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The Finnish Epic Behind Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

Brian Handwerk
for National Geographic News
December 19, 2001

Generations of readers have cherished Middle-earth, the fantasy universe sprung from the mind of storyteller J.R.R. Tolkien. Now, his magical world has been brought to life with the premiere of the first film in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. While the author's imagination was vast, Tolkien's world and its cast of characters do have roots in real-world history and geography, from the world wars that dominated Tolkien's lifetime to the ancient language and legends of Finland.

Anthropologist and ethnobotanist Wade Davis recently traveled to a remote corner of Finland to uncover Tolkien influences that stretch back into the misty past of northern Europe.

Ancient Saga

Davis, a National Geographic Society Explorer in Residence, journeyed to what was once Finland's Viena Karelia region, along the Russian border, to study Finnish. By the 19th century this area was a last refuge for a unique dialect of the Finnish language.



Gandalf lights the way
Moria, in a scene from *Fellowship of the Ring*

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Nearly all Finns at that time were speaking Finnish, Swedish or even Russian, the region's established written languages. But a dialect still existed in this isolated region as it always had—in oral form, passed down through the ages from one generation to the next in songs and verses, or "runes."

A collection of these runes, comparable to India's *Ramayana*, or the Greek *Odyssey*, is known in Finland as the *Kalevala*, and those who sing its lyrical verses from memory are known as "rune-singers." These elders long carried in their minds the entire record of the Finnish language.

"In an oral tradition, the total richness of the language is no more than the vocabulary of the best storyteller," Davis explains. "In other words, at any one point in time the boundaries of the language are being stretched according to the memory of the best storyteller."

In the Viena Karelia region, the oral tradition of the Finnish language is still alive, but now contained in the memory of just a single storyteller. His name is Jussi Houvinen, and he is Finland's last great rune-singer. This elderly man is a living link to myths and languages that have passed mouth-to-ear over the ages in an unbroken chain.

"It's an amazing thing to be in the presence of a man singing even a snippet of the poem," says Davis of his meeting with Jussi, "because it's so powerful that even if you don't speak Finnish it's profoundly moving just to listen to it, just the cadence of the sounds."

"Being in his presence, and knowing how few people can today recite the poem, you felt you were in the presence of history that was about to be snuffed out." When Jussi dies the ancient succession of rune-singers will end. No one from a younger generation has been able to learn the vast breadth of the saga.

However, the *Kalevala* itself will not die with Jussi, due

National Geographic **EXPLORER** embarks on a journey to the far corners of the globe and back into the past to explore the impact of cultural forces that inspired the current motion picture adaptation of the first of J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy, *National Geographic Explorer: The Lord of the Rings*.

EXPLORER examines how Tolkien's imaginary world of hobbits and wizards resonates in today's world in conflict, delving into the parallels between ancient mythic events, and languages those created by Tolkien and interpreted cinematically by director Peter Jackson in New Line Cinema's *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

The National Geographic documentary explores the influences and events of Tolkien's lifetime, including the First World War, which greatly impacted the author. With combat footage, including some of the battles to which Tolkien belonged, National Geographic journeys to the trenches of the battle of Somme where the author witnessed the death of friends, the disintegration of rigid class boundaries, the deeply scarred earth. It was in this setting that Tolkien began to imagine his epic story.

National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Davis takes viewers to a remote village in Finland to meet one of the last "rune-singers," who sings the *Kalevala*. Composed of a collection of old ballads and lyric poetry, the *Kalevala* recounts the mythical

to the efforts of a country doctor named Elias Lönnrot.

In the early 19th century, Lönnrot became enamored of the Finnish songs and runes he found in Viena Karelia. He devoted himself to traveling the district, listening to the rune-singers and committing the oral poetry to the written word. This was the genesis not only of the modern Finnish language, but of the Finnish nation as an entity, creating what Davis calls "this wonderful idea of a...bardic poem inspiring a modern nation."

