

"**Treny** were born out of some inner necessity," Baley says; "of that I'm certain." He had wanted to write something for two talented young cellists now residing in the United States, Natalia Khoma and Suren Bagratuni, and for the Polish-based Ukrainian soprano, Olga Pasichnyk. Pasichnyk was interested in Renaissance music, so Baley's discovery of the 1995 translation of Kochanowski's centuries-old meditations on loss, despair, and the strength of the human spirit seemed fortuitous. At around the same time, though, he lost his mother, Lidia Baley, after a long illness; his close friend Bruce Adams died suddenly; and Larisa Silvestrov, wife of his longtime friend and fellow composer Valentin Silvestrov, also died. Under such circumstances, Baley found that Kochanowski's poetry struck a chord deep within. "Right from the start I wanted to write a tetralogy for two cellos and soprano," he recalls. "A big, abstract music drama in the first three parts, with words – finally! – joining in the last... the culmination."

The start, though, was not *Treny I*, but what is now *Treny III*. Both I and III are for solo cello, although in each case the second cellist provides a subtle drone or simple repeated accompaniment. Like the other parts of the piece, *Treny III* consists of a series of laments, ending with an *envoi* – a concluding stanza or poem of farewell. Three of the laments are in memory of Larisa Silvestrov, Lidia Baley, and the Ukrainian composer Boris Lyatoshynsky, a formative influence in Virko Baley's music and one of the men memorialized in the *Symphony #1*. The *envoi* is in memory of Bruce Adams. The rest of *Treny* is, true to Baley's original conception, somewhat more abstract. *Treny IV* was composed second, and actually sets five short excerpts from the Kochanowski poems to music. It is the only part of the work that features the soprano.

There are several layers of symmetry between the various parts of *Treny*. *Treny I*, the third part to be written, is again for solo cello with an occasional drone accompaniment; while *Treny II*, the last to be composed, is for two cellos together. So parts I and II mirror somewhat the instrumentation of parts III and IV. Obviously, I and III are related, since each is for solo cello with occasional drone; and II and IV are related in their more expansive tonal palette. Finally, I and IV share thematic material – namely, a four-note theme introduced early in the piece (fig. 1) and developed more fully in the last part (fig. 2).

Fig. 1: *Treny I*, bar 4 [Track 1, 0:41]



The descending four note pattern in this example, A - G - F - E, or two whole steps and a half step, was made famous in the early 17th century by Claudio Monteverdi, but it was often used by Renaissance and early Baroque composers, especially as a kind of "Lamento" theme. And indeed, this simplest of musical materials is used that way in Virko Baley's *Treny* as well. In Part IV, the Lamento theme returns in a number of inventive harmonizations, extensions, and transpositions.

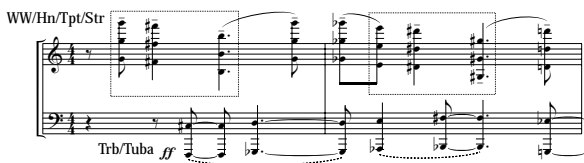
Fig. 2: *Treny IV*, bars 9 - 11 [Track 18, 0:59]



In this example, the two whole steps and single half step appear as G# - F# - E - Eb (the boxed notes), but the theme, in addition to being transposed to four different notes, has also become a part of a chord sequence: E major 7th, D# minor, C# minor, and D# major (with the Eb read as its enharmonic equivalent, D#). The Lamento progression is one of the two main building blocks used to create *Treny*, and the intervals of the major second (whole step) and minor second (half step) are central to the piece. "It is a kind of ur-motif of the whole cycle," Baley explains, "its tone row, if you like."

The other major building block used in *Treny* is a motif Baley refers to as simply "the *Treny* theme," even though it is also used quite prominently in the *Symphony #1: Sacred Monuments*. It consists of a descending minor second (G to F#, for example) and a descending perfect fifth (F# to B, to continue the example). Sometimes the theme goes back up a perfect fifth; often it does not.

