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Narrating gender and politics: representation of feminine identity in György Kurtág's vocal cycles to the texts by Rimma Dalos and Anna Akhmatova



Introduction: gender narrative in Kurtág's Russian-language vocal cycles

This essay examines György Kurtág's (b.1926) vocal cycles to the texts by Russian female poets Rimma Dalos and Anna Akhmatova – *Omaggio a Luigi Nono* for mixed choir opus 16 (1979), *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* for soprano and chamber orchestra opus 17 (1976–80), *Scenes from a Novel* for soprano, violin, cimbalom, and double bass opus 19 (1979–82), *Requiem for the Beloved* for soprano and piano opus 26 (1982–86), and *Anna Akhmatova: Four Poems* for soprano and instrumental ensemble opus 41 (1997–2008) – all of which feature a poet-speaker who reminisces her love- and life-story in quasi-autobiographical poems, negotiating subjectivity, femininity and exploring alternative identity positions¹. I consider gender and the adjacent notions of body, identity, language, and voice as key narratological elements in these compositions. Applying selected tools of narrative theory and gender criticism, I discuss them in relation to historical and modern views on feminine behaviour, exemplified by such works as *Frauenliebe und Leben* (1840) by Robert Schumann and *Psyché* (1972) by Sándor Weöres. The verse novel *Psyché*, with its focus on the amorous affairs of a fictitious early-nineteenth-century poetess, whose place in the national literary canon Weöres allegedly intends to reinstate, adheres to a gender ideology that is quite different from the sentimental domestic ideal of *Frauenliebe*². Ruth

1. Henceforth *Nono*, *Messages*, *Scenes*, *Requiem*, and *Four Poems*; individual songs are referenced as *N4*, *MI.8*, *S11*, *R2*, where a capital letter stands for the initial character in cycle's title, Roman numerals represent three major sections in *Messages* (*MI*, *MII*, *MIII*), and an Arabic numeral indicates each song's order number within a cycle or a section. Kurtág's intellectual involvement with Russian culture is discussed in: István BALÁZS, "Im Gefängnis des Privatlebens. Über zwei neue Werke von György Kurtág", *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* 123 (1983), pp. 277–290; Stephen WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings: The Word Made Flesh", *Contemporary Music Review* 20, Part 2–3 (2001), pp. 71–88; Rachel BECKLES WILLSON, *Ligeti, Kurtág, and Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Dina LENTSNER, "The Russian Kurtág; or How to Adopt a Language", *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung* 20 (2007), pp. 38–42; Julia GALIEVA-SZOKOLAY, "Dirges and Ditties: György Kurtág's Latest Settings of Poetry by Anna Akhmatova", in Friedemann SALLIS, Robin ELLIOTT, and Kenneth DELONG (eds.), *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile: Interpreting the Music of István Anhalt, György Kurtág, and Sándor Veress*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011, p. 279–302; and Anna DALOS, "How to Become a Soviet Composer? György Kurtág's Experiment with a New Cultural Identity (1976–1986)", *European Journal of Musicology* 15/1 (2016), pp. 112–121. For a complete list of Kurtág's Russian-language vocal compositions, see GALIEVA-SZOKOLAY, "Dirges and Ditties", p. 280.

2. See Beata HOCK, "A History of Things that did not Happen: Life and Work of Two Fictitious Hungarian Women Authors", in Franciska DEHAAN, Maria BUCUR, and Krassimira DASKALOVA (eds.), *Aspasia: The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern*

Solie identified the social politics underlying Schumann's songs as "the impersonation of a woman by the voice of male culture, a spurious autobiographical act" conceived as recollections on marriage and motherhood of an unnamed middle-class woman ³. Yet, Kristina Muxfeldt argues in her response to Solie's reading of *Frauenliebe*, "the intensity of Schumann's engagement with the figure of this woman remains deeply affecting", not least due to "the uninhibited imagination of Schumann's act of empathy, his remarkable effort to portray his character's process of mind, which stands to account for the work's continued effectiveness in the present – against all shifting social odds ⁴". Weöres's novel brings forward similar concerns regarding representation and authority. It is one of several Hungarian-language fictional female autobiographies written in the past decades by men using assumed female names – a phenomenon, which, according to Anikó Imre, evinces "a peculiarly East Central European mixture of romantic lyricism and postmodern irony" engendered, as Márta Kőrösi suggests, by "a controversial relationship with existing social, cultural, literary, and historical gender discourses ⁵". Schumann's *Frauenliebe* and Weöres's *Psyché* provide a backdrop for my analysis of Kurtág's compositions. Musical portraits of female characters in his cycles, too, invite critical reflections on existing gender conventions; like their literary counterparts, they herald a new idea of femininity in Hungary in the 1970-90s. The narrated love-and-life stories of women-poets in Kurtág's songs outline a field of investigation where questions about the gendered subject as a complex site of identity-building may be asked.

Lyrics by Dalos appear in all but two of the forty-six songs in *Nono, Messages, Scenes, and Requiem* ⁶. Their common characteristics – confessional tone and focus on private emotions – establish an intertextual unity which allows to regard the lyric voice in these poems as the voice of one and the same persona, introduced in *Messages* as 'The Late Miss Trusova' ⁷. The four Akhmatova songs depict a new speaker in a different historical context ⁸. In all these works, the order and grouping of pieces suggests a narrative thread in

European Women's and Gender History – Vol 2: Women Writers and Intellectuals, Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 146.

3. See Ruth SOLIE, "Whose Life? The Gendered Self in Schumann's *Frauenliebe* Songs", in Steven Paul SCHER (ed.), *Music and Text: Critical Inquiries*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 220.

4. Kristina MUXFELDT, "*Frauenliebe und Leben* Now and Then", *19-th Century Music* 25/1 (2001), p. 48.

5. Anikó IMRE, "Hungarian Poetic Nationalism or National Pornography? Eastern Europe and Feminism – with a Difference", in Arturo J. ALDAMA (ed.), *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender, and the State*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2003, p. 41 [foreword by Alfred Arteaga]; Márta KÖRÖSI, "Performing the Autobiographical: Hungarian Women's Autobiographies by Men Writers", in Katalin KIS, and Aleah N. RANJITSINGH (eds.), *Violent and Vulnerable Performances: Challenging the Gender Boundaries of Masculinities and Femininities*, Oxfordshire, Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013, p. 37.

6. *Nono* consists of six movements: No 1 ("Declension of the pronoun *whose*") is based on Kurtág's own text and has a poetic motto from Lermontov; No 2 ("Separation") is a fragment from Akhmatova's poem; Nos 3-6 use texts by Dalos. Twenty-one poems of *Messages*, all by Dalos, are grouped in three sections (I. Loneliness, II. A Little Erotic, and III. Bitter Experience – Delight and Grief) and bear epigraphs and an epilogue from Akhmatova, Goethe, and Blok. *Scenes* includes fifteen Dalos songs (Nos 2 and 15 are settings of the same poem with different music) with an epigraph from Lermontov. *Requiem* consists of four short pieces based on the poems by Dalos.

7. My transliteration of the name Трусова follows ISO and Library of Congress Transliteration System – 'Trusova', which I use to distinguish the lyric speaker of these poems from the actual poet Rimma Dalos (née Римма Владимировна Трусова), whose name is spelled in this paper as 'Troussova' in accordance with the official title of opus 17 (Editio Musica Budapest Z 12021).

8. Kurtág used verses by Akhmatova in five opuses: the already mentioned *Nono, Messages*, and *Four Poems*, as well as *Songs of Despair and Sorrow* opus 18 (1980-96), six choruses for double mixed choir to the texts by Lermontov, Blok, Esenin, Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, and Tsvetaeva, and the unpublished *Olyan, Amilyen* (This is how I am) for solo voice in Hungarian translation of Zsuzsa Rab. For a discussion of the literary aspect of *Songs of Despair and Sorrow* opus 18, see

the manner of nineteenth-century lyric song cycle⁹. My analysis of gender representation in these opuses draws on two complementary approaches: Andrew Weaver's method of identifying contrasting narrative voices in the musical setting of first-person reflective lyric poetry, and Russell Millard's narratological study of 'transvaluation', in which the musical score is regarded as a critical reaction to gendered cultural values inscribed in the libretto¹⁰. Combining these analytical perspectives, I aim to devise a model for understanding gender-related narrative practices in Kurtág's renditions of poetry by Dalos and Akhmatova through examination of two coexisting scripts, one implied by the text and another carried out by the music; together, they form a medium through which reassessment of gender relations is performed.

Analyses by Weaver and Millard are examples of musicological adaptation of theories on narrative and gender with emphasis on how musical expressions of voice, language, identity, body, and race, conceived as entities created and manipulated by people, are embedded into constructions of subjectivity. These developments help formulate the conceptual basis for my study, namely, the understanding of representing feminine experience in a musical text in light of discussions on polyvocality (the possibility to hear several voices in "a narrative text in which the only agent is a narrator who also serves as the protagonist"), the vacillating focalization (the shifting angle of perception) and the distinction between biological sex, the socially constructed gender identity, and individual gender expression¹¹. Such orientations problematize the idea of the stable, coherent subject and promote a notion that its definition varies according to point of view and context. Weaver argues that the presence of two contrasting voices in *Dichterliebe* (the voices of the narrator-protagonist who addresses the audience and the actor-poet who speaks to both himself and the beloved) reminds us about the split that often exists in an (auto)biographical text between the subject of the narration and the subject of the narrative. Weaver demonstrates how musical focalization (whose function he sees in *Dichterliebe* as assigned primarily, but not exclusively, to the piano accompaniment) highlights the conflicting perceptions of the narrated events by the hero. Weaver claims that the persona's changing attitude towards his past experiences conditions the process of his self-recovery, which, in Weaver's view, is the central focus of the cycle¹².

Weaver's inquiry guides my examination of how the subject is represented narratively in Kurtág's vocal cycles. When placed in the perspective of gender studies with special attention to social-cultural and historical contexts that articulate the concept of human body, the idea of two contrasting narrative voices gains another dimension, thereby enriching the description of how the gendered subject is made accessible through a text. Given that

Julia GALIEVA, "Poetic Motifs and their Transformations in Kurtág's Songs of Despair and Sorrow op. 18", in Márta GRABÓCZ, et Jean Paul Olive (eds), *Gestes, fragments, timbres: la musique de György Kurtág*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2008, pp. 197-220, and Julia GALIEVA-SZOKOLAY, "'In stile popolare': Kurtág's Reading of Lermontov's 'So Weary, So Wretched'", *Slavic and East European Journal* 62/1 (2018), pp. 120-139.

