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GYÖRGY KURTÁG'S *KAFKA FRAGMENTS*, OP. 24:

FRAGMENT AS FORM

By

Kaitlin Cavanaugh Doyle

B.M. Baldwin-Wallace College and Conservatory of Music, 2007

M.M. Music Performance, University of Louisville, 2010

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
School of Music of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Music

School of Music  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011



GYÖRGY KURTÁG'S *KAFKA FRAGMENTS*, OP. 24:  
FRAGMENT AS FORM


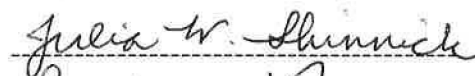
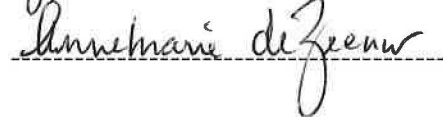
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A Thesis Approved on

April 12, 2011

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Thank you to my beloved parents and brothers, and thanks to A.

## ABSTRACT

### GYÖRGY KURTÁG'S *KAFKA FRAGMENTS*, OP. 24: FRAGMENT AS FORM

Kaitlin Cavanaugh Doyle

April 12, 2011

This paper discusses the *Kafka Fragments* for Soprano and Violin, a work of forty movements composed by Hungarian composer, György Kurtág, in 1985 through 1987. The piece is based Kurtág's own compilation of fragments written by Franz Kafka, which were taken from Kafka's diaries, personal letters, and *Blue Octavio Notebooks*. They are some of the most personal and intimate examples that exist within Kafka's body of writing. The paper primarily addresses Kurtág's compositional process as illustrated through the *Kafka Fragments* and attempts to provide insight about his especially unique qualities as a composer. The main topics of the paper include a discussion of Kurtág's sensitivity to Kafka's text, a proposed analysis of Kurtág's compositional procedures, and an investigation of the extra-musical elements that effect Kurtág's overall process. In conclusion, this study finds Kurtág to be of positive value to study as a model of contemporary composition because of his particularly "organic" way of creating and developing a musical idea.

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## INTRODUCTION

The composers and writers of the German Romantic era shared a relationship of mutual inspiration that became a defining element of the genre. Author Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810) spoke of the incredible influence of music in regards to its power as a means of human connection. An emphasis on music was promoted by Ritter and other writers, such as Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schiller, ETA Hoffman, and Novalis, and it came to be considered “the most Romantic of the arts.” The enthusiasm for the relationship between music and writing encouraged by the literary world was also shared by composers. Musical composers began to include literary accompaniments to their programs in a variety of verbal material. Thus, works were premiered like the tone poems of Franz Liszt and the programmatic symphonies of Hector Berlioz. The composer Robert Schumann, also a writer himself, is a particularly important example of the relationship between literature and music in the German Romantic period. Schumann went beyond associating his music with verbal material or incorporating programmatic elements, as the literature of his favorite authors became a source of inspiration and an essential part of his creative life. In his writing, and specifically, in his music criticism, Schumann developed two characters to convey his ideas who were opposite in character. One was Florestan, an elegant, opinionated, and fiery character, the other Eusebius, a mild, sensitive, and humble character. It has been strongly suggested that Florestan and Eusebius were modeled after Walt and Vult, two characters from a work by one of



Schumann's most beloved authors, Jean-Paul. They stayed with Schumann throughout the remainder of his life, channeling his voice in his work. These literary characters in addition to other influences from literature became an inseparable part of his creative work and personality. In this way, Schumann is unique among composers.

György Kurtág, a Hungarian composer born in 1926, embraces Schumann's interdisciplinary approach to music. In his work, Kurtág's association with literature and personal influences, seen so clearly in his repertoire is a unique example of musical composition. Kurtág's music is informed by history and driven by a deep sense of personal autobiography. Though intensely modern, his music is rich with a sense of ancestry. Pianist Marino Formenti states:

I think that in Kurtág's music, one can recognize a quite nearly obsessive relationship with our common musical tradition. One could say that his music is influenced by both the various productive forces and the burdens of our musical history in general. Burdens, productive forces that are also, of course, our own -- meaning that Kurtág's ghosts are, in fact, our ghosts as well. By ghosts, of course, we mean the great composers of the past to whom we are closely connected.<sup>1</sup>

Kurtág's music pays tribute to the ideals of earlier eras of our Western musical history and exemplifies a sensitivity to time that makes him unique among other composers.

Franz Kafka, one of the authors closest to Kurtág's spirit, shared the composer's universal quality. Though he died in 1924, Kafka's writing is considered to be prophetic beyond his own time. Kurtág, born two years after the writer's death, saw a kindred spirit in Kafka and a sensitivity that appealed to his own aesthetic sense. Their backgrounds are similar. Both men are of Jewish heritage and were born in a divided homeland, yet beyond these historical details, Kurtág identifies his relationship with the

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<sup>1</sup> Marino Formenti, *Kurtág's Ghosts*, CD Liner Notes (Vienna: Kairos Production, 2005), 15.

author Franz Kafka to be primarily artistic and psychological. There are striking similarities between Kurtág's life in Paris, where he survived on only rice and created a sculpture entitled "Matchstick Man" out of matches, blackened cigarette stubs, and balls of dust gathered in his solitary room, and that of George Samsa, Kafka's legendary character from the novel *Metamorphosis*, who painfully strives to maintain composure despite having been transformed from man to vermin overnight. Kurtág has said that he sees himself in Samsa's heart-breaking situation as the character comes to terms with his fate in lonely confinement. Remarking upon his matchstick sculpture, Kurtág comments, "I gave this matchstick composition the title, 'The coachroach seeks a way to the light'."<sup>2</sup> It is indisputable that Kurtág's relationship with Kafka's writing was instrumental in composing the *Kafka Fragments*, a piece that is considered one of the finest of Kurtág's repertoire. This piece, written in 1985 through 1987, is an hour-long work for violin and soprano. It is forty movements in length.

In spite of the significance of the piece, there are few in-depth studies of the *Kafka Fragments*. Kurtág in general has received minimal study in light of his international reputation, deep body of work, and fascinating personal life. Among several researchers of his work is Rachel Beckles Willson, a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music who has dedicated her focus to writing on Hungarian composers. Her book, *Ligeti, Kurtág and Hungarian Music during the Cold War*, is a source of biographical information for both composers. She has also published a book on Kurtág's work, *The Sayings of Peter Boheminsa*, for Soprano and Piano. In the twentieth volume of *Perspectives in New Music*, Willson edited the issue, "Perspectives on Kurtág,"

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<sup>2</sup> Bálint András Varga, *György Kurtág: Three Interviews and Ligeti Homages* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 3.

containing a short article by Arnold Whittal written specifically about the *Kafka Fragments*. Bálint Varga's publication, *György Kurtág: Threes Interviews and Ligeti Hommage*, mainly records Kurtág speaking directly at the prompting of Varga, and offers insight into Kurtág's experiences and compositional philosophies.

There is a biography of Kurtág by Per Halasz and Peter Woodward, published by Magnus Budapest in 1998. Margaret Purcell MacLay wrote "The Music of György Kurtág," a master's thesis published in 1986. The publication of this work precludes the completion of the *Kafka Fragments* in the spring of 1987. There are several articles in the *New Hungarian Quarterly* written about Kurtág, most notably the article by Paul Griffiths describing Kurtág in rehearsal and performance. The publication, *Academici Kiado*, also has an issue primarily concerning Kurtág. This periodical includes several articles, including, "Kurtág's Articulation of Kafka's Rhythms," by Stephen Blum. In other languages, Alvaro Oviedo and Jean-Paul Olive wrote a dissertation entitled, "Fragment et geste le depassement du figuralisme dans Kafka-Fragmente, Opus 24 de György Kurtág," and Marco Mazzolini wrote an article for the Festival di Milano Musica Milano in 1998 entitled, "*Kafka Fragmente*."

One of the most promising sources of research is video documentation on Kurtág. There are a number of videos capturing the composer speaking about his music. "György Kurtág-The Matchstick Man," produced by Seventh Door, provides documentation of Kurtág commenting personally upon his music and includes interviews with Pierre Boulez and Karl-Heinz Stockhausen. Bridge Records, Inc. released a CD-DVD compilation of two performances of the *Kafka Fragments* by soprano Tony Arnold and violinist Movses Pogossian. The DVD includes clips from a masterclass during which

Kurtág instructs the two performers. Several miscellaneous clips from other sources include footage from a meeting with Kurtág and an audience at Teatro La Fenice in Venice, as well as a short movie made during a meeting with Kurtág and his publishers at the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Paris in 2009. Also insightful are videos of performers of Kurtág's music, many of whom have worked personally with the composer, including an interview with violinist Mikhail Shmidt.

The text of the *Kafka Fragments* is taken from Kafka's diaries, personal letters, and the *Blue Octavio Notebooks*, a collection of fragments published after Kafka's death. Kurtág compiled thirty-eight of the fragments (two of the fragments are repeated) for this work. The *Kafka Fragments* highlights the composer's unique qualities and importance as a composer of the twentieth and twenty-first century through its illustration of Kurtág's absolute sensitivity to text, his sense of form that combines modernity with influences from past musical history, and his integration of extra-musical elements.

