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*Singing Wolves and Dreaming Apples:
Cosmopolitan Imagination
in Ligeti's Weöres Songs¹*

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ABSTRACT

György Ligeti (1923-2006) had a special affinity for the poetry of his countryman Sándor Weöres (1913-1989). Early songs set Weöres' iridescent symbolism within spiky arrangements whose imagery seems at odds with both the whose imagery seems at odds with both the "new nationalism" advocated by Bartók and the prevailing doctrines of Socialist Realism. Ligeti set Hungarian again only twice, returning to poems by Weöres in 1983 (the 16-voice *Hungarian Etudes*) and 2000 (*Síppal, doppal, nádibegedűvel* for mezzo-soprano and four percussionists). In these settings both poetry and music embody the "cosmopolitan imagination," a condition of self-problematization promoting new relations between self, other and world. I argue that the free-floating exoticism of these works neither mimics nor merges the vernacular music that inspires it, but produces an authentic moment of aesthetic discovery. Weöres's fantastic poems meet a similar sonic world to produce a singular event, a comic turn that grounds the universal in the concrete, whether the context be melancholy princesses, singing wolves, or dreaming apples.

¹ Earlier drafts of this paper were given at the American Comparative Literature Conference, Long Beach, CA, April 24-27, 2008 and the 19th International Musicological Society 2012 Rome Congress, July 1-7. The author would like to thank Peter Laki for his very helpful comments on this paper.

While a student at the Budapest Academy, György Ligeti (1923–2006) studied not only the music of Béla Bartók (1881–1945), but Romanian folk music – two influences that pervade early instrumental works such as the *Five Pieces for Two Pianos* (1942–50), *Kis szerenád* (Little Serenade, 1947) for string orchestra or *Baladă și joc* (Ballad and dance) for two violins (1950).² Yet the vocal works of Ligeti’s Hungarian period show a less deferential approach to these models, especially those based on the poetry of his countryman Sándor Weöres (1913–89). Songs such as the *Három Weöres-dal* (Three Weöres songs, 1946–7) for voice and piano, *Ejszaka* for a cappella choir (Night, 1955) or the *Magyar Etüdök* (Hungarian Etudes, 1983)—written almost 30 years later—seem to delight in the subversive aspects of their texts, deploying a musical language that complements Weöres’s tendency toward the numinous and exotic. Even the earliest songs play set Weöres’s iridescent symbolism within bare and spiky settings whose imagery seems at odds with both the “new nationalism” advocated by Bartók and the prevailing doctrines of Socialist Realism.

Ligeti’s final vocal work, the song cycle *Síppal, dobbal, nádíbegedűvel* (With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles, 2000)³ for soprano and percussion

² While a student at the Budapest Academy, Ligeti received a stipend to study Romanian folk music for a year. His research resulted in the publication of two articles (“Népzene kutatás Romániában,” *Új Zenei Szemle* 1/3 (August 1950), pp. 18–22 and “Egy aradmegyei roman együttes” in Kodály Emlékkönyv. Zenetudományi Tanulmányok D. Bartha and B. Szabolcsi ed., Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1953, pp. 399–404.), and the composition of several works based on folksongs. These articles have been reprinted in German and English translation (“Volksmusikforschung in Rumänien” and “Ein rumänisches Ensemble aus dem Komitat Arad,” trans. Eva Pintér in György Ligeti, *Gesammelte Schriften* I, Monika Lichtenfeld (ed.), (Mainz: Schott, 2007) pp. 61–68 and 69–76; “Folk Music Research in Romania” and “A Romanian Folk Ensemble from the Arad District,” trans. Zuzana Finger and Friedemann Sallis, in Friedemann Sallis, *An introduction to the early works of György Ligeti*. (Köln: Studio-Schewe, 1996), pp. 239–45 and 246–52.)

³ *Nadíbegedűvel* actually refers to a child’s instrument known as a reed fiddle; see Ildikó Mándi-Fazekas and Tiborc Fazekas, “Magicians of Sound – Seeking Ligeti’s Inspiration in the Poetry of Sándor Weöres,” in Lousie Duchesneau and Wolfgang Marx, eds., *György Ligeti. Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), p. 63; and Peter Laki, “The Linguistic Magic of Sándor Weöres in the Works of György Ligeti,” paper delivered at

ensemble, comes full circle, returning to the verse of Weöres as well as to the literary ideals outlined in the poet's critical writings. Both poems and settings express a kind of guarded idealism that welcomes the influence of other cultures and arts, while remaining resolutely apart from any single cultural influence or trend. I argue that both musical and written texts exist primarily in the "cosmopolitan imagination," and exemplify a form of cultural contestation—a struggle between competing notions of culture—distinct from mere pluralism or hybridity.⁴ As Gerard Delanty notes, the cosmopolitan imagination occurs as a condition of self-problematization "when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness."⁵ As opposed to the social forces of globalization, new cultural forms develop from internal processes, but with the goal of transforming the social world. Following the dictates of Weöres's 1945 work on poetics, *A teljesség felé. Az igazságról* (*Towards the Absolute. About the Truth*)⁶—the songs of *Síppal, dobbal, nádibegedűvel* appear to strive for a transformative moment. Yet as late works, this utopian cosmopolitanism is intentionally riven by fissures, to acknowledge that uncertainty will always be with us.

I offer a brief introduction to both artists' backgrounds as representative of a kind of cosmopolitanism that accepts historical and cultural transition as routine, and identity as somewhat porous. Yet close readings of Ligeti's Weöres songs reveal a "rooted," situational, or yearning cosmopolitanism tied strongly to their Hungarian identities, and which obliquely reflect their experiences during under war torn and Socialist regimes.

"Ligeti 2013: Celebrating the Musical Legacy of György Ligeti," Tallahassee, Florida, Oct. 10–12, 2013.

⁴ Gerard Delanty in "The cosmopolitan imagination: critical cosmopolitanism and social theory," in *The British Journal of Sociology* 57.1 (2006), pp. 25–47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶ Sándor Weöres, *A teljesség felé* (1945), in *Egybegyűjtött írások* (Collected works, vol. I; Budapest: Móricz Zsigmond, 1970); available online at <http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/human/szepirod/magyar/weores/teljesse/teljfele.mek> (accessed 11/16/13). See also Susanna Fahlström, *Form and Philosophy in Sándor Weöres' Poetry* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1999), p. 97.

The Cosmopolitan Hungarian

Ligeti's urbane background—his father Sándor worked in a bank but was trained as a violinist and wrote social tracts in his spare time—was the rule, rather than the exception, in twentieth-century Central European intellectual life.⁷ Emigré communities welcomed the cosmopolitan intellectuals of the *fin-de-siècle* Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁸ The “hybrid” identity of many Hungarian scientists, writers and artists underlined the long-held European conception of Hungary as both the center of Eurasia and yet outside of either Europe or Asia proper. Hungary is the only European state founded during the Middle Ages by those people outside of Europe's three principal language groups: Latin, Germanic and Slavic. Almost as soon as the Finno-Ugric Magyar people established Hungary in the ninth century, they began to assimilate other peoples into their nation. Yet the retention of their native language, unlike fellow Asiatic transplants the Bulgarians, exacerbated European nationalists, who from the eighteenth-century onwards damned the Hungarian “barbarian intruders” whenever conflicts arise between Hungary and its neighbors.⁹

Hungary's political fate in the twentieth century was largely determined by its neighbors and allies; Ligeti's family was directly

⁷ Details of Ligeti's life are taken from Paul Griffiths, *György Ligeti* (London, 1983), pp. 7–26; Ligeti, *György Ligeti in Conversation with Péter Várnai, Josef Häusler, Claude Samuel and Himself*, trans. Gabor J. Schabert, Sarah E. Soulsby, Terence Kilmartin and Geoffrey Skelton (London, 1983), pp. 7–11, Ursula Sturzbecher, *Werkstattgespräche mit Komponisten*. (Cologne 1971), pp. 32–45, Wolfgang Burde, *György Ligeti: eine Monographie*, (Zürich, 1993), pp. 9–30, and Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (London, 2003).