9. Stephen Walsh notes that the "quasi-narrative progression" in *Messages* was imparted by the composer in the process of compiling the texts: "[...] it is hard to believe that, at least from the moment he selected a second poem, Kurtág had not decided on some kind of loosely implied narrative cycle, even though early unsigned publishers programme notes for the Dalos cycles inform us that 'in neither work did he initially have any particular plan in mind,' (Rhydderch 1989)"; see WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", pp. 76, 85-86.

10. See Andrew WEAVER, "Memories Spoken and Unspoken: Hearing the Narrative Voice in *Dichterliebe*", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142/1 (2017), pp. 31-67; Russell, "Musical Structure, Narrative, and Gender in Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*", London, Royal Holloway University of London, 2017, p. iii [Doctoral thesis].

11. See WEAVER, "Memories", p. 38.

12. See WEAVER, "Memories", p. 59.

gender as a social construct resides at the core of human practices in which patriarchal power dynamics are manifested, polyvocality may be seen as a source of narrative tension that propels the story while encouraging revision of existing gender-related conventions. The concept of transvaluation, employed by Millard following Byron Almén's *Theory of Musical Narrative*, denotes a situation in which an observer interprets a change occurring over time within a system of signs as isomorphic with a change applied to a cultural, social, or psychological hierarchy¹³. This idea instructs Millard's examination of two diverging narrative plots in *Daphnis et Chloé*, the first originating in the fin-de-siècle cultural and literary myths about *femme fatale*, and the second, articulated by the music, seeking "something more in tune with the contemporary figure of the *femme nouvelle*"¹⁴. Related to this reading is the interpretation of nineteenth-century ideas on femininity offered by Claudine Jacques in her study of dramatic works by Schumann. Discussing pluralistic concepts on gender in nineteenth-century literature and philosophy, Jacques engages such categories of feminist theory as androgyny – blurring of gender boundaries (Sara Friedrichsmeyer), gender ambiguity – dissolution of ego formation that situates a pre-potent masculine Self over the inferior, dependent feminine Other (Alice Kuzniar, Pam Morris), specular reciprocity (Tracey A. Rosolowski) – the ability of female figures to invert gender roles by gaining control of the male gaze, and *l'écriture féminine* – a mode of expression that takes into view the relationship between female perceptions of the body and the language (Luce Irigaray, Martha Helfer)¹⁵. These developments support my discussion of discourses of gender and sexuality, the ideology of healing after emotional trauma, and the ethics of vulnerability as they are formulated in Kurtág's compositions.

1. Trusova and Psyché

Kurtág's developed an interest in the poems by a Russian-born Budapest-based translator/author Rimma Dalos (b. 1944) in the mid-1970s¹⁶. A few years earlier, Sándor Weöres (1913–89) published a historical verse novel *Psyché. Egy hajdani költőnő írásai* (Psyché. The writings of a poetess from the past), the first Hungarian postmodernist literary text which engages "language games of identity, parody, irony, intertextuality, and the questioning of earlier understanding of authenticity, originality and referentiality"¹⁷. The author posed as a mere compiler of 'a newly discovered' manuscript authored by a nineteenth-century poetess Erzsébet Lónyai, a fictitious young woman of mixed Hungarian and gypsy origin – independent, provocative, and exotic. She is described by critics as

[...] a perfect allegory of the feminized, but beautiful and rebellious, "noble" artist whose masculinity is clearly tied to her intellect, which in turn easily transcends his fictional femininity. Psyché is a woman forged out of the two man-made stereotypes that have been endlessly employed in European arts to

13. See MILLARD, "Musical Structure", p. 51.

14. MILLARD, "Musical Structure", p. 226.

15. See Claudine JACQUES, "Gender Transitivity in Three Dramatic Works by Robert Schumann: the *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (WoO 3), *Genoveva* Op. 81, *Das Paradies und die Peri* Op. 50", Montreal, McGill University, 2011, pp. 15–32 [Doctoral thesis]. For the list of specific works by these scholars, see pp. 350–363.

16. Rimma Dalos translated the text of Kurtág's *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* opus 7 for soprano and piano (1963–68). Translation from Hungarian to Russian was commissioned by the state-owned *Hungaroton* recording company for the sleeve of the vinyl disk SLPX 11845 (1977).

17. Quoted in KÖRÖSI, "Performing the Autobiographical", p. 38.

contain the threatening, castrating aspects of women's sexuality: she is a promiscuous whore and a creative mother – with a mind – in one; she is for and about men with maternal productive talent in a politically prostituted, feminized world¹⁸.

Fictional female autobiographies by Péter Esterházy (*Seventeen Swans*, 1987, published under the name Lili Csokonai), Lajos Parti Nagy (*The Angel of the Body*, 1997, issued as a work of a fictitious female author Jolán Sárbogárdi), and Lóránt Kabai (*Precious Little*, 2008, written as an online blog under the name Laura Spiegelmann) likewise sexualize and, in the case of Esterházy, racialize the persona, a half-Gypsy again. They challenge the reader with descriptions of ambivalent contexts and liminal conditions, and Esterházy, like Weöres in *Psyché*, resorts to a stylised archaised Hungarian which emphasizes subversive ambiguity of representation¹⁹. Gender shift enables these artists to expand the frame of reference in relation to (male) author “as subjective agent and the source or centre of the text and build a decentralized (female) definition of the subject”²⁰. Moreover, by ascribing authorship to fictitious female writers, they gain a new perspective on existing gender culture. Portrayed as an uninhibited, luscious character, *Psyché* repudiates desexualization of the subjects that permeated Eastern European discourse in the 1950-70s²¹. Dissipation of gender-related taboos accelerated in Hungary toward the end of the Kádár epoch as a compensatory “catching up” after the years when open discussion of sex-related matters had been largely absent from the public sphere²². By the mid-1980s, images of emancipated and “exotically racialized” women in Hungarian theatre, literature, music, and film became a common currency denoting the idea of free artistic expression. As Imre writes,

[...] deprived of the possibility of meaningful political action, [creative artists] have rebelled against the communist stifling of public communication by the liberation of the private. Sexual rebellion, ostensibly against the prudishness of the regime, served as an allegorical weapon against political oppression²³.

Kurtág's interest in Weöres, to whom he appears to be related on a formal-aesthetic level, spans over several decades²⁴. In a way, formal design of the Trusova cycles – sets of miniatures framed by poetic epigraphs, mottoes, and descriptive titles – parallels the structural layout of *Psyché*, with its diverse collection of verses, diary entries, letters, memoirs, short biographies, and commentaries attributed to the title character and her nineteenth-century and present-day admirers²⁵. There are other similarities as well.

18. IMRE, “Hungarian Poetic Nationalism”, p. 44.

19. See HOCK, “A History of Things”, p. 141.

20. HOCK, “A History of Things”, p. 148.

21. See IMRE, “Hungarian Poetic Nationalism”, p. 52.

22. See Beata HOCK, “Sites of Undoing Gender Hierarchies: Women and/in Hungarian Cinema (Industry)”, *Medijska istraživanja: znanstveno-stručni časopis za novinarstvo i medije* 16/1 (2010), p. 23.

23. IMRE, “Hungarian Poetic Nationalism”, pp. 46-47.

24. In 1950 Kurtág set Weöres' text in *Tánc dal* for children choir and piano. In a telephone conversation with the author of this paper on January 23, 2018, the composer confirmed that he read the extended version of *Psyché* (released in 1975).

25. Imre describes the structure of *Psyché* as a “‘latent novel’ with five (or later, six) layers” where the story of the protagonist is told, retold, revised, reflected, and commented on five times, each time with new details and from a new perspective: see IMRE, “Hungarian Poetic Nationalism”, p. 142. Hock claims that this form “does carry along a narrative without, however, any of its components bearing the distinct element of a prose narrative/novel”: see HOCK, “A History of things”, p. 147. This strategy is seen as reflecting the struggle to achieve feminine subjectivity that defines feminine textual practice.

Trusova's "sensual abandon" clearly echoes "heightened sexuality" of 'the poetess from the past' who is motivated heavily by her desire²⁶. Like Psyché, the Russian-speaking protagonist of Kurtág's cycles is also subversively exotic. Russian text, reproduced in the score in Cyrillic, and stylistic tropes *chastushka*, *kamarinskaya*, and *dance russe* operate as identity markers, pointing in the direction of Russian literature: Miss Trusova's "self-abasement, humiliation, and self-destruction" call to mind uncontrollable surges of emotion in the novels by Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky²⁷. Historians observe that it was typical for the nineteenth century foreigners to see Russia "as a locus of exotic sexuality"²⁸. Rachel Beckles Willson comments that the unrestrained sensuality of Trusova fits in with the Western public's "vague orientalist prejudices about the 'East'"²⁹. Kurtág's own characteristic of Trusova as "an emancipated young woman of the turn of the century, who allows herself to be taken over and scarred by this emancipation" reiterates the time-honored conflation of subversive female with exotic *other*³⁰. But just as Weöres in his novel uncovers "the biological essentialism of the national imagination" by constructing a context in which Psyché's Gypsy blood is seen to explain and conveniently 'justify' her sexual excesses, Kurtág lays bare the worn-out cultural clichés by reappropriating stereotypical casting of exotic female – including hysterical laughter and carnivalesque violation of propriety in "Chastushka" (*Мила*) – in an ironic response to these notions through exaggerated stylistic idioms³¹.

Yet, despite the similarity of the narrative approaches in the novels by Hungarian writers and in Kurtág's compositions, there also is an important difference between them, which pertains to authorship and gender representation. In the case of Weöres, Esterházy, and other 'men writing in the feminine', a male author *invents* a fictional woman poet/character. Not only he 'wears a mask' but he also employs various authentication techniques to validate the text as a genuine female autobiography: Weöres constructs a veritable frame for the protagonist's adventures in the form of references and fictional excerpts credited to real historical and modern-day figures (such as the early nineteenth century Hungarian poet László Ungvárnémeti Tóth and the real-life actress who portrayed the title character in one of stage adaptations of the novel), while Esterházy sets out a narrative action whose timeline and logic are held tight by a convincing motivational sequence and references to the materiality of the world in which the lead character exists³².