## KURTÁG, KAFKA, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FRAGMENT

Like that of Kafka, the political and cultural climate in which Kurtág grew up was one of political anxiety, cultural segregation, and prejudice. As a boy from a Jewish family living in an occupied area of Hungary, Kurtág knew the difficulty of producing creative work in a country where culture was carefully determined and censored by the government. Hungary's status after World War II was particularly bleak, as Hungary had sided with Nazi Germany during the war. When Germany fell, the Soviet Union occupied Hungary and made the Hungarian people pay dearly for their government's allegiance to the Nazis. Those living in areas occupied by the Soviet Union's Red Army were especially subject to fear and oppression. The Red Army would not tolerate any opposition to communist ideals, and communism was promoted as the new progressive government. In 1948, the communists enforced the cooperation of the Social Democrats and demolished all other parties. By the election in 1949, the Hungarian Independence Popular Front, the communist party, was the only party for which one could vote. Thus, the People's Republic of Hungary was established. This government made use of a strictly enforced system, using violence and terror when needed. After Stalin died in 1953, the government was in a state of reform until the Hungarian Revolution occurred in 1956. The post World War II cultural implications of this political turmoil and strictly enforced communist policy were many, and cultural activity was highly regulated. Despite this, however, artists were eager to begin working towards a better creative

future, often times because they had been prevented from working during the war because of persecution.

Kurtág was born in 1924, and he developed as a young musician in this cultural environment. Kurtág's birthplace was in the Bánát, an area between the Hungarian Plain and Transylvania that had been occupied by Russia after World War II. He grew up speaking three languages: Hungarian, Romanian, and German. He began piano lessons at age five, but stopped two years later, having sabotaged his lessons because of unhappiness at his own development. He became involved in music again around the age of ten when he was enrolled in dancing lessons. When he and his parents went on their summer holiday that year, Kurtág danced every evening in the public area of the spa where they were staying. He speaks of this memory being of great importance. Kurtág says, "The return to music was through dance music, tangos, waltzes, and marches."<sup>3</sup> A year or two later, Kurtág decided to dedicate his life to music. In his twelfth year, he had an experience that changed him: hearing Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony playing on the radio. He soon obtained the score to the piece and studied to play the two-hand arrangement. "That is what decided that music would become highly important."<sup>4</sup>

As Kurtág developed, he had other important influences besides Schubert. He tells Bálint András Varga in an interview, "I lived in Beethoven. And then I lived in Bartók. Basically, in both."<sup>5</sup> Later, he was influenced by Ligeti, particularly by the work, *Artikulation*, as well as Stockhausen's *Gruppen*. Kurtág says that *Artikulation* was "closest to him" during the composition of his String Quartet, Op. 1, an important

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<sup>3</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

landmark in Kurtág's body of work. Kurtág also cites his experience of László

Vidovszky's *Autokoncert* as being especially formative, saying,

From the very first moment, I experienced it as something of a Beckettian tragedy. I was deeply shaken by the tragedy and poetry of the objects that kept falling and emitting sounds every thirty seconds on the empty stage, and the extreme economy by which all that acquired strict musical form. The idiom of the New Music Studio that was emerging at the time played a major role at the start of *Játékok*: it gave me courage to work with even fewer notes.<sup>6</sup>

He was also influenced by Webern, though he emphasizes the fact that his instruction from Webern came from studying Webern's scores rather than listening to his music.

In 1956, at the onset of the Hungarian Revolution, Kurtág had a physical and emotional breakdown, and moved to Paris and engaged in counseling with noted psychologist, Marianne Stein.

I was living in Paris, in a crisis that made it impossible for me to compose: in 1956, the world had literally collapsed around me – not just the external world but my inner world too. Numerous moral questions had also arisen in relation to the work I was doing with Marianne Stein; my entire conduct as a human being had become highly questionable. I sank to terrible depths of despair. Previously I had shunted responsibility for many things onto others, but now, all at once, I was obliged to recognize that I had become disillusioned with my own self, my own character. I have only even been able to compose when I was on fairly good terms with myself, when I was able to accept myself for what I am – when I was able to discern some sort of unity in my view of the world. In Paris I felt, to the point of desperation, that nothing in the world was true, that I had no grip on reality.<sup>7</sup>

During that year, Kurtág lived only on twenty grams of rice a day. He did a regular exercise regimen every day. He changed his handwriting. He also painted, mainly putting down “signs” in India Ink. Also, he created a sculpture of angular forms made

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<sup>6</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

from matchsticks, balls of dust, and cigarette stubs, which came to represent the program for the String Quartet, Op. 1.

Kafka and Kurtág share similarities in their artistic temperament in that they take an extremely humble approach to their work, humility so strong that it often turns to self-degradation. Kurtág seems to live on the basis of deserving; he holds himself highly accountable as an artist and must work for something to be rewarded, whether in composing or listening. Kurtág tells author Varga,

This is closely linked to the question as to when do I deserve to listen with full concentration to Beethoven or Bartók, or to read a poem by Attila József. For years it was a tremendous experience for me to hear the first song of the blackbird in spring. Then that passed; I was in a state where I couldn't really respond to it – either because I was totally absorbed in my work or because I didn't deserve that sound. Maybe I will be able to listen to it this coming spring. Generally, I live on extremely brief impressions – three minutes or five at the seashore or on the cliffs of Prussia Cove. That was all I had before I had to go to teach. But those three minutes – those were real.<sup>8</sup>

The sense of humility applies to Kurtág's compositional process. Kurtág describes his style of composing and mentions that there are times when he writes something down in pencil, prepared to revise it, but never changes a note, and times when he revises a piece over and over again for years, even after it has been performed many times. Those compositions that are written down and approved of, he regards as a blessing or present. "What is good I receive as a gift: I am innocent in the matter. When I am as if paralyzed for months or years on end, the very fact that I can write anything at all is, in itself, a great joy. That alone is a gift. I am also quite aware that the first couple of pieces are

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<sup>8</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 32.



generally just a warming up, and they are discarded. Sometimes, I manage to make something good out of nothing quite by accident. But more often than not I don't.”<sup>9</sup>

Kafka was born in Prague in 1883. He was the only son of Hermann and Julie Kafka. Hermann Kafka was Jewish and owned a goods store in Prague. He was well educated, especially in German literature, philosophy, and scientific writing. His business was successful and the Kafka household was financially comfortable. Franz ultimately chose to study law over German literature or science. After school, he worked as a lawyer with the Worker's Accident Insurance Institute. Though Kafka had no particular enjoyment of his job at the Insurance Institute, he appreciated the position because the work day was relatively short and he had time to compose in the evening. From 1909 to shortly after his retirement, he published numerous short stories and several novels, working mainly at night. Though he was Czech, he wrote almost exclusively in German for the entirety of his literary career. Diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1917, Kafka retired from the Insurance Institute in 1922 when it became too difficult to work because of his illness.

Kafka's personal life was marked by somewhat troublesome romantic relationships, namely with Felice Bauer, Milena Jesenska-Pollak, and finally, Dora Diamant. Descriptions of these struggles appear in many of the fragments. His affair with Felice Bauer was particularly tumultuous, and there are many, many letters between Kafka and Bauer discussing their relationship, particularly Kafka's difficulty in dealing with women. Milena Jesenska-Pollak was a Czech writer who admired Kafka's writing and translated some of it into Czech during his lifetime. Their relationship was largely

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<sup>9</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 11.

based on correspondence, and meetings were carefully arranged, as Milena was married. Kafka's last significant romantic relationship was with Dora Diamant, an Orthodox Jew who was the daughter of a rabbi. Kafka's family had never been particularly religious and he had followed suit. However, towards the end of his life, he became significantly interested in religion. Several of Kafka's fragments illustrate his fluctuating religious anxieties. In 1923, Kafka moved to Berlin with Dora for what he considered to be the happiest time in his life. In 1924, he went back to Prague to reside in a sanatorium and died shortly thereafter.

Kafka's writing has been described as ironic, apocalyptic, and prophetic. It is terrifying in its own right, as Kafka gives the reader access into a world where humans and creatures degenerate through corruption and betrayal at the hands of the self and at the hands of others. His characters are often part human, part animal, perhaps the most famous example being George Samsa of the novel *Metamorphosis*, a man who wakes to find himself have become a giant vermin overnight, and the main character of his last work, *Josephine the mouse*, who many have come to believe represents Kafka himself. Some of the most common themes in Kafka's work are exile, betrayal, loneliness, identity, spiritual filth, and the search for purity.

Writing became the greatest validation in Kafka's life. In addition to his short stories, novels, and numerous letters, Kafka left a large body of diary entries. It appears that from 1912 to the end of his life, he wrote every single day. In a letter to Felice Bauer Kafka writes, "The novel is me, my stories are me . . . it is through my writing that I keep a hold on life" and "My whole being is directed toward literature . . . and the moment I

abandon it I cease to exist.”<sup>10</sup> Despite his dedication to writing, it never came easily to him, and he constantly struggled with feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Kafka’s prolific diary entries provide significant insight into the writer’s state of mind; the diary was of the utmost importance to him. In a letter to Felice Bauer, Kafka writes, “It has become very necessary to keep a diary again. The uncertainty of my thoughts, F(elice), the ruin in the office, the physical impossibility of writing and the inner need for it.”<sup>11</sup> In a diary entry from February 25, 1912, Kafka writes to himself, “Hold fast to the diary from today on! Write regularly! Don’t surrender.”<sup>12</sup> Kafka actually considered the idea of writing an autobiography in 1911. The diary entries were sketches for the book. In his diary one reads, “The writing of the autobiography would be a great joy because it would move along as easily as the writing down of dreams.”<sup>13</sup> He indicates that an autobiography would be a way of creating order in his life and thoughts and of making his efforts worthwhile. The compilation of fragmentary diary entries acts as a sort of autobiography in itself.

