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## Expression Surpassing Words: Gorecki's Symphony No. 3, Op. 36 "Sorrowful Songs"

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# Expression Surpassing Words: Gorecki's Symphony No. 3, Op. 36 "Sorrowful Songs"

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## Abstract

The experience of listening to Gorecki's *Symphony no. 3, op. 36 "Sorrowful Songs"* is one that is not easily forgotten. It is not only musically captivating, but also historically fascinating. After its premiere in 1977, Gorecki's piece captivated listeners across the globe as it became a cultural phenomenon in both Europe and America. The music was a stunning success in both the Classical and popular cultures. What is it about the music that is so captivating? How did the trending, popular thoughts compare to Gorecki's original ideas and compositional motives? What actually inspired this piece? By looking at the composition and premise of each movement, I am going to introduce how the piece was written around the theme of maternal love and separation of mother and child. The Third Symphony was heavily influenced by Gorecki's personal past, but also by his Catholic beliefs and by Polish history. The separate texts to this three movement piece deal individually with a mother's lament over her son's departure, the Virgin Mary's grief at her Son's death, and finally the words of an incarcerated prison girl to her mother. Because of the setting from which the third text was drawn, and because of Gorecki's Polish history and experiences in the post-holocaust world, many people have interpreted this to be a "war piece" which avenges the sufferers of the Holocaust. According to Gorecki, this piece is a lament- it expresses a profound sense of grief which, arguably, cannot accurately be expressed with words. Gorecki used his music to confront, mourn, and express his pain and the pain of many other people. By finding primary sources, such as interviews of Henryk Gorecki, and by looking at the scholarly books and journals by Luke B. Howard, Adrian Thomas, and other scholars of Polish avant-garde music, I hope to properly understand and express the intentions Gorecki wished to convey by writing *The Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*.

## Keywords

Górecki, Symphony, Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, maternal love, Holocaust Music, Virgin Mary

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Expression Surpassing Words:  
Górecki's *Symphony No. 3, Op. 36* "Sorrowful  
Songs"

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A lonely double bass line draws in the listeners' ear by repeating a plaintive motif. The line is slowly more noticeable as the cellos join the original instruments in canon. After a progression of what seems like a dreamy eternity, the violas and finally the violins join in what becomes an eight-part canon. A single crescendo and decrescendo finally terminate into a unison sustained note. Though the introduction seemed like a piece in and of itself, the mournfully sustained voice of a soprano enters to create a contrasting color with the orchestra. The soprano soars high above the orchestra in a foreboding, but beautiful and effortless line. Without knowing the context of this piece, the translation of the words, or anything about the composer, the listener is swept away by the fact that such a simple, repetitive theme can captivate and entrance the listener as it does! Not only is the listener aware of the beauty, but he is also aware of the overtones of despair and lament. As the three-movement piece is artistically presented, not even an hour of music seems to pass. This orchestral composition with solo voice is, indeed, a riveting listening experience.

Górecki's *Symphony No. 3, Op. 36* "Sorrowful Songs" is a lament – it expresses a profound sense of grief which, arguably, cannot accurately be expressed with mere words. Górecki used his music to confront, mourn, and express his pain and the pain of many other people. Górecki's life experiences integrate the theme of maternal love and also the theme of suffering, grief, and commemoration of the Holocaust. In a documentary reflecting on his memories, Górecki said, "This was my world. The only way to confront this horror, to forget, but you could

never forget, was through music.” He said, “Somehow I need to take a stand—as a witness. As a warning.”<sup>1</sup>

The painful life experiences of Henryk Górecki pervade his musical composition; furthermore, the themes of maternal loss and grief from the Holocaust are overwhelmingly present in the composition of his third symphony. Step into a journey which explores the public reception of the symphony, the life of Henryk Górecki, the theme of maternal loss within all his compositions, his interaction with contemporary Polish composers, his personal grief from the Holocaust, and the ethics of depicting pain through artistic expression. This knowledge prepares the listener to engage in an educated, insightful study of the soprano’s text. The lyrics in this piece plead with the audience, ardently imploring them to consider that *Symphony No. 3, Op. 36 “Sorrowful Songs”* should be considered a powerful work of art and a tribute to those whom Górecki sought to honor by its’ composition.

