

Nature versus Culture In Einojuhani Rautavaara's *Thomas*¹

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Opera is undoubtedly the most artificial of art forms. Within its realm it is impossible to represent or even to imitate pure nature. "Nature" in opera is always a mere construction, mediated and perceived via complex codes and signs. Thus we have to accept that there is nothing really natural in opera and that we are only dealing with cultured nature.² My intention is to demonstrate how nature and culture, Lévi-Strauss's famous binary opposition, is also constructed musically, in Rautavaara's *Thomas*.³ I also try to answer the question as to what motivates such an ancient opposition in a modern Finnish opera.

¹An earlier version of this article was presented at the congress on *Culture as Semiotics—Semiotics of Culture* organized by the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies, Odense University, Denmark, 7-9 November 1990.

²See A. J. Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Semiotics and Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 66, 211.

³The opposition nature/culture is a theme that runs through Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques* 1-4 (Paris: Plon, 1964-71); see especially vol. 1 (1964), 24-38, 140, 281-284. The score-page numbers in this essay refer to Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Thomas, An Opera in Three Acts* (1982-85), libretto by the composer (Edition Fazer, Finland; sound recording by Ondine, ODE 740-2).

Composer as Librettist

Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928) is a Finnish composer of the first post-Sibelian generation. He is still very active and influential, with a vast musical production of works belonging to different musical genres and stylistic periods. The eclecticism of Rautavaara's oeuvre rivals that of Igor Stravinsky or Bohuslav Martinů. Besides composing, Rautavaara is known in Finland as a virtuosic writer. In addition to several essays on contemporary music and aesthetic issues, he wrote the libretti for all of his operas, with one exception, *Apollo versus Marsyas* (1970). His autobiography, *Omakeuva* (1989),⁴ was well received in Finland, not only for its interesting subject, but more importantly for its undeniable literary value. Rautavaara also wrote the libretto for *Thomas*, composed during the years 1982-1985 for performance at the 150th anniversary of the *Kalevala*, the cornerstone of Finnish cultural identity. This circumstance of the opera's genesis is reflected in the latter's structural plan, and I will mention this occasion again, at the end of my article.

Thomas is part of the Finnish opera-boom,⁵ launched in the 1970s by Joonas Kokkonen's *The Last Temptation* (1975) and Aulis Sallinen's *The Horseman* (1974). Since then Sallinen has composed *The Red Line* (1976-1978), *The King Goes to France* (1983), and *Kullervo* (1986-1988), which was premiered in Los Angeles in 1992. Kalevi Aho has joined the others with *The Key* (1978-1979), really a monodrama, and Rautavaara with *Thomas*, *Vincent* (1987), and *The House of the Sun* (1990). Even the Finnish *enfant terrible* of music, Paavo Heininen,

⁴For a general introduction to Rautavaara, see Mikko Heiniö, "A Portrait of the Artist at a Certain Moment," *Finnish Music Quarterly* [henceforth *FMQ*] 2 (1988): 2-14; Kalevi Aho, *Einojuhani Rautavaara as Symphonist* (Helsinki: Edition Pan 131 and Sibelius-Akatemian julkaisusarja 5, 1988). The composer's autobiography is entitled *Omakeuva* [Self-Portrait] (Juva: WSOY, 1989); reviewed by Aho in *FMQ* 1 (1990): 79-81.

⁵See the following: the opera issue of *FMQ* 2 (1986); Eero Tarasti, "The Key to Kalevi Aho," *FMQ* 2 (1987): 30-38; Paavo Heinen, "The Music of *The Knife*," *FMQ* 2 (1989): 21-26; Anne Sivuoja [-Gunaratnam], "Rautavaara's *Vincent*—Not a Portrait," *FMQ* 2 (1990): 4-13; Mikko Heiniö, "Joonas Kokkonen's Opera *The Last Temptations*," *FMQ* 3 (1991): 10-13.

has yielded twice to the charm of opera, in *The Damask Drum* (1981-1983) and *The Knife* (1985-1988). An interesting novelty, Erik Bergman's first opera *The Singing Tree* (1986-1988) will be premiered at the new Finnish National Opera House. The operas mentioned here have received many productions and reproductions, and commercial recordings are available for most of them.

