Musical and spiritual affinities: Olivier Messiaen and Eduard Terényi

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Abstract: The paper argues that there is a very close connection between E. Terényi and O. Messiaen, implying the mystical, symbolic and stylistic coordinates of their music. The name of O. Messiaen appears in the titles and the subtitles of some of Terényi's organ works: *Chaconne – Hommage à Messiaen* (1978), *In solemnitate corporis Christi* (1993) – in memoriam Messiaen, *Messiaenesques* (1993), or the filiation can be only suggested, as in: *Die Gottestrompeten* (1995), *Dialogues mistiques* (2006), *The Birds* (2007). One of Messiaen's organ plays particulary had an important influence on Terényi's music: *L'Ascension*, the variant for the organ, based on the idea of Christ's resurrection and His glory.

Key-Words: Eduard Terényi, Olivier Messiaen, L'Ascension, organ music, contemporary music, musical style

For half a century, Eduard Terényi (b. 12th of March 1932, Târgu-Mureş), univ. professor, Ph. D. at "Gh. Dima" Music Academy, develops a prodigious and a vast composing activity which is both musicologist and pedagogical and it is permanently marked by the opening towards the new composing tendencies and the musicological conceptualisations. Regarding the creations that are designed for organ, E Terényi is one of the most prolific of the Romanian composers of the twentieth century which have written for this instrument. His organ catalogue includes solo organ plays and organ concertos as well as chamber works where the organ appears in different instrumental combinations or vocal ones.

There is a very close connection between E. Terényi and O. Messiaen (1908-1992), concerning not only the mystical, symbolic and spiritual coordinates of their music but also their fascination for geometric and synthesis harmony [1], for the organ, the *chant d'oiseaux*, the timbre of the percussion instruments, the synaesthesia (associations between music or tones and colours), the cosmic and mystic perspective, the interest for different time dimensions and atemporality, the celebration of love, nature and the Divine, the insertion of the Gregorian plainchants, the repeated rhythmical patterns, the mosaic form, the palindromic structures.

Messiaen himself was the organist at La Trinité Church in Paris for over 6o years and the sacred, instrumental meditation that has mystical reflexes won an important place in the concert music of the twentieth century due to him. In his turn, E. Terényi has had the same purpose: "I wanted to introduce in the concert auditorium, the glorification of God. The interpretation of the sacred music out of the church has a three hundred years tradition, but the transfer of the Christian mediation in the concert halls was O. Messiaen's conquest." [2]

The aiming of the essence leaded E. Terényi, in an existential level, to a steady dialogue with the divine. This aspect is transposed into a musical content since the beginning of its creation and especially in the row of the plays of the organ (or that of the different formations where the organ can be found) through the mystical and the biblical or religious subjects that appear in this hypostasis through the title or their ideate programme. The thematic of the organ plays are diversified: plays that are dedicated to Mary (*Septem dolores*, *Stella aurorae*, *Stabat Mater*), meditations on the birth of the Saviour (*Introitus*, *Semper felice*), the suffering and resurrection of Christ and their significance (*B. A. C. H – composition for organ*, *The Seven Words of the Saviour on the Cross, Stabat Mater*, *In solemnitate corporis Christi*), meditations above the person of Christ and His glory (*In solemitate corporis Christi*, *Epiphania Domini, Chaconne – Hommage à Messiaen*), dialogue with God, mystic experiences (*B.A.C.H – composition for organ*, *Glocken*, *Messiaenesques*, *Dialogues mistiques*, *The Birds*), the vision of the Apocalypse (*Die Gottestrompeten*), the closeness to the silence and the simplicity of the spiritual truths (*Octo felicitatis*). Messiaen was not only one of the most influential composers of the 20th century, he was also one of the most religious musicians in the history of music. Many of his works are mystical description of the essence of the Christianity: *L'Ascension* (1933), *La Nativité de Seigneur* (1936), *Les Corps glorieux (Seven Brief Visions of the Life of the Resurrected)* - 1939, *Quatuor*

pour la fin du Temps (1941), *Vingt Regards sur l'enfat Jésus* (1944), *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1951) and so on. Messiaen's approach to religion was rather joyous; he didn't write music that was about suffering, on the contrary, he wanted to talk about the most ecstatic aspects of Christianity.

