The background of the entire page is a vibrant red color with a glossy, wavy texture that resembles draped fabric or liquid. The waves flow from the top right towards the bottom left, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lighting highlights the curves, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

Elias Lönnrot  
The Kalevala

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*The Kalevala*



AN EPIC POEM AFTER ORAL TRADITION BY  
ELIAS LÖNNROT

*Translated from the Finnish with an Introduction and Notes  
by*

KEITH BOSLEY

*and a Foreword by*  
ALBERT B. LORD

OXFORD  
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## OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

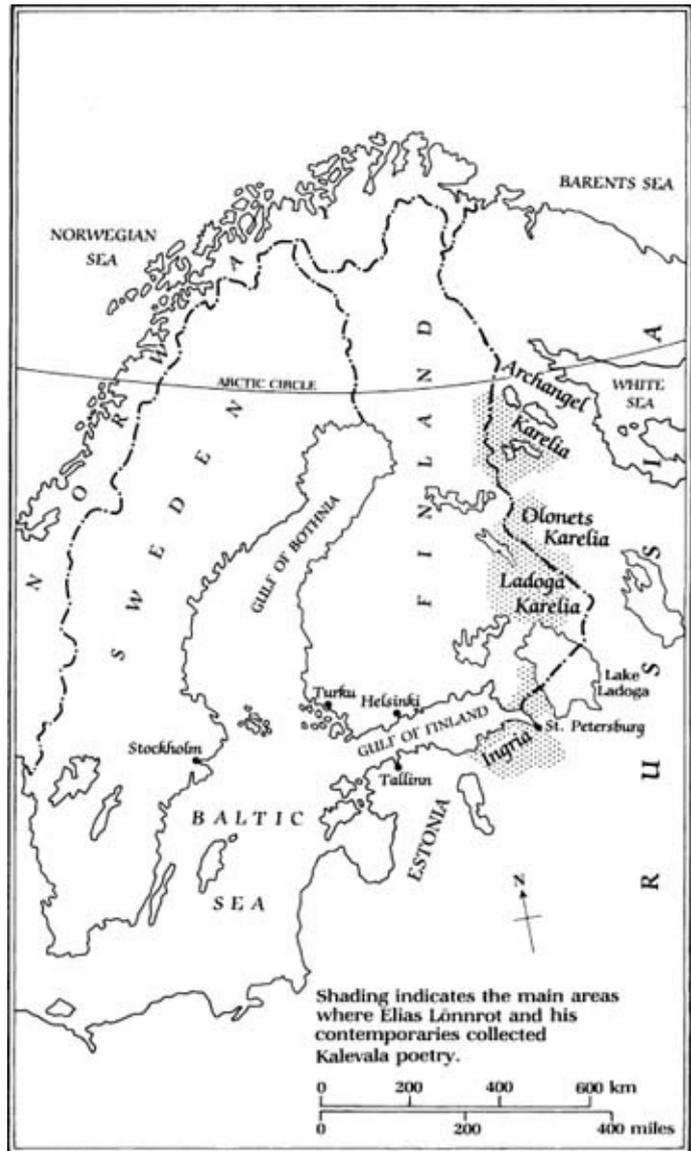
### THE KALEVALA

THE KALEVALA is an epic poem published in its final form in 1849, though much of its material goes back to the first millennium of our era. It is based on Finnish oral poetry, some of the richest and best-documented in the world. It begins with an account of the Creation from broken eggs, and ends with a strange interpretation of the Virgin Birth; in between, a northern people's negotiation with its environment and the conduct of its affairs is set forth in a text that is by turns epic, lyrical, ritual, and magical. The poem's overall structure is the work of Elias Lönnrot, the most famous of the Finnish scholars who saw in their oral tradition an expression of national identity.

ELIAS LÖNNROT (1802-84) was both a scholar and a district health officer covering a wide area of north-eastern Finland. In 1835 he published the first edition of the *Kalevala*, and in 1840-1 the *Kanteletar*, a companion volume of lyrics still almost unknown to the English-speaking world; in 1849 he published the second and final edition of the epic, nearly twice the length of its predecessor. In Finland, a province of Sweden from 1155 till 1809, when it became a Grand Duchy of Russia, he was hailed as a national figure, and the *Kalevala* as the national epic.

