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Journal

Contemporary Music Review, 31(2-3)

ISSN

0749-4467

Author

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Publication Date

2012-04-01

DOI

10.1080/07494467.2012.717358

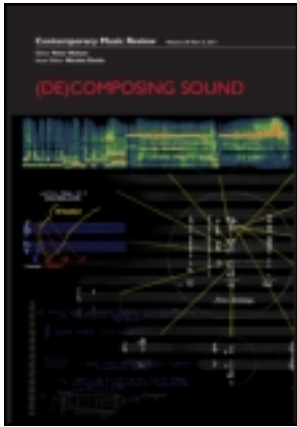
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Publisher: Routledge

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Contemporary Music Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gcmr20>

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Version of record first published: 22 Nov 2012.

To cite this article: Amy Bauer (2012): The Cosmopolitan Absurdity of Ligeti's Late Works, Contemporary Music Review, 31:2-3, 163-176

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2012.717358>

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The Cosmopolitan Absurdity of Ligeti's Late Works

Amy Bauer

As Esa-Pekka Salonen notes, György Ligeti 'was the most cosmopolitan of composers, but, paradoxically, remained clearly defined in terms of his roots and language'. As a 'rooted' cosmopolitan and survivor of Nazi and Soviet occupations, Ligeti retained an inherent idealism that reached back to Kant's notion of a cosmopolitan, universal future, albeit one tempered by nostalgia and fatalism. In their incorporation of disparate cultural influences, the late works in particular exemplify a form of cultural contestation—distinct from mere pluralism or hybridity—known as the 'cosmopolitan imagination'. This paper focuses on one manifestation of this cosmopolitan impulse in four vocal and instrumental compositions. Each work manifests a comic absurdity that neither mimics nor merges the music and text which inspire it, and which binds Ligeti's music to larger modernist themes.

Keywords: Cosmopolitan imagination; Cosmopolitanism; Ligeti; Sándor Wéores; Boris Vian; Hungarian Études

As fellow composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen notes, György Ligeti 'was the most cosmopolitan of composers' yet remained wedded to his roots and language.¹ This apparent paradox reflects several conflicting cultural identities: a Hungarian Jew raised in a Romanian Orthodox community, who later moved to Austria and Germany. As a 'rooted' cosmopolitan and survivor of Nazi and Soviet occupations, Ligeti retained an inherent idealism that reflected Kant's notion of a cosmopolitan, universal future, albeit one tempered by nostalgia and fatalism. The harmonic, formal and affective characters of Ligeti's late works especially express a kind of guarded idealism that welcomes the influence of other cultures and arts. Thus, Ligeti's long-standing interests in historical methods (be they medieval and Renaissance polyphony or techniques of the electronic music studio) and the visual arts were fused with increasingly diverse influences that cannot be attributed to one historical or geographic source. *Scordatura* appear alongside 'imaginary' tunings; folk instruments penetrate the orchestra; chord progressions betray no internal logic or reflect a spectral world beyond reach; and fanciful narratives escape their literary

antecedents.² The late works thus perfectly exemplify a form of cultural contestation—distinct from mere pluralism or hybridity—known as the ‘cosmopolitan imagination’ (Delanty, 2006).

As Delanty notes, the cosmopolitan imagination occurs as a condition of self-problematization where ‘new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness’ (2006, p. 25). These moments of openness do not arise from the simple existence of diversity, or from the specific attachments of the individual, but from a charged encounter of the local with the global. As cultural translations between things that are different, they strive for a transformative moment, despite their author’s awareness that uncertainty will haunt even his most earnest attempts. In this paper, I focus on a particular manifestation of this cosmopolitan imagination: a comic absurdity that on the surface may appear slight or even infantile, but that displays an intimate connection between music and text, binding Ligeti’s music to larger modernist themes. In these three vocal (and one instrumental) works, Ligeti draws from fantastic literary sources that often defy both narrative logic and obvious allegorical readings. But their often opaque charm allowed the composer a freedom of musical manipulation and association that would clash with more conventional texts. Within these examples, I draw further comparisons between earlier and later settings of poems by Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), as well as between two of Ligeti’s well-known passacaglia movements, whose literary associations share a mordant subtext.