In the case of Kurtág, the author/persona relationship is more complicated. On the one hand, there is no gender gap separating the poet and the fictional / she creates. On the other hand, via Kurtág as the composer and compiler of the unrelated poems into larger collections, his male authorship manifests itself too. As Kristina Muxfeldt pointed out in her

26. See WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", p. 82; HOCK, "A History of Things", p. 148. It was likewise perceived by contemporaries as a veiled denunciation of institutionalized violation of privacy (see BALÁZS, "Im Gefängnis des Privatlebens"). This reading resonates with the notion of 'inner emigration,' familiar to many artists throughout the Eastern Bloc. For an analysis of contemporary critical responses to Kurtág's Dalos cycles: see BECKLES WILLSON, *Ligeti, Kurtág*, pp. 201-210.

27. See WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings," p. 77.

28. Jane T. COSTLOW, Stephanie SANDLER, and Judith VOWLES (eds.), *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 8.

29. BECKLES WILLSON, *Ligeti, Kurtág*, p. 209.

30. Quoted in WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", p. 77.

31. "Her Gypsy ancestry explains, in the Hungarian critical accounts, her propensity to "extremes", "adventure", and "amours", defying the convent education she received as a result of her more distinguished paternal heritage", IMRE, "Hungarian Poetic Nationalism", pp. 42, 44.

32. See KÖRÖSI, "Performing the Autobiographical", pp. 38-40.

overview of nineteenth-century and contemporary perceptions of the poetic sources in Schumann's *Frauenliebe*, the unmediated lyric *I* in first-person verses implies

a close correlation, if not an exact identity, between the author's poetic persona and the first-person speaker in the poem. A male poet who undertakes to write *as a woman*, not merely to portray a female character, confounds this assumption, sustaining the illusion that he has shed his own identity in adopting her point of view. Only the title page and the author's signature stand to remind us that this is an exercise in role playing³³.

Although it would be an overstatement to claim that in the Trusova cycles Kurtág 'writes as a woman' rather than 'merely portraying' the female character, it remains true that the difference between these two modes is not so clearly defined – the mediated portrayal of the female persona does not exclude an attempt to adopt her point of view and to some degree identify with her, as Kurtág's words, quoted by Stephen Walsh, illustrate: "Madame Bovary (Mlle. Trusova) c'est moi"³⁴. It seems that the authenticity of gender performance is an issue only to the extent that it helps the female subject to fit in a given narrative context. A crucial part of the story as it arises in Kurtág's sets of songs is its intricate verbal framing – section titles, epigraphs, performance instructions, mottoes, and embedded commentaries such as "Epilogue by Aleksandr Blok, dearly loved poet of the deceased", which indicate an effort to mystify the original author of the poems. Is Rimma Dalos a real person or just another fictitious character? Historical or contemporary? Deceased or living? Russian or Hungarian, as her last name suggests?³⁵ In this essay I offer a reading that considers Rimma Dalos as a fictional figure alongside 'Miss Trusova', her *alter ego*, created by Kurtág in the process of selecting and arranging the text – an act which is not unlike writing a fictional female autobiography. Building on the clue given by the composer in the title of opus 17 (*Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Trousova. Twenty-one Poems by Rimma Dalos*), which ties the two identities without fully conflating them, I view Kurtág's cycles as a musical depiction of two coextensive selves within the lyric speaker. Their respective positions may be aligned with, on the one hand, an immediate experiential perspective of the lyric *I*, and on the other, a reflective narration of the story. The voices representing these positions are congeneric with the voices of both the composer and the actual poet, blurring the boundaries between real/fictional cum male/female authorship in a way that is similar to gender positions established in the works by Weöres, Esterházy, and other Hungarian authors who attempt to adopt a female perspective.

33. MUXFELDT, "Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then", p. 30.

34. WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", p. 76. Walsh interprets this phrase as "a Freudian slip for "Madame Bovary c'est moi (Mlle Trousova)".

35. My reading rests on the understanding that "in a narratological-posthumanist-feminist theoretical context, fictionality, simulation and performativity become constitutive aspects of narrativity": see KÖRÖSI, "Performing the Autobiographical", p. 12. Therefore, biographical details of Rimma Dalos's life, which are well known today, have little relevance to her constructed identity in Kurtág's cycles. A similar concern with (self)representation and language arises in relation to another work by Kurtág, which also features a female persona – "Samuel Beckett: *What is the word*. Samuel Beckett sends word through Ildikó Monyók in the translation of István Siklós" opus 30b (1991), in which the author (Beckett) and the speaker, personified by Kurtág's acquaintance, an injured performer Ildikó Monyók, relate by the effort to regain the ability to speak and to recapture a meaningful link among disjointed recollections.

2. Rimma Dalos: poetic revelations

A collection of sixty-nine verses by Rimma Dalos was published in Budapest in 1988³⁶. This bilingual Russian–Hungarian edition includes most of the lyrics from *Nono*, *Messages*, *Scenes*, and *Requiem*, revealing the poet's penchant for unassuming format, everyday language, recurring images, and folkloric detail. Words of the lyric speaker are punctuated by elisions, repetitions, distorted echoes, and sudden shifts of tone. Suffused with uncertainty and doubt, they capture emotional responses to romantic encounters while aiming to establish continuity in the midst of inner turmoil³⁷. Yes, the persona's self-destructive fixation on the beloved appears to doom her to misery and humiliation, which have elicited Walsh's description of the poems as "single-minded" and the psychological atmosphere they evoke as "rabid"³⁸. Some of the lyrics draw on history and religion, include ironic remarks about 'East-European happiness' and 'Slavic sorrow', and use images of naked or mutilated female body as signs of subversive behaviour. "Merciful ones" (S3) evokes *yurodivy* (Fool-in-Christ), an enigmatic visionary who occupies a special place in Russian culture:

Простите, милосердные,
За слабость мою женскую,
За то, что полюбила я
Душою юродивого.

Merciful ones, forgive me
this woman's weakness,
that I so loved
This Holy Fool.³⁹

The image of Fool-for-God's-sake is essentially a self-characteristic: the protagonist shares with the folk preacher of humility a peculiar mix of anguish and euphoria and the urge to provoke insults and ridicule. Some of Miss Trusova's actions mimic the Holy Fool's celebration of unruly Bakhtinian body ("I want to take in all of you, without anything left over" *MII.2*, "I stand naked before you, bite me anywhere!" *MII.4*). Although Blessed Fools were usually men, like *yurodivy* in *Boris Godunov*, Helena Gosciolo sees revival of this archetype in contemporary Russian female prose, relating its resurgence to economic insecurity of women during the period of transition to market economy⁴⁰. Some of Dalos's strategies are similar to the approaches of Western female writers whose chief contributions were "thematizing 'otherness' as a fundamental experience of identity" and putting their 'bodies' into their writing as the tool for lifting off the disabling weight of ideologically

36. Rimma DALOS, *Я без тебя* / Nélküled, Budapest, Én. Magvető könyvkiadó, 1988. The volume remains the largest publication of Dalos's poetry; an interview with Rimma Dalos, her brief tribute to Kurtág and five poems in French translation by Dominique Levellé are published in Philippe ALBÈRA (ed.) *György Kurtág: entretiens, textes, écrits sur son œuvre*, Genève, Éditions Contrechamps, 1995. Throughout the years, Dalos considered her literary pursuit as a low-key private activity (*пишу для себя* [write for my own pleasure]) fueled by passive resistance towards the mainstream ideology that favoured silent dissolution in compliant multitude while largely ignoring the domain of personal experience. Her self-effacing feminine lyricism contrasts the constructions of the predominantly male 'heroic' dissident discourse, represented, among others, by the work of her husband, oppositional writer, and co-founder of Hungarian underground resistance movement György Dalos, who was tried on the charge of anti-government activity in 1968. The role of women in the dissident wave in Poland is discussed in Shana PENN, *Solidarity's Secret: the Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2005.

37. In the 1993 interview, Rimma Dalos said that her poetry of the 1970s reflected the emotional stress of her cultural assimilation in Hungary. See Philippe ALBÈRA, "Entretien avec Rimma Dalos," in ALBÈRA, *György Kurtág: Entretiens*, p. 71.

38. See WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", pp. 76–77.

39. S3. Unless otherwise indicated, all extracts from the mentioned works, including texts and English translations of the poems are taken from the published EMB scores. Used with permission.

40. See Helena GOSCILO, "Madwomen without Attics: The Crazy Creatrix and the Procreative *Iurodivaia*", in Angela BRINTLINGER, and Ilya VINITSKY (eds.), *Madness and the Mad in Russian Culture*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 226–241.

infiltrated hegemonic patriarchal system⁴¹. Although Rimma Dalos did not take part in the contemporary European feminist movement (which had been pushed aside in Hungary by more urgent political issues), many aspects of her work are close to the mode of writing using feminist perspective.

Literary theory distinguishes between 'feminist text' and 'feminine writing': as Hock notes, the latter does not necessarily imply an overtly stated feminist intention, offering instead "'feminist input', be that a matter of content, 'form', or 'strategy' "⁴²". She points out that some cultural environments tend to undermine the need of women artists' feminist self-identification even if their works engage "categories and interpretative strategies introduced by feminist criticism "⁴³". As Goscilo argues, Russian women writers in the 1970-80s not only "repudiated gender's relevance to creativity" but also "denounced feminism as misguided at best, half-witted at worst "⁴⁴". Hungarian novelist Magda Szabó (1917-2007) stated in a 2007 interview: "To my mind, there are no such categories as female writers or male writers. There are only writers. I am not attached to any sort of ideology, not even to feminism" "⁴⁵. Rather than politicizing gender, as many of their Western contemporaries did, Hungarian women poets Anna Hajnal (1907-77), Ágnes Nemes-Nagy (1922-91), and Margit Szécsi (1928-90) took part in literary discourse as androgynous national artists, aiming, in the words of Nemes-Nagy, to

Write about the extreme: about the assault on existence in a spiritual and physical sense. About physical misery and madness. We let these experiences crawl into our poems. The presence of these two anxieties quasi tamed by a pinch of *intellectualism* was a very good lesson for us "⁴⁶.

Anna Menyhért argues that Nemes-Nagy withheld her feminine poems and instead prioritised genres in which the personal and political is addressed via ontological inquires, the myth, and withdrawal into the private consciousness "⁴⁷. She depicted objects and places that are "not sites for human narrative: they are phenomena composed of impersonal precisions that are nevertheless bursting with human passion. It is just that the passion is in the things, transferred by an enormous, all but passive, act of the will "⁴⁸".