Referring to the musical work *The Concert of the Queen Mab* (of the series of the twelve neo – Baroque concerts) E. Terényi underlines the importance of the duality earth – heaven, the suffering – laudation in his religious music: "The basic suggestion of the musical work is the suffering and the laudation (…) body and soul, earth and heaven, human and the divine. I was preoccupied by the contradictions that are knitted together. This duality characterizes my religious music as well. In the musical works composed for the organ in the eighties, there is already, a special role to the two depictures of Christ: the earthen and the transcendental, spiritual one." [3]

The theological motif *Christus Victor* where the cross signifies not only Christ's suffering but also His victory, through a perspective that offers hope and sense to the earthen suffering moment, has also a great significance in Terényi's organ music, in plays like: *The Seven Words of the Saviour on the Cross*, *Stabat Mater*, *In solemnitate corporis Christi*, *Die Gottestrompeten*, *Epiphania Domini*.

E. Terényi celebrates the nature and the Divine in his unique language and among the archetypes that are presented in his organ plays and his entire creation there are a few primary elements that are highlighted and also their metaphorical and mystical meanings: the flight that symbolizes the Holy Spirit and the aspiration of the soul (*The Maestros Bird Symphony*, *Epiphania Domini*), the flow of the water as the live substance that is purified in the presence of its creator (*Epiphania Domini*, *In solemnitate corporis Christi*), the song of the birds (*The Birds*, *Messiaenesques*) and the sublime sonority of the bells of a cosmic cathedral (*Honterus Odae*, *Dialogues mistiques*, *The Birds*, *Epiphania Domini*, *Glocken*), the fire, the continuity and the intensity of the burning, symbolizing the spiritual energy (*Threnody*, *Introitus*, *Cantico del Sol*).

E. Terényi gave me some interviews in the month of February of 2008, when he confessed to a series of aspects that are part of his musical thinking, including the archetypes that he uses: "In many of my plays the motif of the bells comes back, also the motif of the water, the singing of the birds. These are the three great symbols of my life. The flight of the soul and that of the spirit. The bells, the halo of the sounds where you can dive into and the cosmos of the sounds can be found as well. The water, as a support of the life, it is a live substance and a symbol of the purification as well".

The name of Messiaen appears in the titles or the subtitles of some Terényi's organ works: *Chaconne – Hommage à Messiaen* (1978), *In solemnitate corporis Christi* (1993) – in memoriam Messiaen, *Messiaenesques* (1993). In other plays, this filiation is only suggested by the title and the music as well: *Die Gottestrompeten* (1995), *Dialogues mistiques* (2006), *The Birds* (2007). One of Messiaen's organ plays particulary has had an influence on Terényi: *L'Ascension*, composed for the orchestra (1932 - 1933), initially as "four symphonic meditations" (*Quatre Méditations Symphonique*). The variant for the organ was created later, in 1933 – 1934. Every part has a motto based on the idea of Christ's resurrection and His glory and its implications for Christianity:

1. The majesty of Christ demanding its glory of the Father (Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee)
2. Serene alleluias of a soul that longs for heaven (We pray you, God, help us dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven)
3. Ecstasies of a soul before the glory of Christ, which is its own glory (Givind thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light ... raised us up and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus)
4. Prayer of Christ ascending towards his Father (Father … I manifested Thy name to the men … and I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee)

The first bar of Messiaen's *L'Ascension* (fig. 1) was quoted by Terényi in his *Chaconne – Hommage à Messiaen* **(**1978) as "an ostinato bass", "a ciacona bass," a modal and harmonical support that has the variations of the *Chaconne* to develop onto it (fig. 2). The comprised tones of Messiaen's motif form a palindrome modal scale (A, B, C, D#, E, F, G#, A, B) which, together with its transpositions, constitutes the sonorous frame of the *Chaconne*. *Chaconne* is a synthesis of the constructivism, aleatorism and graphism that represents the two main tendencies of Terényi's first period of creation. The work has 6 parts, each containing 4 variations and each variation has 3 modules (a, b and c). The order and the number of the parts is not pre-established but it is for the player to choose and he can elude up to five parts. The 3rd part of the *Chaconne* ends the first large section of the musical play and it starts the varied recurrence in the mirror of the first three parts.