Fig. 3: *Symphony #1: Sacred Monuments, Movement 1, The "Treny Theme."*



In *Treny*, the theme is heard in many different forms, and, towards the end of the first movement, it appears in several transpositions in rapid succession:

Fig. 4: *Treny I*, meas. 250-252 [Track 5, 2:32]



"That particular nucleus of notes," Baley points out, "is contained in a Ukrainian folk song that Boris Lyatoshynsky used in his big Third Symphony." As noted above, one of the threnodies in Part III is dedicated to Lyatoshynsky. The *Treny* theme and the Lamento progression become intertwined in ingenious ways during the course of this 4-part work. The two whole steps and one half step of the Lamento make up the interval of a fourth (A

down to E, in the example given above). The inversion of that interval (A going up to E, in this case) would be a perfect fifth – the second half of the *Treny* theme.

So throughout *Treny*, various types of fourths and fifths are used prominently. The idea, Baley notes, "is as old as the hills." The trick, then, is to do something new with the idea. "Almost every combination of the twelve notes has been used by composers over the last 300 years," he says. "There are no new combinations, but new ways of thinking with them." Baley chooses his words with care: notice that he says thinking *with* the notes, not *about* them. Art, he says, cannot be about itself; that is only craft. Baley likens it to bar work for a dancer: essential, but in the end just a technical exercise. In *Treny*, Baley uses diminished fifths and augmented fifths throughout – intervals that function here as a contraction and expansion of the perfect fifth. On a deeper level, these intervals also add an emotional intensity to the work. And, used in conjunction with the minor second, they weave the piece's two main themes together throughout *Treny*, holding its disparate parts together and, with their slightly exotic sounds, helping to give the work its "Slavic soul".

Treny I

"I wanted to write a four-part work," Baley explains, "that travels through the various stages of grief in *adagio* manner – for even the fast sections have a basically slow pulse. (Think of the *Largo* of Beethoven's third piano concerto.) In my experience, grief is a slow process, even if the heart beats wildly and the mind races about." While Baley does not link specific stages of grief to the individual movements, it is clear that *Treny I* is about the tormented anger and deep despair that accompanies grief. Baley does not use any of the Kochanowski laments in this section, but draws inspiration from the following lines:

*A mnie płakać mej wdzięcznej dziewczki pomocyę Help me to mourn my small girl, my dear daughter
Z którą mię niepobożna śmierć rozdziałała Whom cruel Death tore up with such wild force.**
*see page 2

Treny I begins with a long, quasi-improvisatory *tren* that echoes Kochanowski's cries of pain. The cellist is playing in a *scordatura* tuning, which means the instrument's normal tuning has been altered – something commonly done in Kochanowski's own time. Throughout *Treny*, the two cellos have their lowest strings tuned down to B, and the G strings tuned down to F#. This allows for a somewhat darker tone color entirely in keeping with the character of the piece. The opening measures immediately introduce the four-note Lamento theme:

Fig. 5: *Treny I*, bars 1 - 4 [Track 1, 0:00]



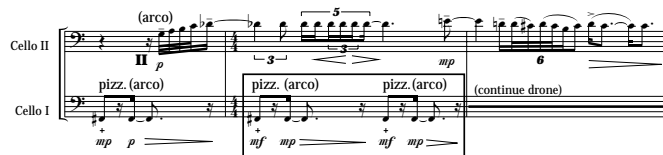
This leads directly into a rhythmically free, chromatic cry, largely written without bar lines or meters. This lament erupts into intense fury with the start of the second *tren* (track 2), and the cellist immediately introduces the *Treny* theme, in a highly exaggerated way:

Fig. 6: *Treny I*, bar 9 (*Treny* theme) and bar 10 (*Lamento* theme) [Track 2, 0:00]



The third note of the *Treny* theme is two octaves below where it is expected. This entire *tren* is one of violence and grotesquerie: full of rapid leaps of register, diminished fifths that appear almost as a parody of the *Treny* motif, and wailing cadenzas that have to be reined in by repeated markings in the score to return to a steady tempo. The third *tren* (track 3) offers an almost vocal-sounding cry of loss and despair, hovering over a simple but unusual drone – one that alternates, in strict rhythm, between the same note plucked and bowed.