Recent studies of body politics in non-democratic environments regard the difference between restrained and resistant behaviour as non-essential, and the notion of resistance as ambiguous. In her analysis of gender representation in Polish cinema before 1989, Elżbieta Ostrowska shows that a single activity may constitute both defiance and acceptance of authority: while resisting domination, the suppressed entities may nonetheless adapt to or even reinforce in some ways the power that necessitates defiance in the first place.

41. See Anna KÉRCZY, *Body-Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter: Writing from a Corporeographic Point of View*, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008, p. 5.

42. Hock, "A History of Things", p. 141.

43. Hock, "A History of Things", p. 142.

44. Helena GOSCILO, "Perestroika and Post-Soviet Prose: from Dazzle to Dispersal", in Adele BARKER and Jehanne GHEITH (eds.), *A History of Women's Writing in Russia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 300.

45. János HÁV, "An Interview with Magda Szabó: I Don't Like Bearing Grudges", *Hungarian Literature Online* (January 8, 2007), [https://hlo.hu/interview/i_don_t_like_bearing_grudges.html], accessed 24/03/21].

46. Quoted in Ágnes LEHÓCZKY, *Poetry, the Geometry of the Living Substance: Four Essays on Ágnes Nemes Nagy*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, [Preface by George Szirtes], p. 9.

47. Anna MENYHÉRT, *Women's Literary Tradition and Twentieth-Century Hungarian Writers: Renée Erdős, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Minka Czöbel, Ilona Harnos Kosztolányi, Anna Lesznai*, trans. en. Anna Bentley, Lenden, Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2019, p. 11.

48. LEHÓCZKY, *Poetry, the Geometry of the Living Substance*, p. xiv.

Her study is focused not on the extent to which an agent is coerced by or unsusceptible to any form of oppression, but on the notions and actions that may be “recognized as a site of ideological opposition, contestation or doubt”⁴⁹. In the poems by Rimma Dalos, such gestures are conveyed via verbal pairs happiness/misery, defeat/salvation, impropriety/decentcy, retaliation/pardon, penance/retribution. Not critical per se, the contexts in which they appear may be understood as responses to restrictive social practices, be that non-corporeal gender outlook, limitations imposed on women by the dominant male culture, or broader ideological constraints⁵⁰.

This is true for many Dalos's lyrics. “In you I seek” presents a compressed version of the Romantic quest plot (the protagonist finds a soulmate while pursuing a challenging task) with the speaker the feminine equivalent to the classic ‘male hero on a mission’ figure and ‘salvation’ the goal of her quest. The lexical pairs *you/I*, *salvation/fall*, and *seek/find* stem from the primary semiotic structure of contradiction denoting tension and requiring resolution through action. The inverted gender roles, and the failure to attain salvation, which lends a perceptibly acerbic tone to the poem, manifest a critical stance, a rejection of an ideology of female passivity and meekness:

*В тебе
свой спасение ищу,
а нахожу паденье.*

In you
I seek my salvation,
but I find my fall.⁵¹

Part of this ideology is a ‘suffering female’, or what feminist theorists call “self-identity based on ‘sacrificial logics’”, the traditional representation of women as redeemers and supporters of men’s heroic endeavours⁵². Although the officially sanctioned model of femininity in post-war Hungary prioritized socialist industriousness and endurance, it also encompassed such ‘innate’ female qualities as chastity, loyalty, docility, and even ‘sweetness’⁵³. Dalos’s poetry both perpetuates and denies these definitions. Her poems are paradoxical yet revelatory in their reworking of patriarchal myths which are at once self-ironically undermined and self-consciously reinstated in search of empowerment and self-assertion. Despite attempting an autonomous subject position, the persona is unable to escape the old-fashioned modes of mind and expression, as in “Without you” (*MIII.9*), which compares romantic separation with body mutilation:

*Я без тебя
как та женщина в бане
с отрезанной грудью.*

Without you
I am like that woman in the bathhouse
with her breast cut off.⁵⁴

49. Elżbieta OSTROWSKA, “Women Who Eat Too Much: Consuming Female Bodies in Polish Cinema”, in Yana HASHAMOVA, Beth HOLMGREN, and Mark LIPOVETSKY (eds.), *Transgressive Women in Modern Russian and East European Cultures: From the Bad to the Blasphemous*, New York, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 129.

50. “The frequent occurrence of sympathetically depicted complex women characters is the kind of film style and film language that prevailed in the 1960-80s. This form of expression was no result of any explicit feminist cultural intervention, yet it yielded modes of production and consumption that, in many respects, transformed the codes of classical mainstream cinema (also in circulation in Hungary in the pre-war and immediate post-war years) in similar ways as those suggested by feminist “counter-cinema”: see HOCK, “Sites of Undoing Gender Hierarchies”, p. 24.

51. *MIII.7*.

52. See KÉRCHI, *Body-Texts*, pp. 14-15.

53. See Eva FODOR, “Smiling Women and Fighting Men. The Gender of the Communist Subject in State Socialist Hungary”, *Gender & Society* 16/2 (2002), pp. 240-263.

54. *MIII.9*.

Femininity narrated by Dalos is ambivalent and inconclusive, becoming an impulse for a not less ambivalent interpretation of the feminine in Kurtág's music. My discussion of the Trusova songs focuses on musical patterns in which the composer examines and reconfigures the narrative models formulated in the poems by Dalos.

3. Trusova: compliance and subversion

According to Stephen Walsh, Kurtág intended to give opus 17 a different title – *Frauenleben und -schicksal* (A Woman's Life and Fate) –, as an homage to *Frauenliebe und Leben* by Chamisso/Schumann. This gesture was likely ironic, Walsh observes, given that “the content and tone of Dalos' poems [is] an out-and-out rebuke to the prudish romanticism of Chamisso's”⁵⁵. Walsh perceives a similar “faintly Heine-esque quality of mood-deflation” in *Scenes* opus 19; he names another nineteenth-century character mentioned by Kurtág in relation to Trusova, Flaubert's Mme Bovary⁵⁶. As Millard noted in his investigation of gender representation in *Daphnis et Chloé*, a fundamental quality of irony is its ability to effect transvaluation by questioning cultural assumptions inscribed into narrative⁵⁷. In this light, references to such dissimilar characters as the woman of *Frauenliebe* and Mme Bovary suggest an inquiry into gendered cultural beliefs.

Nineteenth-century representations of women are considered in scholarly literature as suspended between autonomous and subservient subject positions. Claudine Jacques describes the heroines of Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* opus 50, *Genoveva* opus 81, and *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* WoO 3 as ‘gender transitive’: their feminine qualities (empathy, chastity, naiveté, and the ability to incite men's spiritual desire) are balanced by the traits typically coded as masculine – determination, courage, and initiative, opening the possibility of female agency and autonomy⁵⁸. Ruth Solie recognizes a similar attempt at subjectivity in *Frauenliebe*, which she reads as a narrative of the persona's rising above “a ritualized, mythic existence” told through perceptions and experience of a unique individual⁵⁹. This interpretation is echoed by Kristina Muxfeldt who emphasizes that the woman of *Frauenliebe* “maintains an extremely active life of imagination [...]”, and that this quality figures in the cycle as an unquestionable “virtue, a source of strength, not as the excess of melancholy [...]”⁶⁰.

Like in *Frauenliebe*, love, understood as a “great misery and blessing” (*MIII.2*), is the central theme of *Nono*, *Messages*, *Scenes*, and *Requiem*. Linked to traditional ‘feminine’ attributes such as night, dreams, stars, flowers, pebbles, tears, and rain, love defines the protagonist in many important ways. Notably, these attributes do not surpass the boundary of romantic affection, clinging instead to the drama of everyday existence, as Kurtág downplays the protagonist's intellectual strivings by leaving out the poems which may attest to her interest in any but intimate sphere. We know very little about her exterior surroundings, occupation, or social involvement – on the opposite, the songs are saturated

55. WALSH, “Kurtág's Russian Settings”, p. 76.

56. See WALSH, “Kurtág's Russian Settings”, pp. 77–78.

57. See MILLARD, “Musical Structure”, p. 286.

58. See JACQUES, “Gender Transitivity”, p. 57.

59. See SOLIE, “Whose Life?”, p. 228.

60. MUXFELDT, “*Frauenliebe und Leben* Now and Then”, p. 40.

with the images of passionate devotion. She is shown as accommodating (S3, *MIII.3*), forgiving (R4), caring (S1, 3), passive (N3, S2, 4, 11, R2), reserved (N4, 5), impassioned (*MII.1, S4*), obsessive (S7), frustrated (S5), hesitant (S6), rebellious (*MII.3-4*), bold (*MII.4*), and abused (*MIII.12*). Kurtág emphasizes submissiveness as one of her main characteristics, but as the author of a modern *Frauenliebe*, he also recognizes her courage to 'flee paradise' (S8) while 'squealing like a pig' (*MII.3*). The persona's ability to develop a will of her own and to act on it at any cost arises as a prominent motif in *Messages*, as reflected by the epigraph to Part III of the cycle:

... И была роковая отрада
В попираны заветных святынь,
И безумная сердцу улада –
Эта горькая страсть, как полынь!

... And there was a fatal joy
in trampling on sacred things,
and insane pleasure for the heart –
a bitter passion, like wormwood! ⁶¹

This inner duality is communicated by two contrasting narrative voices, which represent two sides of the lyric persona.

As mentioned, the possibility of two narrative voices in a lyric vocal cycle was explored by Andrew Weaver. One of the central aspects of narratology, *voice* highlights the identity of the speaker, allowing to perceive more than one character in the poems which belong to a single agent ⁶². Even if all the songs appear as first-person utterances spoken by the *same* persona, they may represent different levels of discourse by projecting the words of either the *actor* or the *narrator* and by using one of the two temporal modes, *narrated* or *narrating* time. According to Weaver, Schumann's *Dichterliebe* is dominated by the voice of its narrator-protagonist speaking to the audience in real time, casting his story as he talks. But there is also a second voice, that of the actor, the heartsick poet who is heard when the hero addresses himself or talks to the beloved using first- and second-person personal pronouns. His words belong to the second narrative level. The actor, even if he appears to exist in real time, occupies exclusively the so-called 'narrated time,' or 'present-in-the-past' that recreates the events in vivid flashbacks ⁶³. The difference of the voices that belong to the narrator and the actor is the difference between talking *about* and talking *to* the beloved ⁶⁴.

