

Epic Time and Narrativity in
Jean Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen Suite*

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Abstract

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(Under the direction of Jon Finson)

Jean Sibelius's compositions, like those of many artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, became inseparable from discourses of aesthetics and politics. The 1895 *Lemminkäinen Suite* (Op. 22, no. 1–4) is a work often associated with such trends: the four-movement tone poem is based on the *Kalevala*, a Finnish epic poem intimately tied to artistic and nationalist sentiments in Finland. Situating the *Suite* within the aesthetic/political movement known as Karelianism and parallel to the *Kalevala* as literature, I explore the musical gestures Sibelius employs that create a musical narrative reflecting its poetic source in subject, form, and mode. In analyzing the *Suite*'s uniquely "epic" nature, I approach the musical narrative semiologically by examining musical "topoi" within their larger formal settings. I conclude my narratological examination by focusing on musical time in the work, an element that, in encouraging a perception of expansive temporality, plays an important role in the construction of the musical epic.

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At the intersection of the programmatic and the symphonic, the literary and the nationalistic, we find the most innovative compositions of Jean Sibelius. All these characterizations of his work have one element in common: narrative. How does Sibelius navigate narrativity in works that seem to defy boundaries and may be claimed by multiple semiotic camps? The *Lemminkäinen Suite*, Op. 12, Sibelius's 1895 symphonic poem, proves particularly fertile for the study of narrativity. A work rife with intersections of competing compositional modes and structures, the *Suite* provides an excellent subject for examination of how the composer fleshes out a narrative in a large symphonic work, from small-scale musical signifiers to the overarching symbolic forms.

Sibelius creates a unique narrative mode in his *Lemminkäinen Suite*: musical epic.¹ The *Lemminkäinen Suite* is based on the *Kalevala*, a Finnish epic poem first published in the 1830s.² He crafts a distinctive musical narrative that echoes the epic literary work, though it is not merely a reflection of or another version of the poems, or “runes,” of the *Kalevala*. To accomplish these tasks, Sibelius composes a musical “tale” that pushes the boundaries of “real time” to create an epic musical time much like the one narrated by the poem that provided the impetus for the *Suite*. Sibelius employs specific signifiers, or “topoi,” which shift in relation to one another when heard inside the musical

¹ Epic is used here in the sense that Emil Staiger employs: epic is one of three poetic modes (epic, lyric, dramatic), but also a style or overarching form. See his *Basic Concepts of Poetics* (College Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991).

² In this study I will refer to the widely available Oxford World Classics edition of the *Kalevala* in English translation. Elias Lönnrot, *The Kalevala*, ed. Keith Bosley, trans. Albert B. Lord (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

“crystallized” form, creating a musical vastness—a vastness that echoes and narrates the epic poem of the *Kalevala*.³

At the time of the *Suite*'s composition, the *Kalevala* was an important part of the Finnish nationalist movement, many seeds of which were being planted by artists and musicians of the era. Conscious of these currents, and feeling a personal connection with the *Kalevala*, Sibelius employed legends from the poem in numerous programmatic works, both around the turn of the century and well into his musical career. His first encounters and compositional relationship with this important literary work will provide a suitable base for discussions of the musical use of the *Kalevala* in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*.

The *Lemminkäinen Suite*'s four movements have titles based on legends from the *Kalevala* that refer to specific myths from the poem, and for numerous performances Sibelius conducted, the concert programs contained the corresponding Lemminkäinen runes.⁴ Yet it remains for the listeners' interpretation and reinterpretation to relate the words of the Kalevalic poems to the music they hear. After addressing issues of history and context of the *Suite*, we can begin to pick apart the musical ideas in each movement, distilling musical topoi that carry important narrative roles. This analysis incorporates the concept of topoi rather than specific, fixed signifiers in an attempt to accommodate various subjective listening positions and in order to conceptualize narrativity in an orchestral work. By invoking certain topoi, Sibelius uses an atmospheric approach to

³ The runes dealing with the story of Lemminkäinen are 11-15 and 26-29. See Anneli Asplund and Sikkra-Liisa Mettomaki's article "The Kalevala's Contents," in *Inspired by Tradition: Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Music*, ed. Antti Hayrynen (Helsinki: Finnish Music Information Center Fimic, 2004), 22–25.

⁴ For a copy of the original program (in Finnish and in English) used at an 1895 performance of the *Suite* see Satoru Kambe, *Sibelius's Kullervo and Lemminkäinen: Form, Image, and Musical Narrative*, *Acta Semiotica Fennica XXI, Approaches to Musical Semiotics 8* (Imatra, Finland: International Semiotics Institute, 2005), 93–94.

narrativity, and through his distinctive musical form—a crystallizing one—he is still able to convey narrative motion and progression through musical time.⁵ I will parse the topoi into three categories: Kalevalic, spatial, and actorial signifiers. After viewing the topical level in the four movements, I will examine the formal level: this layer of narrative sets the topoi in musical motion. As we will see, however, the two layers function symbiotically in certain important ways. A large-scale narrative emerges from the combination of the topoi and form, functioning at the level of the movement (and perhaps, even further removed, at the level of the four-movement unit), which narrative constituents require detailed examination. With the topoi and the musical form extracted from the larger textures of the work, I will be able then to reassemble the epic narrative.

The specific crystallizing form Sibelius uses in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* allows the listener to hear the overarching narrative as taking place beyond the temporal bounds of the “real time” it takes to hear the piece. This discussion of musical time takes its cue from Karol Berger’s conception of narrativity in instrumental music; Berger contends that music creates narrative movement by placing characters in the foreground against a fixed musical background.⁶ For this reason I will examine specifically spatial (background) and actorial (character) topoi, in addition to Kalevalic signifiers, in an effort to show how musical time is conveyed. Sibelius constructs an epic musical narrative by creating a sense of shift between the topoi—a shift that is the necessary

⁵ Crystallization is a formal device employed by Sibelius that involves patterns of repetition and gradual change. A more extensive discussion of “crystallizing” form, as derived from the work of James Hepokoski, Daniel Grimley, and others, will follow in Section II.

⁶ Karol Berger, “Narrative and Lyric: Fundamental Poetic Forms of Composition”, in *Musical Humanism and its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1992). Berger’s use of foreground and background are idiomatic in terms of the study of instrumental music; they do not refer in any way to the meaning of foreground and background in the Schenkerian musico-analytic school. I will retain Berger’s, not Schenker’s, sense of the words for this paper.

consequence of the crystallizing form. The temporal shift and the expansion of the bounds of “real time” in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* create a distinctly epic narrative mode in the work. We will need to address briefly issues of musical time in general, therefore, before drawing conclusions regarding Sibelius’s distinctive narrative formation. I will discuss the implications of such an epic narrative in terms of textual significance for Sibelius and the *Kalevala*.

While the primary goal of this study lies in examining the epic narrative of a single Kalevalic work by Sibelius, some of the issues I address may prove applicable to other musical-analytic undertakings. Narrativity is always a contentious issue in the analysis of instrumental music, especially for those works which lack explicit programs or exhibit characteristics of “absolute” music in their use of a symphonic or otherwise codified form.⁷ Of course, *Lemminkäinen* encounters both of these narrative hazards, so to speak, but many other works of the same era also merit careful attention when pursuing signs of musical narrativity. By examining the *Lemminkäinen Suite* in terms of topoi—which I consider broader, culturally interpretive musical gestures rather than direct signifiers—concepts of narrativity in instrumental music can advance tentatively toward the middle ground between too-limiting direct correspondence theories of musical semiotics and overly cautious narrative theories that leave listeners at a relativistic impasse. I hope that examining topoi rather than direct signifiers will prove fruitful for

⁷ Eero Tarasti has focused much of his work on narrativity, specifically in the music of Sibelius (see his *Myth and Music: A Semiotic Approach to the Aesthetics of Myth in Music, especially that of Wagner, Sibelius, and Stravinsky* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979) and *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)). The narrative studies of Carolyn Abbate, Karol Berger, John Daverio, Carlo Caballero, James Hepokoski, Fred Everett Maus, Edward T. Cone, and Anthony Newcomb explore different ideas of musical narrative. Semioticians (both musical and non-musical) also explore the idea of narrative as in the works of Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Kofi Agawu, Roland Barthes, and Umberto Eco.

listeners with diverse backgrounds (for example, in this case, those without intimate knowledge of the *Kalevala*) and for analysts making assertions about what “we” hear in the music.

The intertwining concepts of musical time and narrative time finally intervene here. Though this later discussion will apply largely to the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, I feel that explorations of narrative time can provide insight into narrativity writ large and may lead to interesting questions about non-narrative works (if there can be—or we can perceive—such works). By showing that a fundamental quality of *Lemminkäinen*’s epic narrative mode lies in its ability to expand musical time perceptually, I show how and why temporality plays a crucial role in narrativity. This necessarily leads to questions about narrative time in other works: if *Lemminkäinen* occupies an epic chronological frame, what works might conform to “real time” expectations? Are there works that “sound” faster than they are literally played? I hope that these and other questions of narrativity and musical time arise out of the preliminary conclusions I draw in the analysis of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* and its epic narrative mode.

I. Sibelius and the *Kalevala*

The *Kalevala* is a collection of fifty Finnish poems, known as “runes,” which form a relatively coherent mythic narrative of the ancient Finns and their gods.⁸ The runes come from an oral tradition that developed for the most part in the region known as Karelia,

⁸ Keith Bosley, “Introduction,” *The Kalevala*, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xxxix–xlii; Michael Owen Jones, “Folk Poetry, Finnish Identity, and Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*,” *The World of the Kalevala: Essays in Celebration of the 150 Year Jubilee of the Publication of the Finnish National Epic*, UCLA Folklore and Mythology Publications, ed. Michael Owen Jones (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1987), 15–16.

comprised of eastern and northeastern Finland as well as the western edge of Russia near Finland. The runes are sung verse, not spoken, performed by a designated individual within a community, usually someone who is part of a dynastic line of rune singers. This person learns the legends and the melodies on which to sing them—the melodies are usually specific to the text they are depicting—from a runic singer a generation older. Certain poems and their melodies are unique to specific geographic regions, but many poems are common to various regions of Karelia revealing some common ancestral culture, or at least a pervasive mythology. I will deal with the characteristics of the individual poems in greater detail at the end of this section, but first I will examine the passage from oral tradition into printed word.⁹

The genesis of the myths of the *Kalevala* is quite complicated, spanning centuries of Finnish folklore and tradition. Fortunately, the *Kalevala* as a literary work has a clearer history. In 1835, Elias Lönnrot published a collection of ancient Finnish poems as the *Kalevala*; this publication became known as the *Old Kalevala* following the appearance of the 1849 edition (the more widely read of the two), which became known as the *New Kalevala*, or simply the *Kalevala*.¹⁰ The runes within these works were the fruit of an extensive collecting project that took place throughout Karelia over a number of years during which Lönnrot collected thousands of lines of poetry.¹¹ The runes found in the published *Kalevala* are poems that runic folksingers dictated to Lönnrot during his

⁹ For a discussion of the tradition of runic singing in Finland during Sibelius' time see Veijo Murtomäki, "Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian Folk Music," *Finnish Music Quarterly*, Issue 3 (September 2005).