⁸ See especially Malachi Haim Hacoen's discussion of Jewish assimilation in Late Imperial Vienna and the interwar years in *Karl Popper; The Formative Years, 1902–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and “Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism: Karl Popper, Jewish Identity, and “Central European Culture,” in *The Journal of Modern History* 71/1 (1999): pp. 105–49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164; Stephen Borsody, “State- and Nation-Building,” in Stephen Borsody (ed.), *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1991), p. 3. Ligeti discusses the issue of language in depth in György Ligeti, “*Träumen Sie im Farben?*”; *György Ligeti im Gespräch mit Eckhard Roelcke* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2003), pp. 11–13 and “Ja, ich war ein utopischer Sozialist. György Ligeti im Gespräch mit Reinhard Oehlschlägel,” in *MusikTexte* 28/29 (1989), pp. 85–8.

affected by losses occasioned by the First World War and The Treaty of Trianon.¹⁰ But Hungarians had long been defined by a shared language, culture, and collective history; at the time of Ligeti's birth in 1923, one out of every three Hungarians lived outside Hungary.¹¹ Ligeti's family was part of what became the largest émigré Hungarian community, constituting a full third of Transylvania's population.¹² Ligeti's recollections of his childhood describe progressive authority figures, rich cultural opportunities, racism and brutal political realities.¹³ A childhood that vacillated between extremes of elation and morbidity seemed to goad Ligeti's imagination towards vivid fantasies that might resolve the surreal incongruities of life between the wars. Ligeti's youthful watercolor of the Last Judgment depicts the angel of death as a common butcher, confronting a horde of demon spiders.¹⁴ Later, despite high marks on his *Abitur*, Ligeti was prevented from entering university in the early 1940s by Jewish quotas. But he was invited to attend a private school in the natural sciences organized by both Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarian and Romanian teachers. Yet his fate as a composer was determined by the fact that he was barred from obtaining a legitimate degree in the sciences.¹⁵

From 1941–3, Ligeti studied composition with the well-known composers Ferenc Farkas (1905–2000) and Pál Kadosa (1903–83), until his internment in a Jewish forced labor camp in early 1944.¹⁶ Ligeti broke

¹⁰ John C. Campbell, Introduction, *The Hungarians: a Divided Nation*, p. xxiii. The family soon moved to the slightly larger, but still provincial, town of Kolozsvár, its Hungarian name (also known as Cluj and Klausenburg; since 1974 Cluj-Napoca).

¹¹ Borsody, "State- and Nation-Building," pp. 4–9 and Preface, p. xviii. At the time of writing, Borsody listed the current figure as one out of four.

¹² Ligeti, *Träumen Sie im Farben?*, pp. 13–15; Borsody, Preface, pp. xix–xxii.

¹³ Ligeti discusses this in "Begegnung mit Kurtág im Nachkriegs-Budapest," in *Gesammelte Schriften I*, pp. 480–4; first pub. in *György Kurtág*, Friedrich Spangemacher (ed.) (Bonn, 1986), pp. 14–17.

¹⁴ This drawing is reproduced in Burde, *György Ligeti*, p. 13

¹⁵ Ligeti, *Träumen Sie im Farben?*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Ligeti's account of his surreal adventures in the camp and as a Soviet prisoner of war are recounted in. pp. 11–60, passim. Inter-war Hungary was run by a brutal and semifascist regime receptive to compromise in 1941, when Hitler chose to invade Yugoslavia by marching through Hungary (see Borsody, Preface, in *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, pp. xxiv, 9–11; Eva S. Balogh,

his silence regarding these years at the turn of the twenty-first century, in a series of interviews that delved into the wide-ranging effects of the interwar regimes of both Hungary and Romania on cultural life.¹⁷ Rachel Beckles Willson presents the musical life of Hungary at this time from the twin concerns of land and language. After 1934, two early avant-garde movements, along with official support for ethnographic research, countered the early dominance of the more conservative Ernő Dohnányi (1877–1960), Ferenc Erkel (1810–93) and Liszt factions. Antal Molnár, among other journalists, presented Bartók’s style as a nationalist alternative to the international, more abstract aesthetics of Schoenberg (1874–1951). The towering musical figure of Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) entered political life as a leader in the Hungarian language movement, whose linguistic chauvinism offered a bulwark against fascist cultural leanings.¹⁸

Hungarian Secrets

Ligeti entered the Budapest Academy as a student of both Farkas and Sándor Veress in 1945. The salutary effects of folk music study drove the pedagogical program under Kodály, head of the Budapest Academy while Ligeti was a student. Kodály shared the intense interest of Bartók and Janáček (1854–1928) in the traditional music of Eastern Europe, and strove to represent the values of Bartók in absentia.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Bartók’s 1943 Harvard lectures emphasized the difference between the “old” nationalism and the new regionalism (one should not forget Janáček’s settings of regional dialects in his songs):

“Hungarian Foreign Policy, 1918–1945,” in *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation*, pp. 62–63. Ligeti compares the relative merits of Romanian and Hungarian regimes at this time in “Ligeti im Gespräch mit Oehlschlägel,” p. 88.)

¹⁷ Ligeti, ‘*Träumen Sie im Farben?*’, pp. 37–60 passim; Steinitz, *Music of the Imagination*, pp. 3–36 passim; Sallis, *Early Works of György Ligeti*, pp. 30–46, passim.

¹⁸ Rachel Beckles Willson, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 13–25, passim.

¹⁹ Bartók was supposed to return to the Academy to teach after the war but he died before he could make the journey back; ‘*Träumen Sie im Farben?*’, p. 60.

We [Bartók and Kodály] felt the mighty artistic power of the rural music in its most undisturbed forms—a power from which to start, from which to develop a musical style imbued even to the slightest details with the emanations from this virgin source.²⁰

Bartók found an antidote to the sentimentality and exaggerated expression of Romantic music in the music of any and all “unspoiled rural people.” To both do their models justice and forge a new, “third way” forward, he bid ethnic Hungarian composers “mirror in their minutest details the spirit of rural music.”²¹ Ligeti’s early folk-inspired works seem to heed Bartók’s dictum.²² The *Ballade und Tanz* for school orchestra (an orchestration of the *Baladă și joc* for two violins), one of his most successful folk music-inspired works, bears the mark of Kodály. The opening “Ballade” is based on a Romanian folk ballad, while the “Tanz” features an insistent, asymmetrical rhythm characteristic of middle-European dances.²³ Ligeti adds a personal touch to the orchestration, however: violins divided into three parts, a large array of percussion (used sparingly) and a soprano recorder, which adds the voice of both the folk and the Baroque to the proceedings (Figure 1).

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Soprano Recorder, Xylophone, Triangle, Violin, and Violoncello. The score is in 2/4 time and begins at measure 18. The Soprano Recorder part starts with a melodic line marked *mp*. The Xylophone part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked *p*. The Triangle part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked *p*. The Violin part has a melodic line marked *p*. The Violoncello part has a melodic line marked *p*.

Figure 1: Thematic rhythm and orchestration in “Tanz,” mm. 18–20

²⁰ Béla Bartók, “Harvard Lectures” in Benjamin Suchoff (ed.), *Béla Bartók Essays* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), p. 393.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

²² Sallis, *Early Works of György Ligeti*, p. 61.

²³ I was unable to locate the provenance of this folk song, but the “Ballade” corresponds to many of the melodic features noted in Ligeti’s “Volksmusikforschung in Rumänien” (see fn. 2).

Between 1946 and 1955 Ligeti set twelve Weöres poems, and based an early piano work on the *Rongyszőnyeg* (Rag-carpet) cycle (first published in *Medusa*, 1943). These early settings, while reminiscent of Bartók, introduced most of the compositional techniques found in the avant-garde works that established his reputation in the 1960s.²⁴ Upon fleeing from Hungary in 1956, the composer would not set texts in his native language again until turning again to classic works of Weöres in 1983 and 2000. Beckles Willson sees these later works as imaginary constructions of a utopian lost home: Transylvania as an idealized home to diverse music and ethnicities coexisting in antediluvian harmony.²⁵ Ligeti did construct an elaborate émigré identity for himself, tied to a narrative that kept returning to the trope of perpetual outsider regarding both East and West European musical establishments.²⁶ Yet I argue that Weöres's texts offered more than simple escapism tinged with nostalgia, and that Ligeti composer responded to them in kind. References to folk tradition, the fantastical and the recondite, played specific roles in Weöres's poetics, as shaped by his literary background, critical milieu and political circumstances. In Weöres's poetry, myths from East and West, references to high and low literature, and language from both past and present meet in whimsically yet artfully-constructed images and intricate wordplay derived directly from musical forms and micro-linguistic rhythms.

Born in Western Transdanubia, Weöres spent much of his well-educated youth in Csöngye.²⁷ He published poetry while still in secondary

²⁴ Beckles Willson, *Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, p. 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–22.

²⁶ Ligeti's self-presentation as outsider is discussed at length in Charles Wilson, "György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy," *Twentieth-Century Music*, 1/1 (2004), pp. 5–28.

