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# The Problematic Epic of Finland: An Exploration of Tricky Heroes, Silent Women, and Absent Fathers in the Kalevala

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THE PROBLEMATIC EPIC OF FINLAND: AN EXPLORATION OF TRICKY HEROES,  
SILENT WOMEN, AND ABSENT FATHERS IN THE KALEVALA

by

Carolyn S. Brugman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the English

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Jonathan Wilcox  
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2016

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
English have been completed.

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Marie Kruger  
Honors Major Advisor

# THE PROBLEMATIC EPIC OF FINLAND: AN EXPLORATION OF TRICKY HEROES, SILENT WOMEN, AND ABSENT FATHERS IN THE KALEVALA

by

Carolyn S. Brugman  
Spring 2016

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This thesis explores the complex and arguably under-examined written oral narrative, Elias Lönnrot's the *Kalevala*. It is the national epic of Finland, a compiled work of both medieval oral and 19<sup>th</sup>-century written tradition. This thesis examines how the *Kalevala* works as a national epic and what makes it so distinct, including exploration of the problematic hero, the role of women, and familial norms within the text.

The *Kalevala*, as it survives, is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century written work based on the traditional folk songs of Finland and surrounding Karelian areas. Furthermore, through examining issues of oral transmission in relation to the text, I argue how Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup>-century motivation to shape this piece as his nation's epic influences the way modern readers interpret the challenging themes the *Kalevala* encompasses.

Primarily, I discuss the *Kalevala*'s themes of heroism by criticizing the actions and motivation of the epic's primary hero, Väinämöinen. Following this, I explore possible gender and familial norms within the society of the *Kalevala*, predominantly those present in the *Kullervo* cycle. Sexuality and expectations are complex and recurring themes throughout the story, as the problematic hero, the lack of women's voice, and the absence of fathers plays a crucial role in how sexuality works within the text. Finally, I discuss the importance of the *Kalevala* in modern Finnish society, regardless of Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup>-century inspiration. I hope to show readers the distinctive contributions this piece brings to the discussion of medieval oral literature while simultaneously showing the significance of the *Kalevala* in the Finnish imagination today.

The Problematic Epic of Finland: An Exploration of Tricky Heroes, Silent Women, and Absent  
Fathers in the *Kalevala*

**I: Introduction & the Origin of the *Kalevala***

Finland— it is a nation of pristine forestry, amazing beauty, linguistic complexity, and rich in literary, visual, and musical artistic creation. One of the hidden gems of Scandinavia, Finland came into existence from a history of struggle to gain independence and find an individual, clearly recognizable global voice. This nation of just over 5 million people encompasses a distinct culture, one that is often overshadowed by the neighboring nations of Russia and Sweden. Art, literature, and music have been highlights of Finnish culture for decades, yet it was not too long ago that the Suomi language nearly met an end and many of the works readers in the present access faced being lost forever. 19<sup>th</sup> century Finns faced pressures from both the west and the east, Finland found itself nearly losing its native tongue to the pressures of bordering nations. As a part of the Swedish Empire for centuries, and subsequently, falling under the Russian Empire's control in 1819 (Jutikkala and Pirinen), Finland's struggle for independence had been a perilous and ongoing one. Following the fall of the Russian Empire at the end of World War I, Finland once again found itself on the brink of being a broken state, yet the desire to create an independent nation state, an identity uniquely her own, was growing.

Finally, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917 the nation accomplished just this. However, to be a nation state, Finland would need to become “an independent political unit whose people share a common language and believe they have a common cultural heritage” (Vento 82). This definition is predominantly a 19<sup>th</sup>-century construction, derived from an intense desire for unity and a sense of individuality following the newly gained independence of various nations. Hence, the decline

of the Swedish and Russian Empires left Finland in an unstable position, yet one with many opportunities to establish an identity of her own. Therefore, this thesis explores the creation of Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*—Finland's proclaimed national epic, and arguably, her most identifiable piece of cultural identity.

Aiming to encourage conversation and contribute to the overall discussion of written oral literature, I delve into the mythological world of the *Kalevala*, a world that compiler Elias Lönnrot creates through complicated themes, rich characters, and a multitude of intentions. The unique collective process the Finnish scholar took in crafting this epic largely shapes its multiple layers, and furthermore, it is Lönnrot's voice that largely shapes this piece as nationalistic. However, the complicated themes, abstract story lines, and inconsistent characterization suggests that although his 19<sup>th</sup>-century voice does come through strongly, he also attempts to preserve the original stories of an ancient Karelia, and perhaps more importantly, his work helped preserve the nation's mother tongue.

As aforementioned, the *Kalevala*, as it survives, is a 19<sup>th</sup>-century written work based on the traditional folk songs of Finland and her surrounding Karelian areas. The messages of the runos (songs) contained within the *Kalevala* detail an archaic, largely mythological society, and in particular, these runos reveal gender norms and familial structures (among other themes) shaping those living in the stories. This mythological, riveting piece of literature serves the task of both preserving Finland's native tongue and archaic folk-poetry traditions, while simultaneously crafting a distinct cultural identity that continues to manifest in the modern Finnish imagination. The *Kalevala* presents a problematic hero, challenging ideas on sexuality, explication of familial life, and describes some of the societal expectations within the narrative. These very qualities are what make this work, and others deriving from a similar tradition, so

fascinating and bizarrely intriguing when examined in the modern world of literary studies. The distinct story telling techniques and themes it encompasses make it arguably one of the world's most unique yet overlooked epics.

The driving forces behind this thesis are the many artistic re-creations of the *Kalevala* that exist in modern Finland, many of which I was fortunate to witness this past summer. Strangely enough, my introduction to Finnish literature is rather unorthodox and came quite earlier than my visit to Helsinki. The *Kalevala*, as aforementioned, comes from a folk-music tradition, and though my introduction to these stories is from music as well, it is from a genre far different from the original runos—heavy metal music. An avid Finnish symphonic metal listener for years, I got the opportunity to experience the homeland of my musical heroes, while also learning more about the mythological heroes of the *Kalevala*. The unique ways in which the epic manifests in modern Finnish metal in particular was my initial gateway into the magical world of this story. Therefore, after visiting Helsinki and the neighboring city Alajärvi, I further witnessed how the *Kalevala* is actively present in Finland today. The Finnish landscape, for starters, evidently graces the pages of the *Kalevala*, with rich forestry, breathtaking views of the sea, and quaint, small lake-side dwellings. More specifically, the *Kalevala* manifests in the form of street names, artistic works in museums, cuisine, and so on.

It is apparent then that Finland's epic is actively loved by both casual and academic Finnish audiences, and much scholarship has been written on the story throughout the Scandinavian nations and even into central Europe. Yet surprisingly, this epic has not reached the level of critical study and engagement as other epics have received in the United States. I highlight some of the qualities that make this epic so captivating yet challenging. In exploring

the distinct elements within the *Kalevala*, one can see why this text is crucial to the study of written oral literature, given its unique creation and active relevance in Finnish culture today.

