

THE GATES OF SKY BY EDE TERÉNYI: SOURCES AND CONTEXT

ATTILA FODOR¹

SUMMARY. The ninth decade of the last century brought an opening for domestic composers towards themes less tolerated until then, especially religious ones. In the case of Ede Terényi, this resulted, among other, in a considerable number of church choral works of Protestant and Catholic origin. *The Gates of Sky* composed in 1996 stands out in this context not only for its musical complexity, but also for the way it deals with a subject that has its roots beyond Christianity in archaic cultures. Our study aims to investigate those factors that contributed to the conception of this piece rich in meaning and significance, its sources of inspiration, and the shaping of the text of the three movements. In a subsequent study we will also discuss elements of style and expression in a detailed musical analysis.

Keywords: Ede Terényi, *The Gates of Sky*, choir music, ritual, world tree

Introduction

In many respects, Ede Terényi (1935-2020) occupies a special place in the Transylvanian composer generation of the 1930s.² A panoramic overview of his vast oeuvre reveals a diverse and multifaceted artistic career,

¹ *Partium Christian University, Faculty of Letters and Arts, Department of Arts, RO-410209 Oradea, Primariei Str. 36, senior lecturer, PhD., E-mail: fodorattila@partium.ro*

² The concept introduced by Imre Földes is applied to Hungarian composers of Transylvania born in the 1930s, mostly in Târgu Mures and Cluj-Napoca, who started their careers in the 1950s and 1960s. Cf. Földes Imre. *Harmincasok. Beszélgetés magyar zeneszerzőkkel (The Thirties. Conversations with Hungarian composers)*. Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, Budapest, 1969. See also Hausmann Kóródy Alice. "Egy zeneszerző nemzedék indulása" ("The start of a composer generation"). In Hausmann Kóródy Alice [ed.]. *Erdélyiség a magyar zeneszerzők műveiben (Transylvanianism in the Works of Hungarian Composers)*. Partium Kiadó, Nagyvárad, 2018, pp. 13-22.



highly varied in terms of genre and style, and which shows specific trends³ from one period to the other. A distinctive feature of his creation is his affinity for the visual, which is by no means limited to his graphic artworks or his endeavors in the field of graphic music. He also engaged in intense theoretical (academic and journalistic) activity, which is as enticing to the analyst as it is sometimes puzzling.⁴

Since the focus of our study is on a choral work, we must briefly reflect on his approach of this genre.⁵ This area of his oeuvre comprises about 100 works,⁶ of which approximately a third are for mixed choir and the rest for equal voices (mainly women and children choruses). There may be some significance in the fact that Terényi illustrates the endpoints of his own creative periods with such pieces of music. His first opus composed in 1953 for equal voices, entitled *Had I been running water...* is a kind of ars poetic,⁷ while the last one, *The Gates of Sky* is typical for his last period. (Its second, extended version was published in 2013). In the six decades between, we can observe some correlations with his much-talked-about stylistic turns, as also the decisive importance of the Romanian revolution of 1989 in this sense.

While his enthusiasm for Bartók in the 1950s resulted primarily in folk song arrangements, the serialist “glamour” of the following decade was not favorable to the choral works. Although the composer highlights instrumental works (especially the *1st String Quartet*) in the context of his musical graphic endeavors typical for the 1970s, his relatively rich - mainly poetry-oriented - choral output (including for mixed choir) contains isolated, unconventional notational solutions⁸ that indicate improvisation, aleatory or different sound

³ Terényi was particularly concerned with the question of the inherent quality of time on a (musical) historical and human scale. He saw the defining characteristics of his own creative periods in terms of decade-long changes.

⁴ See Fodor Attila. “Zenén innen, zenén túl – Terényi Ede az esszéíró” (“Music Hither and Beyond - Ede Terényi the Essayist”). In Hausmann Kóródy Alice [ed.]. *Ami ihlet... éltet – In memoriam Terényi Ede (What inspires... is life-giving - In memoriam Ede Terényi)*. Partium Kiadó, Nagyvárad, 2021, pp. 41-66.

⁵ See also Coca Gabriela. “Terényi Ede kórusművészete” (“The choral art of Ede Terényi”) In Dombi Józsefné [ed.]. *Évfordulós zeneszerzők, 2009: tanulmánykötet (Anniversary composers, 2009: book of studies)*. SZTE JPGY Művészeti Intézet Ének-Zene Tanszék, Szeged, 2010, pp. 83-87.

⁶ This approximate number results from the coherent review of the authorized edition of his opera omnia.

⁷ Gabriela Coca dedicated a separate study to the analysis of the work. Coca Gabriela. “If I had been Running Water..., Equal Voices Choir, Op. 1, by Ede Terényi (1954)”. In *Studia UBB Musica*, LVII, 1, 2012, pp. 259-266.

⁸ In Terényi's work, such notational elements display a particular polysemy, which, even in the case of certain conventional signs, can carry symbolic contents beyond their traditional ways of execution, thus becoming sometimes the source of visually inspired musical gestures.

effects. It is also during this period that the percussion accompaniments characteristic for the rest of his work emerge. After the eighties focused mainly on the historical oriented concertos, the political-ideological liberation that accompanied the Romanian regime change opened the way for sacred choral works⁹ (also characteristic for many of his colleagues), which in Terényi's case resulted in a significant number of compositions,¹⁰ not only in this genre.

The Gates of Sky (1996), seems to stand out from this context, indicating a change in the composer's spiritual orientation that went beyond the canonized Christian faith. In this, on the one hand, a decisive role was played by Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical¹¹ oeuvre, also palpable in Terényi's writings of that time.¹² The other important reference point was the influential personality of Imre Makovecz, an outstanding figure of the Hungarian architecture, who, following Steiner's example, found his own way through the human, artistic and public example of Károly Kós¹³ in the archaic worldview and symbolism of Hungarian folk art, seeking the transcendental, elevating and soul-lifting connections between heaven and earth. His encounter¹⁴ with Makovecz's

⁹ Terényi calls this as his *musica sacra* period and comments on its dawn as follows: "In 1990 the world turned a corner. [...] Showing a new face it set to everything a different direction. [...] another path opened up: I was free to immerse myself in the world of sacred music. I could openly come out with my sacred music." In Terényi Ede. *Zeném – Életem. Gondolatok – arcképek – emlékek. Életrajz I. (My Music - My Life. Thoughts – portraits – memories. Autobiography I.)*. Grafycolor, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p.105. In the previous decade, this role was filled more by his organ works.

¹⁰ The large number of Christmas-inspired pieces is striking, the reason for which Terényi has commented on in several of his writings and is also discussed by Gabriela Coca. Cf. Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit.

¹¹ Anthroposophy: so-called spiritual science based on supersensory cognition, which aims at a comprehensive synthesis of ancient Eastern wisdom, Christian teachings and modern Western scientific thought.

¹² This would include his thematic essays published in the *Helikon* journal (Cluj-Napoca) between 1993-2000, which have been collected in book form. Cf. Terényi Ede. *Paramuzikológia (Paramusicology)*. Kolozsvár, 2001. Steiner's ideas also appear as mottos in his other writings, and he has also dedicated an article to them. See for example: "Ahogy Rudolf Steiner látott minket..." ("As Rudolf Steiner saw us ...") In Terényi Ede. *Zene tegnap, ma, holnap (Music yesterday, today and tomorrow)*. Stúdium Könyvkiadó, Kolozsvár, 2004, pp. 202-203.

¹³ Károly Kós (1883-1977), renowned Transylvanian architect, writer and ethnologist.