Ligeti’s early instrumental compositions such as the *Five Pieces for Two Pianos* (1942–1950), *Kis szerenád* (Little Serenade, 1947) for string orchestra or *Baladâ si joc* (Ballad and dance) for two violins (1950) remained indebted to Bartók and the influence of Romanian folk music. But Ligeti’s early vocal works show a less reverent approach to his models, especially those based on the poetry of his countryman Weöres. Ligeti found a kindred spirit in Weöres, a Renaissance figure of post-war Hungarian letters famous for his erudition, eclectic tastes, love of fanciful worlds and utterly original forms.³ Songs such as the *Három Weöres-dal* (Three Weöres songs, 1946–1947) for voice and piano or *Éjszaka* and *Reggel* for a cappella choir (Night and Morning, 1955) show less of a proprietary interest in folk sources than a delight in their subversive aspects, as a complement to the mystical and exotic quality of Weöres’ texts. Their stark musical setting and obscure symbolism summon an imaginary culture at odds with both the ‘new nationalism’ Bartók advocated and the doctrines of Socialist Realism.

After emigrating from Hungary, Ligeti did not set Hungarian again until 1983, when he returned to the poetry of Weöres for inspiration. For Beckles Willson, these later works represent Transylvania, Ligeti’s lost home, an imaginary childhood where an exotic mix of music and ethnicities coexisted in prelapsarian harmony (2007, pp. 117–122). Although Ligeti did construct an elaborate narrative identity for himself as émigré in home and heart, Weöres’ texts offered more than escapism tinged with nostalgia. Weöres’ poetics—shaped by his literary background, critical milieu and political circumstances—embraced references to folk tradition, the fantastical and the

recondite. He was born in Western Transdanubia, and spent much of his youth in Csöngye. Well educated by his mother, he was something of a child prodigy publishing poetry while still in secondary school. Kodály set many of his early poems as choral works, and his genius was quickly recognized, if not universally praised.⁴ Weöres published two volumes and translated the Sumerian–Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* before spending time in India, China and Ceylon, and completing his doctorate in 1939. He and his wife, the poet Amy Károlyi, supported themselves during the war years through translation, and introduced the work of many foreign writers to Hungary for the first time.

Thus, the poetry of Weöres celebrates myths from East and West, references to high and low literature, and language from both past and present, all of which meet in artificial but artfully constructed images and wordplay. In an attempt to counter the ‘iambic hegemony’ of Western-influenced Hungarian poetry, Weöres explored sound symbolism, novel metric structures and absurd juxtapositions that ‘ignore the laws of time and space’ (Czigány, 1984, p. 453; Fahlström, 1999, p. 81). Towards this end, he drew on the ‘primitive’ structuring devices of ancient poetry: the regular metrical units and rhythms of folksong, and parallel grammatical structures independent of syllable length and certain stress factors (Fahlström, 1999, p. 81). The resulting poems are often untranslatable and thus, in the words of Miklós Vajda, ‘must remain Hungarian secrets’ (Kenyeres, 1984; Vajda, 1987, p. 50). Ligeti communed with those early ‘secrets’ again when he set four poems from Weöres’ *Magyar Etüdök* cycle of the early 1940s in his own *Hungarian Études* for sixteen-voice a cappella double-choir (1983). Three of the poems chosen 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.⁵

Ligeti’s second étude sets poems 49 and 40 of the Weöres cycle within an isorhythmic motet identified only by its two competing tempos (crochet equals 88 and 76). As Beckles Willson notes, the pastoral topic and measured descent of the opening phrase recall Kodály’s *Evening Song*, with a satirical edge (2007, p. 117). Clearly articulated lines in choir I are set against Ligeti’s microcanonic technique in choir II, to vividly illustrate shadows descending at dusk. The ‘flocks crowding in’ (Nyáj zsong be a) of the poem’s second line are framed by a harmonic tritone that collapses to a minor second, while the insect ‘swarms’ that follow are echoed a fourth below. In the second choir, women’s voices hum sweetly on the consonant ‘N’, an echo that links the inner consonant of ‘shadows’ (Árnyak) with ‘flocks’ (Nyáj). Meanwhile, choir two buzzes on ‘Z’, linking the quiet flight of the birds to the murmur of insects.