In solemnitate corporis Christi (1993) – *in memoriam Messiaen* depicts "a sonorous fresco of the last Supper that precedes the suffering and the death of Christ. It is a commemoration of the scene which the Saviour talks about himself and the mission that He has to fulfil on the earth" (E. Terényi). The first part represents the pattern for the next two parts, it becomes a sort of "theme – personage" in the mind of the author through the preservation of the algorithm of the three segments A, b, c that are characterized through different syntaxes: *A* -

melody,*b* - chords/figurations, *c* – unison/eighths/chords. The first strophe *A* is a melodic line of a neo – Gregorian style that is partially inspired from the *cantus planus* variant of *In solemnitate corporis Christi* from *Cantionale Catholicum*. The stylistic benchmark of the b segment/motif is represented by the third part of *L'Ascension* by O. Messiaen (fig. 3) which, through the title and the *motto* corresponds to the spiritual ideas of the musical work *In solemnitate corporis Christi:* "Ecstasies of a soul before the glory of Christ, which is its own glory".The chorded cell that is chromatically descending is repeated ternary and it signifies the sorrow of Christ (fig. 4). The composer uses it again in 1995 in *Die Gottestrompeten* where it signifies the pouring onto the earth of the fourth cup of the God's anger (fig. 5). The c segment/motif is derived from the b segment/motif: paralel octaves in long rhythmic values – and it has the connotation of the divine voice and the cosmic time (fig. 4). The leitmotif in itself presents in the Terényian creation some variants, in similar contexts that have the same *teophany* meaning, a revelation of the divine in the person of Christ (*In solemnitate corporis Christi*, *Epiphania Domini*), of celebration of God in a cosmical liturgical frame (*Glocken*) or in the middle of the monumental cathedral of the nature (*Stella aurorae*, *The Birds*), Holy Mary's image (*Stella aurorae*, *Glocken*), the dialogue between the artist and God (*Fadrusz Concerto* for organ and orchestra). The b and c motifs are artistic reflections of a mystical feeling and also of the axiological thinking which are paradigms that seem to correspond as an *affectus* to the phrase *mysterium tremendum* that is used by Rudolf Otto in order to define that "answer of the soul in front of the numinous", as "that part of the sacra (…) that is manifested under the form of a specific accompanying feelings" [4].

In Terényi's organ plays *Messiaenesques* (I, II) and *Dialogues mistiques* (I, II, III) the general composing scheme of the character variations is expressed by the author through a mosaic fantasy – design (fig. 6) that "is like stained glass windows in a cathedral" (Terényi) and bears much resemblance to Messiaen's musical form. Each of the geometrical figures represents a melodic, chorded and rhythmical entity that has an improvisatory character and aleatory possibilities as well. The drawing reflects the structuralism vision of the pre-selected paradigmatic elements and, in the same time, it is a generalized graphic representation of the variational micro–montage technique. The geometrical symbols are visual analogies to the musical "drawing" of the sonorous micro-units.

The *Messiaenesques* does not have a theme or a melodic idea in the traditional sense of the term, but a "theme – idea" or a stylistic "theme – bench-mark". The theme – idea appears when, by the imaginary taking of some stylistic elements, of another composer or musical work, the author creates an imaginary replica that is not declared inside the musical work. The connections between the stylistic pattern and its variations cannot be seen by the players, musicologists or the public. "This might be the most extremist variation musical concept, both as an architectural form and also regarding the ideate content" - states the composer. The filiation of the sonorous entities is suggested by the title of the musical work: *Messiaenesques* –illustrating a series of dispersed stylistic suggestions of the music of Oliver Messiaen, namely, melodic lines, rhythms, the dynamics, chords and so on, which are used to create a series of analogies, variations or oppositions. The play on words from the title - by separating the word *Messiaenesque* we get (Olivier) *Messiaen* + (George) *Enescu* - is not an amusement as it may seem as there are some elements taken from the Enescu's style and this musical play mirrors a double stylistic thinking.