¹⁴ He first reported on this in the journal of the Kós Károly Association. Cf. Ede Terényi. "Léleképítők" ("Soul-builders"). In Gerle János [ed.] *Országépítő*, Kaposvár, 1993/4, p. 42. On the occasion of his 80th birthday, in a conversation with art critic Sándor Balázs, he put it as follows: "But as always, there had to be a moment when, looking into the Book of Fate, we could see into the soul of things. This moment came for me when a group of enthusiastic young architects presented the elements of organic architecture, the life's work of Imre Makovecz and... photos of the Hungarian pavilion he designed and built for the World Exhibition in Seville, at a meeting of the Anthroposophical Society in Cluj. A new world opened up for me: I realized that

concept proved to be revelatory for his hitherto intuitive creative ambitions, and also showed that the Steinerian vision could take a proper artistic form in the appropriate hands and on an adequate cultural ground. This resulted in two representative orchestral works of what he called his organic period, *The Seven Towered-Castle* and *The Legend of the Transylvanian Castles*, in the early nineties.¹⁵ These reflect the kind of sacred music into which the later *The Gates of Sky* seems to fit.¹⁶ His resonance with Makovecz, however, is not limited to the notion of organic art (which the architect preferred to call living art). In the context of his mixed choirs, for example, he spoke of a kind of musical cathedral-building mission,¹⁷ just as one of the striking metaphors of his approach on the harmonic world of modern music - the stalactite and stalagmite (i.e. geometrical and gravitational harmonic structures) - can be paralleled with the spatial design of Makovecz's buildings.¹⁸

I myself was writing organic music: my intuition had become a conscious aspiration; a creative concept. "Balázs Sándor. "Öt érzék és a lélek harmóniája. Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget" ("Five senses and harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi.") In Papp Endre [ed.]. *Hitel*, 30/5 (2017. május), p. 55.

¹⁵ He assessed their significance as follows: "I consider the two orchestral pieces that I composed in parallel over the course of a few months in the second half of 1993 to be the most valuable of the rich compositional output of the 1990s. These two works are *The Seven Towered-Castle* and *The Legend of the Transylvanian Castles*. The music of both works has a sacral conception. The first work is music dedicated to the temple of the Hungarian soul: for string orchestra, violin solo and percussion. It is a musical double of Imre Makovecz's architectural poem exposed in Seville. [...] As for the second work, I can say - as a quick answer: This is my *Le sacre du printemps*. And indeed, I have always considered it as the sanctification of my homeland in the sense of *Le sacre du Transylvania*." In Terényi Ede. *Zeném – életem... (My Music - My Life...)*. Ed. cit., p. 111.

¹⁶ His interest in this direction dates back much earlier. Related to his Hofgreff Symphony, composed in 1983 he wrote: "The work has the appearance of a suite, but it is only a kind of mask, more so on paper than in the structure of the work. [...] I was looking for the color and expression of ancient instruments. I was trying to recreate the movements of wildness, the world of dance movements. From lyrical song to the incantation of shamanic rituals, I searched for the thousand flashes of the ancient soul. All because I feel I am living this ancient world." In Terényi Ede. *Zeném – életem... (My Music - My Life...)*. Ed. cit., p. 82. The central idea of *The Gates of Sky*, the world tree, appears as a motto in the third movement of the aforementioned *The Seven-Towered Castle*. It is entitled: *The Reflection of Roots*.

¹⁷ He commented to Coca Gabriella: "I have tried to build cathedrals, following in the footsteps of the old masters, in a new world where going to church is more a tourist experience than a place of spiritual contemplation, a place of self-reflection. I want these sounding cathedrals to be listened to, performed, as if they were being heard in a church, in the soul-cleansing silence of devotion." In Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit. p. 86.

¹⁸ Mária Beöthy, in her essay "Makovecz szelleme" ("The spirit of Makovecz") says: "...Makovecz's architecture is human-centred, it aims to express the inner essence, in his conception the building as being follows the human body, therefore he attaches a special role to symmetry. He assigns form, function, materials and technology to the spirit of place and earth. The house rises

Finally, at least as important in the development of Terényi's work in the 1990s was the fact that he found a home in the intellectual circles of the Hungarian art world, and later became a member of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA).¹⁹ We quote in this respect two of his recollections:

"I have been a member of the intellectual community of Hungarian Art Life since 1994: I am a small dot in an infinite ocean. The artistic expression of the Hungarian spirit, from the very first moment of my awakening, has been the defining factor of my life [...] Nothing was more natural than to be there at the birth of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, which was slowly taking wings, and to help in every way possible to ensure that the seed sown by Imre Makovecz would sprout, grow stems, leaves, buds and finally blossom. I am very grateful that I was also given this opportunity."²⁰

"Listening to my works (*Transylvanian Codex, Cantus Hungaricus*) at the 80th birthday concert of the HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS (MMA), I was struck by the realization that since a quarter of a century, almost all my significant works are connected to this institution. Thinking back on their creation, presentation and reception, I can only now truly see how blessedly this artistic, philosophical and intellectual community has defined my life and my creative activity."²¹

The above is also of direct relevance to our analysis, since the spiritual background of the work can be traced back to a large extent to the book of Marcell Jankovics,²² also a member of the MMA, entitled *The Mythology of the Tree*, published in 1991.²³

out of the ground, its roof descends from the sky, the centrality of the floor plan takes sacral form in a vertical organization of space." In Kőszeghy Attila [ed.]. *Országépítő (Country Builder)*, 2012/3, p. 51.

¹⁹ The MMA was established in 1992, originally as a social organisation (association), and from 2011 as a public body. Imre Makovecz served as President from the beginning until his death in 2011. According to the institution's website (www.mma.hu), Terényi became a member of the society in 2005 and a full academic member in 2011.

²⁰ Balázs Sándor. "Öt érzék és a lélek harmóniája. Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget" ("Five senses and harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi."). *Ed. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

²¹ In Terényi Ede. *Zeném - életem... (My Music - My Life...)*. *Ed. cit.*, p. 471.

²² Marcell Jankovics (1941-2021), renowned Hungarian cartoon director, graphic artist, book illustrator, cultural historian. He became a member of the MMA in 1993, a full and board member of the public body in 2011, and honorary president from 2020. Gabriella Coca suggested that Terényi dedicated *The Gates of Sky* to Jankovics based on a handwritten inscription in one of the composer's own copies of the volume of the Mixed Choirs. It has not appeared in any edition of the printed score.

²³ Jankovics Marcell. *A fa mitológiája (The Mythology of the Tree)*. Csokonai Kiadóvállalat, Debrecen, 1991.

I. General overview of the composition

The three-movement work for mixed choir and percussion was composed in the spring of 1996. Its estimated duration is 13-14 minutes. Its premiere took place in Sovata²⁴ later that year, performed by the Kós Károly Chamber Choir founded and led by Zita Magyari,²⁵ and was also presented at the 16th Pécs Chamber Choir Festival.²⁶

Coca Gabriela counts it as one of the more demanding pieces in terms of technical-artistic realization, not without reason.²⁷ The eight voices of the divided mixed choir are present almost throughout the work, splitting into fourteen at the climax of the first movement, and being transformed in the second into a two-chorus setting. The complex texture, due to the quasi-orchestral arrangement of the voices or the moving clusters of denser polyphonic moments, raises mainly intonation problems. A further challenge may be the effective interpretation of experimental vocal effects. It is conceivable that Terényi had the above-mentioned mixed choir - at the time mostly consisting of music academy students - in mind when composing.²⁸

The score of *The Gates of Sky* was published in two versions by Grafycolor, Cluj, in the opera omnia edition authorized by the composer. The first one in 2005, in the volume *Choir Book - Mixed Choirs* (under the

²⁴ The event took place on 23 June 1996 in the Roman Catholic Church of Szováta, in the framework of the Transylvanian Hungarian Choir Days, reported by Katalin Járay. In Makkái János [ed.]. *Népújság*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 126, 1996. június 28., p. 2.

