2020

RMMSC

Rocky Mountain Society for Music Theory

American Musicological Society, Rocky Mountain Chapter

Society for Ethnomusicology, South West Chapter

The interaction of Theater and Sacred Music: Jean-Baptiste Lully's Setting of the *Dies irae*

Jason Thompson
University of Northern Colorado

Abstract

For the funeral services of Queen Marie Thérèse at the Basilica of Saint Denis in 1683, Jean-Baptiste Lully composed a *motet à grand chœur* setting of the sequence *Dies irae*. His compositional approach to this familiar text differs in key ways from other contemporary settings by composers such as Lalande and Charpentier. An analysis and comparison of the settings by these three composers reveal certain conventions for setting the text, such as the use of the chant in the opening phrases of the text and the shift from duple meter to triple meter in texts relating to the idea of divinity. At the same time, a comparison also reveals some distinct differences: for example, Lully consistently uses the *petit chœur* for sections of the text that are in the first person. Moreover, Lully frequently uses text painting, such as the *stile concitato* in text like the *Confutatis* text, and his use of upward scales for the "wonderous sound" in the *Tuba Mirum* section. Both Lully's frequent use of text painting and his assignment of text in the first person to a reduced vocal texture suggest that Lully treated the *Dies irae* text as a narrative, an approach more typically seen in a dramatic work, rather than as a more conventional setting of a sacred text.

In comparison to his stage works, Lully's motets are a long-overlooked part of his repertoire. Although he is not necessarily known for his work in sacred music, his twenty-two motets are a remarkable and valuable contribution to the literature. Because of his dramatic training, Lully may have taken a different approach from his contemporaries to writing sacred music, in particular with his 1683 setting of the *Dies Irae* for the funeral of Marie-Thérèse of Spain. I suggest that Lully consciously approached the *Dies Irae* text as a narrative, setting it as he would a stage work. Evidence for this include the various devices Lully used that are also seen in his dramatic works, but are absent in similar motet settings by composers such as Lalande and Charpentier.

Jean-Baptiste Lully was born in 1632 in Florence and learned to play guitar and violin from a local Franciscan friar. Lully was brought to Paris in 1646 by Roger de Lorraine as an Italian tutor for the Grande Mademoiselle Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans. While in the service of the Grande Mademoiselle, he furthered his musical education by studying harpsichord and composition with important figures like Nicolas Gigault. It seems that Lully's musical training prior to entering the service of King Louis XIV in the mid-1650s was comparatively unconventional. For example, many composers and other musicians in this period would have begun their training in the church, likely as choir boys, and gone on to study formally with a composer or musician. Because of his position at the court as the Italian tutor to the Grande Mademoiselle, Lully was able to complete his musical training, not with a Paris musician or composer, but with a Franciscan friar. By contrast, Charpentier studied music in Rome with Carissimi, in part because of his privileged background, compared to Lully.[1] After moving to France, Lully was eventually introduced to the future king Louis XIV, who—at the end of the Regency and his accession to the throne in 1661—made Lully *Surintendant de la musique de la chambre du roi*. Because of his position and his background as a dancer, Lully focused on the composition of stage works and dances throughout his career. A large portion of his work consisted of ballets and operas composed as entertainment for the court. Lully had no official connection to the sacred music at the court, having never held a formal position in the *Chapelle Royale* (Royal Chapel).

[1] Jérôme de la Gorce, "Lully, Jean-Baptiste (i)," *Grove Music Online,* accessed April 10, 2019; and H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Charpentier, Marc-Antoine," *Grove Music Online,* accessed April 10, 2019. These sources point out the backgrounds of the respective composers and where their families were from. Lully's father was a descendant of peasants and his mother was from a family of millers, while Charpentier's father was a master scribe from a family of notaries and merchants. Clearly Charpentier's family was of a higher social station than Lully's and thus had more access to resources for Charpentier and his education.

Despite Lully's official distance from the royal chapel, he composed a number of motets, including 12 *motets à grand chœur* and 10 *petits motets*. His setting of the sequence *Dies Irae*, written in 1683 for the funeral of Marie Therese, the first wife of Louis XIV, is among these *motets à grand chœur.*[2] Lully wrote motets for other important occasions, such as the baptism of the *Dauphin*.[3] Unfortunately, Lully's original autograph manuscripts are lost; despite this, his *Dies Irae* survives in two sources: 1) the copy in the Philidor Manuscripts and 2) the part books published by Christophe Ballard.[4]

The instrumentation of Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Dies Irae* setting can be seen in Table 1. The size of the performing ensemble would have been quite large, given the importance of the event, although the exact number of musicians used for the performance is not known. A contemporary witness, Sebastian Locatelli, who attended the King's mass at Saint Germain in Paris on November 11th 1664, made note that at this service there were "numerous" instrumentalists.[5] This would suggest that for important occasions, the orchestra would be large.