The complex nature of this epic is multifold, and therefore, an in-depth exploration of many of its most shocking qualities is called for. For starters, the characterization of the problematic and sexually deviant hero, Väinämöinen, dominates the text. Additionally, the lack of women's voice is pivotal to the story's meaning, since this may be evidence of Elias Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup>-century desire to shape the piece as nationalistic in a male-dominated society. By highlighting the hero's desirable qualities and not emphasizing the unfavorable ones, readers begin to see how Väinämöinen is shown in a more positive light, framed as encompassing traditional heroic qualities of valor, strength, and wisdom. Later in the epic, moral undertones and themes concerning Kullervo and the absence of fathers further demonstrate the influence of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century voice. The Kullervo cycle provides arguments as to what happens to children who are "brought up crookedly" and the stories of the teaching of the Bride and the Bridegroom contain strong 19<sup>th</sup>-century moral undertones of marriage expectations, such as gender roles and spousal treatment.

These themes are crucial to examine when delving into Lönnrot's work, as his compilation process occurred during a century of great economic and social changes within Finland. In examining these themes, it is easy to see how his nationalistic voice reshapes the poem. Väinämöinen becomes a symbol of both the oral and written past, as his mythological counterparts blend with his reshaping as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century hero; he is stoic, intelligent, and unashamedly proud of his position of authority. Women, on the other hand, are given little agency, even though some of the poetry suggests that characters such as Louhi and Aino are central figures of the mythology, yet the nationalistic inclination silences them. Perhaps the most



troublesome theme to examine is the 19<sup>th</sup>-century explication of familial norms, especially in regard to Kullervo, by far the most tragic of heroes in the *Kalevala*. The horrors of war, poor child-rearing, and absent fathers become key indicators of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century hand reshaping the narrative.

As aforementioned, the extent to which this work has been examined is somewhat limited and its unique collective process plays a role in this. The *Kalevala* is as much a unified work as it is a collection of individual songs. It is equally of oral and written tradition and hence, the task of categorizing this piece presents problems in interpretation, as well as creates a sense of frustration as to how one should study it. Though this thesis does not aim to undermine the significance of this text due to Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup>-century influenced voice, it is important to keep in mind his possible influences and motivations, given that the primary text it is created from contains many differences and there exists little written record of the mythology. However, when interpreting the *Kalevala*, it is equally important to remember that his voice does not undermine the significance of the original poetry, nor was it his intention to do so. After all, it was his goal to preserve traditional Finnish language and maintain a unified cultural identity by restoring these archaic runos in a more widely circulated collection.

Therefore, the *Kalevala* as a complete epic is considered to be a fairly recent collected oral narrative, when compared to other oral stories, such as *Beowulf*, and the Irish epic, the *Táin*. However, the folk songs which Elias Lönnrot collected date back to medieval times, and in addition to this, the Nordic mythology from which these Finnish folk songs originate dates back to a pre-Christianized, largely pagan Karelia. One must examine then the roots of the *Kalevala* in order to understand why this piece is classified as a work of oral tradition.

The collective process of compiling this work is important to investigate when confronting the issue of oral transmission. The *Kalevala* was, initially, oral pieces, folksongs, that were recollected and transformed into the written epic of Finland that readers access in the present. In this thesis, I specifically examine the completed 1849 version of Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*, predominantly referencing the 1988 Eino Friberg translation. The *Kalevala* as a unified work of epic poetry was collected through the fieldwork of Elias Lönnrot. Prior to Lönnrot's fieldwork, the movement and desire to gain a substantial collection of traditional Finnish poetry was growing, as earlier scholars began exploring the possibility of compiling a substantial body of authentic Karelian poetry. The central argument was that the "Finnish language was suitable for literary expression", and with pressure surfacing from bordering nations to assimilate to their neighbors' languages was confirmation that Finland deserved her piece of literary brilliance (Ilomäki).

Continuing the task of compiling the traditional folk songs of Finland and surrounding Karelian areas (parts of modern day Russia and Estonia), Elias Lönnrot began assembling what we now consider the complete, collected *Kalevala*. Lönnrot, a professor of Suomi (Finnish) language and literature, withdrew from his academic activity to devote his time exclusively to the study of his native language. He traveled much of Finland, from Sava and Karjala, as well as much of Estonia and parts of Russia to collect parts of the folk songs the peasant and lower class, as well various minstrels, could recite to him (Ilomäki). Hence, the *Kalevala* came into being as a unique combination of archaic, oral, musical tradition in union with Lönnrot's modern, academic writing. Though the epic poem itself was not written until 19<sup>th</sup> century, its roots are in the Finnish folk song tradition.

The *Kalevala*'s themes of heroism, gender norms, familial norms, and sexuality are present across the entirety of the text, and their presence conveys many complicated, often explicit and extreme criticisms of daily life. It is curious then that this piece is still reverently a part of mainstream modern Finnish culture and recognized as her epic and in the final section of this thesis, I will explore some of the reasons why certain media (such as art and music) lend themselves so well to interpreting the *Kalevala*. Therefore, in unpacking some of the central characters, themes, points of conflict, and marvelous adventures (and misadventures), modern readers can see why this piece is uniquely fascinating and why it deserves a place in academic discussion.

## **II: The Problematic Hero of the Kalevala**

The hero of the *Kalevala*, Väinämöinen, is a character whose intentions, code of ethics, and role in the story are somewhat problematic. Since he is repeatedly called “Old reliable Väinämöinen,” a reader in the modern age might come to the initial impression that our “hero” is going to embody wisdom, valor, and classic traits of the mythological hero. “Old and steady”, Väinämöinen most certainly has reverence and a form of authority over all the land, but not in the gallant, traditional sense one might typically associate with a mythological hero. He is not militant or from nobility; rather, he is the “singer eternal”, the first man of the human world.

The primary reason Väinämöinen gains legitimacy as the predominant hero in the *Kalevala* derives from the sole fact that he is the first human being. For he, “All alone, the poet immortal, / from his mother Ilmatar” breaks free from her womb after seven hundred years of being impregnated with him (Lönnrot 43). She gives birth to him after the opening runo details the mythological Finnish creation story of the world. Since he is the singer eternal and apparently born an adult man, he travels the land that is essentially his to venture through and shares his

great wisdom through his songs. He holds supremacy over the other characters who are later introduced by his right of being the first man, as well as being the son of Ilmatar, the virgin goddess who was impregnated by the sea and reigns as the female spirit of the air. The “hero by default,” so to speak, raises questions as to what the mythological hero is allowed to do and whether or not Väinämöinen is truly a just one.

Within the first ten runos, much of Väinämöinen’s characterization unfolds, as readers witness his actions as the first man of the human world. He leaves the sea in which he was born and begins to step upon the land for the first time. Instantly, traits of the hero’s vulnerability arise, as “Head on hand he pondered thus: / ‘Who is there to plant this land, / Sow the seeds and sow them thickly?’” (Lönrot 43). We learn later that it is Little Samps Pellervoinen, a dwarf boy the size of a thumb (though he has great, perhaps occult knowledge of the earth) that is to do the planting. He drastically contrasts the rather large, fully grown, all-knowing Väinämöinen. Väinämöinen belittles Samps stating,

“What sort of man are you, who  
Among the heroes would be rated/  
Little better than a dead man,  
Nor more handsome than a carcass?”  
(Lönrot 49).

This passage presents two problems worth examining: the inconsistency of the narrator’s storytelling and Väinämöinen’s characterization.

Some tensions arise in these opening sequences, as it becomes clear that the source material of the folk songs is being reshaped, as any oral text being written down undergoes. One might argue that this tension comes in the form of inconsistency in the narrator’s telling of the story. Väinämöinen is the first being to step foot on the human world and instantly calls upon his mother for intervention, who sends a gnome-like boy to assist in the creation of forests and development of nature on the land. The gnome-like boy is called to plant the forests, a feat one

would assume a hero or god would have already accomplished. Furthermore, the manner in which Väinämöinen belittles Sampsa him shows signs of bigotry and malice, perhaps because he is unable to perform the task of planting himself. However, since the boy later transforms from the size of a thumb to that of a giant (a common characteristic in folktales) we see Väinämöinen's error.