Here, a gaping rift opens between the first poem and the second, as well as between their respective settings. An idyllic lyric describing evening in a meadow descends to pianissimo when it is interrupted by a lewd paean to amphibious love in the form of altos and basses instructed to ‘croak’ ever more loudly. The frogs’ canon in triplets obliterates the mood, metre and harmonic relationships established in bars 1–9 as it

takes over both choirs in bars 10–11, repeating twice at T₉ and then at T₇ and T₃ and moving from one symmetrical octatonic collection to another, as shown in an annotated excerpt of the score in Figure 1. Yet what appears to be simply a crude shift into another world actually forges a short circuit between the chaste and the erotic pastoral. Ligeti links the first consonant of the frogs (Békák) in étude 49 to their call in étude 40 (Brekekex). The E/F that represented the swarm in bar 9 initiates the frogs' dissonant call in bar 10, their joyous love-making punctuated by the bells from étude 49. The deafening 'Bim-bam' of their peal—set to another B consonant and another canonic voice—spans both choirs in a syncopated rhythm. The toll continues in bars 11–17, as shifting combinations of fifths culminate in a fading pentachord that imitates the inharmonic partials of bells in the distance (bars 24–25).

Ligeti claims that, in the *Hungarian Études*, he was explicitly trying to find a musical equivalent to Weöres' playful-experimental approach, which draws on folk themes but explores the constructivist potentials of language. Hence, the pitch symmetry of Étude I, the incorporation of a 'madrigalesque' frog concert within a subdued, micropolyphonic frame in Étude II, and the complex canons and spatially

The figure shows a musical score for Hungarian Étude II, bars 10–12. It is divided into two systems, I and II. Each system has four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in Hungarian. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, mf, fff, ppp), articulation (accents, slurs), and rhythmic markings (triplets, syncopation). Annotations include 'OCT (0,1)' and 'OCT (2,3)' indicating octatonic collections, and 'T9', 'T7', and 'T3' indicating tritone transpositions. The lyrics for system I are: S: 'kel az ár kon. Bim! Bim!'; A: 'kon az ár Bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex! Gye-re bujj viz'; T: 'fá kon. Bim! Bam!'; B: 'Bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex! Gye-re bujj viz a-lá, ha szeretsz! Bre-ke'. The lyrics for system II are: S: 'Bim! Bim!'; A: 'Bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex, bre-ke-kex! Gye-re bujj viz a-lá ha szeretsz! a. Bam!'; T: 'ha szeretsz! Bre-ke-kex! I-de-lenn so-ha sincs vad i-dó!'; B: 'Z. Z. ffp Bam! Bam!'. The score concludes with two octatonic collections: 'OCT (0,1)' and 'OCT (2,3)'. The text 'ppp possible, ad lib. falsetto' is written above the final notes of the Soprano staff in system I.

Figure 1 Hungarian Étude II, bars 10–12. © 1983 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany.

divided choirs that characterize the cycle as a whole.⁶ Yet such baroque settings often seem at odds with the epigrammatic spirit of these fragments. The very ‘half experimental, half popular’ (Ligeti, 1985b, p. 76) verse that helped free the composer from restraints while in Hungary here seems confined—at times submerged—by their strict, mannerist treatment. Ligeti would not return to the poetry of Weöres until the end of the century, and only after immersing himself in extra-Hungarian influences, among them the music of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Pacific Islands.