²⁷ The little published on Weöres in English includes Sándor Weöres and Ferenc Juhasz, *Selected poems*, trans. by Edwin Morgan and David Wevill (London: Penguin Press, 1970), Sándor Weöres, *If All the World Were a Blackbird*, trans. by Alexander Fenton (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), and Sándor Weöres, *Eternal Moment: Selected Poems*, trans. by Edwin Morgan and Alan Dixon, intro. by Miklós Vajda (Moorhead, MN: New Rivers Press, 1988). I draw much of the biographical material from Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres' Poetry*, and Mándi-Fazekas and Fazekas, "Magicians of Sound" in *Of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*, pp. 53–70.

school, and Kodály set several of his early poems as choral works.²⁸ Testaments to his genius included a translation of the Sumerian-Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (1937) and two early volumes of poetry published before finishing his doctorate in 1939, and traveling to India, China and Ceylon. Weöres and his wife, the poet Amy Károlyi (1909–2003), translated the work of foreign writers during the war years, introducing their work to Hungary for the first time. Although his first volume of poetry won the Baumgarten Prize, critics on both the right and the left found fault with Weöres's approach. Marxist-Leninist critics such as Miklós Szabolcsi rejected the “dehumanization” and cultural pessimism exemplified by cycles such as *The Book of Hopelessness* from 1944.²⁹ Weöres's mentor Béla Hamvas, on the other hand, objected to the introverted, experimental voice of works such as the *Rag-carpet* cycle, subtitled “Songs, Epigrams, Rhythm-experiments, Sketches, Fragments,” and the *Hungarian Etudes*, both dating from 1941 but for political reasons not published until 1956 (in *The Tower of Silence*). These poems are found in many children's anthologies; their rhythmic and light-hearted nature disguises the fact that they were written for adults, in a style that freely mixes the unsophisticated with the urbane. Weöres fought the “iambic hegemony” of bowdlerized Hungarian poetry through an exploration of sound symbolism, novel metric structures and absurd juxtapositions that “ignore the laws of time and space.”³⁰ He thus drew on the autochthonous structuring devices of ancient poetry: the regular metrical units and rhythms of folksong, and parallel grammatical structures independent of syllabic length and certain stress factors.³¹ Miklós Vajda

²⁸ Weöres' works continue to inspire contemporary modernist composers such as Peter Eötvös and Zoltán Jeney; Peter Laki notes that folk-revival groups have also set his works (“The Linguistic Magic of Sándor Weöres”). See also Peter Laki, “Jenseits des Wortes: Die Sprachmagie von Sándor Weöres in der ungarischen Musik von Kodály bis Eötvös,” in *Kosmoi: Peter Eötvös an der Hochschule für Musik der Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel*, ed. Michael Kunkel (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2007), pp. 115–46.

²⁹ Miklós Szabolcsi, “Weöres Sándor költészetéről,” in *Irodalomtörténet 1957*, pp. 183–92, cited in Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres' Poetry*, p. 20.

³⁰ Lóránt Czigány, *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature. From the Earliest Times to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 453.

³¹ Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres' Poetry*, p. 81.

declared the resulting poems untranslatable and thus the repository of “Hungarian secrets.”³²

Magány (*Loneliness*, 1946) for soprano, alto and baritone, represents Ligeti’s first Weöres song, which likely began as a study of prosody with Lajos Bárdos.³³ These early settings attempt to match the novelty of their texts with a stylized union of folk, Renaissance and Hungarian classical influences. The poetic sentiment, tempo (*Molto moderato, poco rubato*, $q=66$) and final stanza place *Magány* firmly in the larger topic of mourning, as three voices layering simple, archetypal motives in an imitative texture.

<i>Sej, elaludtam</i>	Oh, I fell asleep,
<i>álló víz partján,</i>	at the water’s edge.
<i>Füvön fektemben</i>	Whilst lying there on the grass,
<i>Ottan álomban</i>	in my dreams
<i>nőtt liliomszál.</i>	a single lily grew.
<i>Le kéne venni,</i>	I should pick it,
<i>Melleme tűzni,</i>	and press it to my breast,
<i>Az én rózsámat</i>	I should kiss my Rose.
<i>kéne csókolni.</i>	
<i>Sej, ellankadok,</i>	Oh, I grow tired,
<i>lassan bágyadok,</i>	slowly fading away,
<i>holnap meghalok</i>	tomorrow I shall die. ³⁴

A clear three-part form is set off by a shift of pitch center, harmonic context and meter in the B section. But *Magány* departs from the simple diatonic harmonies of contemporary Ligeti songs (such as the *Idegen földön*, 1946) in favor of symmetrical gestures that generate an octatonic

³² Zoltán Kenyeres, “Sándor Weöres—poet of Cosmic Harmony,” in *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 93 (1984), p. 48 and Miklós Vajda, “The Poetic World of Sándor Weöres,” *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 107 (1987), p. 50.

³³ See Ligeti’s program notes for *Magány*’s premiere, reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften* II, p. 145. Beckles Willson cites corrections by Bárdos in Ligeti’s notebook sketches; *Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, p. 66, fn 139.

³⁴ Translation by Beckles Willson, *Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, p. 67. Written in 1940; published in Sándor Weöres, *Egybegyűjtött írások* I (collected writings vol. I) (Budapest: Magvető, 1970), 479.

collection over a diatonic bassline.³⁵ The first phrase employs an octatonic wedge to generate a series of static, whole-tone harmonies that alternate with simple triads. This gentle rocking motion evokes the haunting loneliness of Weöres's poem, and expresses a muted but frank regret not yet tempered by the harsh dictates of Soviet realism.

Magány seems to embody the despair for which Weöres was chided. Yet it plays a highly ironic role in its original context—the puppet play *The Lunar Boatsman* (1941), where a sad princess rejects the happily ever after of traditional romantic love. The princess returns as a character in the *Három Weöres-dal*, as the subject of “Kalmár jött nagy madarakka” (“A merchant has come with giant birds,” song III); this dark fable suggests that her romantic disillusion predates the melancholy expressed in “Loneliness.” The merchant's birds embody the dark subtext of “A merchant has come,” implying a dangerous carnal knowledge already shared by the pale, silent princess.

Kalmár jött nagy madarakkal,

a hercegkisasszony meg ne lássa,

Őrizzétek a hercegkisasszonyt!

Kalmár jött nagy madarakkal

a gyerekek kiabálnak,

a hercegkisasszony meg ne hallja!

A hercegkisasszony sápadt, sose szól,

szívében sok nagy madár rikácsol,

A merchant has come with
giant birds

the princess must not see,
protect the princess!

A merchant has come with
giant birds

The children were screaming,
the princess should not hear it!

The princess is pale, and as
quiet as always,

In her heart great birds are
shrieking,

³⁵ Set-classes follow the conventions established in Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). The three distinct octatonic collections are identified by a subscript denoting the first unique semitone, when counting upward from C (0). OCT_{1,2} denotes the collection that contains C-sharp and D (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11). I discuss this song further in my monograph *Ligeti's Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism and the Absolute* (Ashgate, 2011), 39ff.

*Őrizzétek a hercegkisasszonyt!*protect the princess!³⁶

Ligeti's setting foregrounds this aggressive subtext by accompanying a stubborn ostinato figure in left hand that cycles from F-sharp to A-flat, with accented vocal repetitions on D, A and G, and dissonant symmetrical chords, as shown by the beginning of strophes 1 and 3 in Figure 2.³⁷ The conflict between denotative and connotative meanings comes to a head at the end of each stanza, in the metric confusion that results when the ostinato is compressed from two bars to two beats that repeat to triple forte and beyond to emphasize the inherent sarcasm of "protect the princess!" revealed in the final bars of the song (Figure 3).

Tempo giusto

f

1. Kal - már jött nagy ma - da - ak - kal,
A mer - chant came with grea - t birds,

2. Kal már jött nagy ma - da - ak - kal,

3. A - her - ceg - kis - asz - szony - sá - padt, so - se szól,
The prin - cess is pale, (she) ne - ver spea - ks,

Tempo giusto

mf

f

senza fine

Figure 2: "Kalmár jött nagy madarakkal," mm. 1–8

³⁶ Written in 1940 as No. 106 of *Rongyszőnyeg*, available online at <http://www.mek.iif.hu/porta/szint/human/szepirod/magyar/weores/rongysz.hun> (accessed 11/16/13). See also Weöres, *Collected Writings* I, 409. Tran. Anna M. Szalai, notes, *György Ligeti Edition* 4, Sony SK62311 (1997), p. 26.

³⁷ Sallis calls D, A and G reciting tones; *Early works of György Ligeti*, p. 71.

20

her - ceg - kis - asz - szonyt!
pro - tect the prin - cess!

ancora più f

22

3.

senza rit.

fff

Figure 3: “Kalmár jött nagy madarakkal,” mm. 20–23

The three vastly different settings of the *Három Weöres-dal* echo the twin poles of Weöres’s poetics at this time, a “cosmic universalism” that referenced Hungarian folk literature alongside playful adaptations of ancient myth and Oriental topics.³⁸ Weöres often relied on a technique associated with traditional folksong known as *népdalküszőb*—to begin with an image of nature—as a metaphor for the emotional tenor of a work, as well as a source of structural oppositions that shape the whole.³⁹ Thus the opening lines of “Táncol a Hold fehér ingben” (The moon is dancing in a white robe, song II), in which the anthropomorphized moon illuminates a lover’s tryst.