²⁵ Zita Magyari (b. 1965, Cluj-Napoca), studied composition at the "Gh. Dima" Music Academy as a student of Ede Terényi. Between 1995-2003 she was the choirmaster and organist of St. Michael's Church in Cluj-Napoca. In 1983 she became the choirmaster of the student choir "Visszhang" in Cluj. In the first half of the 1990s, at the encouragement of Ede Terényi, she founded and led the Kós Károly Chamber Choir until her resettlement in Hungary, which performed several works of 20th century Transylvanian Hungarian composers. The choir has won prizes at several prestigious international competitions.

²⁶ The festival took place between 8-14 July 1996. The choir's performance was reported, among others, in the Hungarian press of Romania: "In the Dome Museum in Pécs, in the Jami and then in the Reformed Church of Nagyharsány, choral works on religious themes by J. S. Bach, Kodály, János Vajda, Ede Terényi, György Orbán, Zita Magyari and Zolt Lászlóffy were performed." In Szócs Géza [ed.]. *Erdélyi Napló*, 1996. augusztus 7., No. 32, p. 14.

²⁷ Cf. Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit. p. 86.

²⁸ On this question in general, he commented to Gabriela Coca: "If I thought that my work would be sung by a mediocre or even weak amateur choir, I might not even compose it, since self-censorship would kill the very idea of the work. Unfortunately, there are very few choral ensembles that are indeed professional in the truest sense of the word. I have often imagined my works for such an ensemble. This is a great luxury on my part. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to hear some of my works performed by such choral ensembles." In Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit. p. 85.

Hungarian title: *Az ég kapui*), the second one with the English title (*The Gates of Sky*) in 2013. There are significant differences in content between the two. Although in the present study we can only analyze the original 1996 version, we will briefly describe the afterlife of the work, as we believe that some of the additions may be valid retroactively, or at least help to understand it better.

The first important difference is that the composer has added to the earlier choral work two more large-scale parts (consisting of several movements and given separate titles), which together form a kind of trilogy under the original title. Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to establish the reason for and circumstances of this, or the year of composition, as the published score does not contain the latter information.

To give a sense of the proportions, and to illustrate the structure of the completed work, here is a table:

Table 1

Parts	Movements	Page number
I. Ritual	1. World Tree	38
	2. Soul Tree	
	3. Life Tree	
II. Extasy	1. The Sacred Tree	91
	2. The Sublime Tree	
	3. The Tree of Aphrodite	
	4. The Tree of Eternity	
III. Magic	1. Adagio solenne	42
	2. Agitato	
	3. Andante	
	4. Adagio mistico	
	5. Lento	
	6. Grave	
	7. Vivace	

The structure of *The Gates of Sky*, 2003 edition

The second essential difference is that in the third part (Magic) Terényi inserted so-called cosmic diagrams in the form of colored drawings, which also contain musical scores, reminiscent of geometric structures, which he either abstracted from the inner form (motifs, structure) of the composed parts or derived from them during the creative process. It is very likely that he considered them as independent works, both because he gave each of them its own title²⁹ and he referred to their paradigmatic significance

²⁹ In order: *The Magic of Infinite*, *The Boughs of Galaxy*, *The Birth of Life*, *Star Neuron*, *The Curtain of Cosmos*, *Multiverse*, *On the Steps of Light*.

as follows: “The 2000s represented a musical exit into the transcendental worlds, musical graphics heightened to the extreme, as a possible starting point for an infinite number of compositional variations and performance improvisations, as a graphic representation of the basic MODEL concept. Main work: THE GATES OF SKY (2013)”³⁰

Thirdly, it should be mentioned, that compared to the 2005 edition, the author has openly revealed the composition’s source of inspiration (with a quotation from the aforementioned book by Marcell Jankovics), and has also placed a seemingly mysterious short motto - written down in music - in front of it, which will be discussed in the musical analysis. Another novelty is that the source texts appear at the beginning of each section in English, Romanian and Hungarian.

II. Layers of analysis

Our further investigations will be carried out along different layers. First, we will review the relevant ideas of Marcell Jankovics’ book, and then we will turn to the conceptual elements (titles, text selection) that determine the framework and direction of the topic as seen by the composer. In a subsequent paper we will look at how the musical shaping of the message has been enriched by additional interpretative aspects in compositional terms (style and expression).

1. *Spiritual background*

Jankovics’ wide-ranging cultural anthropological work explores the layers of meaning of the most complex and richest universal symbol of the plant world. Between its opening and concluding sections, which reflect the present, the author collects and processes the visual, material, and written

³⁰ In Balázs Sándor. “Öt érzék és a lélek harmóniája. Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget” (“Five senses and harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi”). *Ed. cit.*, p. 57. In his autobiographical volume the following description is found about the album Goetheanum, which refers to Rudolf Steiner: “The second work, THE GATES OF SKY, are looking for a higher spiritual world, evoking the spirit of Rudolf Steiner: MUZIKALISCHES Opfer. The seven music to appear on the artwork HUMAN ENTITY (7), which many compositions (score, perhaps improvisation) can take a vowel body. The first four tracks recorded music (MEPHISTOFAUST) is electronic orchestration in traditional musical notation. The next two tracks (THE GATES OF SKY) based on the seven music graphics, electronic version of traditional musical score notation developed image. The last track Emil Gherasim electronic music improvisation based on the seven graphics.” In Terényi Ede. *Zeném - életem... (My Music - My Life...)*. *Ed. cit.*, p. 472.

memories of the ancient tradition, mythology, folk art and various religions (including Christianity), in order to reveal the sacred order of the human-cosmos relationship as expressed in the tree.

Terényi enthusiastically reported³¹ on *The Mythology of the Tree* in a 1994 essay. The writing, despite its somewhat haphazard and abstract character, can also be understood as a kind of primary interpretative framework; an early imprint, if you like, of the outline of creative intent and direction. This short reflection that emerged from reading Jankovics' volume explores the ontological necessity of sound in the alternatives between the alarming external-internal uproar that overwhelms everyday life and the timeless murmur of nature that induces inner silence (or more to the point, the music of the soul). The latter is also true in reverse: the calming man can hear the music of the trees, in contemplation the millennia-old stories and messages about us and the universe can be revealed, so that finally this music to be dissolved in the harmony of pure spirit experienced by the soul climbing up the world tree. The quotation taken from Béla Hamvas and Katalin Kemény's study of Csontvály³², which also can be found at the end of the aforementioned volume, resonates with this idea, and is reproduced here in full:

"...if we stop on our pilgrimage (The authors refer to Csontvály's painting *Pilgrimage to the Cedars in Lebanon*, painted in 1907. E.T.) and sit under it, immersed in contemplation, a miracle happens to us too. In an imperceptible moment, the moment of the disappearance of time, the tree resounds, its vivid colors transform into equally transcendental sounds, its glowing lights into pure harmony. More and more white and black riders lope under the tree, but as the rushing moment passes, they too, touching the trunk of the sacred tree, turn into music and fragrance. And finally, the timeless space absorbs the sound and the fragrance, absorbs the full sensation emanating from the tree. The full perception of the spirit is replaced by the full understanding of the spirit, the miracle. Whoever dances with the pilgrims and is ignited by the joy of the tree miraculously descending from the sky, [...] will be granted grace."³³

³¹ To illustrate this, we quote a passage: "It must be terrible for stones, trees and flowers: they cannot hear their own voices. Or are even they sensitive to sound - their own and the thousands of sounds coming from outside? Can the TREES hear what the people below them whisper? We, in any case, hear the thousands of sounds of the TREES: from the tiny crackling of branches to the rustling of leaves. Wonderful NOISE, magical MUSIC. All this came to me while reading a beautiful book. It is called THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE TREE by MARCELL JANKOVICS. Some of the evocative chapter titles are Tree calendar and Alphabet, Trees grow on the tip of my fingers, The tree that has no end, The gates of sky, etc. Terényi Ede. "Hangok által vagyunk" ("We are through sounds"). In Terényi Ede. *Paramuzikológia (Paramusicology)*. Ed. cit., pp. 250-251.