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, *Síppal, dobbal, nádihegedüvel* (With pipes, drums, fiddles, 2000), binding the set for mezzo-soprano and percussion ensemble together with a title from a Hungarian counting rhyme. Rather than set only those poems with a recognizable Hungarian or folk provenance, Ligeti chose *Orientalia*, nonsense verse, and several lines from Weöres’ much longer and more serious *Twelfth Symphony*. The six older poems fall into three distinct categories: two poems that display a fey Orientalism, two untranslatable sound-poems, and two ‘fake’ fairy tales and Hungarian folk songs. The title of the first song, ‘Fabula’, alerts us to its fantastic but implicitly didactic character. Weöres’ fable depicts a pack of wolves, that most feared of woodland creatures, at the mercy of two peripatetic mountains:

A
mountain
walks.
The other mountain comes toward it.
The wolves howl:
Do not crush us!
I, a mountain,
You, too, a mountain,
We are indifferent to that.⁷

A host of whimsical sounds are arrayed to narrate this tiny tale: a bass drum hit with a heavy stick, slide whistles, flexatone, lion’s roar, Burmese gong, tamtam and recorders, which take over from marimba at the close. A simple three-part form follows the call and response between the mountains (two A sections) and wolves (B section). Mountain number 1 enters on D \flat —a central pitch in the drama—which slides down to C, as shown in an annotated score of bars 1–8 in Figure 2. 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 bass drum punctuates the entrance of each mountain, while the wolves answer with a more varied plaint. Their howl alternates three distinct gestures in three opposed collections: an ascending scale in WT₁, an (0248) tetrachord motive in WT₀, and an (027) motive that incorporates C and G.⁸ These gestures reappear in varied form, accompanied by slide whistles a minor second apart and flexatone a fourth higher.

A $\text{♩} = 48$, *deliberate and cruel*

Mountain 1

Mezzo-soprano: *ff* *nata la forza mit volaminas-keiserer Stimme*
 Egy heggy meggy. Szem jón a má sik heggy.

Mountain 2

Percussion: 1. Marimbaphone, 2. Marimbaphone, Bass-Marimbaphone, Bass Drum (medium low) with a heavy wood stick, Bass Drum (lower) with a bass drum stick

B

M+S: *ff* *brutal and ungentel*
 0 rdi ta nak (027); C-G WT0 WT1 screaming (precise pitches) C-G WT0 sok;

Mar: 1. Slide Whistle fundamentals *ff possible* overblowing, 2. Slide Whistle fundamentals *ff possible* overblowing, 1. Sirene Whistle, 2. Sirene Whistle

Chim.: 1. Flexatone *ff possible*, 2. Flexatone *ff nata la forza*

Perc.: Lion's Roar *ff nata la forza*

Figure 2 'Fabula', bars 1–8. © 2001 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany.

Whereas the mountains were followed by bass drum, the terrified wolves give way to a siren and lion's roar, before a final plea from C that ascends through WT₁. The two mountains unite on E3 in the final A section, accompanied by a Burmese gong on F \sharp 2. A pregnant pause occupies a full bar of 4/2 before their final statement of indifference, attended by a trio of recorders as the mezzo 'climbs' down the mountain from Eb5. This collection subsumes the wolves' whole-tone into the earthy Eb pentatonic, to close on the mountain's final (027) quintal chord on Bb.

No performance detail is too small to escape's Ligeti's precise stage directions, which in mere seconds animate a tense scene composed of fantastic characters. The mezzo swings from extreme hoarseness to screaming, shifting from an unnatural belly voice to an 'evil, cynical' exhortation at the close. *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 the paradox of a mobile earth versus a humbled carnivore, much less consider its political or social implications—a sudden shock that highlights the absurd point of the fable.

'Flying Robert', the fourth of the six *Nonsense Madrigals* for six male voices, is an explicit passacaglia. For the *Madrigals*, originally a commission from the English sextet the King's Singers, Ligeti (1997) began with the nonsense poems of Lewis Carroll, supplementing them with texts by William Brighty Rands and Heinrich Hoffman, the latter translated into charming Victorian English. The passacaglia is set to the translated text, which is also the only one in the set to bear an explicit and dark moral. As one of the cautionary tales included in Hoffman's *Struwwelpeter* ('Slovenly Peter'), 'Flying Robert' warns of a boy who foolishly runs out in a rainstorm only to be swept up in it, never to be seen again. Ligeti (1974) once wrote that Mahler's First Symphony gave the impression of an upholstered Jules Verne rocket with leather seat covers and small curtains, and there is faint whiff of the steampunk in 'Flying Robert's' marriage of mechanical compositional techniques and Victorian charm.