KEITH BOSLEY has published several collections of poems and a good deal of translations, mainly from French, Portuguese, German, and Finnish. Besides the *Kalevala*, his translations from Finnish include books of oral poetry, Eino Leino, Aleksis Kivi, a selection from the *Kanteletar*, and a historical anthology, *Skating on the Sea*. In 1991 he was made a Knight, First Class, of the Order of the White Rose of Finland.

ALBERT B. LORD worked with Milman Parry in the 1930s, revolutionizing Homeric scholarship in the light of their study of oral epic among the South Slavs. He was Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature, Emeritus, in Harvard University.



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## FOREWORD

THE Finnish epic in English translation has been part of my consciousness of heroic poetry since my undergraduate and graduate days, and it has informed my teaching as well as my scholarly activities for some years. It draws one to revisit it frequently, because it has elements of subject and a general atmosphere that are not found in epic and romance as I know them in the European tradition from Homer through the eighteenth century. For the key to an understanding of the *Kalevala* is the power of the word, the power of incantation and of the story that brings power. Its heroes are word-masters and wonder-workers.

In the early 1950s I introduced the *Kalevala* into a course of Comparative Epic. The English translation of the *Kalevala* that I used for teaching at that time was W. F. Kirby's (1907). In the fifties there was little in English beyond Domenico Comparetti's *The Traditional Poetry of the Finns* (1892) to aid one in understanding how this strangely haunting epic from the North came into being. But that book, written by a classicist, was especially helpful for students of Homer, because it explained how Elias Lönnrot had not only collected but also assembled and shaped the great epic from its constituent shorter traditional songs.

In time in my course, Kirby's translation was superseded by that of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. (1963), who had been my teacher in Anglo-Saxon; it was during those years that he was working on his translation of the *Kalevala*. After Comparetti's book, Martti Haavio's *Väinämöinen, Eternal Sage* (1952), with its study in depth of several of the songs used for the composition of the *Kalevala*, was of very great help, for it also adduced comparative thematic material from all over the world and throughout time. With the appearance of *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic* (1977), and now with Keith Bosley's new and exciting translation, the student and scholar, as well as the more general reader, have acquired the means for a rich perspective on the *Kalevala*.

In Matti Kuusi's introduction to *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic* and Michael Branch's to the 1985 edition of the Kirby translation of the *Kalevala*, one reads of the stages through which Finnish folk poetry has gone from that of myth to that which it had assumed when Lönnrot shaped the epic finally in 1849. It is remarkable how well-documented this epic is, thanks to the vast efforts of collecting that have brought together so many variants of so many songs. Variants are indispensable for the investigation of how singers in an oral tradition of sung narrative learn and compose their songs, and the *Kalevala*, with the large collections made since Lönnrot's day, makes ideal material available to comparatists for such research. We are also fortunate in having the earlier forms of Lönnrot's epic, the *Proto-Kalevala* (manuscript 1833-4, published 1929) and the *Old Kalevala* (the first edition, 1835).

Elias Lönnrot collected the songs that he used, among others, in composing the *Kalevala* by writing them down from the dictation of singers of the epic. That is the hard way. Those who have done extensive collecting in the field in these days of

sophisticated, lightweight, portable sound equipment may find the concept of collecting with pen and paper, and nothing more, primitive in the extreme. It has its disadvantages, of course. When the pause at the end of a line is lengthened in the process of dictating beyond the customary interval, the rhythm of sequences of ideas is interrupted, and the singer finds himself in an awkward position in respect to the tempo of composition. Moreover, the musical element is often absent, and the context is not exactly that of regular performance. Yet dictation permits a closer and more ‘uncluttered’ communing with the singer than does electronic recording. There is no strange apparatus to take the attention of both singer and collector, the former wondering what is going on and the latter wondering if the electric box is operating properly, whether there is enough current of the right kind, and so forth. There is no crowd of wondering onlookers to make the singer feel uncomfortable.

Elias Lönnrot simply sat down with his singer and wrote; there were no complications. I have seen such collecting ‘events’ many times in the thirties in Yugoslavia, and with the years I have come to appreciate their directness. Texts collected in that way may, indeed, be better, truer to the singer’s regular performance, than texts obtained with video cameras and sound equipment under artificially staged circumstances.

