

Deutsches Requiem

Guide based on:

Evelyn Fishburn & Psiche Hughes, A Dictionary of Borges

Various reference books.

Deutsches Requiem Literally 'requiem in German', also understood as 'requiem *for* Germany': a choral work by Brahms composed upon the death of his mother and first performed in Vienna in 1867. In spite of its devotional and liturgical associations, it dwells upon problems of individual human destiny without mention of Christ.

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The texts of Brahms' "Ein deutsches Requiem" are from the Old and New Testament.

Job One of the late books of the Old Testament, whose exact meaning has been debated through the centuries. The story illustrates steadfastness of belief in the face of disaster and divine injustice, and raises the question of the individual's place in the scheme of the universe. Maimonides, in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (ch. 3, lines 22/3) attributes Job's defiant questioning of God's justice to his defective knowledge of God, limited to 'report and hearsay' as in 'most adherents of revealed religions'. After the theophany of the whirlwind, however, when he attained true philosophical knowledge of God, Job realised that no misfortune, however grave, can trouble a man. A more radical interpretation, and one which accords better with much of Borges's writings, is that there is no principle of divine retribution because 'justice is not woven into the stuff of the universe nor is God occupied with its administration'. The main theme of Job appears to be the perennial problem of innocent suffering; like the character Zur Linde, Job has no doubt of his innocence. The quotation from Job which serves as epigraph to 'Deutsches Requiem' can be taken as an ironic reflection on the power of blind belief, irrespective of its cause. Lab. 173(141) *Aleph* 81

Zur Linde A fictional name creating a German atmosphere. The *Lindenbaum* (lime tree) which appears in many traditional and patriotic songs is emblematic of the German spirit. Lab.173(141) *Aleph* 81

Zorndorf A village in north-east Germany, since 1945 in Poland. Lab. 173 (141): the Prussian victory referred to took place on 25 August 1758 during the war with Russia.[...]

Marchenoir A forest near Blois, the scene of numerous battles in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Lab. 173(141) *Aleph* 81

Namur A Belgian city and province taken by the Germans in World War I on 25 August 1914. It was also the scene of fighting in World War II.

Danube (Danubio) The second largest river in Europe after the Volga, rich in historical and political associations. Lab. 173 (141): the crossing of the Danube in 1916 probably refers to the German counter-attack after the Brusilov offensives and the Russian attempt to

regain lost territories. Lab. 150 (119) *Aleph* 35, Lab. 159 (128) *Aleph* 48, Lab. 173 (141) *Aleph* 81

Forkel, Johannes A fictional character in Borges's 'Deutsches Requiem', said to have lived from 1799 to 1846. The name recalls Johann Nicolaus Forkel, the first biographer of J.S. Bach, who lived from 1749 to 1818. Lab. 173(141) *Aleph* 81

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1770-1831) A German philosopher, one of the foremost representatives of nineteenth-century idealism. According to Hegel's definition of reality, individual facts are not rational in themselves but only if viewed as aspects of the whole. The whole is called the 'absolute'; it is spiritual, and can only be reached by a process of logic. Lab. 173 (141): this process, known as 'dialectics', is composed of a triadic movement of *thesis*, the original statement, *antithesis*, its counterpart, to which the first gives rise, and *synthesis*, the unification of the two. This synthesis then becomes the new thesis in the next stage of the movement. Lab. 103 (73): Hegel's dialectical system of knowledge also operates in his vision of history. Deeply religious, Hegel viewed the universe as a manifestation of God, the absolute, who arrives at final self-knowledge through the history of finite beings. The human mind, rising from mere consciousness, passes through various stages, culminating in religion and perfect knowledge. Hegel further expands this principle by observing the various dialectic and cyclical stages of human progress in the realisation of God's purpose. Lab. 103 (73) *Ficc.* 139, Lab. 173 (141) *Aleph* 81

Apocrypha (Libros Apócrifos) Greek for 'hidden things': the name given to late Old Testament books of ambiguous status in both Jewish and Christian tradition. By the early Christians they were generally accepted, but in the fourth century the Church Fathers disagreed on whether they were 'canonical', a debate rekindled by Protestant thinkers at the Reformation. Lab. 173 (123): in the nineteenth century interest in the Apocrypha revived.

Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm (1802-1869) A German Protestant theologian and leader of the orthodox Lutherans, a bitter opponent of 'rationalism' as a method of Old Testament criticism. In 1830 he mounted a violent attack on the rationalist Gesenius.

Thilo, Johann Karl A colleague of Gesenius, with whom he travelled in 1822 to Paris, London and Oxford to examine oriental manuscripts. Lab.173(141) *Aleph* 81

Gesenius, Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm (1786-1842) A German orientalist and biblical scholar famous for his rationalist methods of exegesis. In 1830 he was subjected to violent attack in the Evangelical press under the editorship of Hengstenberg. Gesenius was a friend of Thilo, with whom in 1820 he travelled to Paris, London and Oxford to examine oriental manuscripts. Lab. 173(141) *Aleph* 81

Germany (Alemania) A varying symbol in the context of different stories. Lab. 45-6 (20-1): [...] in 'Deutsches Requiem' Germany is used in two sets of conflicting images. Uppermost lies the representation of the spirit of pure Germanism (Kerndeutsch) as expounded in the Third Reich ideology of the master race. Briefly, this argued that the

Nordic Aryans were the bearers of the highest form of civilisation and culture and that their purity had to be preserved for the salvation of mankind. Yet this image is offset by the wider, humanistic tradition exemplified by Hegel, Brahms and Goethe and even by their appropriation of Shakespeare. Lab. 45 (20) *Ficc.* 99, Lab. 160 (128) *Aleph* 49, Lab. 173 (141) *Aleph* 83

Marienburg (or **Marienberg**) German for Polish Malbork, a town in the Polish province of Gdansk, formerly in East Prussia and closely associated since the thirteenth century with the Teutonic Order.

Brahms, Johannes (1833-97) The only composer to be mentioned in Borges's stories.

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German composer and pianist of the Romantic period, who wrote symphonies, concertos, chamber music, piano works, choral compositions, and more than 200 songs. Brahms was the great master of symphonic and sonata style in the second half of the 19th century. He can be viewed as the protagonist of the Classical tradition of Joseph Haydn, W.A. Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven in a period when the standards of this tradition were being questioned or overturned by the Romantics. [from: Encyclopedia Britannica]

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788-1860) A German philosopher of the post-Kantian school, whose best-known books are *The World as Will and Idea* (1818; 2nd edn. 1844) and two volumes of essays entitled *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851). Schopenhauer is the philosopher most quoted by Borges (about fifty times) in his stories and criticism. Solitary and retiring, Schopenhauer was relatively unnoticed until the publication of his essays, which brought him worldwide recognition. His philosophy is based on the principle that all that exists is a manifestation of the Will and is comprehensible only through the constructs of man's intellect engendered by the Will itself, such as time, space and causality. Lab. 53 (28): the reference to Schopenhauer's belief in a uniform absolute time follows: time, being like the rest of experience a representation of the Will, is not subject to variations connected with individual and particular states. Schopenhauer insists that through the constructs of our mind only the appearances of the world are revealed to us, and not its reality.

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Parerga und Paralipomena 'Byproducts and Leftovers': the title given by Schopenhauer to his two volumes of collected essays, fragments, treatises, aphorisms and reflections published in 1851. [...] Lab. 175 (143): on the question of man determining his own destiny, Schopenhauer maintains that, starting again from the standpoint that all life manifestations are representations of the Will which is 'the kernel and essence of man', whatever 'occult power that guides even eternal influences can ultimately have its roots only in our mysterious inner beings' and concludes that 'in the last resort the alpha and the omega of all existence lies within us' (trans. E.F.J. Payne, Oxford 1974,212).

