

Power and Oppression in Eduard Tubin's *Barbara von Tisenhusen*: A Musico-Dramaturgical Reading

Vanja Ljubibratić

Abstract

The Estonian composer Eduard Tubin's opera *Barbara von Tisenhusen* (1968) presents dynamics of power and repression based on true historical events in sixteenth-century Estonia. Through a series of symbolic narrative dichotomies – the primary ones being notions of nobility vs. peasantry and male domination vs. female oppression – this article focuses on a socio-cultural and dramaturgical analysis of the opera's allegorical meaning through an investigation of its libretto and music. The narrative and Tubin's music are synthesised to exemplify how this story of trauma, domination, and resistance culminates in the protagonist's tragic execution. By investigating the opera's treatment of power, gender and social hierarchy, this study demonstrates how musical and dramaturgical elements articulate complex social themes. This situates the opera as a mirror of both historic and modern culture, representing the perennial humanistic phenomenon of subjugating authority and its opposition.

Keywords: Eduard Tubin, *Barbara von Tisenhusen*, opera, Estonian culture, history, power dynamics, female oppression

Eduard Tubin (1905–1982) occupies a central position in the landscape of twentieth-century Estonian music. A prolific composer whose oeuvre spans symphonies, concertos, chamber works, one ballet, two operas and solo works, Tubin's music is widely recognised for its profound evocation of Estonian national identity. Although trained in Tartu and deeply rooted in the Estonian cultural revival of the interwar period, Tubin spent the greater part of his creative life in exile. Fleeing Soviet occupation in 1944, he resettled in Sweden, where he lived and worked until his death. His emigration to Sweden, and its relationship to his broader compositional output, has been examined in studies such as Connor (2004, pp. 43–75) and Tubin (2003, pp. 11–23). This displacement shaped not only his personal worldview but also the symbolic terrain of his musical output. Tubin's best-known works, including his ten symphonies, often bear the imprint of his homeland's historical struggle for cultural and political autonomy, subtly embedded in musical form and idiom. Analytical overviews of his symphonic writing, including discussions of harmony, form, and meaning, have been offered by Humal (2005, pp. 12–24).

Within this broader context, the opera *Barbara von Tisenhusen*, composed in Sweden and completed in 1968, emerges as a unique and compelling entry in Tubin's catalogue.

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The opera's original language is Estonian, but a Swedish translation of the libretto was approved by the composer. The work has not been staged in Swedish; however, the most recent edition includes vocal parts in Swedish. One of only two operas that Tubin completed, *Barbara* represents a rare foray into the operatic genre by a composer otherwise preoccupied with instrumental music. The opera is based on an eponymous 1923 novella by the Finnish-Estonian writer Aino Kallas, itself rooted in a historical episode from sixteenth-century Tallinn.¹ At the narrative's core is the tragic fate of Barbara, a young noblewoman caught between individual desire and the oppressive mechanisms of feudal power, gender hierarchy and social normativity. The opera dramatises her fatal defiance of patriarchal and class-based expectations, culminating in her execution by her own brothers for having secretly married a lower-class scribe.

Tubin's decision to set Kallas's narrative to music during his exile in Sweden is significant. While the opera's medieval setting and historical subject may appear distant from twentieth-century realities, its allegorical resonance is palpable. In *Barbara*'s persecution and silencing, one may discern an encoded reflection of Estonia's own historical subjugation under foreign powers, whether Danish, German, Swedish, Russian, or Soviet. Indeed, *Barbara* can be read as a cultural artefact that, through the distancing device of historical fiction, addresses enduring themes of national trauma, social domination and individual resistance. The opera thereby enters a broader tradition of Estonian cultural expression in exile – one that seeks to preserve national memory and identity even as it operates outside the borders of its depicted homeland.

Despite its significance, *Barbara* remains underexamined in scholarly literature, especially outside of Estonia and in broader discussions of twentieth-century opera. While Humal (2007, pp. 46–58) provides a detailed summary of the opera's libretto and musical structure, interpretations of the work's significance remain comparatively limited. The present study seeks to address this relative lack of analytical engagement by offering a socio-cultural and dramaturgical analysis of the opera, focusing on the interplay between libretto and music as a means of articulating symbolic meaning. Central to this inquiry is the premise that Tubin's compositional choices – his orchestration, use of leitmotifs, harmonic language and dramatic pacing – are inseparable from the opera's interpretive dimensions. Rather than treating the music and text as discrete elements, the analysis situates them in dialogue, illuminating how the opera constructs its ideological and emotional narratives through their synthesis.

Against this scholarly backdrop, particular attention will be paid to the opera's treatment of gendered power structures, class antagonisms and the dialectic of authority and subversion. The two research questions that shape this investigation are: How does *Barbara* portray dynamics of power and oppression in its narrative and characters? And in what way does Tubin's music reinforce these themes? In order to investigate these questions, the analysis is structured around a series of thematic dichotomies that identify

¹ Tubin later returned to Aino Kallas's prose in his second opera, *The Parson of Reigi* (*Reigi õpetaja*), which likewise centres on forbidden love and its tragic consequences. See Vanja Ljubibratić, 'Accusation as Dramaturgy: Narrative and Musical Representation in Eduard Tubin's *The Parson of Reigi*', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (in press).

the opera's principal conflicts as they emerge throughout the work. These contrasting themes are rebellion vs. subservience, love vs. duty, power vs. victimisation, male domination vs. female oppression, honour vs. disgrace and nobility vs. peasantry. The textual appearance and musical treatment of these motivic ideas are examined in the analytical section on the dramaturgical scope of the libretto and score. This inquiry is preceded by a short section on the compositional origins of the opera and the historical events in medieval Estonia represented in *Barbara*. Such an inquest deepens the available understanding of Tubin's compositional approach and contributes to broader discussions within opera studies about the ways in which operatic works can serve as interpretive frameworks for examining ideological conflict, social constraint and individual agency. The present study is thus situated within a body of socio-cultural opera scholarship that approaches operatic and staged works as historically embedded cultural practices, emphasising dramaturgy, narrative and performance in relation to social structures (see Ingraham, So, and Moodley, 2016; Johnson, Fulcher, and Ertman, 2007; Till, 2012).