Lönnrot, as any other collector thoroughly versed in his tradition and not a mere novice, had heard many singers, and did not need to reproduce the ‘normal’ performance every time that he wanted to collect a song text. At any rate, ordinarily when a singer is asked to dictate a song he will have with him a few friends to listen to him and keep him company. They usually are the people who hear him whenever he sings, and he feels at ease with them. He is ‘performing’, therefore, to a small group that is not unlike his regular audience, so that the greatest lack that he may feel—and it is a real one, I admit—is the music and the rhythm afforded by the instrumental accompaniment and the singing. Our great collections from the past, from the Homeric poems to the medieval songs and epics, have very probably been set down in just this way. In the hands of a skilled scribe and/or collector such a performance has in the past produced great poetry. Prime examples are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer! Lönnrot knew his tradition, was constantly learning more and more about it as he wrote, and he knew the minds and the art of the Finnish singers. Keith Bosley has also penetrated into the singers’ way of thinking and of expressing thought and feeling in the images, music, and rhythm of great poetry. All of that comes once more to life in his translation of the *Kalevala*.

*Harvard University*

December 1987

ALBERT B. LORD

## DEDICATION

To Ben, Sebastian, Gabriel, my sons  
big gentle brother to two little boys  
your author dedicates another's lines  
though this would not have taken by surprise  
Lönnrot, our Finnish rhapsode who begins  
and ends with those on whom a bard relies  
to hold dear in a day beyond his knowing—  
the youngsters rising and the people growing.

Do you remember Imatra, the town  
built where the waters of a dozen lakes  
slide off the granite table and tumble down  
roaring to Russia till a man's hand takes  
and turns them into power? Genius home-grown  
blushed unseen till for all his people's sakes  
one man took, turned it so that they would know  
pressed between leaves, its colours still aglow

Kalevala. The people's heritage  
is proved: again it comes before the world  
as the last flower of a heroic age  
when words meant more than iron, when they told  
of holy origins, each word a gage  
for what it named—the kind of truth unrolled  
when Orpheus sang, till Homer came along  
reporting blood and guts to prove him wrong.

Mallarmé, who said that, remains my guide:  
poems are made of words, of phrases too  
for bards who have no letters. I have tried  
to show you how they sang, working anew  
what they received—a mix to set beside  
literature with its names and dates. And you?  
Read, for your mix was made from two tongues' meeting  
and any pudding's proof is in the eating.

## FINNISH PRONUNCIATION

Spelling is almost entirely phonetic, so *kantele* has three syllables; a double vowel is long, a double consonant is lingered over—*Kyl-lik-ki*; accent is always on the first syllable; *a* and *ä* sound as the vowel in northern and southern English ‘pat’ respectively, so the first syllable of *Aino* rhymes with ‘pie’ and the first syllable of *Väinämöinen* with ‘pay’; *h* is always sounded; *j* sounds as in ‘hallelujah’; *ö* sounds as in German; *u* sounds as in ‘put’, so the first syllable of *sauna* rhymes with ‘pow!’; *y* sounds as German *ü*.

# INTRODUCTION

## *Romantic epic*

*Kalevala, taikka Wanhoja Karjalan Runoja Suomen kansan muinosista ajoista* ('The Kalevala, or old Karelian poems about ancient times of the Finnish people'): so reads the title-page of the first edition of the epic, published in Helsinki in 1835. It was a work of literature based on the oral poetry of Karelia, the region that straddles the border of eastern Finland and north-western Russia; it was a compilation of heroic poetry edited to form a more or less continuous narrative by Elias Lönnrot (1802-84), a Finnish scholar and district health officer. Finland, a province of Sweden since the twelfth century, had been annexed in 1809 by Russia, which had made it an autonomous Grand Duchy; but it was beginning to think of itself as a nation in its own right. In his preface Lönnrot wrote of 'trying to set in some kind of order' poems about 'memorable ancestors', as the Greeks and the Icelanders had done. He was referring to Homer and the unknown thirteenth-century editor of the *Elder Edda*; but where the latter was little more than a compiler, as Lönnrot's Finnish predecessors had been, Homer had shaped some of his heritage into two monumental epics. Lönnrot's ambition was of this order, to present the Finnish nation and language as capable not only of poetry, but of epic. How far he succeeded in the eyes of his countrymen can be judged initially from the response of his colleagues, who placed material they had collected at his disposal: in 1840-1 he published the *Kanteletar*, a companion volume of lyrics and ballads, and in 1849 the second and final edition of the *Kalevala*, at 22,795 lines nearly twice the length of the first edition. The work became a rallying-flag for national aspirations, and is regarded as the 'national epic' by modern Finland, which celebrates Kalevala Day on 28 February, the date of Lönnrot's 1835 preface. How far he succeeded in the eyes of the world outside Finland can be judged from the fact that the epic has been translated into forty-seven languages; the present translation is one of five into English. Its status as one of the 'World's Classics' is enhanced by its informing presence in some of the greatest music of Sibelius, which is fully documented at the end of this book. The *Kanteletar*, though in many ways more representative of the tradition on which both works are based, has not had the same international success.