¹⁰ The *New Kalevala* contained many more lines of poetry and unlike the first edition, which was circulated mainly among enthusiastic folklorists, the second edition was widely read.

¹¹ Lönnrot amassed over 13,000 lines of poetry in one fortnight of collecting for the first edition (1835) of the *Kalevala*. The second edition was almost 23,000 lines long—almost twice as many as were published for the first edition. See Bosley, "Introduction," xxviii and xiii.

travels in addition to runes combined (or fabricated) from various sources (including, in a few cases, his own imagination).¹² Lönnrot wove the *Kalevala* as literature into a more or less unified narrative, allowing diverse songs to be perceived by readers as an epic unit.

Kalevalic scholars have tried to situate the origins of certain poems and the sources of the myths they narrate chronologically. The content of the myths ranges from creation stories populated by Finnish gods and ancient Finns to numerous “historical” legends of the gods and people, as well as songs and spells used by the ancient Finns.¹³ In studying the content of the runes, scholars have noted that certain legends must date to a period later than the ancient Finns, who began the oral tradition.¹⁴ These myths seem to have been influenced by Christian culture, for the symbolic life of a few runes draws on New Testament narratives. Thus, while some of the myths may have arisen in pre-Christian Finland, many must be dated to as late as the twelfth century (despite the “ancient” characters they depict) during the era of Christian Sweden’s rule in Finland.¹⁵

¹² Many of the published runes were fabricated from the performances of multiple folk singers. Scholars have found that Lönnrot may have added lines himself in order to craft a more fluid narrative. Lönnrot published a second work called the *Kanteletar*, a book of ballads and lyrics in the style of the *Kalevala* on mostly romantic themes. These runes were written by Lönnrot himself, although the similar style seems to have obscured that fact for some readers. See Juha Y. Pentikäinen, *Kalevala Mythology: Revised Edition*, Ed. and Trans. Ritva Poom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) and Bosley, “Introduction.”

¹³ Bosley, “Introduction,” xxxix–xlii; Jones, “Folk Poetry, Finnish Identity, and Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*,” 15–16.

¹⁴ As early as 98 AD the “Fenni” were noted as a people of the North by Roman culture (although scholars believe now that those referred to as Finns at this time were most likely the Lapps). Finland was taken by Sweden during a crusade in the middle of the twelfth century. Finland remained under Swedish rule until it was defeated by Russia in the Finnish War (1808 and 1809). Finland was a Russian Duchy following this possession and until 1917. See Pentikäinen, *Kalevala Mythology* and Keith Bosley, “Introduction,” xviii.

¹⁵ On the general influence of Christianity (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) on the runes, see Pentikäinen, *Kalevala Mythology*, 84–85; on the specific case of the runes which relate a parallel narrative of the Christian Nativity see Thomas A. DuBois, *Finnish Folk Poetry and the Kalevala*, New Perspectives in Folklore Volume 1, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 93–126.

However diverse the origins of the runes, by the 1880s the *Kalevala* had gone through two editions (1835 and 1849), and it had become a culturally ubiquitous source for artistic inspiration and national pride. Juha Y. Pentikäinen summarizes the significance of the work in mid-nineteenth century Finland: “The *Kalevala* was considered comparable to the *Nibelungenlied*, the works of Homer, and other celebrated epics.”¹⁶ Sibelius as well as other intellectuals and artists began to view the *Kalevala* in this light and viewed the epic as a rich source for creative and nationalist endeavors. Significantly, the *Kalevala* came to be considered as a unified literary work by the turn of the century, a coherent epic rather than as a collection of poems or folklore. In spite of this view, however, artists and intellectuals conceived of the *Kalevala* with a considerable amount of flexibility; its acknowledged oral origins encouraged at the turn turn-of-the-century an understanding of the *Kalevala* as a work inherently shaped by the variations in and internal transformations of the runes (characteristics of Kalevalic poetry to be discussed below). The conception of the *Kalevala* as both fixed and mutable was evident in much of the rhetoric used by artists at the time, including Sibelius. For Sibelius and others, the *Kalevala* stood as a unified epic that “proved” an extensive cultural history and provided a deep well from which to draw culturally meaningful inspiration for artistic endeavors. It represented, at the same time, a work which welcomed multifarious reinterpretations in such endeavors.

The use of the *Kalevala* by artists and intellectuals formed part of a movement that arose in Finland at the close of the nineteenth century called “Karelianism,” named

¹⁶ Pentikäinen, *Kalevala Mythology*, 1.

for the region where most of the Kalevalic poetry was collected.¹⁷ Like other folk or ancient culture revivals throughout Europe, Karelianism connected to nationalist sentiment in Finland.¹⁸ For many centuries Sweden ruled the Finnish people, until Russia annexed Finland following the Finnish War in 1808 and 1809. Though Finland was a Russian Duchy from 1809 until 1917, the long rule by the Swedes resulted in the majority of Finns speaking Swedish, not Finnish (the primary language of Eastern Finland in the Karelian region). Not until the 1860s and 1870s—around the time the young Sibelius began his schooling—did Finland begin the process of making Finnish the national language. This shift signaled a change in attitude, though not away from Sweden, since the Scandinavian country had long since lost power. Rather it reflected the emergence of a new patriotism in Finland, one which focused on the region of Karelia as a site of national heritage. Nationalist currents that were building in the mid-nineteenth century, then, were further strengthened by the artistic response to Karelianism.¹⁹ Artists

¹⁷ For further discussion of the Finnish nationalist movement in the mid-nineteenth century and the *Kalevala*'s influential role in this process, see Antti Hayrynen, "Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Classical Music: Sibelius Discovers the Tone of the *Kalevala*," in *Inspired by Tradition: Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Music*, ed. Antti Hayrynen (Helsinki: Finnish Music Information Center Fimic, 2004), 69.

¹⁸ Like other European nations in their infancy at this time, Finland employed images of ancient culture in music, literature, and art in an effort to liken its society with older models of nationhood. Many countries employed images of Ancient Greece or Rome at this time; Finland was able to draw upon *Kalevala* sources, which, as we have seen, were modeled on Homeric works themselves. Michael Branch discusses the link between the sentiments of early admirers of the *Kalevala* and the thoughts of eighteenth-century German thinker J. G. Herder: "Herder argued that a 'nation' could exist only if it possessed a distinctive cultural identity founded on the language and oral literature of the ordinary people. In Finland, where Swedish was the principle language of government and education at the end of the eighteenth century (and was to remain so until the second half of the nineteenth century), such thinking fell on fertile ground...." Michael Branch, "Kalevala: From Myth to Symbol," *Kalevala 1835–1985: The National Epic of Finland*, Books from Finland (Helsinki: Helsinki University Library, 1985), 1–2. On this subject see also Jones, "Folk Poetry, Finnish Identity, and the *Kalevala*," 17–18.

¹⁹ For a recent discussion of Finnish nationalism and Finnish self-representation outside of Finland, see Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005). For more on how artistic movements like Karelianism were integral to nation building see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

and intellectuals, having first decided to make the official urban and intellectual language Finnish, now searched for distinctly Finnish beliefs and cultures. In this light they saw Karelia as the wellspring of all Finnish heritage. As such, artists and intellectuals put enormous value on the Karelian people, their traditions, and their folklore. The myths presented in the poems of the Kalevala stood as a testament to an ancient and still-thriving Finnish culture. Finland could take pride in its history and traditions; nineteenth century Finns were no longer a root-less long-dominated people: they were descendants of a rich cultural tradition.²⁰

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Sibelius and many others traveled to Karelia in order to witness firsthand the “bearers” of their culture. Back in urban centers like Helsinki, they began to adopt Kalevalic myths and runes for various endeavors, including scholarly research on the history of Karelia and its cultures as well as numerous artistic projects in the domains of poetry, literature, visual arts, and music.²¹ This strengthening of cultural heritage had a powerful effect on Finland. In the early years of the twentieth century, when many continental European nations were redefining nationhood, Finland was well on its way to separation from the Russian government. After the withdrawal of Russia from World War I in 1917 and during the subsequent

1983), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁰ William A. Wilson, “Sibelius, the *Kalevala*, and Karelianism,” *The Sibelius Companion*, Ed. Glenda Dawn Goss (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996) 51–53.

²¹ Wilson, “Sibelius, the *Kalevala*, and Karelianism,” 57.

political collapse of the tsarist monarchy, Finland officially became an independent nation.²²

Sibelius took part in the nationalist current before and after Finland's official independence, but his artistic involvement was more nuanced than mere zealous patriotism. At the end of the nineteenth century, when Sibelius was coming of age as a composer, the arts and politics nourished one another; the arts aided in the political goal of strengthening of nationalist sentiment in Finland by making visible (and audible) a cultural history in which the Finnish people could take pride. Concurrently, institutions rose up around the artists and intellectuals portraying and documenting Finnish culture, providing support for artists and scholars both intellectually and financially. Expressing more than simply nationalist sentiments, Sibelius seems to have been caught up in the spirit of Karelianism—although it is fair to say that Karelianism became a movement as such because of the kindling possibility of Finnish independence (as opposed to the intrinsic value of Karelian culture).

For Sibelius the interconnectedness of music and politics through Karelianism meant the opportunity to study and later teach at Helsinki Music Institute and Orchestra School, and to conduct and compose for the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra (both of which arose amidst nationalist institutional change).²³ In such an environment Sibelius was able to harvest the artistic aspects of the Karelian movement from the atmosphere of

²² Daniel M. Grimley, Ed., "Chronology," *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi.

²³ Matti Huttunen, "The National Composer and the Idea of Finnishness: Sibelius and the Formation of Finnish Musical Style," *Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, Ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10–1.

nationalism around him.²⁴ Understanding some of the cultural institutions that made Karelianism available to Sibelius, we can now examine how he came into contact with the *Kalevala* itself and his associations with the epic, as well as those characteristics of the work that sparked his creative interest.

Sibelius first became acquainted with the *Kalevala* while studying composition in Vienna in 1890 and 1891. A native Swedish speaker, it is not surprising that he did not begin to read the epic work written in Finnish until well into his twenties, once he had become more familiar with the increasingly popular Finnish language as used by Karelian sympathizers.²⁵ The *Kalevala* itself was already extremely popular among Finnish nationalists and artists by the time Sibelius came to it. It seems appropriate that as the composer was exposed to more Germanic compositional techniques through Viennese teachers like Karl Goldmark and Robert Fuchs, he would seek after elements of his own culture that he could incorporate into his work. It also appears that Sibelius found the *Kalevala* highly inspirational musically. In December 1890, Sibelius wrote to his then-new wife Aino about his first encounters with the work:

I am reading the *Kalevala* a lot and am already beginning to understand much more Finnish. The *Kalevala* strikes me as extraordinarily modern and to my ears is pure music, themes and variations; its story is far less important than the moods and atmospheres conveyed: the gods are human beings, Väinämöinen is a musician, and so on.²⁶

²⁴ This may explain some of the idealistic, art for arts sake claims of early Sibelius biographers who note that the composer was uninterested with the political movement; he merely mined the *Kalevala* for artistic value. This may also shed some light on Sibelius's own words on the subject.