Table 1. The instrumentation of Lully's Dies irae setting taken from the part books published in 1684.

Petit chœur	***Grand chœur***	**Orchestra**
Dessus	Dessus	Premier Dessus du violon
Bas-dessus	Haute-contre	Second Dessus de violon
Haute-contre	Taille	Haute-contre de violon
Taille	Basse-taille	Taille de violon
Basse	Basse	Quinte de violon
		Basse de violon

[2] Gorce, "Lully, Jean-Baptiste (i)."

[3] John Hajdu Heyer, "The sources of Lully's *grands motets,*" in *Jean-Baptiste Lully and the Music of the French Baroque: Essays in honor of James R. Anthony,* ed. John Hajdu Heyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 81. This was the *Plaude Laetare Gallia* (1668), the text for which was written by Perrin, who worked under Lully.

[4] Heyer, "The sources of Lully's *grands motets*," 98. The sources must be taken together to compile an accurate edition, as there are mistakes in the printed editions. Mistakes in the parts for the *Miserere* were corrected in the part books in the collection at Glasgow University, which is mentioned by Heyer.

[5] Sébastien Locatelli, *Voyages de France moeurs et coutumes Française,* trans. Adolphe Vautier (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1905), 126.

Basse-continue

As a composer with a background in dramatic music, it should not be surprising that Lully may have approached a sacred text in a manner similar to a text for a dramatic work, including the use of text painting, assigning first person text for soloists, and the use of the choir for commentary and dramatic effect.

Table 2 outlines the structure of Lully's setting; in the table, narrative text is represented by plain text, while first person text is represented by bold, and third person text is represented by italics. A clear pattern emerges: The sections of the text that function as narration are sung either by a solo bass or by the full choir, while the sections that are in the first-person are sung by the soloists or members of the *petit chœur*, unless the choirs are used for dramatic effect in order to illustrate the text, such as with the "Rex tremendae majestatis" (see Example 5, below).

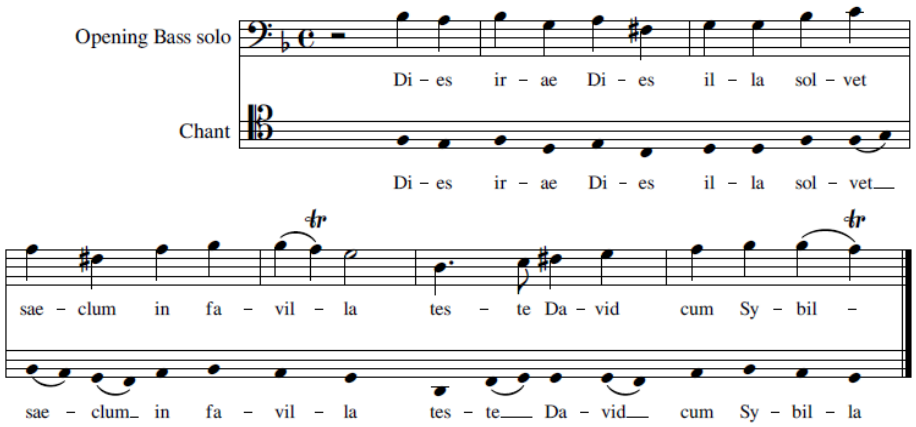
Table 2. Structural analysis of Lully's Dies Irae setting. The sections of narration text are shown in normal text, the first-person text in bold, and the third-person text in italics.