From a Western point of view the *Kalevala* is a double anachronism, an epic produced at a time when epic was regarded as a thing of the past, set in a world more archaic than that of *Beowulf*. To see the *Kalevala* as a work of European literature rather than an attractive curiosity, we need to adjust our sights. First, outside the mainstream of the Renaissance tradition, epic had a new lease of life thanks to Romanticism; second, in backwaters like Finland, oral tradition, long the Cinderella of Western culture, was still the major vehicle of talent. In other circumstances its unlettered bards and healers, with their prodigious memories, might have become leading figures in the arts and sciences.

Epic is about heroes making history, or what passes for history. The last heroes of

Renaissance epic were Milton's Satan and Klopstock's Messiah: history had lost its nerve to pietism, and the large nations of Europe were settling down to the fruits of 'civilization'. But in this Age of Reason a new spirit was moving: Rousseau was singing the praises of the *bon sauvage* (after the 'noble savage' of seventeenth-century English fiction), and Herder, the future theorist of the *Sturm und Drang* ('Storm and Stress') movement in Germany whose rising star was the young Goethe, was developing ideas of a world of nations defined by vernacular and by folk culture. He urged his disciples to refresh the muse at the pure spring of folk song: in Germany, and later in England, poets wrote the rough-hewn, 'artless' lyrics and ballads beloved of *Lieder* composers—what Schiller was to call *naive* (as against *sentimentalische*) *Dichtung*.

Among the models Herder proposed was Ossian, allegedly a third-century Gaelic epic bard, translated into English prose by James Macpherson. Dr Johnson had dismissed Macpherson's texts, published in the 1760s, as 'impudent forgeries'; but Scotland, still smarting after Culloden, had welcomed Ossian, while the response on the Continent had amounted to a craze. Modern research has shown that the texts are based on genuine material, but that Macpherson lacked the scholarship to do it justice. Such scholarship was, meanwhile, evolving on the other side of Europe, where the Finnish historian Henrik Gabriel Porthan and his students saw in Macpherson at least a kindred spirit.

Ossian marks the beginning of what might be called Romantic epic, though it was not always epic in form. In the wake of the French Revolution poets proclaimed ideals of universal brotherhood in epic fragments like *L'Aveugle* by Chénier, in which a group of shepherds rescues a blind wandering bard—originally Ossian, but Chénier changed him to Homer. The epic fragment gathered momentum, culminating with Victor Hugo, who used what he dubbed the *petite épopée* for *La Légende des Siècles* (1859-83); the type was to live on for another hundred years with the *Canto general* (1950) of Pablo Neruda. Conversely, Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797) is epic in form but hardly so in character. For the large-scale 'poem including history'—Pound's famous definition in *ABC of Reading* (1934)—one must turn to nations that felt a need to explore their history. For these, Romanticism offered the freedom not so much of personal expression as of national self-determination. *Zalán futása* ('The Flight of Zalán', 1825) by Vörösmarty the Hungarian and *Pan Tadeusz* ('Master Thaddeus', 1834) by Mickiewicz the Pole are two of many 'national' epics to appear, mainly in Eastern Europe; to these might be added *Mirèio* ('Mireille', 1859) by the Provençal poet Mistral, though the dedication to Lamartine by an author styling himself a *païsan* is hardly compelling.

Herder's ideas about national identity had their greatest impact among nations with little by way of recorded history or literature, small nations that for centuries had been mostly unlettered peasants under masters speaking another language. In such nations a rising educated minority was inspired to return to its roots, and apply its learning to the hitherto despised vernacular and folk culture. This meant going out and finding them, and from the Baltic to the Balkans there followed a collecting and 'correcting' (as Alecsandri the Rumanian put it) of folk poetry, concerned less with fidelity to sources than with validation of a national culture. The antiquarian interest that had prompted

Bishop Percy to collect and publish his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765-94) had become a political imperative. Among the host of collectors who ventured into the wilds of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires, it was Lönnrot who made the double leap: from oral poetry to publication, and from publication to literature.

