

## Is the Unspeakable Singable?: The Ethics of ‘Holocaust’ Representation and the Reception of Górecki’s Symphony no. 3

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A large body of scholarly reflection and critical interrogation has considered questions of the politics and ethics of historical, literary, cinematic and graphic representation of the victimisation of civilians in World War Two (Friedländer 1984; LaCapra 1994; Bartov 1996; Rothberg 2000; Zelizer 2000; Finkelstein 2001; Lang 2003). This paper reconsiders the claim of Holocaust unspeakability through an examination of the massively popular Symphony no. 3 (*Symfonia pieśni żalonych*) of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, a work that has increasingly been construed as a Holocaust symphony, in spite of the composer’s insistence that it is not (Górecki 1992). It would appear on the surface that the question of the Symphony no. 3 as a ‘Holocaust’ piece is a non sequitur, since its construction as such occurred primarily through its reception and post factum global marketing rather than as product of its composition. That important distinction may appear to dispel any suggestion that Górecki’s work might be subject to the same ethical concerns as other kinds of artistic referencing of World War Two victimhood.

In fact there are strong reasons to think that the Symphony no. 3, in simultaneously dramatising, genderising and universalising ethnically and religiously specific forms of suffering, is even more problematic in its relationship to war victims and the ethics of an appropriate compassionate response to them. This article does not assume that the use of the term ‘Holocaust’ to refer to all World War Two victimisation is unproblematic. On

the contrary, it is clear that questions about how the suffering and persecution of particular groups have been generalised to all of humanity go to the heart of the ambiguities in Górecki's artistic intention, and even more so in the morally dubious market reception of his work. The symphony no. 3 was commissioned as a war symphony for Polish victims of Nazism, and it explicitly references the suffering of an innocent female Polish Catholic civilian in a Nazi Gestapo prison cell. In its reception it has been encoded as a symphony about the victimisation of genocidal target groups more generally, and oddly, about the persecution of the Jews under Nazism more particularly.

That slippage, I will argue, is indeed part of a global marketing politics of the aestheticisation of the Holocaust. However, the recognition that 'Holocaust' suffering was not part of the intended references in Górecki's musical intention cannot be sustained as a defence of Górecki against the demand that his creation should be subject to the similar ethical considerations that have been applied to Jewish-specific World War Two artistic representation. The aestheticisation and dramatisation of suffering in the symphony give it a politics all its own in relation to the Polish post-communist context it prefigured. National-, religious-, and gender-specific themes in the symphony that reinscribe World War Two victimisation within Catholic traditions of piety make Górecki's claims to a universalist view of the suffering all the more reductive. The title of this article poses the question, 'is the unspeakable singable?,' because unspeakability has been invoked in ethical discussion of the Holocaust representation, both to sacralise the suffering of Jewish victims and to insist upon the danger of voyeuristic accounts of Nazism. But if writing and visualising the suffering of World War Two victims are problematic for the reasons that survivors and historians have argued, where does music stand in its capacity to create listener pleasure from the suffering of others, or to invoke a type of indulgent compassion with the potential for a collapsing of self and a universalist reductionism?

### **Suffering beyond words ...**

Perhaps no other historical phenomenon is so ethically fraught to represent and, in particular, to aestheticise, as World War Two. The German Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno was perhaps the first observer to suggest that the horrors of the war could not, or should not, be the subject of aesthetic representation at all

(Adorno 1983: 34). Numerous variations of the claim have been repeated by scholars, novelists, critics and essayists. In each case, the ethics and the possibility of representation are conflated, blurred or deliberately intertwined. The US literary critic George Steiner exemplified that position when he asserted that ‘The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason’ (quoted in Lang 1990: 151), and that, ‘It is by no means clear that there can be or that there ought to be, any form, style, or code of articulate, intelligible expression somehow adequate to the facts of the Shoah’ (Steiner 1967: 199). Berel Lang has asserted an ethical position around the failure of language in relation to the Holocaust, since a respectful silence is the only humanitarian response to the facts of such brutality and suffering (Lang 1990: 158–160). A broader claim appeared in the later work of Susan Sontag. Discussing the ethics of photographic representation of war in the twentieth century she argued that even the First World War had produced conditions that ‘exceeded the capacity of words to describe’ (Sontag 2003: 22).