Fig. 7: *Treny I*, meas. 57 [Track 3, 0:00]



True to Baley's idea of grief as a slow process even if things are happening quickly, *tren 4* (track 4) uses a rapid, strict tempo, often in familiar 4/4 time, but the obsessive repetition of a single note in several passages gives this *trena* curiously static quality: for all its sound and fury, it doesn't really go anywhere. In addition, that ostensibly simple rhythm is often twisted and obscured beneath layers of cross-rhythms and syncopations.

Fig. 8: *Treny I*, *tren 4*, meas. 32 [Track 4, 1:22]



The use of quintuplets and septuplets in Baley's work is another factor common to *Treny*, *Dreamtime*, and the *Symphony #1*. "The use of different note groupings," he says, "suggests different zones of being – and stretches or contracts the phrases. The basis for it is in some way acoustical, but also psychological: a state of mind is suggested, and thus a point of view." The fluid state of rhythm in Baley's music contributes to the unreal or

surreal mood of this trilogy of compositions. So too, does the almost improvisatory sound. As the fourth lament progresses, variations on the Lamento and Treny themes are suggested; materials are stretched out, brought back, inverted. At one point toward the end of *tren 4*, the cellist recalls the droned accompaniment of *tren 3*, although in this case the bowed note precedes the plucked.

The rhythmic freedom and quasi-improvised sounds suggest jazz, and while Baley states that he does not know how to play jazz, he certainly knows how to enjoy it. "My favorite, still, is Lennie Tristano. I know that dates me, but I like his use of rhythm and multiple levels of perception – forcing you to hear two conversations at the same time." The fifth *tren* (track 5) in *Treny I* continues the dual nature of the fourth; although marked "andante cantabile", it is quietly agitated, finally achieving a sort of equilibrium through a series of variations on the Treny theme – which also serves as a variant on the Lamento theme:

Fig. 9. Treny I, tren 5, bars 20 – 23 [Track 5, 2:32]



Notice that this is essentially the same example as figure 4 above. Adding a fourth bar, with a somewhat extended Treny motif, reveals that the four Treny variations add up to a slightly altered version of the Lamento theme's whole-step/whole-step/half-step pattern: the four variants descend in a half-step/whole-step/whole-step progression, embroidered by various major and minor seconds.

Each of the four parts of *Treny* concludes with an *Envoi*, a musical eulogy. Here, the *envoi* is appended to the fifth *tren*, and provides a hushed, almost desolate conclusion.

Treny II

The second part of *Treny* brings both cellos together, both playing in the same *scordatura* tuning introduced in *Treny I*. *Treny II* consists of two laments and an *envoi*. Baley refers to Kochanowski's *Tren 6* as a kind of motto for this movement:

<i>Nie nasyciłaś mych uszu swymi piosnkami.</i>	<i>You did not fill</i>
<i>I tę trochę teraz placę sownie łzami</i>	<i>My ears with songs enough, and yet I still</i>
<i>A tyś ani umierając śpiewać przestała.</i>	<i>Pay with my tears for those few that I heard.</i>

The first of *Treny II*'s laments (track 6) again suggests two different streams of thought simultaneously. It is a mysterious, nocturnal, yet troubled work. There are references to earlier musical gestures (septuplets again, as well as odd rhythmic combinations on a single note) and both variations and inversions on the Treny theme. The perfect fifth is compressed into a diminished fifth throughout much of the lament and eventually is inverted and constricted even further:

**Treny/Laments* by Jan Kochanowski; a bilingual edition. English version by Stanislaw Baranczak and Seamus Heaney; published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1995.

Fig. 10. Treny II, bars 36-38 [Track 6, 4:04]

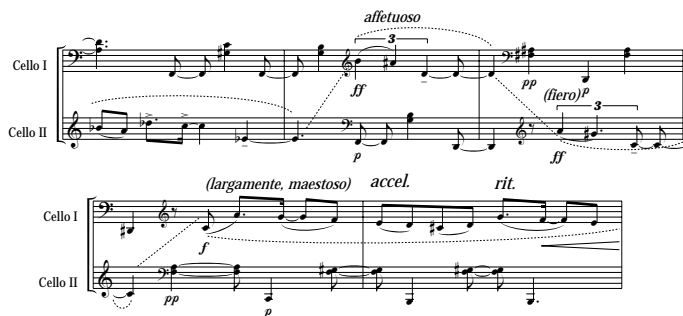


Measure 38 is the Treny theme (minor second, perfect fifth) inverted, with a diminished fifth used instead.