By the end of the nineteenth century the *Kalevala* had been translated into eight languages, including English—though John Martin Crawford's version (1888, the first in English) was made from Schiefner's German (1852). The latter also produced a curious offshoot in English: after reading Schiefner, the indefatigable Longfellow was moved to pen *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), adapting metre, theme, and character to his purpose. Although the West was already aware of poetic stirrings in the northern forests from reports and samples in travel books (one such book had prompted Goethe to write his *Finnisches Lied*, a translation of a folk lyric), the *Kalevala* came as a revelation. In Finland its effect was immeasurably greater. At first, during the years that followed annexation, the Russian authorities welcomed Finnish nationalism as a way of severing links with Sweden, and the destruction by fire in 1827 of Turku, the old capital on the south-west coast, with its university, led to the founding a year later of Alexander's University (named after the Tsar) in Helsinki, the capital since 1812. Here the Finnish Literature Society was founded in 1831, and four years later it published the first edition of the *Kalevala*. The reading public was still more at home in Swedish, but the Finnish of its servants and tradesmen was clearly the language of the future. The *Kanteletar* appeared soon after, and in 1847 a cartoon portrayed Lönnrot with walking-stick and scroll hurrying barefoot across open country over a caption based on Ennius: *Unus homo nobis cursando restituit rem* ('One man by running about is restoring to us our state'). The misquotation acquires further point from the knowledge that Ennius, and Virgil after him, have *cunctando* 'by delaying'. Two years later came the definitive *Kalevala*: Finland had its 'poem including history', and was preparing to make history.

In any serious approach to the *Kalevala*, literary studies cannot ignore the oral tradition behind it. The text of a folk poem is no more than the record of a performance; if the collector has been trained in what has come to be known as the Finnish Method, there will be the name of the bard, his or her age, the place of performance, and the date. The text itself is called a variant, which implies an original; but the original may exist only in the mind of the collector, who knows of other texts similar enough to be fellow variants. Bards would draw on a repertoire often learned from a relative (since talent tends to run in families) which they would handle in their own way, rearranging set-pieces or 'formulas' of a phrase, a line, or several lines, leaving some material out, adding new. There was no problem of personal style: the ancient poetry which is now called Kalevala poetry has a single style transcending not only individual talent but even region and century. One is tempted by this to wonder whether some ancient poetry from oral sources—such as Homer—has not led scholars to infer a single author from a single style.

The present approach to the *Kalevala* will look first at the oral tradition and its background, then at how the epic was assembled, and at the *Kalevala* as a text. Finally, the present translation will be discussed.

## ***The Finnish tradition***

‘The Fenni are remarkably brutish and appallingly wretched: no weapons, no horses, no dwellings; their food vegetation, their clothing skins, their bed the ground; their only hope is in arrows which, lacking iron, they sharpen with bone.’ Tacitus’ laconic description of a Stone-Age people in the final chapter of his *Germania* is the earliest surviving written reference to people living in Finland, which is named after them in most languages; but the Fenni were probably Lapps, not Finns. In the first century AD, when the Roman historian wrote, the Lapps were being partly assimilated, partly displaced by a more advanced people, the Finns. It was during the first millennium AD that the foundations of Kalevala poetry were laid in a society with animistic beliefs, whose shamans negotiated with an otherworld through magic.

Who are the Finns, speaking a language so different from those of their Russian and Scandinavian neighbours? Neighbours they have long been, ethnically and culturally; but linguistically they are outside the Indo-European group, which ranges from Bengali to Gaelic. Their language group is Uralic, comprising Finno-Ugrian and Samoyed. Some five thousand years ago a group of tribes of non-Indo-European speech were living between the Volga and the Urals, whence the name. Most of the group migrated westward, and between three and two thousand years ago settled where their linguistic descendants now live. That is all that can be said with any certainty: the movement of language and culture is most often like wave motion, whereby a wave travels but the water merely goes up and down. Today, of roughly twenty million who speak a Uralic language, about two-thirds speak Hungarian; the rest speak up to twenty languages, of which the biggest are Mordvin (spoken south of Gorky, Russia) and Estonian with about a million speakers each, and Finnish, with not quite five million.

