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***Text-Music Relationships in
Paavo Heininen's Opera
Silkkirumpu, op. 45***

- *Inkeri Jaakkola on valmistunut musiikin tohtoriksi Taideyliopiston Sibelius-Akatemiassa, jossa hän on valmistellut tieteellisen väitöskirjansa otsikolla Beneath the Laurel Tree: Text-Music Relationships in Paavo Heininen's Opera Silkkirumpu, op. 45. Artikkelin pohjautuu Jaakkolan Lectio praecursoria -luentoon, joka pidettiin väitöskirjan tarkastustilaisuudessa Taideyliopistossa 26.9. 2020.*

*Tekstin ja musiikin vuorovaikutus Paavo Heinisen oopperassa
Silkkirumpu, op. 45*

Artikkelissa esitellään Paavo Heinisen *Silkkirumpu*-oopperaa kerronnan strategioiden näkökulmasta toisaalta valottaen tekstin ja musiikin yhteisvaikutukseen perustuvia kerronnan keinoja, toisaalta paljastaen tekstin ja musiikin välisen ristiriidan tuottamia tulkintatasoja.

Roolihenkilöiden musiikillinen karakterisointi perustuu vokaaliosuuksien rakentumiseen ja muuntumiseen draaman edetessä. Tarkastelussa hyödynnetään kirjoittajan ideoimaa vocal style -analyysimallia, jossa solistien kokonaisvaltainen vokaali-ilmaisu kuvataan eri osatekijöiden yhdistymänä. Oopperan ”La Follia I e Cadenza” tulkitaan kerronnallisena kaarroksena, jossa rinnakkaiset vokaali-ilmaisuuden muuntumisen ja kielen fragmentoitumisen prosessit ilmentävät päähenkilön mielen hajoamisen vaiheita. Musiikkidraaman kokonaiskaarrossa päähenkilöt omaksuvat toisiltaan piirteitä vokaali-ilmaisuunsa, kunnes he lopulta toimivat yhteen sulautuneina, ilmentäen näin oopperan symbolista tulkinnan tasoa.

Silkkirummun ironinen tulkinta perustuu kerronnan elementtien yhteensovittamattomuuteen tilanteissa, joissa musiikin piirteet saavat kuulijan kyseenalaistamaan tekstin merkitykset. ”Promesson” johdantotahdeissa trumpettien duetto selvästi viittaa perinteiseen fanfaariin, mutta topokselle tyypillisen ylväyden ja juhlavuuden sijaan kuullaan oikukasta, kömpelöä musiikkia.

Orkesteri toimii kertojana oopperan loppukohtauksessa, jonka kaoottisen musiikin pehmeä, lyrinen materiaali katkaisee useasti ja yllättäen. Lyrinen musiikki on peräisin oopperan alusta, joten se on kuin elokuvallinen flashback, joka palauttaa yleisön mieleen tarinan alkutilanteen. Musiikin abstraktilla kielellä orkesteri muistuttaa hukatusta mahdollisuudesta ja tuo ilmi vaihtoehtoiseen loppuratkaisuun, josta oopperassa ei verbaalisesti kerrota lainkaan.

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Looking back on my doctoral project, I can remember the very moment when I had the idea of studying Paavo Heininen's opera *Silkkirumpu*. I was listening to the recording of the opera with the libretto in my hand, and when the music began number XIV, "Cabaletta", I was hooked. I replayed again and again the number in which the Courtier warns the Princess about the deceived Gardener with chilling words.

Kuuntele, Prinsessa:
Rumpu oli mykkä, epätoivoissaan
vanha puutarhuri heittäytyi lampeen
laakeripuun luona ja hukkui.

Listen, Princess:
the drum was dumb, and in his utter despair
the old Gardener cast himself into the lake
beneath the laurel tree and drowned.

Kuule Prinsessa:
tuonkaltaisen miehen sielu
voi saalistaa ja vahingoittaa sinua.

Listen, Princess:
the spirit of that kind of man
can prey on you and harm you.

