

Abbreviation of the dissertation titled: *Kenosis. Simone Weil and Kaija Saariaho*

The core of the dissertation is an analysis and interpretation of the figure of *kenosis* in the oratorio titled *La Passion de Simone* by Kaija Saariaho. The piece is entirely dedicated to French woman philosopher Simone Weil, who was born in 1909 and died during the Second World War in England. The composition tells the story of her eventful life and refers to her writing, which can be divided into four areas of interest: analysis of ancient Greek philosophy and literature; considering contemporary social and political problems; research and comparison of pre-Christian religions with Christianity; writing down internal mystical experiences, which began with participation in the liturgy of Holy Week in 1938 in Solesmes.

La passion de Simone relates to every mentioned aspect of her thought and it incorporates short quotations from her writings. It takes the form of the *Stations of the Cross*. Oratorio was composed in 2006 for the New Crowned Hope Festival in Vienna. The work is written for soprano solo, choir, orchestra and recorded declamation of citations from original Weil's work performed by Dominique Blanc. The libretto was created by Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf and then directed by Peter Sellars.

Kenosis – as Christine Hof claims – seems to be the most important idea in Weil's thought and life. The notion is directly derived from the second chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, where the Apostle to the Nations describes the humiliation of Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the form of a servant and, despite being God, was made in the likeness of men. Furthermore, he humbled himself, and became obedient to Father's will unto death, even death on the cross. The word comes from the Greek verb *kenou* used in the Philippians, which can be translated as voiding or emptying of self, of one's own will, and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

Weil did not devote a compact text to this notion, but its presence is mediated by the concept of decreation created by the philosopher, which can be understood as the transposition of *kenosis* into the ground of human experience. Decreation is a process of maturation in human beings. The most crucial are the endeavors to void one's will and to deny one's dreams of power, of social prestige, and even to harness one's imagination of the future. The most difficult task on the path of this spiritual formation is to deprive yourself of the inner „I”. French philosopher claims that one should follow the example of God, who renounces being everything, withdraws himself from the world to give his creature place to live in. When God created man, he gave him his own free will. As a creature of God one should give it back to Him as a gift and evidence of one's perfect love. Thus decreation means going back to the phase of the

„uncreated stage”, when one do not have any powers to decide. When one become empty, God, by virtue of His grace, can act in oneself. In Weil's understanding this is the real fulfilment of the creation.

The first part of the dissertation titled *Kenosis. Philosophical and aesthetic research* functions as a kind of prolegomena to the analysis of *La Passion de Simone*, focusing on the recapitulation of kenotic threads present in various areas of Weil's thought: from the concept of decreation (chapter *From Decreation to Interpretation*), through the kenotic-soteriological treatment of beauty [chapter *Beauty (itself) decreates*] and music, elements of which are treated as a metaphor of the mechanics of spiritual development (chapter *Music in Weil's work*), up to the concept of paradox, present in Weil's poetics and influencing the shaping of individual stations of *La Passion de Simone* by Kaija Saariaho (chapter *From paradox to kenosis. Poetics of Weil and Saariaho*).

The second part called *Kenosis. Being in the world* takes up the theme of Simone Weil's identity as a woman, intellectual, social activist, political agitator and worker of Alsthom and Renault factories. The last role is particularly important, because the working-class experience can be discerned as a kind of social *kenosis*. It resulted – as Weil whrote – in impressing the indelible seal of slavery, which in turn led the thinker to the Christian religion. This part of the dissertation is based on the interpretation of the first six stations of the *La Passion de Simone*.

The third part titled *Kenosis. Imitatio Christi* is an attempt to analyze the next parts of the oratorio (from station VII to X), in which the problem of idolatry is raised. In some civilisations (mainly Roman and Hebrew) nation and society become – In Weil's thinking – an idols that legitimize what is good and what is bad. An equally important theme of this part is the motive of God's abandonment of the world and, consequently, the domination of the laws of necessity. The culmination of this thematic segment is brought by the interpretation of the X station of the oratorio, where the most important motive is *kenosis*, which is experienced by the thinker in her intellectual life and in the aspect of social activity as a loneliness among philosophers and intellectuals of her time and voluntary self-voiding.

The final part titled *Kenosis. From Death to Life*, which consists of reflections on the last five stations (stations XI to XV), takes up the theme of Weil's slow departure from the world immersed in the turmoil of war to the world of mystical experiences that finally preceded her death. The goal of this part is the recapitulation of Weil's thoughts on the impact of violence on the human condition, which results in a specific reification of a human being. The second, extremely important motive is Weil's desire, or – as the philosopher puts – the ever-consuming hunger for extending the right to free will to every human being as a guarantee of preserving the human subjectivity. The last issue is the attitude of the philosopher to the Catholic Church and her motives to persist on its threshold.

The second, third and fourth parts of the study form a triptych consisting of an analysis and interpretation of the individual stations of the *La Passion de Simone*. It investigates *kenosis* in the layer of

libretto as a description of Weil's comportment and her philosophy, as well as, in the style of her writings, cited in the libretto, which are conspicuous attempts to efface her „I” or her own persona. The dissertation also examines the presence of the figure of *kenosis* in the musical language of the composer, especially in the distinctive and vivid melodic motifs in the part of soprano and other instruments; likewise, in the interaction between two contrasted sonorities, which appear in the orchestra.

The last chapter is devoted to location of Simone Weil's thinking on the map of continental philosophy in XX century. This part traces similarities between Weil and mainly post-secular thinkers as Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou etc. The chapter shows how much Weil anticipated the problems of philosophy and theology at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It also explains the motives behind the choice of Weil to be the main character of *La Passion de Simone* and considers the importance of her philosophical achievements for the present day.

The general methodology used in the dissertation is based on theoretical recognitions or insights of the German scholar Werner Wolf, who described the phenomenon of the opera or oratorio as a specific example of several types of inter-mediality. The first is called inter-medial transposition and it means: transfer of an individual work of art to another form or piece, for example, a literary piece to an opera. The second type of inter-mediality determines the existence of the same qualities in two different media, for example, leitmotifs in literature and music or the presence of narrativity in these two areas or fields. The last, but not least, is pluri-mediality, which defines coexistence of two media at the same time, for example, it is the sung word in a song, an opera or an oratorio. All mentioned types of inter-mediality are present in *La Passion de Simone*, although the inter-medial transposition applies only to fragments of the oratorio which contain direct quotations from the writings of Simone Weil.

One of the basic theses of this dissertation is the assumption that the interaction of word and music strengthens the potential for expressing the idea of *kenosis*. The coexistence of two artistic languages in one piece weakens them reciprocally, but thanks to this inter-medial expression we arrive at new meanings in the active relation between them. Moreover, relation or mediation, except for decreation, is one of the most crucial ideas in Weil's vocabulary, and this is why music, which is based on relations, is her favorite art. She also claims that music – more than other artistic language – can express the most elusive ideas. Nevertheless, relations between people in society, in their different religions and cultures, and between human beings and God, are at the heart of her thought. *Kenosis*, as a comportment full of mercy and compassion to other people, is the most important message from Simone Weil and composer Kaija Saariaho, who strongly underscores these themes in her numerous interviews.