But if words have been imagined as problematic tools for representing Holocaust suffering, images have no less conjured ethical reprobation. In *Reflections of Nazism*, Saul Friedländer pioneered discussion of filmic and fictional representations of the Holocaust as overwhelmingly unethical because they aestheticized it for voyeuristic pleasure and numbed appropriate responses of horror under the exigency of entertainment (Friedländer 1984). Lanzmann, too, claimed that even posing the question of why Jews were killed by the Nazis ‘immediately reveals its obscenity. There is indeed an absolute obscenity in the project of understanding’ (Lanzmann 1990: 271). That view has been called into question for its censoring implication. Dominick LaCapra, for example, argues that Lanzmann’s affirmation of a *Bilderverbot* (forbidding of images) extended to a kind of *Warumverbot* (forbidding of ‘why?’) around Holocaust representation, thus appearing both to ‘sacralize the Holocaust and to surround it with taboos’ (LaCapra 1997: 236). As Hayden White has remarked, the calls for reverent silence around genocide have haunted fictional representation of such events, making the necessity of distinguishing history from fiction even more acute in Holocaust debates than in other historiographic discussions about the disciplinary boundary separating historical from fictional truth (White 1992). In Holocaust representation, the stakes are higher all round. Statements about the unrepresentability of the Holocaust are not only claims about the unthinkable magnitude of those horrors; they are also moral

claims about the obscenity of representing them. In her *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust*, Carolyn Dean demonstrates that the term pornographic has been used repeatedly by those criticising the moral ground of graphic depiction of suffering and victimisation in writing, art and cinema about the Holocaust, alongside claims about it as unspeakable (Dean 2004). There are ethical dimensions and disputes, then, both to the representation of Holocaust violence and suffering, and to the statement about its impossibility.

Curiously, none of these concerns appear to have been raised in relation to musical representation. With so many critics asserting that the Holocaust is obscene to depict graphically and is unspeakable in literary and other verbal forms of expression, why, it might be asked, does no one seem to think that the suffering of World War Two victims is similarly un-singable? One way to address that question might be to argue that music has a unique capacity to represent that which is outside the limits of other forms of human expression. But that line of thought, however fruitful, would not help to explain why music has escaped from ethical considerations about the Holocaust as a site of aesthetic pleasure. If the activities of writing and visually referencing the horrors and suffering of World War Two are laden with the moral danger of turning those events into voyeuristic spectacle, then why is music not viewed as equally, if not more, problematic, given its exceptional capacity to transport, soothe, excite and pleasure us?

Indeed, although there have been some excellent studies of European composers in their relation to the Holocaust (Kontaski 2001; Wlodarski 2010; Kramer 2002), and studies of Holocaust referencing in punk music (Stratton 2007), there has been very little ethical consideration about the various musical references to wartime suffering and to other moments of historic mass violence and victimisation, even though such events have inspired musical composition. Around the time that Adorno was famously asserting the existence of a Holocaust *aporia* (impossibility of poetry), the French composer Olivier Messiaen was writing from within a German prisoner of war camp a piece of chamber music entitled *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the end of time) (Pople 1988). Messiaen's work is not explicitly about the events of World War Two but was created from within the composer's own experience of them. Evidencing an eerie bleakness of rupture, alienation and a world turned inside out, before hurtling toward apocalypse with exhilaration and horror, Messiaen's piece was perhaps the very first to suggest that