The Two Story Lines

Thomas, an opera in three acts, is written for conventional orchestra, tape, soloists and choir. Most exceptional in this opera is its two story lines. One tells about the Finnish people, three magi, and The Girl. The other, much more extensive, centers on Bishop Thomas, a historical figure from the 13th century. To give some idea of the opera's story line, a brief summary follows.

Act I. The opera starts with invocations of Finnish people, three magi, and The Girl, but events soon shift to the world of Bishop Thomas. He is dying in the Visby monastery, surrounded by singing Dominican monks. Thomas is already delirious, and he hears accusing voices from his past. They are overcome by the voices of childhood playmates and his mother, who invite him to take an imaginary journey back to Finland.

In Finland, Thomas musters troops in order to attack Novgorod, the Russian military and trade power by the River Neva. In a cathedral an icon of the Virgin Mary suddenly starts to sing, and a young girl steps down. She initiates Bishop Thomas into pagan rituals, during which the three magi or shamans produce *soma*, an intoxicating juice.⁶ The mysterious Girl decides to leave her home forests and follow

⁶*Soma*: an Indian deity and a plant from which juice was extracted for sacred rituals (Gordon R. Wasson, *Soma, Divine Mushroom of Immortality* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1971]). Rautavaara was inspired by Carsten Bregenjoh's article, "Kansanrudouden tutkimuksen suurin ongelma," *Kotiseutu* 3 (1983): 124-128, published during the time of *Thomas*'s composition. Bregenjoh's controversial theories about *soma* also appear in his *RgVeda as the Key to Folklore: An Imagery Experiment* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1987).

Thomas to the battles of Novgorod.

Act II. Among the soldiers, the green-eyed girl brought by Thomas to Novgorod raises interest mixed with fear. And the knight Johann von Gobyn tries to seduce her, eventually by force. Thomas rescues The Girl, but soon he has other worries: his knights begin to question his ability to run the war. To silence the doubts, Thomas produces a forged letter from the pope, with which he hopes to affirm his position. The letter does not convince merchant Styver, who believes that it has been fabricated. Thomas, fearing mutiny, has Styver killed by his servants, Doberanus and Manhard. On the battlefield, the Russians have overcome Thomas's troops, and total defeat is inevitable. Thomas prepares to die with his knights and soldiers, but is rescued by The Girl through a mysterious invisible door.

Act III. The Russians pursue the couple through the Finnish wilderness in vain. While Thomas is asleep, the three magi appear to fetch The Girl back home.

The setting now shifts back to the monastery of Visby, where Thomas is still lying on his death bed. The accusing voices from the past haunt him again, but he finds peace when thinking of the bird—symbol for the mysterious Girl he met in Finland. In the finale, the voices of Thomas, The Girl, and the three magi join together in a musical synthesis. Finally, we hear the powerful stroke of a tam tam, which marks both the end of the opera and the death of Thomas.

The Isotopies of Nature and Culture

Isotopy is a concept from A. J. Greimas's semio-narrative model, the "generative trajectory."⁷ In practice, isotopy serves as a strategy or principle that guarantees homologous interpretation of any text or text segment. To meet this requirement for internal coherence, the chosen syntagm must contain semantic redundancies.

Ivanka Stoianova defines musical isotopy as "a specific type of

⁷See Greimas and Courtés, 163-165; and Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966), 69-72, 87-101.

texture that is particularized enough to be composed and recognized as different from other types of textures that make up the utterance.’⁸ According to Eero Tarasti, musical isotopies may be considered as the following: (1) an abstract deep structure, like Schenker’s *Ursatz*; (2) thematicity in Rudolph Réti’s sense; (3) genre features, such as sarabande or fugue; (4) types of musical texture; or (5) textual strategies within a piece.⁹ There has been lively discussion as to whether isotopy should be defined only according to semantic redundancies, or if the concept might also be applied to the discursive level, as do Stoianova and Tarasti. In music this last alternative seems rather obvious, since the discourse (the level of expression or signifier) is something automatically given, whereas the content or signified is much more difficult to trace. Since we are dealing with opera, both levels are considered here.¹⁰

As the plot summary clearly indicates, *Thomas* consists of two story lines. One tells about medieval Bishop Thomas, who is dying in Denmark and who in his memory returns to Finland, and particularly to his unsuccessful war against the Russians. This story line belongs to the isotopy of culture, and besides Thomas, its actors are the knight Johann von Gobyn, merchant Styver, catholic monks Doberanus and Manhard. Thomas’s story about his ambitious plans to form a Finnish national state is loosely based on historical facts. Still, the events have been strongly dramatized by the composer, and the gaps in the Finnish historiography have allowed him to furnish Thomas’s operatic

⁸Stoianova, “On Isotopies and Disengagers in Music,” *The Semiotic Web 1986*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987), 460.