Inspiration for Middle Earth

The *Kalevala* inspired not only Finnish nationalism, but also a young English scholar and writer named J.R.R. Tolkien, in whose mind was already taking shape a magical universe which was about to be transformed by Finnish language and legend.

In a letter to W.H. Auden, on June 7, 1955, he remembered his excitement upon discovering a Finnish Grammar in Exeter College Library. "It was like discovering a complete wine-cellar filled with bottles of an amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before. It quite intoxicated me; and I gave up the attempt to invent an 'unrecorded' Germanic language, and my 'own language'—or series of invented languages—became heavily Finnicized [sic] in phonetic pattern and structure."

The Finnish language that so delighted the young student became the inspiration for the lyrical tongue of Middle-earth's elves. Tolkien taught himself the ancient and newly codified Finnish to develop his elfin language, and so that he could read the *Kalevala* in its original Finnish. This extraordinary achievement opened the door to many further influences from Finnish mythology. Parallels abound between the *Kalevala* and Tolkien's own saga, in terms of both the characters themselves and the idea of the hero's journey.

The *Kalevala* features "all the themes of pre-Christian

history of the Finns—the creation of the world and the adventurous journey of brave heroes. Finnish, language of the *Kalevala*, believed to have influenced Tolkien's invented language of the elves.

Featuring exclusive footage from *The Fellowship of the Ring* and interviews with cast and filmmakers, *National Geographic B the Movie: The Lord of the Rings* premieres on EXPLORER on Sunday, December 23, at 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT on MSNBC. The program will be repeated on Friday, December 28, at 9 p.m. ET/6 p.m. PT. It will be released on home video DVD in February 2002.

traditions, shape-shifting, mythical demons, magical plants, animals becoming human beings," says Davis, while the story itself "is fundamentally a story of a sacred object which has power, and the pursuit of the mythic heroes who seek that power, to seek a way of understanding what that power means." Davis describes the *Kalevala* as "a journey of the soul and a journey of the spirit—and that's obviously what drew Tolkien to it."

Tolkien readers have long seen Tolkien's bucolic vision of rural England represented in Middle-earth's The Shire, and recognized English farmers in characters such as the hobbit Sam. But those who explore the *Kalevala* may discover much of the land of the elves, and their language, in the vast snowy spruce forests of Finnish legend.

The Kalevala and other influences on Tolkien are the subject of a one-hour documentary National Geographic Beyond the Movie: The Lord of the Rings, which premieres in the United States on December 23 on MSNBC.

Related Websites

- [National Geographic Beyond the Movie: Lord of the Rings](#)
- [Lord of the Rings Official Web Site](#)
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The Kalevala Society, the Finnish Literature Society

KALEVALA - THE FINNISH NATIONAL EPIC

 The first edition of the Kalevala appeared in 1835, compiled and edited by Elias Lönnrot on the basis of the epic folk poems he had collected in Finland and Karelia.

This poetic song tradition, sung in an unusual, archaic trochaic tetrametre, had been part of the oral tradition among speakers of Balto-Finnic languages for two thousand years.

When the Kalevala appeared in print for the first time, Finland had been an Autonomous Grand Duchy for a quarter of a century. Prior to this, until 1809, Finland had been a part of the Swedish empire.

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.

Lönnrot and his colleagues continued their efforts to collect folk poetry, and new

material quickly accumulated. Using this new material, Lönnrot published a second, expanded version of the Kalevala in 1849. This New Kalevala is the version which has been read in Finland ever since and upon which most translations are based.

The songs behind the Kalevala

What was the nature of the old folk poetry recorded by Lönnrot on his collecting journeys?

What stories did the songs tell, how did they originate and how long did they survive?

It has been estimated that approximately 2,500 3,000 years ago there occurred a major new development in the culture of the proto-Finnic groups living near the Gulf of Finland. The result of this development was a unique form of song characterized by alliteration and parallelism as well as an absence of stanza structure. The poetic metre of these songs was a special trochaic tetrametre which is now often called Kalevala metre. When sung,

the lines actually had four or five stresses, and the melodies covered a narrow range, usually consisting of only five notes.