Hence, the hero's legitimacy can be questioned; he mistakenly underestimated the boy's supernatural ability. Since the narrator already characterized Väinämöinen as all knowing, readers now face the trouble of understanding just how extensive his knowledge is. Furthermore, rather than striking down an enormous oak tree himself to begin his wider travels and song sharing, he is reliant upon the dwarf, who becomes a physically large presence after Väinämöinen again insults and belittles him. Little animosity must exist between the two, however, for the little man jumps into the vessel and, surprisingly, embarks on the first boat travel with Väinämöinen.

This is one example of the narrator's inconsistent characterization of our hero, as throughout the text many contradictions and confusion of plot lines occur. But perhaps more significantly, it highlights not the flaws of Lönnrot's writing, but the inevitable shaping of external factors. Since Lönnrot's compiled these folk songs during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, a time of great change in Finland, it is worth examining how true these mythological characters hold to their mythological folk counterparts. It would be nearly impossible to determine just how much is changed, but it is important to consider Lönnrot's possible influences, motivations, and creative input. This quality of narration is not uncommon when exploring written folk narratives, yet readers in the present find it difficult to adhere to this more archaic style of unfolding the story, as it clashes with some of the more modern themes the narrator explores. Perhaps then, we

as readers should examine the actions of Väinämöinen to determine if he is truly heroic.

Observing his character in relation to other central figures in the text provides evidence both supporting and defeating the claim that Väinämöinen is heroic.

Moreover, there are explicit examples of Väinämöinen giving in to his lust and selfish desires that further hint he is not an all good, all just hero. One could argue that Väinämöinen is not playing the traditional role of a hero in myth, but rather, is exemplification of human nature, of our tendency to act on desires of the flesh. However, he is the product of nature intertwining with deity (his virgin mother, Ilmatar the wind goddess, is impregnated by the sea) and lacks any biological linkage to mankind; he has no father figure and this theme carries throughout the entirety of the *Kalevala*. The ambiguous nature of his origin parallels those typically found in Christian texts, and this may be one example of how 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Christianized motivation affects the original, predominantly pagan characters. Hence, it is difficult to understand why Väinämöinen would instinctively encompass very human, almost petty traits for a hero. However unclear the origin may be, his actions and treatment of other characters exemplify these tendencies, portraying him as both worthy of reverence and discord.

Following setting sail with the dwarf on the large vessel, Väinämöinen continues his journey. Runo 3 opens with the narrator stating,

“Old reliable Väinämöinen  
Lived his days in lyric leisure  
In the glades of Väinölä,  
On the heaths of Kalevala,  
Singing songs and learning wisdom”

“Songs that children cannot copy  
Nor even wise men understand  
In these dreadful days of evil,  
In this last and fleeting age”  
(Lönnrot 54).

Hence, he is once again set up as an all knowing, wise man, yet his encounter with the *Kalevala*'s next protagonist ensues. Joukahainen is characterized as extremely envious of Väinämöinen's talent as a singer, wishing he had the same wisdom and musical talent. Characterized as loving towards his parents yet reckless of their warning to not contend with Väinämöinen, Joukahainen leaves to rival him, introducing themes concerning parentage and familial social norms.

This scene contains the near-perfect formulation of a battle between a hero and his protagonist. Väinämöinen warns Joukahainen to leave (since he is so young). He refuses and insults Väinämöinen's intelligence and talent, and they partake in a battle of wits. Väinämöinen wins. Hence, Joukahainen does the only thing he finds sensible and challenges our hero to a sword fight, but Väinämöinen refuses and instead chooses to sing.

"This roused Väinämöinen's wrath.  
 Stirred to anger and to shame,  
 He himself began to sing,  
 Conjuring with words of power.  
 They are not the songs of children,"  
 (Lönnrot 57).

Furthermore, "Then he sang young Joukahainen,/ Sang him loin-deep in a swamp," and continues to do so as Joukahainen continues lying, and Väinämöinen does not stop sinking him until he begs for mercy; he offers his beautiful, young, and virtuous sister, Aino, as a barter. Up until this point, it is easy for the reader to decide who the righteous character is and who the faulty one is; Väinämöinen is idealistic, manly, and heroic, whereas Joukahainen is unworthy and boy-like. However, the narrator's inconsistent recounting and characterization of Väinämöinen following his encounter with the innocent Aino creates much speculation concerning his validity as a hero. It is through this section of the *Kalevala* that the theme of

mankind's lustful nature and criticisms concerning upbringing and familial ties is introduced. This is later exemplified more accurately in Runo 35.

Väinämöinen's first encounter with Aino is one that is both disturbing and confusing for readers. In the previous runo, Väinämöinen was characterized as valiant, wise, god-like, and strong until the promise of receiving Aino is introduced. His attitude greatly changes as states:

“Hearing this, old Väinämöinen,  
Was delighted beyond measure:  
Winning Joukahainen's sister  
For his old age—sweet provision!  
Down he sat upon the joystone,  
On the singer's rock he settled;  
Sang an hour, sang another,  
Through the third hour singing also:  
Sang his magic backward now  
And reversed his incantations”  
(Lönnrot 59).

It is immediately following the introduction of a woman into the *Kalevala* that the element of lust begins to affect our hero and he becomes misguided. The next runo characterizes him in a rather controlling, intrusive, and lustful fashion. About Aino, the narrator describes a horrific scene of an older man advancing upon a young girl.

“Just as she was starting homeward  
Stepping lightly through the alders;  
Väinämöinen came upon her,  
Saw the maiden in the grove”

“Said a word and spoke out thus:  
'Not for anyone else, young maiden,  
Not for anyone else but me,  
Young maiden, wear that beaded necklace  
Or the crosslet on your bosom,  
Put your hair up in long braids  
Tie them round with silken ribbons”  
(Lönnrot 62).



This request terrifies little Aino, and she runs away, home to her father and mother, who try to convince her this is best for her. However, terrified, her lament is both revealing and disturbing, as it not only highlights the severity of the situation but also foreshadows other sexual complications that occur in the *Kalevala*, particularly Runo 35, entitled “Incest.” Aino’s laments and responses to being promised to Väinämöinen are as follows:

“This I, wretched virgin, weep for  
 And will grieve for all my days:  
 That you gave me, wretched maiden,  
 That you promised your own child  
 To become an old man’s comfort,  
 As a pleasure for the old one  
 And a refuge to a trembler,”

“As she went she sang her sorrow,  
 Sang her grieving in her going:  
 ‘In my heart the hurt is heavy,  
 In my mind the thought is moaning,  
 But the hurt could not be heavier  
 Nor the moaning more despairing  
 If I, miserable girl, should die”  
 (Lönnrot 65).

She commits suicide after crying by the sea. Then the narrator continues onward to describe “the mother started weeping,” and her reaction to her daughter’s horrific passing.

“Never again, you poor mothers,  
 Never try to trick your daughters  
 With your lullabies and rockings  
 To accept your choice of husband,  
 Wed a man against her will”  
 (Lönnrot 68).