²⁵ Although Sibelius was a native Swedish speaker, his mother insisted that he attend the local grammar school that pioneered instruction in Finnish (Hämeenlinna Suomalainen Normaalilyseo). This was his first introduction to the language, but he did not regularly speak (or read in) Finnish until his early twenties. See Robert Layton, *Sibelius and His World* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 8.

²⁶ Letter from Jean Sibelius to Aino Sibelius (26 December 1890) quoted in Erik Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, Vol. 1: 1865–1905 (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) 76.

The *Kalevala* as art, then, became valuable to Sibelius even in his first readings. In fact, in earlier letters of this same period Sibelius remarks on the musical tone he finds in the Finnish language. As Erik Tawaststjerna notes, however, this element should not be overemphasized, since Sibelius had been and would continue to be immersed in Fenno-Swedish culture.²⁷ Nevertheless, the poetry of the *Kalevala* and the characters and myths it described greatly impressed Sibelius and immediately evoked music in the composer's mind.

When Sibelius returned to Finland in the summer of 1891, he strengthened his association between the *Kalevala* and other non-literary works of art, both visual and musical. He became familiar with paintings by Finnish painter (and acquaintance) Akseli Gallén-Kallela, whose works depicted Kalevalic legends.²⁸ He also found new musical experiences that stretched beyond the Romantic concert-hall atmosphere to which he had previously been exposed in Helsinki. While Sibelius attended the Helsinki Music Institute and studied composition under Martin Wegelius, he was frequently exposed to the music of Mendelssohn and Schumann as well as more recent composers like Wagner and Liszt. However, after returning from his studies in Berlin and Vienna, Sibelius turned to the music of fellow Helsinki composer Robert Kajanus, who conducted his own symphonic poems based on the *Kalevala*.²⁹ Sibelius also became acquainted with the folk melodies that traditionally accompanied the singing of *Kalevala* runes. While still in Vienna, he wrote that

²⁷ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 76.

²⁸ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 130, 136–137.

²⁹ Hayrynen, "Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Classical Music: Jean Sibelius Discovers the Tone of the *Kalevala*," 73–75.

I believe in the future of a national Finnish music, however much the knowalls may turn up their noses. The deep melancholy and insistence on one mood or phrase which is at the heart of so many Finnish folk songs, though it can be a shortcoming, is none the less a characteristic.³⁰

Sibelius was already aware of the unique character of Finnish folk songs early in his compositional life, and just a few months later in the summer of 1891 he actually traveled to Karelia to witness traditional rune singer Larin Paraske.³¹

In the same year, Sibelius began composing his own Kalevalic works, having become acquainted with the rune singing of Paraske and after attending concerts of the Kalevalic works by Kajanus. Sibelius's first publicly performed *Kalevala* work was the *Kullervo Symphony* (Op. 7), which he conducted with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in April 1892. The work met with mixed reactions from audiences and critics, both from Swedish-speaking Finns and Finnish nationalists. Overall, Sibelius made quite a grand statement with the premier of this work; a Finnish critic noted that he had "taken a long step forward with this work and, at the same time, taken Finnish art towards a highly promising future. The whole composition is, due to its Finnish content, the most impressive and powerful work ever to come from a Finnish pen."³² This tentative praise was apparently enough to encourage the composer to continue in this Kalevalic vein. Many of his works may be considered explicitly Kalevalic: they include texts from the epic either as part of choral pieces or chamber works for voice and piano or small

³⁰ Jean Sibelius (7 January 1891) quoted in Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 87.

³¹ Murtomäki, "Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian Folk Music," 33–34.

³² Oskar Merikanto (in *Päivälehti*, 29 April 1892) quoted from "Kullervo," *Jean Sibelius: The Website* <http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/ork_kullervo.htm> [Accessed on 11 March 2007]. This website is maintained by the Finnish Club of Helsinki as part of their project known as "The Electronic Memory of the Finnish People." It contains extensive biographical and compositional information on Sibelius available in Finnish, Swedish, and English, including many of his letters and a valuable collection of contemporaneous critical material for the composer's works.

ensemble, or they take Kalevalic themes for their titles, internal movement titles, or as parts of their accompanying program.³³

Lönnrot's *Kalevala* remains well known even today as the national epic of Finland.³⁴ Though much of its renown outside of Finland likely stems from its unique narrative among all other ancestral cultures of Europe, its notoriety may have been due in part to the distinctive formal characteristics that lent some staying power to the epic. Ancient Greek epic poetry thrived as an oral narrative because of the mnemonic organizing factor of its hexameter, a formal characteristic that in the modern world marked this poetry as artistically separate from other poetic traditions. Finnish poetry in the *Kalevala* seems to have met a similar fate. It uses a variety of unaccented trochaic tetrameter distinctive enough to be referred to as the *Kalevala* meter. It usually falls in isolated couplets linked by alliteration, though sometimes pairs display assonance rather than alliteration. Most significantly, lines group not in stanzas but in parallel structures by subject matter (reflected in the repetition of root words) and by phrase structure. Additionally, *Kalevala* poetry does not use end rhyme.³⁵ We can see some of these characteristics in the following passage from "A Bond Made," number 11, the first rune containing the story of Lemminkäinen, the hero of the *Suite*:

The sun wooed her for his son

³³ For a detailed list of Sibelius's works which includes relevant citation of literary origins, see "Works in Chronological Order," *Jean Sibelius: The Website* <http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/js_saveltajana.html>.

³⁴ Michael Owen Jones reminds us that the *Kalevala* is "the most translated piece of Finnish literature. By now [1987], 120 separate works have appeared in 230 editions. Among the more than two dozen major translations are those in the national languages of European countries as well as in Hebrew (1930), Japanese (1937), Chinese (1962), and Fulani (1983)." Jones, "Folk Poetry, Finnish Identity, and Lönnrot's *Kalevala*," 3.

³⁵ See Bosley, "Introduction," xxi and Jones, "Folk Poetry, Finnish Identity and Lönnrot's *Kalevala*," 16.

but she'd not go to Sunland
 to shine with the sun
 in the summer rush
 The moon wooed her for his son
 but she'd not go to Moonland
 to gleam with the moon
 to go the sky's rounds.
 A star wooed her for his son
 but she'd not go to Starland
 to twinkle night-long
 in the winter skies.³⁶

This English translation, unfortunately, does not preserve the trochaic tetrameter of Kalevalic poetry, though it highlights other features of the verse. The translation above shows clearly the idea of parallelism in the poetry (“The sun wooed . . . ,” “The moon wooed . . . ,” “A star wooed . . .”). We can also see the use of both alliteration (“to gleam . . . / to go . . .”) and assonance (“to twinkle . . . / the in *winter*”). Alliterative and assonant passages, we can see here, occur in paired lines within larger parallel structures.

In addition to the distinctive formal characteristics of the *Kalevala* poetry and its unique meter, the performance practice of *Kalevala* runes served as an artistic element culled by Sibelius and other musicians for Karelian works. Rune singing was a tradition passed down through generations and, just as the meter acted as a mnemonic device for storytelling, specific melodies connected to certain types of runes by theme or character. Rune melodies varied across geographic location and among rune singers, but like the poetry itself, there was an element of regularity to the melodic declamation of runes. Melodies were always pentachordal, with an ambiguous third inflected by the performer. A rune melody consisted of four melodic segments each lasting five beats: the rhythmic pattern in these melodic segments featured three pairs of eighth notes followed by two quarter notes. Four lines of tetrameter were sung over the four melodic segments, and the

³⁶ Lönnrot, “A Bond Made,” No. 11, *The Kalevala*, 120–121.

tetrameter itself fit into the five beats by placement of one trochee on each beat until the fourth and fifth beat, which split the final trochee. Each melodic segment, then, has the effect of slowing the metric pulse of the melody at the end of each line of poetry, emphasizing line breaks within larger poetic units. This rhythmic construction also points to parallelism in the poetic lines, because frequently the four-segment melody is divided in two by common notes at the end of the first two segments and at the close of the four segment grouping. This example, collected by Sibelius himself during a trip to Karelia, makes clearer some of the melodic and rhythmic characteristics discussed above.³⁷



Example 1: transcription of runic melody, *The Kalevala* (1835)³⁸

The formal characteristics of the *Kalevala*—its singular metric construction and structural organization as well as the performance practice surrounding the work (the pentachordal melodies and distinctive rhythm)—are all elements from which composers such as Sibelius drew inspiration. With this basic understanding of the literary epic, we are now prepared to examine the history of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* itself and how it fits into the intersecting currents of nationalism, Karelianism and into continental debates on music and form. From there, we can view the *Suite*'s musical topoi and start to unearth the building blocks of a Kalevalic narrative.

³⁷ Bosley, "Introduction," xxi–xxii.

³⁸ Bosley, "Introduction," xxiii.

II. The *Lemminkäinen Suite*

The *Lemminkäinen Suite* premiered on 13 April 1896 under Sibelius' baton, the culmination of a multi-year period of composition. In its earliest phases some of the music of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* was composed by Sibelius as part of a would-be opera *The Building of the Boat* (*Veneen luominen*). The opera was to follow a libretto culled by the composer from the *Kalevala* in the fashion of Wagner's treatment of the *Nibelungenlied*; Sibelius dreamed of this opera becoming a Finnish *Gesamtkunstwerk*.³⁹ He put the project aside when the director of the Finnish Theater cast aspersions on the work in progress; eventually Sibelius became so disheartened by the opera, perhaps because of the mix of awe and fear he experienced in attending numerous Wagner operas in Munich, that he ceased composition of *The Building of the Boat* permanently.⁴⁰ Shortly after this retreat from music-drama, however, Sibelius began to rework the music into a large-scale tone poem called *The Four Legends* or the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. The overture to *The Building of the Boat* soon morphed into the third movement, "The Swan of Tuonela," and the other three movements took shape throughout 1894 and 1895. Sibelius revised the movements on many occasions—all four movements had a second version in 1897, three were finalized in 1900 (all but "Lemminkäinen in Tuonela" which was finalized in 1939). The middle movements were reordered by Sibelius so that the

³⁹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 141; in a letter writing about *The Building of the Boat* during its composition, Sibelius exposes his debt to Wagnerian ideology by echoing one of Wagner's most salient metaphors in *Oper und Drama*. Sibelius writes: "I believe that music alone, that is to say absolute music, is in itself not enough. It arouses feelings and induces certain states of mind, but it always leaves some part of one unsatisfied: one always asks questions, why just this? Music is like a woman, it is only through man that she can give birth and that man is poetry. Music attains its fullest power only when it is motivated by poetic impulse" (July 1893).

⁴⁰ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 158; during this period Sibelius saw *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*, and *Parsifal* (twice).