Origins of the opera and historical background

The initial conception of *Barbara* is well documented in interviews with Tubin. In 1967, the Estonia Theatre in Tallinn – the national opera company – was performing various concerts in Helsinki as part of a week-long cultural residency of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Tubin was present to attend performances of his ballet *Kratt*, at which the director of the Estonia Theatre, Arne Mikk, presented him with the idea to compose an opera (Viires, 2015, p. 104).² Tubin later reflected on this suggestion:

I did not take it very seriously – I thought it was not my field. I had written choral and solo songs, but I still mainly considered myself a symphonist. I felt that the only thing that would compel me to write an opera was Aino Kallas's story "Barbara von Tisenhusen." I had even forgotten about this story, but after thinking about it more closely, I became convinced that this material should be turned into an opera. What I liked most is the straightforwardness of the story's action, especially from an operatic point of view – it opens with a big ball and ends with Barbara's tragic death. (Viires, 2015, p. 102)

Tubin again spoke of his opera in 1968, noting that "the story revolves around a noble girl and her family in the sixteenth century. The girl abandons the customs of the nobility and turns towards the Estonian people. The novella reveals her interest in our folk music and the whole range of emotions is further enhanced by the groom, who is not of noble birth. There are also some Swedish names among the characters. The whole story goes straight from the ballroom to the ice hole, where the Tisenhusen family court directs the girl's brothers" (Teataja, 2015, pp. 106–107). Here, the "ice hole" refers to the frozen lake opening in which Barbara is executed at the opera's conclusion.

When discussing the libretto, Tubin reflects that "the poet Jaan Kross was given the task of writing it. The first version was a bit short, and since it was difficult to discuss all the problems by letter, I travelled to Tallinn in September 1967, where we had a long

² Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

consultation with the librettist and also the director Udo Väljaots. Jaan Kross finished writing the first scene in a few days, so I had it with me when I returned and was able to start composing at the beginning of October. During October, I received the entire libretto” (Kiisk, 2015, p. 107).

A brief historical overview of Estonia in the sixteenth century, under the control of the Baltic German aristocracy, will contextualise the opera's setting and socio-cultural foundation prior to the analysis of the opera. Although the term “Estonia” is used here for clarity, the territory in question was known in the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries as the northern part of Old Livonia (Alt-Livland). To begin, German expansion eastward reached the Baltic region at the end of the twelfth century. The movement was sanctioned in 1198 by Pope Innocent III as a German crusade to introduce Catholicism to Europe's last pagans (O'Connor, 2006, p. 8). The migration was instigated by merchants as well as crusaders, who, upon conquering the Livonian region in the early thirteenth century, spent the remainder of the century consolidating their rule. The expansion then pushed north into Estonian territories. German forces were reinforced by those from Denmark to finally subdue Estonian resistance. By 1220, almost all of Estonia was controlled by the Germans or the Danes. However, by the middle of the fourteenth century, Denmark could no longer finance its distant colony in Estonia, selling off its territory to the Teutonic Knights of Prussia in 1346. It was subsequently passed to the Livonian Order the following year. The Livonian Order was a colonial oligarchy that only accepted Germans at first, and by the fifteenth century, only those of noble status. A feudal system in Estonia ensued where land was given to German vassals who, with their ownership, had a military obligation to protect the land in the name of the German empire. Overall, it was a delicate and tenuous balance with frequent civil wars erupting in the region.

The socio-economic phenomenon during this time in Estonia's history most relevant to Tubin's opera was the relationship between the nobility and the peasantry. German expansion did not bring with it a German peasant class to the Baltics. The ruling Germans, therefore, made use of the local peasantry that came with their land acquisitions. As such, this balance between lord and peasant contained an ethnic element as well. The Estonian peasant population became serfs to the Germans and had to endure consistently worsening conditions, such as the loss of property rights and exposure to capital punishment. The emergent Baltic German nobility was comprised of elite crusaders who were given fiefs by the Danish king, the bishops, or the Livonian Order. Peasant culture reflected in their folklore traditions is another integral staple of Tubin's opera. Due to drastic divisions in socio-economic stature, the culture of the Baltic Germans did not trickle down to the peasant class, which never embraced the ways of their German lords. As a result, pagan traditions remained prevalent among Estonians – a trait that Tubin emphasised in order to culturally dichotomise the two opposing factions of his narrative (Raun, 2001, pp. 15-24). This overview sets the stage now to delve into *Barbara*, which takes place in 1551 – precisely ten years before the fall of medieval Livonia, with Russia, Denmark, Sweden and Poland all contesting for control of the area.

Dramaturgical analysis of the libretto and music

To reiterate, the following analysis traces a series of recurring oppositional tensions within the opera's libretto, including those between individual rebellion and enforced subservience, emotional attachment and social obligation, authority and vulnerability, patriarchal control and female constraint, honour and disgrace, and the divide between nobility and peasantry. These thematic tensions are examined in the linear progression of the narrative, following the sequence of events as they unfold on stage rather than treating each category in isolation. Through this approach, my analysis identifies an emergent portrayal of social and gender hierarchies, with Barbara at the centre as a figure of oppression. Her position as a woman underscores her limited agency throughout and anticipates the tragic outcome at the opera's conclusion.

In a series of letters to Arne Mikk, the director of the Estonia opera house, who first broached the topic of writing an opera to Tubin, the composer shared his initial musical and dramaturgical ideas of the score and narrative, respectively, regarding an overarching thematic construct. On 22 May 1967, Tubin wrote:

Having considered once again – actually several times – the “Barbara” we have been discussing lately, the matter is quite clear for me: there is probably no better subject that would suit me for an opera. I even have a clear musical plan, as much as is necessary to start the work and foresee where it will end. It was so easy to determine the starting point when we spoke: a ball and from there an almost straight line to the ice hole. This inevitability requires a certain musical form, which I know quite well – the *chaconne*, an old dance that was danced at balls at the time, but which in the opera would take on its main meaning in such a way that it would return on certain occasions, for example, in the trial and also on the ice. This way, it is unified, which is what I need in order to carry out the work in a certain direction. At the same time, or rather in parallel, another direction emerges: humanity, which develops along with the first idea that leads to the hole in the ice, while the other results in open rebellion. (Rumessen, 2006, p. 269)

One month later, after having read the entire novella of Kallas's *Barbara*, Tubin wrote to Mikk again to express more detailed ideas about the scenario and regarding how the opera's scenes could develop. He also stated that “in my opinion, the whole story should consist of shorter and longer scenes that should be combined into a complete event that is as consistent and logical as possible. There should be no narration of events that develop the story but that the audience does not see; what happens, happens before the audience's eyes, on stage. That is why a straightforward cinematic scene of a bear hunt would not work because you cannot bring bears or dogs onto the stage” (Rumessen, 2006, pp. 272–273). A few weeks later, Tubin wrote to his librettist, Jaan Kross, sharing his assessment of the first version of the libretto, which had just been completed. Tubin's response further reflects his developing clarity regarding the integration of music and narrative. After complimenting Kross on a fine effort, Tubin continued:

Of course, I could start working on it right away and finish writing the opera. However, as a reflective person, I would like to have a little more information for the beginning of the opera. At the wedding ball, there could be more presence of a choir, dances and hustle and bustle. I would like to include some of the obligatory wedding dances of that time, such as

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the *Branle de la torche* (torch dance), which is performed on the stairs as people exit (transition to scene two). Also the *Carola* – lead singer + chorus (rondo), perhaps the *Chaconne* – I would like to insert these. Instead of the servants who open the opera in your version, there could be some kind of festive dance that suddenly fills the hall with sound and noise. Also, the libretto does not exactly show this budding love (and its reasons) between the two young people: they get to know each other, and there's tension because there hasn't been any kissing. Yet, in the next scene, they're right up against each other, things are more relaxed, and they need to think about getting married. In between, you should consider a whole scene where, as in every opera, the love affair is so great that it begins to be noticed and, as usual, a polite declaration of love is made in the middle of the stage. It does not have to be overly emotional (Rumessen, 2006, pp. 279–280).