Of course, Ligeti's quaint accommodation to the past reaches further back, combining mensural techniques with aspects of chaconne. The passacaglia proceeds in minims in duple time, as a harmonic setting in the three lower voices; it supports a largely chromatic melody with the ghost of a i-V progression in d minor, which nonetheless encompasses eleven notes of the total chromatic (F, the odd note out, may be perceived as the focus of the melodic theme in tenor, bars 1–5, as Malfatti (2004) observes). The passacaglia enters in bar 2, and repeats three times in its original form, under a theme structured by three ascents from C to Eb—similar to one of Ligeti's lament topics—with a 3–2–3 division of the 2/2 bar, as indicated in an annotated reduction of bars 1–14 in Figure 3. This scene-setting call, introducing the storm, is answered by a response, which again begins on C. But this time, C ascends a major third on 'good', within a 3–3–3 division that spans the bar, and is harmonized by shifting intervals that cadence with a perfect fifth (bar 14), a more stable progression that underlines the moral at the outset: good children stay at home and mind their toys. Robert, our defiant subject, interrupts the third appearance of the passacaglia in the bass with his own eleven-note tune and his own, irregular talea.

A tenor solo in quaver triplets enters near the end of the fourth passacaglia statement (bar 20); its harmonization and development in low voices will eventually displace the passacaglia, ‘blown away’ by rising and falling semiquaver chromatic scales that represent the wind beneath Robert’s umbrella, as shown in a reduction of the score in Figure 4.

The madrigal reaches a furious climax at bar 39 marked triple fortissimo, *tutta la forza*—followed immediately by *subito pp*—as Robert ‘screams and cries’, then disappears, along with his symbolic ‘hat that touched the sky’. A fragmented form of the passacaglia, and retrograde fragments of the theme, returns for an epilogue that begins in bar 48. Although the theme returns here in full, it now begins on B4 in alto II (bar 49) in the tenuto minims that earlier characterized the passacaglia rhythm. As the storm abates the alto theme becomes stuck on four repetitions of ‘never’, harmonized by a minor third before dying away on a sustained B♭ that is absorbed by the opening note of the still-repeating passacaglia (bars 69–77). As the madrigal winds down like one of Ligeti’s earlier, broken clockworks (for instance, the third movement of String Quartet No. 2), the passacaglia collapses into a generic, chromaticized form, a continual echo of the opening ‘raindrops’, which, as in the second *Hungarian Étude*, come to rest on a series of bell-like, quintal chords that echo from the distance, as seen in Figure 5, a reduction of the final bars.

Autumns in Collapse

The physically and emotionally demanding ‘Automne de Varsovie’, which closes Ligeti’s first book of piano études, serves as my final example of a cultural translation that maps one absurd world to another. As do many of Ligeti’s late works, ‘Automne’ registers several discursive, as well as structural, layers, which rely on the temporal succession and accumulation of musical and extra-musical ideas in dialogue. The conflict between two distinct traditions of rhythm and metre, as discussed by Stephen Taylor and others,⁹ represents one narrative thread, while the sixth étude’s formal structure traces a complementary narrative. Its keening melodies over a repeating ostinato bass cite folk and classical traditions of lament, and reflects the work’s function as a memorial for colleagues caught up in the 1981 imposition of martial law in Poland. But the full comical and subversive thrust of the étude emerges when we consider these influences alongside a third intertext noted by Richard Steinitz: the surreal novel *L’Automne à Pékin* (Autumn in Peking, 1947) by the French jazz musician, critic and author Vian (1947, 2005).