if the events of World War Two, in their ghastly plenitude, surpassed the capacity of words to express them, they did not exhaust the negative sublime expressive capacities of music. Adorno was considerably more accommodating about representation of the events of the war in relation to musical composition, as he indicated in his praise of Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor From Warsaw* from 1947 (Adorno 1983; Schoenberg 1951). A number of other musical compositions have referenced the events of World War Two. In 1960 the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki wrote a *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*. And in 1967 he composed a hastily written *Dies Irae* for the unveiling of the Polish government war memorial at Auschwitz. His compatriot and contemporary, Henryk Górecki, who had been first commissioned to write the memorial work, withdrew from the task months prior to the ceremony, saying that he had been unable to imagine music that might do justice to such suffering (Thomas 2005: 183; Thomas 1997). But Górecki later did historically reference the war in his 1976 Symphony no. 3, opus 63, known as the 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs,' a work that since the late 1980s has flooded popular classical music cultures globally and become one of the most commercially successful pieces of classical art music in its time, estimated to have sold over 1 million copies and ranking in the top ten discs of the decade 1992-2002 ('Top Ten Discs' 2002).<sup>1</sup> Although Górecki claimed that, like words, music is incapable of representing the monumental horrors of World War Two (Górecki 2004, cover notes), his third symphony has been overwhelmingly interpreted as a work about the Nazi persecution of Jewish and Slavic populations, as evidenced in the examples discussed in the following sections of this article. Denying such historically specific interpretations, Górecki has instead promoted a universalist view of the work, dedicating it to all victims of war and repression, in spite of its explicitly Catholic and Polish national frames of reference (Rusbridger 1993).

The universalist account of Górecki's no. 3 appears to be supported by its international popularity, but if credence in that view is suspended momentarily, then we might consider the more unique historical contexts relevant to the production and reception of the work. The Symphony no. 3 is about a particular someone's suffering in war: that is, a Polish national, feminine and Catholic pious form. And it contains verbal and conceptual content that is specific to the experience of persecuted Poles under Nazism.

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<sup>1</sup> In August 2011 Amazon.com ranked the London Sinfonietta CD recording alone the 11<sup>th</sup> bestselling symphony, and the 11<sup>th</sup> bestselling Classical Modern, 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> Century work ('Henryk Gorecki'). (Note, the link is to the page for this particular recording, and its sales rankings list is updated daily).

Its reception, as distinct from its content, has overwhelmingly been about the generation of a particular kind of compassionate response to World War Two, one that is heavily imbued with Catholic pathos and redemption, and which arguably encourages a collapsing of the listener's own emotional pain into an identification with the suffering of war victims. That argument would rely upon a view of music in the majority of its forms and genres as designed, above all (and more than any other kind of art), to make us feel something, as well as potentially making us think and move. But in that view, the use of music to reference historical events deemed too horrific to aestheticise in literary, filmic or graphic forms, would surely be even more problematic, given its potential to engender emotions without reflection, and identification without appropriate attribution of whose suffering is being represented.

### **The Sorrowful Songs sensation**

As Górecki's Symphony no. 3 climbed in popularity across the 1990s and in the first decades of the new millennium, so too has it become associated with the Holocaust victims, and with the question of mass violence and suffering and the compassionate response deemed appropriate to it. In 1993 a documentary film about the 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs' was produced by the British film-maker Tony Palmer (Palmer 2008). The documentary contains an interview with Górecki as well as a full recording of the symphony played by the London Sinfonietta and conducted by David Zinman, with the soprano solo performed by Dawn Upshaw, identical to the 1992 recording that was the most widely sold and circulated version in the 1990s (Górecki 1992). Dawn Upshaw is shown in a dramatic physical performance, even as her vocal style is restrained. She gazes upwards to represent piety, blinking and squinting with heaving of breast to show grief and sorrow. The documentary follows a pattern of other attempts to visualise the themes of the Symphony no. 3, which tend to focus on the soprano soloist as a figure of tragic, pious and graciously suffering feminine beauty. The 2008 documentary also contains a collection of photographic and video images showing scenes of mass killing, emaciated survivors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, brutal state violence against civilians in various cultural contexts, bodies of dead children in wartime Bosnia, and journalist footage of the aftermath of bombings where women weep at the loss of those dear to them. By splicing these images alongside those of Upshaw acting the role of someone in sublime ecstatic sorrow as she soars sweetly into the upper reaches of her vocal range, the documentary yokes Górecki's text into a roughly packaged statement

about the horror of violence, and the beauty both of suffering itself and of our compassionate responses to it.