The major themes in the text of the *Kafka Fragments* are issues to which both Kurtág and Kafka are emotionally connected. The first major theme is the issue of chaos versus order, mostly referring to the idea of the institution and allegiance to one’s institution, thus distinguishing those who follow and those who dissent. This theme appears from the very beginning of the work, in the first movement of Part I. The text reads, “The good march in step. Unaware of them, the others dance around them the

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<sup>10</sup> Franz Kafka quoted in: Nahum N. Glatzer, *I am Memory Come Alive* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), viii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

dances of time.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, in this fragment there are those that follow, the “good” marching in step, and those that dissent, the “others.” Here is a major point of Kurtág’s (and Kafka’s) biography: living between the desire to be free of the overwhelming oppression of authority and a fear of complete chaos in political freedom. Kurtág speaks of his difficult situation when he existed between authority and revolution in Hungary, especially in light of the toll that it took upon his creative life. Arnold Whittall explains, “Kurtág is not an uncritical supporter of ‘the good,’ nor is he attracted to the Utopia of a freedom that knows nothing of discipline.” Rather, “he relishes the subversive tension of opposition.”<sup>15</sup> The application of this conformity/dissent theme refers especially to the authority in the fifth movement of Part IV, which Kurtág himself defines as being in reference to institution. The text of this fragment illuminates the idea that chaos and violence can coexist with the most “civilized” of cultures: “Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial jugs dry; this is repeated, again and again, until it is possible to calculate in advance when they will come, and it becomes part of the ceremony.” Thus, the violence of chaos of the leopard’s attack becomes a part of the civilization; terror is something to be expected. The crime is repeated to the point where the citizen’s initial outrage turns to numbness.

This juxtaposition of ideas of citizenship contributes to the difficult relationship with nationalism common to the work of both Kurtág and Kafka. In the text of the *Kafka Fragments*, there is a strange mixture of anger and exuberance towards belonging. Several fragments describe the sorrow of one who has been exiled, now free from the

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<sup>14</sup> György Kurtág, *Kafka Fragments* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1992). This footnote serves for all subsequent quotations from the score of the *Kafka Fragments*.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold Whittall, “Plotting the Path, Prolonging the Moment: Kurtág’s Settings of German,” *Contemporary Music Review* 20, no. 2/3 (2001), 91.

boundaries but aimless without them. Arthur Whittall writes, “The exile who has all too much space in which to move and the motion itself is the epitome of purposeless despair.”<sup>16</sup> Exile is a recurring element in the *Kafka Fragments*, as well as a theme of Kurtág and Kafka’s biographies. The first mention of exile in the *Kafka Fragments* appears in the sixth movement, subtitled *Excommunicatio*. The text reads: “Nevermore, nevermore will you return to the cities, nevermore will the great bell resound above you.” Exile is again specifically mentioned in the seventh movement of Part IV: “Again, again, exiled far away, exiled far away. Mountains, desert, a vast country to be wandered through.” The word *exile* is specifically used only twice, but it is an undercurrent throughout the entirety of the *Fragments*.

Exile is frightening to both Kafka and Kurtág because this type of freedom is undesirable: with no sense of community or belonging, the range of movement is without aim and too great. Movement and motion are another of the most prevailing themes in the *Fragments*. In fact, the majority of the *Fragments* have to do with motion, specifically, advanced or hindered motion, and motion along a path. Motion is frequently a struggle in the *Kafka Fragments*, mainly because of obstacles along a path. The idea of motion is seen from the very beginning of the piece with “the good march in step,” and the next movement describes the perpetually-hindered path: “Like a pathway in autumn: hardly has it been swept clean; it is covered again with dry leaves.” The text of movement three of Part I is as follows: “There are countless hiding-places, but only one salvation; but then again, there are as many paths to salvation as there are hiding places.” The next movement which refers to a path is movement 15 of Part I, which reads, “On the stock of Balzac’s walking-stick: ‘I surmount all obstacles.’ On mine: ‘All obstacles

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<sup>16</sup> Whittall, “Plotting the Path, Prolonging the Moment: Kurtág’s Settings of German,” 98.

surmount me.' They have that 'all' in common." The text of Part II, or movement twenty, expresses the most poignant statement about the nature of the path. It reads, "The true path goes by way of a rope that is suspended not high up, but rather just above the ground. Its purpose seems to be more to make one stumble than to be walked on." There are three movements that refer to a path in Part III, that is, movements 7 through 9. The text of movement 7 is, "There is a destination, but no path to it; what we call a path is hesitation." The text of movement eight reads, "As tightly as the hand holds the stone. It holds it so tight only to cast it as far off as it can. Yet even that distance the path will reach." The text of movement 9 is, "There are countless hiding-places, but only one salvation; but then again, there are as many paths to salvation as there are hiding places." In Part IV, one movement refers specifically to the path, which Kurtág identifies as one of the most important texts of the work. It reads, "I can't actually . . . tell a story, in fact I am almost unable even to speak; when I try to tell it, I usually feel the way small children might when they try to take their first steps." Altogether, the text of nine of the movements specifically mentions the idea of the path.

With the acknowledgement of the obstacles hindering motion, however, there emerges another theme, which is the resolve and determination of the human spirit and more generally, the inherent beauty of the human spirit in the face of violence, rejection, heartache, and challenge. "I will not let myself be made tired," Kafka writes. "I will dive into my story even if that should lacerate my face." Kurtág uses this fragment for the text of the movement 17 of Part I. The counterpart to this determination of spirit is the appreciation of beauty and the acceptance of life as it is. The first movement of Part IV reads, "Too late. The sweetness of sorrow and of love. To be smiled at by her in a

rowing-boat. That was the most wonderful of all. Always just the yearning to die and the surviving. That alone is love.”

Lastly, there is perhaps the most important theme in the *Kafka Fragments*, the theme that interconnects all of the others: the search for purity and redemption. The other themes contribute and apply to this theme as Kafka searches for this purity perpetually between the balance of chaos and order around him, from the beauty of character within him; he is always struggling forward along the path towards his goal. From his musical setting of Kafka’s writing on this matter, his comments about the fragments, and his own biography, it is clear that Kurtág travels a similar path on the search for redemption and meaning. Thus, the fragment of movement 3 in Part I, which is repeated in movement nine of Part III: “There are countless hiding-places, but only one salvation; but then again, there are as many paths to salvation as there are hiding-places.” Kafka’s search for purity is hindered, however, by his belief that he is always filthy. Kafka’s feelings of dirtiness or disgust are an overwhelming aspect of his biography. Through the entirety of his life, Kafka felt that he was unclean and unappealing, both mentally and physically. Kafka’s obsession took on a physical manifestation in terms of sexual anxiety and illness. *The Kafka Fragments* are mainly concerned with Kafka’s self-defined mental or spiritual “dirtiness,” a sentiment which is made clear through his biographical materials. Kurtág himself relates to this concept. Movement 4 of Part III sets one of the fragments that does not come from Kafka’s diaries or the *Blue Octavio Notebooks*. Rather, it is from a letter written by Kafka to Milena Jesenská. The source is fitting for this sentiment in that Kafka’s romantic interests, Jesenská included, were a major focus of his feelings of inadequacy. The fragment reads, “I am dirty, Milena, endlessly dirty, that is why I make

such a fuss about cleanliness. None sing as purely as those in deepest Hell; it is their singing that we take for the singing of angels.” Despite acknowledging his “dirtiness” in this fragment, Kafka also describes a juxtaposed image that reveals a sense of hope in his condition: the idea of purity in the place where it is seemingly least likely to be found. Thus, though Kafka is constant in his self-degradation, he allows himself to hope for a salvation, allowing the possibility that his self-contempt is unwarranted.

Fragments as a form in general have a large place in Kafka’s repertoire. Kafka uses the fragment to piece together an overall narrative quality in his work as a whole. In his article on the aesthetics of Kafka, Henry Sussman writes, “Kafka’s plays on fragmentation are twentieth-century literature’s response to awe, magnificence, and cultural grandiosity generated systematically.”<sup>17</sup> In creating his fragments, Kafka opens up new possibilities for writing expressively in twentieth-century literature. His narrative fragments are sublime in their potential to create a world that is contradictory in its order. Sussman writes, “Kafka’s fictive discourse is explicitly engaged in experiments of narrative scale and framing or contextualization . . . in a literal sense the fragment comprised Romantic theory’s most visible trace of its opposition to *a priori* systematic orders and the ideological conditions under which they thrive. Kafka’s exploration of the writerly phenomenon of fragmentation are many.”<sup>18</sup>

The use of the fragment became a trend in literature during the German Romantic era. Although Kafka was not German himself, he wrote exclusively in German, and he studied German literature growing up, as his own father had. Thus, Kafka would have been deeply aware of the phenomenon of the fragment. The fragment perfectly

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Sussman, “Kafka’s Aesthetics: A Primer: From the Fragments to the Novels,” in *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. James Rolleston (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), 126.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



encapsulated the aesthetic of the German Romantics. Hughes describes the nature of German Romantic writing as having an “etherealized, blood-drained quality that does violence to common expectation and common sense.” Hughes says, “The writer himself may diminish in the vaporous air.”<sup>19</sup> The fragment, with its open-ended form, was an appropriate match for the ethereal quality of the German Romanticism. The writer could be allusive and could instigate a thought or feeling but leave it ultimately unresolved. It offered a type of freedom that no other form could provide. Friedrich Schlegel formally published a treatise on the genre entitled the *Critical Fragments* in 1797, and this was followed with a collection of 451 entries about the nature of the fragment, including the section entitled *Antheam Fragments*.

If we look at Friedrich Schlegel’s fragments and some of his own statements on them more closely, however, we soon realize that what he has in mind is not a classical or classicistic form of brief, isolated statements like the epigram and the maxim, but a type of fragmentary writing that does not necessarily have to break apart into splinters of thought, but can also manifest itself in more coherent texts like the essay, the dialogue, the lecture, and still reveal a fragmentary, incomplete, perspectivistic, or asystematic outlook.<sup>20</sup>

Of the writers to use this expressive means, Novalis, the Romantic poet, was perhaps the most prolific in his use of the fragment. In 1798, Novalis published a collection of 114 of them entitled, *Pollen*. In a letter to Schlegel he calls his own attempts “fragments of the continuing dialogue with myself.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, the genre provided the writer with a unique opportunity to develop a continually growing narrative, an autobiography in a very different construct.