⁹Tarasti, “Music as Sign and Process,” in *Analytica: Studies in the Description and Analysis of Music* (Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Music 47, 1985). See also Stoianova, 460-467; and Márta Grabócz, *Morphologie des oeuvres pour piano de Liszt* (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézet, 1986), 120-123.

¹⁰For further discussion of isotopy, see e.g., Groupe μ , *Rhetorique de la poésie* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 34-40. For my heuristic model in this paper I have used that of Eero Tarasti’s segmentation of Wagner’s *Ring* into isotopies of myth, saga, and fairy tale. See Tarasti, *Myth and Music* (Helsinki: Acta Musicologica Fennica 11, 1978), 175-181.

biography with imaginary details.¹¹

The other story line represents the isotopy of nature, and it concentrates on the soma rituals of shamanistic Finnish people, The Girl, and the three Magi. The events of this story line are purely fictitious, although they may contain some deeper folkloristic truth.

Even though the two isotopies coexist in *Thomas* simultaneously, their stories intertwine only a couple of times, remaining otherwise separate and proceeding on different planes. Only The Girl can cross the boundaries and move in both worlds, in opera's nature and culture. This ideological division also has practical consequences, since musical and textual discourses of these two isotopies are in strong opposition—which can be partly perceived even without a score—and obey different temporal laws.

Temporal Dislocations

The narrative structure of *Thomas* is exceptionally complex and ambiguous for an opera. Besides the two story lines, it makes use of internal narrator, embedded narratives, streams of consciousness, changing points of views, flashbacks and other temporal dislocations, and many other literary devices.¹²

The isotopy of culture is dominated by a linear time concept. The events of the story follow each other in teleological or temporal-causal order (for example, Thomas prepares his troops for the battle of Novgorod, the battle takes place, the defeat in Novgorod, and so on). It is very easy to determine the sequence of events, by applying

¹¹Rautavaara, *Omakuva*, 317-318.

¹²In this context, we should recall Zimmermann's opera, *Die Soldaten* (1958-60), which exhibits *Kugelgestalt der Zeit* and other modern literary techniques. See also, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, *Intervall und Zeit* (Mainz: Schotts Söhne, 1974). For a detailed analysis of literary devices in the present opera, see Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, "Compositions narratives dans *Thomas*, opéra de Rautavaara," *Degrés* 68 (1991): c1-c17.

Greimasian concepts of anteriority/posteriority.¹³ The idea of succession is manifested even in sentences, which usually obey normal temporal-logical rules. For example, in act 2 Thomas sings: “In the morning we shall attack back down to the shore and squeeze them [the Russians] between the water and the spears!”¹⁴ This love for order is heard in the music, too, which proceeds, if not teleologically, at least from one clearly defined state to another (see Example 1).

The time of Thomas’s world is not only linear, it is also multi-layered. The flashback about his unsuccessful campaign against Novgorod is linear, forming a major part of the opera. Paradoxically, the act of seeing this flashback lasts only couple of seconds for Thomas, who on his death-bed experiences his past life floating rapidly by inside his mind.¹⁵ Thus two temporal layers combine: (1) the point-like present time (Thomas’s act of seeing the flashback) and (2) the flashback about Thomas’s past in Finland, with its linear sequence of events (which is logically contained within the first temporal layer). Obviously, the time-as-point in an opera lasting almost two hours is only illusion. The illusion is created by the framing of Thomas’s flashback with similar musical and textual elements, so that the sounds and accusing voices delirious Thomas (and the audience) hears, just before his imaginary journey to Finland, haunt him again at the end, immediately after he returns to his diminishing reality in Visby.

¹³Greimas and Courtés, 14, 239-240.

¹⁴Trans. Roy Goldblatt. On temporal linearity/non-linearity in music, see Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), esp. 32-33; and Lewis Rowell, *Thinking about Music* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), 242-243.

¹⁵The presentation to an audience, however, lasts about an hour and twenty minutes in “real” time. According to Carl Dahlhaus, incongruities between real time and story time are typical of opera as a genre; see Dahlhaus, “Zeitstrukturen in der Oper,” in his *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper* (München: Katzbichler, 1983), 25-32. For a more detailed analysis of temporal layers in *Thomas*, see Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, “Compositions narratives,” c9-c11 (n. 12, above).