³² Csontvály Kosztká Tivadar (1853-1919), a highly original, visionary Hungarian painter of the 20th century avantgarde.

³³ Terényi Ede. "Hangok által vagyunk" ("We are through sounds"). Ed. cit., p. 251.

Why did Terényi - like Jankovics - think it was important to reproduce this passage? Presumably because it highlights the fact that the archetypal world of ancient wisdom represented by the tree can be brought to the surface and translated into contemporary artistic form by artists such as Csontváry or Makovecz. (It is no coincidence that a recurring element of the latter's buildings is the pillar-like appearance of the tree, which apparently grows out of the ground and shoots a branch towards the sky, supporting the roof structure.) Terényi thus saw the rich musical implications of the tree's meaning, which eventually took shape in the ritualistic formulation of *The Gates of Sky*. Gabriella Coca rightly calls the composition "pagan ritual music evoking shamanic memories"³⁴.

In a broader sense, the revival of the elementary, ecstatic drumming tradition during the rhythm revolution of the first half of the 20th century goes back to the so-called primitive cultures (in the spirit of the much-quoted Bülow's saying: "in the beginning was the rhythm"): above all, Stravinsky's famous *The Rite of Spring* or even the percussive character of Bartók's music (we are thinking here, for example, of his *Allegro barbaro*). Although the core of Terényi's theoretical research was the study of modern harmony,³⁵ he reflected several times on the potential of rhythm in his writings³⁶ and explored its expressive possibilities in his music (not only in his works using percussion instruments). One of the general features of his style is the repetitive character,³⁷ and one aspect of its multifaceted use is linked to an archaic approach to time.

³⁴ In Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit. p. 86.

³⁵ Main work: Ede Terényi. *The Harmony of the Modern Music*. Grafycolor, Cluj, 2006 (English version).

³⁶ Here's a passage from one of his essays about the remarkable precursor of this revolution, Carl Orff: "Rhythm is everything! And the truest interpreters of this are percussion instruments. He »treats« all other instruments as percussions, strings as well as a wide variety of wind instruments. The KNOCKED TONE becomes a symbol. The sharply rising accent, which either disappears immediately into nothingness - secco (dry!) effect - or strangely, sometimes hauntingly, continues to resound in SPACE, as if it were a cry. These are magical effects, in a magical world of motif repetition heightened to the extreme. Shamanistic music, more barbaric, more primitive than any of his contemporaries. Its melodies recall shamanistic drawings or the primitive melodies of the »sunken« Middle Ages. Their beauty lies in their very magic. Orff writes MAGIC-MUSIC. He is both a shaman and a medieval alchemist." In Terényi Ede. *Paramuzikológia (Paramusicology)*. Ed. cit., p. 209.

³⁷ He himself expressed this idea: "My repetitive tendency is most strongly reflected in my works. That is why one of my critics remarked: »E.T. was composing repetitive music before it had even been invented«. I think that is a correct statement. The structure of repetitive music is similar, and sometimes identical to the way a plant produces and repeats its leaves one after the other. Here, the previous idea (of the structure of music based on natural models) can be expressed in this way." In Balázs Sándor. "Öt érzék és a lélek harmóniája. Terényi Ede zeneszerzővel Balázs Sándor beszélget" ("Five senses and harmony of the soul. Sándor Balázs talks to composer Ede Terényi."). Ed. cit., p. 67.

However, Terényi - again in the vein of Jankovics' book - goes beyond the sound world that can be musically evoked from shamanism, and points to another more general correlation of the question. In his essay entitled *Artists – or Shamans?* (2001) we read among other things:

“The shaman travels between worlds: he forms a bridge between the earth and the cosmos. His journey is accompanied by drumbeat, incantation, particular costume, and dance, from rhythmic movements to »chaotic« gesticulations expressing a state of ecstasy.

The artist follows the same path, but his shamanic journey is not spectacular and remains a secret to the uninitiated. What we can glimpse of his cosmic journey - is the work of art.”³⁸

He goes on to explain why, in his view, the true artist is like the shaman, and why the ritual nature of the work is not a mere program, a surface, but an essential, inner component. From the context we can also deduce that the tree on which the latter travels between the lower and the higher worlds is identical with the work, at least it is an imaginary copy of it as a creative and performative “tool”.

2. Text motto, titles

In the second step, we will examine the way in which Terényi, inspired by Jankovics' work, developed the immediate meaning layers of his music. Therefore, we ourselves rely mostly on this source, which, due to its complexity, we summarize instead of quoting.³⁹

Although the textual motto does not appear in the first edition, we consider that it can be applied to it. For the two short quotations from *The Mythology of the Tree* are a concise summary of the worldview on which the composition is based, above all in relation to the first movement, which evokes a shamanic ritual. Quote:

„The passage to the upper world is at the branching of the trunk, or at the top of the world tree. The shaman in the sacred yurt places his tree in a pit so the greenery of the tree could look out at the smoke vent. The pit represents the passage to the underworld, the smoke vents the crossing to the upper world. [...] The shaman, the *táltos*⁴⁰ did not climb up his tree only

³⁸ Terényi Ede. *Zene tegnáp, ma, holnap (Music yesterday, today and tomorrow)*. Ed. cit., pp. 24-25. It appeared originally in *Helikon*, Vol. 12, No. 18, 2001. September 25.

³⁹ We also use as a supplementary reference the following volume: Hoppál-Jankovics-Nagy-Szmadám [eds.]. *Jelképtár (Dictionary of Symbols)*, second, revised edition. Helikon Kiadó, Budapest, 1994.

⁴⁰ „Táltos: 1. a person of supernatural power in the Hungarian folk beliefs, who became a *táltos* as a result of the ordination of supernatural beings. [...] He knew everything, prophesized, told where there was treasure in the earth, caused and dispersed hail and storms, his body was not

at spiritual journeys, he also did it when he prayed for rain, when he looked in the past or in the future, when he wanted to find the lost sheep, when he wanted to talk to the dead, when he lighted the »sunfire« in midsummer, or sacrificed animals. Whatever he had to do, his tree was always apart from his road to the skies.”⁴¹

Terényi refers to the various attributes of the tree in the titles of all three movements, which can be found in the same volume as the title of the work. A sketch of these is given below.

The tree, as a universal symbol, has played a central role in the worldview of ancient cultures in particular, and can be found in folklore, but its imprint is also preserved in European civilization with Greco-Roman and Christian roots (we are thinking here of myths and scripture, to mention just two significant examples). It is linked to the duality of life and death, knowledge, nourishment, growth, and the eternal cycle of life, it has a spatial and temporal quality, the latter also in its cyclical and irreversible aspect, it contains the male and female principles, and in a broader sense it is an archetypal model of the cosmic order.

Its threefold articulation (root, trunk, crown) carries multiple meanings. In spatial terms, it connects the worlds along which souls and shamans travel (historically related images are the mountain, the temple, the pillar, the bridge, the ladder, etc.); in Christian culture it is analogous to the three “places” of the soul’s state (Hell, Purgatory, Paradise); in temporal terms it corresponds to the triad of past-present-future; Jungian psychology sees it as a symbol of the unconscious, conscious and the higher self.