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<sup>19</sup> Glyn Tegai Hughes, *Romantic German Literature* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979), 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 152.

<sup>21</sup> Hughes, *Romantic German Literature*, 61.

The height of the enthusiasm for the fragment was rather short-lived; having begun in 1797, it ended around 1800. The impact of the form, however, carried on for many years. While Schlegel published no fragments after 1800, he continued to privately write them long after. The possibilities of the fragment, especially its unique narrative qualities, retained its appeal. Certainly, the living, breathing quality of a narrative that continues without refined closure was attractive to Kafka, a man whose diary entries and writings acted as an aspect of his living self. In one of Kafka's fragments called, "A Dream," written in 1917, Kafka describes himself in his grave, in ecstasy at the thought of his name being inscribed in word form on his gravestone. This desire to become one with the text, or even to become the text, speaks volumes about the importance that Kafka placed on the written word. In a way, it seems that the fragment's perpetually continuing narrative is, perhaps, the best way for Kafka to remain present in the world.

Fragments are a recurring element in much of Kafka's informal work, including his personal letters, diaries, and notebooks. They act as some of the most intimate elements in Kafka's body of work. It is likely, for this reason, that Kurtág related to Kafka's fragments on a personal level and decided to compile thirty-eight of them (two are repeated, thus making forty movements) for his own piece. Kurtág took several fragments from Kafka's letters and diaries and many from the *Blue Octavio Notebooks*. These notebooks exclusively contain fragments, many of which are from the diaries. Some of the fragments are repeated in the last section of the notebooks, entitled "Reflections," a list of fragments expressing suggestions of wisdom especially important, we assume, to Kafka. Through this compilation is created a juxtaposition of two autobiographies – Kafka's and Kurtág's. Both men have spoken of the texts as being

autobiographical; Kurtág borrows from Kafka's "autobiography" to create his own life story.

A forty-movement work based on fragments, however, is particularly prone to a feeling of disjunction, despite the commonality of stylistic elements. The question remains, then, as to why Kurtág chose to compose an extended set of fragments. An answer is best found with reference to the generation of early Romantics. Schumann, though several generations before Kurtág, faced a similar dilemma in terms of problematic cohesion between psychological memory and musical structure when setting the texts of ETA Hoffman. He, like Kurtág, had a preference for the fragment because of its flexible structural qualities and potent emotional possibilities. Charles Rosen writes, "An imperfect, incomplete memory is doubly a fragment. Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* ends with a memory -- but one that has been mutilated at the moment of greatest pathos . . . the melody continues to exist as a memory . . . Schumann has forced the listener to acknowledge the eternal imperfection of the memory and to complete the song. . . . In the end, the unexpected void is more affecting than the original melody."<sup>22</sup> Rosen identifies the fragment as attractive to Schumann because of its "personal urgency," its distinct emotive quality, housed within a concise, encapsulated statement.<sup>23</sup> As it appealed to Schumann, this "personal urgency" clearly appeals to Kurtág in that he finds the literary fragment a perfect complement to his musical intuitions. His wife, Marta, speaks of a relationship with the fragment, saying, "One loves them because they let your imagination wander freely."<sup>24</sup> Kurtág responds, "That is also what attracted me about the

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 112-115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 56.

*Attila József Fragments*. A completed poem often does not give you any leeway.”<sup>25</sup> A form that is not dictated by the poetic structure of a text allows complete freedom. Furthermore, because the fragments presumably have no fixed order, the movements of the piece may be repositioned. In a more recent development, Kurtág took advantage of this idea in the *Holderlin Songs*, the song cycle composed after the *Kafka Fragments*, where the performers may chose the order of the movements themselves. “Recently his music has revealed a marked tendency to avoid imposing a form on the collection of fragments or moments that constitute the musical work . . . The best that can be said in this respect is that Kurtág hints at many forms, but all are incomplete.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, the form of the fragments leaves Kurtág with the freedom to compose independently from formal restrictions of traditional prose, as well as to adjust the order of the movements, even after the composition is finished. Kurtág’s enthusiastic use of the fragment as a constant fixture in his repertoire provides insight into the formal possibilities inherent in the genre, as well as to his perception of form.

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<sup>25</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Alan E. Williams, “Kurtág, Modernity, Modernisms,” in *Contemporary Music Review* 20 No. 2/3(2001), 61-67.

## ELEMENTS OF STYLE AND MUSICAL FORM

Through his music, Kurtág brings electricity to the compilation of Kafka's fragments. In the *Kafka Fragments* reside some of the best examples of stylistic elements and structures in Kurtág's work list. Accordingly, the *Fragments* illuminate Kurtág's compositional process. Among these processes is a three-tiered system from which the *Kafka Fragments* seems to derive its uniqueness: a structural base through established rhythmic and formal means; the occupation of musical space with certain intervals and the melodic lines which they comprise; and the articulation, which acts as a type of catalyst for the entire creation. By means of this combination of elements, Kurtág creates a work which possesses the refinement of a composition meticulously labored over, and a spontaneity that would seem as if it were an improvisation.

Three components interact to form this relationship: rhythmic and formal base, melody and intervallic relationships, and articulation. This partnership is balanced in its careful juxtaposition of improvised sound and meticulous composition. The rhythmic base provides the structural framework for the entire composition. Dance forms, chorale forms, and other rhythmic elements, such as pause and silence, create a firm foundation on which to further develop the sound. The second layer of melodic and intervallic constructs fills out the sound, and the final aspect, articulation, adds color. For this reason, it is possible for the typical intervals that Kurtág uses over and over, and indeed, the symbolic meanings that he applies to them (lament, purity) do not become clichés.

Instead, they provide a consistency to the sound that contributes to the unification of the movements despite their seemingly improvisatory nature. Within the formal structure, surrounded by the density of the intervals, Kurtág's specifically marked articulations function not only as coloristic variants, but they act as catalysts setting off reactions in the sound. They are a kind of electricity in the sound-world, for every movement in the piece has an energy that either diffuses or builds throughout. This sense contributes to the modernity of the work. Also contributing to the modernity of the work is the careful balance between composition and improvisation. In a way, the compositional form is improvisation over a rhythmic base. The melodic lines exist within the density and consistency of the intervals, and the articulation markings ignite the movement forwards and backwards, in and out, etc. Indeed, it is this formula of structure and their included specifics that make Kurtág's pieces of music sound like Kurtág. Through these technical layers, the compositional identity of the composer has been developed.

Rhythm and form is the first component, which acts as the overarching structural element. The repetition of particular rhythmic and formal elements acts as a unifying factor throughout the entire forty movements. Kurtág uses several specific forms that function as the rhythmic basis the sections. The first of Kurtág's favorite choices is dance forms. There are numerous movements throughout the *Fragments* based on dances; often dance is referred to in the text. One of the most obvious is the *Chassidischer Tanz* (Hassidic dance) movement, number 13 in Part I. The text reads, "Einmal brach ich mir das Bein, es war das schonste Erlebnis meines Lebens/ Once I broke my leg, it was the most wonderful experience of my life." Here Kafka's text refers to a man who has broken his leg, but desires to dance the *Chassidischer Tanz*. Upon

beginning to dance, the man finds that the movement he is forced to make because of his injured leg sends him into complete reverie, resulting in an experience of ecstasy.

Kurtág's jubilantly awkward rhythms mimic this experience, as demonstrated in Example 1.

Example 1 György Kurtág, Kafka Fragments, Op. 24, "*Chassidischer Tanz*," rhythm,

mm. 4-6

Mit Humor  
Moderato, ben tenuto

The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in G major, with lyrics: "Ein-mal brach ich mir das Bein,". The lower staff is a piano accompaniment in G major, featuring complex, syncopated rhythms with accents and lurching crescendos. The tempo is marked "Moderato, ben tenuto" and the mood is "Mit Humor".

The piece is mostly in triple meter, as a typical *Chassidischer Tanz* would be, though Kurtág uses accents varying between bars and lurching crescendos to evoke the character's strange movements. A predictable pattern of emphasized beats is never completed, as it typically would be in a traditional dance, so the element of unpredictable accents evokes the way in which the injured man looks down in surprise at the way his leg causes him to move.

The waltz form appears quite a few times throughout the fragments. It is seen the first time in movement 7 of Part I, where the text reads, "‘Wenn er mich immer immer fragt.’ Das a, losgelost vom Satz, flog da-hin wie ein Ball auf der Wiese/ ‘But he just won’t stop asking me.’ That ah, detached from the sentence, flew away like a ball across

the meadow.” Taking up the waltz form also potentially refers to the text, as Kurtág plays on the word “ball” (the “ball” that flew across the meadow). The waltz begins on the word “flog/flew” and continues until the end of the movement as the marking upon measure 5 indicates, “Tempo di Waltz,” shown here in Example 2.

Example 2 “Wenn er mich immer immer fragt,” waltz rhythm, mm. 1/2

tempo di Walzer  
*p, leggierissimo*

flog da-hin wie ein Ball auf der

*p, leggierissimo*

One of the most brilliant examples of the waltz occurs in the colorful Eduoarda movement, number 12 of Part III, “Scene on a Tram.” This waltz, clearly marked Tempo di Valse, briefly makes reference to the *Blue Danube Waltz*, as seen in Example 3 below.

Example 3 “Scene on a Tram,” waltz, mm. 9-14

[Eusebius:]  
 Denn es be - steht kein Ver-bot, wa - rum

*mp, espr., con molto sentimento*

*sempre simile*

*sempre sul IV.*



The violin plays chords on the second and third beats, though the direction of the chords is atypical, as they are marked to be played downward, rather than up. This produces a strange and eccentric effect juxtaposed against the tradition of the *Blue Danube*.