This piece is not only musically captivating, but also historically fascinating. After its premiere in 1977, Górecki’s piece captivated listeners across the globe as it became a cultural phenomenon in both Europe and America. According to Luke Howard, “When Górecki’s Third entered *Billboard* Magazine’s classical charts in May 1992, a month after its U.S. release, few people took any notice. But when it quickly climbed into the top ten and continued to move up, its improvement and staying power caught the attention of industry observers. Never before had a recording of a major work by a living composer achieved such status.”<sup>2</sup> According to Howard, “The breakthrough moment in the Górecki phenomenon occurred in late January 1993, when the disc crossed over into *Music Week*’s pop charts. Górecki had broken through the core market of classical music buyers to an audience known in the trade as the ‘massive passive.’ This somber and serious contemporary orchestral work was the highest climber on the British pop charts on two separate occasions, outselling

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<sup>1</sup> Górecki, Henryk Mikolaj. *The Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. The London Sinfonietta, David Zinman. Directed by Tony Palmer (England: Isolde Films, 2007), DVD.

<sup>2</sup> Luke B. Howard, “Motherhood, Billboard, and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Górecki Symphony No. 3,” *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (1998): 142, doi:[10.1093/mq/82.1.131](https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/82.1.131).

new albums by Michael Jackson and Madonna.”<sup>3</sup> The recording by Elektra-Nonesuch has sold over one million copies to date, and American magazines such as *Forbes*, *USA Today*, and *Time* were commenting about the dramatic success of a classical piece in the popular realm.<sup>4</sup>

This music was a captivating and stunning success in both the classical and popular realms, but the general public had different ideas about this piece than Górecki had when he was originally inspired to compose it. Visiting the past and observing the experiences of Górecki’s childhood years as well as his compositional products written prior to the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* will create a contextual setting for the composition of this piece. Because Górecki only recently died in 2012, direct information can be used to understand Górecki’s compositional ideas and motivations. Studying this piece and also Górecki’s life experiences creates an understanding of the powerful message which is conveyed by this symphony and a reaction which is based on that comprehensive understanding of Górecki’s intentions.

Henryk Mikołaj Józef Górecki was born on December 6, 1933. His parents, Roman and Otylia, had been married the year before his birth and lived outside the village of Czernica, Poland. His father, an amateur musician and railway employee, was left alone with the child upon the death of his wife when their son was two. He remarried fourteen months later.<sup>5</sup> Henryk’s birth mother was the musician in the family. Unfortunately, their small home did not have room for her grand piano, and after her death, her son was not really encouraged in his music. Young Górecki was also continually plagued by ill health which continued into his adulthood. He suffered from a permanent limp, tuberculosis, a skull tumor, and almost had to have his finger amputated. Many of his health issues were mistreated because of the German occupation, difficulty obtaining medicines, and poor recommendations from quack doctors.<sup>6</sup> Górecki’s poor health is summed up in his personal words: “That I’m alive is a miracle.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Thomas, *Górecki* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xiii-xv.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Jacobson, *A Polish Renaissance*, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Górecki applied to several intermediate music schools after gaining his secondary school certificate in 1951, but was not considered because of his advanced age and poor training. He eventually enrolled at a music learning centre in Rybnik, where he worked as a teacher and studied piano simultaneously for two years.<sup>8</sup> He ultimately studied composition at the State Academy of Music in Katowice for five years with Boleslaw Szabelski. He eventually married a piano teacher, Jadwiga Ruranska, and they later taught together at the Academy.<sup>9</sup>

Górecki's childhood was heavily influenced by the blatant absence of a strong mother figure in his life. According to Howard, "Górecki's emotional impetus for writing the Third Symphony (completed in 1976) drew on a whole lifetime of feelings and experiences, but it arose especially from his veneration of the maternal bond, a connection that surfaces very early in his oeuvre."<sup>10</sup> We can see the resulting emotional scarring in Górecki's life by observing the dedications of some of his earlier works.