Shakespeare, William (1564-1616) England's greatest poet and playwright, author of more than 35 plays. Lab. 99 (70): Borges tends to use Shakespeare's name as a symbol of all humanity, the creator whose identity (not unlike that of God himself) is dispersed in his multiple creation. He quotes Coleridge, for whom Shakespeare is a 'literary variation of

Spinoza's infinite God'; Hazlitt, who said that Shakespeare resembled all men but in himself was nobody; and Hugo, who compared the poet to the ocean, the seed bed of all forms of life (Other Inq. 148). He later repeats this concept in an essay entitled 'Everything and nothing' (*Haced.* 43). Lab. 174 (142): Borges's reference to 'the immense Germanic name' of Shakespeare stems from the fact that, with the interpretative work of Lessing in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth-century translations of August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Shakespeare became one of the most influential forces in the forging of the new German aesthetics of the anti-classicist and anti-rationalist *Sturm und Drang* literary movement. He was admired for the individuality and restlessness of his characters and the grandeur of their ambitions and uncontrollable passions.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844-1900) A German philosopher whose belief that absolute truth is a philosophical invention had a marked influence on Borges. Nietzsche's writings must be understood against the background of the extreme physical suffering he endured which led eventually to his insanity. His philosophy is neither systematic nor expounded in a systematic form, but can be seen as a collection of different points of view reflecting the growing disintegration of his mind. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) he changed traditional perceptions of classical culture as expounded by Goethe. He highlighted the irrational or Dionysian streak which, he maintained, had co-existed with the more restrained Apollonian element. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) he developed the idea of the *Übermensch* ('overman') as the person who has organised the chaos of his passions, achieved a distinctive individuality and become creative. The term has been popularly misconceived: it was not intended in a Darwinian sense ('superman' is a bad translation), but as implying a desire to reach out beyond one's condition. Life for Nietzsche was not a wretched struggle for existence but a positive and dynamic striving for power. He revolted against Christianity, which he came to see as an enfeebled religion of comfort, and he preached a new master morality, inciting the *Übermensch* to trample underfoot the servile herd of the weak. He cited the sprouting plant and the babe in the womb as evidence of this natural will to grow, declaring that creation necessarily involves destruction, since life is always at the expense of other life. Thus he saw pity in negative terms, as based on sentimental morality, admiring instead Schopenhauer's ideas of courage and destruction in pursuit of the realisation of one's own self. He regarded suffering, cruelty, dissimulation and revenge as virtues which developed strength and integrity. Speaking of the *Übermensch*, he wrote: 'We must be hard against ourselves and overcome ourselves; we must become creators instead of remaining mere creatures.' He considered Goethe the model of the *Übermensch*. Some of Nietzsche's coinage and epigrammatic sayings glorifying courage were taken out of context by the Nazis and used to support the ideology of the master-race. Lab. 69 (42) refers to this misreading of Nietzsche's conception of power in militaristic terms. See Zarathustra. Lab. 69 (42) *Ficc.* 54, Lab. 174 (142) *Aleph* 82

Spengler, Oswald (1880-1936) A German philosopher of history, best known for his pessimistic work *The Decline of the West* (1918). Lab. 103 (73): Spengler argues against a linear interpretation of history, which he sees as consisting of aimless cycles of cultural configurations, of which western European civilisation is only one and already in decline. Lab. 174 (142): Spengler expresses the passing of cultures in terms of seasons, at times Apollonian, at times Faustian. By the latter term he means everything that is dynamic and

speculative, a romantic longing for the unattainable. An ardent nationalist, he believed in the need for an aristocratic elite; today he is accused of laying the intellectual foundations of fascism. His concept of Faust became the symbol of German dynamism at the time of the Third Reich. Lab. 103 (73) *Ficc.* 139, Lab. 174 (142) *Aleph* 82