Hence, we are given an explanation as to why the cuckoo bird cries, for they cry out to the mother after Aino dies, signaling another attribute to common characteristic of folk narratives—the explanation of a natural phenomenon. This is one of the more disturbing sequences of the *Kalevala*, and it is questionable as to who is at fault for Aino’s suicide—our hero or the protagonist. It was Väinämöinen’s lust, after all, that terrified Aino so one could

make the argument that he is not heroic; he abused his power and his lustful actions caused the destruction of a character who is depicted as pure and innocent.

Jealousy and its harrowing consequences presents itself, and this sequence may be a critique of jealousy and its effects. It is evident that our hero is not meeting the standards to which readers nowadays would hold a hero accountable, but perhaps one must consider the context, expectations, and the roles men and women fulfilled during this time. The only criticism that is concrete within the text following this episode is the criticism of family and upbringing. The mother blames herself and draws attention to a moral in this story, the consequence of choosing a child's suitor for her. This criticism of familial life and upbringing remains present in the *Kalevala*, and is worth exploring when trying to understand the story telling techniques and motivation to keep the piece moving.

### **III: Sexuality and Lust in the Kalevala: Exploring Familial and Gender Norms in the Text**

As aforementioned, the *Kalevala* seems to present a unique criticism of familial life, particularly when exploring themes of marriage, gender roles, sex, and the raising of children. Man's innate lustful nature is a recurring theme, and the previous discussion of the hero Väinämöinen's actions supports the notion, and therefore he is not judged within the poem and must act upon these desires of the flesh. Furthermore, the suicide of little Aino might further imply that the society in which women live is an unstable, unsafe one where men prey on the innocence of young girls. Intriguingly, the true origin of man's misconduct and lustful actions is somewhat explained in the Kullervo cycle of the *Kalevala* (runos 31-36). Explicit criticism of the upbringing of children presents itself as the root of the degradation of women, sexual deviance, and ultimately suicide within the story's society. But, before one can explore the complex

criticisms that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Finnish voice (or perhaps even the medieval Finnish people) may be suggesting in the Kullervo runos towards child rearing and sexual deviance, one must first look into the gender roles and norms concerning marriage.

There are multiple references and accounts of marriage within the *Kalevala*, but perhaps the most noteworthy is the marriage between the hero Ilmarinen, who (unlike Väinämöinen) successfully woos and marries the ever-desired Maiden of Pohjola. After completing a variety of challenging tasks in order to win the hand of the Maiden (a recurring trope in folk tales), runos 22 through 24 detail the expectations of the bride, as well as the expectations of the bridegroom. These sequences provide much insight into the gender specific roles concerning marriage, and it is interesting that the woman receives not only instruction, but must also undergo mockery prior to marrying Ilmarinen. Her forthcoming role as a wife is described across two runos, entitled “The Teasing of the Bride” and “The Teaching of the Bride”.

Ilmarinen, however, does not undergo the cruel teasing the Maiden must endure, suggesting the “teasing of one to wed” was a custom only applicable to women during this time. It is also worth noting that the perpetrator doing the teasing is the Maiden’s own mother (who is assumed to be the one who instructs her in the subsequent runo). Perhaps this is one of the roles a woman must fulfill as the mother of a bride. She tells her daughter,

“Maybe not til now, young lady,  
Have you weighed the good and bad sides,  
Never even understood  
If you made a sorry bargain”  
(Lönnrot 185).

The maiden then begins to feel that marriage will be entrapment, and yet another central theme of the *Kalevala* arises when the Maiden declares that a young lady must:

“Never give your heart to a suitor,  
Never for his eyes or looks,  
Nor the sweetness of his mouth”

“He smiles at you with melting mouth,  
 Ogles you with innocent eyes,  
 Though the devil’s on his jawbone,  
 Doom be dwelling in his mouth”  
 (Lönnrot 187).

The negative attitude the Maiden develops towards marriage following her mother’s teasing may imply that the structure of marriage was often an incomplete, unhappy one, and although the daughter chooses her husband (it is not an arranged marriage) and the man is characterized with positive heroic traits, perhaps this is a criticism of man’s nature and gender specific roles in a marriage.

In the following runo entitled “The Teaching of the Bride,” the teacher gives specific advice towards ensuring a lively, happy marriage and an easy, respectful relationship with in-laws. The teacher continues on to reveal her own experience with marriage, which proved to be an abusive one. Like the young bride to be, the older woman states, “So the instinct of a maiden/  
 Draws a maiden to a man...[to] Clearings empty of all mercy,/ Woodlots empty of affection” (Lönnrot 199). Not only, then, does she transform from a youthful, joyous, free maiden to a woman imprisoned by duty and abuse, but this teacher also faces complete isolation and out-casting from her family and society when she breaks free from her husband. She describes how this man would “Beat me with a furious hand, / Many a blow with willow switches” (Lönnrot 201). Hence,

“There are many people now,  
 Very many of them now,  
 Who speak to me with angry voices,  
 Snap at me in irritation;  
 Very few address me kindly,”

“I could never have believed,  
 Never in my younger years,  
 Even though a hundred told me  
 Or a thousand tongues repeated  
 That I’d descend to these conditions,

That I'd ever see such days  
 As the days I suffer now—  
 What a lot has fallen to my hand!"  
 (Lönnrot 202)

This critique of marriage raises questions as to why these men are allowed to be so destructive towards women, what was deemed socially acceptable for men to do to their wives, and what the proper etiquette towards females is in the *Kalevala*. After all, the lustful nature of Väinämöinen does not dissuade others from viewing him as heroic, and additionally, this woman is completely shunned for escaping an abusive marriage; man's deviant and impulsive behavior is rarely shown as a societal issue in need of correction in the story. Hence, one could conclude that a woman's role in marriage was to be a dutiful servant, with no opportunity to voice concern or be taken seriously when mistreatment by men so frequently occurred. The society of the *Kalevala* may present a male dominated, forceful marriage culture in which women had no choice but to remain submissive.

By contrast, the instruction of the bridegroom Ilmarinen provides examples of very specific gender roles and expectations men are supposed to meet as husbands, and his husbandly duties are explicitly outlined as to keep him from being the kind of abusive, lust-driven man that his bride's teacher married. Rather, Ilmarinen proves to be a just husband who follows the given specific teachings regarding punishment, affection, and the relationship with in-laws.

Ilmarinen's actions characterize him fulfilling and considerate husband, and modern readers can identify Ilmarinen as accurately fulfilling the role of a just man too. Runo 24 centers around the pre-marital advising of Ilmarinen, who is presumably taught by a different teacher than the bride, for the narrator himself states he will advise the bridegroom. In one passage, the narrator tells this hero how fortunate he is to have such a pure, radiant, graceful, and hardworking bride. He is advised to always speak highly of this woman, to care for her in the

same caring and loving manner she received when under the protection of both her own mother and father. The narrator instructs Ilmarinen to “not leave her in some corner/ Moping idly by herself” for she was never made to feel loneliness or sorrow in the home of her father. Moreover, Ilmarinen is instructed,

“See you do not, you poor bridegroom,  
Ever treat this  
maiden badly;”

“Let no stranger treat her meanly  
Nor a neighbor dare abuse her.  
If the family says to whip her,  
Others want her to be punished,  
You can’t dare to whip your sweetheart  
Nor to punish your beloved  
The long-desired one whom you won  
After three long years of waiting,  
Such a long time in your courting”  
(Lönnrot 205).