“Swan” became the second movement. The works were performed under the composer’s baton and elsewhere into the late 1940s.⁴¹

The four movements—“Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island,” “The Swan of Tuonela,” “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela,” and “Lemminkäinen’s Return”—have their poetic origin in specific runes from the *Kalevala*: Runes 11-15 and 26-29 tell the story of the mythic character Lemminkäinen. A complex association exists between these poems and the *Suite*’s movements that reflect the narrative. The characters and general spirit of the *Kalevala* stories are present in each of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* movements, but a one-to-one mapping-on of the epic poem onto the music would be (as is often times the case when creating direct relationships between literary and musical works) ultimately fruitless. Sibelius’s treatment of the narrative is not leitmotivic (though we may draw comparisons between Strauss’s Don Juan and Sibelius’s Lemminkäinen as characters);⁴² rather, the Finnish composer creates an epic musical narrative in general, the specifics of which individual listeners would be more than welcome to map onto the musical narrative themselves depending on their familiarity with the mythic characters in the poetic narrative. We might expect this compositional strategy, despite Sibelius’s intimate familiarity with the work of Wagner and this *Suite*’s musical birth as failed music-drama. We can recall the composer’s experience of the *Kalevala* as a work of art; Sibelius describes the aesthetic of the epic poem with these

⁴¹ “Lemminkäinen,” *Jean Sibelius: The Website*, <http://www.sibelius.fi/english/musiikki/ork_lemminkainen.htm> [accessed on 12 March 2007].

⁴² Stephen Downes, “Pastoral Idylls, Erotic Anxieties and Heroic Subjectivities in Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island* and the First Two Symphonies,” *Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, Ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

words: “its story is far less important than the moods and atmospheres conveyed.”⁴³

Sibelius values the *Kalevala* for its atmospheric qualities rather than the explicit points of the narrative. Because he constructed the musical narrative with this in mind, we must develop an analytical lens which will bring this type of musical storytelling into focus.

Musical topoi form the core of the narrative structure in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. I will use the word “topos” to describe the process at work in the *Suite* because I want to convey a certain type of musical signification; Sibelius incorporates a group of musical elements, rather than a single gesture, to signify a generally extra-musical idea. Thus he may use different or changing musical elements to convey a single character, landscape, atmosphere, and so forth, though these extra-musical ideas may be diffuse or multivalent. Though the topoi may consist of a group of musical gestures, these various elements need not connect one-to-one with specific facets of the extra-musical idea they typify. The musical topoi in the *Suite* are also unique to the work. This is not to say that Sibelius completely reinvented his musical vocabulary with each work; he offers a group of gestures within a musical and extra-musical context, allowing semiotic associations to build over the course of a work. Thus, unlike musical topoi like “the pastoral” or “the heroic” that we might find in other works, which rely on a heritage of extra-musical associations, Sibelius creates the topoi in his music anew within each work.

We will be looking at “topoi” rather than individual signifiers for two reasons, both corresponding to Sibelius’s compositional strategy as well as the needs of the analyst. The first has to do with audience: in using a group of musical gestures, Sibelius allows for differing levels of musical and cultural knowledge. Many musical gestures

⁴³ Letter from Jean Sibelius to Aino Sibelius (26 December 1890) quoted in Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 76.

permit a wider population of listeners to associate certain musical gestures with certain extra-musical ideas, with which they may or may not have had any familiarity prior to listening to the piece. This was useful for Sibelius as a composer and artistic nationalist; the *Kalevala* would be most familiar to Finnish-speaking audience members, somewhat familiar to Swedish-speaking individuals, and relatively unknown to those outside the borders. For the music analyst, the examination of topoi as the semiotic components of a narrative allows for a fluidity of interpretation—just as it does for the listener—as well as facilitating the practical means to analyze the narrative content of the work at all.

Because semiotic connections form loosely throughout the work, creating an atmospheric sense of narrative rather than a literary one, the composer gives the analyst the tools to understand the piece as it unfolds. The second reason closely relates to the first and deals with the nature of Sibelius's compositional ideals. The composer strove for an atmospheric use of orchestral coloration allowing many elements to convey a single idea, an ideal we saw paralleled by the composer's view of the *Kalevala*. Therefore, it would be impractical to search for single gestural correspondences between the *Suite* and the epic; one cannot analyze the narrative leitmotivically where leitmotifs do not appear.

Sibelius uses three distinct types of topoi in his *Lemminkäinen Suite*: Kalevalic signifiers, spatial signifiers, and actorial signifiers. The way in which these three kinds of topoi shift and change throughout the sections of the *Suite* will become very important, but since this constitutes a type of formal structure for Sibelius, this discussion will follow in the section on form. For the time being, I will examine each of the three topoi as fixed signifiers. All four movements of the *Suite* use the three varieties of topoi, but the extra-musical objects differ according to the distinct legends from the *Kalevala* that

the movements narrate. The topoi form the musical content of the narrative that, when contained within the larger form of the movements, tell the stories of the *Kalevala* legends about the hero Lemminkäinen. Time, dominated by the crystallization form, animates the topoi. The topoi themselves are the objects or characteristics of each legend necessary to sustain the narrative once set in motion by the formal structure of the music. It is also important to note that each of the varieties of topoi serves as a marker of the “epic”—Kalevalic topoi refer to the structure of the Finnish epic; the spatial ones refer to the expansiveness of the uniquely mythic environment, and the actorial ones refer to the grand characters and events of the *Kalevala*. Thus, Kalevalic topoi give the musical epic literary, folkloric, and historical import, the spatial topoi supply the backdrop for the legend being told, and the actorial topoi correspond to the main characters of the narrative.⁴⁴

Kalevalic signifiers are those musical features that refer to the poetic characteristics of the *Kalevala*, often by imitating the poetic structure of the epic or the musical materials associated with the tradition of runic singing. This may include references to the trochaic tetrameter unique to Kalevalic poetry or the structure of the poetic line or poetic groupings, as discussed previously. Spatial signifiers include musical features that establish an extra-musical environment or physical geography. These signifiers inscribe the boundaries and describe the features of the landscape in

⁴⁴ I should reiterate that none of the topoi (including the actorial variety) are leitmotivic in the traditional sense that we might see in a Strauss opera or tone poem or a Wagnerian music drama. Though the musical figures are associated with different extra-musical ideas consistently, the extra-musical ideas themselves are not necessarily to be interpreted as intently fixed ideas or objects. Thus listeners unfamiliar with the nuances of Kalevalic legends might still be able to identify a “hero” or “lover” motive in the first movement, “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island,” where others more familiar with the epic poem would identify Lemminkäinen and his deeds specifically.

which the narrative action takes place.⁴⁵ Sibelius often opens the movement with the musical gestures that narrate the landscape of the legend. The music may rely on some conventional extra-musical associations with place—for example, a dark underworld might appear musically in the minor mode, with low tones, and a slow harmonic rhythm—but the available titles of each movement, which all refer to the surroundings, allow Sibelius to create a musical palate with some freedom. The actorial signifiers describe the characters who act within the established spatial surroundings.⁴⁶ Actorial signifiers represent the players in the narrative or their actions; these actions are not those narrated by the specific runes, rather they are the archetypal actions of the character. For example, if in “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island” the actorial signifier that represents Lemminkäinen takes on a dance-like character, it does not correspond to a single episode of dancing in a *Kalevala* legend, but instead refers to the nature of the hero as playful in his wooing of the maidens. The actions that actorial signifiers may represent do not constitute “events” in a narrative, therefore, but rather part of the fabric of the character’s poetic personality in that particular movement.

In composing the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, Sibelius incorporated both poetic features of the *Kalevala* and traditional musical features from the practice of runic singing.

Because the poetic elements of the *Kalevala*—the metric and poetic structures—have

⁴⁵ As instrumental gestures, the spatial topoi “describe” the surrounding environment in a different way than language or visual images would. I will discuss how these topoi narrate space further in this section.

⁴⁶ Algirdas Greimas (and others following him) distinguishes between actors and “actants” in the plot of a narrative. Actors are characters in the narrative and relate to the structural system that the larger narrative follows; actants (a term also used by Roland Barthes in his narrative studies, particularly *Image-Music-Text*) play passive roles in a narrative. In using the term “actorial” to qualify the topoi that carry character functions in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*’s Kalevalic narrative, I wish to retain Greimas’s idea of deep structural narrative. See Felluga, Dino, “Modules on Greimas: On Plotting,” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* (28 November 2003, Purdue University) <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/narratology/modules/greimasplot.html>> [accessed on 12 March 2007].

been absorbed into the runic melodies through centuries of tradition, it is difficult to separate the poetic from the musical-poetic. We know from Sibelius's letters that he read the *Kalevala* as a literary work and extolled its inherent musicality before witnessing a performance of some of the legends of the epic in a musical setting. Despite Sibelius's exposure to and collection of folk melodies (he transcribed more than forty melodies for the 1895 edition of the *Kalevala*), he significantly did not borrow directly from any specific melody.⁴⁷ Stylistically, though, elements of poetic meter and poetic structure (from musical-poetic sources) and purely musical elements like mode and timbre (from musical sources) turn up as Kalevalic topoi in the *Suite*.

The metric construction of melodic lines, though taken initially from poetic meter, clearly derives from the musical tradition of runic singing. The trochaic tetrameter of the *Kalevala* meter becomes five rather than four beats in runic singing, with the final two syllables doubled in duration. Thus, in *Lemminkäinen* we do not find four-beat melodies with articulated accents on every beat (a possible musical translation of tetrameter). Instead the meter as transmitted through Kalevalic melodic patterns usually uses a five-beat pattern. This usually translates as a measure of 5/4 where the first three beats are subdivided into two eighth notes and the last two beats are full quarter notes.⁴⁸ We can

⁴⁷ For the new edition of the *Kalevala* in 1895, the editors chose Sibelius to transcribe forty folk songs; only seventeen were used (See Murtomäki, "Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian Folk Music," 34.). The task of hunting for runic melodies in Sibelius's music has been considered "politically incorrect" by Finnish scholars seemingly because it might be conceived of as nationalist sacrilege. It may also be due to the fact that Sibelius is a native Swedish speaker (while the *Kalevala* is in rural Finnish) and the melodic parallels so "easily" found in his Kalevalic works, which mean so much to Finnish national pride, can also be found in Sibelius's settings of Swedish texts in other works (See Hayrynen, "Kalevala poetry in Finnish Classical Music: Sibelius Discovers the Tone of the *Kalevala*," 77).