In 2005 a joint BBC and Polish Television DVD production by James Kent filmed the performance of the second movement of Górecki's third symphony on the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the camp's liberation (Kent 2004). This documentary won a number of awards (BAFTA 2006 'Huw Wheldon Award for Best Specialist Factual'; International Emmy 2005 'Best Arts Programme'; RTS Award 2005 'Best Arts Programme') and was nominated for several others. In this visual account we see the dramatic soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian standing in an open doorway in the snow, white flakes decorating her thick hair that flutters in the breeze; she, too, looks upwards to heaven as the tears roll down her cheeks. There are no dead babies or other inapt juxtapositions of violent imagery here, and yet suffering is made into an object for potential voyeuristic enjoyment through the image of feminine beauty and piety. This documentary is ethically problematic in relation to the question of the sensual aestheticisation of Gestapo victims, as suggested by the cinematography of the scene, by the body and face of the soprano singing Górecki's score, and by the pathos-imbued vocal interpretation brought to the piece musicologically in this rendition. Such an interpretation appears to encourage forms of gratuitous indulgence in the pleasures of sorrowful empathy, which might be viewed as a somewhat kitsch or crass response to an historical awareness of the realities of a terrible violence that remains in living memory for a considerable number of survivors.

It might be protested that Górecki cannot be held responsible for the various visual glosses on his music; he has stated that he was mortified by Palmer's documentary ('Sorry Story' 1993: 82). Luke Howard has argued that the view of Górecki's no. 3 as a symphony about war or the Holocaust is largely generated by its reception and marketing and not by the intentions and ideas of the composer himself. If the no. 3 is about anything, Howard argues, then it is about the sorrow of mothers (Howard 1998: 151). Similarly, the biographer Adrian Thomas claims that while the no. 3 is 'concerned with inner sorrow and compassion,' it is 'no more connected with Auschwitz than it is with more recent barbarities' (Thomas 1997: 94). But while the symphony no. 3 does not attempt to represent 'the Holocaust' in the way its popular reception has suggested, it does nonetheless make explicit reference to the Nazi persecution of civilians in

World-War-Two Poland, where the majority of Nazi concentration camps were located, and where around 90 percent of the native Jewish population (3 million people) were killed, in addition to the 2.5–3 million non-Jewish Poles, and several million other Europeans identified by the Nazis as Jewish, Romani, Slavic, or in other respects enemies of Nazi racial purification (Gross 2006: 4.). Such a context appears in tension with Górecki's own insistence on the universality of his work. Clearly the symphony is indeed about the suffering of particular cultural subjects, located in a series of historical events, which are both uniquely famous and historiographically contested.

The claim to universalism may, in part, help to explain why there has been a striking lack of ethical or historiographic examination of the Górecki no. 3. But the fact that Górecki's work is sonic, rather than visual, theatrical or literary, is perhaps also responsible for it evading the charge of aestheticisation that has heavily tarred various artistic (especially cinematographic) attempts to evoke the suffering of World War Two genocide victims. (See Dean 2004: 36-37). While Górecki may indeed have experienced his inspiration in terms that were not limited to forms of national, religious, ethnic or temporal identity, the content of his expression is acutely historically and culturally located. It is about a very specific kind of suffering—that of a Silesian mother grieving the loss of her son in a war against the Germans (relevant to Górecki's own upbringing in the multicultural environment of lower Silesia), that of the Virgin Mary in Polish Catholic liturgical tradition, and, most saliently for the politics of its reception, that of a civilian victim of the Gestapo in Poland during World War Two.