In comparison to the previous treatment of women and the acceptable behavior of males previously indicated, readers find that this hero is not only expected to treat his bride with respect and dignity, but he is explicitly advised to never abuse her and to never let anyone else belittle his maiden either—Ilmarinen now plays the role of protector in marriage. It is part of his gender role as a man and a marital expectation of him as the husband to provide for his wife. Prior to the introduction of Ilmarinen, men in the *Kalevala* are shown as dominating, aggressive, and even perpetrators of violence towards women. The rights of women and their voice seem somewhat limited in the story, yet this is an example proving that a good husband in this society does not abuse his stance of dominance over his wife.

Following this discussion of gender roles and expectations in marriage, one cannot help but wonder who is to blame for this societal issue, and the *Kalevala* makes the source of this

problem blatantly clear in the runos of the Kullervo cycle. In exploring the possible causes of man's extremely lustful nature, readers better understand the significance of lust in this epic. The story seems to identify a very particular cause for this character flaw that shapes many of the men's actions around women—the absence of a father figure. One could even make the inference that since Väinämöinen has no father figure, perhaps this could be a source of his sexual deviance and misguidance towards young Aino. This is a bold claim, yet the narrator does provide further examples and explicitly attributes deviance to a flawed quality of parenting, precisely taking the form of parental absence. The narrator may be trying to critique a dark, challenging societal issue of spousal mistreatment and abuse within the story, and perhaps attempting to criticize a problem outside of the world of the *Kalevala* as well.

The most disturbing sequence of storytelling occurs within some of the final runos of the *Kalevala*. Troubling and unsettling to readers, the Kullervo cycle presents two issues existing within the society of the *Kalevala*: the absence of parental figures and incest. The *Kalevala* is arguably trying to convey a warning through defining potential causes of sexual misconduct. The concept of being “nurtured badly” is explained through Kullervo's story, and the horrific results of failed parenting convey a theme that is both disturbing and largely debatable.

Beginning in Runo 31, readers are introduced to Kullervo, a character who, prior to this section, has made no appearance in the story yet becomes the sole tragic hero within the entire epic. His characterization is quite complex, and his actions and upbringing raise the conversation concerning the *Kalevala*'s critique of poor parenting. Runo 31 opens by introducing Kullervo and his woeful emergence into the world. Being born in a war-ridden Karelia, poor Kullervo endures much abuse at a young age after his enemy and uncle, Untamoinen, takes Kullervo as a prisoner of war to be raised by a “lone pregnant housemaid” who is further described as a

“lonely luckless mother”, lacking adequate parenting skills (Lönnrot 31). Several explicit claims concerning his parentage are presented in the passage, and these prove to be quite detrimental to Kullervo’s mental development; he endures neglect, abuse, and Untamoinen’s army wishes to bring about his death. Many examples of what is considered to be poor parenting within this society are highlighted. For example,

“Then the orphan boy they swaddled,  
And they laid him in a cradle,  
In a cradle to be rocked,  
Swinging cradle to be swung”

“So they swung him and they rocked him,  
Rocked him till his hair was flying...  
But already of the third day  
The young brattling started kicking,  
Kicking, thrashing, flailing round him—“  
(Lönnrot 258).

The neglectful care here seems to be inappropriately severe roughness constituting physical abuse. In addition to the neglectful nurturing as an infant, Untamoinen begins to believe his rival brother Kalervo has been reborn as Kullervo after he states, “I’ll avenge my father’s beatings, / and repay my mother’s weepings” that Kalervo inflicted upon Kullervo’s biological parents. Therefore, Untamoinen’s people begin to horribly abuse Kullervo. Some examples of the abuse being as follows:

“So they put him in a keg,  
Shoved him down into a barrel;  
Then they lowered it to the water,  
Lowered it down upon a billow”  
“Was he dead inside the keg?  
No, he had not drowned at all,  
Had not died inside the barrel”

“So they gathered in one pile  
Birches, hardwood, pitchy pines”

“Then they set it all on fire,  
The whole pyre of wood ablaze



And they flung the boy upon it..."

"Still upon the third day burning;  
When they went to see what happened,  
The boy was knee-deep in ashes"

"So they hanged him from an oak branch,  
String him up beneath an oak tree"  
(Lönnrot 259-260)

Despite the horrific abuse, the boy does not die and therefore the only plausible solution Untamoinen believes is to make use of the "bratling" and put him to work. Unfortunately, the abuse Kullervo endured affects his ability to work as a caregiver, and while watching another woman's infant, he "Broke its hand and gouged an eye out" of the baby (Lönnrot 260). Hence, this may be a criticism of child-rearing, for the cycle of neglect and abuse continues from Kullervo to this innocent baby because he is not aware of how to properly treat children. He proves to be mentally and physically stunted, so to rid themselves of the burdensome Kullervo, Untamoinen loses his temper and sells Kullervo as a slave (ironically) to Ilmarinen, the Bridegroom from previous runos. Here begins a complex relationship between this ideal husband, hero character, his wife the Maiden, and Kullervo. Many complications unfold that suggest child abuse can never be reversed, as this mistreatment has forever distorted Kullervo's thinking.

Questions concerning marital life begin to resurface in the *Kalevala*, as Ilmarinen's wife is now characterized as a "vicious woman" and "sneer-mouthed" (Lönnrot 32). Though she may be treating Kullervo in such a manner since he is a slave and was bought with their money, it is doubtful that her sweet, caring, compassionate traits would completely diminish, especially due to the fact that Kullervo is significantly younger. One may wonder then if her marriage proved to become an abusive, miserable one, as she was warned it might become. Though Ilmarinen still loves his wife, her character has drastically changed from the beginning of the *Kalevala* to this

point. Her malicious characterization becomes apparent, especially when she bakes a rock in Kullervo's bread, making him break his knife, which in turn leads him to kill her out of revenge. Ilmarinen mourns this horrific loss of his beloved and never successfully remarries. Being a mystical craftsman and smith, he does attempt to make a new bride of gold and silver, but fails. Perhaps then Ilmarinen does not miss his wife as an individual, but more so only misses companionship since he so quickly tries to forge a new wife. This leaves readers with an uncertain impression as to what marriage truly means to the people within this society, and whether the marriage of Ilmarinen and his wife was a successful one.

But perhaps more important to return to is the harrowing moral the *Kalevala* presents when Kullervo commits an act most heinous—he sleeps with his sister. After fleeing from the scene of murder, Kullervo actually finds his family whom he up until this point assumed were all dead. In one of his many lamentations in the forest, he expresses his deep self-loathing, stating how he is a

“child unnatural  
so utterly unloved—  
Fatherless beneath the heavens,  
Least of all one motherless—”  
(Lönnrot 275).

The implication that he is disturbed because he was not raised by a caring mother and father presents the argument that abused children do not develop and become functioning people in society. In fact, one could argue that the *Kalevala* suggests that abused children destroy society, for Kullervo acts lustily but without thinking, accidentally partaking in an immoral sexual act in Runo 35 entitled “Incest.”