⁴⁸ Glenda Dawn Goss discusses Sibelius's prevalent use of the time signature 5/4 in his works in relation to the composer's treatment of and response to Finnish text. She also notes that he sometimes uses other meters, "enhancing the overall elastic treatment of the Finnish text," as we see in ex. 2 above. Glenda Dawn Goss, "Vienna and the Genesis of *Kullervo*: 'Durchführung zum Teufel!'" *Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, Ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27.

hear an excellent example of this type of rhythm in the now-famous English-horn line in “The Swan of Tuonela.” The meter is expanded to the level of the half note, where the first subdivision into quarter notes recollects the typical starting point for Kalevala rhythms and the first two half notes of the ensuing measure (here subdivided as a half note followed by a quarter, which elides into the next pattern of coupled quarter notes) conclude the pattern (see ex. 2 and compare with ex. 1 above).⁴⁹



Example 2: “Swan of Tuonela,” English horn Solo (m. 84-89)

Parallelism seen in the poetry of the *Kalevala* as well as in the runic folk melodies also makes its way into the *Suite*. The excerpt of the *Kalevala* examined earlier shows the type of parallelism Sibelius would have read in the epic and heard in the construction of rune melodies:

The sun wooed her for his son
but she'd not go to Sunland
to shine with the sun
in the summer rush.⁵⁰

This type of parallel construction—in which a line retains its basic shape, but sustains minor alterations of form due to its gradually changing content—again manifests itself in both the composition of runic melodies and also in those by Sibelius.

⁴⁹ These rhythms are present in the English horn line in m. 84–9 (shown in Example 2), 23–4, and 28–9. The strings (minus string basses) also use this Kalevalic rhythm in a dramatic unison passage at m. 75–80.

⁵⁰ Lönnrot, “A Bond Made,” No. 11, *The Kalevala*, 120–1.

Kalevalic signifiers based on the purely musical features of the traditional Finnish melodies which accompanied rune singing also occur throughout the *Suite*. Sibelius's melodic lines in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, like runic melodies, generally sketch a pentachord (scale degrees one, two, an approximated flat-three, four, and five). The minor pentachord is pervasive in Finnish folk music, as is the Dorian mode in general. Veijo Murtomäki even discusses the Dorian mode as the "Finnish mode." Melodies such as that in "The Swan of Tuonela" immediately recall the soundscape of a Finnish folk tune with their Dorian characteristics, especially when inscribed within the characteristic rhythmic patterns discussed above.⁵¹ Yet as we know from linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure, signifiers are arbitrary.⁵² Thus for Kalevalic signifiers, the more familiar a listener is with the structural traits of the *Kalevala* and the traditions of runic singing, the more he or she might engage with these topoi. Of course, any degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity with such Kalevalic traits may make for a valuable or worthwhile musical experience. Nevertheless, Sibelius's Finnish audiences would have been intimately familiar with not only the content, but also the structure of Kalevalic poetry and may have recognized these features in his *Suite*. Perhaps this is what led contemporaneous critic Oskar Merikanto to remark, upon hearing Sibelius's *Kullervo* that "we recognize these [tones] as ours, even if we have never heard them as such."⁵³

Spatial signifiers form the second variety of topoi in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* important to the construction of an epic narrative. These signifiers arise, in effect, from

⁵¹ Murtomäki, "Sibelius and Finnish-Karelian Folk Music," 36.

⁵² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵³ Oskar Merikanto (28 April 1892) in the *Päivälehti*, quoted in Huttunen, "The National Composer and the Idea of Finnishness: Sibelius and the Formation of Finnish Musical Style," 8.

blocks of sound conveying a specific physical or geographic space. Eero Tarasti describes the use of spatial signifiers in the work of Sibelius terming them “fields.”⁵⁴ Such fields (related to the “space dramaturgy” noted by Luyken and the “sonoristic” fields of the Polish school noted by Mirka) arise when

the same melody or theme recurs until, by repetition, it loses its character as a musical subject that distinguishes itself from its surroundings, its musical *Umwelt*. The music itself becomes a subjectless environment.⁵⁵

Daniel Grimley also explores the idea of spatial signifiers in two tone poems of Sibelius (*Nightride and Sunrise*, Op. 55, 1908). Grimley traces Sibelius’s construction of musical “landscapes” in these works, examining the way in which musical features become a “sonorous embodiment of the Finnish landscape” by their temporal unfolding, just as a visual landscape allows a viewer to perceive visual space.⁵⁶

Each movement occupies a definite physical space in the rune to which it corresponds, each of which is epic at the very least in its expansiveness (a dreamlike island, the edge of river of the underworld, the murky waters of the underworld, and the vast homeland of Lemminkäinen). Taken together, the many landscapes become epic in scale and also in character—these are not quotidian backdrops: they can only be inhabited by the heroes and villains of a mythic world.

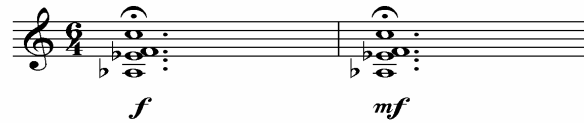
In “Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island” Sibelius creates what Tawaststjerna terms an “atmosphere of a dream landscape . . . with an air of expectancy

⁵⁴ Eero Tarasti, “Metaphors of Nature and Organicism in the Epistemology of Music: A ‘Biosemiotic’ Introduction to the Analysis of Jean Sibelius’s Symphonic Thought,” in *Sibelius Forum II* (Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, Department of Composition and Music Theory, 2000), 177.

⁵⁵ Tarasti, “Metaphors of Nature,” 177.

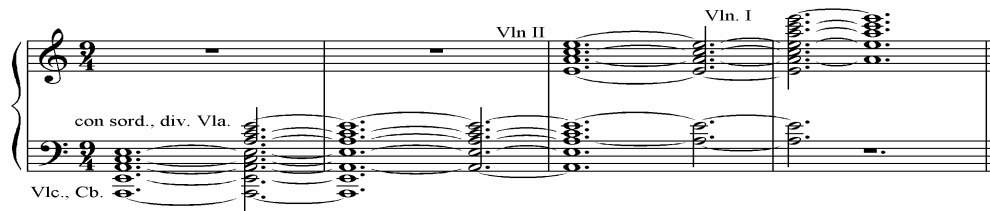
⁵⁶ Daniel Grimley, “Landscape and Structural Perspective in *Nightride and Sunrise*,” *Sibelius Forum II* (Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, Department of Composition and Music Theory, 2000), 248.

and mystery.” In evoking the general atmosphere of the poem and not an exact program, Sibelius creates the physical space of the island through an A-flat-Major chord with an added sixth scored for horns (see ex. 3).



Example 3: "Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island," opening on horns

The other movements of the *Suite* also use specific musical topoi that shape an aural backdrop. The opening of “The Swan on Tuonela” alludes to the “darkness” of Tuonela, the mythical underworld to which Lemminkäinen is sent; an A-minor chord begins in the lower strings and transfers slowly to the upper octaves of the violins in a “continuous but ever-changing sonority” (see ex. 4).⁵⁷



Example 4: "Swan of Tuonela," opening strings

Upon this fluid background representing the dark waters of Tuonela the swan’s melody (in the English horn) floats. The chords that follow this in the same texture constantly shift in harmonic function as the swan’s melody begins—Tawaststjerna notes that the piece modulates three times within the first fifteen bars, modulations that unlike *Tristan*’s “sensual and ardent” harmonic progression are “cold, icy, frigid and tinged with an almost Palestrina-like archaism” ultimately conveying a “desolate, deathlike landscape”

⁵⁷ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 168–171.

(see ex. 5).⁵⁸ “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela,” according to Tawaststjerna, find the hero again in the underworld, but unlike the cold dark waters he implied for the first encounter with swan, here Sibelius fashions a “world of the dead,” where one “seems to discern their cries.” After having killed the swan of Tuonela, Lemminkäinen is in turmoil and can only be saved by his mother’s love. For Tawaststjerna, Sibelius casts Tuonela in the

Example 5: "Swan of Tuonela," English horn solo

form of “an inferno rather than a land of shadows, dark and unpeopled” as in the previous movement. The double basses and cellos, in Tawaststjerna’s view “set the mood of menace.”⁵⁹ Following the death of the swan, however, the jealous father of Kylliki (the hero’s beloved) immediately kills Lemminkäinen and cuts him into millions of pieces; his body then rests at the bottom of the river in Tuonela. The low string motives that create the landscape do not signify flames or kindling for an underworld inferno; they portend the watery depths of the river where Lemminkäinen now rests in pieces (see ex. 6).

⁵⁸ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 172.

⁵⁹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 173.

The final movement of the *Suite*, “Lemminkäinen’s Homeward Journey,” uses a “germinal motive” as a spatial signifier.⁶⁰ By this point Lemminkäinen has been killed, cut into millions of pieces, thrown into the river, fished out by his mother, and carefully sewn back together. The last movement, then, takes as its landscape the journey of Lemminkäinen homeward after this harrowing ordeal. Thus, the germinal motive that

Example 6: “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela,” opening

appears first in the bassoons, in addition to the held, low-string drone with timpani that soon follow the motive, both construct an expansive landscape, this time with an inherent motoric element upon which other actions in the narrative take place (see ex. 7).

The third type of signifier essential to the construction of the *Lemminkäinen Suite*’s epic narrative is the actorial signifier. These melodic topoi act as characters in the narrative. As stated above, Sibelius does not follow a distinct program aligning exactly with specific lines from the *Kalevala*, nor does this analysis attempt a mapping of

⁶⁰ This movement sometimes bears the title “Lemminkäinen’s Return” in English, although “journey” conveys the motoric sense of motion that occurs throughout the movement.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of "Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey." The score is written for five instruments: Bassoon, Horns, Viola, Violoncello (Vlc.), and Timpani (Timp.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The Bassoon part begins with a few notes in the fifth measure. The Horns play a series of sustained chords. The Viola has a dense, rhythmic accompaniment of sixteenth notes. The Violoncello plays a series of sustained chords. The Timpani part features a series of notes with a trill-like ornament (tr) above the first few notes.

Example 7: "Lemminkäinen's Homeward Journey," opening

musical lines on to lines of text. Rather, the melodic topoi used in the four movements of the *Suite* relate to characters or the actions of characters. In this sense, the actorial topoi come closest to the Wagnerian or Straussian leitmotifs that have invited so much comparison and that Sibelius himself seems to have admired greatly for their ability to intimate characters or actions musically. Nevertheless, the actorial topoi behave different than characters' leitmotifs in that they are not subservient to the order of the literary narrative. Rather they connote the general characteristics of the primary figures in the literary and musical narrative.

In "Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island," Lemminkäinen, in true Don Juan form, busies himself trying to seduce the many maidens (particularly Kyllikki) who

live there.⁶¹ We hear the main theme the first time in the woodwinds at bar 48 (see ex. 8). This theme does not represent Lemminkäinen the character, but his “wild pursuits”; hence the dance-like feeling of the theme and its increasing intensity as it reappears throughout the movement, finally becoming “caught up in a more frenzied and furious pace.”⁶² The actorial signifier in the second movement, “The Swan of Tuonela,” is not surprisingly the swan. The English-horn solo plays this role, as mentioned before, after

The image shows a musical score for the main theme of "Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island." The score is in 6/8 time and B-flat major. It features a woodwind part for Flute, Oboe, and Clarinet (Fl., Ob., Cl.) and a string part. The woodwind part begins with a melodic line that is repeated and then becomes more rhythmic. The string part provides harmonic support with chords and a steady bass line.