Some of the earliest references to Uralic-speakers are in Alfred the Great’s ninth-century adaptation of a fifth-century Latin history of the world, whose lack of information about northern Europe he made good with travellers’ tales. One such traveller was Ohthere, a Norwegian walrus-hunter, who sailed round the North Cape and the Kola Peninsula to the White Sea, then up the Northern Dvina where he met the prosperous ‘Beormas’. The name is cognate with Old Norse *Bjarmar* ‘Permians’, a Uralic-speaking people skilled in metalwork, but Ohthere’s hosts were more probably North Karelians, also smiths; he reported to Alfred that they seemed to speak ‘almost the same language’ as the Uralic-speaking Lapps. He also mentioned the ‘Terfinns’, Lapps of Turja or Tyrjä, that is eastern Kola (there is a warning against them in canto 12 of the *Kalevala*), and the ‘Finns’, that is Lapps, who did not get on with their Norwegian neighbours. Another of Alfred’s travellers was Wulfstan, perhaps an Englishman, who reported on the alarming funeral customs of the Estonians.

The Finns themselves enter recorded history in 1155, when the Swedish King Eric the Good and the English-born Bishop Henry of Uppsala made Finland a province of Sweden. According to a folk poem Henry, the patron saint of Finland, came from Cabbageland—the English taste for the vegetable was already an international talking-point; and the modern Finnish writer Veijo Meri has observed that the first Finn known to history was a murderer, Lalli, the peasant responsible for Henry’s martyrdom in 1156. In 1240 Alexander Nevsky turned the Swedes back from Russia, and much of

Karelia has been Orthodox ever since, venerating Alexander as a saint. Here the clergy was more tolerant of the pagan oral tradition and it was here that Lönnrot found most of his material. During the sixteenth century, the rest of Finland became Lutheran, and written Finnish was advanced by Bishop Mikael Agricola, whose translation of the New Testament appeared in 1548. In 1809 Finland became a Grand Duchy under the Tsar, but during the nineteenth century its growing sense of national identity—fed in no small measure by the *Kalevala*—led to increasing oppression, till in 1917 it declared itself independent of a Russia preoccupied with other things. During the Second World War Finland ceded to the USSR some of Finnish Karelia, whose population moved west, where their lively temperament and sense of oral tradition still set them off from their countrymen.

‘I used to be reckoned a good singer before these here *tunes* came in’: the old Suffolk labourer’s celebrated grumble about commercial popular music could have been uttered centuries earlier by a Finnish bard on hearing the kind of folk song that entered Finland from Western Europe after the Middle Ages. There are examples in Lönnrot’s preface to the *Kanteletar* and in any book containing Finnish folk songs. The Finns have a ballad, *Velisurmaaja* (‘The Brother-Slayer’), which has a parallel in Scotland (‘Edward, Edward’, the inspiration of the first of Brahms’s *Ballads*, op. 10), and the plants intertwining from the graves of Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor also appear in the Hungarian ballad *Kádár Kata* (‘Kate Cooper’). But such songs, with their tuneful rhymed stanzas, have nothing to do with the starker music of the *Kalevala* tradition. This too shows international influence, albeit more ancient: Finnish bear-hunting ritual (recalled in canto 46 of the epic) shares a distant ancestor with the bear dances Bartók knew. As the Finnish scholar Kustaa Vilkuna remarked in 1974: ‘No nation has its own culture, only its own barbarism.’ In Finnish folk poetry we hear the influence of Baltic song and Russian storytelling (the *bylina* tradition), of Viking and early Christian cultures. This brings in the historical dimension, as another Finnish scholar, Matti Kuusi, has written (1977) of the problems of dating a folk poem:

A poem noted down in the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth century can be compared to the numerous strata of a burial mound in which many generations of men and their artefacts have been buried, although even this does not fully depict the magnitude of the scholar’s task because the strata of a folk poem do not occur in a relatively clearly defined historical order—it is as if the burial mound had been disturbed by a bulldozer.

Of the various influences mentioned, the Baltic seems to have been the most radical, if—as is now thought—it reshaped the Finns’ (and the Estonians’) style of singing. The Indo-European-speaking Balts—Latvians, Lithuanians, and the now extinct Old Prussians—have a form called the *daina* which strongly resembles what is now known as *Kalevala* metre. Of all Uralic-speakers only those in the Baltic region used this metre.