Example 1. From Thomas' aria

Handwritten musical score for Example 1, from Thomas' aria. The score is written on ten staves, labeled from top to bottom: COR 1, Tbn 1, Vl 1, II, Vc, A, and B.

The top staff (COR 1) shows a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5, with a dynamic marking of *p* and a *Solo* instruction. The second staff (Tbn 1) contains the lyrics: "TALVAN - KAN - TA NINNUVIN KOR - PI - LAV - MA, KUJIE LA PI SEI - NA - HIPREN". The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

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By contrast, the isotopy of nature is dominated by a cyclical, non-linear time concept.¹⁶ No causal chains connect the few scenic events, which mainly consist of sung spells, soma hymns, and ecstatic rituals. Greimas's concepts before/after are of little use here, even in strongly metaphorical sentences. This non-linearity is heard in the music, too. As shown in Example 2, rhythmic values often remain unspecified, and only the pitches have been indicated. This results in music that is very static, manifesting "continuity without goal,"¹⁷ where aleatoric sound fields do not proceed in any particular direction. Jonathan Kramer's description of stasis is relevant also in *Thomas*: ". . . a single present stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite 'now' that nonetheless feels like an instant."¹⁸

We could apply here Jurij Lotman's terms *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* in order to describe the opposition between the temporal concepts of these two isotopies. The isotopy of culture clearly represents Lotman's syntagmatic culture. In his essay "Numerical Semantics and Cultural Types," Lotman writes: "The cultural role of the number is actualized . . . in syntagmatic types of culture in connection with the idea of *order, sequence, series*." Thus it emphasizes succession. Still following Lotman's terminology, our isotopy of nature could be described as paradigmatic: "In the paradigmatic type of cultural organization, the entire world picture is presented as an *extratemporal* paradigm in which the elements are situated on various levels and represent different variants of a single invariant meaning."¹⁹ What is important here is not the order, but the

¹⁶For example, the very first (!) words of the opera: "Time/time is at the beginning/the beginning is at the end of time/the end is at the beginning/rise seeing king/blind god Soma!" (trans. Roy Goldblatt).

¹⁷Rowell, *Thinking about Music*, 172, 243; see also Rowell, "Stasis in Music," *Semiotica* 66/1-3 (special issue on the semiotics of music), ed. Eero Tarasti: 181-195.

¹⁸Kramer, 55.

¹⁹Both Lotman quotes are taken from *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. Daniel P. Lucid (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 230 and 270, respectively. Italics

isomorphism between various levels.

Example 2. From the girl's air

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "From the girl's air". The score is written on multiple staves. At the top, there is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The vocal line features a long melodic phrase with notes and rests, and a final upward-pointing arrow. Below the vocal line, there are two staves for lyrics: "ku-ka oLET?" and "ku-ka?". The instrumental accompaniment consists of several staves. The first two staves are for strings (S and Cello/Double Bass), with rhythmic patterns and wavy lines. The next two staves are for woodwinds (A and Flute), with rhythmic patterns and wavy lines. The bottom section of the score is for a string quartet (VL 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), with detailed rhythmic notation and wavy lines. The score is marked with various musical symbols, including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

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mine in both quotes.

A Network of Musical Systems

Never a stylistic purist, Rautavaara typically follows no strict method, but instead fuses together different musical techniques, even within a single piece.²⁰ In fact, he was a post-modernist as early as the 60s, long before it became fashionable.

Faithful to Rautavaara's pluralist ideology, *Thomas* is a meeting place for different musical techniques and systems. In a somewhat cryptic article, Rautavaara has discussed the kinds of twelve-tone series, symmetrical modes, and harmonic modulators used in *Thomas*.²¹ He explains at length how these various scales and series relate to one another, their "genealogical hierarchies." In this context, however, it is more important to understand how and why these different materials have been used. The series and the modes serve as constructive material for musical and vocal texture, but as careful analysis of the score (and the libretto) reveals, they have symbolic dimensions, too. My analysis confirms that the antagonism of isotopies and their social hierarchies is reflected even in pitch organization.