Verse	Latin text	English Translation	Vocal Setting	Measures
1	Dies irae, dies illa	Day of wrath, that day	solo bass	14–20
	Solvet sæclum in favilla,	Shall dissolve the world into embers	I	
	Teste David cum Sibylla.	As David prophesied with the Sibyl.	I	
2	Quantus tremor est futurus,	How great the trembling will be,	Both choirs	21–51
	Quando Judex est venturus,	When the Judge shall come,	I	
	Cuncta stricte discussurus!	The rigorous investigator of all things!	I	
3	Tuba mirum spargens sonum,	The trumpet, spreading its wondrous sound	I	
	Per sepulchra regionum,	Through the tombs of every land,	I	
	Coget omnes ante thronum.	Will summon all before the throne.	I	
4	Mores supebit et natura,	Death will be stunned, likewise nature,	Solo bass	52–62
	Cum resurget creatura,	When the creature shall rise again,	I	
	Judicanti responsura.	To answer the One judging.	I	
5	Liber scriptus proferetur,	A written book will be brought forth,	Both choirs	62–80
	In quo totum continetur,	In which all shall be contained,	I	
	Unde mundus judicetur.	From which the world shall be judged.	I	
6	Judex ergo cum sedebit,	When therefore the Judge is seated,	I	
	Quidquid latet apparebit:	Whatever lies hidden shall be revealed,	I	
	Nil inultum remanebit.	No wrong shall remain unpunished.	I	

7	**Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?** **Quem patronum rogaturus,** **Cum vix justus sit securus?**	**What then am I, a poor wretch, going to say?** **Which protector shall I ask for,** **When even the just are scarcely secure?**	Solo HC I I	81–90
8	**Rex tremendæ majestatis,** **Qui salvandos salvas gratis,** **Salva me, fons pietatis.**	**King of terrifying majesty,** **Who freely saves the saved,** **Save me, fount of pity.**	Both choirs I Solo bass, then tutti	91–95 96–102 103–105
9	**Recordare, Jesu pie,** **Quod sum causa tuæ viæ:** **Ne me perdas illa die.**	**Remember, merciful Jesus,** **That I am the cause of your sojourn;** **Do not cast me out on that day.**	Solo bass I I	105–117
10	**Quærens me, sedisti lassus:** **Redemisti Crucem passus:** **Tantus labor non sit cassus.**	**Seeking me, you sat down weary;** **Having suffered the Cross, you redeemed me.** **May such great labor not be in vain.**	Solo HC I I	117–130
11	Juste Judex ultionis, Donum fac remissionis, Ante diem rationis.	Just Judge of vengeance, Grant the gift of remission Before the day of reckoning.	Both choirs I I	130–140
12	**Ingemisco, tamquam reus:** **Culpa rubet vultus meus:** **Supplicanti parce, Deus.**	**I groan, like the one who is guilty:** **My face blushes with guilt.** **Spare thy supplicant, O God.**	*Petit chœur*, contrapuntal texture	141–151
13	**Qui Mariam absolvisti,**	**You who absolved Mary [Magdalene],**	HC, T duet	152–157, 162–167 172–178
	Et latronem exaudisti,	**And heeded the thief,**	Solo bass	157–161, 166–172, 178–182
	Mihi quoque spem dedisti.	**Have also given hope to me.**	HC, T, B trio	183–189
14	**Preces meæ non sunt dignæ;** **Sed tu bonus fac benigne,** **Ne perenni cremer igne.**	**My prayers are not worthy:** **But Thou, good one, kindly grant** **That I not burn in the everlasting fires.**	Solo tenor I I	190–203
15	**Inter oves locum præsta.** **Et ab hædis me sequestra,** **Statuens in parte dextra.**	**Grant me a favored place among thy sheep,** **And separate me from the goats,** **Placing me at thy right hand.**	D, HC, T trio Both choirs Solo HC	204–211 212–214 215–227
16	**Confutatis maledictis,** **Flammis acribus addictis,** **Voca me cum benedictis.**	**When the accursed are confounded** **Consigned to the fierce flames:** **Call me to be with the blessed.**	Both choirs I I	228–233
17	**Oro supplex et acclinis,** **Cor contritum quasi clinis,** **Gere curam mei finis.**	**I pray, suppliant and kneeling,** **My heart contrite as if it were ashed:** **Protect me in my final hour.**	Solo basse I I	284–295
18	*Lacrimosa dies illa,* *Qua resurget ex favilla,*	*O how tearful that day,* *On which the guilty shall rise*	Solo choir: Imitative, contrapuntal entrances	296–311
	Judicandus homo reus. *Huic ergo parce, Deus:*	*From the embers to be judged.* *Spare them then, O god.*	Both choirs, short HC, B duet	312–325