But in the two preceding measures, the second interval is a minor third, a subtle but effective evocation of the constricted feeling of grief. This particular *tren* ends with the Treny motif in its descending mode but, again, using the minor third.

The second *tren* in *Treny II* (track 7) uses the two cellos as a single composite instrument, passing melodies seamlessly to each other. Marked "lento con tristezza," it begins with a soulful lament over a rhythmic accompaniment reminiscent of the drone in *Treny I*. There are numerous variations on both of Baley's main themes – often going on simultaneously.

Fig. 11. Treny II, bars 72 – 76 [Track 7, 2:24]



Listeners who enjoy dissecting a musical score love passages like this. The dotted lines in the score lead first, in measure 73, to an expanded Treny motif in the first cello (minor second, augmented fifth). This is played in the treble clef; it interrupts a descending Lamento sequence that the same instrument is playing in the bass clef. In the next measure, the second cello plays a similar motif. A statement of the Lamento theme by the first cello follows. While that Lamento theme is heard in the first cello, the second cello plays two broken chords which are inversions and contractions of the Treny motif... And yet,

somehow, this passage does not sound like a welter of musical complexity. There is in this lament a perhaps more measured sadness than in *Treny I*, as well as a dignity that leads neatly into *Treny II*'s final *envoi* (track 8).

The dark and stately conclusion to *Treny II* is essentially a variation on the Lamento theme. Here Baley uses to good effect the interval of the minor third introduced in the movement's first lament, and like the *envoi* that concluded *Treny I*, this excerpt offers a dark, tremulous ending that hints at feelings and thoughts yet to be heard.

Treny III

The first of the four parts to be written, *Treny III* consists of seven laments, an intermezzo, and another *envoi*. In most of *Treny III*, the solo cello plays in its normal tuning, returning to the *scordatura* tuning only at the end of the movement. The second cello provides a drone during both the Intermezzo and the *envoi* and also uses the *scordatura* tuning for the latter. "The first four laments form a group," Baley explains, "which, after a certain amount of energetic lamenting, becomes essentially slow and contemplative." The energy is fitful in the first *tren* (track 9), which again has a strong improvisatory flavor and which dispenses with bar lines halfway through. The Lamento theme is hinted at in a series of descending minor thirds and in a more rhythmic but still unmetered passage just before the lament ends. The second *tren* (track 10) in *Treny III* is marked "In Memoriam: Boris L." As noted earlier, Baley first found the three-note Treny motif in Boris Lyatoshynsky's music, so this lament begins immediately with two statements of the theme:

Fig. 12. Treny III, tren 2, bars 1-2 [Track 10, 0:00]

II. (In memoriam: Boris L.)



The first version of the theme, Bb – A – D, ascends again before moving on to measure 2's G – F# – B. This allows Baley to suggest a variant of the descending four-note Lamento theme at the same time (Bb – A – G – F#). Much of this particularthrenody consists of an often vigorous working out of this thematic combination. The third *tren* (track 11) also starts with two versions of the Treny theme, but it is a quieter, more reflective work, featuring some unusual harmonics from the solo cello and ending with a lovely song of resignation. The fourth *tren* (track 12) is marked "In Memoriam: Lidia B." This lament for Baley's own mother continues in the reflective, sorrowful vein of the preceding track.

The character of *Treny III* changes quite dramatically with the beginning of the fifth lament (track 13).

Fig. 13. Treny III, tren 5, bars 1-2 [Track 13, 0:00]



The alternating pattern of double-stops and single notes on the cello was introduced early in *Treny I* and is used at various times throughout the piece, usually in a lyrical way. Here, though, it becomes a snarl of anger, a contorted reflection of what's come before. (Bearing in mind, of course, that *Treny III* was composed first... so the earlier appearances could actually be seen as a kind of foreshadowing of this angular, agitated passage.) The sixth lament (track 14) is almost as intense. Although the tempo marking is considerably slower, each measure is full of movement, making it hard to determine whether the piece is actually moving quickly or not at all.

