Deathfugue

a setting of the poem by

Paul Celan

in an English translation by

John Felstiner

for

Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, String Quartet
and Male Voice
Deathfugue (Todesfuge)

-60 (Adagio)

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B♭

Voice

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

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Paul Celan

Richard Ratner
Black milk of day-break we drink it at evening, we drink it at mid-day and morning, we drink it at night, we drink and we drink and we shovel a grave in the
air where you won't lie too cramped

A man lives in the house he
plays with his vi-ners he writes he writes when it grows dark to Deut-schland

your golden hair your golden hair your
golden hair

Mar-ga-re-ta he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all

spark-ling he whistles his hounds to stay close

he whistles his Jews in-to
rows has them sho-vel a grave in the ground
he com-mands us play up for the

dance
Black milk of day-break we drink you at night we drink you at morning and
mid day we drink you at evening we drink and we drink...
lives in the house, he plays with his violin, he writes, he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland.

Meno mosso

A tempo

your golden hair, Margareta.

Meno mosso

A tempo

your auburn hair, Shulamith.

we
shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped

He shouts dig dig this earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt, he swings it

his eyes are so blue

stick your spades deeper you
lot there
you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of day-break we drink you at night we drink you at mid-day and
morning we drink you at evening we drink and we drink a man

lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete your a-sche-nes Haar Sulamith

Meno mosso

A tempo
mas-ter from Deut-schland
he shouts scrape scrape your strings dar-ker
you'll rise up as smoke to the sky
you'll then have a grave in the clouds where you won't lie too cramped
Black milk of day-break we drink you at night we drink you at mid-day

Death is a master Aus Deut schland we drink you at eve-ning and mor-ning we drink and we

spoken, ad lib.
drink

this Death is ein Meis-ter aus Deut-schland

his eye it is blue he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you
level and true a man

lives in the house your goldenes Haar Mar-ge-te he looses his hounds on us grants us a
grave in the air
he plays with his vipers
he day dreams
der

Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
dein goldenes Haar Margarete

whispered, ad lib.
Or maybe it is the Jews themselves who are looking forward to death as a way of escaping the cramped and horrible conditions of the camps. Celan is probably alluding to the fact that many Jews were cremated during the Holocaust, particularly those killed in the infamous gas chambers. The Nazis didn't even want to take the time to give their victims a proper burial.