In many respects it is unsurprising that the Symphony no. 3 has enjoyed a popular reception as a 'Holocaust symphony.' Partly it may have been encoded in this way due to popular forms of historical ignorance, and to the magnetic vortex of 'the Holocaust' as a trope of narrative force. Górecki himself did little to resist its association with that branding, ambiguously alluding to the universality of the suffering it references in a move that both allowed for the symphony's participation in an ongoing project of Polish national memorialisation, and for a global capitalisation of the work in relation to Jewish and multiple other identities of suffering. However, music historians' assertions that the Symphony no. 3 is *not* a Holocaust symphony have not helped to tease out the work's ambivalent relationship to the larger politics of World War Two global memory. If 'Holocaust victims' are defined expansively to include all civilians who were racially



targeted by the Nazis, then Górecki's piece has an obvious relevance in discussions of the ethics of Holocaust representation. The question of such definitions cuts across some of the most contested issues in Holocaust studies, and in this article, I make no moral claims either way as to whether Polish non-Jewish suffering should be considered part of 'the Holocaust,' or about how such a construct as 'the Holocaust' is most properly defined.

The symphony no. 3's most troubling aestheticisation of the suffering of victims of the Nazis lies in its use in the second movement of words taken from the inscription carved into the wall by a young woman held in a Gestapo prison cell in Zakopane in 1944. The inscription is a plea to the girl's mother and/or the Virgin Mary not to weep for her, and concludes with a Catholic Ave Maria. The first movement is set to the words of a fifteenth-century Polish Easter hymn in the model of the *pietà* lament of Mary as she contemplates the death of her son Jesus; while the third movement is based on a Silesian folk song in which a mother laments the loss of her son in the Silesian Uprisings against German rule from 1919–1921, a conflict that is often commemorated as a source of Polish national pride in resisting foreign domination. But while the first and third movements heavily encode the symphony in Catholic and nationalist terms, the text of the second movement, which references the Gestapo persecution of a Polish Catholic girl, has received the most overwhelming praise and fascination.

Górecki's choice of and remarks on this text suggest that the no. 3, in fact, is about something more than just the sorrow of mothers. Górecki has often explained why he chose the words of the second movement from among many other inscriptions carved on those cell walls by the prisoners held within them and that typically railed bitterly against the injustice of their treatment: The young woman's words revealed a selflessness; in spite of her own victimisation, the prisoner's thought is not for her own misery but for the pain that her death will cause her (biological or spiritual) mother (Górecki 2003). In referencing Nazism's victims through this choice of text, the second movement invokes the power of compassion to transcend suffering—it is not merely about the love between mother and child, but about the freedom from despair afforded by an experience of kindness to others within the context of contemplating the victims of Nazism. The aesthetic and ethical pleasure this contemplation invokes, the tears it prompts, the rapturous statement of superlatives it inspires, have occurred in response to

a young Catholic woman's prayer, interpreted and presented by Górecki as an example of the highest moral and most elegantly sublime redemption.

The history of various musical interpretations of the Symphony no. 3 also suggests something about both Górecki's intentions and the significance of the work's reception. In spite of having a discernible Anglophone accent in her articulation of Górecki's Polish lyrics, the composer commended Dawn Upshaw for the demure and understated vocal style she has brought to recordings of the symphony, similar to that of the Polish soprano and Mozart specialist Teresa Zylis-Gara, for whom the part was originally written, and unlike Stefania Woytowicz, whose more dramatic style dominated the earliest recordings of the work (Howard 1998: 142). Upshaw's less powerful voice, her sweeter tonality and restrained vibrato, suggest something about the feminine persona Górecki imagined this vocal part to embody: the imprisoned girl of the second movement, like the Virgin Mary of the first movement, and the lamenting mother of the third movement, weeps peacefully, not angrily, graciously, not bitterly; she is noble, morally commendable and beautiful in her suffering. In a transcript from a rehearsal of the work in 1997 Górecki is noted responding to comments from listeners in the audience who remarked that the soprano was swamped by the orchestra in the opening of the first movement; she is supposed to be swamped, he replies, and only later in the movement should her voice rise above the pitch of the orchestra as she climbs upward into the more resonant zone of her range (Górecki 2003). This corresponds to the division of the score between the opening vocal entry, with its simple two note descending motif in which the girl calls out to her mother despairingly, as any young person facing death might be expected to do, and the brighter rising sequence of notes, which corresponds to the lyrical revelation that the mother is invoked, not so that the girl might take solace from her, but so that she might give it instead. The simple semiotic message of these contrasted passages is transparent. In her suffering, the victim is overwhelmed, but in her piety and selflessness she transcends her suffering and attains resonance and perfection. The ability of her voice to rise above the orchestra in the climax (both in pitch and in volume) designates religious self-sacrifice, selflessness and compassion for others as the keys to transcending suffering. The Ave Maria prayer component of the lyrics coincides with a monotone resolution settling into the major key—her voice is steady, while the orchestral parts dwindle out in an eerie minor key. In completing her invocation the victim, then, is at peace, at one with god in the

feminine aspect of Mary, and she maintains her spirit even as the dark events of her imprisonment loom threateningly around her.