*Kalevala* metre seems to be basically a trochaic tetrameter measured quantitatively—that is, four feet each consisting of a long and a short syllable: *Niin sanoopi Väinämöinen* (‘Thus says Väinämöinen’). As in Classical prosody, accent—always on the first syllable in Finnish—does not feature, so there is often a tension between verse

rhythm and speech rhythm entirely absent from Hiawatha metre, which replaces quantity with stress, the Germanic counterpart of accent; the *daina* is similarly quantitative. The foregoing description, it should be pointed out, is controversial; more will be said about metre when the translation is discussed.

Kalevala poetry was usually sung to tunes built on a pentachord (the first five notes of a scale) with an ambiguous third (between major and minor), corresponding to the five strings of the earliest kantele, a kind of zither which sometimes accompanied the singer. The rhythm varied, but narrative poetry was sung to tunes of five beats setting two or four lines:

*Tempo Giusto.*



Kä = wi täästy taima halta,  
Ett bud utgick från Himlen.

Käwi täästy taima ha = sta  
Ett bud utgick från Himlen.

kaiken luondon halbi = al = ba,  
af hela Naturens Upprätthållare,

kaiken luondon halbi = al = ba.  
af hela Naturens Upprätthållare.

That was the first appearance in print (1795) of such a tune. The text (in black-letter Finnish and roman Swedish) reads: ‘There went a command from heaven’ (twice) ‘from all creation’s Guardian’ (twice)—the lines are not in the *Kalevala*, and the repetition is not typical. The grouping of lines into pairs suggests a caesura at the end of the first line of a pair. Perhaps the Homeric hexameter was originally such a pair of lines; whether it was or not, some editions of the *Kalevala* run pairs of lines together, though Lönnrot and his colleagues never did.

Kalevala poetry has neither rhyme nor stanza; its other formal features are alliteration and parallelism, often inverted into chiasmus. Alliteration is irregular and sometimes absent, but it often determines word choice, as in canto 46 of the epic when the bear’s skull is set up to face east: east is *itä*, and the only part of the skull that alliterates with it is *ikenet*, the gums. Alliteration on a vowel requires the same vowel, unlike in Anglo-Saxon. Parallelism corresponds to the pairing of lines just mentioned, though this too varies: the sources often have odd lines, which suggests that they were spoken rather than sung. Lönnrot, however, always (with the solitary exception of 5:131-3, which is why the epic has an odd number of lines) thought in pairs of lines, even when they were not parallel. Such pairing recalls the description of performance in Porthan’s seminal work *De Poësi Fennica* (1766-78): he describes two men, a lead singer and an assistant, singing antiphonally as they ‘sit either side by side or facing

each other, close enough to lock hands and knees ... their bodies gently swaying ... their expressions thoughtful and serious’—we have a glimpse of this in the opening lines of the epic. When women sang, the lead singer would be accompanied by a group. Antiphonal singing was already in decline before Lönnrot’s day, but solo singing survived long after in a few areas: the granddaughter of a man who sang for Lönnrot was still singing in 1942. In the *Kalevala*, Lönnrot sought to reconstruct the original setting.

As in other places where it has been possible to study a singing tradition, narrative poems were what the South Slavs called ‘men’s songs’, the rest were ‘women’s songs’; this is the basis of Väinämöinen’s taunt in the singing-match in canto 3, that the upstart Joukahainen sings only ‘child’s wisdom, woman’s recall’ which ‘is for no bearded fellow’. But in Finland, as the tradition declined during the nineteenth century, women took over the songs which men no longer sang, giving rise to what Finnish scholars call ‘lyrical epic’ because the women would lace the stories with fragments of their own songs, adding a new warmth, or would tell stories of their own in epic style, giving ballad material an unforeseen gravity. The best example of ‘lyrical epic’ in the *Kalevala* is canto 4, whose source was a woman; we shall be looking at it and meeting her later. But why did the Finnish tradition decline and eventually die out?