As Rautavaara openly admits, the idea of a scale evolving into another scale ("genealogical hierarchies") goes back to Joseph Yasser's *Theory of Evolving Tonality*.²² In his once fashionable study, Yasser claimed that a musical scale is a "materialized product of our inmost psychic functions. . . . It is essentially an *evolving*, not a *static* phenomenon." These changes from one scale system to another are gradual and organic, and it is Yasser's intention to disclose their logic.

²⁰Heiniö, "A Portrait of the Artist," 8-12 (n. 5, above).

²¹Rautavaara: ". . . it is my belief that all artistic taboos are evidence of short-sightedness (in time and place), and often of racism." In his essay, "*Thomas*—Analysis of the Tone [sic] Material: An Experiment in Synthesis," *FMQ* 1-2 (1985): 47-53.

²²Rautavaara, "*Thomas*—Analysis," 48. Yasser, *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (New York: Da Capo, 1975 [1932]) quoted from p. 3, Yasser's italics; information on his historical overview, etc. comes from pp. 7, 40-194. It is obvious that Yasser's theory was strongly conditioned by evolutionism, a fashionable ideology from the turn of the century. Today his theory should be judged against that historical background.

He gives a detailed overview of the historical development, from sub-infra-diatonic mode, which consists of five tones, to the chromatic scale, and finally reaching the future supra-diatonic mode, which would contain 19 different pitches.

Besides Yasser, Kurt Blaukopf's musico-sociological theories have had a fertilizing impact on Rautavaara. According to Blaukopf, a scale in a given culture is a "fait social." The scale and the way it is used manifest social characteristics of the culture. Changes in the social organization are reflected in the musical scales, too.²³ From Yasser Rautavaara has borrowed the idea of evolving scale systems and from Blaukopf their social connections, and he has produced in *Thomas* an artistic application of these musicological theories. The scales and series of *Thomas* and their social signification are presented in Figure 1.

The Finnish people are situated at the bottom of the social hierarchy of *Thomas*, which consists of paganish natives, forming a mass of people without any recognizable individuals. Their only acts on stage are to participate in ecstatic mass rituals, where intoxicating soma is consumed. The ritual music is based on a pentatonic scale, the shortest and least organized of the musical materials in *Thomas* (score pp. 191-197, 203-206, 214-217). The three magi belong to the isotopy of nature, as do the Finnish people, but their position is socially higher, because as shamans they lead and control the people in the soma rituals. Accordingly, their music is seldom based on a pentatonic scale, but on a more complex one (β in Figure 1) commonly known as Messiaen's 2nd "mode of limited transposition," in which half steps and whole steps succeed one another.²⁴ The scale underlying *The Girl's airs* ($\beta\beta\beta$ in Figure 1; also Example 2) resembles the previous mode in symmetry and intervallic content (see score pp. 12-18, strings

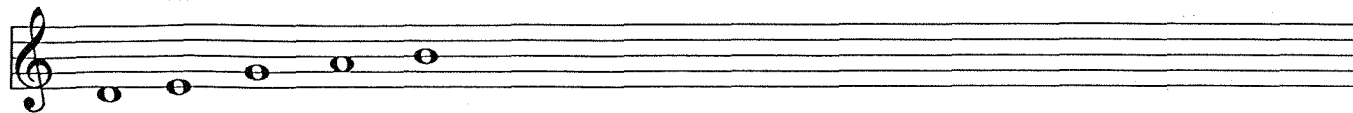
²³Rautavaara, "Thomas—Analysis," 48. Information on Blaukopf comes from his *Musik im Wandel der Gesellschaft* (Nördlingen: Bärenreiter, 1984), 239-240; also see his *Musiksoziologie* (St. Gallen: Zollikofen, n.d.), 101.

²⁴Occasionally, though, the music of the magi is derived from a pentatonic scale, as in score pp. 478-483. On "modes of limited transposition" see Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Leduc, 1956), 59-60 (vol. 1), 50-51 (vol. 2).

Figure 1. The series and modi of *Thomas*.