The Catholic aestheticisation of Polish suffering in Górecki's work is also one of the points through which the symphony should be interrogated in relation to ethical discussions of Holocaust representation. One possible auditory interpretation of the second movement of the symphony no. 3 might note its hasty leap to redemption, which follows rapidly after the evocation of despair. In a study of documentary and other filmic representation, the intellectual historian Dominick La Capra has criticised accounts of the Holocaust that imbue it with a mystical sublimity, beyond cognition, or that attempt to make it into a sad story in which everything is rectified in the end. Redemption, La Capra insists, is the one thing that any work of art that references to World War Two should avoid giving us, since it serves to occlude the traumatic abyss that those events represent to those who survived them (LaCapra 2000: 179). By that measure, then, the Górecki's no. 3 is a dubious exemplar of how we might respond to World War Two suffering. Its Catholic dimension enables the automatic redemption following each articulation of despair. Its epic quality connotes the sublime—that which is beyond the capacities of thought or speech to contain; and, its relentless *lentissimo* suggests a patience (or an indulgence) to remain within the vulnerable sadness it evokes. The hopeful sweetness of its rising note progressions reassure us that if only we weep, then everything will be alright. That is not a universal response to victimisation, but rather a particularly religious one. Contemplation of World War Two horrors may only feel redemptive to those who believe that the innocent and the righteous will be saved, and that the evil ones will pay for their sins by the will of some divine moral arbiter. But why then has the Górecki no. 3 had such a massive power to seduce even those who do not subscribe to his own Catholicism, or to other compatible religious world-views? Solace and redemption are clearly appealing tropes to a range of audiences, and the 'abyss' of World War Two suffering may indeed not be any easier for atheists to contemplate.

### **Catholic suffering under Nazism**

The Catholicism of Górecki's evocation of Nazi atrocity, then, may be one of the least appropriate spiritual frameworks through which to approach the human questions suggested by this historical phenomenon. Of all the categories of people to which the

suffering of World War Two is associated, Catholics are not, in fact, one that might legitimately make a special claim to persecution, even if many Polish victims of racial persecution under Nazism were also Catholic. In 1933 Pope Pious the twelfth signed the *Reichskoncordat* with Hitler to secure the privileges of the Catholic Church in German territories, and Hitler was never excommunicated by the Papacy. As the historian Richard Steigmann-Gall remarks in *The Holy Reich*, ‘the insistence that Nazism was an anti-Christian movement has been one of the most enduring truisms of the past fifty years,’ generated in order to sustain both ‘the myths of the Cold War and the regeneration of the German nation’ (2003: 266). In Poland Catholics numbered among the victims of Nazism and its sympathisers and collaborators. Many Catholics across Europe were complicit in the persecution of the Jews under Nazism. There is a long tradition of Catholic anti-semitism throughout Europe, and collaborationist regimes, from Vichy France to Ustasha Croatia, were heavily Catholic in their right-wing ideological outlooks.