Tubin's correspondence in the early negotiating phase illustrates his thought process concerning the most effective dramaturgical evolution of text and music as a symbiotic process. Furthermore, in an expansion of his earlier statement regarding the centrality of the *chaconne* form, Tubin adds how this will be carried out through the course of the opera: "The opera's musical structure is built up in the free form of a *chaconne*. The main theme is stated in Scene 1 and its basic form as a *Passacaglia*, in Scene 2 in retrograde, in Scene 4 again as a *Passacaglia* (inversion) and in Scene 5 in retrograde inversion. Phrases and motives of the same theme occur in other scenes, now in an episodic form, now as a developed *Chaconne*" (Humal and Marttila, 2016, p. 18). On 9 November 1968, Tubin discussed the completed composition of *Barbara* in an interview. He reiterated his vision of the thematic contour of the opera, adding an insight into the work's continuous line and his need to conceptualise the music accordingly:

The entire opera is based on a single theme. Its nine-note *passacaglia* first appears in the basic form, then in reverse, in mirror image, in reverse mirror image, etc. The entire music is based on this main theme. I did it first for my own awareness, to see what I could do with one theme, but I also found that Aino Kallas' short story is like a continuous progression from the wedding to the ice hole. This progression is carried out consistently, which is why I tried to give it a corresponding musical structure. The question then was how to vary the theme so that it would characterise each situation. (Kiisk, 2015, p. 108)

Act I, Scene 1:

With this historical and compositional framework established, the following analysis proceeds to a detailed examination of the opera's dramaturgical trajectory, beginning with its first scene and unfolding through the narrative in sequence. The libretto's narrative is heavily predicated upon social appearances and the presentation of class structures. The opera itself opens with an opulent wedding of the nobility, which is meant to flaunt status as much as celebrate the matrimonial event. But under the surface of this respectable pretence is a merciless brutality ingrained in the ruling elite that seeks to violently quell all resistance to the established status quo. The opening scene immediately establishes the archetypal character traits. The priest Friesner complains that Barbara's attire at the wedding does not sufficiently embody a modest chastity that would hide her feminine beauty. Barbara's aunt Anna protests against this male-centric assessment, underscoring the first subtle example of rebellion against social strictures. Soon thereafter, Barbara's three brothers are introduced as staunch defenders of their sister's honour, and by

extension, their own. Their aggressive over-protection accentuates their patriarchal power over Barbara, but not out of fraternal love; they only wish to retain their social status and see their sister as an extension of their position. Indeed, her brother Bartholomeus reflects on the admirers who are ogling Barbara, stating that “we could only tolerate a gentleman in her company”. Her brother Jürgen concurs, adding: “As anybody can tell, we are ourselves responsible for upholding her honour – and ours” (line 285).³ The theme of honour vs. disgrace is established as the brothers illustrate how intrinsically connected this phenomenon is with the social standing of Barbara’s future husband.

It is only towards the end of the opening scene that Barbara has her first lines. Thus far, she has only been gossiped about, further objectifying her womanhood and defining the values of nobility. Indeed, it is only after the tanner calls her “the harlot of Babylon” for her seemingly provocative dress and jewellery, that Barbara speaks up: “This tanner’s mockery is like your word! This burdening sparkle [the jewellery] imprisons my heart! I want away! I wanted long ago to get away!” (line 448). From the start, Barbara’s discomfort as a noble is on display, as she rebels against the superficial pretence of her surroundings by openly declaring her own antithetical values and identity as one who does not seek to be defined by the moral codes of her status. As Barbara attempts to flee, her brothers block her way. Jürgen exclaims, “No tricks, wench! Stay here!” Barbara retorts, “It’s not you who can block my way! Get away!” (lines 479, 480). The misogynistic remark aside, the short exchange typifies how her brothers always attempt to block Barbara’s pursuit of freedom from expectation through various expressions of control. The penultimate line in this scene is also Jürgen’s: “Our sister gives herself license!” – once more evincing female oppression at the hands of male dominance.

Musically, the opera opens with an energetic orchestral introduction that depicts dancing wedding guests. The choir jubilantly sings of the event at hand in a repeated sequence of the word wedding, which matches the perpetual rhythm of repeated notes throughout the orchestral texture. The musical atmosphere is rather square and rigid, like the sensibilities of the attending noble class. Due to the nature of the celebration, Tubin incorporates historically derived dance styles in some extended musical passages within the scene. In bar 152, the score indicates *Gagliarda*.⁴ The galliard was a popular dance form in the sixteenth century, featuring highly choreographed step patterns that generally excluded improvisation. The inherent control and predictability of this dance reflect the values of the nobility here. Tubin describes the galliard as “a dance with foot-swinging and great leaps containing certain pantomimic elements which may tend towards obscenity, as was typical of that time” (Humal, 2007, p. 53).

Towards the middle of the scene, when Friesner enters and argues with Anna over the suggestiveness of Barbara’s attire, the music suddenly changes. For only the second time

³ References to the libretto refer to Eino Tubin’s English translation, revised and published by the International Eduard Tubin Society (Humal and Sömer, 1991). The libretto references bar numbers in the full score in relation to each section of text. The lines will be cited in accordance with this system of numbering.

⁴ References to the score refer to the new Collected Works edition of the opera (Humal and Marttila, 2016).

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in the scene, Tubin notates *dolce* articulations in the oboes and clarinets when Friesner sings Barbara's name for the first time. This implies, for the first time, that a character refers to Barbara with genuine care and affection rather than with objectifying lust. Moreover, when Anna replies in defence of Barbara's clothing, Tubin uses melodic solo violins in higher registers to accentuate the sympathy of the female perspective in counterpoint to the stricter male gaze that demands greater modesty (bars 186–204). Shortly thereafter, Barbara's brothers are introduced, and the music shifts once more to exemplify their role as the opera's main antagonists. Indeed, when the brothers initially exert their male domination over their sister, Tubin thins the orchestration and brings to prominence the horns, which are notated as stopped, thereby producing a more buzzing and stilted tone. Tubin thereby presents a musical suggestion of the brothers' stifling attitudes.