Example 8: "Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island," main theme

the strings' opening chords and continues with a more plaintive tone as the movement progresses, acting out not just the character of the swan but its ultimate fate: destruction

⁶¹ For an “erotic” reading of this movement regarding the “virile” heroism of Lemminkäinen, see Downes, “Pastoral Idylls, Erotic Anxieties and Heroic Subjectivities in Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island* and the First Two Symphonies,” 35–48.

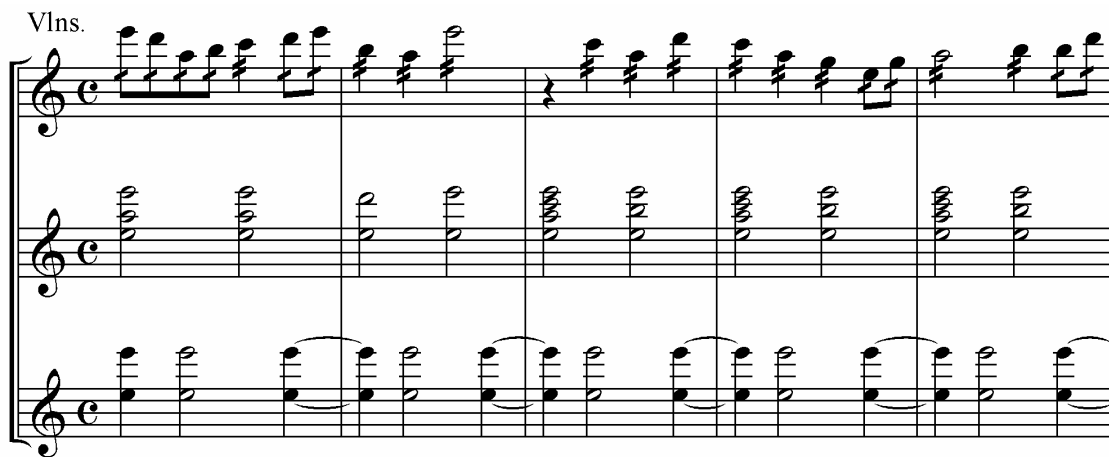
⁶² Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 170.

at the hands of Lemminkäinen (see ex. 9). Were we to understand “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela” as set in a fiery inferno, as Tawaststjerna does, the actorial signifiers in “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela” would be difficult to discern, a fact evinced by the sketchy language he uses while trying to outline the movement’s themes. Yet, we can understand this movement as a corollary to the rune entitled “Resurrection” (No. 15), in which Lemminkäinen’s mother learns of his death and searches frantically, first for the truth of what has happened to her son and then with the help of a magical rake, for her son’s body at the bottom of the river. Indeed, Sibelius, too, seems to have viewed this movement in the way I am suggesting: “The lullaby at the end of the piece represents maternal love,

The musical score for Example 9, "Swan of Tuonela," m. 84, death of the swan, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is for the English Horn (Eng. Horn) in treble clef. Below it are the percussion parts: Bass Drum (Bass Dr.) and Timp (Tympani) in bass clef, and Harp in bass clef. The bottom section of the score includes the string parts: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vlc.), and Contrabass (Cb.) in bass clef. The score shows a lullaby-like passage with a melodic line in the English Horn and a rhythmic accompaniment in the strings and percussion.

Example 9: "Swan of Tuonela," m. 84, death of the swan

which rakes up the pieces of Lemminkäinen from the river of Tuonela.”⁶³ With this in mind, the disturbing interruptions of fanfares seem to correspond to the mother’s outbursts; fragmented themes recalling the swan’s theme remind the listener of both the cause of this search and of a parallel narrative of suffering. The strings’ subdued section in the middle of this ternary movement suggests the mother’s lullaby (see ex. 10). In the final movement, “Lemminkäinen’s Homeward Journey,” Sibelius constructs the main theme from the germinal motive that plays a role in the creation of the landscape. This theme becomes, with time, the actorial signifier portraying Lemminkäinen as he journeys home after being raked up, sewn whole again, and sent on his way by his industrious mother.



Example 10: “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela,” lullaby passage

The three topoi—Kalevalic, spatial, and actorial—constitute fixed points within the narrative, but without the element of temporality or change the narrative would stagnate. The formal structure used by Sibelius in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* accomplishes this important animating task of narrativity. The form, in this case, also serves to set a

⁶³ Jean Sibelius to Jussi Jalas, 26 August 1948, <http://www.sibelius.fi/english/omin_sanoin/ominsanoin_17.htm>

particularly epic narrative in motion. The topoi, as we have seen, are distinctly epic in their frame of reference, yet the element of expansive temporality is lacking without a formal device that creates a framework for the musical topoi. For this Sibelius uses what many music analysts have described as a processual or “crystallizing” form.⁶⁴

Daniel M. Grimley outlines the process of crystallization succinctly as “the gradual establishment of melodic, harmonic and textural order through a strongly linear growth.”⁶⁵ Timothy L. Jackson characterizes crystallization as a harmonic process which leads to an arrival point he terms “definitive tonic arrival.”⁶⁶ In this analysis I will not focus on the harmonic features of the *Suite*, but this model may in fact corroborate the topical semiotic model at work here. The use of crystallization in Sibelius’s music very likely reflects the organicism Eero Tarasti observes in the composer’s symphonies (Sibelius sometimes referred to the *Lemminkäinen Suite* as a symphony after the work was composed).⁶⁷ Joseph C. Kraus explores another facet of crystallization in his article

⁶⁴ Sibelius subsequently used this form in many of his works, but the *Lemminkäinen Suite* appears to be the first to incorporate the technique.

⁶⁵ Daniel M. Grimley, “The Tone Poems: Genre, Landscape, and Structural Perspective,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101; terming this processual form “crystallizing” seems to have come from Sibelius’s own views that the last movement of the *Third Symphony* (1907) involved “the crystallization of ideas from chaos,” but the process has been recognized by numerous scholars in Sibelius’s works since *Lemminkäinen*.

⁶⁶ Timothy L. Jackson, “Brucknerian Models: Sonata Form and Linked Internal Auxiliary Cadences,” *Sibelius Forum II* and “Observations on Crystallization and Entropy in the Music of Sibelius and Other Composers,” *Sibelius Studies*, Eds. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 177.

⁶⁷ For organicism in Sibelius’s symphonies see Tarasti, “Metaphors of Nature and Organicism in the Epistemology of Music: A ‘Biosemiotic’ Introduction to the Analysis of Jean Sibelius’s Symphonic Thought.” Sarah Menin also touches on the organic in Sibelius’s music with regards to spatial relations in a discussion on the composer and Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. She notes that Sibelius’s late works “comprised tiny fragments of sounds which were gradually permuted, varied and amalgamated through the composition. The structure of the piece seemed to grow with these germs of sound. They are treated like cells of a living creation.” See her “Spatial Soundings: Aalto and Sibelius,” *Musical Semiotics in Growth*, Ed. Eero Tarasti, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. On the *Suite* Sibelius writes to Jussi Jalas (June 1957): “I actually have nine symphonies, since some of the movements in *Kullervo* and

surveying the literature on the transformation of themes in Sibelius's music. He notes the numerous appellations that Sibelius scholars have given to the idea of crystallization discussed above, from "fragments-into-themes" to "teleological genesis" to a musical "synthesis."⁶⁸

In the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, the crystallization takes place at the level of the movement; within each movement the contents in the form of the topoi examined above gradually shift over the course of the various sections. Larger generic forms also apply to the *Suite* and to the individual movements: as mentioned above, Sibelius later considered the *Suite* a symphony, with each of the movements operating as a characteristically symphonic form (a sonata-allegro with slow introduction, a slow movement, ternary scherzo macabre form, and a rondo finale).⁶⁹ These larger forms, however, are in no way at odds with the fact that a crystallizing form unfolds in each of the movements.⁷⁰ Just as the topoi nest within the crystallizing epic form, a crystallizing form may be encased within sonata form, for example, or even within symphonic form. The crystallizing form, in any case, represents the formal level at which a narrative epic begins to take shape.

To understand how and why a crystallizing form allows Sibelius to create an epic form, we must initially examine a literary theory of the poetic epic form, Emil Staiger's

Lemminkäinen are in pure sonata form." <http://www.sibelius.fi/english/omin_sanoin/ominsanoin_17.htm> [accessed on 7 March 2007]

⁶⁸ Joseph C. Kraus, "'From Fragments into Themes' Revisited: Sibelius's Thematic Process," *Sibelius Forum II* (Helsinki: Sibelius Academy, Department of Composition and Music Theory, 2000), 193–210.

⁶⁹ Tawaststjerna, *Sibelius*, 176–7.

⁷⁰ For more on Sibelius's innovative musical forms see Grimley, "The Tone Poems: Genre, Landscape, and Structural Perspective", 95–6.

discussion in his *Basic Concepts of Poetics*.⁷¹ He notes several salient aspects of epic style which condense into two features: consistency of meter and a perceived temporal distance between speaker and audience. Applied by Staiger mostly to Greek epic poetry, these features apply to that tradition's pervasive hexameter and the ability of the narrator to move in and out of "real" time: multi-year wars may take place in the space of a few lines of verse yet a description of the armor worn by one person in one battle may take up dozens of lines. This parallels the construction of the *Kalevala*: hexameter replaces trochaic tetrameter, and temporal distance marks Kalevalic verse, which slips in the span of just a few lines from a grand tale into a description of the minutiae of the surroundings. Yet though the *Kalevala* fits neatly into Staiger's mold, neither Finnish nor Greek epic poetic form maps immediately onto musical form. However, the fact that the *Kalevala*'s sung tradition (not the text's traits) mediate the compositional use of the epic poem for Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen* gives us an important clue as to how he constructs an epic musical form for the work.

The performance tradition of the *Kalevala* has certain features that we can easily distill now into one overarching characteristic: runic folksongs on the text of the *Kalevala* rely on small variations in rhythm and melody over time. Sibelius recognized and embraced this tradition through the use of crystallizing forms in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. Antti Hayrynen discusses the impact Kalevalic performance traditions had on Sibelius: "The narrow compass of the themes gave scope to an original brand of symphonic motif processing. The endless repetition of *Kalevala* tunes sparked an ornamental variation

⁷¹ Staiger, *Basic Concepts of Poetics*.

technique where ornaments transformed into mythical ostinatos.”⁷² In runic folksong gradual changes in rhythm and melody probably served to add musical drama to the sung poems. In Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen Suite* crystallization (the turn of the century version of this runic tradition) served an entirely different function: temporal indication. Unlike runic folksingers’ audiences who were able to hear the text and determine temporal progress through a story by its linguistic signifiers, the listener hearing Sibelius’s *Suite* has no words to follow for this purpose, and without some indication of the passage of time, it would be impossible to hear the story as epic.