*Three Songs* is dedicated to Górecki's mother. Each song shows different reactionary emotions, including anger, grief, and skittish relief to sadness. For instance, in the second song, "Jakiz to Dxwon Grobowy," according to Adrian Thomas "Górecki emphasizes the almost confrontational outrage of the bereaved son, the piano's thundering ostinato in the outer sections vividly capturing the image of a man "tormented by black despair." In contrast, the first song "Do Matki" ("To Mother") is elegant, indirect, laconic, and distant. The words for this text are as follows: "Within the darkness I see the image of my mother, As if walking towards the source of the rainbow – Her turned face looks over her shoulder, and her gaze reveals that she is looking at her son."<sup>11</sup>

*Ad Matrem, Opus 29* for Soprano, Chorus, and Orchestra, written in 1971, also shows this theme of maternal loss. This piece is also titled "Do Matki" and is once again dedicated to his mother's memory. The mournful sounds of violins are contrasted with the anger in the percussion. Howard says, "Periodically the chorus enters with quadruple-forte outbursts, calling out in Latin, "Mater mea" ("My

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, xv-xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobson, 171.

<sup>10</sup> Howard, 131.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

mother”). Though intended as a sacred work on the subject of the Holy Mother, the allusion to Górecki’s own mother almost overwhelms this religious devotion.” Górecki wrote music about his mother, but he also wrote a lot of music about the Virgin Mary. Maja Trochimczyk suggests that these are separated into three categories, including songs addressing Mary in prayer, “Marion songs,” and other works which reference the mother of God. *Totus Tuus*, op. 60 and *O Domina nostra (Meditations on Our Lady of Jasna Góra)*, op. 55, for soprano and organ both are songs of prayer to Mary.<sup>12</sup> “Marion Songs,” or songs of private devotion, include *Pod Twoją Obronę* (Under Your Protection), op. 56, for eight-part mixed choir, and parts of *Pieśni Kościelne* (Church Songs) for mixed choir, which remains unpublished. Thomas suggests that many of the pieces written by Górecki after 1960 are *Bogurodzica*, songs in reference to the Mother of God.<sup>13</sup> He also wrote lullabies, which are intrinsically maternal.

Górecki’s ideas about maternal love were undoubtedly not only influenced by his personal history, but by Polish religion, history, and politics. Górecki was a devout Catholic. In Poland, Roman Catholicism has a heavy emphasis on revering the mother of Christ, especially when contrasted to American Catholic churches, which are more influenced by their Protestant neighboring churches. Polish liturgy and masses are more directly focused on marion prayers and hymns. Also, there are many holidays and three months dedicated to her.<sup>14</sup> The other important Polish maternal image is that of fictitious “Matka Polka,” a heroic, political mother figure. During the years of partitions, between 1795 and 1918, Poland became less independent and the culture drew strength from the family-oriented culture it preserved. The family became “the stronghold of national identity,” and “the maternal element in culture became particularly prominent through the emphasis on the survival and transmission of Polish cultural values in the homes.”<sup>15</sup> Górecki’s personal ideas about maternal love were a direct result of his personal situation, but they were also heavily influenced by Polish images of Matka Polka as well as the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>12</sup> Maja Trochimczyk, “Mater Dolorosa and Maternal Love in the Music of Henryk Górecki,” *Polish Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (2003): I, [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish\\_music/PMJ/issues.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issues.html).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., III.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

To set Górecki's composing in context, we must look at how he compared to other Polish composers who worked and lived during his time. Some other Polish composers of the time period include Penderecki, Panufnik, and Lutosławski. These four composers shared the similarities of a Polish heritage, Catholic tradition, and the influence of the communist and post-communist culture. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Górecki did not like to travel and he was not interested in developing a career as a composer or becoming famous, which is ironic considering the record-breaking blooming sale of the third symphony. He did not enjoy giving interviews or speeches, so we do not have many recorded speeches or interviews with him. Many composers in addition to Górecki wrote music in response to Polish political interest and dedicated to war victims. Some of these works include *Musica humana* by Zbigniew Penherski, *Requiem for the Victims of War* by Zbigniew Rudzinski, and *Holocaust Memorial Cantata* by Marta Ptaszynska.<sup>16</sup> As previously mentioned, the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* was prevalent among these compositions. According to Thomas, "A large part of its appeal was its non-institutional expression of sacred and patriotic sentiment – death, familial loyalty, sacrifice, and transcendence – which by nature of Górecki's treatment of the genre emphasized these sentiments over and above a specifically Christian message."<sup>17</sup> Given these similarities, each composer developed his own unique voice in the avant-garde Polish music community, and Górecki's voice is very prevalent among these.