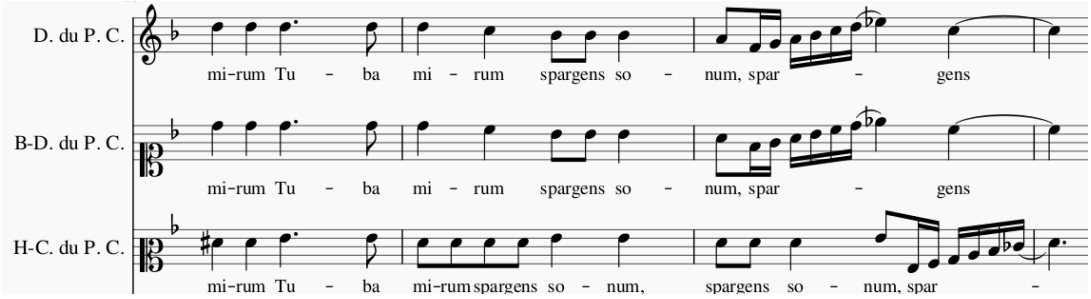
19	*Pie Jesu Domine,* *Dona eis requiem. Amen.*	*Merciful Lord Jesus,* *Grant them rest. Amen.*	Solo choir; imitative, contrapuntal entrances; tutti in counterpoint	346–390

After an instrumental prelude, a direct quote of the first three lines of the Dies Irae chant begins with the entrance of a solo bass voice on the third beat of measure 14; the chant quotation has some slight modifications, such as at the words "solvet saeclum," where the melody is revised to outline what we would identify as a dominant function chord; Example 1 shows a comparison between the solo bass melody and the original chant. The chant is no longer quoted after the line "Teste David cum Sibylla."



Example 1. Comparison of bass solo melody with the Dies Irae chant.

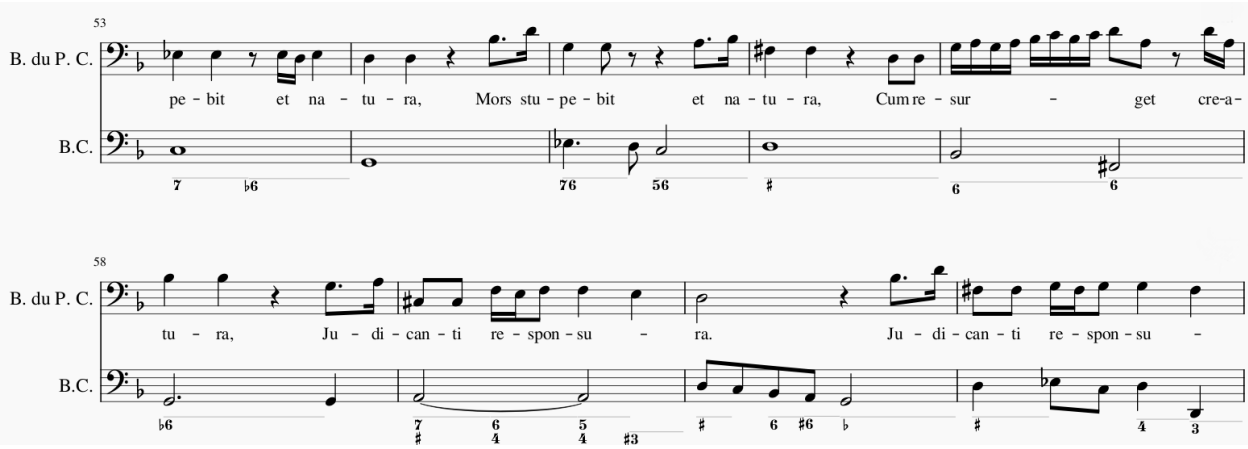
After the bass solo, both choirs enter in measure 21 with the text "Quantus tremor est futurus" or "How great the trembling will be," a clear example of text painting because of the number of voices, particularly in contrast to the preceding phrase. Both choirs continue into the "Tuba Mirum" verse, in which the words "spargens sonum" (wonderous sound) are set to scale passages—essentially written out glissandi (see Example 2).



Example 2. Lully, *Dies Irae*, mm 35–8, setting of "spargens" to scale passages.