In addition to using dance forms as a structural force in his music, Kurtág frequently makes use of the chorale as a rhythmic base. Movement 11 in Part III is perhaps the most profound example of the chorale in the *Kafka Fragments*. The text is as follows: “Staunend athen wir das grosse Pferd. Es durch brach das Dach unserer Stube. Der bewolkte Himmel zog sich schwach entlang des gewaltigen Umrises und rauschend flog die Mahne im Wind./ Amazed, we saw the great horse. It broke through the ceiling of our room. The cloudy sky scudded weakly along its mighty silhouette as its mane streamed in the wind.” The meter varies measure by measure, which Kurtág effectively notates by marking the number of beats per bar in a circle at the start of a new section. Marked *largamente*, the tempo is slow, thus the combination of the varying meters and slow time cause an ambiguous temporal quality. The rhythmic values, in general, are slow:

Example 4 “Staunend sahen wir das grosse Pferd,” chorale rhythm, mm. 6-8



As illustrated above in Example 4, the rhythmic values are usually half or whole notes, in keeping with the chorale-like quality. The variations to the chorale come in the form of ornamentation (trills and tremolos in the violin). The soprano line moves slowly throughout.

A third rhythmic element is extremely predominant in all of Kurtág's work, including the *Fragments*: the pause. Silence, which fills these pauses, is one of Kurtág's most frequent tools. He uses silence and pause in a definitively theatrical way. As a rhythmic element, pause is a structural device in Kurtág's music in that the music is built around it. The silence, in many ways, is as important as the sound itself. Pause is used in an example of the chorale, "Meine Festung," in the majority of the measures, demonstrated in Example 5.

Example 5 "Meine Festung," pause, mm. 1-5

The musical score for Example 5, "Meine Festung," measures 1-5, is presented in G major and 4/4 time, marked "Largamente". The tempo is indicated by a circled number 3. The score consists of two staves: a soprano line and a piano accompaniment. The soprano line is mostly silent, with the text "Mei - ne" appearing in measure 5. The piano accompaniment features sustained chords in the left hand and moving lines in the right hand. Performance instructions include "sonore, ben tenuto" and a circled number 3.

Another example of the use of pause is movement six in Part III, "The closed circle is pure." After a pattern of eighth notes that coincides with "the closed circle," Kurtág inserts a pause before setting the text, "is pure." A pause occurs in direct relation to the

text in movement ten of Part I, which text reads, “The onlookers freeze as the train rushes past.” There is silence after the word “freeze,” which evokes the scene of people frozen in movement, seen in Example 6 below.

Example 6 “Szene Am Bahnhof,” pause, mm. 3-4

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "- star - ren, wenn der Zug vor - bei - fährt." Above the staff, there are markings: "p, dim. . . . perdendosi al fine". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment. It starts with a piano (p) dynamic and includes markings for "pizz." (pizzicato), "arco" (arco), and "pizz." (pizzicato) again. At the end, it has "dim. . . . perdendosi al fine". The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and a final cadence.

The piece reaches its dramatic climax at this point; in fact, the pause, itself, is the climax of the music and becomes a powerful structural component in the composition.

To this framework of rhythmic form Kurtág adds melodic line and intervallic space, which comprise an additional major element of Kurtág’s characteristic compositional sound. The *Kafka Fragments* are melodically driven. Though aspects of harmony are essential to the piece, Kurtág makes a distinctive choice when he uses two treble instruments for the piece. Also, they are instruments that typically have the solo line. Their lines respond and correspond to one another, but many times they are independent. Thus, an older music, psalm tone chant, which is such a prominent influence in Kurtág’s development, is evoked in the *Fragments* by the two independently functioning melodic lines. Both melodically and harmonically, however, Kurtág uses a particular set of intervals to fill the space, intervals which, as a result, become evocative

of Kurtág. These sets of intervals include the minor seconds, the perfect fifths, and a fluctuation between the perfect fourth and tritone. Certain movements use other intervals; they are the exceptions and stand out as a result. Also, some intervals are used with particular connotations, specifically, the minor second, which refers to a lament, and the perfect fifth, played with open strings or harmonics, which refers to purity. The intervals of major and minor seconds are used as structural principles and as symbolic elements. They are used from the very start of the entire piece, beginning with the first movement.

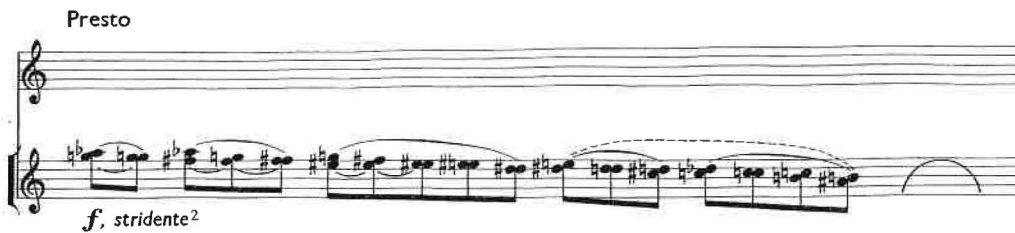
Example 7 “The good march in step,” seconds, m. 1

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Canto (Soprano) and VI. (Violin). The Canto staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with lyrics: "Die Gu-ten gehn in glei-chen Schritt." Above the Canto staff, the marking "ben tenuto" is written. The VI. staff is also in treble clef and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Above the VI. staff, the marking "mp, indifferente al fine" is written, and below the staff, the marking "simile" is written. A dashed box encloses the first measure of both staves.

As shown in Example 7, the C to D in the violin, followed by the G to A in the soprano mimics the diligent marching of the “good.” “Die guten gehn in gleichen Schritt, Ohne von ihnen zu wissen, tanzen die andern um sie die Tanze der Zeit./ The good march in step. Unaware of them, the others dance around them, the dances of time.” When the soprano breaks the intervallic pattern to signify the “others” dancing around the good, the violin holds fast to its original pattern; indeed, it never strays from the major second alteration of notes until the end. In the second movement, seconds appear, though most

prominently in the flourishes of the violin. In the third movement, however, the pattern of seconds again moves to the forefront, beginning in the soprano line with F, F#/ E, Eb/ F, G, G#, and in the fourth movement, “Ruhelos,” the intervals consist almost entirely of minor seconds, played together on a generally downward moving line, thus evoking the lament, as demonstrated in Example 8.

Example 8 “Ruhelos,” minor seconds, m. 1



A similar pattern of major/minor seconds continues throughout the whole of the forty pieces.

The other most important predominant interval in terms of structural use and symbolic quality is the perfect fifth. Structurally, the fifth appears constantly. It is a harmonic entity in the first movement with the violin and soprano lines forming a fifth vertically, from the C in the violin to the G in the voice, moving to the D in the violin to the A in the voice. Melodically, the leap of a fifth is extremely common; it occurs in great numbers in almost all of the movements, and, furthermore, the fifth comes to represent purity, or sometimes, salvation, especially when it is played with harmonics or

open strings on the violin. An example first occurs in the third movement of Part I, “Verstecke,” upon the word, “Retung,” or, “Salvation,” shown here in Example 9.

Example 9 “Verstecke,” perfect fifth, mm. 1-5

The image shows a musical score for Example 9, titled "Verstecke," perfect fifth, mm. 1-5. The score is in 2/4 time and consists of two staves: a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble clef). The tempo is marked "Presto". The vocal line has the lyrics: "Ver - stek-ke sind un - zäh - li - ge, Ret - tung nur ei - ne,". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, often marked with an "8" and a dashed line, and includes performance instructions such as "col legno, battuto", "ppp, staccatissimo", "ord.", "sub. f", and "col legno, tratto". Dynamic markings include "ppp", "sub. f [non troppo!]", and "sub. pp".

Another example is found in the sixth movement of Part III, when the violin leaps the interval of a fifth upon the word “pure.” The fifth is also associated with comfort or security, as in the beginning of the fifth movement of Part I, “Berceuse,” where the violin introduces the piece. An alternation between the perfect fourth and augmented fourth also figure predominantly throughout the work, as does an alternation between the major third and minor third.

The third technical component of Kurtág’s writing is articulation, which he uses as color and emphasis for musical and textual purposes. Among numerous elements of articulation found throughout his repertoire, some appear more regularly in the *Kafka Fragments*. The first articulation marking is specific to the violin. Flourishes in this part appear constantly throughout the work, beginning with the second movement of Part I

where the text reads, “Wie ein Weg im Herbst: Kaum ist er reingekehrt, bedeck er sich wieder mit den trockenen Blättern./ Like a pathway in autumn, hardly has it been swept clean, it is covered again with dry leaves,” and the violin part throughout the first half of the piece consists of flourishes up and down scalar patterns.

Example 10 “Wie ein Weg im Herbst,” violin scalar pattern, m. 1

Ruhig-erstaunt

Wie ein Weg im Herbst: Kaum ist er

rein gekehrt.

*sempre poco rinf. [quasi presto]*  
*poco*  
*sempre simile*

The flourishes in Example 10, above, suggest trails of leaves, which fly in the air and settle down upon the freshly-swept walk. The scalar figure rises and falls three times. The last flourish in the violin reaches a high G and stops midair.

This movement contains a characteristic articulation mark, which parallels a textual reference. In the second half of the movement, grace note figures are found in the soprano part, as shown in Example 11.

Example 11 “Wie ein Weg im Herbst,” grace note figures, mm. 4-8

The musical score for Example 11 consists of two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "mit den [de(he)n] Irk - ke - nen Blät - tern". The piano part features grace notes and complex rhythmic patterns. Above the piano staff, there are time signatures: 2/4, 3/4, 1/4, and 3+3/4+16. The piano part includes markings for "sul II", "ppp", "al niente", "sul I", and "pochiss.". The piano part ends with a fermata and a final note marked "8".