Subsequently, the herald announces the next dance, which is called a "torch dance" (*Fackeltanz*), a ceremonial procession in a polonaise-like style. People hold candles and torches in their hands and dance, again, in precise, choreographed patterns. Tubin composed an extended orchestral passage for the torch dance using unusual instruments and textures to differentiate the dance music as an exotic event. To begin, he introduces a solitary military snare drum that plays a repeated four-bar phrase as a drone for almost the entire dance. This is accompanied by short, staccato rhythms with frequent grace notes and glissandi in the strings and brass. The strings alternate between pizzicato and arco. In the final section of the dance, the persistent ostinato of the military snare drum is replaced by solo timpani that plays eighth-note figurations unceasingly until the end. The music unfolds as a processional built on sequentially repeated figures, further underscoring the culture and aesthetics of the nobility (bars 361–416). Tubin states that the torch dance "develops slowly and with dignity, without singing, accompanied by loud music and a drum roll; the music continues during the stage turn and Scene 2 follows" (Humal, 2007, p. 53).

Act I, Scene 2

The second scene of the first act offers a counterpoint to the strictness of the nobility by shifting focus to the peasantry, who sing as they work and express their identity through folk customs. It becomes clear that the peasants fear the nobility, except for Barbara, whom they venerate as the only noble who shows them kindness and compassion. The peasants are recognisably unhappy with their treatment, further illustrating the negative disparity in the theme of nobility vs. peasantry as a historic by-product of the German occupation. Barbara enters the fray dressed simply like one of the workers, symbolising her moral solidarity with the people. She also asks one of the girls to teach her the song they are singing, further displaying her wish to embrace the peasants' culture through their music.

The renewed entry of the nobility and the priest in the central part of the scene once again shifts the atmosphere. With disgust, they observe Barbara fraternising with the peasants, commenting amongst themselves that their singing is nothing but awful "screams and village noise" (line 137). Barbara defends the peasants by praising their culture, adding that they should not be beaten but rather educated. This subtle defiance is dismissed by

Jürgen, who points out that a monk in Germany once made a similar suggestion, implying that it led to his death. This aggressive retort is intensified by the other noble amongst them who provocatively declares that such a decree for peasant education is “not a matter for women” (line 165). This is another example of female oppression at the hands of male domination.

Following this tense exchange, the nature of the scene shifts one last time as guests enter. Amongst them is the estate’s new scribe Franz Bonnius. As the nobles greet each other, Bonnius stands aside in silence. Barbara notices this and asks him why he does not greet her with a kiss, like the others. Bonnius replies that such an exchange is reserved for the nobility alone, as he is not one of them due to his lack of honour, arms, land and house. In a seemingly prophetic twist, the stage direction at this moment reads that Friesner notices the “fateful moment” in which Barbara instantly becomes enamoured with the scribe. Bonnius’s honest remark about his lower class is obviously appealing to Barbara. When his station precludes him from playing a dice game with the other nobles, Barbara “defiantly” decides to play with him instead. This subtle form of rebellion is not lost on Bonnius, who asks with surprise if Barbara really means to play with him. The strict class hierarchy is firmly on display here with Bonnius’s shock at Barbara’s recalcitrant attitude. During their game, they speak openly, with Barbara pressing Bonnius to candidly share his views of their country. To this, Bonnius “harshly” states that “for the nobility this is paradise but for the peasants it is hell!” (line 279). Their shared morality is an immediate catalyst for mutual admiration. The scene closes with Barbara’s abrupt exit, but not before calling Bonnius a “wondrous man”, prompting him to imagine whether their feelings might transcend the limitations of their socio-cultural circumstances. This is the first instance of the duality of love vs. duty emerging amidst Bonnius’s questioning of possibilities.

In Tubin’s score, the opera’s underlying *chaconne* structure is articulated through a recurring thematic ground, which appears in retrograde at the very beginning of the second scene, with the cellos and basses playing alone for several bars (bars 1–6). The reversal of this ground in the scene depicting the peasants can be understood as an inversion of its earlier association with the nobility, suggesting a corresponding shift in the moral and social framework attached to it. This scene also introduces the culture of the peasantry in the form of a folk song that they sing as they work. The melody is established first in a chorus of girls from bars 19–30. The character of the music changes to a darker quality when Jürgen enters, as Tubin again employs the lower register ominously with accents in the third trombone, tuba, cellos, and basses, along with stabbing accented eighth notes in the horns and upper strings (bars 158–162). The stopped horns once again return at the end of Jürgen’s subtle allusion of capital punishment for dissidence.

Act I, Scene 3

In the next scene, Barbara and Bonnius are reunited and proclaim their love for each other. Barbara continues with her rebellious streak, refusing to submit to social conventions, firmly stating that nobody can separate them. Bonnius shares in the euphoria but remains more guarded, aware of the opposition they will face. They both ultimately accept the irrepressible nature of their union, and the scene takes on a semblance of

Tristan und Isolde in its representation of actualised love in the face of great opposition. Just like in Wagner's music drama, the love scene has an observer who takes the side of rational scepticism: in *Tristan*, this is Brangäne, while in Tubin's opera it is Friesner, who is described in the stage direction as quietly observing the lovers, "shaking his head and walking away with a worried face" (line 144). This moment of fatalistic significance closes the first act. Rein Undusk (2011) presents an interesting observation regarding love in Kallas's novella *Barbara*. Undusk argues that while love is Barbara's driving motivation, there is very little content to that love, because it is most often projected as the observation of an exterior onlooker. Undusk further categorises this as an "emptiness" or "nothingness" that Kallas presents as a representation of her heroine's inescapable march to her tragic demise, where the absence of this content of love is merged with the inevitability of death. However, Undusk continues, the choice of later dying in the name of love must be seen as an act of freedom, which is at the same time paradoxically "inauthentic" because it is made in the context of certain death (Undusk, 2011, p. 151). The point here is that the abruptness and depth with which Barbara's love for Bonnius is depicted is not in itself as relevant as it is a catalyst for placing Barbara firmly on the path towards death. In other words, this hypothesis suggests that since their love could never have been sanctioned to endure for its own sake, it is a hollow phenomenon due to Barbara's martyr death, holding more significance than the cause that led up to it. Debatable as this may be, this love scene stands at 144 lines of text, making it the shortest scene in the opera. Moreover, Undusk's observations are made in the context of Kallas's wider authorship of the three prose ballads, of which *Barbara* is the first. The heroine's inevitable death is a staple of all three works, adding legitimacy to Undusk's contextualising theory that love is only a facilitator of violent death in Kallas's trilogy of novellas. Lastly, Undusk's assessment that this scene contains little content reflects Tubin's own view, expressed in an earlier letter to his librettist, Jaan Kross, in which he writes that the libretto does not sufficiently capture the budding love between Barbara and Bonnius. The scene ultimately remained unchanged due to Kross's faithful adherence to the source material. However, Tubin's early criticism is a telling parallel to Undusk's views, highlighting the dramaturgical nuances that are on display in this scene.