Certain harmonic stylemes and the rhapsodic style of some micro – elements (through the rhythmic liberty that allows agogic micro - variations) they remind us of the Enescian thinking and that of Messiaen as well (the *oiseaux* style, the harmonic strata). In addition, the abstract conception of the micro – elements, the lack of fixed themes, and the evolving, organic style of the music is common for all three composers Enescu, Messiaen, Terényi and it is opposed to the Western music configuration in explicit melodic entities that culminated as Pascal Bentoiu remarks, with the rigidity of the Wagnerian musical ideas [5].

In the vision of the composer, this type of musical thinking has an archetypal value that comes in the prolongation of the model of the divine creative thinking: "There is an abstract idea of the leaf, ant, human being and so on. Nevertheless, you will not find in the nature two identical leafs or insects. On the same principle I have my *organic* musical work to rely on".

Fig. 7 is a sample of analyse of the first play from the *Messiaenesques* cycle on the manuscript of the author, by unifying the tones with imaginary lines, and getting different geometrical figures (e. g. 2). For example, the isosceles triangle – is associated with the melodic cell/motif that is characterised through a leap (a generally ascendant one) and the coming back to the basic tone or to one of the tones that is closed to it. The next sign, that is similar to the *rectangle* appears in different forms along the musical play we have analysed so far – as it signifies a figure with latent plans which are the superior oscillations above a pedal tone. It is the symbol of a bird signal, an improvisatory micro – unit in Messiaen's *chant des oiseaux* style [6], and so on.

From 2007 on, the Terényian music goes increasingly towards the mystic states, an aspect, which is strengthened in his organ works as *Dialogues mistiques*

(2006) and *The Birds* (2007). "These two plays- the author confesses in the interview - are about a dialogue with the God. They ask for a different receptivity. This is the type of music that has to be listened in the absolute silence of the church, in the dynamically reduced sonorities by the avoidance of the excessive expressivity of an expressionist type which characterize certain musical works - especially those that belong to the first and the second wave of my creation."

Dialogues mistiques (2006) with the subtitle "three meditations for the organ" has as a basis a variational principle that is similar to that of *Messiaenesque* (1993). The sonorous process is generated by an exterior stylistic complex that is not declared by the composer and it is not suggested by the title. There are stylistic micro – bench-marks that are inspired from the creation of Messiaen, particularly through his organ variant of *L'Ascension*. The artistic filiation comes together with similar mystical revelations on the sacred coordinates. In this respect, the title and the *motto* of the second part of *L'Ascension* confess the same inner imperatives that impulsioned the creation of the musical work: *Serene alleluias of a soul that longs for heaven. Dialogues mistiques* is a prayer and, as a manner of presentation, it is a stylistic and spiritual dialogue with Messiaen's music, on a rich "archetypal palette". In the fig. 8, there are exposed, in a comparative table, a few samples taken from the two musical works (*L'Ascension* and *Dialogues mistiques*), of those sonorous units that are considered by the composer as the archetypes regarding their abstract contour and not the content: "I started from a few moments under the sign of certain musical memories and not of the quotations. I took into consideration the direct hints and not the copying of the contents. The forms are renewed. There is a permanent dialogue between the model (Messiaen's play) and my micro – variations. What is significant here is the fact that all the elements that have already been taken (reminded) represent personal processed feelings and they are not themes with variations but models with remodelling. It is a superior stage in the gradation of the variational forms in the idea that, the variation concept itself can be renewed in this way."