³⁸ Sallis lists a fourth song that was lost (Ibid., p. 69). Tibor Kardos discussed the close connections between Kodály and Weöres, as discussed by Beckles Willson; Kardos, “Weöres Sándor pályaképe,” in *Elő humanizmus* (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), pp. 574, cited in Beckles Willson, *Hungarian Music*, pp. 64–65.

³⁹ Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres’ Poetry*, p. 27.

<i>Táncol a Hold fehéringben,</i>	The moon dances in a white shirt
<i>Kékes fényben fürdik minden.</i>	in bluish light everything swims.
<i>Jár az óra: tik-tak, tik-tak.</i>	The clock goes tick-tock, tick- tock,
<i>Ne szólj ablak, hogyha nyitlak,</i>	Be still, window, when I open you.
<i>ne szólj lány, ha megcsókollak,</i>	Be still, girl, when I kiss you –
<i>fehér inge van a Holdnak.</i>	A white shirt has the Moon. ⁴⁰

Ligeti's setting features an impressionistic style indebted to Bartók, in which the so-called "Hungarian" melodic fourth dominates the soprano's line. Yet this lyrical voice is accompanied by alternating symmetrical diatonic harmonies extracted from a chromatically filled tritone from B-flat5-E6, as shown in a pitch and rhythmic reduction of the song in Figure. 4. A diminished- to perfect fifth ambitus constrains the vertical harmonies that—as in *Magány*—mark the beginning and endpoints of outwardly expanding, mirrored harmonies. A six-note cluster partitioned into the same set at T₂I (measure 3) masks a hidden C-sharp axis that serves as the symmetrical center of "The Moon is Dancing," explicitly confirmed in the coda (measures 33-43). This technique closely echoes Bartók's use of inversion in works like "Minor 2nds/Major 7ths" (Book VI of the *Mikrokosmos*, 1926–39). But in "The Moon is Dancing," harmonic inversion explicitly underscores the poem's conclusion, which cleverly reverses its opening line. The dancing moon—the opening cluster in its bright, diatonic form—heralds the final verse by entering in inversion at the sixth octave, sliding down the scale to rest on a symmetrical voicing that emphasizes its inversional axis. Thus the initial image is revealed as the form of the whole, a lunar arc that embraces a lover's evening revels.

⁴⁰ Weöres, *Collected Writings* I, p. 403. Modified from the trans. by Sallis, *Early Works of György Ligeti*, pp. 72–3. Originally published as No. 94 of *Rongyszőnyeg*.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Táncol a Hold fehér ingben." It consists of three systems of music. The first system shows the piano accompaniment (p) and vocal line (sop.) starting at measure 1. The piano part is marked "pp molto leggiero" and "con ped." The vocal line has the lyrics "Tán - col a hold fe hér - ing - ben". The second system continues the piano accompaniment from measure 20 to 31, with the vocal line starting at measure 31 with the lyrics "fe - hér in - ge van a - hold". The third system continues the piano accompaniment from measure 33 to 43, with the vocal line starting at measure 43. The piano part includes markings like "8va" and "8va...".

Figure 4: “Táncol a Hold fehér ingben,” harmonic reduction

“Gyümölcs-fürt, ingatja a szél” (A Cluster of Fruit, swayed by the wind, song I) again begins with an image of nature, but one that fills the poem as the fruit swells in size and scope through the force of heat and wind.

Gyümölcs-fürt, ingatja a szél

Ágobn libeg, duzzadtan a fénytől.

Gyümölcs-fürt, kelő melegben,

Puha lomb közt ingratja a szél.

Gyümölcs-fürt, hozzuk le,

Add nekünk, boldog ág.

Gyümölcs-fürt, ingratja a szél.

A cluster of fruit,
swayed by the wind
flutters on the branch
swollen from the beam.

Cluster of fruit in the
rising heat

swayed in the soft leafy bough.

Let’s bring down that cluster of
fruit,

give it to us, joyous limb,

a cluster of fruit, swayed
by the wind.⁴¹

⁴¹ Weöres, *Collected Writings*, I, p. 601. Trans. by Szalai, *György Ligeti Edition 4*, p. 26.

Minimal pitch materials (the anhemitonic pentatonic collection F, G, A-flat, C, D-flat), a simple additive pulse, profuse ornamentation, and a three-part heterophony among voice, and both clefs in piano all bear Far Eastern overtones. But both poem and setting may equally suggest a painter's still life in motion, or the fluctuating strokes of Chinese brush painting; as indicated by the final five bars (Figure 5). Through an exquisite compression of sound and image, "A Cluster of Fruit" plays out a dialectic between freedom and balance on the micro- and macroscale. The poem recasts the opening image with synonyms for "swaying," branch and wind, while the song exists as a miniature set of variations: the length of each phrase fluctuates in concert with its pitch, according to the number of syllables in each line. As the fruit holds fast despite the vagaries of wind, so the symmetry inherent in the alternation of semitone and fourth (G-A-flat-C vs. A-flat-C-D-flat) anchors the unstable pitch collection, despite audible beats caused by the semitonal clash between piano and voice (measures 5, 7, 9, 14), and meter changes in every bar (each two-bar phrase, except for the sixth, fluctuates in length). Yet the phrase structure creates a highly symmetrical arch form in four parts—17-18-18-17 (where 1 = an eighth note)—capable of absorbing the intrusion of first person plural and thirty-second-note quintuplets at "Let's bring down (that cluster of fruit)."

13
hoz-zuk le. Add ne künk, bol-dog ág.
let's bring down. Give it to us, joy-ous limb.

16
Gyü-mölcs-fürt. in-gat-ja a szél.
Clus-ter of fruit, sway-ing in the wind.

Figure 5: "Gyümölcs-fürt, ingatja a szél," mm. 13–17

The concerns that animated Ligeti's *Három Weöres-dal* are refined in the deceptively simple *Két kánon*. These two canons are rooted in folk traditions but explore canonic artifice and the subtle irony that marks both *faux* folk poetry and that in translation. "Ha folyóvíz volnék" (Like a stream gently flowing, 1946) is a Renaissance-like treatment of Slovak folk poetry in Hungarian translation, moving easily between D Lydian and Dorian modes, while "Pletykázo asszonyok" (Gossiping Women, 1952) is a diatonic canon on a text by Weöres.

*Juli néni, Kati néni,
letyepetye letyete,
üldögélnek a sarokba,
jár a nyelvük mint a rokka,
letyepetye letyete!*

Auntie Julie, Auntie Cathy,
natter chatter, natter chat,
sit together for a prattle,
and, my goodness, how they tattle,
natter chatter, natter chat!

*"Halották hogy letyepetye?"
"Ne mondja!"
"Mit szól,
letyepetye, petyeletyepetye?"*

"Have I told you natter chatter?"
"No, not yet"
"Oh dear:
natter chatter, natter chatter
natter!"
"Is that so?"

*Bárki inge, rokolyája,
letyepetye, letyete,
lyukat vágnak közepébe,
kitűzik a ház élébe, jajj!*

Did you see it with your own eyes,
natter chatter natter chat?"
"It was torn right in the middle,
how it happened is a riddle!"
"Oh!
natter chatter natter chat,
natter chatter chat."⁴²

Letyepetye letyete, petyeletyepetye.

In the latter, the gradual construction of a diatonic cluster through recursive, stepwise motion reaches a peak on E5 then dissipates slowly, separated into phrases marked by a diatonic scale segment and its return. Diatonic clusters born from ascending scale segments on C, B-flat and F, and descending segments from A and G, grow to seventh chords in open position. A large-scale descent of a tenth in soprano confirms C

⁴² Weöres, *Collected Writings I*, p. 498. Trans. Desmond Clayton, György Ligeti, *Két kánon* 47 267 (Mainz: Schott, 1999).

mixolydian, while nonsense syllables and sharp accents capture the ebb and flow of chattering women.

In the mid-1950s, Ligeti set two choral works to poems written after Weöres, under the sway of Hamvas, adopted an Orphic, more spiritual approach.⁴³ Writing in retrospect, Ligeti calls the texts he chose “snapshots of moods,” that exploit the onomatopoeic characteristics of the Hungarian language.⁴⁴ The binary pair *Ejszaka/Reggel* (*Night/Morning*) splinter into several dichotomous strands: *Morning* is a five-voice double fugue illustrating the chaos of dawn, as a rooster competes with the church bells. Yet the entire harmonic and metric structure of *Night* grows recursively out of a single rising second presented at the outset, a simple pitch and rhythmic motive derived from the pronunciation of *rengeteg* that stems outward and upward like the “masses of thorns” that frame the stillness at *Night’s* heart.⁴⁵ In selecting and condensing but three lines, Ligeti removes much of the original poem’s metaphysical content; yet his text setting seems to heed Weöres’s directive to read poems as sound, to “become acquainted with the music of the language and the inner music of the creating spirits.”⁴⁶ (The original poem is listed below with excised portions in square brackets; remaining lines are repeated, and the final lines rearranged, to end with “night.”)