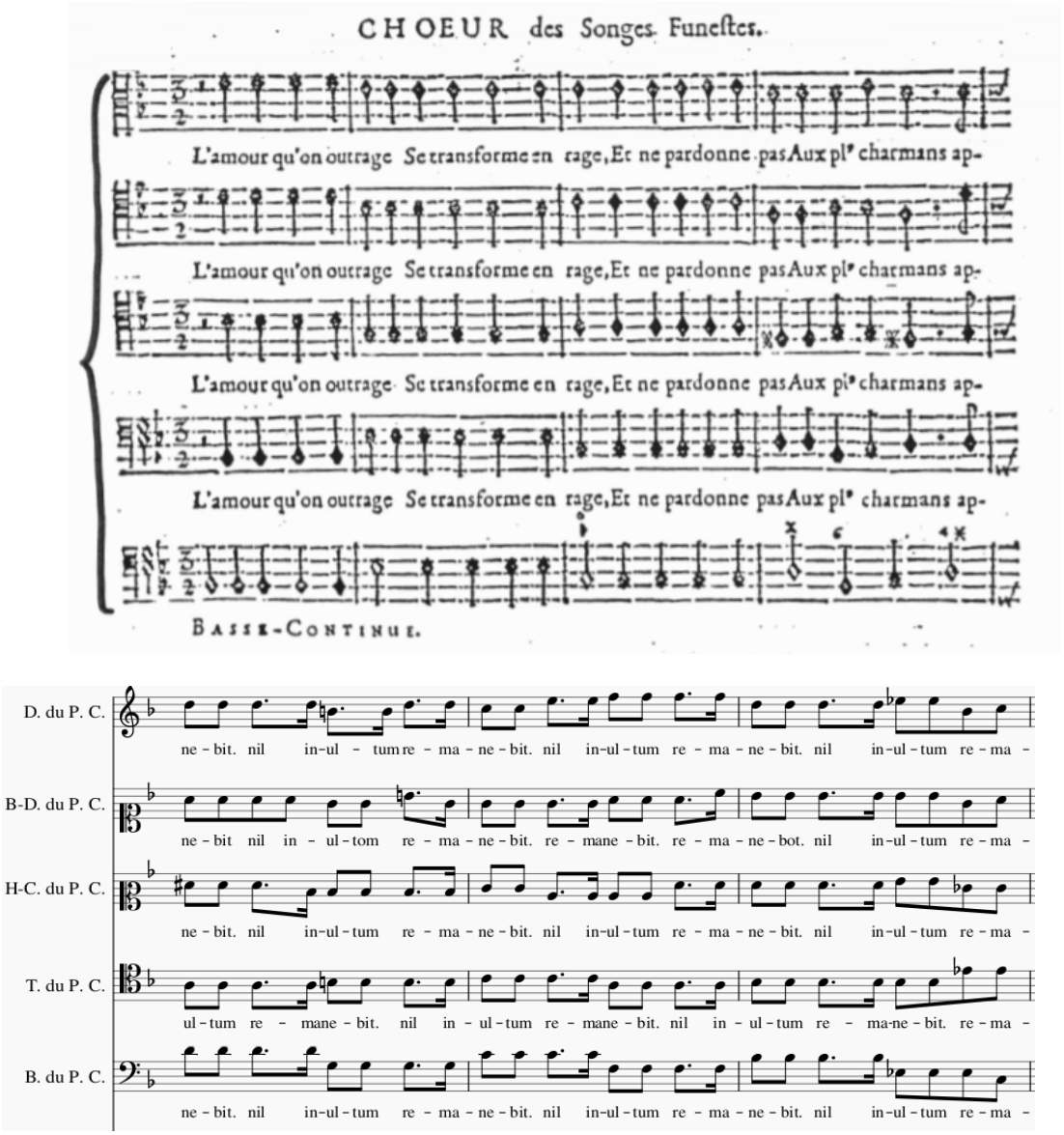
This choral section ends with the text "Coget omnes ante thronum," which is set with a dotted rhythm and a leap of a 4th, suggesting a trumpet fanfare intended to "summon all before the throne."

The bass solo in the next section ("Mors stupebit") includes two instances of text painting. In the first, the melody features an upward run for the word "resurget" (rising again). In the last phrase of the section, "judi canti responsura," the melody repeats a motive a minor third higher to illustrate the word "respond" (see Example 3). The change of meter to cut time to begin the next section provides a march-like quality suitable to the text "Liber scriptus proferetur" (A written book will be brought forth).



Example 3. Lully, *Dies Irae*, mm 53–61, bass solo for "Mors stupebit."