This happens again in the twelfth movement of Part I, and again, when a leaf is mentioned in the text of the movement: “Meine Ohrmuschel fühlte sich Frisch, rauh, kuhl, saftig an wie ein Blatt./ My ear felt fresh to the touch, rough, cool, juicy like a leaf.” This is illustrated in Example 12.

Example 12 “Meine Ohrmuschel fühlte sich Frisch,” grace note figures, m. 1

The musical score for Example 12 shows a vocal line with lyrics: "Mei - ne Ohr - mu - schel fühl - te sich frisch, rauh, kühl.". Above the staff, there are performance instructions: "Prestissimo possibile", "(Katzenartiges Sprechgesang)", "(Nyávogva)", and "pp, dolcissimo". The score includes grace notes and specific rhythmic markings.

The figure has a mischievous quality, like a leaf that cannot be contained. In this movement, the quality is further indicated by the composer when he asks that the *sprechgesang* of the vocalist be “Cat-like,” implying a sneaking character.



There are also series of “pizzicato interruptions” throughout the work, particularly in reference to a pattern of brief pizzicato passages in the middle of movements. This first occurs in measures eight and nine of the sixth movement of Part I, “Nimmermehr,” when the moving notes of the violin stop to play a pizzicato. A similar situation also occurs in movement two of Part IV, “Eine lange geschichte,” as seen in Example 13 below.

Example 13 “Eine lange geschichte,” pizzicato interruption, m. 2

The image displays a musical score for two staves, likely representing the first and second violins. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows a melodic line starting with a *più f* dynamic, followed by a *pp* section. The second system begins with an *arco* section, followed by a *poco* section with a *ricochet-gliss. [col legno battuto]* instruction, then a *pizz.* section, and finally a *f* section. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The tremolo is another of the textural elements that Kurtág asks the violin to produce numerous times throughout the work. In the twelfth movement of Part I, underneath the *sprechgesang* of the vocal line, the violin has tremolo throughout the movement, resulting in a rich juxtaposition of textures that makes the sound particularly distinctive. Kurtág repeats these textures many times.

In spite of the apparent simplicity of working with two melodic lines (or perhaps because of it), Kurtág’s compositional style is multi-faceted; the aural and written

presentation of the music are at odds. To the ear, the lines of the violin and soprano seem almost improvisatory. When the lines cross, it almost sounds accidental. The notation on the page, however, could not be more different. It is precise and meticulous; nothing is haphazard or left to interpretation. Its minimal quality arguably comes from the fact that Kurtág revises over and over until the notation is perfectly clear. When the notes are played, the gestures are natural and elegant. Thus, Kurtág creates a musical work in which the exacting composition leads to an effortless sense of improvisation. This is the phenomenon that is created by a careful layering of the musical elements, namely, in three parts: rhythm and form, melodic and intervallic development, and decoration, the latter best described here as articulation. Kurtág uses these three elements in a way that signifies them as defining aspects of his music.

Kurtág's unique manner of formally unifying the piece is particularly interesting. There are no real motives that return throughout the movements of the *Kafka Fragments*. Rather, the quality of the sound, whether achieved by texture, intervals, or rhythm, is the returning motive. The concept of textural and aural quality as a unifying element of a work is sophisticated, elegant, and poignantly musical; however, it remains sometimes difficult to identify. Kurtág realizes this, and takes care to avoid losing the listener amidst the numerous movements. As explained in Simone Hohmaier's article, "Analysis-Play-Composition: Remarks on the Creative Process of György Kurtág," he does this by providing an "axis" on which the entire work is balanced. Kurtág explored the idea of the axis in his sketches for *Játékok*, or, "Games," a work written for the piano in 1973. In one particular sketch, Kurtág refers to a movement from Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* called "Line and Point," which explores the development of a musical idea

through the expansion and contraction of intervals around a single note. Several measures from “Line and Point” are illustrated in Example 14 below.

Example 14 Béla Bartók, *Mikrokosmos*, “Line and Point,” mm. 1-4



In his sketchbook, Kurtág experiments with the idea himself, sketching a short passage where the note, E goes to F, F#, G, and so on. Thus, the movement is by semitone leading from the E. He further develops this concept by identifying the patterns of movement as either “open” or “closed.” An “open” movement occurs when the passage begins on E, moves by semitone in some pattern (E, Eb, D, Eb, E, F) and ends on a different note than the one on which it began (say, on F or D). In this case, the passage is “open” to continuation. In a “closed” movement, the passage ends on the note on which it began (in our example, E). In this way, the passage is “closed,” as it has returned to its original note.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Simone Hohmaier, “Analysis-Play-Composition: Remarks on the Creative Process of György Kurtág,” translated by Alan E. Williams. *Contemporary Music Review*, 20, no. 2/3 (2001): 39-50.

The *Kafka Fragments* was written several years after Kurtág first experimented with the idea of an axis. Kurtág regards the development of his work while composing *Játékok* extremely valuable, even, as he has said, a turning point in his career. He has applied his experimentation in *Játékok* to subsequent compositions, including the *Fragments*. Like the axis experimentations in *Játékok*, the axis of the *Kafka Fragments* is balanced upon a single note. In the musical “solar system” of the piece, the balancing note is the sun and all other pitches orbit around it. The *Kafka Fragments*, however, use the axis in a particularly revolutionary way, as Kurtág expanded the concept of the axis to the macro level, where the axis is actually the unifying element of the entire piece. In the *Fragments*, the axis is the overarching form which enables the individual movements. Numerous musical details occur within the large axis, allowing the piece to be endlessly interesting, beautiful and elusive rather than formulaic. Kurtág has so skillfully woven the musical fabric of the movements that the axis is difficult to discern. Rather, it exists organically as a structure containing the work. The *Fragments* as a whole entity are balanced on one point, or, note, which is the note G. G is determined to be the balancing point of the axis for several reasons. One, G is the most frequent note on which the movements begin and end.<sup>28</sup> Two, G to G is, generally, the most common range of the work. G is the highest note of any of the pitches in the majority of the movements, and is also the lowest. Three, the note G is effectively positioned throughout the piece as a structural element. For instance, seven of the eight movements in Part IV end on G, including the very last movement, thus stressing G as the finality. This movement

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<sup>28</sup> The notes that are literally the first pitches in these movements are sometimes not G, but rather a rhythmic pick-up to the note G. Thus, I consider these movements to begin on G in terms of the structure of the piece. In regards to the last movement of the work, the literal last pitch is not a G, but I consider the last phrase to be a gestural “flourish.” The last note of substantial structural and rhythmic value that precedes the flourish is a G. Thus, I consider the piece to end, formally, on G.

illustrates the axis theory on a micro-level, as the axis is shown in its completion within one movement.

Another supporting factor for concept of the axis as a formal structure and the argument of the note G as the balancing point of the axis is movement twenty. Movement Twenty, “Message and Homage to Pierre Boulez,” is the only movement in Part II of the work. It is not only numerically central to the piece, but also works well in dividing the piece approximately in half according to the length of the performance. Interestingly, this movement, itself, is a clear example of an axis system with the note G as a balancing point. The movement begins on G above middle C and ends on G below middle C. The highest and lowest notes of the movement are on the G below middle C and the G in the register two octaves above middle C. The highest note of the movement, which occurs at the very center of the piece, and thus, the center of entire work, is a G. As in the experiments of an axis system in the sketchbooks for *Játákok*, Kurtág moves closely around the balancing point, the note, G. To enhance this effect, he uses microtones, thus creating even closer movement between the notes. In his study on Kurtág’s settings of German poetry, Arnold Whittall suggests that this movement is a teasing play on IRCAM, the institute for electronic music that was frequently used by many of Kurtág’s contemporaries. While the microtones do add a spectral and electrically fluctuating effect to the music, Kurtág’s purpose in movement twenty, certainly, goes beyond imitation or jest. Rather, it exemplifies the concept of movement around an axis based upon one note. Thus, movement twenty, the central movement of the piece, acts on the micro-level as an example of the axis system on which the entire

work is based. The example on the following page, Example 15, shows several measures from the beginning, middle, and end of the movement.

Example 15 “Message and Homage to Pierre Boulez,” axis, mm. 1-6, 10-11, 20-23

Adagio

*ppp*, sempre *sfz*,  
legatissimo, molto ridur.

*sempre sfz*

*ppp*

poco e poco più amore

[quasi Calceana]  
(bellina)

*ppp*, come primo

## INTEGRATION OF TIME, NATURE, AND THEATRICAL GESTURE

In the same natural manner in which he incorporates overall form into the music, Kurtág incorporates extra-musical elements into the *Kafka Fragments*, namely, literature, nature, and theater. Kurtág's music is interesting, unique, and a valuable study as a model of contemporary music because it is open-minded, interdisciplinary, and well-informed.

Kurtág is unique in that the text is completely integrated into his entire compositional process. A lifelong dedication to language and poetry has enabled him to internalize text where the words develop within the musical form, sense of space, and the spirit of the gesture. In this work, the verbal idea and time dimension are depicted musically in a way that is completely natural in form. In his article on the "modernisms" of Kurtág, A.E. Williams considers Kurtág more of a "literary modernist than a musical modernist of the post-war avant-garde."<sup>29</sup> Though the author's statement is bold, Kurtág's artistry deserves to be looked at from an interdisciplinary point of view, especially in light of Kurtág's portrayal of Kafka's experience of time by means of the musical rendering of memory, form, nature, and gesture.