The *World Tree* (1st Movement) carries the most ancient, almost timeless layers of representations associated with the tree (with a fairy-tale idiom: “once upon a time...”). The fairy tales have preserved it in the image of a tree that reached the sky.⁴² For our ancestors, it was a vegetable expression of the supreme mother goddess (*Celestial Mother, Divine Mother, Heavenly Lady*), and the sun on top of it refers to her “son”, the first man,

touched by bullets. His typical activity is fighting. [...] The purpose of the fight is to correct the weather, to turn it for good or bad. They knew in advance where, when, in what shape and with whom they would have to fight.” In Ortutay Gyula [ed.]. *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon (Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopedia)*, Volume V. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1982, p. 168.

⁴¹ Jankovics Marcell. *Op. cit.*, pp. 223 and 201.

⁴² A tree that reached the sky, a tree without a top: a fairy-tale representation of the world tree. According to the Hungarian Ethnographic Dictionary, “Sándor Solymossy and Vilmos Diószegi also consider it a typical shamanistic type brought with us from the East and identify the image with the tree of shamanic ceremony, on whose steps the shaman walks the 7 (9) layers of the sky.” In Ortutay Gyula [ed.]. *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon (Hungarian Ethnographic Encyclopedia)*, Volume I. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1977, p. 640.

symbolized by the summer solstice.⁴³ Its roots reach into the underworld (from which a river sometimes emerges), its trunk is associated with nourishment (milk, resin, myrrh) and knowledge (a huge snake coiled around it as the guardian of the tree), its foliage is identical to the sky (heavenly dome), and its fruits are the planets and the stars. In a general sense, it represented the cosmic order, and can therefore be considered a cosmic tree, whose archetype is the Milky Way.

The significance of the *Soul Tree* (2nd Movement) can be traced back to the ancient animistic belief. Thus, all living things, including plants, are inhabited by a soul or spirit, which is expressed in the cultic tree worship of the ancients. Its imprint is preserved, for example, in the humanized (talking, advising, etc.) trees of fairy tales and legends. In many cultures it was a common belief that man had several souls. Therefore, when a child was born, a tree was planted and believed to be equally at home there, so the condition of the plant was seen as a measure of vitality, health, or a sign of destiny. This is also expressed symbolically by the motifs that often decorate the headstone ("dead" tree) on the grave of the deceased, often depicting a tree or a flower. At birth and death souls passed through the world tree. In the same way, the shaman travelled between heaven and earth in its miniature version, i.e., the shaman tree (which he actually climbed), representing his own soul tree. It was originally a living tree, and its growth and death marked the endpoints of the shaman's activity.

The concept of the *Tree of Life* (3rd Movement) also appears frequently in the context of the world tree. The latter refers to the spatial structure of the cosmos, the former to the life-giving emanation expressed in the symbol of the tree. It is also found as an otherworldly form of the world tree, where souls await birth in the form of a bird on its branches and return there after the completion of their lifetime. In a broad sense, it refers to the eternal source of all life and nourishment (see the *Milky Way*), in ancient tradition it carries the principle of motherhood ("the Divine Mother created the Sun"), in popular culture it is associated with the unfolding of life and with significant moments in the human journey (branch, bud, flower, greening life trees).

Of the three tree concepts, this is perhaps the one that has been given the greatest significance in Christianity. In this sense, the *Virgin Mary* ("*Queen of Heaven*") is the last sprout of the *Tree of Life*, in whom the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, was conceived without sin (according to his revelation, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" John 14:6). The cross (Latin: *lignum vitae*) was identified in the Middle Ages with the biblical tree of Eden (Latin: *arbor vitae*), which brings forth new fruit in the

⁴³ "The shaman [...] lighted the »sunfire« in midsummer." Cf. the text referenced in footnote 41.

sacrament of the altar, and from its root springs the water of life, which is represented by the wine, that is, the blood of Christ (“I am the vine; you are the branches” John 15:5).

Finally, a few thoughts on the title of the work (*The Gates of Sky*). The term gates may refer to the transit points between worlds expressed in the structure of the world tree, and their astronomical equivalents seems to be the calendar nodes (turns)⁴⁴ and the cardinal points (symbols of the latter, as other cosmic figures are found, for example, on Siberian shamanic drums). Jankovics distinguishes two ways of crossing. According to the horizontal one, there is a moving canopy or curtain of sky at the edge of the Earth, through which only the fast-moving Birds (that is, souls) pass to the other firmament beyond the horizon. Its vertical form is represented by the world tree (or its analogue: the world pillar). The rot at the base (the excavated pit in the case of a pillar) leads to the underworld, and the upper branch of the trunk (the upper smoke hole in the case of a tree placed in a yurt) leads to the upper one.

The crossing is strictly regulated in tradition (in folktales, for example, it is subject to challenges) and dangerous for the mere mortal. Therefore, it could only be performed by selected, initiated persons for various purposes (e.g., helping souls to cross over, transcendental communication, healing, divination, magic, driving away evil spirits, etc.). Such persons were, among others, the Siberian shamans, or their Hungarian equivalents, the *táltos*. The journey takes place in a ritual state of trance. The drum as the main magical instrument (the fairy-tale equivalent of the steed, the *táltos*' horse - both are fed with embers), which evokes the ancient rhythm of the universe, is here a prominent element.⁴⁵

Finally, the gateway between the worlds is not unknown to Christianity, think of St Peter, the guardian of heaven. Furthermore, tradition has identified Virgin Mary with the “*Gate of Sky*”, an attribute rooted in the ancient astral belief that at the winter solstice the Son of God is born in the cleft of the *Milky Way* (*Progenitress*), i.e., the sun rises.

3. Text sources

From the above, it can be seen that this syncretic worldview, which transcends time and culture, carries a rich range of meanings, which the composer further clarifies in the choice of texts, starting from the titles of the individual movements. Gabriela Coca, in her mentioned article, refers to the

⁴⁴ The winter and summer solstices were also called the gates of the year. Cf. Jankovics Marcell. *Op. cit.* See the chapter *The Gates of Sky*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Diószegi Vilmos. *Samanizmus (Shamanism)*, second edition. Terebess Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, Chapter VI.

fact that Terényi gave priority to lesser-known sources when composing his choral works.⁴⁶ We believe that in our case this statement is particularly true.

While the third movement was provided with a precise reference (Erdélyi Zsuzsanna: "*Climbing the mountain, down to the valley*"⁴⁷ nr. 3), the first two were left somewhat obscure by the designation "folk text". This is probably because the latter cannot be traced back to a single source. In a general sense, all three can be described as folk, and - in an archaic sense - sacral. Although they represent different aspects of the worldview expressed in the tree, and are historically and culturally linked to various strata, they are in fact spiritual sprouts of the same strain.

Below, we quote the texts of each of the three movements, and then discuss the question of sources and possible readings.

1st Movement: World Tree

„... at the gateway of hell
rises a large oak”

...

„Heavenly lady, mother of all
Heavenly lady,
Heavenly dome,
Heaven veil,
DIVINE TREE.

The world's resounding tree.

The branches are reaching heaven.

... surrounded with eggshells, resting in a meadow of diamonds...

We have not been able to identify the source, at least in this coherent form. All the concepts contained in it can be found in Jankovics' book, so it is possible that the composer himself compiled it. Its special feature is that it combines the archaic elements of shamanistic tree worship with the world of Hungarian folk tales.