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749-1832) The most celebrated modern German writer, exceptional for the range and depth of his work and generally considered the last universal genius. In his great drama *Faust* Goethe presents a symbol of Western European man in his unceasing quest for all possible experience. Although man's activity is shown to have negative results, the spark that ignites him is regarded as divinely inspired and in harmony with Nature. Lab. 46 (21): by comparing the sinologist Albert with Goethe, the narrator attributes to Albert a transcendental understanding of the individual human condition. This idea is emphasised in Lab. 174 (141), where Goethe is referred to as 'the prototype of that ecumenic comprehension'. Lab. 179 (147): the allusion to hammer and anvil as metaphors for master and slave is derived from two of Goethe's poems, 'Koptisches Lied' and 'Epigramme 14'. See *Faust*. Lab. 46 (21) *Ficc.* 100, Lab. 174 (141) *Aleph* 83

De Rerum Natura 'On the Nature of Things': a didactic and philosophical poem in six books by the Roman poet Lucretius (c.95-55 BC) in which the universe is explained, from an Epicurean point of view, as the result of the chance encounter of atoms rather than the intervention of the gods. Lab. 174 (142); the Faust-like traits found in *De Rerum Natura* refer to its challenge to religion, liberating man from the fear of death. Lab. 174(142) *Aleph* 83

"**an enormous and flaccid cat...**" translated by Palley from: " Símoló de mi vano destino, dormía en el reborde de la ventana un gato enorme y fofo."

Ephesus (Efeso) One of the largest cities of Greek origin in the Roman world, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. The temple of Diana at Ephesus was one of the 'seven wonders of the world'. Lab. 176 (144): St Paul lived and preached in Ephesus for three years (Acts 18 and 19); subsequently the city was the scene of many acts of Christian persecution. [...]

Paul, St (Pablo) (c.5-10 - c.67) The most important figure in the early history of the Church, whose theological principles were set out in his Epistles. Lab. 152 (121): while in Jerusalem to complete his education, Saul (as he was originally named) came across the followers of Jesus, whom he attacked and persecuted. He witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen, though he did not participate in it, merely guarding the cloaks of those who were stoning him. Lab. 130 (99): while Saul was on the road to Damascus on a mission to arrest some Christians, he was blinded, and converted, by a light 'from heaven' that shone 'round about him' (Acts 9:1-19, 22:5-16, 26:12-18). Paul died, a martyr, in Rome.

Napoleon (1769-1821) France's most famous general, who became Emperor. His military exploits extended French dominion over a large part of Europe, and his ideas were a source of inspiration to the liberation movements of Latin America. In the Romantic imagination

Napoleon typified a new spirit of individual freedom and power such as could 'challenge the world and subdue it with his genius'.

Raskolnikov The protagonist of Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866): a poor student in love with Sonia, a prostitute, who becomes the means of his spiritual regeneration. The crime of the title is the murder of an old woman, a repulsive money-lender; the punishment is the gradual racking of his conscience. Lab. 176 (144): in part 5, chapter 4 Raskolnikov confesses his crime to Sonia, saying that he committed it as a test of his daring because he wanted to become a Napoleon.

Tarnowitz (Tarnowitz) A town in south-west Poland, in the province of Katowice, formerly in Silesia, which belonged to Germany. Lab.176(144) *Aleph* 85

Zarathustra In Greek, Zoroaster: a figure who probably lived in the sixth century BC in eastern Persia. Very little is known about him. He was the consolidator of a religious doctrine now called Zoroastrianism, whose essential feature was dualism, expressed in a belief in two predominant spirits, Ormazd, the spirit of good and light, and Ahriman, the spirit of evil and darkness. The world was created out of the struggle between these two opposing powers; the conflict is reflected in man, who however is endowed with the freedom to choose between them. Zoroastrianism is a life-affirming religion, based on the ultimate triumph of good after the life on earth of a Saviour born of a virgin, for which it is thought to have influenced Apocalyptic Judaism and the New Testament. Nietzsche, in his poem 'Thus spake Zarathustra', talks admiringly of 'that Dionysian monster, whose fundamental message is that manhood is a state to be surpassed'. Lab. 176 (144) refers to part 4 of the poem in which Zarathustra speaks of having overcome his last sin, pity. In a highly poetical rendering of an encounter with a soothsayer, who had come to seduce Zarathustra to feel pity for the *higher man* (italics in original), Zarathustra relates the various stages through which he overcame this temptation. Though pity for the suffering of the world hangs heavily upon a sensitive man, yet he must have courage to overcome it for 'courage is the best killer; courage kills even pity. But pity is the deepest abyss.' The English translation of 'Deutsches Requiem' slightly alters the correct emphasis given by Borges in the original. See Parsis. Lab.176(144) *Aleph* 85

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In original: "No en vano escribo esa palabra; la piedad por el hombre superior es el último pecado de Zarathustra. Casi lo cometí (lo confieso) cuando nos remitieron de Breslau al insigne poeta David Jerusalem."