Kurtág understands the relationship of time as a crucial modern aesthetic and element of form. In general, time is a defining concept of twentieth-and twenty-first-century art. In music and literature especially, temporal considerations extend far beyond the duration of the piece to become a governing principle on which the form of the work

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<sup>29</sup> Williams, "Kurtág, Modernity, Modernisms," 61.

is organized. The present of the work of art is saturated by memories of the past and expectations of the future. Author George Rochberg writes, “The present, the only moment in which we know we exist, is burdened by the weight of accumulated past experience, and the future is always one moment ahead of us -- the next ‘present’ moment in which we hope to exist. So we live between memory and anticipation ... We live in time and through time.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, art lives in time and through time. Art is one of the most apt reflections of our temporal experience, in fact, because it is a complete entity through which growth and transformation may be observed. In this way art is alive and exists in literal and figurative time. Music and literature are especially clear in the discussion of time, as their unfolding over clock time generally makes reveals the transformation between stages.

Authors such as Proust and Joyce depicted a consciousness that was not dictated by the diligent hands of the clock. Chronological order of events gave way to sensory experiences and memories that evoked the past and future at any given point in the narrative, thus the “the bringing together of two sensations which gush out from the signs and signal themselves . . . Proustian time, which brings together the sensations imprinted in signs, is a metamorphosis.”<sup>31</sup> The association between this “metamorphosis” of time applies especially fluently to music. Like literature, it is a temporal art form that unfolds over a period of clock time. Music begins at a certain point, progresses in the ear of the listener, and evokes a sense of character advancement and narrative. Musical time, like Proustian time, acts subjectively in that musical form is not necessarily chronological in a linear sense; though the piece itself is running for a period of clock time in a certain

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<sup>30</sup> Rochberg, George, *The Aesthetics of Survival: A Composer's View of Twentieth-Century Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Proust and the Sense of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5.



tempo, the form can allow for the return of past ideas, the foreshadowing of future events, and the simultaneous presence of varying motives. Nancy Anne Cluck states,

The temporal arts require chronological time in order to unfold, yet, in their very development through time they go beyond it and transmit the essence of internal, subjective time. The movement toward form -- this process of becoming -- in the temporal arts, then, momentarily impels the perceiver beyond chronological time and provides him with the illusion of wholeness, of completed design which has achieved being.<sup>32</sup>

This is the temporal climate in which Kurtág's setting of the *Kafka Fragments* exist.

The forty movements acting independently of each other lack a sense of progression from beginning to end. Kurtág intentionally juxtaposes the movements as separate entities, leading the audience to be spun in different directions between movements, hanging in a time that is subject to memories and sentiments. As a result of these juxtaposed aural images, his music is a representation of the unpredictability and disjunction of life. Kafka writes: "To every moment there corresponds something outside time. The empirical world cannot be followed by a transcendent world, for transcendence is eternal, and therefore cannot touch the temporality of the empirical directly."<sup>33</sup> Kurtág musically represents Kafka's sentiment.

In the world of Proust and Kafka, memory is the key to the progression of time, which is subject to the whims of memory as prompted by sensory experiences. "The Proustian theory of memory: the most powerful and profound memories are those that cannot be consciously recovered, that can only be called up from the past involuntarily by

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Anne Cluck, *Literature and Music: Essays on Form* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 3.

<sup>33</sup> James Rolleston, "Kafka's Time Machines," in *Franz Kafka: His Craft and Thought*, ed. Roman Struc and J.C. Yardley (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 30.

sensations of taste or smell.”<sup>34</sup> In “Swann’s Way,” this first volume of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, a significant portion of the novel explores the response to the narrator’s sensory experience of a “Madeleine” cake soaked in tea, and the memories that are stimulated by it. With memory as the guide, inciting past and future within the present alternatively, sometimes even simultaneously, time lacks a strict sense of chronological order. Music functions comfortably in this construct, being largely dictated by musical memory itself through the return of the original theme, the repeat of a prior section of music, and the repetition and transformation of a motive. Proust’s Narrator alludes to this pattern: “Any yet, when, later on, this sonata had been played to me two or three times I found that I knew it perfectly well . . . Probably what is wanting, the first time, is not comprehension but memory. For our memory, relatively to the complexity of the impressions which it has to face while we are listening is infinitesimal.”<sup>35</sup> The Narrator refers to the sonata form, itself a genre of repeated sections and motives remembered from earlier in the piece. In his book, *Proust the Musician*, Jean Jaques Nattiez writes,

The theme of the superiority of musical language is intimately bound up with that of the unity of the work, for the resemblances between similar musical phrases in different works and the similarities between different phrases in one and the same work constitute . . . a musical metaphor for the workings of involuntary memory. Now, these workings are at the root of the recurrence of the themes that lend unity not only to a particular work but also to the entire output of a composer or writer.”<sup>36</sup>

It is this concept of memory that directly influences Kurtág’s compositional process.

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<sup>34</sup> Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Proust as Musician* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

In one of his interviews with Kurtág, author Balint Varga asks the composer about the importance of memory in his life and works.

BV -- The notion of memory of as a way of thinking. It appears to have special significance for you.

GK -- Yes. It is very important.

BV -- In other words, the past lives on in you and you conjure it up again and again.<sup>37</sup>

The primary way in which we see Kurtág's use of memory is his constant practice of dedications and homage for each of his compositions. He does not work on commission, interestingly, insisting that he cannot complete a piece on the basis of composing solely for a self-gratifying purpose. Instead, he is prompted to write on the strength of his personal connections. In this way, he pays tribute to those who are important to his life and his work. He acknowledges the compositional masters to whom he considers himself indebted, among them Bach, Bartók, Schütz, Machaut, and Schumann, in a way that is intensely personal and self-reflective. Also, Kurtág dedicates his music to family and friends who are dear to him. As a result, his personal life and history are completely integrated into his music. He joins his inspirations, friends, and teachers in the music itself, and is thus constantly present within the piece. Williams writes, "These further levels of reference can suggest a great deal about Kurtág's thinking at the time of the composition of the piece; it is in this respect that a consideration of Proustian memory can help to illuminate Kurtág's thinking."<sup>38</sup> The *Kafka Fragments* are no exception; almost every movement is marked with an homage or dedication. While listening to the

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<sup>37</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, "Kurtág, Modernity, Modernisms," 64.

music and being aware of these references, we intuitively sense multiple layers in the piece. Each movement is a patchwork quilt of Kurtág's musical and personal ancestry.

Kurtág is mysterious in the presentation of his memories, however. We rarely know the reason behind the conjuring or significance of a particular memory, as he offers no explanations. His ambiguousness in answering personal questions about his references illuminates an interesting aspect of his compositional process. He allows us to see the person with whom he had, presumably, a certain relationship, but does not let us know anything further. In his interview with Varga, Kurtág states, "Composing is strictly a private affair . . . It's a message . . . That is most important."<sup>39</sup> Author Alan E.

Williams writes,

The presence of "secret" dedicatees, hidden meanings, or arcane multiple references is an impression at least partly created by Kurtág himself. Kurtág's unwillingness to reveal fully these associations may be part of a desire to protect the aura of meaningfulness the music maintains: we may never know, for example, what the association is in Kurtág's mind between Stephan Stein (commemorated in *Grabstein for Stephan*, Op. 15) and the (almost) open strings of a guitar. In a sense what matters is that an audience should believe there to be an association beyond the one in the here and now of the performance of the piece.<sup>40</sup>

Kurtág is adamantly private, sharing no personal anecdotes when teaching, rarely divulging his secrets. It may be safe to say, however, that the answers to our questions are indeed in front of us, within the piece. Kurtág emphasizes the idea of worthiness, deservedness, and reward for hard work, both in his personal and professional life. His music is notoriously difficult, but he insists that it is completely playable if the performers are willing to dedicate themselves to the piece. In his mind, music (his or others) requires nothing less. Perhaps it is this issue of dedication that keeps him from

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<sup>39</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 34

<sup>40</sup> Williams, "Kurtág, Modernity, Modernisms," 66.

revealing the how or why of his constant dedications: if we really want to know, we should find it in the music. To truly understand his music is to know Kurtág, and in knowing him through music, we are allowed into a deeply intimate creative world. Kurtág is strikingly different from many of his peers in that he allows us the possibility of experiencing this connection. Williams compares Kurtág to Stockhausen:

Kurtág can be seen in this way to be reflecting, rather than conflicting with, the main tendencies of the European Avant-garde. Again though, this would obscure the sense in which Kurtág's music is directed from a purely personal response to the world: whereas the references in *Hymnen* [Stockhausen] are international, impersonal, and explicit in their meanings, Kurtág's references are parochial, personal, and covert.<sup>41</sup>

This depiction of time has implications for the nature of the compositional structure. Thus, in keeping with his preference for free form, Kurtág's conceptualization of his composition evokes a sense of the natural world. During an interview the composer, author Balint Varga draws a conclusion about Kurtág's compositional process: "So for you, composing is not at first an act of conscious shaping. Rather, you help with the birth of what wants to be born."<sup>42</sup> Kurtág himself has frequently remarked that he thinks of the development of his compositions as a form of childbirth. He conceives of and fosters the music, but the composition as a whole enters the world when ready, independent of his control. When discussing his work, the language that he uses offers strong evidence of a relationship between his compositional process and inspiration from nature. He quotes, I almost inscribed as an epigraph at the start of the movement two lines by Tudor Arghezi: "From mildew, suppurating wounds and ordure/ I generated

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<sup>41</sup> Williams, "Kurtág, Modernity, Modernisms," 52.