A praise that is given to "the nature", *The Birds* (2007) has as the basis (as the title suggests), the signals of some imaginary birds, *chants d'oiseaux*. There are two variants of the musical work: one for solo organ and another for organ with the percussion. The birds are imaginary and so are their sonorities (fig. 9). The twenty signals present a triple typology: signal – ornamented tone, signal – interval, signal – figuration (arpeggio, scale). These constitute nuclei that are extremely short, which come in an improvisatory order in different repetitive-variational forms, through a composing technique of a montage type: "These signals appear all the time varied although the basic pattern stays the same, with intonation differences – sometimes calmer, sometimes more agitated. Although it is repeated, we listen to it with a great pleasure, without being bored as this permanence of the ostinato creates a big stability, replacing the tonal circle. The ostinato suggests, if we wish, the steadiness of the tonic, the stability through the coming back to a basis structure. The sensibility, our reticence towards the phenomenon of the imponderability explains the tendency of finding fix points of equilibrium to which to come back after each tension state. In a way, we find this continuum flux of the dramaturgic movement in the signals of the birds, the ripple of a spring, the rustle of the leaves spluttered by the wind, whose sounds that are apparently monotonous do not create nervousness – but calm and intimacy".

Although in the first instance the form seems to be free evolving, the writing differences and contrasts allow the detachment of three strophes models, such as: A – ornaments on a tone, the trills, the appoggiaturas (ornaments); B - arpeggio, figurations; C – choral, homophony. In a metaphoric plan, the strophes A and B represent the miracle of the creation and the C strophe (*The Choral*) – the celebration of the Creator.

In conclusion, we can state that Terényi's musical dialogue with Messiaen on different levels, going from quotation to stylistic replicas is manifested under the aegis of everlasting ingenuity and creativity that is anchored in the profound strata of the authenticity and it comes as a result of his spiritual affinity with the French composer, of their related perceptions and the similarity of the artistic credos.

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Fig. 1 (O. Messiaen, the first incipit of the first part of *L'Ascension*)

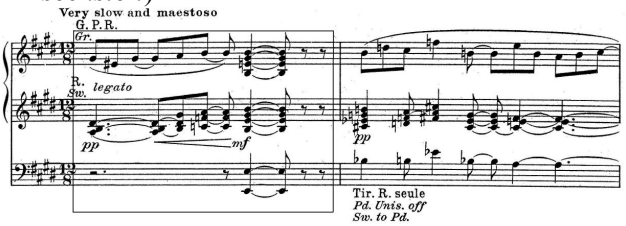

Fig. 2 (E. Terényi, the first part of *Chaconne*)

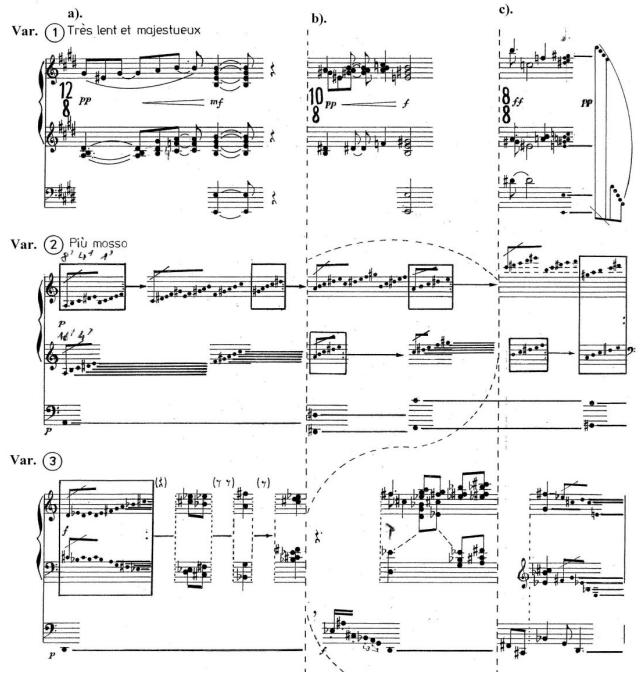

Fig. 3 (O. Messiaen, the incipit of the third part of *L'Ascension*)