<i>Rengeteg tövis: éjszaka!</i>	Masses of thorns: night!
<i>Rengeteg csönd: [tücsök-cirpelés!]</i>	infinite silence: [cricket-chirping!]
<i>En csöndem: szívem dobogása!</i>	My silence: my heartbeat!
<i>[Tejről, mézről] szóljon az ének.</i>	[Of milk, of honey, let the song sing
<i>Virágról szóljon az ének.</i>	Of flowers let the song sing
<i>Sok, nagyon sok virágról.</i>	Of many, very many flowers
<i>Anyáról szóljon az ének.</i>	Of mother, let the song sing.

⁴³ Hamvas was a philosopher and novelist who mentored Weöres after the latter moved to Budapest in 1945; “A *Meduza* (1947),” in Mátyás Domokos, ed., *Magyar Orpheus. Weöres Sándor emlékezete* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1990), pp. 213-1, cited in Becklas Willson, *Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Ligeti, “*Mátraszertimrei dalok*,” undated program notes, *Gesammelte Schriften* II, p. 164.

⁴⁵ Ligeti’s remarks on text-setting stem from a letter written in Vienna to Weöres on 11-8-72, cited in Sallis, *Early Works of György Ligeti*, p. 173.

⁴⁶ Weöres, *A teljesség felé*, p. 671, cited in Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres’ Poetry*, p. 97.

Rengeteg tövis: éjszaka!

Rengeteg csönd: [tűcsök-cirpelés!]

én csöndem: szívem dobogása!

Masses of thorns: night!

infinite silence: [cricket-chirping!]

my silence: my heartbeat!⁴⁷

Night begins as an eight-voice canon in two octaves, separated by bass/tenor and soprano/alto voice pairs in the white-key diatonic collection. As each canonic voice enters, additive rhythms create a shifting series of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5-bar units that defy any larger periodic phrase rhythm, a technique that prefigures Ligeti's sound-mass works of the 1960s. Symmetrical diatonic clusters grow progressively larger in size and ambitus until reaching a point of saturation in measure 15, while voice-exchanges and imitation between men's and women's voices obscure the movement of individual lines (tenor and bass measures 7-14, 16-18, and 21-28; soprano and alto measures 20-32). The further expansion of voice-pairs outward and away from one another in measures 15-43 alternately opens up and condenses the harmonic texture, while the polyrhythmic layering of canonic lines creates a pulsing, resultant rhythmic pattern in an arch form, punctuated by a rhythmic ostinato—a tutti dotted-quarter/eight/quarter rhythm (measures 1, 6, 10-11, 29, 32 and 36-42).

The interval of a major third, prominent in both the opening C-D-E trichord and the melody, functions as an axis of harmonic inversion between the “ren” and “teg” octachords that close the A section, spatial inversions of one another at T₄I (measure 42, see the reduction of measures 42-68, Figure 6). At this point—the song's Golden Mean—the white-key collection shifts to a cadential black-key pentachord, again symmetrical at T₄I around the central pitch A-flat₄. An immediate contrast of collection, ambitus and rhythm heralds the “silence” of the B section. As soprano 1 holds D flat₅, the remaining voices move downward through the pentachord, whose pianissimo dissonances mimic the sound of inharmonic partials growing over a sustained fundamental, the soft peal of bells in the distance. Sopranos inflect this chord with tones from the white-key collection, creating acoustic beats on “szívem dobogása” (“my heartbeat”). Under this “heartbeat” remaining voices sing a symmetrical form of the pentachord on the words “rengeteg csönd!” (“infinite silence!”). The soprano's final pitch B₄ (measures 60-

⁴⁷ Weöres, *Collected Writings*, I, p. 603. Trans. by Sallis, *Early Works of György Ligeti*, p. 189.

61), acts as a leading tone to the closing harmony in bars 65-68. Here the women's voices drop out and tenor and bass collapse into a C major triad on "éjszaka" ("night"), with an augmented version of the initial rhythmic cell. While certainly indebted to Bartók's choral works, *Night* takes its compositional cues from the sound and rhythm of the text.⁴⁸ As he would later in the *Drei Phantasien nach Friedrich Hölderlin* (1982), Ligeti seems interested primarily in illustrating and prolonging the poem's striking images, excising the more literal, prayer-like middle section with Biblical overtones. Yet the metaphysical implications of the poem's outer sections remain.

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 42-55) is marked "a tempo" and features dynamics such as *sf pp*, *sf pp*, and *ppp*. The lyrics for Soprano and Alto are: "ren - ge - teg csönd! csönd! ren - ge - teg, ren - ge - teg csönd!". The Tenor/Bass part has lyrics: "ren - ge - teg csönd! in - fin - ite silence! csönd! silence! csönd! silence! ren - ge - teg, in - fin - ite, ren - ge - teg csönd! in - fin - ite, in - fin - ite silence!". The second system (mm. 56-60) is marked "Sostenuto" with a tempo of 100 and dynamics *f*, *mf*, and *p*. The lyrics for Soprano are: "En csön - dem szi - vem ga - sa". The Alto part has lyrics: "my si - lence: ten - ge - teg csönd! my heart - beat! do - bo -". The Tenor/Bass part has lyrics: "ren - ge - teg csönd!". The third system (mm. 61-68) is marked "perdendosi" and features dynamics *sf ppp* and *ppp*. The lyrics for Soprano are: "csönd! csönd! Éj - sza - ka. Ah! Night!".

Figure 6: *Ejszaka*, reduction of mm. 42–68

⁴⁸ Beckles Willson likens *Ejszaka* to Bartók's *Twenty-seven choruses for women's and children's choir*, fn 149, p. 72. Sallis discusses the possible influence of the theorist Ernő Lendvai on *Ejszaka/Reggel*, pp. 183–8.

The text of *Ejszaka* came from *Forróövi motívumok* (*Torrid motives*), the same cycle that yielded “Gyümölcs-fürt.” But *Reggel*–like *Táncol*–was originally part of the *Rongyszőnyeg* cycle, whose revealing subtitle translates to “Songs, Epigrams, Rhythm-experiments, Sketches, Fragments.”⁴⁹ None other than Kodály—who continually prodded Weöres for new poems to set—was responsible for the genesis of *Rongyszőnyeg*.⁵⁰ Most of these poems begin with image that is not so much developed as reflected, as in the first stanza of number 14:

*Rózsa, rózsza, rengeteg,
lányok, lepkekék, fellegek,
lányok, lepkekék, fellegek,
illanó könny, permeteg.*

Roses, roses, a lot of roses,
girls, butterflies, clouds,
girls, butterflies, clouds,
evanescent tears, sprinkling.⁵¹

Rongyszőnyeg No. 2, labeled “Village Morning” in various collections, begins with literal reflected images, the chiasmatic “Már üti – üti már” (which the composer himself translates as “Ring, tick-tock, tick-tock, bell,” retaining the onomatopoeic sound, rhythm and echo of the original).⁵² Ligeti combined the first three lines of the poem’s first stanza with the eponymous “reggel” (“morning”) in a double fugue for five voices (SMATB).

*Már üti - üti már
a torony a hajnalban!
Az időt bemeszeli a korai kikeriki,
[reggel van! Már üti - üti már!
Reggel! Ab!]*

Ring, tick-tock, tick-tock, bell!
And the clock ticks, wishing well.
In the dawn, cock-a-doodle-doo,
the cock cries and the duck too,
[Ring well bell! Ring, ticktock,
ticktock, bell,
Ring well, bell!]

⁴⁹ Dalok, epirammák, ütempróbák, vázlatok, töredékek. Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres' Poetry*, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

⁵¹ Weöres, *Collected Writings* I, pp. 367–8; Trans. Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres' Poetry*, p. 38.

⁵² György Ligeti, *Ejszaka/Reggel*, 6415 (Mainz: Schott, 1973). Compare the translations of Nagy Baus (“tolling at dawn,” *György Ligeti Edition 2*, Sony 62305, 1994, p. 15) and Alexander Fenton (“The clock is striking,” Weöres, *If all the World Were a Blackbird*, p. 3.

Reggel begins with what the composer would later term one of his “signal” harmonies: a minor third/major second motive that outlines a (0, 2, 5) trichord.⁵³ This subject is followed by an answer in mezzo-soprano at the fifth (measure 3), and two repetitions that form part of a longer fugal subject (measures 4-11 and 11-20). Soprano and mezzo are set against an F Lydian fugue in alto and tenor (subject measures 5-14, 15-19, alto; answer measures 7-13 and 14-20, tenor); after one full statement of each subject, the bass enters with open fifths on the dominant of E-flat, B flat (measures 13-21). As in the more complex imitation of the 1960s, the subject opens with homogenous rhythmic values that pull apart from one another, to close in successive waves. Although each half of the subject opens with the same note values in every voice, the final notes of each phrase are altered so that, despite the entrance of each voice every two bars in measures 1-7, the last downbeat of each phrase comes at a different point in the bar. The ensuing repetitions of the “üti” motive dissolve the solid 3/4 meter of the opening fanfare, foreshadowing the “crimson sky” (purpurne that repeats 328 times in the last of Ligeti’s *Drei Phantasien nach Friedrich Hölderlin* (1982).