“Kullervo, son of Kalervo,  
Old man's son in blue stockings,  
Was now living there at home  
Under the guidance of his parents,  
But his mind was not mature,

Could not get the knack of things  
 Since he had been nurtured badly,  
     Cradled wrongly as a child  
     By the wicked foster-parent,  
 By that crooked-minded cradler”

Subsequently following this, he pursues a young woman in the woods, who initially rejects his  
 “talk of lewdness” until she is tempted by the lure of materialism. For,

“Soon the treasures [Kullervo presents to her] took her fancy  
 And her temper quickly sweetened  
     She was smitten by the silver,  
 And the gold—it whispered to her”

“Holding one hand on the reigns,  
 The other playing with her nipples.  
 Then he played and sported with her  
     Till at length he overcame her”  
 (Lönnrot 280)

However, this lustful act proves most immoral, for shortly thereafter Kullervo learns that  
 they are of the same lineage—he has committed incest with his little sister. She then takes her  
 own life by drowning herself in the river. Kullervo repents his act to his mother, and soon after  
 goes to war. Nobody in his family forgives him for this heinous act except for his mother before  
 he leaves for battle. When he returns from war and discovers family is dead, Kullervo,

“Started out to climb the trail  
 Rising to the backwoods country.  
     Where he came upon that place,  
     Happened on that very spot  
 Where he ruined that young maiden  
 And despoiled his mother’s child”

“On that awful, evil spot  
 Drew his sword, looked at it,  
     Placed the hilt upon the ground,  
     Turned the point against his breast  
 And threw himself upon the point—  
     There fulfilled his destiny,  
 Chose dark death and met his doom”

(Lönnrot 286-287).

One could conclude then that the moral of this tale, or the central societal critique, is that misguided children, particularly sons without fathers, participate in such destructive acts of the flesh. Furthermore, there is a stark contrast between Kullervo's loving mother, who misses him and is the only family member who cares, and the daughter who partook in the sexual deviance immediately following the introduction of gold and material desire. There are certainly hints towards a criticism of materialism in this text, and this may be another instance of 19<sup>th</sup>-century moralistic tone coming through.

Though there is ample evidence that it is the absence of a father that caused such failure in Kullervo, our hero Väinämöinen concludes what he, the "all knowing singer eternal", believes caused such atrocity, for he warns:

"Do not you, O future people,  
 Bring up children crookedly  
 In the care of stupid cradlers  
 With a stranger as a rocker.  
 Children brought up crookedly,  
 Any infant cradled wrongly,  
 Never learns the way of things,  
 Never acquires a mind mature  
 However old he grows to be  
 Or however strong in body"  
 (Lönnrot 286-287).

Therefore, one can conclude that the causes of sexual deviance are multifold, and it is somewhat ironic that Väinämöinen, who is arguably quite deviant and lustful himself, would declare "crooked" upbringing and being held wrongly as the cause of this. One could counter argue that Väinämöinen himself therefore must be the result of crooked parenting, though not caused by being "cradled wrongly"—he is missing a father figure, like Kullervo.

In this conclusive warning towards parenting in the *Kalevala*, Väinämöinen introduces an important presence to readers—the voice of the "future people." So far, this thesis has only

discussed the significance of the many themes in this text as relevant to the time in which it takes place. Moreover, though perhaps it is uncertain how much of the text is faithful to the medieval folk songs and how much of Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup> century voice and criticism that is present, the unique inclusion of both archaic mythology and the more modern voice present in this epic that shapes it as a distinct work amongst oral literature studies. The tension between this being a piece of an archaic tradition and its very alive presence in modern day Finland makes it both challenging and fascinating to study.

This raises the very question then as to why the Finnish people would desire to claim the *Kalevala* as their epic, as the mouthpiece for what makes them uniquely Finnish. Most modern readers of the *Kalevala* interpret the subjected role of women and the sexual norms of this society, and frankly, much of the epic's material could be seen as disturbing, with such dark themes and moral warnings. One must ponder then why it works as Finland's epic, a major voice of the nation. Since this piece is twofold in regard to the tradition it falls into (both relatively modern and medieval), one can only assume that the nature of this text therefore proves to be quite twofold as well. That is, though it does contain explicit references to traditional Finnish myth and messages of heroism are conveyed, harkening back to the folksongs, the nature of this work has also been heavily shaped by Lönnrot's 19<sup>th</sup> century desire to perhaps moralize about the immoral society within the *Kalevala*.

This claim is not to criticize or undermine the national importance of this epic, but rather, this point then calls for a sympathetic exploration as to how Lönnrot utilized this text to bring about Finnish pride and nationalism that is so relevant today. It also returns readers to the point of why exactly this text should be studied among critics of written oral epics. The runos surrounding the stealing and reclaiming of the mysterious Sampo perhaps are the most

characteristic and demonstrative of Lönnrot's desire to make the work the nationalistic epic of Finland.

#### **IV: The Stealing of the Sampo and Lönnrot's Preservation of Finland's Identity**

The Sampo, as mysterious, ambiguous, and unclear as it may be as to what it exactly is, one thing is for certain: the characters within the *Kalevala* covet it, and the value of this artifact is never questioned. Runos 39-43 detail the stealing, destruction, and ultimate recovering of this pivotal artifact, and perhaps it is within these runos that Lönnrot's desire to make this text work as a national epic is realized. Crafted by Ilmarinen in the story, his land befalls much atrocity and hardship following its theft. Scholars and critics of the *Kalevala* have made many inferences as to what exactly the Sampo is, some guessing it is a tree of knowledge, a compass, a world pillar, or symbolic of the Finnish language itself (DuBois).

The theft of the Sampo, and examining who steals it, presents many ideas one could find in compliance with Lönnrot's nationalistic desire. As discussed throughout this entire thesis, the roles of the heroic man and the typically submissive, innocent woman are ever present in these runos of the *Kalevala* as well. There is one woman, however, who is a stark contrast to the aforementioned females within the text—Louhi, the witch, the wicked outsider of Pohjola—stealer of the Sampo.

Readers are initially introduced to Louhi early on the *Kalevala*, for in the first runo she makes her debut. The prelude runo entitled "Creation and the Birth of Väinämöinen" sets up quite clearly how the tale is going to end—our heroic man is going to defeat the mischievous temptress woman. The narrator conjures images of past heroes, of family gathering, and a description of the ideal family. He proclaims,

"Come good brother, little brother,  
Pretty playmate of my childhood,"

“Long ago my father sang them  
 As he carved his ax’s handle  
 And my mother also taught me”  
 “Magic never failed the Sampo,  
 In her spells old Louhi vanished”  
 (Lönnrot 41).

This is support that Lönnrot may be trying to appeal to the working class, nuclear family of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, it is interesting to learn that Louhi herself quite contrasts the typical homely woman role, for she is explicitly described again and again as “Louhi, mistress of Pohjola” and as a “sparse-toothed mistress.” She is not only a contrast from the other women in the tale; Lönnrot also uses her as a tool to shape the piece as nationalistic, putting her in stark contrast to the hero Väinämöinen too. This is a point Patricia E. Sawin explores in her essay “Lönnrot’s Brainchildren: The Representation of Women in Finland’s *Kalevala*”. She makes the case that Lönnrot uses Louhi, and arguably all of the women in the *Kalevala*, for this purpose. She argues that “women in the *Kalevala* are casualties of Lönnrot’s overall aim to create a nationalistic epic. He has used the female characters to justify, support, and frame the doings of men, whom he employs to embody essential Finnish virtues” (Sawin 1). This is plausible, since Väinämöinen’s atrocious lust is understandable when put in contrast to the implied sexual deviance of the mistress Louhi. Sawin makes another crucial point more specifically in regard to the possibly imperialistic messages conveyed in the *Kalevala*. The stealing of the Sampo may represent Lönnrot’s desire to convey a distinctively pure and unified Finland by having Louhi, an outsider, steal and break the coveted artifact.