The gradual change enacted by crystallizing form influences the musical realization of all three topoi discussed above. The Kalevalic topoi, inherently linked to the structure of the poem, reach their full potential as signifiers of the “epic” within a form which allows the individual signifiers to behave as they might in their original folk setting. The rhythmic structure of a melodic Kalevalic signifier may alter throughout the course of a movement, as could the parallel structure or the melodic mode associated with the performance of runes. Spatial topoi are subject to the same transformational power of the crystallizing form as well: landscapes that set the scene for the legend at the beginning of the movement always recur slightly altered. We find one example of this in the tremolo figure in the low strings that sets the scene of the depths of the river of Tuonela in “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela” (see ex. 6 for a musical instance of the opening figure). When it returns in the middle of movement, changed in instrumentation and treatment, it is immediately apparent as the same topos, yet subtle alterations make it sound as if the expansive background has slowly changed over time, as the landscape of a

⁷² Hayrynen, “Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Classical Music: Jean Sibelius Discovers the Tone of the *Kalevala*,” 78.

literary epic would. Actorial topoi also shift and grow over the course of the piece, retaining the same general characteristics of the character or trait that they represent, yet signifying movement in time and narrative action. We can find an example of this type of shift in “The Swan of Tuonela”: the re-entrance of the swan’s actorial topos changes markedly, though its distinctive instrumentation and figuration allow the signifier to retain its extra-musical connotations (compare ex. 5 for the opening of “The Swan of Tuonela” and ex. 9 for the death of the swan).

Many layers of epic arise from this analytical approach. The topoi themselves begin to assume epic traits; they recall the *Kalavala* in style and narrative content, bringing to the *Lemminkäinen Suite* the salient features of the epic narrative. The crystallizing form mirrors the incremental structure of the *Kalevala* as well as the performing traditions and musical features of Karelian runic singing. This formal technique not only adds an outer layer, which is itself a type of signifier of the “epic” mode of narration, it also sets the three topoi in motion, such that each intimates the scale of an epic through change and growth. This change and growth now bears close scrutiny, since it touches on an element of musical time key to understanding the “epic” nature of Sibelius’s *Suite*.

III. Epic Time in Music

The element of expansive temporality, or in Staiger’s words “timelessness,” comprises perhaps the most important trait of an epic narrative. Greek epic poetry, the object of Staiger’s analysis, creates timelessness by the consistent meter of the poems, the grandiose locations of the action, and the types of characters involved in the narrative as

well as their actions and interactions. These characteristics are also consistent with Kalevalic poetry, and as I have discussed in the previous section, we can see that these poetic elements relate directly to the three topoi of the *Lemminkäinen Suite*: Kalevalic signifiers recall the epic poetic structure, spatial signifiers place the music's narrative geographically, and actorial signifiers denote characters of the *Kalevala*. In order to augment Staiger's model for epic poetry to accommodate specifically Kalevalic poetics, I included the element of gradual change found in the meter and narrative content of the poem; for this, too, we could identify an analogous musical feature: crystallizing form.

Though we can trace all of the elements that account for timelessness in a poetic epic in the music of the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, the quality of timelessness in this work does not arise in the same way, simply because music functions differently than the written word. Music and literature both use symbols (in their own media) as components of a larger narrative, but a musical narrative relates to time in a different way than poetry or literature does. We may experience both music and poetry within the time it takes to hear a given piece, yet music, unlike literature, has the singular ability to function in a non-linear way. Music may have layers of narrative structure occurring simultaneously, yet poetry's narrative can only unfold with each passing word. Thus, poetry attains its epic status through each successive phrase using the same metric construction, or by the development of characters and events. Because music may consist of varying and overlapping narrative elements sounding together, narrative time transpires in a different way.

The idea of musical time in general is a complicated and contested issue. One fundamental concept, borrowed from phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, is the notion

that there is a distinction between “the duration of sensation and the sensation of duration.”⁷³ Thomas Reiner notes that this concept “finds an immediate application to musical time, where one would be unwise not to differentiate between the duration of the perception of sound, that is, the duration of the act of hearing, and the possibility that sound is apprehended as enduring.”⁷⁴ We can extend this latter condition of music—that we may hear in music a sense of time—further to the possibility that music may convey a specific span of time separate from the time it takes to hear the music.

The distinction between “real time” and “musical time” is important here. Real time refers to the former half of Husserl’s dichotomy—the duration of sensation. This is the time it takes to hear a piece of music from the beginning of the work to the cessation of sound at the end.⁷⁵ Musical time lies closer to the second half of Husserl’s dichotomy. It refers to the perceived time of the narrative that unfolds musically. Musical time may be less than, equal to, or greater than the amount of real time necessary to hear the work. In fact, we may imagine that in narrating a specific amount of musical time, these conditions correspond to the three poetic modes. That is to say, works whose musical time is less than real time correspond to the lyric mode; works that convey a musical time equal to the real time in which they are performed fall in the dramatic or mimetic mode.⁷⁶

⁷³ Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill, ed. Martin Heidegger (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 31, in Thomas Reiner, *The Semiotics of Musical Time*, in *Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics*, vol. 43 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2000), 4.

⁷⁴ Reiner, *The Semiotics of Musical Time*, 4.

⁷⁵ Real time does not include artificial silences during the listening experience produced by the stopping and starting of a work that is possible with recorded music.

⁷⁶ Karol Berger likens the dramatic mode to the mimetic mode of presentation. In the dramatic mode, the narrator speaks as though he or she is inside the story and must therefore adhere in the narration to the “real time” of the story world. See his “Narrative and Lyric: Fundamental Poetic Forms of Composition” and his

works whose musical time is greater than the time it takes to hear the piece fall in the epic mode.

Temporally, the lyric mode of narrative is characterized by stasis. Lyrical presentation has no past or future, simply a present. It is often the domain of emotional reflection or description. Musically this is most often accomplished by the repetition of musical material so pervasive in the work that the repetition becomes form. Generically, we might regard lyrical works as analogous to the form of theme and variations pieces, as well as to some minimalist or impressionist forms. Theme and variations forms, and perhaps ground bass forms like the chaconne and the passacaglia, use musical repetition to create and recreate a single sonic character and environment. With each subsequent thematic repetition, the narrative returns to its original place in time and elaborates on or reinterprets the main musical idea of the work. The narrative of the piece fixates on its own repetition and the musical time of the work collapses inwardly, encompassing only a fraction of the real time it takes to hear the work. These pieces are temporally static and cover less musical time than real time. Minimalist and impressionist works are some of the most lyrical in terms of mode. Works by Philip Glass, John Adams, and Terry Reilly are characterized by the extreme level of repetition and the minute scale of change. Harmonic and motivic stasis or near stasis convey temporal stasis and thus sense that musical time is smaller than real time. Often these works, and earlier impressionist works by composers like Debussy, have titles which also reflect their lyric status—*The Phrygian Gates* (Adams), *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (Debussy)—capturing a single descriptive moment of observation.

“*Diegesis and Mimesis: The Poetic Modes and the Matter of Artistic Presentation*,” *The Journal of Musicology*, 12 (1994): 408.

Works whose narrative conveys “real time” belong to the dramatic or mimetic form of presentation. A great many works likely fall into this category including nearly every non-repetitious Baroque, Classical, or Romantic form. As works with a stable musical background and a perceivable foreground (in Karol Berger’s sense, not Schenker’s; see note 6 above), these pieces convey narrative movement, a tendency Berger notes in his analysis of narrative and lyric forms in music.⁷⁷ Though the works in this category, as narratives, allude to a temporal shift, there is no way to posit the elapsed length of this change as anything other than the time it takes to play or listen to the piece. Thus, these pieces are analogous to a dramatic or mimetic mode. Beethoven’s First Symphony or Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos, which may narrate the purely musical, are works that convey narrative movement at the rate at which we hear the music. Baroque and Classical era sonatas exemplify the mimetic mode as they are constructed as narratives through their internally relevant musical gestures or large-scale harmonic progressions.

The final possibility, that a work may convey musical time beyond the literal length of the work’s performance, is indicative of the epic mode of presentation. Most frequently we think of conjunction of the epic and music in musical works with some literary precursor. This mode of musical presentation is by far the least explored area in the study of musical time because there are few instrumental works (outside Sibelius’s Kalevalic oeuvre) that contain epic programmatic underpinnings. In the study of this relatively small body of epic instrumental music, the idea of temporality as an important

⁷⁷ Berger, “Narrative and Lyric,” 451–470.

facet of the conveyance of epic mode is completely absent.⁷⁸ For Sibelius's music specifically, writers have paid little attention to the idea of epic temporality, though many authors address the composer's use of the *Kalevala*. In his discussion of a "biosemiotic" approach to the music of Sibelius, however, Eero Tarasti proposes the idea of "biological time," a term that conveys music's ability to be perceived as following biological patterns of tension and release outside the bounds of "normal" time.⁷⁹ If we also allow Tarasti's idea that a biological organicism creates musical "fields" (similar to my spatial topoi), then the idea of "biological time" comes close to my idea of epic time (though I am unwilling to concede all of my analysis to biological metaphors). Apart from Tarasti, though, among the many Sibelius scholars who explore narrativity in the composer's instrumental works (both tone poems and symphonies), none consider the idea that shifts in the perception of temporality may be an invaluable compositional technique developed by Sibelius.⁸⁰

If we follow Berger's model for narrative in music, in which musical time equals real time, a work in which musical time appears greater than real time would occur when both the background and the foreground figures shift in the course of a work. In Berger's

⁷⁸ Lotte Tarkka discusses a Bakhtinian concept of dialogism to guide a study of the multiple voices of the *Kalevala* which create an epic narrative in Kalevalic musical works. Lotte Tarkka, "Other Worlds: Symbolism, Dialogue, and Gender in Karelian Oral Poetry," *Songs Beyond the Kalevala: Transformations of Oral Poetry* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 1994).

⁷⁹ Tarasti, "Metaphors of Nature," 180.

⁸⁰ Tim Howell suggests that Sibelius creates an "expansiveness" in his instrumental music through elements of tempo, meter, rhythm, among other musical factors. However, Howell does not approach the tone poems of Sibelius as narrative works (see his dissertation *Jean Sibelius: Progressive Techniques in the Symphonies and Tone Poems*, Outstanding Dissertations in Music From British Universities, Ed. John Caldwell [New York: Garland Press, 1989]), nor does he integrate his study of musical time (based on Jonathan Kramer's *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* [New York: Schirmer, 1988]) with extra-musical studies of the epic mode or the *Kalevala*. Tim Howell, "'Sibelius the Progressive,'" *Sibelius Studies*, eds. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40–3.

traditionally narrative pieces, where the background is stable and the instrumental “voice” moves on top of it, the dramatic action occurs as a narrative because we can ascertain a sense of time in the relationship between the background and the events that take place against it.⁸¹ If a piece of music contains a background with its own sense of motion apart from the motions of the “voice,” this internal shift would cause the listener to perceive the narrative actions against a moving backdrop, thereby increasing the amount of perceived musical time. An audience member accustomed to a narrative structure in which the musical time is “measured” against stable background would, in the case of a moving background, have to reevaluate the musical time of the background in order to understand the time of the narrative space in general. The listener would have to “stretch” or expand the background in order to understand its relationship with the foreground (see Figure 11 for a visual representation of this phenomenon).