Heininen and Manner 1984, the English translation by Inkeri Jaakkola

"Cabaletta" expresses the essence of *Silkkirumpu's* story: the Gardener, given a false promise of love as the prize for making music with a damask drum, loses his mind and commits suicide. However, with the help of supernatural forces he transforms himself into a Demon and tortures the treacherous Princess until she too goes mad. Finally, they both suffer their punishment in the transcendental world.¹ The story is simple, even predictable, but how it is narrated, both verbally and musically, is what attracted me. As for "Cabaletta", I was absolutely fascinated by the intense atmosphere and the capricious music in the scene and by the sound of the over-articulated phonemes and the freely flowing rhythm of the poem. I admired the way music and text had been combined to form

¹ The libretto of *Silkkirumpu* (Heininen and Manner 1984) is based on Zeami Motokiyo's *noh* play *Aya no tsuzumi*.

an extremely gripping artistic expression, and I wanted to study how the interaction between text and music in this opera works.

Today I want to introduce two narrative processes in *Silkkirumpu*. One is a local process, depicting the Gardener's gradual mental breakdown. The other is a large-scale process, which symbolizes the opera's overall trajectory and the irrevocably intertwined destinies of the characters. These processes are realized both by language and by music. The dramatic theme of losing the ability to think rationally is verbally reflected in the text's fragmentation, meaning broken prosody, repeated syllables, phonetic language and paralinguistic expressions (Jaakkola 2020, 155, 176–178).² The characters' mental states change in the course of the drama, and these changes are expressed musically by the soloists' transformed *vocal styles*. Here my term vocal style refers to the soloist's part as a combination of pitch content, intervallic and rhythmic content, linear aspect as well as expressive and vocal qualities (Jaakkola 2020, 59–64). Parallel, directed changes in the text conditions and in several components of the vocal style create musical and verbal processes that align with the above-mentioned dramatic processes. Let's begin with the Gardener's mad scene "La Follia I e Cadenza" and see how his mental breakdown is narrated.

At the beginning of "La Follia I" the Gardener realizes that he has been cheated. His cry of pain shows extreme frustration and disappointment (Example 1). The Gardener's rational, yet desperate state of mind is expressed by the condition of the text and the vocal style of his part.

885 *fff* Vo - o - oi! *fff* Mi - ksi mi - ksi

893 *f* *ff* mi-nun pi-täi - si sie - tää tä-llai-sta e - lä - mää kuin tä-mä tä-mä

Example 1. "La Follia I", bb. 885–898. The Gardener's anger and frustration is manifested by the components of his vocal style. © Fennica Gehrman Oy, Helsinki. The musical examples are used with the kind permission of the publisher.

² Peter Stacey (1987; 1989) has discussed the text types and text conditions in twentieth-century music and in Boulez's compositions, in particular.

He performs the poetic lines of the libretto in their original form. The rhythmic structure in his syllabic singing follows the natural Finnish prosody. As for the pitch structure, the large intervallic leaps dominate his expressive, continuous melodic lines, which are performed *forte fortissimo*. The micro-tonal embellishment around the beginning pitch D₄ might be a paralinguistic expression of the voice trembling, revealing an extremely emotional state of mind.

In the opening section of “Cadenza” the lines of the libretto appear fragmented and multi-layered (Example 2). Their content has been amplified into three distinctive texts, in which the syllables seldom follow each other in correct linguistic order. The multi-layered text is realized by the three-part pseudo-polyphony in the soloist’s vocal style. Voice 1 proceeds *mezzo piano* on relatively long note values and unfolds a melody with only small intervallic leaps. The sudden *sforzando* cries of Voice 2 form a disjointed *cantus firmus*, which realizes the original poetic text. Voice 3 is an embellishing voice consisting only of stepwise or microtonal motion on sixteenth notes. Performed *pianissimo*, it creates an impression of the Gardener’s manic spluttering. The fragmented, multi-layered text composed to the pseudo-polyphony in the soloist’s vocal style, seems to reflect the Gardener’s split mind.