Modi for the isotopy of nature

Pentatonic Mode



β -mode



$\beta\beta$ -mode



Series for the isotopy of culture

γ -series



γ -V (M7 of γ -series)



$\gamma\gamma$ -series

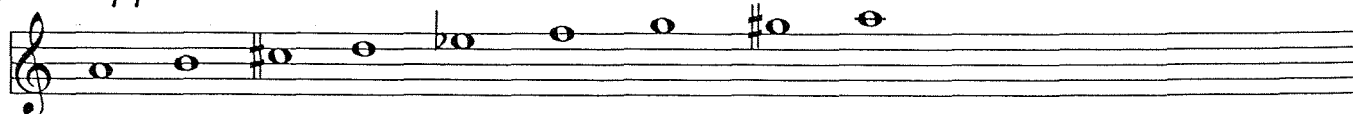


$\gamma\gamma$ V (M7 of $\gamma\gamma$ -series)



A musical mode for both isotopies

$\gamma\gamma$ -mode



only; and pp. 166-172).

While the music for isotopy of nature is based on fairly simple musical modes, the actors belonging to the isotopy of culture (Thomas, Gobyn, Styver, monks) are symbolized musically by much more complex material, a twelve-tone series. The Lotmanian concepts of paradigmatic and syntagmatic also apply here. In twelve-tone series the sequence of the tones is predetermined, thus the idea of syntagmatic order is preserved even at the level of the musical “raw material.” The isotopy of nature is also paradigmatic musically, because the tones belonging to the scales don’t obey pre-established rules of succession, and no repetition taboos are applied, as in serial textures. Thus the pitch paradigm can sound in any order, sometimes even simultaneously, as in Example 2.²⁵

For *Thomas* Rautavaara constructed two series, Γ and $\Gamma\Gamma$ in Figure 1, and from these derived two *Quintenreihen* or M7-cycles, resulting from the circle of fifths transform (ΓV and $\Gamma\Gamma V$ in Figure 1).²⁶ Bishop Thomas represents the top of the social ladder in *Thomas*, and his music is mainly based on the most complex symmetric series, as shown in Example 1, where Thomas’s vocal line and the orchestral texture are both derived from $\Gamma\Gamma$. The other series, Γ , simpler in intervallic structure, is used for the knight Johann von Gobyn and the merchant Styver, who are socially subordinated to Thomas. Despite this fairly constant system, finding the series is more than difficult, because it is typical for Rautavaara to derive only the orchestral texture from the series, and let the voice move elastically, following more the composer’s intuitions of a good vocal line than numerical values of the

²⁵For example, on score pp. 166-172 the entire pitch paradigm of the $\beta\beta\beta$ -mode is presented simultaneously; that of the $\beta\beta$ -mode on score pp. 521-527, 533-537, 540-550; that of the pentatonic scale in 191-197, 478-483, 528-532 (strings). Also see the beginning of the opera (pp. 1-18), where a static sound field is immediately associated with the Finnish people.

²⁶Rautavaara, “*Thomas* – Analysis,” 51; Herbert Eimert, *Lehrbuch der Zwölftontechnik* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1958), 29-32; John Rahn, *Basic Atonal Theory* (New York: Longman, 1980), 53-55.

series.²⁷

There is only one musical scale, $\beta\beta$ in Figure 1, common to both isotopies—Messiaen's mode no. 6—wherein two half steps are succeeded by two whole steps. This mode somewhat resembles the series (Γ) belonging to the isotopy of culture, as well as the musical scale of the magi (β) from the isotopy of nature. This shared mode ($\beta\beta$) acts as a kind of musical *lingua franca*, understood and used by both isotopies. It is highly significant that the finale is entirely composed from this mode, where the voices of Thomas, The Girl, the magi, and the chorus join in a cultural and musical synthesis (score pp. 540-550).

The network of scales and series in *Thomas* is so extensive that in the 550-page score there are less than 30 pages where the musical texture is not based on either the series or the symmetrical modes mentioned above. Deciphering this network of musical materials requires intensive close reading of the score, and one can hear their differences only vaguely. It is obvious that music based on the pentatonic mode sounds very different from the serial texture, but it would be much more difficult to determine aurally which of *Thomas*'s two series has been used. Still, by their specific intervallic content, the various series and modes create a recognizable atmosphere that is further reinforced by the semantic content arising from how they are systematically associated. The agreement between different types of series and modes, and their significations, is valid only within this opera. Thus these signs are interoceptive; that is, the signifying bond between signifier and signified is arbitrary, and one could not derive its interpretation rules outside the particular utterance, in this case *Thomas*. Exteroceptive signs, which refer beyond a given text, are briefly treated in the section after next.²⁸

²⁷Rautavaara: "Continuous recitative or 'speechsong' is in my view conducive to making out of opera something quite unnecessary, that is to say muddled, garbled spoken theatre. . . ." In his "*Thomas*—Analysis," 48.