<sup>42</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 34

new beauties and values.”<sup>43</sup> In this way, Kurtág’s compositions are a gradually evolving process with strong implications of environmental history and layers of geological memory. Again, Kurtág shows inspiration from his Romantic predecessors. Rosen writes, “The landscape of the Romantic poet and painter was saturated with memory, geological as well as sentimental: the essential condition of the new style was the visible presence of the past in the present. Opposition of past and present was not felt as a contradiction, paradox, or oxymoron.”<sup>44</sup> The landscape becomes the purest portrayal of time in the Romantic period. The early Romantic composers’ sense of form was often informed by the growth and decay of nature, the change of season, and the natural progression of earth’s aging process. Similarly, Kurtág’s sense of nature is deeply striking, but his modern perception of nature reveals it as intense, destructive, and even undiscerning. Its abnormalities and points of strangeness are a source of beauty in their own right and its process of evolution reflects our psychological processes. Author Dana Barazzoni writes,

There is a sort of “spirit”-ism in Kurtág’s music which, more or less consciously, tends always to discover a dynamic force that can be turned into an evolving process: what is attractive for the composer in most of his pieces is in fact the initial movement of elementary cells, outwardly chaotic but none the less well organized, that broaden out in the course of the piece and invade the register . . . following precise strategies and directions. It is this inner mobility and energy that comes from this basic material, always in the course of transformation and irregular in its own rhythm that hints at processes and rhythms of biological development, as well as the flow of the natural element.<sup>45</sup>

Specifically in the *Kafka Fragments*, the development of musical organisms drives individual movements as well as the piece as a whole. Kurtág remarks:

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<sup>43</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> Dana Barazzoni, “Kurtág’s Music: The Spectacle of Nature, the Breath of History, from op. 7 to 27.” in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 43, no. 3 (2002), 253-254.

*Fragments* provide a graphic construct in the work, even a type of sign. Kurtág has experimented with the graphic representation of his ideas, especially during his brief period in Paris.

When I was producing my things in India ink, I was making signs . . . during my year in Paris (and again at the end of the period of paralysis, which preceded *Játékok*, roughly a year beforehand), for months on end I only drew, set down signs . . . There wasn't much difference between the signs, but it's as if a bit of them passes over into *Játékok*.<sup>50</sup>

The sign of the path and circle are a constant in the *Kafka Fragments*. Of the forty fragments, fifteen are concerned with concept of a path, especially in the process of a path to salvation or purity. They are one of Kurtág's most insistent preoccupations, and one that Kafka shared: the perpetual search for redemption.

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<sup>50</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 8.

## CONCLUSION

After the premiere of Kurtág's *Eight Duos*, Op. 4, András Pernye, a leading music critic who wrote for the *Magyar Nemzet* in Hungary, praised Kurtág for his ability to represent a "living, organic world." There are inherent difficulties in applying the term "organic" to a work of art. The current ease with which word is used in modern society and the term's inherent vagueness cause the word to be subject to misuse. The formal definition of the word *organic* is: "of, relating to, or derived from living organisms." An alternate definition is as follows: "forming an integral part of a whole." The difficulty in using either definition as a descriptor for a work of art is evident; in light of the inspirational material and processes involved in Kurtág's music, however, there is evidence for an argument that Kurtág's compositional process is, indeed, organic.

The commonality between the two definitions above is the idea of growth and process. One definition refers to a living organism, which grows and develops from birth to adulthood. The second definition concerns a whole and its crucial parts, an idea which can be applied to a wide range of concepts, including an ecosystem or other community. Thus, the word *organic* possesses inherent possibilities for the concept of living growth, development, and change.

Many of Kurtág's individual qualities stem from the instigation and manner of his compositional process. Kurtág has a very unusual concept of where his composition originates. For Kurtág, the development of his process fully came into fruition after his



work with psychologist Marianne Stein in Paris who gave him the courage to compose beginning from only one note. From this advice, he stripped his life down to the point where he could clear his mind and compose with minimal materials. Kurtág remarks, “The year in Paris and the work with Marianne Stein virtually split my life in two.”<sup>51</sup> Although he had previously written several compositions, Kurtág considered his first work after his sessions with Marianne Stein, a string quartet, as his opus one.

Kurtág’s concept of composition coming from one note further developed several years later when he wrote *Játékok*, or *Games*, for piano, which allowed him to experiment fully with the birth of musical composition from a single note. Kurtág remarks,

*Games* was one of my new beginnings. But that doesn’t mean I took a new direction. I just thought that there was this basic element . . . that all I knew was that there was this ‘C’ . . . so what could be a response to that? Perhaps another note, and then the music gets underway. But that’s as old as music itself. It’s how Gregorian chants came about. They’d read the texts out loud, on the one note . . . then they’d want to stress something and they’d go . . . (sings down, emphasizing second note) . . . so already they had two notes. Then they’d go . . . (sings melisma) . . . So, by adding a few notes, you can mark the end of the phrase. That’s pretty much how music was born. I can always come back to this basic conception that you only need one note.<sup>52</sup>

From that point of view, *Játékok* became for me something of a new Opus 1. Suddenly, there is no system, there is no chromaticism, only a C in the middle of the keyboard. One can try to find notes around it. That provided a path toward many things and also helped me to draw conclusions from the practice of Gregorian chant. I learned from it, for instance, how melody came about through the slightly heightened recitation of a single tone.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Kele, *The Matchstick Man* [videorecording] : György Kurtág; The seventh door : Peter Eotvos [Les Films d’ici ; produced by Serge Lalou] (Paris, France, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 58.

Thus, Kurtág looks back again, this time, not to the early Romantics, but to some of the earliest music, the psalm tone. He takes the concept of the psalm tone and uses it as a basis for the composition of his modern music. Kurtág's explanation of his response to the psalm tone reveals something else about the nature of his composition, however. In describing the development of the chant, Kurtág highlights the chant's musical progression as a means to emphasize a point in the text when he says, "They'd read the texts out loud, on the one note . . . then they'd want to stress something and they'd go . . . (sings down, emphasizing second note.)" Insight can be gained from Kurtág's explanation and an application of his chant concept to his own music: Kurtág composes to emphasize the text. Though he writes instrumental music, Kurtág's ingenuity is most present in his works with text, as he takes the ancient concept of composing to emphasize a text and makes it relevant in a contemporary construct.

During an interview with author Varga, Kurtág pauses momentarily in the middle of a discussion about his compositional process and says, "Childhood again . . . Slow processes."<sup>54</sup> He does not offer an explanation of his remark, nor does Varga press him. Yet, when the statement is studied in the context of the entire interview, it becomes one of the most important utterances because it encapsulates Kurtág's ideas about the nature of his composition. Under all of the meticulously interwoven complexity of his music, there is a simplicity that is almost childlike. Kurtág does not hesitate to say that composing is difficult work, but he speaks of the music as coming from him in a way that is fundamentally uncontrived. He says that he composes "practically without material, quite simply because something is happening which transforms nothing into

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<sup>54</sup> Varga, *Three Interviews*, 8.

movement.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Kurtág does not shy away from the past, whether it is the music of his childhood or that of his former influences. He incorporates these influences into his modern music, sometimes directly referencing an earlier composer through dedication or homage. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Kurtág has retained a childhood sense of wonder for the world around him, including nature and the potential for expression and beauty that is inherent also in other disciplines. He is constantly enthralled by new discoveries in art, language, and literature, and he embraces such findings as another aspect of his musical personality.

In this way, there are ties between the idea of “organic” and Kurtág’s artistic concept of composing from one note. Each process involves the birth of an idea or “organism” in its simplest means – a life form in its beginning stage, and a single pitch. As the “organism” develops, it gains the ability to become more complex through the absorption of new concepts and inspirations. In the *Kafka Fragments*, the growth from an initial note (G) becomes an entire complex ecosystem on which Kurtág’s axis and means of musical form is based. Kurtág’s development of the single note into a complicated being allows him to articulate the text in a particularly natural way, to use extra-musical elements as influences inherent to the compositional process, and to develop a sophisticated musical form that retains the elegance of a stunningly simple idea.

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<sup>55</sup> Judith Kele, *The Matchstick Man: György Kurtág*.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Kate Cavanaugh Doyle**

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### **Education**

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, Music History, 2010 to Current

**Graduate Teaching Assistant, Ethnomusicology Department**

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, M.M., 2009 to Current, GPA: 3.9

**First Violinist, University of Louisville Graduate String Quartet**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant**

Baldwin-Wallace College and Conservatory of Music, Berea, OH, B.M., 2003 to 2007, GPA 3.6

**Major: Violin Performance; Magna cum laude graduate**

### **Administrative/General Employment**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant**, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, 2010 to Current

*Teach/Assist Classes in Ethnomusicology Dept.*

**Assistant to Executive Director**, Oldham County Arts Center, Crestwood, KY, 2009 to 2010

*Assist Executive Director with administrative support, grant writing, faculty affairs*

**Graduate Teaching Assistant**, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, 2009 to 2010

*Teach university classes; provide private violin instruction for university*

*undergraduates; develop outreach and educational community programs; perform*

*administrative duties; perform with quartet for university functions*

### **Organizations/Professional Affiliations**

**President**, World Music Organization, Louisville, KY, 2010 to Current

**President, Volunteer**, Cardinal Musicians Outreach Initiative, Louisville, KY, 2009 to Current

**First Violin**, University of Louisville Graduate String Quartet, Louisville, KY, 2009 to Current

**Concertmaster**, University of Louisville Symphony Orchestra, Louisville, KY, 2009 to Current

**Member**, Music Teachers National Association, 2007

**Member**, Mu Phi Epsilon Music Honors Society, 2005 to 2007

**Assistant Concertmaster**, Baldwin-Wallace Symphony Orchestra, 2003 to 2007

**Member**, Baldwin-Wallace Bach Festival Orchestra, 2004 to 2006

**Board Member**, American String Teachers Association, 2003 to Current

### **Honors/Awards:**

National Fulbright Scholar Alternate, 2010

University of Louisville Graduate String Quartet Assistantship, 2009

Music Teachers National Association Teacher Achievement Award, 2009