Now that we have looked at how Górecki personally established himself within the Polish music community, we can specifically look at his personal experiences with the Holocaust. The horrible remnants of the Holocaust persecutions were very real to Górecki. He said, "I remember, when I was twelve years old, we went on a school visit to Auschwitz. I had the feeling that the huts were still warm . . . The paths themselves – and this image has never left me – the paths were made from human bones, thrown onto the path like shingle. We boys had to walk on this? This is not sand, not earth."<sup>18</sup> In fact, several of his family members, including his grandfather and aunt, died in

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<sup>16</sup> Adrian Thomas. *Polish Music Since Szymanowski* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 255.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>18</sup> Jacobson, 171-174.

concentration camps.<sup>19</sup> In composing the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*, Górecki wanted to remember and grieve over this pain. According to Jacobson, “[He] had never lost sight of the universal aspect.” Górecki himself said, “Those things are too immense – you can’t write music about them.”<sup>20</sup>

Allison Moore offers valuable insight into the ethical question of whether or not Górecki’s *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* accurately addresses the suffering of the Holocaust. She says, “Although Górecki claimed that, like words, music is incapable of representing the monumental horrors of World War Two, his third symphony has been overwhelmingly interpreted as a work about the Nazi persecution of Jewish and Slavic populations.”<sup>21</sup> In her paper, *Is the Unspeakable Singable?: The Ethics of ‘Holocaust’ Representation and the Reception of Górecki’s Symphony no. 3*, Moore addresses the question “Should we try to depict the Holocaust verbally, or even visually?” If we should not, she says, “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 unsingable?”<sup>22</sup> This is an important consideration in the discussion of Holocaust music.

Since the composition of *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* was a personal way for Górecki to grieve, it should not be over-interpreted it as a “depiction” of the Holocaust, but more as a “reflection on” the Holocaust. The piece was intended to be personal, not a political statement. In fact, Moore says, “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.” Through his music, Henryk

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>21</sup> Alison Moore, “Is the Unspeakable Singable? The Ethics of Holocaust Representation and the Reception of Górecki’s Symphony No. 3,” *Portal Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 8, no. 1 (2011): 5, doi:[10.5130/portal.v8i1.1888](https://doi.org/10.5130/portal.v8i1.1888).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 4.

Górecki was able to properly convey emotion which he could not express through words alone.

Given the life experiences of Górecki, his interaction with Polish history and politics, and a proper ethical interpretation of his works, there are two themes which have emerged prevalently throughout Górecki's life. Because of his mother's early death, Henryk Górecki missed having a maternal influence in his life. This is evidenced by his early music. It also was exploited by the fact that the Polish culture had such a heavy influence on the mother-figure. Because of his personal experiences with the prison camps and the persecution of his family members, Górecki wanted to write a piece of music expressing his grief, commemorating his love for the sufferers, and dealing with the pain associated with the holocaust. In the *Symphony of Sorrowful Song*, Górecki artistically used the medium of orchestral and vocal sound to express his pain. This pain was directly based on two themes: grief from maternal loss and grief from personally experiencing the Holocaust. These two themes are captured in the soprano's lyrics, interspersed throughout the three movements, which cumulatively create a captivating textual study.

The theme of maternal love is clearly evident in the text which the soprano sings above the orchestra accompaniment. Thomas states: "At the heart of the Third Symphony lie its texts, each dealing with a different aspect of a woman's response to death, each with a Polish context: (i) a fifteenth-century lament of the Virgin Mary for Christ on the Cross, (ii) a prayer to the Immaculate Queen of Heaven inscribed on the wall of a Gestapo jail in 1944 by an eighteen-year-old highland woman, and (iii) a folksong, whose text may date from the Silesian uprisings (1919-21), in which a mother mourns for her missing son."<sup>23</sup> Individual examination of the source of these texts will avail insight into Górecki's compositional intentions.

The first movement of the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* draws its lyrics from a fifteenth-century text. These words were a *Lament swietokrzyski* or a Holy Cross Lament – words of Mary lamenting her grief following her son's death. The actual text is as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music*, 265.