Lully seems to make an explicit reference to theatrical music via his use of the *stile concitato* for the text "nil inultum remanebit" (no wrong shall remain unpunished); the texture is similar to its use in his opera *Atys*, when the choir speaks of Cybele's love turning to rage (see Example 4). Lully uses the *stile concitato* in other parts of the motet as well, particularly for the text "Confutatis Maledictis" (the accursed are confounded). In the "Inter oves" section, the meter changes to cut time at "Et ab haedis me sequestra" (and separate me from the goats) for the introduction of *stile concitato*, where it likely refers to the damned, who are the goats among the sheep.

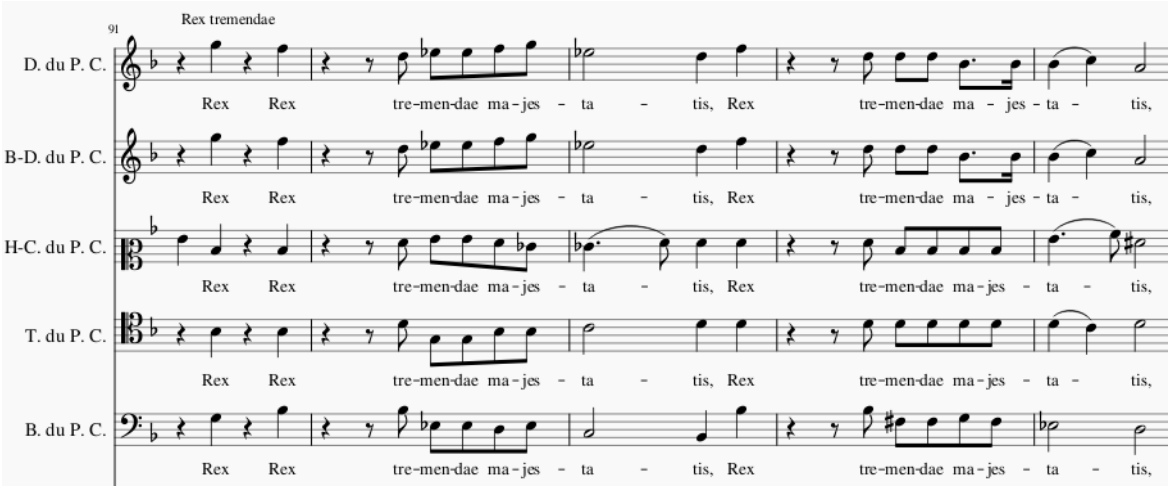


Example 4. Lully, *Dies Irae*, mm 77–9; Lully, *Atys*, Act III Scene 4, "Chœur des Songes Funestes."

Lully also makes use of meter to represent the subject of the text. The use of triple time signatures, like 3/4, is known to have been used to represent the holy trinity and emphasize the holiness or divinity of the topic/ person/ character discussed in the section. Cut or common time, by contrast, is tied to subjects that are human, unsanctified, or unholy. The "inter overs" section is an example of text-painting with meter. The first line of the stanza, "Grant me a place among

the sheep," is in 3/4 in a pastoral reference to sheep, the followers of Christ. The second line of the stanza, "and take me out from among the goats," changes to duple meter for a few bars as it mentions the goats, representing those that have not been saved. The music then returns immediately to 3/4. This interpretation of these two lines is further enforced by the use of the *concitato* style for "and take me out from among the goats," as previously discussed.

A more personal, intimate appeal in the "Quid sum miser" section, is followed by "Rex tremendae majestatis" (see Example 5). Lully begins this section *tutti* with two chords on the word "Rex" or "King" as if announcing the King (referring to Christ). The rhythm slows on the word "majestatis," likely to illustrate the text by reflecting "majesty" in the music. The next two lines, "Qui salvandos salvas gratis, salva me fons pietatis" or "Who freely saves the saved, save me, save me, fount of pity," are then sung by a solo bass; this personal appeal for salvation is consistent with the narrative approach. This section is then punctuated by a *tutti* statement for two measures repeating the line "Salva me fons pietatis," which could serve as an emphasis on the phrase as well as collective call for salvation.



Example 5. Lully, *Dies Irae*, mm. 91–95, "Rex tremendae."