Breslau The German name of Wrocław, a city in Polish Silesia, which belonged to Germany until 1945. Lab. 176 (144): Jews have lived in and been expelled from Breslau many times since 1203. At the end of the eighteenth century they gained a foothold in the city, and Breslau was the home of many distinguished Jewish scholars. In 1939 the Jews numbered 10,309; from 1941 they were deported to concentration camps and only a few hundred survived. Lab. 176(144) *Aleph* 85

Soergel, Albert (1880-?) A German literary critic, author of *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit: Eine Schildung der deutschen Literatur des letzten Jahreszente* (2 vols, Leipzig, 1911-28). In this panoramic study of German creative literature from about 1880, Sorgel traces the main influences, native and foreign, that have shaped German literature. Lab. 176 (144): Walt Whitman is mentioned several times and has a separate entry with a photograph (vol.1, 533-6). The comparison with the character David Jerusalem is of course apocryphal. Lab.176(144) *Aleph* 85

Shylock The Jewish usurer in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, a character who has been interpreted in many different ways. Lab. 177 (144): the history of Shylock as set out in the fictional *Rosencratz Speaks with the Angel* is obviously apocryphal. There is, however, a long list of speculations about his origins. Among these figure an early ballad entitled *Ser Germutus the Jew*, an English version of the Italian play *Il Pecorone*, the Persian story of the 'Seven Wise Masters of Rome' from the Sinbad series, an English version of the *Gesta Romanorum* (c.1472) and the state trial of Rodrigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth's Jewish physician. Lab.177(144) *Aleph* 86

Sephardim The plural of the Hebrew *Sepharad*, meaning Spain: the term applied to Jews who were resident in Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages and their descendants, as distinguished from Ashkenazim or German Jews. Lab.177(144) *Aleph* 86

Ashkenazim The plural of the Hebrew 'Ashkenaz', meaning 'Germany': the term applied to the descendants of the Jews resident in medieval Germany and France, including Polish and Russian Jews. They are distinguished from Sephardim, the Jews of Spain and Portugal and their descendants. Lab. 177(144) *Aleph* 86

El Alamein The name applied to several military operations in North Africa in World War II, but more specifically to the decisive British battle under Montgomery on 4 November 1942 which resulted in Germany's retreat. Lab. 178(145) *Aleph* 87

Third Reich (Tercer Reich) (1933-1945) From the German *Reich*, 'empire': a concept made popular by a treatise *Das Dritte Reich* ('The Third Reich') published in 1923 by A. Moller van den Bruck. It originated in the Christian tradition of the millennium described in the book of Revelation (20-22) and adopted in the twelfth century by the German theologian J. von Floris (1132-1202). Floris divided all time into three ages: the age of the Father (up to the birth of Christ); the age of the Son (up to 1260); and the age of the Holy Spirit, or *Drittes Reich*, a messianic age in which there would be a universal reordering of peoples and nations. Under National Socialism the idea of a Third Reich was reinterpreted in triadic Hegelian terms, as the synthesis of the First Reich, the Holy Roman Empire, 962-1806, (the thesis), and the Second Reich, the empire of the Hohenzollerns created by Bismark in 1871, (the antithesis).