Fig. 14. Treny III, tren 6, bar 10 [Track 14, 0:38]



After a somewhat extended set of these long runs of notes, the sixth *tren* climaxes in a fortissimo crash of octaves, a moment that sounds not just Slavic, but Slavonic, as if that ancient language of the Eastern Orthodox church was being chanted by the cello. A long diminuendo on D, with an occasional Eb added for pungency, links this lament directly to the Intermezzo, in which the second cellist imperceptibly picks up the D and holds it as a drone. Here, finally, [track 15] a degree of calm and equilibrium is restored. The Intermezzo contains some of the most plaintive and ethereal music in all of *Treny*, with the drone suggesting the implacable, infinite universe – in much the same way as the repeated string chords in Charles Ives' *Unanswered Question*.

The mood of the Intermezzo is suddenly broken by the seventh and final *tren* of the set (track 16). This highly rhythmic lament is comprised of quick bursts of notes punctuated by a repeating F#. (F#, by the way, is one of the main notes in *Treny*, along with B and D – the three notes of a B major chord. The *scordatura* tuning heard in most of *Treny*, using the lower two strings to play F# and B, essentially grounds the piece on that chord.) As if spent, the seventh lament ends with a single measure marked "Adagio." Its long, descending phrase is to be played "quasi senza misura" – as if there were no bar lines. Slow and mysterious, with a freedom and elasticity to its phrasing, the concluding *envoi* (track 17) follows immediately. It begins with several palindromic iterations of the Treny theme, weaves in the Lamento progression, and then, after retuning the lower two strings practically in mid-bow, the solo cellist launches into an achingly beautiful "aria of farewell and epiphany," as Baley puts it. He refers to this *envoi*, marked "In Memoriam: Bruce A.," as a kind of wake. The second cello provides a two-note drone (B and F# again) which recalls the sound of the harmonium, while the solo cello plays a two-part melody that seems to oscillate between acceptance and questioning.

Fig. 15, *Treny III*, envoi, bars 10–11 [Track 17, 2:04]

“Until the final long phrase of the *envoi*,” Baley says, “*Treny III* is a monodic piece, a soliloquy, a stream of consciousness, elegies of lamentation – a single voice heard in the desert.” Even with the addition of a second voice in the *envoi*, though, a sense of loss and loneliness prevails at the end of the movement.

Treny IV

“*Treny IV*,” Baley states, “is the point to which the previous three parts were leading. It is here, finally, that the soprano appears, to give words to the voice crying out in the desert. Baley was moved by the English translation of Jan Kochanowski’s poetry by Seamus Heaney and Stanislaw Baranczak; but he chose to set the original Polish text in *Treny IV*. Or to be more specific, he chose to set excerpts from Kochanowski’s cycle of poems.

Treny IV begins with an Introitus (track 18) – and without words, as the soprano hums and sings a lyrical, beautiful vocalise. The cellos, playing together again and once more back in their *scordatura* tuning, join in only during the last few seconds of the introduction. The first *tren* in the final movement (track 19) is a setting of the following excerpt:

<i>Człowiek nie kamień, a jako się stawi</i>	<i>Man is not stone; his wounds run deep;</i>
<i>Fortuna, takich myśli nas nabawi</i>	<i>His joys are like a scar on top;</i>
<i>Przekleste szczęście! Czyż smac gorzej duszy,</i>	<i>And once it’s touched, that buried ache</i>
<i>Kto rany ruszy?</i>	<i>Throbs wide awake.</i>

Again, this lament is to be sung and played freely, as if there were no bar lines written. The first cello sometimes doubles the soprano, and near the end of the lament both cellos follow the soprano line in canon:

Fig. 16, *Treny IV*, bars 17–19 [Track 19, 0:46]

The second lament (track 20) is a brief, almost epigrammatic setting:

<i>Terazem nagle z stopniów ostanich zrzucony</i>	<i>Wisdom for me was castles in the air;</i>
<i>I między insze, jeden z wielu, policzony</i>	<i>I’m hurled, like the rest, from the topmost stair.</i>

The melody is a flowing one, for all that it is quite chromatic and contains several leaps of register. The mood by the end is one of ambiguity, a mood that continues in the third *tren* (track 21).