Musically, the third scene is relatively short and is built around propulsive, agitated ostinato rhythms that convey a sense of continuous motion. The beginning of the scene is an *andante* – the general tempo for a walk – which is precisely what is happening: Friesner, Anna, and Tödwen (Anna's husband) are walking calmly as a folk melody is played in the oboes (bars 8–11). The score indicates that bagpipes are heard in the distance, perpetuating the atmosphere from the previous scenes where diegetic music is recognised. As the scene shifts and the characters from the opening of it exit, an *allegro vivo* section begins, coinciding with Barbara's entrance. The faster tempo and ceaseless ostinatos mirror Barbara's euphoric energy, especially when Bonnius enters soon after. The orchestration also thickens as the two lovers sing a duet, bringing an emphatic end to the first act. Tubin describes the rapport in this scene between Barbara and Bonnius, where "love flames up, but there will be no embraces" (Humal, 2007, p. 53).

Act II, Scene 4

The fourth scene continues the opera's alternating movement between the worlds of the nobility and the peasantry, with the action now returning to the former. A bear hunt is afoot, exemplifying the duality of power vs. victimisation. The nobles unleash a pack of dogs on the bear. A frenzy of violence and bloodlust erupts around the participants, who include Barbara's brothers. Barbara and her aunt Anna watch on in horror, and Barbara passionately asks the men if they are not ashamed of torturing the bear for nothing more than pleasure. The moment is an example of women morally resisting the brutality of men, demonstrating further gender division. Barbara's outburst elicits misogynistic replies from her brothers. In an echo of Jürgen's line from the opening scene of the opera, Bartholomeus reiterates that "our sister really gives herself license", to which Jürgen adds that "the plague may strike me if I cannot tame her!" (lines 131, 133). Barbara's remarks are therefore invalidated by a reassertion of male dominance that forces female oppression. Bonnius arrives to console Barbara and embraces her, although this physical contact is not allowed due to his lower class. The duality of love vs. duty comes into direct confrontation with male dominance vs. female oppression as Barbara's brothers observe her closeness with Bonnius, quickly prompting them to action.

Barbara is prepared for the ensuing altercation and does not suppress her rebellious nature to placate her brothers. She tells them that she cannot abide the hunt's ongoing carnage. Bartholomeus invokes a pejorative remark directed at the peasantry when he replies: "You are a Tisenhusen but you have the faint heart of a merchant mistress!" (line 266). The narrative quickly shifts to the actions of Bonnius, when, after her brothers press the issue, Barbara unwaveringly says that she hates their bloody games and loves Bonnius. The brothers are horrified at their sister's intention to marry the scribe and threaten violence upon him. In another example of male-induced oppression, Jürgen commands Barbara to stay put, adding, "how foolish can a noble maiden be, growing up without mother and father" (line 321). At this point, he asks Barbara if she is familiar with the Pact of Pärnu – a legal statute governing marriage within the nobility – which she is not. The brothers exit, thus closing the scene, with a feeling of triumph at having found a legal precedent to rein in Barbara's rebelliousness.

The score to the fourth scene begins with an inversion of the opera's recurring chaconne ground, presented in a choir of low brass and double basses (bars 1–13). Throughout the opera, Tubin frequently alternates between scenes centred on the nobility and those aligned with the peasantry or with figures who stand in opposition to noble authority, such as Barbara and Bonnius in their developing union. Moreover, the inversion of the chaconne ground in this scene suggests a distorted and increasingly ominous transformation of the opera's central musical idea, particularly through its association with the low brass, which has already been established as a recurring musical signifier of Barbara's cruel and oppressive brothers. A fast tempo and stopped horns enhance the sharp, angular ethos of the music that accompanies the bear hunt – the exemplification of the hedonistic barbarity of the nobility. Tubin's music reinforces the frenzy of the event by frequently applying *Sprechstimme* glissandi up and down in the choir, which acts as a heady cheering section for the carnage (bars 62–63). In addition, a

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wider range of percussion is employed in this animated moment, including wood block, bass drum, xylophone, and military snare drum.

Act II, Scene 5

The fifth scene is comparatively restrained in tone, yet it remains shaped by underlying conflict as Barbara and the priest, Friesner, engage in an honest conversation. To begin, Barbara asks the priest what the Pact of Pärnu is. He explains that it is a law that “prevents noble-born maidens from marrying an unworthy” (line 40). It is the most overt articulation of division between the nobility and peasantry. Friesner then elaborates a crucial element of the law: if a noble maiden marries an unworthy (i.e., lower-class individual) against the wishes of her family, the couple, as well as all their enablers, lose all their rights and holdings, with the couple being condemned to death by starvation (line 50). Barbara asks who is considered unworthy, and Friesner explains that it refers to anyone of a lower social class than the noble maiden. Barbara then asks whether he agrees with the law, to which the priest diplomatically replies that it is an earthly law, not God’s law. The conversation now shifts to Bonnius, whom Barbara says she loves. To this, the priest cannot remain impartial. While he is sympathetic to Barbara’s situation, he ultimately sides with duty and tells her to forsake Bonnius. Although he does not hold Bonnius as an inferior, he cannot endorse their union knowing the laws. Barbara refuses to accept this and exclaims that she will not leave Bonnius, even if it means death by starvation. Despite her situation, Barbara does not submit to pressure and remains defiant. She still asks Friesner to bless her, which the kind-hearted but cowardly priest does “in a fatherly manner” (line 127), as the stage direction reads. He is clearly torn between what he knows to be God’s unbiased sanction of love and the laws of man, but not enough to take a decisive stand.

The fifth scene presents the basic chaconne theme in retrograde inversion, enacting a fatalistic and pivotal point in the opera. The somewhat extended orchestral opening passes the theme around the orchestra, first in solo instruments – the clarinet, bassoon, oboe, English horn, and horn – before incorporating it into wider categories of instrument families (bars 1-24). The orchestration thins out as Friesner and Barbara begin their dialogue, with the priest attempting in vain to dissuade Barbara from pursuing Bonnius. Tension rises as the two argue, with the music fortifying the priest’s biting anticipation of the violent retribution that will be brought upon Bonnius with short and sharp attacks in the orchestra. The fatalistic moment arrives when Barbara disregards the warnings and exclaims that she will stay with Bonnius even if it means her own death. Upon her admission, an extended tutti orchestral passage begins in which the main theme reappears in retrograde inversion in the trombones, tuba, and horns (bars 110-118) – instruments associated with Barbara’s treacherous brothers. Musically, this moment foreshadows Barbara’s fate at the hands of her brothers.