The old folk poetry does not originate from a single historical period, but is a mixture of numerous layers which vary in age. The oldest layers are represented by mythical poems which tell of creation acts in a primordial past, as well as the origins of the world and human culture.

The main character in epic poems is usually a mighty singer, shaman, and sorcerer, the spiritual leader of his clan who makes journeys to the land of the dead in order to seek knowledge. The songs' heroes also have adventures in a distant land beyond the sea, on journeys where they woo potential brides, make raids, and flee the enemy.

Lyric songs express human, personal emotions. Ritual poems focus especially on weddings and bear-killing feasts. Kalevala metre incantations are verbal magic, which was part of people's everyday lives and activities.

The archaic song tradition was a vital, living tradition throughout Finland until the 1500s.

Following the Reformation, the Lutheran Church forbade the singing of the songs, declaring the entire tradition to be pagan. At the same time, new musical trends from the West found a foothold in Finland.

The old Kalevala metre song tradition began to disappear first from the western part of the country and then, later, from other areas as well. Some songs were recorded already in the 1600s, but most of the folk poetry collection work was not carried out until the 1800s.

In Archangel Karelia the old poetry tradition has survived until the present day.

Finnish culture at the beginning of the 1800s

The status of the Finnish language left much to be desired during the period of Swedish rule (-1809). The language used in schools and universities was either Swedish or Latin, and the language of state administration was Swedish. Only the ordinary peasants in the countryside spoke Finnish, and the only publications to appear in Finnish were some legal texts and religious literature.

By the end of the 1700s, however, there was already a small group of students at Turku University who were familiar with the ideology of National Romanticism. These students realized that the language of the common people, as well as folklore collection and publication, were crucial to the development of a uniquely Finnish culture.

As part of the Russian empire (1809-1917), Finland occupied a special status. Located between Sweden and Russia, Finland was the military buffer zone in Russia's northwest corner. On the other hand, the Finns' autonomous status meant that they could begin to see themselves as a separate nation for the first time.

Although new cultural ties were formed with St. Petersburg, the border between Finland and the Swedish 'motherland' was not entirely closed off. Romanticist ideals became stronger and made a significant impact on the attitudes of Finland's learned people, who began to collect, study and publish Finnish folk poetry.

Väinämöinen, a central figure in the poems, was seen to be the symbol of national rebirth. A singer and player of the kantele, a folk instrument, Väinämöinen was compared to Orpheus of Ancient Greek my-

thology, who, like Väinämöinen, was able to enchant his listeners with his playing.

The Turku Romantics realized that resources for the development of a small nation lay in its own language and distinctive culture. The first national works of art in Finland originated in the spirit of Romanticism.

Elias from Sammatti village

Elias Lönnrot was born on the 9th of April, 1802, in the parish of Sammatti in the south of Finland. He was the eighth child of tailor Frederik Juhana Lönnrot. The fact that Elias was a gifted child was spotted early in his childhood. He learned to read at the age of five, and books became the boy's great passion.

In his home region, anecdotes and tales sprung up concerning his desire to read. "Get up already! Elias has long been sitting on a tree branch reading", said the mother from a neighboring croft as she woke her children. According to another story, a hungry Elias once asked his mother for bread, which she did not have to give him. "Alright, then I'll go and read", was the boy's response.

His parents decided to send the boy to school, even though they were in fact quite poor. Through perseverance and a zeal for learning, however, the boy nonetheless struggled through and entered the University of Turku as a young man in 1822.

Lönnrot's university studies

In his first years at the University of Turku, Lönnrot studied a number of different subjects. In addition to medicine, he studied Latin, Greek, history and literature.

He also became acquainted with a small circle of nationalist-thinking teachers and students whose primary aim was to promote the status of the Finnish language.