At measure 25—the approximate negative Golden Section⁵⁴ — *Morning* shifts mode, the fugue is replaced, the tempo accelerates by a third (half-note = 38), and a new canon enters on repeated E4s (measure 24) a repeating two-bar rhythmic pattern outlines a canon drawn from the E major scale. As each voice ascends upwards it creates diatonic clusters as in *Night*, while the steady eighth-note pulse foreshadows later pattern-meccanico textures. A solo tenor as the cock punctuates the canon with insistent falsetto cries *da lontano*; a dynamic crescendo, the increased frequency of the cock’s “ki-ke-ri-ki!” and the interruption of 2/2 with a bar of 3/2 all serve to bring the sounds of the dawn nearer as the coda approaches. The A section returns with the ringing bells of the opening bars, yet here the metallic sonorities arrive in measure 48, *after* the bells toll in measure 46. Just as the dissonant harmonics of a pealing bell develop over time, and across a distant space, the final chords of

⁵³ *Ligeti in Conversation*, p. 29.

⁵⁴ Sallis demonstrates proportional tempo relations between the two songs in terms of duration: the length of *Reggel* is to the length of *Ejszaka* what the length of *Ejszaka* is to the whole; *Early Works of György Ligeti*, p. 187.

Reggel move through evermore dissonant but thinning harmonies to finally resolve on an open fifth D-A.

When Ligeti left Hungary in 1956, he left behind the genre of solo song and choral work until 1972, when he produced *Clocks and Clouds* for 12 female voices, and 1982, when *Drei Phantasien nach Hölderlin* for 16 voices emerged. But he did not set Hungarian again until the *Magyar Etüdök* of 1983 for 16-voice *a cappella* double-choir, when he returned not only to Weöres but to poems of the early 1940s for inspiration. Ligeti chose four songs from Weöres's *Hungarian etudes* cycle: the three poems of the first two etudes (nos. 9, 40 and 49) celebrate nature, in a way that—along with their straightforward metric structure—recalls folksong. Yet all four poems display a virtuosic treatment of sound symbolism and the formal elements of language, with Ligeti's elaborate settings designed to highlight each poem's structural features.⁵⁵

The first etude, based on the well-known *Olvadás* ("thaw"), takes the form of a strict mirror canon based on a 57-note chromatic melody; bounded by an eleventh, each canon ends a whole-step higher than it began. Two choirs in proportional tempo relations—choir I in 6/4 and choir II in 2/2—are each separated into 6 independent voice parts, with the first entry in alto, choir II. The four sopranos and altos sing transpositions of the first entry, while divided tenors and basses sing transposed inversions. As in *Night*, each new statement of the canon enters on the subsequent step of a symmetrically-arranged pitch collection: female voices enter in WT_1 , the D-flat collection, while male voices enter on subsequent steps of WT_0 , the C collection, as indicated in Figure 7, a representation of each canon without pitch repetitions. The inexorable "drip" of symmetrical pitch structure models the methodical, mechanical thaw of an icicle into a formless pool. Yet the rigid structure is masked by the variability in tempo between choirs, and the shifting pace of the canon: short, front vowels are sung on eighth-notes, while back and long vowels vary in length from a quarter-note to that of the final "puddle," 28 quarter-notes long.

⁵⁵ The clever, madrigalesque character of Ligeti's settings has attracted a fair number of likeminded analysis; see Luminita Aluas, "Visible and Audible Structures: Spatio-Temporal Compromise in Ligeti's 'Magyar Etüdök,'" in *Tempo* 183 (1992), pp. 7-17, and Martin Bergande, '...halb experimentell, halb volkstümlich...' *György Ligeti's Magyar Etüdök* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1994).

The image shows a musical score for 'Mirror canons in Hungarian Etude No. 1'. It is a complex score with multiple staves. The score is divided into two main sections, 'Choir I' and 'Choir II'. Each choir has four voices: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, and Tenor 1. The score is written in a single system with multiple staves. Each voice part is a canon with a different rhythmic pattern, creating a complex, layered texture. The score is written in a single system with multiple staves.

Figure 7: Mirror canons in *Hungarian Etude* No. 1

Ligeti compared the second etude, on poems 49 and 40 of the *Weöres* cycle, to an isorhythmic motet. An idyllic lyric describing evening in a meadow links the sound of frogs rising from a roadside ditch with a lewd paean to amphibious love. The pastoral topic and measured descent of the opening phrase recall Kodály's *Evening Song*, but with a satirical edge.⁵⁶ Clearly articulated lines in one choir are set against Ligeti's microcanonic technique in the second choir (tight stepwise canons with a different rhythm in each voice), to vividly illustrate shadows descending at dusk. The "flocks crowding in" of the poem's second line are framed by a harmonic tritone that collapses to a minor second, while the insect "swarms" separate into seven distinct canons. In the second choir, women's voices hum sweetly on the consonant "N," while men's buzz on "Z," descending at *pianissimo*, only to be interrupted by boisterous frogs, in the form of altos and basses instructed to "croak" (the canon on "Bre-

⁵⁶ Beckles Willson, *Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, p. 177.

ke-kex” that repeats at T₉, T₇ and T₃ in Figure 8). Ligeti saves the final two lines from Weöres’s Etude 49 for a reprieve: here the “Bim-bam!” of the bells in the tower is illustrated by strict canonic imitation at the quarter note, which comes to rest on a harmony formed from the F-sharp acoustic scale, voiced at *ppp* to imitate the inharmonic partials of bells in the distance (Figure 9).⁵⁷

Figure 8: Annotated score of *Hungarian Etude* No. 2, mm. 10–12

⁵⁷ I analyze this song further in my article, “The Cosmopolitan Absurdity of Ligeti’s Late Works,” in *Contemporary Music Review* 31/2 (April, 2012): pp. 1–14.



Figure 9: Final chord in *Hungarian Etude* No. 2

The third Hungarian étude, “Vásár,” reprises the simple conceit of canonic imitation to portray a bustling rural fair. But “Vásár” augments the complexities of the preceding movements by assigning overlapping verses to five different voice groups, each with its own canon and separate tempo and rhythmic cycle. Choir I includes four SATB groups while choir II forms a fifth group of one soprano, alto tenor and bass respectively; the five asymmetrical groups assume a spatial arrangement on stage: “in the front, in the rear, sideward, also above in a gallery or loge.”⁵⁸ Ligeti states that in the *Hungarian Etudes* he was explicitly trying to find a musical equivalent to Weöres’s playful-experimental approach, which draws on folk themes but explores the constructivist potentials of language; hence the pitch symmetry of *Etude I*, the incorporation of a “madrigalesque” frog concert within a subdued, micropolyphonic frame in *Etude II*, and the complex canons and the spatially divided choirs that characterize the cycle as a whole.⁵⁹ Yet such baroque settings may seem at odds with the epigrammatic spirit of these fragments. The very “half experimental, half popular”⁶⁰ verse that helped free the composer from restraints while in Hungary here seems confined—at times submerged—by their strict, mannerist treatment. Ligeti would return to the poetry of Weöres only after immersing himself in extra-Hungarian influences, among them the music of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands.

⁵⁸ Performance instructions, *Magyar Etüdüök*, Schott SKR 2006, p. 28

⁵⁹ Program notes for performance at the Styrian Autumn Festival in Graz, 1984, reprinted as “*Magyar etüdüök*,” *Gesammelte Schriften* II, pp. 286-7.

⁶⁰ “György Ligeti im Gespräch mit Denys Bouliane,” in *Neuland* 5 (1985), p. 76.