Act II, Scene 6

The sixth scene revolves around Barbara’s brothers, who lament the shame that their sister has brought upon them. The theme of honour vs. disgrace is met with the dichotomy of power vs. victimisation as the brothers use their social standing to draw up legal proceedings, which dictate that the escaped couple must not be given sanctuary and are

to be captured and brought to the brothers at the tip of a sword. Anna enters the fold, questioning the brothers' need for swords. They reply that they will use them to kill Bonnius and remand Barbara to their custody. Anna pleads for them to let Barbara go, saying that while Barbara's actions hurt her, "as a woman, I know what is love" (line 133). Anna attempts to invoke the duality of love vs. duty in Barbara's favour, drawing on a shared understanding as a fellow woman. But she is met with rebuttals that accentuate male dominance, the righteousness of the nobility, and the need to preserve honour in the face of pending disgrace. All of this is qualified by Reinhold, one of the brothers, who states: "We'd never get over this river of filth. It would splash us all our lives: Ah, Tisenhusen, that Tisenhusen who gave his sister as harlot to this ink-scribbler" (line 163). There is clearly no compromise to be had, as Barbara's own happiness is incidental to the reflection that marrying a commoner would have on her brothers. The disagreeing air takes on an even more sinister quality when Bartholomeus angrily condemns Barbara to Anna: "Mrs Anna? Ah, an in-law of this quill driver, the aunt of his whore!" (line 185). With Anna in complete distress, the brothers depart to capture the wayward couple, which closes the second act of the opera.

The sixth scene is one of great musical agitation. It opens with a solitary timpani roll that builds to a crescendo, along with a similar feature in the trombones – the instruments usually found accompanying Barbara's brothers. The music throughout the scene mirrors the brothers' anger over the feeling of disgrace that they attribute to Barbara's elopement with Bonnius. When Jürgen calls the scribe to issue their arrest warrant, the music captures this display of calculating power and mercilessness through martial-like sharp rhythms with a military snare drum and stopped horns that accompany the scribe's reading of the warrant in *Sprechstimme* voice (bars 52–66). The music is angular, horizontal, and devoid of melodic line in this scene of heightened tropes of male domination. A counterpoint to this texture is only felt later in the scene with Anna's entrance. A lyrical English horn passage accompanies her request for compassion in the name of love, perceived through her feminine intuition (bars 110–117). When she asks the brothers to reply, they stay silent, but the music answers for them with the regimental return of the military snare drum, trombones, tuba, and stopped horns (bars 145–159). Reinhold subsequently replies that they will never relent. The scene and the second act end with Jürgen's call to action under the steady beat of the bass drum, and the final four-bar phrase with a powerful tutti punctuated by timpani and military snare drum (bars 218–232). Tubin's music in this emphatic and tumultuous scene exemplifies the dualities of power vs. victimisation and male domination vs. female oppression.

Act III

The third act begins with a short orchestral introduction that features a male choir in the score. They sing what is akin to a hunting song (Introduction, bars 9–14). Coincidentally, the rhythmic structure and shape of this song bear oblique resemblance to the peasant folk song sung in the second scene by female workers. Tubin's aesthetic dichotomies are showing between that early all-female song of delight and this late all-male song of brutal determination. Ostinato figures abound, with repeated notes and patterned sequences

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illustrating the relentless pursuit of the hunt as a reflection of an obsessive male desire to assert domination over a disobedient woman.

Act III, Scene 7

The seventh scene, which opens the third and final act, isolates Barbara and Bonnius as they flee their pursuers. They are rather disconnected from the dire reality of their situation and focus inwardly on their love. This in itself constitutes a form of continued rebellion against submission. Bonnius tells Barbara that he loves her pride, while lamenting his own lack of honour. Barbara dispels his misgivings before they briefly part to allow Bonnius to look for a new horse to carry them across the border. As she rests, her brothers catch up to the unprotected and sleeping Barbara. Her fear over being captured passes, and she accepts her fate as she accompanies her brothers back to their home. In a letter to Arne Mikk on 18 March 1968, Tubin comments on Barbara's mindset in this scene, noting that she is "running out of strength [and] has a feeling that this will not end well, and is already subconsciously accepting that she has to surrender" (Rumessen, 2006, p. 308).

Although the start of the seventh scene is the final love scene between Barbara and Bonnius, the music opens with stopped horns as a prophetic implication of pending danger (bars 42-46). The quality of the music between the two lovers is highly melodic, with frequent instructions in the score to play expressively, tenderly, and sweetly. Tubin's violin writing is often at its most intense and passionate when conveying Barbara's emotional outbursts. For example, *divisi* notation in octaves in the upper register of the first violins is a recurring musical vehicle for Barbara's more energetic expressions (bars 75-79). The idyllic atmosphere is fleeting, though, because midway through the scene, the militaristic orchestration from the third act's introduction returns, quickly followed by the male choir's pseudo hunting song. The effect from the opening of the sixth scene with its suggestive solitary timpani roll is repeated as Reinhold ambushes the sleeping Barbara and takes her prisoner. Tubin notates *marziale* (bar 201) in the score as half of the men depart with Barbara, while the other half go to look for Bonnius. Triplet figures in the trumpets, along with timpani and crash cymbals, accentuate the processional march until a soft eight-bar sustained passage ends the scene in quiet contemplation of what is about to befall Barbara (bars 204-230).

Act III, Scene 8

In the following scene, Barbara is brought before an all-male tribunal of Tisenhusens to be judged for her transgressions and sentenced accordingly. The legal exchange that ensues in the pseudo trial is a theme of power vs. victimisation as Barbara's brothers accuse her of "forbidden intercourse with Franz Bonnius, a travelling merchant" (line 66). When Barbara is asked to comment on the accusations levied against her, she describes circumstances emphatic of male domination vs. female oppression. Barbara notes how her brothers threatened to take her dowry if she were to marry Bonnius, which she roundly rejected as immaterial. After her brothers told her they would never allow a union between Barbara and Bonnius, she tells the tribunal that they decided to decamp to live together abroad. She further scandalises the assorted gathering by claiming that it was God

rather than an earthly priest who married her and Bonnius. Anger erupts over this admission, with Jürgen expressing an ethos related to nobility vs. peasantry by stating that “you are not Bonnius’ wife as you believe but his concubine, and wolves walked in your wedding train!” (line 122). After this, Barbara expresses her rebellious nature by refusing to submit and tell them where Bonnius is, even if she knew his whereabouts. She then declares with full conviction that they will see him again and that he will bring destruction upon them. With this, Barbara is sentenced to death, which she accepts. When she is asked if she has anyone whom she wishes to call to her defence, the stage direction reads that Barbara looks around at all the men seated around her and, in a final declaration evoking the theme of love vs. duty, states that the only person who loves her is not present and that her family, who should also love her, instead wish to execute her. Jürgen interjects to deflect this accusation, invoking the theme of honour vs. disgrace by saying that they did not reject her – she did it to herself by betraying her birthright. Friesner then finally speaks up for the first time in the opera, arguing that Barbara be spared, because she acted out of love, which, although excessive, should not bear capital punishment. His plea is routinely dismissed with a wave of a hand from the head of the tribunal, who states that only those of Tisenhusen blood can decide how to “wash off this insult that she has done to us” (line 190). Jürgen, as the spokesman for all three brothers, declares that they have suffered the “greatest dishonour” from Barbara’s actions, and therefore demand that she be remanded into their custody for them to decide how to punish her. It is another instance of power vs. victimisation, along with the acquiescing verdict from the tribunal head, who ratifies the outcome so that Barbara “may receive the punishment that will absolve all her sins and misdeeds” (line 212).