⁴⁶ "Ede Terényi followed a road less travelled and was inspired by rare, little-known poems." In Coca Gabriela. "Terényi Ede kórusművészete" ("The choral art of Ede Terényi"). Ed. cit. p. 85.

⁴⁷ Erdélyi Zsuzsanna. *Hegyet hágék, lőtőt lépék (Climbing the mountain, down to the valley)*, second edition. Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1976.

At its center is the image of the cosmic ancestral mother (Heavenly Lady, Mother of All). The associated visual metaphors (Heavenly dome,⁴⁸ Heaven veil⁴⁹) refer to the so-called horizontal crossing points between sky and earth, mentioned earlier. The term DIVINE TREE⁵⁰ presumably denotes the imaginary pillar of the world holding up the sky, evolved from the image of the world tree, and whose earthly counterpart is the shaman tree⁵¹. The rest of the text evokes analogies and mythical fairy-tale moments preserved in Hungarian folklore, which can be traced back to shamanic roots, sometimes directly or indirectly related to the activity of the *táltos*. These include „the world’s resounding tree”⁵² associated with the “Divine tree”, which can also be understood as a musical metaphor for the world tree⁵³, and the image of the tree that reached the sky (“The branches are reaching heaven”).

The archaic text elements of the movement are framed by the opening and closing passages of a folktale, *The Brown Cow’s Son* (“...at the gateway of hell rises a large oak” and “...surrounded with eggshells, resting in a meadow of diamonds...”⁵⁴). They correspond to two distant points on the

⁴⁸ The tent is also a symbol of the sky, and its earthly counterpart is the yurt, the accommodation of nomadic peoples. Cf. Hoppál-Jankovics-Nagy-Szemadám [eds.]. *Jelképtár (Dictionary of Symbols)*. Ed. cit., pp. 188-189.

⁴⁹ According to Jankovics, in some Siberian peoples it corresponds to the silk skirt of the Milky Way goddess, the bottom of which waves up and down. Its analogy can be found in the moving sky tent. Cf. Jankovics Marcell. *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁵⁰ The capitalized form of the word here may refer to its archetypal (cosmic) antecedent, but it may also be a sign of cultic veneration, invocation or exaltation. Another name for the divine tree is the forked pole used to mount (or even anchor) the yurt’s roof structure, usually decorated with painted or carved world-tree motifs.

⁵¹ Terényi, in his aforementioned essay entitled *Artists - or Shamans?* adopts the legend of the Siberian Yakuts quoted in Jankovics’ book. In Terényi Ede. *Zene tegnap, ma, holnap (Music yesterday, today and tomorrow)*. Ed. cit., p. 24. Original source: Diószegi Vilmos. *A pogány magyarok hitvilága (The Beliefs of the Pagan Hungarians)*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1978, p. 93. According to this the first shaman, created by the Lord of the World, who dwells in the ninth heaven, grew a sacred tree opposite the door of his home: the *туру*, which has 8 branches. To commemorate this, every shaman on earth has his own *туру*, on which he travels to the upper world.

⁵² It appears, for example, in some versions of the Hungarian folk tales *Jankalovics, The Golden-Feathered Bird* and *The Hedgehog*, as an object of challenge to be obtained under dangerous circumstances. The hero is sometimes accompanied by a helper, who may have the characteristics of a *táltos* (e.g., Jankalovics).

⁵³ The “tree resounds”, the colours “turn into endless sounds”, the “lights into pure harmony” and all this into music - echoes Terényi’s earlier quoted essay (*We are through sounds*) the key concepts of Béla Hamvas and Katalin Kemény’ Csontváry study. In Terényi Ede. *Artists - or Shamans?* Ed. cit., p. 25.

⁵⁴ The ellipsis at the beginning and end of the two quotes refer to the timelessness of the story. See for example typical phrases like “once upon a time” and “they are still alive today, if they are not dead”.

world tree, between which the contests of the “good” and “evil” forces take place: the first is the underworld passage at the root, and the second is the various forks marking the meeting of the trunk and the sky, which in our case are divided into the spheres of silver, gold and diamonds. The eggshell, meadow of diamonds, as fairy-tale twists, signify not only the happy ending⁵⁵ but also the furthest place on the world tree. According to Jankovics, these two symbols “represent the outer shell of the stars of the universe.”⁵⁶ It seems thus, that it was important for Terényi - in all three movements, by the way - to emphasize the Hungarian aspects of the tree worship, so that this story also contains several elements related to the activity of a *táltos*.⁵⁷

The logical-narrative incoherence of the text shows its ritual nature and function.⁵⁸ One could also say that the words spoken and sung here are more like incantations (especially the invocation of the Heavenly Lady), that is, they are a means of bringing the shamanic ritual to life in an effective artistic way. This was most certainly the movement that the composer had in mind when he included this 1996 version under the name of Ritual in *The Gates of Sky* trilogy (2003) as its first part.

2nd Movement: Soul Tree

In the center of the round woods,
Is a grieving cemetery,
There is my darling's house,
Where red roses grow.

I have planted those flowers,
Watered them with my tears.

In the center of the round woods,
Live two pretty birds.
If i could catch one of them,
I would close it in my heart.

⁵⁵ For Jankovics, the eggshell symbolizes the fairytale fulfilment of love. In Jankovics Marcell. *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ Idem, pp. 198-199.

⁵⁷ Such is the case of the figure of the *táltos* cow, the fight with the bull, etc. Cf. Diószegi Vilmos. *Samanizmus (Shamanism)*, second edition. *Ed. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁸ According to Vilmos Diószegi, improvisation is common in shamanic ceremonies. Cf. *ibid.* See Dramatic play: the shaman's “journey” subsection.

Its source is two old-style folk songs from Szeklerland that begin with the same text. The first six lines are part of a soldier's song⁵⁹ from a Kallós⁶⁰ collection, which the composer may have known from an audio record⁶¹. The last four are from a Bartók collection⁶², which appears in its entirety.

The choice is likely to have been influenced by several factors. Since Terényi also made use of their melody⁶³, compositional considerations seem to be primary, but at the same time this region had not only musical but also symbolic significance⁶⁴, as in the case of the following movement. The starting point could have been Jankovics' book, who quoted a version of the text⁶⁵ and later expressed his thoughts on the amorous and even erotic aspects of the forest theme.⁶⁶ Terényi's concept seems to point in a somewhat different direction, at least as indicated by the title of the movement and the dialogue-like linking of the two texts.

If we consider the threefold worldview expressed in the tree symbol, the analogy of which seems to be reflected in the structure of the work, the second component, the trunk, would be the equivalent of human life. Without denying the cultural impact of the secularization observed in the historical development of this topic, in this case we must consider the title (soul tree) as a guiding principle. The concept, as explained earlier, carries the double syncretic manifestation of the soul (or spirit) in the interconnected earthly existence of the human body and the tree that is connected to it. It is worth mentioning here the interpretation of the ethnographer Vilmos Tánzos, who discusses the forest as a symbol in two approaches. According to the first

⁵⁹ Lunca de Jos - Trei fântâni (Ciuc), July-August 1962. Informant: Károlyné Oltyán, Teréz Páll. Source: https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/ZTI_AP_04641-04670. Accessed 9 July 2023.

⁶⁰ Zoltán Kallós (1926-2018), a prominent Transylvanian ethnographer and folklorist.

⁶¹ In several of his writings he has confessed his passion for collecting records and listening to music. In one of them, he gave an account of another Kallós-album related to the third movement, so it is possible to have known the 1988 disc entitled *Vágják az erdei utat. Erdélyi katonadalok (They cutting down the forest road. Transylvanian Soldier's Songs)*, that contains the folk song recording in question. Source: http://album.hagyományokháza.hu/album/felvetel_show.php?id=17714. Accessed 9 July 2023.