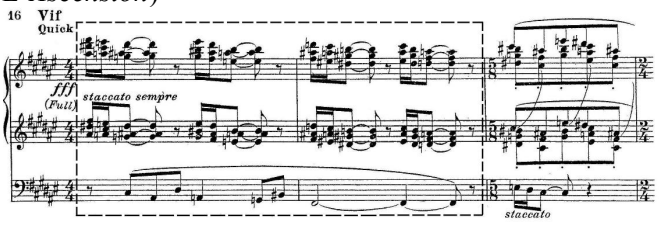

Fig. 4 (E. Terényi: *In solemnitate Corporis Christi*)

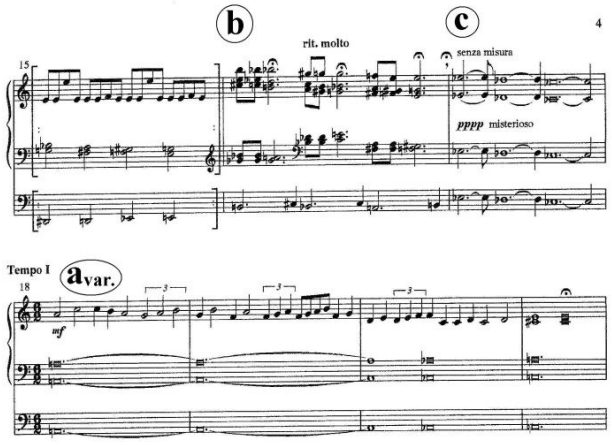

Fig. 5 (E. Terényi: *Die Gottestrompeten,* the 4th Bowl)

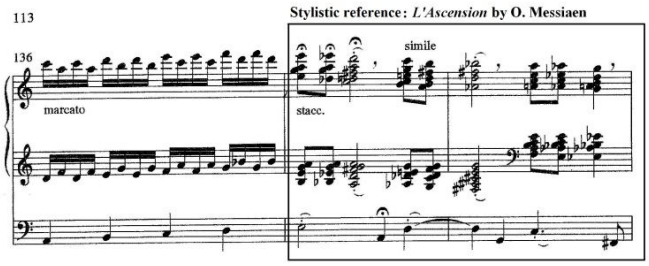

Fig. 6 (E. Terényi: *Messiaenesque*)

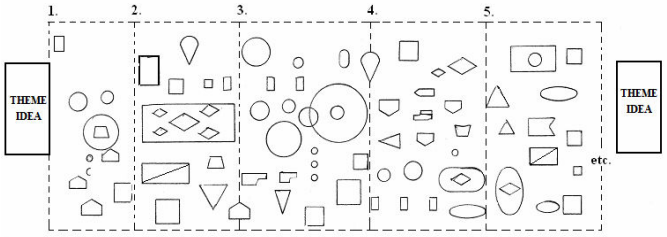

Fig. 7 (E. Terényi: *Messiaenesque*)