The eighth scene oscillates musically between moments of cold austerity that signify judicial ruthlessness among the male Tisenhusen tribunal, and more expressive, agitated moments in which Barbara launches into moral justifications of her actions, devoid of any regret. As a scene that almost exclusively serves to express power and male domination, the atmosphere of the music projects a rather bureaucratic quality of calculated policy and law, with constant announcing calls, primarily in the brass and percussion. These are generally notated as two repeated notes – a sixteenth note followed by a longer held note. It connotes an official setting within the strict ethical confines of the nobility. An anticipatory ostinato timpani figuration followed by two short and accented fortissimo strokes announces the presence of Tisenhusen of Konguta – the head of the presiding tribunal. Henceforth, whenever the stern Konguta has a vocal entrance, Tubin notates two strikes in a descending interval with the same rhythms and articulations, or the same figure transplanted to the third trombone and tuba (bars 46, 70, 101, 151). In all these instances, no other sounds are played in the orchestra when these musical announcements are made. The effect is menacing and foreboding as the musical and textual narrative moves closer to Barbara’s inevitable death sentence. Along with the opera’s opening scene, this eighth scene is the longest of the work, whereby Tubin takes the listener on a harrowing descent into the realm of accusation, denouncement, and finally punishment.

The vocal writing in this scene for all protagonists, including Barbara, is uniformly square and rhythmically repetitive, with sequences of syncopated and tripletised groupings

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of repeated notes. These passages lack clear melodic contour and are marked by an absence of slurring that would suggest phrasal cohesion or continuity. Even when Barbara sings with greater emotional intensity, the quality of the vocal writing remains unchanged. Her register and dynamic simply rise, closely paralleled by the first violins in a similar articulation and registral profile. The judicial harshness and the reality of the situation are reflected in the structure of the vocal writing in this scene.

After Barbara is condemned to die by being remanded to the custody of her brothers, the stage direction reads: "Darkness. All but Barbara leave" (line 212). Following this, Tubin presents the longest purely orchestral passage in the opera, which continues until the end of the scene. The passage begins with a timpani figure that builds progressively from the bottom up, adding trombones and tuba, then trumpets, followed by horns and winds and finally the strings (bars 221–234). This section stands in stark contrast to the musical ethos earlier in the scene with the vocal parts. Barbara stayed calm, defiant and reserved to her fate in the presence of the male tribunal. But now, alone in the dark, Barbara can let go of her brave façade and mourn the injustice and tragedy of her fate. There is no narrative indication of this, but the music displays an eruptive outpouring of emotion like a bursting dam that can no longer tolerate the immense pressure exerted upon it by unrelenting forces that push to break through. And like the dam that has finally capitulated, where the water eventually becomes calm, the orchestral passage ends quietly. As this surge subsides, the orchestral passage gradually diminishes, flowing directly as an *attacca* into the opera's final scene. As such, the orchestral ending of scene eight can be seen as a pseudo-overture for the final scene, as a transition from distraught turmoil to calm acceptance. Indeed, it is with stoic resolve that Barbara meets her end in the concluding scene.

Act III, Scene 9

The ninth and final scene of the opera features Barbara, her three brothers, Friesner, and two Estonian peasants at a frozen lake. The opera's most overt socio-cultural symbolisms re-emerge here at the end – most notably the dichotomies of nobility vs. peasantry and power vs. victimisation. Jürgen orders the peasants to cut a hole in the ice, which they do only begrudgingly and "stubbornly", as the stage direction reads. Friesner makes one final attempt to dissuade the brothers from executing their sister, but Jürgen rejects the priest's imploration, which is a response that reinforces the dynamics of male dominance and female oppression, as well as honour and disgrace. He refuses to entertain any other perspectives but his own, exclaiming that Barbara rejected her blood and her brothers by extension, and now her family has disowned her, adding that she is no longer his sister. Friesner tries once more, but Jürgen dismisses him, commanding, "don't preach; make her ready for death!" (line 313).

Barbara's final statement to Friesner is of enduring defiance, in which she says that she does not regret having loved Bonnius and that she goes to her death happy for having known his love. She is then called to the hole in the ice by her brothers, who order the peasants to push her in. A microcosm of the opera's allegorical crux is played out in this moment as the peasants refuse to comply. Jürgen is outraged and asks if they are insubordinate. One of the peasants confronts Jürgen, stating that he is cruel to them and

that only Barbara has shown them kindness. Jürgen threatens them for their disobedience, calls over his brothers, and the three of them push Barbara in. The opera ends with Friesner falling to his knees and asking God why He has forsaken them. The libretto contains a historical addendum that recounts how, twenty years later, in 1571, Karl Henriksson, the young son of a knight from Finland, led a battalion of 300 Swedish soldiers that overwhelmed the forces of Jürgen Tisenhusen, killing them all in the process. As such, Jürgen is met with retribution for executing his own sister, who defied her brothers (line 402).

The final scene of Tubin's opera is generally thinly scored, enabling greater introspection, as everything is now oriented to the singular event of Barbara's execution. Two bars before the *attacca* into the ninth scene, Tubin introduces the celesta for the first time – an ethereal instrument whose delicate timbre and transparent texture stimulate a symbolic move inwards. While the music and the narrative's demeanour reflect a solemn death march, there is a brief and joyous reprieve when Barbara reflects on the love she feels for Bonnius, regretting nothing. High divisi first violins (bars 330–334) once again accompany Barbara's moments of emotional intensity and defiance before she makes her peace and has a few moments to herself. To capture this isolated moment for Barbara, Tubin composed a six-bar phrase of celesta passagework above full divisions of the entire string section, keeping a steady pulse (bars 355–360). It is the final, purely orchestral representation of contemplative, interior reflection before explicit action ensues to the very end of the work.