The land of Pohjola is extensively described as a barren, unworthy land. Runo 42 entitled “The Theft of the Sampo” conveys images of a dark, isolated and warrior-ridden northland. Louhi’s homeland is in “the dark of Pohjola...that man-devouring region/ Where so many humans founder” (Lönnrot 312). Again, the argument is that this is a “man-devouring region”

and since the leader of this land is a woman, there is something innately immoral or taboo about her reign. This statement is further supported by the text when a few lines later Louhi declares war upon the Kalevala lands and steals the Sampo from the hero. After stealing the Sampo the narrator states,

“Louhi, mistress of Pohjola,  
Furious at the threatening words,  
Called together all her people,  
Young men eager with their swords,  
Warriors ready with their weapons  
To attack old Väinämöinen.”  
(Lönrot 312).

Sawin comments on this imperialistic undertone within the Kalevala as well, stating that “the philosophy behind their concepts of nation and tradition explicitly required the subordination of women and implicitly demanded the sacrifice of minority points of view to the goal of unified cultural identity” (Sawin 193).

This notion of Lönrot desiring to shape this work as a mediator for a unified cultural identity is quite possible, when one looks into the fact that it is the threat of outsiders and people of a disruptive nature that cause chaos for the peaceful Kalevala. After all, the only other significant reference to war and cross-territorial battle is located back in the Kullervo cycle, when the sinful, incestuous Kullervo contemplates fleeing after sleeping with his sister. And (as an additional societal impurity is suggested) he leaves for war after disturbingly implying his mother should have aborted him, or more explicitly, committed infanticide. Distraught Kullervo laments,

“O my mother, O my bearer!  
If at my birth you had only  
Filled the sauna full of smoke,  
Bolted fast the door and left me  
There to smother in the smoke”  
(Lönrot 281).



Hence, through these examples and many more throughout the tale, it seems Lönnrot is including an underlying message of removing impurities from the land, sacrificing those whom he deems a threat to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ideal familial and gender norms, and he may be attempting to convey a nationalistic unification of the country. Returning to the theft of the Sampo itself, it is none other than Väinämöinen who restores unity and prosperity to the land, as well as paving the path for a future people. Runo 43 details Väinämöinen's recovering of the broken Sampo, describing:

“Väinämöinen saw those pieces,  
Those small fragments of the Sampo,  
Splinters of the ciphered cover;  
Saw the sea swells lifting them,  
Herded landward by the combers  
Driven shoreward by the breakers”

And, elated to have found the revered Sampo, he says:

“There's a seed of future fortune,  
Germ of everlasting thriving  
For our plowing and our planting  
And for crops of every kind  
That will make the moon to glimmer  
And the sun of fortune shine  
On the wide farmlands of Finland,  
On the lovely land of Suomi”  
(Lönnrot 322).

One can interpret much of the runos within the *Kalevala* as symbolic of Finland's fight for independence, and the desire of the people to keep their unique language and culture distinct for the future development of the nation. One could find this interpretation as controversial or extreme, but given the historical circumstances of the time Lönnrot compiled this text, it would seem accurate. Another point worth examining then is how true these characters hold to their mythological folk counterparts, and how much was changed about them in order to support the overall message of the text that Väinämöinen states here.

Sawin makes a keen point on this very idea. She states that, “Lönnrot frequently coalesced multiple characters into one, attributing the characteristics and deeds of several personae to a single *Kalevala* character. A uniform approach does not, however, guarantee a uniform result. In Lönnrot’s hands this same process proves detrimental to certain female characters, while it creates male characters who are more sympathetic and praiseworthy than their folk originals” (Sawin 196). Hence, we see that that the reason Lönnrot altered the text perhaps was to give it a more nationalistic tone and message, to make it work as Finland’s epic.

However, this conclusion is not intended to, nor should it undermine, the greatness of the work in regard to how it helped preserve the very voice of Finland herself—the Suomi language. Some historical analysis as to what was going on in Finland can help bring in support as to why what Lönnrot wrote is such a powerful, momentous preserver of Suomi. For example, “During the period of Swedish rule, a situation arose in Finland in which alongside the vernacular oral culture, a literary culture first based on Latin and later on Swedish was constructed” (Ilomäki 95).

Additionally, the language used by the elite during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was predominantly Swedish and Russian; therefore the middle class could speak Finnish but “in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century they had little experience in reading and producing texts in the language” (95). Perhaps then by constructing the *Kalevala* with a nationalistic theme in mind, the benefits of sustaining and reviving the Finnish language outweigh the loss of the original mythological counterparts.

The impact of Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* solidified the argument that Finland needed to preserve and practice her native tongue, and many attribute Lönnrot with the reviving of Finnish literature in the face of great linguistic dominance and pressure from Sweden and Russian. The head of the Finnish Literature Society said in 1836 that thanks to the *Kalevala* “Finland can with heightened

self-assurance learn to understand not only her past correctly but also her future development. She can say to herself: I, too, have a history” (Ilomäki 99). Lönnrot’s work helped ease the pressures of Russification, which is why many believe the stealing of the Sampo is an allegory for the near demise of the Finnish language. Even if, many scholars argue, ironically, “Lönnrot’s Kalevala were not just Finnish national property, but that the themes of songs were international borrowed goods,” one thing for certain is that this was the first major published work of poetry completely in Finnish and its historical and cultural value cannot be undermined (Urpo 90).

One should examine the ways in which this text has been kept alive within the modern society of the land it was written in, and why the Finnish people are so passionate about this epic.

### **V: The Kalevala and Modern Finnish Society**

It’s no secret that Lönnrot succeeded in shaping the *Kalevala* as Finland’s national epic. Street and town names, jewelry lines and cuisine, story-book character names, locations, and occurrences within the world of the *Kalevala* are all largely present in modern Finnish culture. The ways in which Lönnrot’s work has influenced Finland’s unique culture not only exemplify his successful preservation of nationalism, but continues to be a monumental signifier of what it means to be Finnish. The Finns are passionate about nature, music, education, and the arts, and it is evident that the *Kalevala* presents itself across a range of areas of Finnish life.

Prior to the mass circulation of the *Kalevala*, Finland was still part of the Swedish empire and striving for a distinct cultural identity. As previously mentioned, linguistically, the nation was facing domination and lacking a piece of literature Finns could claim as uniquely their own. Anneli Asplund and Sirkka-Liisa Mettomäki capture perfectly the importance of the *Kalevala* to the Finns in their article “Kalevala: The Finnish National Epic.”

“The Kalevala marked an important turning-point for Finnish-language culture and caused a stir abroad as well. It brought a small, unknown people to the attention of other

Europeans, and bolstered the Finns' self-confidence and faith in the possibilities of a Finnish language and culture. The *Kalevala* began to be called the Finnish national epic” (Asplund and Mettomäki ).

Prior to Elias Lönnrot's compilation of the work, the only people who knew of the folk songs were the lower class folk-singers who had been passing them down orally for generations. The publication and collecting of these songs, though not entirely faithful to their original folk counterparts, paved the way for Finns to secure a national identity and offer a piece uniquely Finnish to the literary world. In modern day Finland, there have been various re-makings of this epic to contribute to other areas of Finnish culture.