My son, my chosen and beloved,  
Share your wounds with your mother  
And because, dear son, I have always carried you in  
my heart  
And always served you faithfully,  
Speak to your mother, to make her happy,  
Although you are already leaving me, my cherished  
hope.<sup>24</sup>

Though this text is intrinsically connected to the crucifixion, it does not specifically mention Christ or the cross. In this text, we can see the pervasive themes of maternal love.

These lyrics are in the midst of a larger canonic texture, and the soprano voice enters only after thirteen minutes of purely instrumental introduction. According to Thomas, “The first is framed by an extraordinarily evocative canonic texture in which the theme is an amalgam of two Polish religious songs – a beggar’s Lenten hymn and a song of praise to the Lord– whose combination symbolizes the bittersweet message of the Crucifixion.”<sup>25</sup> It was composed in the Aeolian mode on E, and overlapped the first eight bars of the Lenten song with the final four bars of a hymn by Skierkowski. Górecki used a motif of E–F#–G, combined with traditional Slavonic elements from the Sixth Symphony written by Tchaikovsky and the Third Piano Concerto of Rachmaninov, to ultimately compose a naturally evolving motivic theme.<sup>26</sup> He also drew from Szymanowski’s music, specifically *Stabat Mater*.<sup>27</sup> The canonic texture is extremely effective because of the familiar and straightforward textural building, the singular modality, and the structural equality in the instrumental entrances.<sup>28</sup>

The popular culture, composed largely of the general public, formed the idea that the *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* is a “war song” with a specific political agenda. This idea is derived from the lyric inspiration of the second movement. Górecki found the words in a book entitled ‘Palace’: *Katowinia Podhala* which translates to ‘Palace’: *Place of Torture in Podhale*. This book describes a Gestapo prison in Zacobane,

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<sup>24</sup> Howard, 132.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music*, 266.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-86.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

a town in Southern Poland.<sup>29</sup> Prisoners were kept and tortured there, and many scratched their names, ages, hometowns, and messages of revenge or of farewell into the cell doors and walls.<sup>30</sup> Górecki was struck by the simplicity of one simple phrase found there. It simply said, “Oh Mama do not cry –I mmaculate Queen of Heaven, support me always.” This phrase was penned by a young eighteen-year-old girl by the name of Helena Wanda Błażusiakówna who came from the highlands.<sup>31</sup> Speaking of these words, Górecki said, “I have to admit that I have always been irritated by grand words, by calls for revenge. Perhaps in the face of death I would shout out in this way. But the sentence I found is different, almost an apology or explanation or having got herself into such trouble; she is seeking comfort and support in simple, short but such meaningful words. I like such texts: short and simple.”<sup>32</sup> Interestingly enough, Helena’s inscription actually has a back-story. She was apparently quoting the final words of a young, patriotic martyr named Jurek Bitschan who died while unsuccessfully fighting to defend the Polish city of Lwów.<sup>33</sup>

This text has a very specific history, but Howard reminds us, “As in the first movement of the symphony, the composer chose to focus not on the specifics of this text’s source but on the universal sentiment it carries, this time the reciprocal expression of a child’s concern for her mother.”<sup>34</sup> So we can see that the text shows themes of maternal love, only in the inverse sense of a child loving her mother. This text is set within the context of a rocking or cradling pair of harmonic chords. These two chords eventually lead to the climax of the prayer. Interestingly enough, Górecki borrowed this from Chopin’s Mazurka Op. 17, No. 4. He also references the development of the first movement of Beethoven’s Third Symphony.<sup>35</sup>

This movement is a compelling portrayal of maternal love, but it also shows the theme of suffering and the grief of the Holocaust. Because the lyrics come from the history of Gestapo prison camps, people have extrapolated the themes war and torture, describing this piece as a

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<sup>29</sup> Howard, 132.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>34</sup> Howard, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music*, 266.