With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles

After self-consciously retrospective works of the early 1980s such as the *Horn Trio* (1982), Ligeti professed his interest in a cross-cultural amalgamation of styles. Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands were first evident in the *Piano Concerto* (1985–8) and *Etudes* (1985–2001), but also appeared in the *Violin Concerto* (1990), the *Viola Sonata* (1990–2) and the *Hamburg Concerto* for horn and chamber orchestra, where they were woven into a denser conceptual weave that responded as well to the timbral experiments of the spectralist composers. Yet, at the end of the 1990s, Ligeti turned back to the short Weöres poems of the 1940s (and part of a later poem) for his first and only solo song cycle, binding the set together with a title from a Hungarian counting rhyme: *Síppal, dobbal, nádibegedűvel* (2000). The novel combination of mezzo-soprano and percussion ensemble may explain why—rather than set only those poems with a recognizable Hungarian or folk provenance as in the *Magyar Etiüdök*—Ligeti chose orientalia, nonsense verse, and several lines from Weöres’s much longer and more serious *Twelfth Symphony* (1970). The six older poems fall into three distinct categories: “Kínai templom” (“Chinese Temple”) and “Kuli” (“Coolie”) display a fey Orientalism, “Táncdal” (“Dance Song”) and “Szajkó,” (“Parakeet”) are untranslatable sound-poems, and “Fabula” (“Fable”) and “Keserédes” (“Bitter-sweet”) fall into the category of “fake” fairy tale and Hungarian folk song. The discussion below chooses one movement from each of the three groups, along with the cycle’s centerpiece “Alma álma,” (subtitled “Dream”).

The title of the first song, “Fabula” alerts us to its fantastic but implicitly didactic character. Ligeti’s fable proves far more cynical than the fractured fairy tale of “A Merchant with Great Birds,” depicting a pack of wolves, that most feared of woodland creatures, at the mercy of two peripatetic mountains:

*Egy
Hegy
Megy.*

A
mountain
walks.

Szembejön a másik hegy.

The other mountain comes
toward it.

*Orditanak ordasok;
Össze ne morzsolijatok!*

The wolves howl:
Do not crush us!

*Én is hegy,
Te is hegy,
nekiünk ugyan egyremegy.*

I, a mountain,
You, too, a mountain,
We are indifferent to that.⁶¹

A host of whimsical sounds are arrayed to narrate this tiny tale: a bass drum struck with a heavy stick, slide whistles, flexatone, a lion's roar, a Burmese gong, a tamtam and recorders which take over from marimba at the coda. A simple three-part form follows the call and response between mountains (two A sections) and wolves (B section), as shown in an annotated score in Figure 10. Mountain number 1 enters on D-flat—a central pitch in the drama—which slides down to C. The second peak enters with an analogous gesture in reverse, moving from G-flat through C to repeated Fs, accented by a full E-flat pentatonic collection arranged in fifths. The entrance of each mountain is punctuated by the bass drum, which the wolves answer with a more varied plaint. Their howl alternates three distinct gestures in three opposed collections: an ascending scale in WT_1 , an (0, 2, 4) trichord motive in WT_0 , and an (0, 2, 7) gesture that incorporates C and G. These gestures repeat, accompanied by slide whistles a minor second apart, and a fourth higher on flexatone. Whereas the mountains were followed by bass drum interludes, the terrified wolves give way to a siren and lion's roar, before a final plea from C that ascends through WT_1 . The mountains unite on E3 in the final A section, accompanied by a Burmese tuned gong on F-sharp2. A pregnant pause occupies a full bar of 4/2 before their final statement of indifference, attended by a trio of recorders that accompany the mezzo climbing down the mountain from E-flat5. This collection subsumes the wolves' whole-tone into the earthy E-flat pentatonic, to close on the mountain's final (0, 2, 7) quintal chord on B-flat.

⁶¹ All translations by Sharon Krebs are taken from *The Ligeti Project III* (2003), Teldec CD 8573-87631-2. The entire score of "Fabula" is reprinted in the enclosed booklet.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Fabula" from the opera "Sippal, dobbal, nádibegedűvel". The score is divided into two parts, A and B. Part A, "Mountain 1" and "Mountain 2", features a mezzo-soprano vocal line with lyrics in Hungarian and Italian, and a percussion ensemble including marimbas, bass-marimba, and bass drum. Part B, "WT1" and "C-G", features a marimba and chime ensemble with various techniques like slide whistle and flexatone, and a lion's roar. The score includes detailed performance instructions such as "ff tutta la forza", "screaming (precise pitches)", and "overblowing".

Figure 10: Annotated score of “Fabula,”
from *Sippal, dobbal, nádibegedűvel*, mm. 1–8

No performance detail is too small to escape’s Ligeti’s precise stage directions, which in mere seconds must animate a tense scene composed of fantastic characters. The mezzo-soprano swings from extreme hoarseness to screaming, in final phrase shifting from an unnatural belly voice to an “evil, cynical” exhortation. *Tutta la forza* passages alternate with rests, with a full bar at the end of “absolute silence and immobility.” The entire ordeal is over in one minute, before we have time to reflect on its absurdity—the paradox of a mobile earth vs. a humbled carnivore—or consider its political or social implications (which is perhaps the entire point of the fable).

The poem “Kínai templom” exists not as lines nor as stanzas, but as a 4 x 7 grid of 28 words, to be read top to bottom, and left to right. The words seem to be chosen for their sound, but may be juxtaposed at random; nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, colors, sounds, and sensations—ranging from the general to the sensuous particular—toll in sequence like temple gongs, meant to express the contentment of a

Buddhist view of life.⁶² Ligeti chose six sundry bells to accompany the text: Japanese rin, tuned Burmese gongs, Western tubular bells, glockenspiel, crotales and a vibraphone without its motor. While the sound world of “Chinese temple” differs from that of “Fabula,” its tonal structure relies on the same contrast between dissonant, symmetrical harmonies and the asymmetrical, open sound of empty fifths, as subsets of several pentatonic collections, as shown in an annotated pitch reduction of the score in Figure 11.

mezzo.
perc.

WT₁

Szent kert bő lomb tőt zöld számy, föm lenn tág éj öö, kék árny.
Saint field broad leaves full green wings, high down far fair comes, blue shade.

FM
anbemitonic pentatonic colls

EM
pent

WT₁

Négy fém cseng: Szép, Jó, Hír, Rang, majd mély csönd leng, mint hűlt hang.
Four bronze ring: Night, Good, News, Rank, hence deep Still swings, like cool sound.

Chord annotations: G^bM, D^bM, CM, A^bM, AM, E^bM, G^bM, G^bM, B^bMm, E^bM, G^bM, HEX(0), OCT(23)pent, pent, F[#]m?, CMm

Figure 11: Analytical reduction of “Chinese temple,”
from *Sippal, dobbal, nádibegeđűvel*

⁶² Ligeti’s program notes, in *The Ligeti Project III*.

The steady procession of dotted quarters sounds like the peal of a carillon. Tritones and extremely disjunct intervals in the mezzo-soprano's part disguise the fact that, like the wolf howl in "Fabula," the vocal line follows a whole-tone wedge in WT_1 before closing on C. The singer leaves this pattern in measures 3-6, but returns to it to close the song in parallel, with a final phrase that begins on C and returns to WT_1 . The song divides into two halves, each composed of two phrases with a similar rhyming cadence shaped by rhythmic augmentation (by one-third) and the major-minor tetrachord (the second cadence a whole-step higher than the first).

By contrast, "Táncdal" is constructed around the repeated nonsense syllables "pa-nyi-ga-i," accompanied by a G-F-sharp-D-C ostinato, with mezzo echoing the marimba as the ostinato is passed from one voice to another. As "Kínai templom" contrasted symmetrical and pentatonic chords, so "Táncdal" moves from the C acoustic to the $OCT_{(1,2)}$ collection through a modified Rondo form, ABCBAB. Each nonsense word is set to a unique rhythmic figure, and the introduction of a new word in the poem coincides with a new pitch collection and formal section, all of which relate back to the opening ostinato, as shown by the chart in Figure 12. The B-flat, C and F in "Fable" return here prominently, while the $OCT_{(1,2)}$ collection and F-sharp acoustic collection refer back to the second movement of the *Magyar Etüdök*.

Motives **Shift of pitch collection**

3 $\frac{2}{4}$ *p* (the voice is virtuoso, dangerous, capricious)
 Pa - nyi - ga - i Suggests C Lydian

6 $\frac{3}{4}$ *f*
 ü Confirms C Acoustic collection

12 $\frac{7}{8}$ (*p*) Introduces OCT_{1,2} holding pcs 10, 2, 7 invariant with C acoustic

18 $\frac{8}{8}$ *f* *molto ritmico*
 Kot - ta Confirms F# Acoustic; transforms into descending semitone motive at *a tempo*, closing F5-E3

20 $\frac{3}{8}$ *più ff* (possible)
 Ház Returns to OCT^{1,2}

Figure 12: Analytical chart for “Táncdal,”
 from *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedűvel*

“Kínai templom” and “Táncdal” belong to Weöres’s category of nonsense poems, which range from experiments in automatic writing to “Hangcsoportok” (sound-groups), a poem in which vowels and consonants are structured by the inner harmony of their phonemes. In an interview decades later, Weöres asserts that these apparently “meaningless” poems implicitly critiqued the notion of progress, so tarnished during the war years, searching for a lost purity of expression.⁶³ This “nostalgia for a more well-ordered, more intelligible, more perspicuous world,” comes through in his philological fable “Barbár dal”

⁶³ Weöres in Mátyás Domokos, *A pályatárs szemével* (Budapest, 1982), p. 548, cited in Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres’ Poetry*, pp. 96-7.