In connection with his studies, Lönnrot also became acquainted with newly-published folk poetry. It soon became clear that Eastern Finland and particularly Archangel Karelia on the Russian side of the border were areas in which the older song tradition still lived on.

Under the guidance of his mentor Reinhold von Becker, Lönnrot wrote a doctoral thesis on a subject from Finnish mythology, Väinämöinen. This small monograph in Latin appeared in 1827.

In 1827, catastrophe struck Finland. Turku, the capital city, burned to the ground. No university instruction was available during the academic year 1827-1828, and so Lönnrot spent the entire winter as a tutor in Vesilahti. The idea of a trip to collect folk poetry in Karelia began to take root in his mind.

Lönnrot decided to spend the summer of 1828 on a folk poetry collecting trip to Savo and Karelia.

Collecting trips

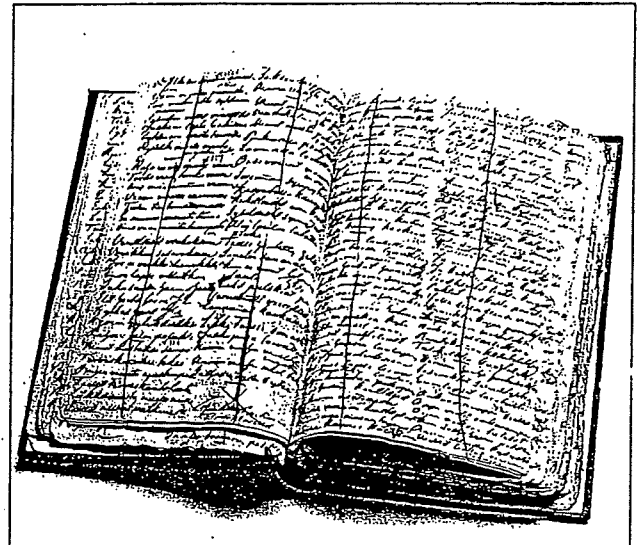
On his first collecting trip Lönnrot stayed away for the entire summer and returned to Laukko in the autumn with a large number of recorded folk poems, most of them incantations and epic poems, approximately 6,000 lines in all. Lönnrot spent the autumn in Laukko, organizing his collected material for publication.

Lönnrot continued his studies at the university, which was now relocated to Helsinki, but his favorite pastime was still his work with folk poetry. He belonged to a small group of persons whose ambition was not only to record the older folk po-

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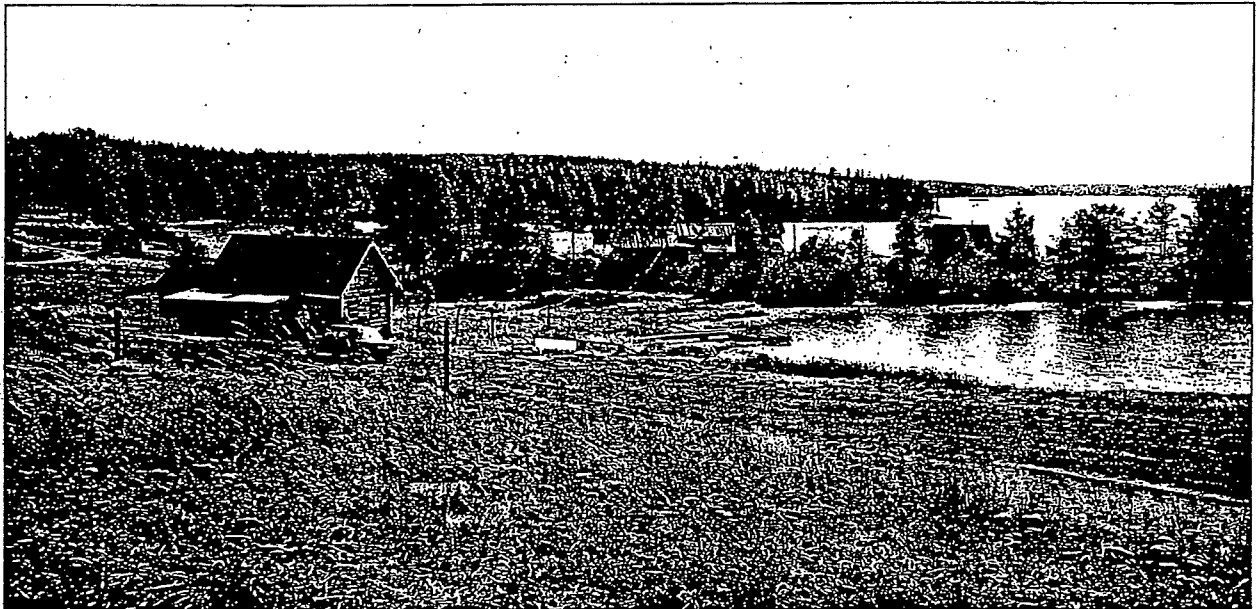