Perhaps the most prevalent area of Finnish culture that the *Kalevala* finds its way into is none other than music. Since the *Kalevala* derives from a folk-song tradition, it readily lends itself to modern musical interpretations. The original songs, sung in an unusual, archaic trochaic tetrameter, were part of the oral tradition among speakers of Balto-Finnic languages for 2,000 years and the written version of these songs continues to inspire modern Finnish musicians across a range of genres. The first composer who aspired to capture this sense of Finnish nationalism through his usage of the *Kalevala* was Robert Kajanus, who crafted *Kullervon Surumarssi*, or *Kullervo's Funeral March*, in 1881. Shortly following this, he orchestrated *Aino*, which was “regarded as the greatest achievement in Finnish symphonic music up to that time” (Aho 45). By far, the most internationally renowned Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius, heard *Aino*, and it influenced him to utilize the wealth of material the *Kalevala* contained.

Sibelius became actively involved in studying Finnish language, and stated that “To me, the *Kalevala* is completely modern. It's all music, theme, and variations. The action is always subordinate to mood: the gods [are] men, Väinämöinen is a musician, and so on” (Aho 46). His most heavily *Kalevala* influenced work is *The Kullervo Symphony*. In addition to orchestrated

compositions, the choral works based on the runos are numerous, and the most well-known modern one is *Lemminkäinen* by Erik Bergman. According a study conducted in 1985 by French musicologist and composer Henri-Claude Fantapie, “a compiled list of Finish compositions on *Kalevala* topics arrived at a total of 330” (Aho 45). Since then, the number of compositions has increased to no fewer than 500. Though choral and orchestrated forms of the *Kalevala*’s runos seem to be the most prevalent renditions musically, another genre, arguably the most popular genre of music young Finns (and quite a few Americans as well) enjoy today has utilized the themes and characters of the *Kalevala* as well— hard rock and heavy metal music.

Since the 1970’s, modern Finnish musicians have been actively working towards shifting their lyrical content to be performed in Finnish, and the *Kalevala*’s presence in popular modern musicians’ writing is evident. “Suomi-rock” or “Finnish-rock” musicians such as Pihasoittaja draw on direct textual influences. They crafted verses “during the mid-1970s of *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar* influenced pop-folk ballad[s]” and additionally “the linkage of the *Kalevala* to popular music also came about naturally and the impact of the *Kalevala* on the emergence of a national rock culture has been of particular importance. It has provided a lyrical-linguistic model on which a new type of expression in Finnish rock has been built since the 1970s” (Kallioniemi and Kärki 62-65). The referencing of the *Kalevala*, in general, was a consequence of the birth of a national Finnish-language and musicians’ desire to contribute to their nation’s cultural identity.

Perhaps most notably, and less known to the American rock scene, is the presence of mythology in heavy metal music. Many do not link the two together, yet the influence of mythology is more prevalent in modern metal music than one may initially think. In America, bands such as Kamelot have drawn lyrical influence from Arthurian legends, Metallica’s “Enter Sandman” is based on early northern European folklore, and Judas Priest (though technically a

British metal band dominating the 80's metal music scene in America) has songs based on Norse mythology, including the track "Halls of Valhalla." In fact, there is an entire genre completely devoted to Norse mythology and the Viking sagas (the genre is rightly called "Viking Metal"), yet even the *Kalevala*, in particular, shapes the lyric writing of many world renowned Finnish bands. Finland has become known as a "power-house" when it comes to the quality and quantity of metal musicians she generates. In fact, "Kalevalaic Finnish heavy metal achieved unique international visibility both at the end and in the beginning of the millennium. Heavy metal is the popular music category in which mythologies play a particularly important role and the *Kalevala* was perfectly suited for this context. A number of bands have combined heavy metal music and the *Kalevala*" (Kallioniemi and Kärki 66-67). The most famous example of a *Kalevala* influenced metal band is Amorphis, who frequently uses the *Kalevala's* content across all twelve of their albums since forming in 1990. Amberian Dawn has *Kalevala* inspired songs, the most notable entitled "Sampo." And, perhaps even truer to the *Kalevala's* traditional musical roots, exists the genre of Finnish folk-metal, with bands such as Korpiklaani and Ensiferum being a couple of the most predominant ones. The *Kalevala's* presence spans a vast majority of Finnish symphonic metal, folk-metal, hard rock, Viking metal, death metal, and black metal music alike.

In addition to musical interpretations of the *Kalevala*, this epic has been kept alive through visual interpretations of the text as well. Ranging from plays to cinematic creations, the desire to make the piece come alive visually has been a part of the Finnish imagination for decades. Though "Cinematic interpretation of the epic has, however, been problematic, and the impact of the *Kalevala* on film and television remains smaller than the other art forms," there have been many attempts since the 1920's to capture, visually, the essence of the runos (Laine and Salmi 73). *Sampo* is the only full feature attempt to visually show the entire epic, and

although it was poorly received, it has found a cult following in both Finland and the United States alike. Furthermore, there were small screen renditions of the text as well, such as the animated series *The Legend of the Sampo*, the four part mini-series *Rauta-Aika*, which would later become a written revisiting of the original epic.

Art is the most prevalent medium of visual representation of the *Kalevala*, and many of the translations of the text provide artwork within the confines of the book. Countless painters have captured the imagery present in the runos, but perhaps the most noteworthy is Askeli Gallen-Kallela. A prominent artist from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Golden age of Finnish art, Kallela created paintings of several of the runos, perhaps most famously “Lemminkäinen's Mother.” His pieces equally depict the dark, harrowing themes of the *Kalevala* while capturing the natural landscapes and complicated characters with an aesthetic beauty through his art. The Ateneum Art Museum houses the most art dedicated to the Kalevala, with “more than 200 works by almost 60 artists, all inspired by the Finnish national epic. In addition to bringing together many venerated, famous pieces” it “displays the work of ten artists and ten composers commissioned by the Kalevala Society to express how the Kalevala looks and sounds” (Marten).

The *Kalevala* continues to inspire new music, art, and other re-imaginings, as countless short stories, children adaptations, and other landmarks take on parts of this epic. If one finds himself traveling abroad and is aware of the *Kalevala's* characters and storyline, one might recognize streets, cities, and shops embodying the text. For example, there is the district of Pohjola in the city of Turku, a Finnish dairy company puts out a line of ice cream called *Aino*, and *Lemminkäinen* takes the form of a construction group. *Kalevala Jewelry* is one of many businesses to take the epic's title as a company name, and the Finns even have a day dedicated entirely to the *Kalevala*. “Kalevala Day” is celebrated on February 28<sup>th</sup> each year, the same day

as Finnish Culture day; it is also the day Elias Lönnrot's first version of the *Kalevala* was released in 1835. This day serves not only as a day to remember Elias Lönnrot's work, but it serves the purpose of being a day dedicated to celebrating being Finnish. School age children often participate in a *Kalevala* theme day and the national flag is proudly flown outside of most homes. Though it is not recognized as public holiday, it is an important observance day, classified as a "name day" to honor the flag.

## VI: Conclusion

Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* continues to bring attention to a nation that is well-deserving of international literary exploration. The linguistic, cultural, and historical significance of this epic spans decades and a multitude of re-imaginings, and I hope this thesis opens up broader discussion of this work. The complexity of the work and its unique creation presents ample challenges in interpretation, yet there is much that can be said of the value of its characters, themes, and inspiring nature. Though this thesis is not intended to merely share my enthusiasm and fascination with the *Kalevala*, I do hope that the limited exploration I took in writing this thesis sparks another's interest, and that one may find this story as enthralling, intriguing, and mesmerizing as I did. It is clear that the impact of this piece on Finland's national identity is crucial and without Elias Lönnrot's work, much of what makes Finland uniquely her own nation would be lost.



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