The “Cadenza’s” last bars show the end result of the parallel verbal, musical and dramatic processes in the number (Example 3). The mad Gardener, as shown by his fragmented text, is bogged down stuttering

Molto mosso (cadenza)

907 Voi sie täää täLL - L ai kuin

MI pi mi KSI mi e - tä pä MI ksi nun sta-NUN lä

sf pp sf pp sf pp pp

mi e lä PI TÄI SI kuin lai täää pi mi ksi pi täi si e lää

sf sf sf pp mp

f SIE *f* TÄÄ

Example 2. “La Follia I”, bb. 907–908. The multi-layered text, combined with the pseudo-polyphonic musical structure, reflects the Gardener’s split mind. The notation follows the composer’s manuscript.

929

LA la la *sf mp* ME me me VE ne ne *sf mp* HU ne ne *sf p*

KU ne ne TA ne ne ne *sf p* I TSE NI ne ne *p* la la *p* la la la me la la *mp* ve la la

te ne ne hu te te liikkumatta, *lungo* yhtäkkiä juoksee *nopeasti pois*

Example 3. “La Follia I”, bb. 929–930. Recited, phonetic text connected with the pseudo-polyphonic vocal parts (b. 929) and fragmentary musical ideas (b. 930) reflect the gardener’s irrational, psychotic state of mind.

the syllables of the words *lammen veteen* (meaning, “into the lake”). Sudden, manic screams appearing scattered through various registers make an understandable sentence *HU-KU-TAN I-TSE-NI* (meaning, “I will drown myself”). The directed transformation of the Gardener’s vocal style has proceeded to its close. In his pseudo-polyphonic texture exact pitches, intervals and precise rhythms have been replaced by inexact *Sprechstimme*. The text condition and the vocal style reflect the Gardener’s irrationality and his descent into madness, which drives him to commit suicide.

In observing the relations between language and music in this number, I have paid attention to the relative dominance of each medium of expression. As the fragmentation process goes on, language begins to lose its essential capacity for precise meaning and as a medium of expression thereby approaches music, where sonic features are fundamental. Simultaneously, the music is gradually losing its conventional attributes – its exact intervallic and rhythmic structure – and approaches spoken language (Stacey 1989, 22–23; Jaakkola 2020, 93–95). The dual sign systems thus adopt features from each other and so gain potential for new artistic meanings.³ By the end it is impossible to define which of

³ Irina Rajewsky (2002, 53) has written a comprehensive theory of intermediality. According to Rajewsky the cross-references between two sign systems may be extended to the structures and sign systems of the media (*Systemreferenz*).

147

mp A - aoi-a - ü - üi - a E - ei-a o - a - uo-o-oi

Example 4. “Duetto”, bb. 147–153. The musical characterization of the Princess through her vocal style in the duet’s vocalise section, suggesting pastoral topic.

these media of expression is primary: language and music have been assimilated into one combined, artistic communication system.

Let us move on to the large-scale narrative process, which reflects the opera’s overall trajectory and symbolizes the characters’ intertwined destinies. Our attention is now focused on the conditions of the text and the various vocal styles in the Princess’s part. She is introduced in number II, where she is walking in the palace garden and singing a duet with her Lady-in-Waiting. Picture 4 shows a passage from the duet’s *vocalise* section.

In comparison with the Princess’s vocal style in general, the melodic lines sound continuous and flow with ease, thus creating an impression of simplicity. A regular meter is maintained long enough to hold the listener’s attention in an otherwise complex, unpredictable rhythmic structure. The rocking rhythm suggests the *pastoral* topic, which has been associated with idealized nature and innocence of peasants since the seventeenth century (Monelle 2000, 25). As for the Princess’s characterization, the pastoral music in her *vocalise* portrays a young, flighty maiden walking in the palace garden and chatting empty words with her friend. The sudden simplicity in the Princess’s vocal style might refer to the careless and childish aspects of her character, which lead to tragic consequences.

After her duet, the Princess is seen on the stage only in the latter part of the opera. In her mad scene, “La Follia II”, the Courtier’s words of warning come true. The Princess begins to lose her sense of reality and constantly experiences auditory illusions, imagining a drumming sound. Her alternating mental states are reflected in her part by the alternation of two contrasting musical materials, one virtuosic and solistic, the other chordal and repetitive (Example 5).