(Barbarian Song), in which a lyric—created in an archaic language that never actually existed—is presented next to its thoroughly researched and annotated, yet utterly fictive, “translation.” Here the poet becomes other to himself twice over: as both mythical bard and his equally unreal amanuensis. This playful approach to language is thus inseparable from Weöres’s metaphysical concerns, the notion that constant transformation, along with the search for what was once lost, are in some ways the essence of what it means to be human. This search occupies many of the poet’s symphonic poems, written throughout his career, but not collected together until the *Eleven Symphonies* (1973). The text of Ligeti’s “Alma álma” comes from the *Twelfth Symphony*, which stands apart from the earlier ones in the series just as “Alma álma” stands apart from the other six works in *With Pipes, Drums, Fiddles*. Although all of the symphonies pay homage to sonata form, in Susanna Fahlström’s analysis, only the *Twelfth Symphony* separates the forms of words from their meaning; thus the symphonic series culminates with a poem that is itself a kind of music. Although written much earlier, the *Twelfth Symphony* did not appear in print until the *Egybegyűjtött írások* of 1975.⁶⁴

Ligeti selected only 26 lines from the *Twelfth Symphony* for the quiet heart of his cycle, where the four percussionists trade sticks and mallets for the unexpected sound of chromatic harmonicas (“chromonicas” in the score). A simple folk-like melody vacillates between two modes over an opening two-chord introduction on B-flat^{Maj7}/C major-minor chords, as shown in a reduction of measures 1-30 in Figure 13, in which grey notes stand for the OCT_(0,1) collection and black notes represent B-flat major. The score’s explicit breathing instructions, and an antiphonal structure in which two pairs of chromatic harmonicas play in turn (one in C and one in B-flat), impart a spatial and physical immediacy to the lullaby: the dream of an apple swaying on a branch. Each pair of performers alternates dyads (seconds, thirds and fourths): while one breathes in, the other blows out, to create a wheezing, consumptive sound (Ligeti’s phrase) reminiscent of the 1960s organ etude *Harmonies*.⁶⁵ After an opening vamp on the same dotted-quarter rhythm that characterized “Kínai templom,” the chromonicas rise as the

⁶⁴ Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres’ Poetry*, p. 223.

⁶⁵ Ligeti’s programs notes explain this “surreal” atmosphere as an attempt to capture the apple’s dreams of journeys in distant, enchanted lands (*The Ligeti Project III*).

apple swings, reaching the extremes of the instrument's range in measure 26. All four harmonicas return to middle C in measure 27, as the poem shifts register, to reframe the hanging apple as the mind's *dream* of an apple; emphasized as the chromonicas's two- and three-chord patterns sweep upward in canon at irregular intervals, in a steady quarter-eighth rhythm.

♩ = OC1 0,1 *p con tenerezza*

Mezzo

al - ma á - gon al - ma ring az á - gon al - ma ring al - ma ring a lum - bos á - gon
 an apple on the branch an apple swings on the branch an apple swings apple swings on the leafy branch...

Chromonicas

B^b67 Cm B^b Cm⁶ B^b Cm⁶ B^b Am⁷ B^b Am⁷ B^bm⁶ A⁶7

12

ring a ring a bar - na á - gon ring - va ring - a - rin - ga - tóz - va in - ga hin - ta pa - lin - ta
 swings - swings on the brown branch swing - ing rock - ing pen - du lum - swing - pa - lin - ta

B^b7 Em⁶ B^b7 C⁶7 Dm C[#]6⁰ B^b B^b7 Fr⁶ Cm⁶ B^b C⁶m C[#]6 B^b Am⁷ B^bm Am B⁹ A⁰7 B⁰7

22

G⁶ (0157) F⁷ (0235) (0235) (0246) (0257) * (024) ** (0155)

27

p *poco* *mp* *p*

al - ma á - gon al - ma el - me á - ma al - ma
 a dream of an apple dream dream

C D^b Dm E^bm C D^b Dm E^bm C⁶ B^b7 Fr⁶ C⁶7 C⁶ B^b B Cm

*partials 7-9, or 8-10 or 9-11 (A3, G3, F3) **partials 9-12/F#3

Figure 13: Analytical reduction of “Alma álma,”
 from *Síppal, dobbal, nádibegedűvel*, mm. 1-30

At the repetition of “dream” the chromonicas halt on an A minor triad, moving through D-flat and B major to a static whole-tone tetrachord [8, T, 0, 4]. The oxymoron “motionlessly swinging” returns us to the opening ostinato, with all four harpists now in unison. They halt when the singer gets stuck, rocking physically between C and either A-flat or A along with the text. The apple finally achieves autonomy within the dream, becoming the icon of a world united, if not in daylight, than

in sleep, “staying in this spot it casts off/to India to Africa to the moonlight dream” over a final symmetrical pentachord from the OCT^(1,2) collection.

Ligeti’s return to Hungarian for his last vocal work seems to mark a withdrawal from the more international exoticism of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet the minimal, untranslatable poems of *Weöres* offer a cosmopolitanism of the fantastic. His poems remain accessible in terms of their concrete language and vivid imagery, and yet remain mysterious, in their abrupt juxtapositions of times, space and narrative voice. The two artists shared a common sensibility, a paradoxical combination of the purist and the profligate, the cultivation of a painstaking technique and an openness to influence from other cultures, arts, and historical periods. Their “rooted,” or situational, cosmopolitanism, acknowledges ties to a country and tradition while retaining an inherent idealism about the role of culture on the world stage. Because the cosmopolitan sees historical and cultural transition as normative, and thus resistant to the claims of particular nationalist or ethnic identity, he or she resides in the margins of modernity. But the cosmopolitan remains resolutely modern, if a “minority” modernity that may provincialize European thought as often as that of other cultures. In Ligeti’s case, that of a Hungarian Jew brought up in an Eastern Orthodox community in Romania, and a survivor of both Nazi and Soviet occupations, the openness and idealism of his “cosmopolitan imagination” was tempered by nostalgia and fatalism.

As Slavoj Žižek notes, the relationship between transcultural universals and culture-specific features is “historically overdetermined: the very notion of a transcultural Universal means different things in different cultures.”⁶⁶ What marks an authentic moment of aesthetic discovery, then, is when the universal emerges from the concrete, as though its identity were split into a particular and a universal dimension. In *Síppal, dobbal, nádihégedűvel* the “more perspicuous world” of *Weöres*’s fantastic poems meets a similar sonic world, full of mixed folk modes, a playful instrumentarium, and simple rhythms used to pointed effect. This world neither mimics nor merges the vernacular music that inspires it, but strives for “Wonderful, serious fun, mingled with ... infectious wisdom.”⁶⁷ The cultivation of this free-floating exoticism produces a

⁶⁶ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (London, NY: Verso, 2000), p. 241.

⁶⁷ Alan Rich, “Clouds and Cuckoos,” *LA Weekly* (Feb. 28-Mar. 6, 2003).

singular event, a comic turn neither ironic nor facetious, that grounds the universal in the concrete, whether that be singing wolves, rolling “Coolies,” or dreaming apples.

The narratives of “Fabula,” “Keserédes” and “Alma álma” are universal in import, while the images and sounds that dominate “Kínai templom,” “Táncdal” and “Szajkó” require no translation, fusing poem and music as in Ligeti’s earlier *Adventures* (1962).⁶⁸ Weöres in fact urged readers to regularly read poems in unknown languages:

Not much, only a few lines every time, but then do it several times. Don’t care about what they mean, but if possible, learn the right pronunciation, the acoustics. You then become acquainted with the music of the language and the inner music of the creating spirits. And you may get to the point that you can read the texts of your own language independent of the content, and this is the only way to experience the innermost real beauty, the incorporeal dance of the poem.⁶⁹

Ligeti’s settings of Weöres’s urbane and paradoxical texts may decontextualize or even misread the original, yet seem attuned to “the inner music of the creating spirits.” Likewise, Weöres’s poems in a sense help us “read the text” of Ligeti’s musical language, independent of a modernist narrative freighted by internecine, ideological baggage. If there is something naive about Ligeti’s eternal search to express “a sense of order on a higher level,”⁷⁰ his desire never fails to reveal the absurdity of the master narrative itself which, if not self-aware, is apt to be crushed by the walking mountain of historical and cultural change.

⁶⁸ Peter Lakı presents a fascinating analysis of implicit meanings present in the “nonsense verse” of “Szajkó,” in “The Linguistic Magic of Sándor Weöres.”

⁶⁹ Weöres, *A teljesség felé*, p. 671, cited in Fahlström, *Sándor Weöres’ Poetry*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ Ligeti in Sima Arom, *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm*, trans. by Martin Thom, Barbara Tuckett, and Raymond Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. xvii.

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