*Elias Lönnrot as a young man.
G. Budkovski's engraving from 1845.
Finnish Literature Society*



*Some of Lönnrot's manuscripts from the
collections of the Finnish Literature Society
Folklore Archives. - Photo: Timo Setälä 1998,
Finnish Literature Society.*

*The folk poetry village of Venehjärvi in Archangel Karelia.
Photo: Anneli Asplund 1997, Finnish Literature Society.*



etry but to also promote the use of the Finnish language in a broader sense as well.

In order to further this cause, the Finnish Literature Society was founded in February of 1831. Lönnrot became the Society's first secretary and was for many years its most active member.

One of the Society's first tasks was to provide Lönnrot with a stipend for a collecting journey across the Russian border to Archangel Karelia. This trip was nonetheless interrupted when a cholera epidemic broke out and the folk poetry collector was called back to his medical duties. The trip was postponed until the following summer in 1832, at which time Lönnrot noted down some 3,000 lines of incantations and epic poetry.

In 1833, Lönnrot took up a posting as a general practitioner in the small and outlying city of Kajaani. The fact that he had to leave behind his circle of like-minded acquaintances and friends was compensated by the fact that Kajaani was situated near the folk-singing areas of Archangel Karelia. A new plan for the publication of the folk poems also began to take shape in Lönnrot's mind. His ambition was to publish the songs as separate episodes focused on the main heroes of the epic poetry.

Lönnrot's fourth collecting trip undertaken in the autumn of 1833 was epoch-making from the standpoint of the birth of the Kalevala. In the villages of Archangel Karelia, Lönnrot was able to experience for himself the vitality of the epic song tradition in that area.

Lönnrot began to organize his folk poetry notes for publication. The poems collected by Lönnrot on his first journey had appeared in a series of books entitled *Kantele* between 1829 and 1831. The manuscripts *Lemminkäinen*, *Väinämöi-*

nen, and *Naimakansan virsiä* (composed of wedding songs) appeared after the collection journey undertaken in 1833.

Still, Lönnrot was not satisfied. His goal was a unified body of poetry a grand epic modelled after Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the *Edda* of the ancient Scandinavians.

Thus came into being a unified, 5,000-line long body of poetry which later came to be known as the *Proto-Kalevala*. Nor was Lönnrot yet satisfied, for he still longed to return to the folk poetry villages of Archangel Karelia.

On his fifth journey in April of 1834, Lönnrot met Arhippa Perttunen, who was the most skilled of the singers he had met thus far in Archangel.

The preparation and publication of the Kalevala in 1835 and 1849

After his collection trip in 1834, the possibility of a unified epic seemed to Lönnrot to be within reach. The Kalevala was ready for publication in 1835. Lönnrot dated his preface the 28th of February, which is now celebrated as Kalevala Day.

The publication of the Kalevala did not dampen his enthusiasm for collecting, however. He continued his work and travelled to Archangel Karelia in April and October of the same year. In 1836-37 he undertook a major expedition. Lönnrot's example inspired many others to undertake collection journeys.