⁶² Racu (Csík County), July 1907. Source: <http://systems.zti.hu/br/hu/search/12918>. Accessed 9 July 2023.

⁶³ To the best of our knowledge, this is the only clearly identifiable borrowed melodic material of the choral work.

⁶⁴ As became clear from Bartók's early collections, the Szeklerland region preserved the best the most ancient (e.g. pentatonic) layers of Hungarian folk music.

⁶⁵ The folk song with this beginning line has survived in many textual and melodic versions not only in Transylvania, but also in the present Hungary.

⁶⁶ See the chapter "Ezt a kerek erdőt járom én" ("I walk this round forest"). In interpreting folk songs in this direction, he relied mostly on the works of Béla Bernáth. Cf. Bernáth Béla. *A szerelem titkos nyelvén (In the secret language of love)*. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1986.

one, it is “the sanctuary of nature, *the scene of initiation*, the place of transition to another state of soul, *i.e. death*.”⁶⁷ On the second, he writes: “The symbolism of the forest also has an erotic aspect. This rich and mysteriously lyrical symbolism is created by the simultaneous presence of two archetypal images: on the one hand, the forest is a closed place, a symbol of intimacy and happiness, and on the other, by its vegetal nature, a symbol of life and fertility.”⁶⁸ Later, reflecting on Béla Bernáth’s sexually explicit interpretations (referring to genitals), he adds, “It is undoubtedly true that the basic orientation of the forest symbolism is erotic, but one can hardly agree with such a »clear translation« of the language of symbols.”⁶⁹

In our view, the texts chosen for this movement are more personal expressions of the pain felt over the passing and the unattainability of love, embedded in natural imagery. In both cases, the lyric self is a woman⁷⁰. The first folk-text excerpt is about the grief over a loved one (“my darling”) who probably died in the army. The “house” here represents the grave⁷¹, the red roses growing on it correspond to her lover whom she weeps for⁷² and cherishes his memory (“Watered them with my tears”). The round woods here refer rather to enclosure, in a temporal sense to irrevocability (the phrase is in the past tense). If we relate the second song’s text to the first, the bird in the context of the woods may be a male symbol⁷³, but here it is probably more the expression of the soul’s freedom (which is not limited by the enclosure of the round woods), even if it’s formulated in the context of desire.

⁶⁷ Tánczos Vilmos. *Folklórszimbólumok (Folklore Symbols)*. Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Kolozsvár, 2006, p. 197.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p. 198.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ In fact, the feminine quality, even if it takes different forms of expression, is common to all the movements.

⁷¹ As a feminine principle, it is reminiscent of the womb, here associated with concepts of eternal refuge and rest (final resting place). Cf. Pál József - Újvári Edit [eds.]. *Szimbólumtár. Jelképek, motívumok, témák az egyetemes és a magyar kultúrából (Dictionary of Symbols. Symbols, Motifs, Themes from the Universal and Hungarian Culture)*. Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 1997, p. 158.

⁷² The rest of the folk song, which consists of six sections, is mostly about longing for the loved one and the never-ending lamentation.

⁷³ Cf. Tánczos Vilmos. *Op. cit.*, p. 198.

3rd Movement: Life Tree

... Blessed Virgin Mary with her blessed child departed,
in her white veil,
With three candles to the holy church to celebration,
On the way she met with women bearing ill breezes,
Blessed Virgin Mary asked where they went,
We are headed towards the bosom of the Rose
- what sort of name is this, perhaps is diseased –
Let's wilt his heart, his liver, clot his red blood,
Turn around, turn around, don't go to the bosom of the Rose
Don't wilt his heart, his liver,
Don't clot his red blood,
Go to the botton of the ocean,
There you find your laid table, your dinner,
I will be here tomorrow noon,
I will tie your stalls,
For the Rose to remain pure, like a new-born,
Mary gave him to this world, amen.

...

I surround him with a candle... I light it, I place two this way, I light one and I tell a verse, then I put out the first one, light another one, repeat it nine times, until I finish the three verses three times, therefore every vers nine times...

Jankovics repeatedly refers to Zsuzsanna Erdélyi's work⁷⁴ mentioned above, a volume of archaic folk prayers, mainly to illustrate how the ancient representations of wood were incorporated into the symbolism of the Christian culture. This book was not new to Terényi, but the disc⁷⁵ that brought this special repertoire within earshot was. He recounted the experience in an essay ("*Lord, have mercy on us*") in 1994. We quote an extract from it:

"A former student of mine surprised me with a beautiful disc: István Pávai personally brought me the folksong collection entitled *Hungarian hymns and prayers from Moldavia*, edited by him and selected from the collection of Zoltán Kallós. I was very pleased to receive the disc, in fact this is the first time I have heard such a series of recordings. I have been using Zsuzsanna Erdélyi's outstanding book for a long time. I also keep in my memory the beautiful appreciating words of Ferenc Juhász: »I call these

⁷⁴ Erdélyi Zsuzsanna. *Op. cit.*

⁷⁵ *Lord, have mercy on us! Hungarian hymns and prayers from Moldavia.* [Collected by Kallós Zoltán. Edited by Pávai István.] Pentaton, ST-CS 0309 record. Târgu Mures, 1993.

prayers, which the people have lived, and which have lived secretly in our people for centuries, like the most luminous layer of our folk poetry. And their beauty and power are not only in their content, but also in their language, for when I hear them, I am so powerfully moved by the beauty, courage, purity and vision of my people's spoken language that I can only smile and weep sweetly in my poet-heart, amazed and ashamed, like in the music-vortexes and blazing visions of Béla Bartók«.

[...] while listening to the album - I was amazed and ashamed to discover in my musician heart the spiritual swirls of a hitherto hidden world, the fervent confessions of faith, the infinite subtlety of the inner ripples of a man who turns inward. For these prayers and supplications are strictly interior. They are not recited in the context of the liturgy but are at most imaginatively associated with it. They are not formally accepted or distributed. They have remained the innermost secrets of the soul, of souls to this day.”⁷⁶

The semantic field of the third movement's title is related to the source of life emanating from the higher world, evoking the visual analogy of the canopy, where the branches of the tree meet the different layers of the sky. As mentioned above, the *arbor vitae* (tree of life), as one of the trees of paradise, became increasingly identified with the tree of the cross (*lignum vitae*) from the Middle Ages onwards, and thus became a symbol of redemption through suffering and the promise of eternal life.⁷⁷ This actually makes shamanic journeys on the world tree meaningless, which eventually gives way to prayer. But the former beliefs have not completely disappeared. As Erdélyi writes of the praying elders: “With words, prayer, singing and chanting, they could set up a ladder. They would climb frequently on it because they often had a reason to. In the end, they got so into it that were »almost flying like a thought«. The thought flew, but the body stayed on the ground.”⁷⁸

Although Christian salvation history has changed over the millennia the very foundations of the old faith, the beliefs of the past, preserved in the depths of the popular psyche, have to some extent resisted the attempts of the church to fully enforce its dogma. The common man had to cope with the problems of everyday life and the fears of his helplessness, for which religion offered only a partial solution. This unmet spiritual need led them to turn eagerly to heavenly help outside the Church, above all to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, whom they saw as the main patrons of their self-defence practices handed down by their ancestors. All of this was put together in a sung or spoken folkloric lyric, highly layered in its historical motifs, concise

⁷⁶ Terényi Ede. *Zene, költői világ (Music, Poetic World)*. Grafycolor, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 254.

⁷⁷ Cf. Erdélyi Zsuzsanna. *Op. cit.*, p. 518, footnote 146.