Over the course of *Messages* and *Scenes*, the female persona shares her excitement and misery in vocal miniatures which unfold in a narrative sequence reminiscent of Romantic vocal cycle. Using the narratological distinction between *plot* (the underlying series of events) and *discourse* (the order and manner in which the events are narrated), it is possible to condense the implied *plot* of the Trusova songs as the story of overpowering passion ending in separation. Unlike the implied plot, the narrative *discourse* in the cycles is non-linear, with digressions and omissions – a common strategy for narrative effects that deflect from directional flow into an atemporal path, as one of the songs in *Messages* describes:

Твои исчезновенья
как провалы в памяти.
Нет связи в действии,

Your disappearances
are like gaps in the memory.
A link in the action is missing.

61. Alexander BLOK, *To Muse*, 1912, *MIII*.

62. See WEAVER, "Memories", p. 38.

63. See WEAVER, "Memories", pp. 38-39.

64. See WEAVER, "Memories," p. 42.

но есть другая связь,
которая зовётся время.

But there is another link
which is called time.⁶⁵

Discussing the very same quality in the plot of *Dichterliebe*, Weaver finds that it creates "the crucial need for the listener actively to put the pieces together, fill in the gaps and participate in the construction of meaning...⁶⁶". What makes it possible is that the attention is fixed not on the chain of underlying events and not on the actual order in which they are presented in the cycle, but on the stages of the lyric speaker's self-exploration and his emotional reactions to the past events, which he reminisces while telling his story. Following Weaver's model, I recognize two narrative voices in the Trusova cycles. They belong to one speaker but fulfil different functions: the narrator *describes* the events to the audience in narrating (real) time, and the actor *participates* in the events while speaking to the beloved in narrated time⁶⁷.

The narrator sets the spatial and temporal frame of the story ("In a space of six by four meters" *MI.1*, "The day has fallen" *MI.2*), introduces its main theme ("...there is one hope less, but there will be one song more" *MI*, epigraph from Akhmatova), and provides atmospheric intermissions ("In a cold blanket of snow" *S13*, "Autumn flowers" *MIII.6*). As the storyteller, she directs the discourse, as stated in the epigraph to *Scenes*:

Её волшебнo-тёмную завязку
Не стану я подробно объяснять,
Чтоб кой-каких допросов избежать;

But I shall keep my readers at a distance
By hiding some ambiguous facts, for which
Immodest people have the strongest itch;⁶⁸

In some pieces, she assumes the role of an uninvolved observer, like the genderless Reporter of "Two interlaced bodies" (*MII.2*) or the nameless speaker of the poetic Epilogue in *Messages* who calls the persona 'the deceased', emotionally detaching herself from the past events. Analysing *Dichterliebe*, Weaver regards the narrator's position as more neutral and impersonal than that of the actor, due to the time gap between narrated events and the time of narration; his findings translate well onto *Messages* and *Scenes*. "In a space," the first song of *Messages* (*MI.1*), is an example of the narrator's effort to disengage herself from the story. She is conceived here as a non-perceptible narrator: no first-person pronouns are used, and the music, with the twirling viola gesture in subdued dynamics, muted timbres, and fluctuating pitch of accompanying lines, gives a dispassionate account of the physical and mental discomfort of an unnamed genderless 'man'. Yet, the viola ostinato carries gendered connotations, as it recalls musical depictions of spinning, a recurring topic denoting female domestic activity as well as a state of loneliness, distress, and disenchantment. But above all, it portrays entrapment in a suffocating unhospitable place (*agitato, suffocato*) (Example 1).

65. *MIII.8*.

66. See WEAVER, "Memories," p. 53.

67. My observations echo Weaver's account of the narrative structure of *Dichterliebe*. One can speculate whether similarity between Schumann's and Kurtág's narrative strategies are engendered by the similarity of purpose, or else they reflect a special place occupied by Schumann's output in Kurtág's compositions. References to Schumann feature prominently in Kurtág's music: in addition to the woman of *Frauenliebe*, there are Johannes Kreisler, Eusebius, Florestan, Meister Raro and the composer himself in *Hommage à R. Sch* opus 15d (1990) and *Kafka-Fragmente* opus 24 (1986). Like many of Kurtág's other musical tributes, for example "Fanfare in the manner of Mussorgsky" and "Hymn in the manner of Stravinsky" (*A kis csáva* op. 15b, 1978), they participate in his identity-play that is not dissimilar to Schumann's carnivalesque role-assuming technique. Both composers depict contrasting entities within a unique creative consciousness using strikingly opposing self-projections.

68. Lermontov, *A Fairy Tale for Children*, translated by An. Liberman, S.

Ex. 1: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late R. V. Trousova* opus 17, "In a space", mm. 1-5.

The function of the actor is different – to re-enact the events. Addressed to the beloved ("Love me, forgive me... *MIII.10*), her words are mere reactions to his actions ("took my heart on the palm of your hand" *MIII.1*, "uttered those terrible words" *MIII.13*, "stole my strength" *R3*), their recurrence a sign of her emotional dependence ("Every night the same dream" *S6*, "I'm waiting for you again" *S11*, "That's another Sunday over" *S12*) and balancing between hope ("My dear one brought me pebbles" *MIII.3*) and despair ("I was just a plaything" *MIII.12*).

Each cycle creates a different pattern of the two voices. Parts *I.1-2* in *Messages* constitute the narrator's introduction; numbers *II.1-4* and *III.1*, 3-5, 7-10, 12-13 are sung by the actor (with the exception of the poetic motto in *II.1* and the Reporter's lines in *II.2*); songs *III.2*, 6, 11 and 14 may be heard as the narrator's words, where *III.2* ponders the nature of love, *III.6* is an interlude, *III.11* cites the Bible, and *III.14* ('epilogue') brings the story to an end. This layout follows the narrative thread in which the actor's entries act as 'retroversions' (Bal) offering snippets of the past events.

As shown in (Figure 1), the line separating the narrator's and the actor's positions is not so clearly drawn. The words in songs *II.3* and *III.15* in *Messages* may belong to either agent – it is the affect communicated by the music that clarifies the speaker's identity. The sense of despair in "Why should I not squeal like a pig" (*MII.3*) – wide leaps, contrasts of volume, and technically challenging vocal ornaments – associate with the crushed, hurting actor, whereas the atmosphere of aloof reserve, expressed in "For everything we did together" (*MIII.15*) using slow tempo and reduced instrumentation, suggests that in this song the narrator steps in and concludes the story. She has put her emotions aside, and simply sums up the situation as she sees it (Examples 2a and 2b).

Such strategy is described in narrative theory as *focalization* – a specific perspective from which the scene is depicted. Focalization implies a possibility of adopting the view of a different agent, including a speaker located outside the plot⁶⁹.

Throughout much of the Trusova cycles, the viewpoint of a focalizer coincides with that of the speaker, but in some songs Kurtág creates a 'mediated', or focalized outlook. Among the means of musical focalization which he uses are genre and style tropes, as in two songs from *Scenes* which present the same text with different music ("From meeting to parting" *S2* and *S15*).

69. BAL, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. en. Christine van Boheemen, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009 p. 90; Weaver, "Memories", p. 58; Millard, "Musical Structure", p. 26.

Part I. Loneliness

Poetic epigraph: " <i>I have stopped smiling</i> " (Akmatova)	1. "In a space"	2. "The day has fallen"
Narrator	Narrator	Narrator

Part II. A Little Erotic

Poetic epigraph: " <i>... and unwillingly this song</i> " (Akmatova)	1. Heat		2. Two interlaced bodies			3. "Why should I not squeal like a pig"	4. Chastushka: "Bite me on the head"
	Poetic epigraph: " <i>Und wenn ein Irrlicht</i> " (Goethe)	„Heat, heat..“	Reporter: "Two interlaced bodies"	She: "My skin turned pink"	Instrumental conclusion		
Narrator	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Narrator or Actor – to herself	Actor – to Beloved

Part III. Bitter Experience – Delight and Grief

Poetic epigraph: " <i>... And there was a fatal joy</i> " (Blok)	1. "You took my heart"	2. "Great misery"	3. Pebbles: "My dear one brought me pebbles"	4. "A slender needle of suffering"	5. "I know my loved one does not need me"	6. "Autumn leaves are fading"	7. "In you I seek my salvation"	8. "Your disappearances"
Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Actor – to herself	Narrator	Narrator	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Actor – to Beloved

9. "Without you I am like that woman in the bathhouse"	10. "Love me, forgive me"	11. Retaliation: "An eye for an eye"	12. Plaything: "Let my words not sound like reproaches"	13. "Why did you utter those terrible words"	14. "In the cloudburst"	15. Epilogue: "For everything we did together"	Poetic epilogue " <i>Fly away as flew and thawed</i> " (Blok)
Actor – to Beloved	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Narrator or Actor – to Beloved	Narrator

FIG. 1: The Narrator's and the Actor's songs in *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* opus 17.

f *fpp* *f sub.* *meno f* *cresc. molto*
 S По - че - му мне не ви - жать сви - .

Ex. 2a: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late R. V. Troussova* opus 17, "why should I not squeal like a pig", m.1 (vocal part).

3 4
 S За всё что мы сде - ла - ли с то - бой ког - .
 Cor. (in Fa) sonore
 Cb. pp

Ex. 2b: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* opus 17, "For everything", mm. 1-5.

От встречи
До расставания,
От прощания
До ожидания
Пролѣг мой бабий век.

From meeting
to parting,
from leave-taking
to awaiting
that was my woman's lot.⁷⁰

As (Figure 2) demonstrates, both pieces belong to the narrator who speaks in real time, providing a narrative frame for the story, but the contrast of tempo (*molto agitato* in S2, *lento desolato* in S15) and character (perpetual motion in S2, lamentation in S15) signals a change of discursive perspective. In S2, the narrator adopts the actor's viewpoint, mentally placing herself in the past: the pulsating triplet accompaniment and syncopated chromatic vocal line evoke the emotional crisis at the time when the persona realized that her relationship had no future. This means that the narrator is quoting the actor's words, originally uttered in the past (Example 3).