²⁸In the French tradition of semiotics, the sign has two sides: signifier (expression) and signified (content); see, e.g., Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 101-118. On interoceptivity/exteroceptivity, see Greimas

Deviations

There are some interesting deviations from the usage of musical materials and isotopies presented above. An actor belonging to the isotopy of nature may be accompanied by a wrong signifier in the form of musical material. These few digressions are structurally significant and meaningful.

At the end of the first act, Bishop Thomas is surrounded by music derived from a pentatonic mode, which normally belongs to the isotopy of nature (score pp. 220-230). The explanation for the “inappropriate” musical material comes from the dramatic context in which Thomas has temporally abandoned his normal sacerdotal role and entered (maybe in his dreams) the realm of desire and ecstasy. He takes part in a huge shamanistic ritual with the three magi, the Finnish people, and The Girl, who offers him soma, hallucinogenic juice.

Another apparent deviation can be found at the beginning of act 2 in the inner monologue of The Girl (score pp. 235-240). To be precise, we learn her thoughts only from the chorus, for The Girl sings semantically empty vocalises. Though she belongs to the isotopy of nature, here her music is based on a twelve-tone series (TV). The “wrong” musical material is well motivated, because The Girl has left her home forests and followed Thomas to the battles of Novgorod. At the beginning of act 2 she is in the middle of Western (martial) culture, which is musically symbolized by a twelve-tone series. She has become acculturated, and as a result her own idiolect ($\beta\beta\beta$) has vanished.

Other Signs for Nature and Culture

The opposition between nature and culture is further reinforced in *Thomas* by more obvious means, which do not demand as close a

and Courtés, 148 (n. 2, above). Frits Noske uses the terms “intra-dramatic” and “extra-dramatic” for the classification of operatic signs, in his *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990 [1977]), 319.

reading of the score as does the network of musical materials. These signs are exteroceptive, in the sense that their signification could be understood also outside *Thomas*, in a more general cultural context.²⁹ Here I am able to treat only few examples from the extensive network of extra-dramatic signs in *Thomas*.

When The Girl appears on stage, we hear loud noises of birds from pre-recorded tape.³⁰ The howling of wolves is connected with the magi as is the sound of the horn, which raises bucolic connotations. At the level of scenic events, the Interlude between the first and second acts signals a transition from the isotopy of nature to the isotopy of culture—from forest to war. It begins with sounds resembling wind, soon followed by ecstatic shaman drums just heard in the preceding soma ritual. The drums refer to the isotopy of nature, but they are soon joined by hard metallic clangs and clashes, like the swords, lances, and spears that belong to the isotopy of culture. Thus the Interlude also musically represents the transition from nature to culture.

Conclusion

At the beginning of my article, I mentioned that *Thomas* was composed for The *Kalevala* Festivals in Joensuu, Eastern Finland. One might wonder, what a strange plot for a nationalistic opera: Why this strong opposition of nature and culture, which has been carefully constructed by means of text and music? I can find two short explanations.

First of all, historical Bishop Thomas was probably the first to conceive of Finland as an independent nation lying between Russia and Sweden, thus his operatic biography would be a fitting subject for an opera celebrating Finnish identity. The second explanation has to do

²⁹See Greimas and Courtés, 114-115.

³⁰Rautavaara seems to be obsessed with bird-song. One of his most performed compositions is *Cantus arcticus: Concerto for Birds and Orchestra* (Helsinki: Edition Fazer, 1973); sound recording by Ondine ODE 747-2. See also Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, “Rautavaara’s *Thomas*,” 9-11 (n. 5, above).

with The Girl and Finland. As you remember, she was the only actor able to materialize in both worlds: in the world of Thomas and that of Finnish natives. This factor and many other allusions in the libretto clearly indicate that The Girl is a symbol of Finland—the Finnish Maid.³¹ She is not understood by the representatives of culture, because she sings semantically-empty vocalises consisting only of vowels. Yet despite her language problems, she is able to join the (Western) culture. This symbolically describes the fate and state of Finland itself, lying at the border-line of culture and nature, East and West, civilization and forest.

³¹Carmela Bélinki, “Einojuohani Rautavaara’s opera *Thomas* ur ett kvinnoperspektiv,” *Nya Argus* 3 (1986): 59.