Lönnrot began work on a new, expanded version of the Kalevala, which appeared in 1849. To this New Kalevala Lönnrot added entire new episodes and made changes to much of the text.

While the Old Kalevala had been nearer to the original performances of the actual folk poets, Lönnrot moved further and

Stepanie Lesonen was the granddaughter of Varahvontta Sirkeinen, a farm master who sang for Lönnrot. One of the most prolific collectors of Finnish folklore, Samuli Paulaharju, photographed Stepanie in Venehjärvi in 1915. - Photo: Samuli Paulaharju 1915, Finnish Literature Society.



The features of Elias Ahtonen, nicknamed Uljaska from Rimmi, are recognizable in Akseli Gallen-Kallela's painting of the Väinämöinen figure in his Aino triptych. - Photo: Samuli Paulaharju 1915, Finnish Literature Society.



A well-known hunter and singer of folk poetry, Pedri Shemeikka was born in Suistamo but lived later in Ilomantsi. - Photo: Samuli Paulaharju 1907, Finnish Literature Society.



Matjoi Plattonen, a folk poetry singer from Suojärvi. Photo: A.O. Väisänen 1917, Kalevala Society.

further away from his source texts in compiling the New Kalevala.

With regard to his method, Lönnrot explained: - I felt myself to have the same right which, according to their conviction, most singers bestow on themselves, namely, to be able to order the runes as they are best suited to be joined together, or, in the words of a rune: "I conjured myself into a conjurer, a singer came of me. That is, I considered myself as good a singer as they."

The Kalevala's Contents

POEMS

- 1-2 Ilmatar (the Virgin of the Air) descends to the waters. A pichard lays its eggs on her knee. The eggs break and the world is formed from their pieces. The mother of the water then gives birth to Väinämöinen. Sampsa Pellervoinen sows the forest trees. One of the trees, an oak, grows so large that it blots out both the sun and the moon. A tiny man rises from the sea and fells the giant oak. The sun and moon can shine once again.
- 3-4 Joukahainen challenges Väinämöinen to a contest of wisdom and is defeated. With his singing, Väinämöinen causes Joukahainen to sink into a swamp. In order to save himself, Joukahainen promises his sister's hand in marriage to Väinämöinen. Upon learning of the bargain, the sister Aino mourns her fate and finally drowns herself.
- 5-7 Väinämöinen searches the sea for Aino and catches her (she has been transformed into a fish) on his fishing hook. However, he loses her again and sets out to woo the maiden of Pohjola, the daughter of the North Farm. Meanwhile, eager for re-

venge, Joukahainen watches out for Väinämöinen on the way to Pohjola and shoots Väinämöinen's horse from underneath him as he rides across a river. Väinämöinen falls into the water and floats out to sea. There an eagle rescues him and carries him to Pohjola's shores. The mistress of Pohjola, Louhi, tends Väinämöinen until he recovers. In order to be able to return home, Väinämöinen promises that Ilmarinen the smith will forge a Sampo for Pohjola. The maiden of Pohjola, Louhi's daughter, is promised to the smith in return for the Sampo.

On his way home, Väinämöinen meets the maiden of Pohjola and asks her to marry him. She agrees on the condition that Väinämöinen carry out certain impossible tasks. While Väinämöinen carves a wooden boat, his axe slips and he receives a deep wound in his knee. He searches for an expert blood-stauncher and finally finds an old man who stops the flow of blood by using magic incantations.

Using magic means, Väinämöinen sends 10 the unwilling Ilmarinen to Pohjola. Ilmarinen forges the Sampo. Louhi shuts it inside a hill of rock. Ilmarinen is forced to return home without his promised bride.