Poetic epigraph: "I do not read" (Lermontov)	1. "Come, here is my hand"	2. "From meeting to parting"	3. Supplication: "Merciful ones"	4. "Allow me"	5.Counting-out Rhyme: " Here and there"	6. Dream: "Every night the same Dream"	7. Rondo: "I said it cannot be"
Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator or Actor – to herself	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator or Actor – to herself	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator or Actor – to herself

8.Nakedness: "I will cover my soul"	9. Hurdy-Gurdy Waltz: "Even in the rush-hour"	10. Fairy-tale: "I wanted you to see me"	11. Again: "I'm waiting for you again"	12. Sundays: "That's another Sunday over"	13. Visit: "In a cold blanket of snow"	14. True Story: "The love conceived amid the haste"	15. Epilogue: "From meeting to parting"
Narrator or Actor – to herself	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator	Narrator	Actor – to Beloved	Narrator

FIG. 2 : The Narrator's and the Actor's songs in *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19.

The musical score is for a piece titled "From Meeting to Parting" (A Desperate Lament) by György Kurtág. It is in 3/4 time. The vocal line is in Russian, with lyrics: "От встре - чи до рас-ста-ва - ни -". The piano accompaniment features a pulsating triplet pattern in the right hand and a syncopated chromatic line in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *più f*, *meno f*, and *f, come prima*.

Ex. 3: György KURTÁG, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, no 2, "From Meeting to Parting (A Desperate Lament)", mm. 5-8.

70. S2, 15.

Медленно, уныло, пусто (*Lento, desolato*)
[Lassan, kietlenül, siváran]

Ex. 4: György KURTÁg, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, no 15, "From meeting to Parting (A Dispirited Wail)", mm. 1-4.

In contrast, in S15 the narrator separates herself from the speaker of the previous songs. Her words are the same as in S2, but the descending chromatic line, Baroque *passus duriusculus*, and canonic texture denote conscious stylization that heightens self-irony in the narrator's closing remark. It also suggests a realisation that a crisis can lead to emotional transformation through escape from the delusions and grievances of an unhappy relationship (Example 4).

The change of perspective (change of focalization) is used frequently throughout the second section of *Messages* (II. A Little Erotic). This part of the cycle is preceded by an epigraph from Akhmatova:

... и эту песню я невольно
отдам на смех и поруганье...

... and unwillingly this song
I shall give away for laughter and profanation... ⁷¹

"Heat" (MII.1), the opening song of this section, has an additional motto:

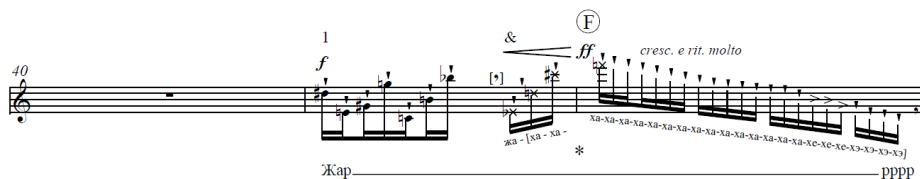
Und wenn ein Irrlicht Euch die Wege weisen soll,
So müsst Ihr so genau nicht nehmen.

And if your guide's to be a Jack-o'lantern's light,
Strict rectitude you'll scarce require. ⁷²

Both poetic excerpts represent the voice of an external narrator who serves as focalizer for the ensuing actor's songs. Her words may be understood as an invitation to question patriarchal gender configurations by reading the musical discourse against normative plot structures (strict rectitude/laughter and profanation). Several aspects of "Heat" indicate that the persona's act is not without deliberate affront to 'proper' gender roles. She takes initiative and revels in sexual pleasure, giving an attitude traditionally coded as masculine ("Can't you see how I burn with desire for you?"). An important issue here is the exercise of agency, an emancipated woman claiming the right to an equal gender status. Transvaluation of 'standard' gender expectations is staged in "Heat" as an utterance that involves increasingly 'deviant' vocal strategies, such as extended vocal techniques (Example 5).

71. Akhmatova: *I stopped smiling*, "White Flock", 1915, MI.

72. Goethe: *Faust I*, *Walpurgisnacht*, MII.



Ex. 5: György Kurtág, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* opus 17, "Heat", m. 40 (vocal part).



Ex. 6: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* opus 17, "Heat", m. 1 (vocal part).

The excitement is so high, the speaker is not always coherent, and when she is, vocalization loses precision. The word жар (heat), repeated *presto*, *feroce* with rapidly expanding range, alternates with *Sprechstimme* and spoken phrases accompanied by resonant chords of the piano, xylophone, harp, and cimbalom. More instruments join in imitating vocal flourishes, which start to dissipate in an uncontrollable affect, a refusal to yield to a restrictive opinion (*excited, hysterical laughter; performed with gradually pulling back the tongue; on a gradually full-bodied, increasingly hoarse voice*). The capacitating agency arises from the friction between the frenzied atmosphere of vocal coloratura and technical control required for their execution (Example 6).

The following song, "Two interlaced bodies" (*MII.2*) begins with a love scene depicted through the eyes of an uninvolved Reporter. Since the presence of a spectator is not expected in this scene, it is logical to identify the voice of the Reporter with that of the actor reliving the moment of intimacy in the mind of an imagined narrator. Like in the previous song, focalization suggests here mental separation from the love act as a form of power play in the context assumed to be male-dominated: the persona not only usurps the masculine role by leading the action but also navigates the narrative discourse (Example 7).

Репортёр: Два сплётённых тела,
красное, белое, чёрное.
Иступлённое наслаждение
любовной ласки.

Reporter: Two interlaced bodies,
red, white, black.
Frenzied enjoyment
of love's caresses.

Она: Моя порозовевшая кожа,
горящая под твоими поцелуями,
Твоё побледневшее лицо
от сдерживаемого желания.

She: My skin turned pink,
burning under your kisses.
Your face turned pale
from repressed desire.⁷³



Ex. 7: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Troussova* opus 17, "Two Interlaced Bodies", mm. 1-3 (vocal part).

73. *MII.2*.

Cl. (in La)

Cor. (in Fa)

Pf.

50 [♩ = 100]

2 3 2 3

Ex. 8: György KURTÁG, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Trousova* opus 17, "Two Interlaced Bodies", mm. 50-56.

When the focus on the actor is restored, a denser texture engenders a feeling of being enveloped by sound, as short glissandos bounce between the lower and higher register. In the second stanza, several textural layers are assembled, building toward the climax in the long instrumental coda. Its ornate postlude, played by the French horn, piano, and clarinet, is imbued with a sensual, orientalist feel. The effect is enhanced by the impression of time-flow arrested conjured by the ornaments languidly stretched out in the parts of clarinet and French horn. The sense of timelessness clashes with the rush of 'love's caresses' and encourages the listeners' attention to shift from the female speaker in her role as sexualized exotic *other* to an active agent who rejects objectification by describing and observing the scene (Example 8).

As a result, the conventional erotic focus on the female form is replaced by a more nuanced power dynamic: the subject under the gaze turns it into a source of authority by using body exposure to assert the courage to show off. This is significant, given that the gaze/body balance oscillates in the Trousova songs between the moments when the speaker is reduced to a powerless object under the scrutiny of a (male) crowd ("In the cloudburst of lustful looks I was standing naked to the bone" *MIII.14*), and the scenes in which she subverts and controls the narrative by becoming the voyeur, an equal party in the game of desire. "Two interlaced bodies" manifests co-dependence of female and male subjects rather than reliance of the woman on the male partner for self-construction.

This approach has a major impact on gender representation. In the tenth song from *Scenes* ("Tale" *S10*), the speaker fails to impress her lover with 'heavenly' appearance - a trope for traditional gender expectations based on the Romantic belief in "womanly ability to lead men to higher, transcendental spheres with their love"⁷⁴:

*Хотелось явиться тебе
небожительницей
в сиянии звёздного нимба.
а пришлось отворить дверь
замарашкою
с веником в грязной руке.*

I wanted you to see me
like some goddess
In the glory of the starry sky:
but then I opened the door
all ragged,
A broom in my dirty hand.⁷⁵

74. JACQUES, "Gender Transitivity", p. 2.

75. "Tale" *S10*.

3

Хо - те - лось я - вить - ся те -

puha verő* *ppp*

mp

p, legato, poco tenuto

pp

Ex. 9: György KURTÁG, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, no 10, "Tale", mm. 1-3.

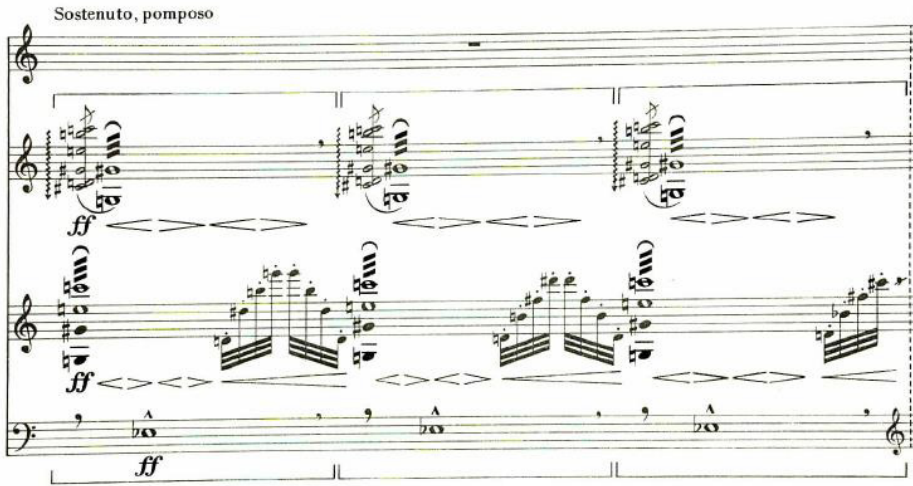
'Glorious goddess', the symbol of the sublime and mysterious, and an incomprehensible object of religious devotion, is depicted by the high-pitch double bass pedals, violin harmonics, the shimmering cimbalom trills, and the dreamy, hovering vocal melody (Example 9).

It becomes almost immediately clear that this 'ephemeral' sonority is flawed, the unnaturally high double-bass line at odds with the naively curving vocal part. This tension marks fluctuation in status, the momentary switch to the narrator's viewpoint in the song sung by the actor. As soon as the theme is stated, it crumbles under the impact of the 'earthly' dance rhythms of "then I opened the door". This shift reveals the artificiality of the distilled feminine ideal, introducing the idea of 'play-along' as a potent enabling technique. Rivière argues that in so far as it entails an *act* free of emotional investment, the feigned femininity resists an imposed identity and lends a positive aspect to the norm-fulfilling gender routine ⁷⁶.