Holocaust memorial or a “war piece.” Górecki was more concerned with the broad theme, wishing to grieve over his past and remember the loved ones which had been lost. Writing this piece was a way to express his grief and move forward. This music not only depicts suffering, but transcends Górecki’s grief providing a form of expression which cannot be conveyed through words. Mark Swed describes it this way: “The amplification of the simple into the monumental through repetition serves here as perhaps the only way to comprehend the Holocaust, the amplification of individual loss into mass destruction. And beauty, wondrous beauty, this symphony tells us, has to be found in the smallest crack in the wall in order to transcend terrible suffering.”<sup>36</sup>

The third movement of the symphony was inspired by a Silesian folk song, “Kajze mi sie podziół mój synocek miły,” which speaks of a mother’s mourning because of her son’s death. The text is from when the Silesians fought the Germans in an uprising during the early 1900’s, though the melody may be from the nineteenth century. The context of the lyrics has to do with an uprising in Opole, southern Poland, and Górecki believe that the text was written during World War I.<sup>37</sup> Górecki himself said, “For me, it is a wonderfully poetic text. I do not know if a ‘professional’ poet would create such a powerful entity out of such terse, simple words. It is not sorrow, despair or resignation, or the wringing of hands: it is just the great grief and lamenting of a mother who has lost her son.”<sup>38</sup> The words are set to a chordal structure with a motif built on two alternating chords and a melody line in the lower tessitura of the orchestra. Górecki actually used this same motif in Opus. 3, “Do Matki”.<sup>39</sup>

While conducting a rehearsal for an upcoming performance of the piece, Górecki said, “Let us now take a small “breathing space” so that you can understand my intentions. This is a mother's song. This song has to be expressed both by the orchestra and the soloist. It has to be

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Swed, “Górecki’s Third is all his Own,” Music Review from the Los Angeles Times, *Polish Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (2003): [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish\\_music/PMJ/issues.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issues.html).

<sup>37</sup> Howard, 133.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Howard, 133

contemplative in mood...”<sup>40</sup> Górecki was training the orchestra to contemplate and convey the importance of the maternal love theme in their performance of the piece. Although the lyrics for this movement were drawn from a specific context, they universally represent the themes of maternal love and suffering in the midst of separation.

Throughout Górecki’s life, there are two dominant themes which pervade his compositions; Górecki themed his music around maternal love and grief in suffering. In all his music, but specifically in *Symphony no. 3, op. 36* “*Sorrowful Songs*,” Thomas says: “Górecki has moved beyond basic sacred and patriotic sentiment to another plane of understanding. He has transcended not only the vileness of death and war, which he refuses to depict, and instead has sought resolution through contemplation.”<sup>41</sup> While trying to write a piece of lament which personally expresses the pain in his life from the Holocaust suffering and his mother’s untimely death, Górecki reached a higher goal. He grasped an essential value of music: the fact that music can arguably express emotions and convey feelings which cannot be communicated with words. Steven Wingate summed it up well by saying:

As I try to understand my reaction to this symphony, my thoughts twine down to a single idea: art creates a vessel that allows human suffering to be shared across generations, distances, and creeds. The “Holy Cross Lament” that Górecki invokes was written half a millennium ago, and no one knows how long it lived in the oral tradition before it made its way onto paper; “When I cry over it, I’m crying with all of the other people who have ever cried—in any language—over that prayer or others like it. I’m crying with everyone who has imagined Mary’s sense of lost hope at the foot of the cross, as well as all of those who ever will.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Henryk Mikolaj Górecki, “Remarks on Performing the Third Symphony,” trans. by Maja Trochimczyk, *Polish Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (2003): [http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish\\_music/PMJ/issues.html](http://www.usc.edu/dept/polish_music/PMJ/issues.html).

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, *Polish Music*, 266.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Wingate, “A Communion of Tears: Henryk Górecki’s Symphony No. 3 and the Fellowship of Human Suffering,” *The Other Journal*, last modified September 22, 2008, accessed February 8, 2014, <http://theotherjournal.com/2008/09/22/a-communion-of-tears-henryk-gorecki%E2%80%99s-symphony-no-3-and-the-fellowship-of-human-suffering/>.

Through this Symphony, one can glimpse into the soul of Górecki and share in his suffering and grief. Furthermore, Henryk Górecki's composition of *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* invites the listener to experience a carefully crafted, intentional composition which transcends the barriers of language and verbal expression, providing a breathtakingly ethereal musical experience which captures the soul like no other work of art.

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