Among other possible forms, a crystallizing form induces the perception of a “stretched” epic mode, since by its gradual changes in “melodic, harmonic, and textural” material it has the opportunity to shift background material as well as foreground, creating a temporal space larger than the time it takes to hear the work.⁸² The background, as we have already seen, is made up of the spatial signifiers that grow and change because of the crystallizing form in which Sibelius places them. The foreground, the actorial signifiers, also transform throughout the course of each movement once set in

⁸¹ Berger, “*Diegesis and Mimesis*,” 408.

⁸² Grimley, “The Tone Poems: Genre, Landscape, and Structural Perspective,” 101.

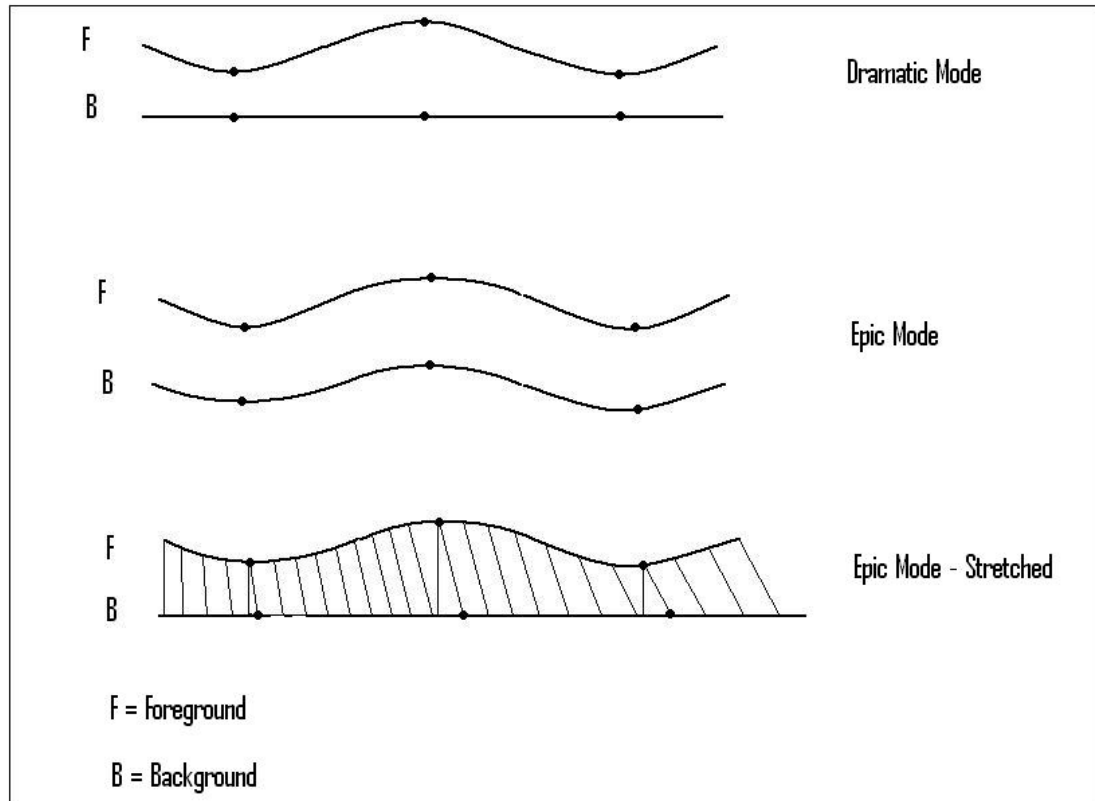


Figure 1: Diagram of Dramatic Mode, Epic Mode, and the perceived “stretch” of time in the Epic Mode

motion by the crystallizing form. As these two topoi shift in relation to each other, they create a sense of epic temporality, that is, they create a musical time larger than the time it takes to hear the work. This feature of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* may also be present in numerous other works that take advantage of music’s ability to narrate using more than one voice at a time, in a nonlinear fashion very unlike the epic narratives from which these works derive. It is possible that other tone poems on epic subjects or even epic operas (especially nineteenth- and twentieth-century music dramas like those by Wagner or Strauss) narrate their epic tales with the use of similar shifts, but I have not yet explored this avenue. The temporal shift created by certainly Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen*

Suite and likely many other works indicate the epic mode of presentation in the narratives of the works since the shift satisfies the need for temporal distance in an epic.

Epic narrativity in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* results from many distinct compositional circumstances. For the *Lemminkäinen Suite* to form an epic narrative, it must have a deep-structural form incorporating internal epic topoi into an external epic form. The epic topoi would be merely digressions into the epic mode or signifiers of some outside epic were it not for the larger structure in which they nest and with in which they may interact. The crystallizing form similarly could be merely an outer progressive shell, were the inner structures not constructed such a way that a musical “background” and “foreground” were audibly changing in relation to one another. The two layers necessary for epic narrative—topoi and form—are mutually dependent.

Turning back briefly to each of the topoi, we can see how reliant they are on the larger epic form to be considered part of a narrative epic. Kalevalic signifiers act metonymically; the importance of repetition and the significance of minor variants in both poetic and runic traditions from the *Kalevala* function on a topical level, as well as on a formal level. As topoi they refer not only to extra-musical poetic traditions (or even extra-Sibelian music) but also to the larger crystallizing structure in which they are encased, and then, on a more esoteric level they signify their metonymic function. Thus, the discreet Kalevalic topoi, only when nested within the epic crystallizing form (which draws on Kalevalic principles of gradual change), signify a narrative larger than themselves. Because they act simultaneously as individual topoi while representing the larger epic form that they move within and in relation to, Kalevalic signifiers help yield an epic narrative.

For the spatial and actorial topoi to function as part of an epic narrative, the necessity of a deep-structural form is slightly more straightforward. These two topoi interact with one another only when placed in a crystallizing or epic form. The gradual incremental change in each of the two allows the crystallizing form to convey an epic narrative; as spatial topoi shift throughout a given movement (and even across movements) actorial topoi, similarly affected by the crystallizing formal structure, shift in relation to the background spatial topoi.⁸³ Even though the spatial and actorial signifiers, like the Kalevalic signifiers, do function on one level as discreet units with epic connotations, only as internal structures within a larger epic form can they function in such a way that a temporal progression beyond the literal passage of time in the piece occurs. For the crystallizing form the reverse is true: without internal structures that themselves shift and in turn create large-scale shifts, the crystallizing form would yield only lyric stasis, not an expansive narrative epic as we have in the *Lemminkäinen Suite*.

The *Lemminkäinen Suite* is a site rich with potential for cultural and musical analysis. As a Kalevalic work, the *Suite* offers many avenues for exploration. In composing this work, Sibelius actively participated in the turn-of-the-century artistic and cultural movement known as Karelianism. In doing so, he aligned himself artistically and politically with some of the great creative minds of Finland that played an important role in the progression towards Finnish independence. Musically, the composer drew

⁸³ The musical features that act as spatial and actorial topoi occasionally seem to develop across movements in addition to the gradual change they see within each movement (Tawaststjerna notes the similar intervallic structure of the main themes in “Lemminkäinen in Tuonela” and “Lemminkäinen’s Homeward Journey”). But, because each of the movements displays the three important epic topoi and all within a larger crystallizing form, the *Suite* is already epic at the scale of a movement. The fact that four movements are a part of a larger work simply adds another dimension to the epic narrative. Individual tales in the *Kalevala* (or Homer’s *Odyssey*, for another example) are clearly epic even if the entire work is not read. In the same way, the individual movements of the *Suite* can be musical epic narratives even outside the context of the whole *Suite* (or a hypothetical setting of the entire *Kalevala*).

immensely from the Karelian movement; his exposure to the *Kalevala* and runic singing clearly affected his compositional practices around the time of the composition of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* and throughout his career. Sibelius mined the *Kalevala* for its structural traits—its trochaic tetrameter, parallelism, and repetitive structures—as well as the musical traditions associated with the epic, and began to develop techniques to work these elements into his compositions.

The four-movement *Lemminkäinen Suite* is both one of Sibelius's first forays into Kalevalic instrumental works and a work that blurs the generic boundaries between tone poem and symphony. As such, some of the techniques Sibelius develops in the *Suite* are innovative and invite interpretive dissection. He employs three important types of topoi, the Kalevalic, the spatial, and the actorial, as the keystones to his instrumental musical narrative. These topoi reflect the epic's content—its rhythmic, textual, and musical characteristics, as well as the locations and characters of the epic world. Sibelius nests these topoi within a crystallizing structure, likely one of the first instances of his incorporation of this formal device. Through a process of gradual change in the musical figures of the *Suite*, which then becomes form, the composer allows the topoi to grow and change throughout the course of the work. In employing a crystallizing form, Sibelius accomplishes three things. First, the crystallizing form musically mirrors one of the traits of Kalevalic verse—its tendencies to repeat phrases, alter lines gradually through alliteration and assonance, and the habitual modification of the melody over time in the practice of runic singing. The crystallizing form also animates the topoi, allowing the individual musical figures to behave in the same manner as the formal level does. In so animating the topoi, particularly the spatial and actorial ones, the form yields a third

unique compositional device: a temporal shift is created between the two topoi, perceptually expanding the musical time of the *Suite*.

In terms of temporality in instrumental musical narratives, Sibelius expands musical time in the *Lemminkäinen Suite* by creating a uniquely epic mode in the work. In employing a crystallizing form he creates an internal shift of the topoi in relation to one another. In this way the *Suite* becomes not just epic in content (the topoi) and form (the crystallizing form), but also in mode.

The exploration of musical time with regards to narrativity may prove fruitful for the analysis of Sibelius's music and for many other instrumental works. It might be especially relevant to those pieces that incorporate explicit or implicit programs drawn from literary epics, and may also expand the ways we think about texted works like songs and operas based on similar themes.

The *Lemminkäinen Suite* provides an elegant example of numerous innovative musical techniques in Sibelius's employ. Additionally, as a work familiar to many people (at least in part), it offers an opportunity to apply a listener-centered mode of analysis. In analyzing three malleable types of topoi that function in spite of listeners' varying levels of historical, cultural, and musical knowledge, my semiotic analysis focuses on small but valuable segments of the work that may enrich and enhance the listening experience of listeners, performers, and analysts. Crystallization and temporal shifts may be less immediately perceptible intellectually, although I suspect that some of the wonder many listeners experience in taking in these works arises from these nuanced compositional techniques.

The depth of the listening experience for the audience in a work like the *Lemminkäinen Suite* runs parallel to the way in which the work itself was constructed. Sibelius creates in the *Suite* a deep structural narrative capable of examination and appreciation on numerous levels, from the minute changes in inflection that shape a repeating musical line to the grand—one might say epic—gestures on the formal level when musical landscapes seem to change before our ears just as time-lapse photography fashions evolution before our eyes. The *Lemminkäinen Suite*, as a narrative instrumental work which functions on many levels, affords us the opportunity sink into the sometimes epic task of music analysis. By examining the *Lemminkäinen Suite* in this way, we gain insight not only into a well-loved work, but also raises questions of how we might perceive and analyze the epic mode in a musical work.

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