The robust dance accompaniment and the feverish, almost hypnotic instrumental gestures between vocal phrases impart to the words of the speaker a distinctive aura of ironic detachment. When the singer pauses after the word 'halo', a new picture comes into view: we see the image of 'goddess' shatter under the impact of the cimbalom and violin chords (*sostenuto, pomposo*). They are unrelenting in the act of dispersing of the persona's idealized status, female subjectivity increased by what may appear as crashing of the ideal (Example 10).

The dancelike "then I opened the door" is an exaggerated version of its prototype, an exuberant folk плясовая (dance). With the heavy beat and rolling tempo, the music draws upon *danse russe* and delivers it in an overdone manner which heightens the sense

76. See Raman SELDEN, Peter WIDDOWSON, Peter BROOKER (eds.), *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Pearson, Longman, 2005, p. 131.



Ex. 10: György KURTÁG, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, no 10, "Tale", m. 11.

of parody, turning *Cinderella*-like transformation from goddess to dirty-handed maid (the song's title is *Fairytale*) into an act of self-assertion. The emphatic dance rhythm overshadows the dreamy harmonics of the first stanza, flipping upside down conventional narrative models and replacing the idealized view on women with a more realistic gender definition. As a result, what may appear as a passive acceptance of the 'failure' to fulfill patriarchal expectations, is in fact a rejection of fixed gender identity and a withdrawal from stereotyped gender performance (Example 11).



Ex. 11: György KURTÁG, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, no 10, "Tale", mm. 12-14.

4. Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems: transformative creativity

My discussion of gender representation in Kurtág's works continues with *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41 (1997-2008) ⁷⁷. Like *Messages*, the Akhmatova songs are written for soprano solo and large instrumental ensemble, but the narrative trajectory in *Four Poems* is much more streamlined, and the scope of associations is broader, reflections on poetic craft, authority, eminence, and civic resistance weaved into the constructions of femininity. In her role as a witness to grim historical events, the persona contrasts the self-centered protagonist of the Dalos cycles. Yet, there are similarities between Trusova and her successor in *Four Poems* – both identify with the process of dissolution of gender ideology based on sexual difference rather than gender equality. Akhmatova's (1889-1966) years of artistic maturation coincided with the period of disintegration of Imperial patriarchal norms of femininity and domesticity, with women's drive to pursue greater public roles, self-realization, and the right to financial and personal independence. In the first song, the female speaker ruminates on life and work of the national classic (Pushkin), in the second an aspiring woman-poet seeks approval from an older male artist (Blok), in the third she mourns his death, and in the last, she visits an exiled poet friend (Mandelstam). In all four songs, the persona establishes her gender status in relation to male poets, both classical and modern, problematizing traditional gender assumptions which situate creative ability in the rationalized subjectivity of men while denying women validity as a source of creativity. "To Alexander Blok" (F2) shows the persona as Blok's humble admirer. The protagonist describes the setting (Sunday noon, intense cold, raspberry sun, bluish smoke, tall grey building, spacious quiet room) but tells little about her interaction with Blok. Passive and shy ("I came" is the only self-motivated action in the poem), she feels overpowered by her host, yet there is an air of mutual attraction (his silent gaze, her averted eyes), conveyed in the music by playful yet jittery vocal ornaments and a flute ostinato gesture (m. 22f) that evoke expressions of seductive female agency in *Messages* ("Why should I not squeal like a pig" *МII3*, "Heat" *МII.2*) (Examples 12a and 12b).

Performance instructions *impertinente*, *scherzando-capriccioso* and the rather theatrical silent 'alas' at the end suggest a game denoting feminine ambitions and expectations beyond gender 'difference'. Like "Tale" (S10), the song transforms the underlying 'romantic rendezvous' plot into a narrative in which the female actor is no longer

Soprano solo

Я при - шла к по - э - ту в гос - ти.

ossia:

Ex. 12a: György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "To Aleksandr Blok", m. 1 (vocal part).

FL. 

Ex. 12b: GYÖRGY KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "To Aleksandr Blok", mm. 22-26 (flute).

77. Literary aspect of the poms is discussed in GALIEVA-SZOKOLAY, "Dirges and Ditties", pp. 279-302.

molto misurato
eco, ppp

45 [в умилении]

У [мор - ских во - рот Не] - вы ...

[*беззвучно, только шевеля губами] ossia: + pochissimo sussurrare
[...и, может быть прибавить в глубине души: УВЫ!...]

Ex. 13: György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "To Aleksandr Blok", mm. 45–47 (vocal part).

an unresisting object of male attention but a subject with her own agenda. The remarkably non-climatic dynamic contour of the song strikes the listener as compelling evidence of persona's self-control (Example 13).

The effect of this shift is also evident in other songs of the cycle. It translates into musical depictions of images associated with the feminine – ballerina's feet in "Pushkin" (F1), the red-cheeked widows in "Dirge" (F3), and the Muse in "Voronezh" (F4). The musical context for all three, the dancer, the mourner, and the muse, elucidates their meaning as symbols of transformative creativity of women. In "Pushkin" (F1) the speaker reflects on the poet's challenges and sacrifices, constraints of popularity and literary fashion, and the ability to turn personal experience into art that amalgamates psychological and social insights with satire, irony, and flippant remarks. The singing voice receives in this song undivided attention, as instrumental ensemble merely echoes the speaker's words. The facetious final words about women's feet reveals the persona's attempt to identify within the spiritual but also physical and gendered sides of life. The heavier leap on *ногу* (foot) is followed by two lighter skips on *ножкой* (footsie), the feminine-coded agility of the gravity-defying upward curve balanced by the 'masculine' precision of downward landing. This gesture illustrates "the right, the ability, or the blessing" of poet's creative imagination: when the singer repeats *ножкой* with an even more refined upward thrust, she fleetingly reaches the highest vocal pitch in this song (G^{#5}), foreshadowing the even higher pitches in the subsequent songs. Although the persona speaks about Pushkin, her words are self-addressed, a reflection on the extent to which feminine nature may intersect with, or be bolstered by, the pursuit of literary career, and a reference to struggles which the author of the poem encountered upon entering the male-dominated early-twentieth century Russian literary scene (Example 14).

"Dirge" (F3) describes Blok's funeral, connecting the speaker with the departed poet in a very personal way. The wavering vocal line and chromatically inflected harmony evokes *lament*, but there is also a sense of melancholic waltz in the first interlude, with a gently spinning cimbalom melody in triple meter. Bringing together contrasting style

a tempo
leggiere
grazioso-scherzando
eco

17

нож - кой [нож - кой...] на-зы - вать? ...

кой...]

Ex. 14: György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "Pushkin", mm. 17–20 (vocal part).

Ex. 15: György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "Dirge," mm. 34-40.

types in a single musical phrase yields a unique expressive effect. Given the historical association of waltz with romance, its fusion with lament leads to something in the mode of nineteenth-century operatic *love-death*, infusing the subsequent stanzas' description of the cemetery (dark blue incense, a grove of nightingales, sun's bright blaze) in more ambiguous tones. The image of rosy-cheeked widows with small children visiting their fathers' graves is the metaphor for spiritual affinity between the speaker and the late poet, supporting her implicit claim to his literary legacy (Example 15).

"Voronezh" (F4) opens with two crank sirens and percussions setting up the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear (Example 16).

The speaker attempts to control its dangerous energy by turning to the city landscape and history. Images of frosty streets and historical battles evoke an epic narrative that comes across as the opposite of the story of exiled poet, manifesting a wish to share and

Quasi senza tempo, molto agitato ♩ = 36-30

Ex. 16: György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "Voronezh", mm.1-3.

[...epilogo...]

Lento
senza colore
legatissimo

тей. А в ком-на-те о-паль-но-го по-э-та Де-жу-рят

Fl.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Cor. 1

Cor. 2

Ex. 17 : György KURTÁG, *Anna Akhmatova. Four Poems* opus 41, "Voronezh", mm. 64-68 (fragment).

belong rather than reflect on individual destiny, and delays the portrayal of the exiled poet until the last quatrain of the poem. The protagonist's self-mastery is depicted as her ability to direct musical syntax. The supporting instrumental lines are, for the most part, dissonant contrapuntal variants of the vocal line rather than independent motivic entities. Notably, they are delivered in a markedly strict way (*molto misurato*). In contrast, dramatic outbursts of emotion surge in momentary breaks between vocal statements, filled in with loud orchestral 'gasps' (*Kommentar*). Unlike what may be expected to appear in orchestral interludes, their role is to enhance the emotion, not to objectively reflect on it.

Second stanza describes St. Peter's cathedral in Voronezh. It leads to a climatic scene of the mighty feast celebrating the fourteenth-century victory over the Tatars on Kulikovo field. The short but powerful orchestral climax makes the shift to the exiled poet's chamber near the end of the song especially cutting, the lonely poet's only companion, the silent Muse, symbolizing the effort to combat helplessness and fear. On the whole, despite the cycle's gloomy ending ("And the night approaches that has no knowledge of the dawn"), *Four Poems* is a definite departure from inconclusive gender ideology of the earlier Dalos settings. It illustrates the evolution of the concepts of femininity and 'otherness' in Kurtág's works, projecting the increasingly enabling aspect of the female speaker, moving away from the destructive self-revelations of the Trusova cycles to the empowerment and ethically-invested empathy of the poet-'witness' of *Four Poems* (Example 17).

As a female poet, Akhmatova negotiated her work in an environment defined by aesthetic and social conventions established by men, and like many women artists of the time, she adapted to these conventions without retreating to androgyny, using the voice of a mother, mourner, lover, scribe, and a muse to assert her place among male authors. It is well known that she often assumed a public mask of 'womanliness', but this role did not conceal her rejection of the outlook that relegates women to the margin or denies their creativity. Svetlana Boym identifies another Russian female poet Tsvetaeva's self-construction as a 'poetess' (a term that in today's public discourse would not be used) as an improbable blend

of feminine abandon and feminine inferiority, a combination that posits her exaggerated femininity as masquerade⁷⁸. The narrative trajectory of Kurtág's *Four Poems* reflects this position by incorporating multiple perspectives which escape presenting the hero's mindset as overtly 'gendered' but instead disrupt the unitary meaning and thus offer a potent form of social and cultural critique.