The Princess begins with the virtuoso material, in which the direction of the intervals changes constantly, and she has to perform large

1213 *f* Ran - nan - aa - KU - aa - lto- jen - LKA- e - n hä - ly - stä kuu RU uu

1215 *f* L - e - MPU- e - n ru - mmun ää - nen *f* Oi

div. 1: pizz., div. 2: c.l.b. tutti arco

div. 1: pizz., div. 2: c.l.b. *mp* tutti arco

Example 5. “La Follia II”, reduced score of bb. 1213–1217, showing alternating musical materials, one of them virtuosic and the other, chordal.

leaps as well as complex figures in a capricious rhythmic structure. The continuity of the melody is disrupted by sudden, rapid intervallic leaps. The intelligibility of the text is weakened, because the Finnish prosody is completely broken. The combined components in the virtuoso material might be heard as the vocal expression of the Princess’s madness. The chordal material consists of repeated chord progressions on five successive eighth notes. The soloist joins in the blocks of chords, which are bogged down repeating their uppermost pitch Eb₄. As all chordal passages are orchestrated for strings using *col legno battuto*, they readily create an association with the illusory drumming.

The musical form of “La Follia II” is based on the frequent alteration of the juxtaposed virtuoso and chordal textures. Sudden interruptions in the musical flow blur the temporality in “La Follia II” and create a *musical montage*.⁴ In this number the musical montage shows how the mad Princess momentarily immerses herself in the illusory drumming and soon is again babbling to the courtiers about her hallucinations. In her altered state of consciousness, she has lost her sense of time, as if in a trance.

⁴ In Reyland’s and Klein’s *Music and Narrative since 1900*, Almén and Hatten (2013, 59–85) discuss various temporal strategies, one of them being musical montage.

Example 6. “Duetto con coro”, bb. 1694–1698, showing the characters’ assimilated vocal styles. The intensification in several musical parameters underlines the dramatic content of the musical passage. In the Princess’s part the melodic segments as well as their basic melodic contours are indicated in the brackets. The numbers between the staves refer to the pitch intervals between the vocal parts.

Both mad scenes in the opera express lunacy by using diverse, expanded vocal techniques. The repetitive elements in the soloists’ parts seem to reflect how their thoughts are mired in obsession and mania.⁵ The weakened understandability of the text aligns with each character’s irrational mental state. However, whereas the Gardener’s “La Follia I” depicts his gradual breakdown, thus forming a local narrative process, “La Follia II” creates a single portrait of the insane Princess. Now it is time to move on to *Silkkirumpu*’s final scene and observe the characters’ vocal styles at the ultimate point of the opera’s large-scale narrative process.

The final scene illustrates the spirits of the Princess and the Gardener who are suffering their punishment in the transcendental world. In their final duet, the characters perform exactly the same text, furiously repeating curses only (Example 6). In their assimilated vocal styles the Gardener and the Princess almost represent a single, compound vocal persona: the rhythmic content as well as the expressive and vocal qualities in their parts are similar. In their two-part texture the singers mainly employ contrary motion with an evident tendency towards inversionsal

⁵ *Silkkirumpu*’s two mad scenes, “La Follia I e cadenza” as well as “La Follia II e cadenza”, are intertextually linked with mad scenes in general. For the (vocal) expression of madness in the twentieth-century repertoire, see, for example, Howe (2016) and Williams (2000).

symmetry. Their parts gradually approach each other, and the gradual compressing of the musical shapes gives an impression of acceleration and growing tension. The construction underlines the dramatic meaning of the passage. The Princess and the Gardener, those whom destiny has joined, share the same punishment. In their eternal suffering, they cannot free themselves of hatred and fury, but endlessly curse each other in the transcendental world.