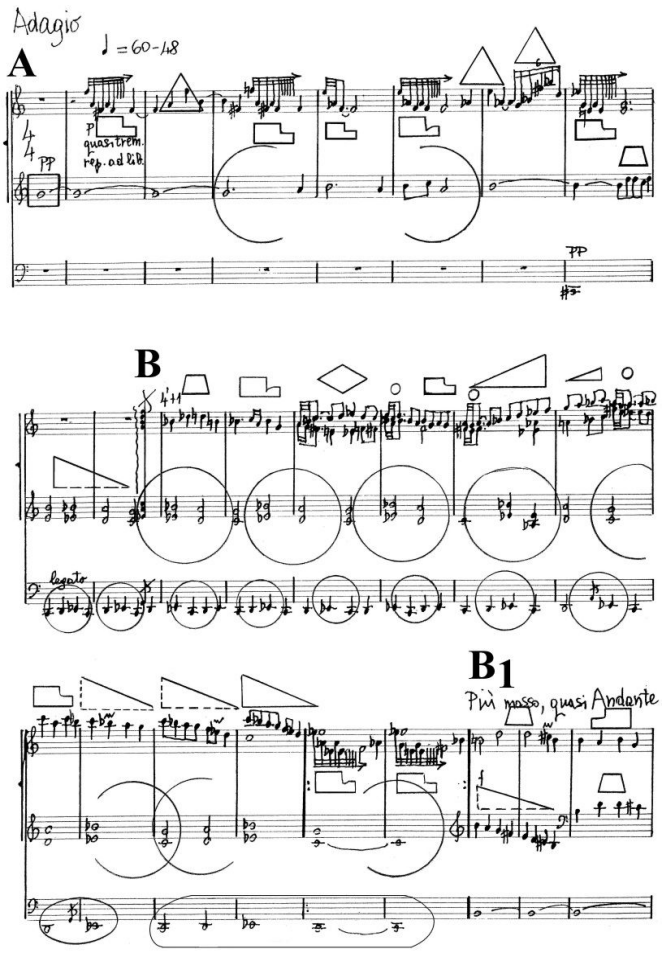

Fig. 8 (Essential elements in *Dialogues mistiques* and their stylistic correspondences with *L'Ascension*)

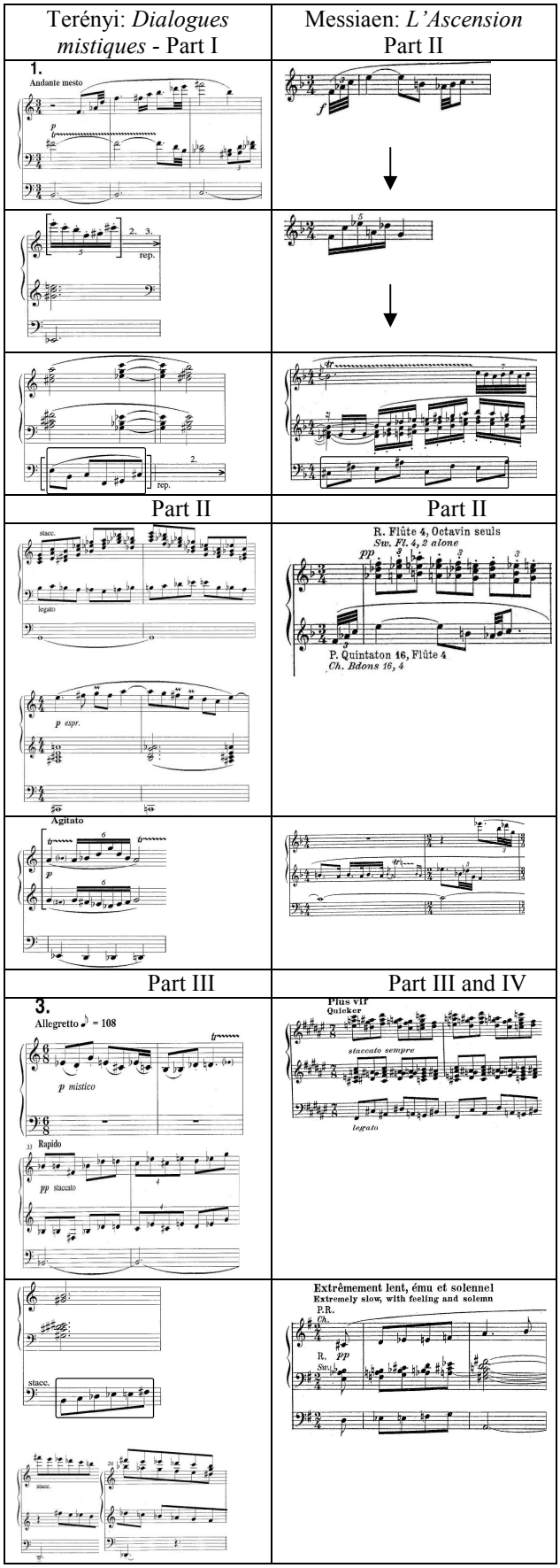

Fig. 9 (E. Terényi: *The Birds*)