All oral tradition thrives on want—of material progress, of education. The Marxist notion of culture produced only from an economic surplus (Brecht’s ‘grub first, then ethics’) is soon dispelled by the knowledge that most Finnish bards lived in abject poverty; references in the *Kalevala* to gold and silver, to ownership of land and of serfs, are usually epic hyperbole. In Finland for centuries there was little opportunity for self-advancement: the tolerance mentioned earlier of Orthodox clergy amounted in the long term to indifference. Gifted individuals had nowhere to go, so they stayed at home, and developed their gifts as best they could. Gray’s ‘mute inglorious *Milton*’ buried in Upton churchyard was a victim of English privilege, like Clare; but the Finnish bard lived at the back of beyond, and did not even speak the language of his rulers. Yet, in his own small world at least, he was respected: Arhippa Perttunen (1769-1840), an important source of the *Kalevala*, told Lönnrot that at singing-matches ‘his village used to put him forward, and he did not remember ever being beaten’. An idea of the richness of the tradition can be had from the same bard’s boyhood recollections of fishing-trips with the village men: ‘They often sang all night hand in hand by the fire, and the same song was never sung twice’ (1835 preface).

Finnish folk poetry was first written down in the 1670s: ironically perhaps, the palm belongs to a variant about the murder of Bishop Henry, one of the most modern themes. The following century saw a trickle of collectors at work, which in the nineteenth became a flood. The main interest was in the older, *Kalevala* tradition, with its vast range of material all in the same metre. It included epic narratives, lyrics, rites, magic incantations, and lullabies and children’s songs, some of which are still in use today. One poem might have up to two hundred variants scattered across the country. The richest areas were the Orthodox borderlands of Finland and Russia—Archangel Karelia towards the Arctic Circle, Olonets Karelia, Ladoga Karelia, and Ingria, stretching from the St Petersburg area westward along the south coast of the Gulf of Finland towards Estonia. A village in Archangel Karelia, some 375 miles north of St

Petersburg, was the home of Arhippa, who sang 4,000 lines to Lönnrot, and of his son Blind Miihkali (1815-99) who was to continue the family tradition. Of a later generation still was the Ingrian bard Larin Paraske (1834-1904), who had an astonishing repertoire of more than 11,000 lines. She was a national celebrity when, in 1891, the young Sibelius heard her and was deeply affected: his first *Kalevala* setting, the *Kullervo* symphonic poem, was performed the following year. Of the material collected, about a million and a quarter lines were eventually published in *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* ('Old Poems of the Finnish People', 33 volumes, Helsinki, 1908-48), from which a selection with an English translation has been published as *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic* (hereinafter FFPE); a selection of lyrics is projected. There is half as much again unpublished material in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society, and large collections in Russian Karelia and Estonia.

Lönnrot's 'old poems' led, as we have seen, to a cooperative effort among collectors. Though some of these complained that he had tampered with his source material, most educated Finns were so enthusiastic that, around the turn of the century, the identification of Karelia with the emerging Finnishness prompted a vogue for pilgrimages into the eastern wilds, where, with luck, one might meet a poetic backwoodsman and persuade him to sing. Karelianism, as the vogue was called, attracted a number of creative spirits including the protean 'national artist' Axel Gallén, who later finnicized his name to Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and his friend Jean Sibelius.

It will be clear by now that folklore has an importance in Finland it cannot claim in the West. A review of an English Baroque violinist in a Finnish newspaper a few years ago likened her playing to that of a folk fiddler: this was intended as high praise. The American scholar Robert Redfield speaks of 'great' and 'little' traditions, meaning educated and folk traditions respectively. In most Western nations 'great' tradition has long been dominant, influencing 'little' tradition from above—a process known as seepage. In countries like Finland the situation is reversed: for centuries it had only 'little' tradition, which eventually influenced an emerging 'great' tradition from below—a process described by the English scholar Michael Branch as 'rising damp'. Before we see the beginning of this process in Finland with the *Kalevala*, we need to look at how the poetry of 'little' tradition was composed—and still is in some parts of the world.

A village might claim a 'singing family': though the Western world may still dream of noble savages composing in committee, oral epic was the preserve of a talented few. A bard's repertoire can be compared with what one uses to build a garden wall—bricks, mortar, and a length of string to guide the builder. The bricks are the 'formulas' mentioned earlier: they may be whole or half bricks, chunks of stone, pebbles, flints, shards. The mortar is the bard's powers of invention: here, where the bricks are regular, only a thin layer is needed; there more is needed, in which to set the awkward pieces. To guide the performance there is the 'thread' of the story to be told, the mood to be communicated, the rite to be celebrated, the spell to be recited. Underlying all this is the ability to do the job—a command of the *métier*, of the metre: anyone, even a politician, can improvise in prose, but only a bard can keep a poem alive.

The American scholar Milman Parry (1902-35) revolutionized Homeric studies by