We have now followed the plot of *Silkkirumpu*, beginning with its initial circumstances and ending with the final scene. We have seen and heard how the story is narrated both verbally and musically in the soloists' parts. To interpret the story, we need to consider a crucial question: given the Gardener's task of making music with the damask drum, was his failure foreseeable beforehand?

If the answer is yes, then the audience is watching his endless attempts at drumming from a distance, aware of the actual meaning and the final outcome of the events, whereas the Gardener makes his decisions ignorant of their consequences. The listener's distanced attitude leads to an ironic reading of the opera, supported by the music, which suggests a covert meaning behind the characters' words (Jaakkola 2020, 97–99, 104–105). Example 7 shows, how the orchestral brass instruments prepare the Courtier's delivery of the false promise with their ironic fanfare.

score in C
329 Tr 1 *imperioso*
f assai
Tr 2 *imperioso*
f assai

331 **Promesso**
f
Courtier
ff
Ku - uu le,

Example 7. “Interlude I” and “Promesso”, bb. 329–332. The trumpet fanfare leading to the Courtier’s solo.

Tranquillo
 1555 *pp* Fl, Ob, Cor.ingl.

mp espr.
 Vlc
p con sord., div.

Example 8. “Memory of the Future the never came”, bb. 1555–1559. The lyrical orchestral material.

The trumpets’ rapid, repeated rhythmic figures, performed in the *clarino* register, clearly refer to the conventional, noble fanfare, but at the same time the original meaning of the topic is denied by the unpredictable expression, harsh dissonant harmony as well as the player’s obvious, but failed attempts to maintain *unisono*. These mocking elements in the music hint at a covert, ironic meaning and thus question the reliability of the Princess’s promise.⁶

An ironic reading of the opera is perhaps the most plausible. However, a parallel, tragic layer of interpretation is openly expressed in the final scene’s sextet, entitled “Memory of the Future that never came” (Heininen and Manner 1984). The number creates a sad reminiscence of the past with its furious musical illustrations of the characters’ suffering in the transcendental world. The essential narrative element in the sextet is the lyrical orchestral material, which creates associative links between the opera’s beginning and its end. The music originates in “Interlude I”, which is situated before the story events begin (Example 8). It is recalled by textural associations at the beginning of the “Memory of the Future that never came”, and it appears again as sudden brief flashbacks at the end of the number. From the perspective of musical narrative, unexpected appearances of the lyrical music break the continuity of the musical flow. Discontinuity is employed here as a narrative strategy (Jaakkola 2020, 263–264).⁷ The musical flashbacks remind the audience

⁶ For musical irony, see, for example, Sheinberg (2000). Johanna Frymoyer (2016) has discussed the ironic reading of conventional topics in the non-tonal context.

⁷ Andrew Davis (2010) examines discontinuity as a narrative strategy in Puccini’s late style.

of the initial circumstances and hint at the lost possibility of love and of an alternative outcome to the drama.

In closing, I want to emphasize the diverse layers of interpretation in *Silkkirumpu*. The story itself offers several alternative readings. As *Silkkirumpu* is a morality play, its universal, abstract themes and symbolism can be interpreted both in a Japanese context and in a Western context, utilizing the large intertextual network. *Silkkirumpu*'s archetypal characters represent human beings in general who arouse our pity and our empathy. In the opera's central scene, the rites of drumming portray a man who is desperately fighting for his dream, trying to make his life worth living – a character with whom we all can identify. Eeva-Liisa Manner's Finnish translation expresses this passionate desire with the touching poetic lines in "Arietta".

Kuun puutarhassa
kasvaa laakeri, lumottu puu,
siitä ihmiset puhuvat.
Mutta minulle on olemassa
yksi ainoa puu, tämä laakeri,
joka kasvaa lammen rannalla.

Kunpa saisin rummusta mahtavan äänen,
musiikkia, joka rauhoittaisi
hullun sydämeni.

In the garden of the moon
grows the laurel, enchanted tree,
the one people talk about.
For me there is but one tree,
the laurel by the lake.

If only I could make a tremendous
sound of a drum,
music that would calm
my frantic heart.

Eeva-Liisa Manner, translated into English by Inkeri Jaakkola

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