As Jürgen tells Barbara to come forward and position herself before the hole in the ice, a four-bar *grave* accentuates her approach with a dramatic tutti build-up from piano to forte and then quickly from double forte to triple forte (bars 364–367). After the final argument with the two peasants, Jürgen beckons for his brothers. A fast and loud scalar run in the strings (bar 397) accompanies their convergence upon Barbara, with another four-bar tutti *grave* at triple forte commencing the moment her brothers push Barbara under the ice (bars 398–401). The orchestral texture then dissipates over the final eight bars of the opera, with subtle dynamic hairpins swelling and constricting, like Barbara's diminishing life force, as the opera fades away into nothingness (bars 402–409).

Conclusion

In this study, Barbara's fatal defiance of the patriarchy has been examined through a socio-cultural and dramaturgical analysis, centred on the interplay between the opera's libretto and music as a catalyst for allegorical meaning. The synthesis of the opera's two component parts illustrates the ideological and emotional scope of the narrative, through a series of dichotomies that are applied in an analysis of the entire work, to investigate how *Barbara* portrays dynamics of power and oppression and how Tubin's music complements these expressions. The narrative's keen moral divisions exemplify the subsidiary derivations that are generated from the primary points of conflict that revolve around ideals of nobility vs peasantry and male domination vs. female oppression. While other dualities bear frequent representation, they are essentially by-products of the two

principal ones. The story itself is based on true events, further epitomising the turbulent history of the region when Estonia was occupied by the autocratic Baltic Germans.

Tubin's music fundamentally reflects the ethos of the narrative through an integrated musical idiom derived from the basic *chaconne* theme, which he manipulates to reflect shifting dynamics as the narrative evolved. Motivic devices in the music accompany the depiction of certain characters and their demeanour towards Barbara, which closely corresponds to the atmosphere of unfolding events. However, at the end of the opera, when Barbara's death becomes the sole focus of the action, Tubin's sparse orchestration induces a psychological turn inwards that perceptibly captures the reflective anticipation of Barbara's final execution.

Considered across the entire opera, the detailed readings of each scene disclose a consistent dramaturgical trajectory in which musical means repeatedly articulate Barbara's increasingly constrained position within the social order. Public situations are characterised by broadly stabilised orchestral textures and clearly profiled gestures that project social authority and ritualised display, while more intimate encounters progressively narrow the musical space through changes in instrumentation, register and articulation. Over the course of the opera, these shifts accumulate into a temporal process that frames Barbara's fate as something gradually shaped and foreclosed by its surroundings, rather than as the result of a single decisive rupture. It is through this chronological unfolding – rather than any isolated moment – that Tubin's music renders the opera's tragic culmination as both socially conditioned and musically prepared.

One of the most prominent attributes of Tubin's music in *Barbara* is its palpable symphonic core. Indeed, the interconnecting *chaconne* theme – which Herbert Connor (2004, pp. 63–64) believes enhances the opera's dramatic and psychological ethos – together with the various dances, all contribute to the use of symphonic structures within the opera. This is also punctuated by extended orchestral passages that often open and close scenes as symbolic commentaries on a narrative action that has just transpired or will commence. Moreover, the melodic, rhythmically complex and polyphonic nature of the music reflect Tubin's own symphonic writing. However, his symphonies are not programmatic works. Therefore, from a certain perspective, the *Barbara* score may be interpreted not as a formal symphony, but as a structural mirror of Tubin's symphonic idiom in terms of thematic transformation, orchestration and rhythmic contour – especially the shared use of syncopations and ostinato figures that are characteristic of both his symphonies and this opera. Such a perspective within this operatic framework allows *Barbara* to be viewed through the lens of Tubin's symphonies, revealing the consistency of his orchestral writing across the contrasting genres of opera and symphony. Tubin was previously quoted as saying that the function and return of the *chaconne* was to establish unity in a way that would define the entire work. This is a fundamental statement of the composer conceiving the opera's music as symphonically structured, situating the work within the parameters of Tubin's musical thinking.

Earlier, I designated the orchestral ending of scene eight as a makeshift overture that signalled the character of the final scene as a meditation of introspective resignation. This interpretation situates *Barbara* in close relation to Alban Berg's expressionist drama

Wozzeck. Berg's final orchestral interlude before his opera's final scene has been regarded as an overture for setting up the retrograde motion at the close that triggers the narrative repeat of the drama, in which matters begin anew. Berg addresses this circular conception explicitly in his lecture on *Wozzeck*, stating, "Although it [*Wozzeck's* ending] clearly cadences on the final chord, it creates the feeling that it could keep going. In fact, it does keep going! The first measures of the opera might well link up harmonically with these final measures without further ado, thus closing the circle. Here is the end of the opera, then the beginning" (Berg, 2014, p. 232). This bears congruence with *Barbara*. Eino Tubin writes, in a biography of his father, that he "was especially interested in two modern operas, Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* and Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*" (Tubin, 2017, p. 180). The influence of *Wozzeck* – a work that Tubin saw staged in Vienna under the direction of Karl Böhm – reinforces a vision of the latent symphonic structure of *Barbara*. Indeed, the second act of *Wozzeck* was constructed as a symphony in five movements, with each of the five scenes designated musically as the following symphonic movements, respectively: Sonata movement, Fantasia and fugue, Largo, Scherzo, and Rondo con introduzione. A detailed formal diagram of *Wozzeck's* structure is provided by Douglas Jarman (1989, p. 42). A comparable structural logic can be observed in *Barbara*, where the recurrence and transformation of the *chaconne*-based material, together with the framing function of extended orchestral passages, articulate a symphonically conceived dramaturgical continuity across the opera.

These stylistic similarities position *Barbara* alongside an elite pantheon of celebrated twentieth-century operas (including the aforementioned *Peter Grimes*) that focus on a marginalised protagonist persecuted for perceived deviance within a merciless society that does not tolerate differences. Within this shared framework, *Barbara's* allegorical ethos exemplifies its resonance with some of the most visceral humanistic themes in modern operatic theatre. This realisation further reinforces the view that Tubin's opera offers a poignant socio-cultural commentary on Estonia's history of subjugation by foreign powers, in its tragic portrayal of the fate of a noblewoman who defies the rigid social norms imposed by an occupying power – even if she was originally a part of that group. Through this narrative, Tubin reflects on Estonian cultural identity as one shaped by resistance, moral integrity and the enduring struggle for autonomy, using historical allegory to critique oppression and valorise resilience. These symbolic characteristics coalesce to position *Barbara von Tisenhusen* as a mirror both of its own time and of history more broadly.

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Biography

Vanja Ljubibratić specialises in the life and works of Alban Berg and Richard Wagner. He received his PhD in historical musicology from the University of Turku with the dissertation *Hans Christian Andersen and the Cultural Reception of Richard Wagner in Denmark, 1857–1875*. He is currently a guest researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki, where he is writing a monograph on Berg.