⁷⁸ In idem, *Introduction*.

and archaic in language, with a central theme of the evocation of suffering and the underlying hope in caring love.⁷⁹

It could even be surprising that Terényi has chosen from among the texts that preserve the most the pagan memories and practices, which were collected also by Kallós in 1971 (informant: Jánosné Harangozó, Margit Bartos, 70 years old) in the same Moldavian Csángó village of Lespezi, from where part of the material of the previously mentioned disc originates.⁸⁰ Erdélyi, according to its stratification classifies it as a mixed (pagan-Christian) one, and by its function it considers to be a rune⁸¹. However, in her book she also discusses the similarities and differences between prayer and rune.⁸² Szilvia Takács also draws attention to the fact that it is not always possible to draw a clear line between the two, so she uses the concept of epic rune for certain intermediate instances.⁸³ The epic frame is also present in our case, but because of the function given by the informant (Seizing the scare⁸⁴) it is rather a rune. (True, the text ends with a clause followed by the word amen.) Erdélyi makes the following clarification about the latter: “A highly

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ Erdélyi's volume contains three of these prayers. The text in question is not on the disc, but is available in audio form in the database of the *Folk Music Collection* of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: <https://zti.hungaricana.hu/en/audio/8533/>. Accessed 16 July 2023.

⁸¹ As a magical form, the rune has been widely used in several areas of everyday life in order to attain positive or negative influence. Thus, it has a somewhat similar role to that of shamanic rituals (e.g. warding off evil, healing, protection, etc.). The essential difference, however, is that it is less commanding or ecstatic, based more on a belief in the magical power of the words. Cf. Ortutay Gyula [ed.]. *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon (Hungarian Ethnographic Lexicon)*, Volume IV. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1981, pp. 304-305.

⁸² “In the people's consciousness, the identification of prayer and rune is almost natural, since both have their origin in the belief that the word has a special power to influence supernatural forces. As our historical examples show, certain elements of the rune and prayer texts can overlap. The difference lies in the manner of recitation and the use of stylistic forms to achieve the desired purpose. In the rune, the desired purpose is achieved by the will, the compelling force of the speaker towards the person addressed, and this is what the imperative forms are for. In prayer, on the other hand, there is a request, the fulfilment of which requires the will, the intention, the love of the higher power addressed, flowing from the praying to the prayer.” In Erdélyi Zsuzsanna. *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

⁸³ Cf. Takács Szilvia. *A nyelvi mágia eszközei az epikus ráolvasó imádságokban (The Tools of Verbal Charms in Epic Prayers)*. Doctoral dissertation. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Budapest, 2004, pp. 108-109. In the following, the structure and meanings of the text are described based on this work.

⁸⁴ The Hungarian word “kerítés” suggests a ritual possession (to enclose something), in our case the forces that cause disease. Cf. Tánczos Vilmos. *Nyiss kaput, angyal! Moldvai csángó népi imádságok. Archetipikus szimbolizáció és élettér (Angel, open the door! Archetypal symbolism and life space)*. Püski Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, p. 100.

archaic and rare variant of text for encountering and dismissing the disease demon.”⁸⁵

Based on Takács’ analytical model, we find in it the tripartite spatial structure characteristic of the medieval worldview (1. sacral space: the holy church, 2. “land of the curse”: bottom of the ocean, 3. earthly life space: human body); we can also discover the timelessness of the sacral dimension (the making present of some sacred event to erase the causes of an undesirable situation existing in time – here: illness). Participants: the healer-benefactor (the Blessed Virgin Mary), the women embodying the evil spirit, the sick person or animal, the person who casts the rune (“I surround him with a candle ...⁸⁶).

The text can be divided into the following moments, content, and plot units:

Table 2

A	Origin, delimitation	Character, plot description	Attributes
a1	„Departed”-formula	The Virgin Mary goes to church with her holy son to attend the mass.	She is wearing a white veil, holding three candles.
a2	The encounter	With the women of destructive power.	They bear ill breezes.
a3	Question, interrogation	Where are you going?	
a4	Answer	Towards the bosom of the Rose [...] Let’s wilt his heart, his liver, clot, his red blood.	
D	Imperative		
d1	Command	Turn around, turn around...	
d2	Ban	Don’t go the bosom of the Rose...	
E	Misleading	Go to the bottom of the ocean...	
F	Threats	I will tie your stalls...	
I	Clause	For the Rose to remain pure, like a new-born, Mary gave him to this world, amen.	

The epic framework of the third movement’s text

⁸⁵ Erdélyi Zsuzsanna. *Op. cit.*, footnote 101, p. 508.

⁸⁶ This concluding passage was given at the collector’s request, in which the informant details the performance of the ritual.

In our view, several factors may have played a role in Terényi's particular choice of text. On the one hand, as we have read, he was fascinated by the beauty of the Csángó⁸⁷ dialect as he experienced in its sounding reality, and by the pure and sincere, sometimes dramatic devotion to God behind the prayers. Secondly, he may have felt the relevance of its archaic and ritualistic features, which serve as a unifying factor for the work as a whole. (If you like: they approach the meanings carried by the world tree in an organic way, signalling that in sacrality, roots are as important as trunk or canopy, in a historical and spiritual sense.⁸⁸) Thirdly, he also makes a statement of faith in eternal life as the conclusion of the work, indicating that ascension is only possible through the redemption of Christ. It is not so much a synthetic trinitarianism in the - theologically conceived - Dantean sense that prevails, but rather the unifying force of the different phases of organic faith development. And the ritual character of all this points to the importance of experience, in which, as we will examine in our next paper, music can play a primary role.

Partial conclusions

Thanks to Terényi's many disciples, for whose kind help we are grateful, and to the rich statements of the author, we consider that the most important data concerning the history of the origins of *The Gates of Sky* are relatively well available. In addition to the difficulties of dealing with primary sources, the greatest challenge for the researcher is the composer's bewilderingly complex and multifaceted way of thinking and worldview, which - at least in the case of the present work - goes far beyond purely musical issues, so that the real conception of the message can only be reconstructed in traces. The creative sensibility that we have noted in another study about his essays,⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Hungarian ethnic group of Roman Catholic faith. They live mostly in Moldavia region of Romania (especially Bacău County).

⁸⁸ We quote in this respect his motto for the third movement of the Seven Towered-Castle, entitled *The Reflection of Roots*: "The canopy of the tree opens its branches and leaves to the SKY with delight, but what would its proud radiance be without the ROOTS that open out to the depths. Beneath the glass of our imagination, we see the roots of the tree, the ROOTS OF THE WORLD-TREE." In Terényi Ede. *A hét torony (The Seven Towered-Castle)*. Grafycolor, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, p. 89.

⁸⁹ "The living in the moment, as a continuous pursuit, is as much a mode of approach as it is a frequent (if not the most frequent) subject of his writings. His essays show him not as a dreamer locked in his room, but as a thinker who breathes with the times, keeping all his senses on the very pulse of the present. His refined hearing, his colour vision, his affinity for nuance and his extraordinary openness make him a highly sensitive barometer of his times." In Fodor Attila. "Zenén innen, zenén túl – Terényi Ede az esszéíró" ("Music Hither and Beyond - Ede Terényi the Essayist"). Ed. cit. p. 50.

as it turned out for us, is even more important in the process of composition. In the case of the present work, the passion and care with which he approaches his chosen subject is certainly remarkable. It would be impossible to list all the impulses that vibrate in the conception of *The Gates of Sky*. We have tried to mention and contextualize the discoverable part of these in this paper without claiming completeness. In a forthcoming study, we will examine in detail the way in which the poetic message takes a musical expression and thus adds new layers of meaning.

Translated into English by Attila Fodor

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