Many Catholics, of course, did not support the Nazis, and they even risked or lost their lives in their efforts to help those who were persecuted (Opdyke 1999). In Germany the position of Christianity was ambivalent in relation to Nazism. Protestant relations to the regime became increasingly strained throughout the early years of Hitler’s rule, as exemplified by 1936 objection of Protestant leaders to Nazi racial policies, the subsequent persecution of religious leaders, and the active resistance of anti-Nazi clergymen such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Catholic clergy, too, were sent to concentration camps if they opposed the Nazi regime, though in Germany only a small percentage actively did so (Phayer 2000: 67–68). In Poland Catholics were heavily victimised, but that was in large part due to targeting of Poles in general given the Nazi view that Slavic populations were sub-human. Many Polish civilians hid Jews out of a Catholic-based ethical conviction about the wrongness of murder (Tec 1987). There are numerous Jewish testimonials of Poles who helped Jews even in spite of holding anti-semitic beliefs themselves, because their ethics in principle opposed the persecution of innocents, both through Catholic belief and what the historian Michael Gross refers to as a Polish cultural ‘romantic tradition of nurturing the weak and defending the persecuted’ (Gross 2006: 261). Both hostile and complicit Catholics feature in the account of the Jewish-Polish survivor and historian Nechama Tec, who remained in hiding in Poland throughout the Nazi occupation (Tec 1984). If Catholicism cut across

the line of complicity with Nazism in the Polish wartime context, while also acting subversively against it, its ambivalence surely cancels out any claim to a particular identity as a persecuted religion.

In short, the relationship of Catholicism, and indeed of many Christians, to Nazism was a mixture of defiance and obedience, of objection and support. But if Catholicism has no particular victimhood claim in relation to World War Two, Polish identity generally can legitimately make such a claim, and historically has indeed done so. While Polish Jews were decimated by the Nazi invasion with deaths estimated around three million, non-Jewish Poles were killed in roughly equal numbers. Recent nationalist tropes claim survival through great suffering as a particularly strong Polish trait, a result of the shattered history of the nation, denied its autonomy under Russian and Hapsburg rule, then again under Nazism and its communist successor. Communist historical accounts, too, emphasised the nation as a site of victimhood. As Magdalena Teter remarks, the view of ‘Polish history as a history of suffering and martyrdom throughout the ages’ (1999: 1) resembled the popular perception of Jewish history that Salo Baron has called ‘lachrymose’ history (cited in Liberles & Lyman 1995: 341). This helps to explain how, in the postwar politics of official national war memorialisation, ‘Jews became “competitors” in suffering’ (Teter 1999: 1). In 1964 the Gomułka regime appointed the ultra-nationalist hard-liner General Moczar as Minister of the Interior. Moczar led the state towards greater police repression in response to the student uprisings of the late 1960s, blaming Jewish students for the ferment, and pressuring the remaining postwar Jews to emigrate en masse. By 1970 only a tiny smattering of the Jewish population remained in a country that had held Europe’s largest Jewish population prior to World War Two (Steinlauf 1997: ix). Catholicism had been increasingly tolerated from the late 1950s as well, and throughout the remaining communist period the Polish Catholic Church enjoyed considerable freedom.

Moczar also had a significant influence on the state institutions responsible for memorialisation of the war. As the historian Michael Steinlauf shows in *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, the period from the late 1960s until 1989 saw a marked disavowal that Jews were the largest group massacred by the Nazis on Polish soil, and a concomitant insistence on an official memory of the war as a story of Polish, not Jewish, victimisation. The official communist *Great Universal*

*Encyclopaedia* entries on the war were ‘de-Judaised’ and ‘Polonised,’ and its historical writers were harassed to remove all mention of specific groups who had suffered at the hands of the Nazis apart from Poles (Steinlauf 1997). The unveiling of the Auschwitz memorial in 1967, for which Górecki was supposed to compose a piece of music, was part of this revisionist moment in the cultivation of memory about the war. But if Górecki’s withdrawal from that contract came from an unwillingness to be implicated in the new de-Judaised version of the past, he has never said so. His Symphony no. 3, written seven years later, referenced the war in terms consistent with the Moczar movement toward commemoration of a national suffering and toleration of Catholicism as a Polish national treasure.