Conclusion: new femininity through the eyes of a male artist

In this essay I have sought to sketch out a model for analysing gender-related narrative practices in Kurtág's vocal cycles to the texts by Rimma Dalos and Anna Akhmatova. My investigation included an overview of historical and contemporary attitudes towards feminine behaviour while remaining focused on the female protagonists' constructed identity to mark crucial points within the rapidly changing gender discourse. The undertaking to situate Kurtág's songs within the conflicting currents of action and reflection characterising late-twentieth-century gender-relations in Hungary reveals a special place of these works among his compositions – lyric vocal cycle, a genre that since the early nineteenth century had evolved into a medium for exploring the inner recesses of the heart, unfolds here as an intellectual space that enables reassessment of present gender expectations. Kurtág envisions the female figures in his songs as bearers of a new gender ideology; he paints scenes of emotional intensity or distress in a woman's affair and uses trivial tropes to parody the outdated patterns of domestic existence. Occupied with the conflict within the lyric persona, he is fascinated by the insights a female outlook on a romantic affair can bring. Two tendencies stand out in Kurtág's representation of the lyric speaker: a growing uneasiness with declining norms that frame the existing female/male gender dynamics, and an inclination to supplement contemporary men writers' postmodernist "heroic search for self-expression" with a more nuanced psychological inquiry aimed at the female consciousness with an angle that is not intended to align with a male point of view⁷⁹.

I am aware that the survey I outlined in this paper is no more than a partial image, for to fully understand the relationship between identity, voice, body, and language in Kurtág's oeuvre one would have to expand the scope of analysis so as to not only address his other settings of Russian and Hungarian-language female poetry (for example, the unpublished Akhmatova and Dalos pieces and *Seven Songs* to texts by Amy Károlyi opus 22) but also to include an extensive corpus of works in which the composer uses the medium of female voice to depict male speakers (*The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* opus 7, *In Memory of a Winter Sunset* to verses by Pál Gulyás opus 8, *S. K. Remembrance Noise* to lyrics by Dezső Tandori opus 12, *Attila József Fragments* opus 20, *Kafka-Fragments* opus 24, and *Einige Sätze aus den Sudelbüchern Georg Christoph Lichtenbergs* opus 37). Indeed, analogies between the idea of vulnerability, irrationality and female timbre could be drawn, as demonstrated by Rachel Beckles Willson in her extensive study of Kurtág's *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* for soprano and piano⁸⁰. Still, one can glean from my analysis of Kurtág's

78. See Svetlana BOYM, "Loving in Bad Taste: Eroticism and Literary Excess in Marina Tsvetaeva's *The Tale of Sonechka*", in Jane T. COSTLOW, Stephanie SANDLER, Judith VOWLES (eds.), *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, p. 161.

79. See IMRE, "Hungarian Poetic Nationalism", p. 45.

80. See Rachel BECKLES WILLSON, *György Kurtág: The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza Op. 7: A 'Concerto' for Soprano and Piano*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004, p. 71.

works that female poetry by Dalos and Akhmatova provided him with a challenge as well as inspiration to give poetic voice to an underrepresented woman's perspective, an endeavor that had had not many precedents in Hungary in the late 1970s-early 80s. There must have been a significant artistic stimulus for a male composer to musically depict an experience so private as a woman's recollection of physical intimacy. *Psyche* comes to mind as one of the possible precursors for this approach, yet, as Kristina Muxfeldt noted discussing poetic sources of Schumann's *Frauenliebe*, "novels or plays, because they speak through specific, well-developed characters, allow, and even invite, greater freedom in this respect"⁸¹. In a 2001 article on Kurtág's Dalos settings Stephen Walsh remarks on the "astonishing sensual energy and candour" projected in the songs and on the composer's ability to engage deeply with a woman's inner thoughts and intimate experiences (he talks about "resolute bitterness", "the obsessiveness of experience", "stark self-degradation", and "sexual frustration" of the female protagonist)⁸². Beckles Willson cites similar responses from the early 1980s, noting that Hungarian perception of *Messages* demonstrated a greater concern with "metaphysical suggestiveness" of Kurtág's "evasively mysterious" music and with deciphering political innuendoes in the work, rather than with the fact that Kurtág took an effort to depict a woman's impassionate fixation of her beloved. It may seem rather paradoxical today, given that, according to Beata Hock's 2008 essay, "this country still comes across as a persistently patriarchal society"⁸³.

Discussing Hungarian novels from the 1970-80s, Hock notes that in gender-conservative environments which "deny and resist the emerging changes in male-female relationships both on the personal and societal level", male cultural producers often "appear more willing or better equipped to deal with issues elsewhere typically addressed by female artists/authors or feminist theorists"⁸⁴. György Kurtág's rendition of the texts about woman's "love, parting and a fear of loneliness"⁸⁵, which takes as its subject private self of a fictitious poetess, and his setting of the poems about female creativity and resistance, illustrate this tendency. They de-essentialize the adjective 'feminine' in respect to representation of female persona, substantiating the feminist claim that feminine content need not originate exclusively from women authors, as elaborated by theories by Alice Kuzniar and Pam Morris, who recognize the presence of gender-ambiguous and feminine voices in male-authored works. My reading of Kurtág shows that this model celebrates female agency, which is overlaid with frailty, and which reflects a gender ideology in transition, with an 'emancipated' but sexualized *new woman* as cause of special concern, signalling a deep reconfiguration of female identity through artistic expression.

81. MUXFELDT, "*Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then*", p. 30.

82. See WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings", pp. 76-78, 82-83.

83. BECKLES WILLSON, *Ligeti, Kurtág*, pp. 202-203, 205-207; Hock, "A History of Things," p. 141.

84. Hock, "A History of Things," p. 141. Observations by Fodor ("Smiling Women and Fighting Men"), Penn (*Solidarity's Secret*), Imre ("Hungarian Poetic Nationalism"), and Černá ("Women under Socialism") suggest that this situation occurred in many Eastern European countries.

85. WALSH, "Kurtág's Russian Settings," p. 72.

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Titre de l'article – Article Title

Genre et politique narratifs : représentation de l'identité féminine dans les cycles vocaux de György Kurtág par rapport aux textes de Rimma Dalos et Anna Akhmatova

Narrating gender and politics: representation of feminine identity in György Kurtág's vocal cycles to the texts by Rimma Dalos and Anna Akhmatova

Résumé – Abstract

Cet article examine les cycles vocaux de Kurtág sur des textes de Rimma Dalos et d'Anna Akhmatova (*Omaggio a Luigi Nono* opus 16, *Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Trusova* opus 17, *Scenes from a Novel* opus 19, *Requiem for the Beloved* opus 26, et *Anna Akhmatova: Four Poems* opus 41) mettant en scène une poétesse qui se souvient de son amour et de l'histoire de sa vie dans des poèmes lyriques quasi-autobiographiques, mêlant subjectivité, féminité et créativité. Je considère le genre et les notions adjacentes de corps et de voix comme des éléments narratologiques dans ces compositions, et je les discute d'un point de vue historique et moderne du comportement féminin, en utilisant des outils sélectifs de théorie narrative et de critique de genre, et en m'appuyant sur des exemples d'œuvres comme *Frauenliebe und Leben* de Schumann ou *Psyché* de Sándor Weöres (1913-89).

Mon analyse s'appuie sur deux approches complémentaires : la méthode d'Andrew Weaver, qui consiste à identifier deux voix narratives contrastées dans le cadre musical de la poésie lyrique à la première personne, et l'étude narratologique de la « transévaluation » de Russell Millard, dans laquelle la partition musicale est comprise comme une réévaluation des valeurs culturelles de genre inscrites dans le livret. En combinant ces perspectives analytiques, j'essaie de concevoir un modèle de compréhension des pratiques narratives liées au genre dans les interprétations de la poésie de Dalos et d'Akhmatova par Kurtág. Ma lecture vise à montrer que ce modèle célèbre une image de la femme caractérisée par la fragilité et l'insécurité ; cela reflète une idéologie du genre en transition, avec une nouvelle femme « émancipée » mais sexualisée et racialisée, impliquant une reconfiguration de l'identité féminine via l'expression artistique.

This essay examines György Kurtág's vocal cycles to the poems by Rimma Dalos and Anna Akhmatova (Omaggio a Luigi Nono opus 16, Messages of the Late Miss R. V. Trusova opus 17, Scenes from a Novel opus 19, Requiem for the Beloved opus 26, and Anna Akhmatova: Four Poems opus 41) featuring a female poet-speaker who reminisces her love and life-story in quasi-autobiographical lyric poems, negotiating subjectivity, femininity, and creativity. I consider gender and the adjacent notions of body and voice as key narratological elements in these compositions. Applying selected tools of narrative theory and gender criticism, I discuss them in relation to historical and modern views on feminine behaviour, exemplified by such works as Frauenliebe und Leben by Schumann and Psyché by Sándor Weöres (1913-89).

My analysis draws on two complementary approaches: Andrew Weaver's method of identifying two contrasting narrative voices in the musical setting of first-person lyric poetry, and Russell Millard's narratological study of "transvaluation", in which the musical score is understood as re-assessment of the gendered cultural values inscribed into the libretto. Combining these analytical perspectives, I attempt to devise a model for understanding gender-related narrative practices in Kurtág's renditions of poetry by Dalos and Akhmatova. My reading aims to illustrate that this model celebrates female agency that is overlaid with fragility and insecurity; it reflects a gender ideology in transition, with an 'emancipated' but sexualized and racialized new woman as cause of special concern, representing a reconfiguration of female identity via artistic expression.

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Julia Galieva-Szokolay est docteur et membre senior de la Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory of Music de Toronto au Canada. Elle a fait son doctorat en musicologie à l'Institut national des études d'art de Moscou. Ses recherches portent sur la théorie de la forme et de la fonction en musique, les pratiques de composition contemporaine, la musique et la culture d'Europe de l'Est, la performance vocale folk, l'ethnomusicologie, la critique féministe, les études de genre, la théorie narrative, la pédagogie et l'éducation de la théorie de la musique. Elle est co-auteur de quatre ouvrages de théorie de la musique (*Celebrate Theory, Harmony, Analysis, et Counterpoint*) et de plusieurs articles sur des compositeurs d'Europe de l'Est.

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Mots clés – Keywords

Kurtág – Cycle vocal – Idéologie de genre en transition – Polyvocalité – Théorie narrative – Critique de genre
Kurtág – Vocal cycle – Gender ideology in transition – Polyvocality – Narrative theory – Gender criticism