Critic Maillé (1996) saw *Autumn* as the pre-eminent surrealist novel, a scathing farce about a deadly love triangle, a train station to nowhere, and an unforgiving desert land which may or may not represent the contemporary decay of Paris itself. According to Alistair Rolls, Vian’s novels are highly intertextual, with Lewis Carroll the most important influence on *Autumn*, a novel in which all of the major characters fall asleep on entering the narrative proper.¹⁰ The bureaucrat Amadis Dudu, having accidentally travelled by bus to an enormous desert named Exopotamie, decides to

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Flying Robert', consisting of two systems of music. The first system begins at bar 22 and ends at bar 25. The second system begins at bar 26 and ends at bar 27. The score is written for a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes lyrics and performance markings such as *f*, *mp*, and *mf*. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *f* and *ff*, and is characterized by triplet patterns and a section labeled 'passacaglia' starting at bar 26. The lyrics describe a scene with children playing with toys in a park, with a focus on the 'Flying Robert' toy.

System 1 (Bars 22-25):

- Bar 22:** and mind their toys, good
- Bar 23:** here you see him, sil - ly fel - low, un - der - neath his red um - brel - la!
- Bar 24:** Here you see him, sil - ly fel - low, un - der - neath his red um - brel - la!
- Bar 25:** it it did did. Oh! Oh! How it whis - tles through the trees and flow'rs and this - tles!

System 2 (Bars 26-27):

- Bar 26:** li(t)le girls and boys
- Bar 27:** through, li(t)le Oh! the Solo Oh! It has

Performance Markings:

- Dynamic:** *f*, *mp*, *mf*, *ff*
- Tempo/Style:** *passacaglia*
- Articulation:** *ff*, *ff*
- Phrasing:** *ff*, *ff*

Figure 4 Score Reduction of 'Flying Robert', bars 22-27. © 1991 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany.

81 *ppp* *diminuendo poco a poco al fine*

T, Bar I
 their toys, their and toys, mind, mind their

B, Bar II
 and stay at home and mind their

86 *pppp*

toys, and mind their toys...
 toys, mind their toys...

Figure 5 Score Reduction of ‘Flying Robert’, bars 81–90. © 1991 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz, Germany.

construct a useless railway there, and promptly hires two male engineers and romantic rivals, Angel and Anne, and their secretary Rochelle. Exopotamie may be a harsh landscape, but it is home to a host of characters caught up in the action: an archaeologist and his assistants, a hotel and its proprietor, a hermit and an abbey, among others. The novel is among Vian’s darkest, both metaphorically—the sun in Exopotamie emits black rays—and in terms of its many intertwining plots, which end in death or disaster for most of the characters.

Like Ligeti’s étude, *Autumn in Peking* is rooted in a series of hierarchies, with ‘division and stratification’ on every level of structure, from its theme—a futile search for ideal love—to its geography, characters and internal structure (Scott, 2000). As ostinati and recurring lament phrases structure ‘Automne de Varsovie’ on different melodic, registral and temporal levels, so cycles, decay and recurrence are central to Vian’s novel (Scott, 2000, p. 109). *L’Automne à Pékin* can be divided into three intersecting planes that mirror the various social roles played by its inhabitants. Thus professionals, bureaucrats, workers and lovers occupy either the subterranean world, the neutral desert or the deadly air—the latter host to murdering toy airplanes, the railway and the deadly black rays. As in Ligeti’s étude, there is a sense that the identity of individual lines/characters, and their forward progression threatens to continually spiral ever upward, downward or disappear altogether, although complete disintegration is continually deferred.