The section setting first-person text begins with the verse “Quid sum miser tunc dicturus” (What then am I, a poor wretch, going to say?), which is sung by a solo tenor. This personal appeal to God is consistent with the narrative approach Lully seems to take with this work. The section beginning, “Recordare, Jesu pie” (Remember, merciful Jesus) is a clear instance of a first-person appeal. Instead of setting it for haute-contre solo, Lully calls for solo bass, which was used earlier for narration, but here it is used for supplication. Lully seems to associate the bass voice with Christ. Moreover, Lully uses a solo bass for the line “Et latronem exaudisti” (and heeded the thief), referring to the thief who was crucified with Jesus and asked for salvation from Jesus. The haute-contre solo returns for the section beginning “Quaerens me” (Seeking me), yet another personal appeal to God. Lully sets the text “Juste Judex ultionis, Donum fac remissionis, Ante diem rationis” (Just judge of vengeance, grant the gift of remission, before the day of reckoning) as a tutti, reflecting the text’s less personal nature and its purpose as narration.

The section beginning with “Ingemisco” includes another personal supplication; Lully’s setting reflects this, but rather than one voice, he uses the multiple voices of the *petit chœur*, giving the impression of multiple “characters” appealing for forgiveness at once, which is reinforced by the contrapuntal texture of the music. Lully set the “Qui Mariam” verse for three voices (likely reflective of the trinity), using dessus and haut-contre solos for the line “Qui Mariam absolvisti” (You who absolved Mary [Magdalene]) and the solo bass on the line “Et latronem exaudisti” (and heeded the thief): These voice types would likely be expected for the characters referenced in those lines if the music were for a staged work. Here, the soprano reflects Mary as a devout female follower of Christ and the bass reflects the robber. The bass is used for the villain or criminal many times in dramatic works.

Although Lully returns to a solo supplication by the solo *taille du petit choeur* for the lines “Preces meae” and the “Inter oves,” Lully again uses multiple voices of the *petit choeur* for the supplication of multiple “characters,” as in the “Ingemisco” section. Lully also uses the solo voices of the *petit choeur* for this more personal appeal of the text “Voca me.” After this text is completed by a punctuating tutti , the final first-person supplication of the work appears with the solo bass for the text “Oro supplex et acclinis, Cor contritum quasi cinis, Gere curam mei finis” (I pray, suppliant and kneeling, my heart contrite as if it were ashes: protect me in my final hour).

The “Lacrimosa” begins with all the voices of the *petit choeur*, who are joined by the *grand choeur* at the “Judicandus homo reus.” The final two lines of the text, “Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem. Amen” are separated from the rest of the work by an instrumental *symphonie*. Lully uses a contrapuntal texture for “Pie Jesu Domine”; none of the parts come together until the final “Amen.” The text of these last two sections, “Lacrimosa” and the “Pie Jesu,” are in 3rd person: Whoever is speaking here is speaking on behalf of another. The way Lully sets these texts could imply two things: first, that multiple characters/beings are speaking; and second, the use of an older style. The cut-time meter and the contrapuntal texture of this *tutti* section do not reflect a personal supplication. Nevertheless, the counterpoint begins with solo entrances by the *petit choeur*, likely because this section represents an appeal from another group on behalf of mankind. The pronoun “eis” (them) in the text supports the idea that the “characters” here are not the same as the “characters” who were begging for forgiveness throughout most of the work. Rather, these voices—perhaps saints—are appealing to Christ on behalf of mankind.

That Lully approaches the setting of the *Dies Irae* text differently from his contemporaries is clear when looking at settings of the same text by Lalande (S.31) and

Charpentier (H.12). Neither Lalande nor Charpentier made any distinction between the use of solo or choral voices to offer a literal narrative adaptation of the text. This is most obvious in the setting by Lalande, in which he uses the solo tenor for both the last two "narrator" stanzas of the opening ("Liber scriptus" and "Judex ergo") and the first two stanzas of the subsequent "first-person" section ("Quid sum miser" and "Rex Tremendae") without providing a clear distinction between them.

Nevertheless, the works show some similarities. Much like his two contemporaries, Lully begins the work with a direct quotation from the Dies Irae chant. In addition, all three settings seem to link 3/4 with the divine and common time or cut time with the un-sanctified. The specificity with which Lully assigns the voices seems to show an intentional approach to treating this text in a way similar to how he set a ballet or opera. A brief analysis at the works of his contemporaries demonstrates that this approach was not necessarily commonplace at the time. The Dies Irae text provides numerous opportunities for differentiating between voices, which Lully uses to great advantage. Further exploration into his other sacred works could show whether or not Lully used this ingenious method of text setting more widely.