In the global context, on the other hand, Polish victimisation by the Nazis, like victimisation of such groups as homosexuals and the Roma, has been underplayed against the dominant perception of the Holocaust as a Jewish tragedy. One of the more influential documentary films about the Holocaust, Claude Lanzman’s 1985 *Shoah*, overwhelmingly represented Poland as the site of Jewish persecution, and includes interviews conducted by Lanzman travelling through Poland in the 1980s. Non-Jewish Poles appear in Lanzman’s account as bystanders to the Holocaust, witnesses to its horrors, complicit collaborators with the Nazis, and perpetrators themselves of genocidal violence; but they are not represented specifically as victims of the Nazi persecution of civilian, as indeed they also were. In fact non-Jewish Poles were racially targeted on a massive scale because the Nazi theory of race ranked all Slavic peoples only slightly higher than Jews in the hierarchy of *Untert* to *Übermenschen* (sub-human to super-human). The plans for the *Lebensraum* invasion of the East entailed the total displacement of existing Polish, Russian, and other populations in order to create settlement for ethnic Germans (Burleigh 2002). There is a place, then, for specific forms of Polish memorialisation of Nazi victims, such as Górecki’s symphony exemplifies, just as there should be memorialisation of all the groups targeted for persecution by hostile, genocidal regimes.

But against the backdrop of its Polish context, Górecki’s national emphasis stands complicit, willingly or unwillingly, with the anti-semitic move within Polish communist memorialisation of the time. The fact that the Symphony no. 3 does not refer to Jewish persecution is less an indication of its universality, than a symptom of the postwar

Polish political will to elide the suffering of particular groups into an inclusive historical myth of communal national struggle. If the fact of a broad Polish victimisation by the Nazis cannot be denied, nor should the particular victimisation of Jews, or for that matter any other group, be subsumed within it.

### *Ecouterism*

Musicological criticisms of Górecki's Symphony no. 3 commonly focus on its accessibility and simplistic diatonic modality, and on its betrayal of the serial, atonal and avant-garde project of most twentieth-century art music, a project to which Górecki himself was committed up until the 1970s (see Jakelski 2009). But never do such critics consider the politics of the Symphony's pathos and redemption. Modernist musical aesthetics possibly are more appropriate for representing the senseless death and unredeemable horrors of World War Two precisely because they do no attempt to translate such events into a pretty tune for our listening pleasure or a trigger for the exquisite sweetness of sadness or the ecstatic release of cathartic sorrow. But ought we to be wary of judging Górecki's piece as problematic simply because of the pleasures it provokes or the mass popularity it has gleaned? As Carolyn Dean's work shows moral objections to aesthetic or voyeuristic representation of the Holocaust have rarely justified how pleasure of any kind actually disrupts an appropriate recognition of the suffering of others (Dean 2004: 50-51).

The question driving the present inquiry, however, is not whether the pleasure of Górecki's sad songs encourages an inappropriate memorialisation of the victims of World War Two, but rather, by what mechanism or dynamic might it operate in this way—if indeed that is its effect? The work's tendency to nationalise the suffering of the war and to redeem its horrors with the soothing balm of Catholic redemption make its historical referencing suspect. The visual accompaniments that have followed in the reception and dissemination of the symphony no. 3 show that the work's effect on some consumers is related to its aestheticised and highly gendered views of suffering and compassion. If the term voyeurism connotes too restrictedly a visual enjoyment, perhaps another French-derived neologism is needed to describe a similar pleasure taken in aural stimulation: as *voyeur* derives from the verb *voir* to see, then the verb *écouter* to listen would give us *écouteur* and hence 'ecouteurism.' Debates about Holocaust representation and the ethics of aestheticisation have tended to assume that the greatest

dangers may lie in the use of imagery that repeats a dynamic of genocide in the violation of victims or the sadism of perpetrators (Steiner 1967). But Górecki's sad songs suggest concerns about another kind of representation of genocide, all the more insidious for its sweetness: Musical evocation of compassion for the suffering of others in war has the potential to encourage a pleasurable sadness derived from the collapsing of our emotions into an imagination of historical subjects' suffering. Feeling good, feeling ourselves to be 'good' because we weep for the pain of others, we turn away from the horror of reality and make an object of solace and satiation from their suffering. In accepting universalist denials of the cultural specificity of expressions of pain, spirituality and transcendence, we risk ignoring the messier memory contexts in which all works of art about World War Two emerge.

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