The novel is structured like a musical work, with an introduction and three movements divided by passages, or neutral transitions which recall the calm bridge at bars 55–61 of the piano étude. The novel’s subtle intertextuality mirrors its archaeological theme without drawing attention to itself, much like the allusions that

pepper Ligeti's late works. Small disasters litter *Autumn in Peking* as characters senselessly cause the death of others or disappear, and the railway, defying logic, is directed through the hotel. As the excavation of the desert's ruins persists below the surface, it leads to the intersection of every stratum, prefiguring the final section of Ligeti's 'Automne de varsovie'. At bar 99 in the piano étude a fragmented quasi-stretto section first leads to an accelerated ascent, and a culmination on *ff* in bar 107. This is followed by a concluding section: a series of protracted descents from bars 107, 112 and 114 that echoes the three-phrase construction of the initial lament subject. As in the third movement of Vian's novel, the persistent pull of the subterranean leads to collapse and a final cataclysm. Yet Vian adds a final coda that drives home the cyclic theme. At the novel's end, a new archaeological expedition, and a new collection of bureaucrats intent on rebuilding the railroad to nowhere, head once again into the desert, as Ligeti would soon begin a second book of even more fantastic études.

Ligeti's return to the poems of Weöres and English Victoriana in his late vocal works seems at odds with his weightier, and on the surface more cosmopolitan, works of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet, the untranslatable sounds, absurd protagonists and stark juxtapositions of Weöres' poems forge a short circuit between generic conventions and a stubborn materialism, as do the texts of Hoffman and Vian. 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'.¹¹ What marks an authentic moment of aesthetic discovery, then, is when the universal emerges directly from the concrete, and when that very particular position is in turn haunted by its implicit universality.

In the second Hungarian Étude, but especially in 'Fabula', the 'more perspicuous world' (Domokos, 1982, cited in Fahlström, 1999, p. 96) of Weöres' fantastic poems meets a similar sonic world, full of mixed folk modes, a playful instrumentarium and simple rhythms used to pointed effect. These settings, along with 'Flying Robert' and 'Automne de Varsovie', neither mimic nor merge the music and texts which inspire them, but carve out distinct sonic and discursive spaces that are constantly in dialogue with one another. All four works cultivate a free-floating exoticism in the service of a revelatory comic turn: singing wolves, copulating frogs, flying Roberts and simultaneous autumns in Peking, Paris and Warsaw. Although there may be something naïve about Ligeti's expressed desire (1985a, p. xvii) to continually strive for 'a sense of order on a higher level', his quixotic late works seem to anticipate this order's defeat. They never fail to reveal the absurdity of any master narrative, crushed as it no doubt will be by the walking mountains of historical and cultural change.

Notes

- [1] Esa-Pekka Salonen, cited in Swed (2006).
- [2] Ligeti expressed his new aesthetic in passionate, sometimes contradictory, terms in lectures, interviews and writings, perhaps most memorably in Ligeti (1993).

- [3] The little published on Weöres in English includes Weöres and Juhasz (1970) and Weöres (1986, 1988). I draw much of the biographical material from Fahlström (1999) and Mándi-Fazekas and Fazekas (2011).
- [4] Although his first volume of poetry won the Baumgarten prize, critics on both the right and the left found fault with Weöres' 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 (Szabolcsi, 1957, cited in Fahlström, 1999, p. 20). Weöres' mentor Belá 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 Études*, both dating from 1941 but for political reasons not published until 1956 (in *A hallgatás tornya*, Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó). 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.
- [5] The clever, madrigalesque character of Ligeti's settings has attracted a fair number of likeminded analyses; see Jane Clendinning's contribution to this volume, as well as Aluas (1992) and Bergande (1994).
- [6] Program notes for performance at the Styrian Autumn Festival in Graz, 1984, reprinted as Ligeti (2007).
- [7] Ligeti (2003). The entire score of 'Fabula' is reprinted in the enclosed booklet.
- [8] The two whole-tone collections are identified by a subscript denoting the first pitch-class of each collection in normal order.
- [9] Published discussions of the sixth étude include (but are hardly limited to) Bouliane (1989), Edwards (2001), Morresi (2002, pp. 122–144), Rümenapp (1997), Steinitz (2003) and Taylor (1997).
- [10] Alistair Charles Rolls explores the dream logic of *Autumn* in Rolls (1999, pp. 105ff).
- [11] Žižek in Butler, Laclau, and Žižek (2000), p. 241.

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