<i>Nie chciałem żywym śpiewać, dziś umarłym muszę</i>	<i>And I, who never wrote</i>
<i>A cudzej śmierci płacząc, sam swe kości suszę</i>	<i>To court a living ear, have tuned my note</i>
<i>Prozno to!</i>	<i>To appease the dead; in vain, alas!</i>

Throughout this lament, both the voice and the cellos skirt the two major themes of the piece. Only in the last phrase does the soprano sing the *Treny* motif in its unvarnished, minor-second/perfect fifth form. This *tren* ends with the second cello offering a variant and an inversion of the Lamento theme.

The fourth lament (track 22) is perhaps the closest of all to a conventional song. The melody is fairly restrained – less chromatic and mainly avoiding wild leaps from one register to another. The accompaniment is largely built around a progression of chords – an unusual sequence, to be sure, but a chord progression nonetheless.

Fig. 17, *Treny IV*, bars 44–49 [Track 22]

The full text of this *tren* is as follows:

Lecz kiedy nędza albo żal przypadnie
Ali żyć nie tak, jako mówić, snadnie
A śmierć dopiero wtenczas nam należy
Gdy już k’nam bieży

But when the Parcae cease to spin
Their thread, when sorrow enters in,
When death knocks at the door, at last
We stand aghast.

After the last line, words fail, and the two cellos continue their somber sequence of chords without the soprano. The fifth and final *tren* (tracks 23 - 25) is a setting of the longest excerpt Baley has chosen from the Kochanowski poems:

“Próżno płakać” — podobno drudzy rzeczenie
Cóż, prze Bóg żywy, nie jest prózno na świecie?
Wszystko prózno! Macamy, gdzie miękczej w rzeczy
A ono wszędy ciśnie! Bład—wiek człowieczy!
Nie wiem, co leżę; czy w smutku jawnie żałować
Czyli się z przyroddeniem gwadtem mocować?

“You weep in vain,” my friends will say. But then,
What is not vain, by God, in lives of men?
All is in vain! We play at blindman’s buff
Until hard edges break into our path.
Man’s life is error. Where, then, is relief?
In shedding tears or wrestling down my grief?

Here the soprano’s tender, expressive melody is doubled in harmonics by the first cello – adding a ghostly presence in the already surreal atmosphere. The second cello, meanwhile, offers an obsessive series of inversions of the Lamento theme. At the phrase, “all is in vain” (track 24), the second cello recalls briefly the F# and B drone heard in *Treny III*. The intensity builds, as the first lines of the text are sung again and then, when the soprano stops momentarily, the cellos plunge into a purely instrumental passage of rolling emotion. The last two lines of the text (track 25) are sung by the soprano with virtually no accompaniment at all – truly a lone voice crying out.

Treny concludes with another *envoi*, “a fragment of an ever-resounding and eternal wake,” Baley says. After mourning the loss of three people close to him in *Treny III*, Baley describes the conclusion of *Treny* as “an attempt to ‘wrestle down my grief’”. After the soprano has sung those words to conclude this final lament, we return to a realm beyond words, and the two cellos perform a postlude marked “*Allegretto fantastico*”. The composer’s beloved quintuplet figures hover over the double-stop/single-stop pattern that has appeared throughout the work.

Fig. 18, *Treny IV*, bars 108 – 110 [Track 26, 0:00]

Here, at the end of the piece, the purpose of the alternating double- and single-stops is revealed, as the second cello spins out a series of variants on the Lamento theme. The last word, as it were, is left to the second cello, as the Lamento theme fades away into emptiness. In *Treny*, Virko Baley offers an honest and emotional response to human mortality. “I think what I am after,” muses the composer, “is capturing some kind of internal truth (with a small ‘t’).” When it comes to the great questions of life and death, of why and what comes after, *Treny’s* uncertain ending suggests that a small, internal truth is perhaps the only kind there is.

— Notes by John Schaefer, WNYC Radio, New York