Aristotle (Aristóteles) (384-322 BC) A Greek philosopher whose comprehensive system over a range of theoretical and practical questions from metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics to politics and biology has influenced Western science for more than two thousand years. Though not a philosopher whom Borges quotes extensively, Aristotle's awareness that no

one system of thought can encompass the whole of being and serve for the deduction of all truths is an underlying theme in Borges. Aristotle, a pupil of Plato, found himself in disagreement with his master's idealism, according to which the observed world is only a reflection of the real world of ideas. Aristotle stressed the primacy of the particular or individual over the general. Thus in the *Categories* he distinguished between *primary* substances, such as particular men or horses, and *secondary* substances, such as the species or genera to which these particularities belonged. This polarity has characterised human thought through the centuries. Lab. 178 (146): when Borges, quoting an aphorism of Coleridge (*Other Inq.* 156), divides men into Aristotelians or Platonists, he refers to their contrasting world views. The difference between the Aristotelian concept of the particularising nature of reality and the Platonic concept of its abstract, generalising nature as manifested in language is humorously treated by Borges in 'Funes the Memorious'. [...]

Plato (Platón) (427-347 BC) An Athenian philosopher, the disciple of Socrates whose teachings he expanded in his early dialogues, illustrating Socrates' inductive system which aims at knowledge through a process of dialectic. Lab. 59 (34), 183 (151): the celestial archetype, or Platonic model, refers to the 'forms' of which, as Plato states in the *Republic*, the world is the manifold reflection. Thus we perceive the world in its multiplicity through our senses, while we conceive of the existence of the 'forms' by abstracting the essential from the many manifestations of the one archetype. The forms, however, are not just concepts of our minds but exist independently of their physical representation in a hierarchical system of which the idea of God is supreme. Awareness of their existence (absolute knowledge) is seen in contrast with the perception of each particular appearance, derived from our sensory experience. Lab. 178 (146): Borges comments on Coleridge's statement that all men are divided between Platonists and

Aristotelians in these terms: that the former see reality as manifestation of a cosmic order, while the latter, for whom reality consists of each individual experience, know that that order could be a 'fiction of our partial knowledge'. This distinction is fundamental for Borges, in so far as it indicates two totally opposed attitudes to life which are reflected in all antagonistic situations. Carrying Coleridge's distinction into the world of language, Borges concludes that, while for the Aristotelians language is only a system of arbitrary symbols, for the Platonists it remains the symbol of cosmic order, 'the map of the universe' (*Other Inq.* 156). [...]

Varus, Publius Quintilius (Varo) (d. 9 AD) A Roman general whose three legions were wiped out by the Germans under Arminius in 9 AD, the worst defeat suffered by the Romans in Augustus' time. Varus committed suicide after the battle. Lab.178(146) *Aleph* 88

Luther, Martin (Lutero) (1483-1546) A German religious reformer of intense vitality who inaugurated the Reformation on 31 October 1517 by fixing on the church door at Wittenburg his ninety-five theses against the penitential system of the Church and the sale of indulgences by the Dominican Johann Tetzel. For this act he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X and his writings were burnt. Luther based his doctrine on the individual responsibility of all believers for adherence to the truth as expressed in the bible and on salvation by the grace of God alone. When in 1521 he was summoned by Charles V to the

Diet of Worms he made the celebrated speech which ended with the words: 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me, amen.' In 1525 he married a nun who had renounced her vows. Lab. 176 (146): Luther's greatest influence on the German people was through his translation of the bible. He completed it in 1532, but revised it constantly until 1545. Through his translations and other writings he may also be regarded as the founder of the present literary language of Germany, that is, of New High German.

David (d. c.970 BC) The second king of Israel, first king of the Judaeen dynasty. Lab. 179 (146): the incident mentioned alludes to the sequel to the story of Uriah the Hittite, whom David sent to the front line so that he could marry his wife Bathsheba with whom he had committed adultery. The prophet Nathan tells David a parable of a rich man with many flocks who took a poor man's only ewe lamb to offer it to a visitor at his table. When David heard the story 'his anger was greatly kindled against the man', whereupon he was told: 'Thou art the man' (II Samuel 12:7). Brodie 83 (101) alludes to the description of David dancing, as he brought the Covenant into Zion: 'And David danced before the Lord with all his might...' (II Samuel 6:14).