Lemminkäinen sets off to woo Kyllikki, 11-12 a maiden of Saari Island. He makes merry with the other maidens and abducts Kyllikki. He later abandons her and leaves to woo the maiden of Pohjola. With his singing he bewitches the people of Pohjola to leave the farmhouse at North Farm. Only one person, a cowherd, does not fall under his spell.

Lemminkäinen asks Louhi for her daughter, but Louhi demands that he first hunts 13-15

- and kills the Demon's elk, then the Demon's fire-breathing gelding, and finally the swan in Tuonela River, which is the boundary between this world and the next. There the vengeful cowherd kills Lemminkäinen and throws his body into the river. Lemminkäinen's mother receives a sign of her son's death and goes out in search of him. She rakes the pieces of her son's body out of Tuonela River, puts them back together and brings her son back to life.
- 16-17 Väinämöinen begins to build a boat and visits Tuonela in order to ask for the magic spells needed to finish it. He does not find them. He then seeks the missing spells from the stomach of the ancient wise man, Antero Vipunen, who has long been dead. He finds them and finishes his boat.
- 18-19 Väinämöinen sets off in his boat to woo the daughter of Pohjola, but she chooses instead Ilmarinen, the forger of the Sampo. Ilmarinen successfully performs the three impossible tasks set before him: he plows a field full of vipers, hunts down the bear of Tuonela and the wolf of Manala and finally fishes the Great Pike out of the Tuonela River. Louhi promises her daughter to Ilmarinen.
- 20-25 In Pohjola, preparations are made for the wedding and invitations are sent to all except Lemminkäinen. The groom and his folk arrive in Pohjola, and there is great feasting. Väinämöinen entertains the wedding guests with his singing. The bride and groom are given advice concerning marriage, and the bride bids farewell to her people and departs with Ilmarinen for Kalevala. There a banquet is also ready for the guests. Väinämöinen sings the praises of the wedding guests.
- Lemminkäinen shows up at the banquet in Pohjola uninvited, and demands food and drink. He is offered a tankard of beer filled with vipers. Lemminkäinen engages the master of Pohjola in a singing contest and swordfight and kills him.
- 26-27
- Lemminkäinen flees the people of Pohjola who are rising up in arms against him and hides on Saari Island, living among the maidens of the island until he is forced to flee once again, this time from the island's jealous menfolk. Lemminkäinen finds his home in ashes and his mother hiding in a cottage in the forest. Lemminkäinen sets out to seek revenge on Pohjola, but is forced to return home because a cold spell cast by the mistress of Pohjola has frozen his ships in the sea.
- 28-30
- Brothers Untamo and Kalervo quarrel violently, Kalervo's troop is slain, and of his kin only his son Kullervo remains. Because of his superhuman powers, Kullervo fails in every task he is given. Untamo sells the boy to Ilmarinen as a serf. The wife of Ilmarinen send Kullervo out to be a cowherd and out of spite bakes a stone into the bread which is his only provisions. Kullervo breaks his knife on the stone while trying to cut the bread, and in revenge drives the cows into the swamp and brings home a pack of wild animals instead. The mistress, intending to milk the cows, is mauled to death. Kullervo flees. He finds his family in the forest, but hears that his sister has disappeared.
- 31-34
- Kullervo's father sends him to pay the taxes. On his return trip, Kullervo unwittingly seduces his sister, who then drowns herself in the rapids upon discovering the truth. Kullervo sets out to seek revenge on Untamo. Having killed Untamo and
- 35-36

- his family, Kullervo returns home to find his own family dead. Kullervo commits suicide.
- 37 Ilmarinen mourns the death of his wife and decides to forge a woman of gold. The golden maiden remains, however, lifeless and cold. Väinämöinen warns the young people against worshipping gold.
- 38 Ilmarinen is rejected by the youngest daughter of Pohjola and carries her off in his sleigh. The girl reviles Ilmarinen and so offends him that he finally turns her into a seagull with his singing. Ilmarinen tells Väinämöinen of the wealth and prosperity that the Sampo has brought the people of Pohjola.
- 39-41 Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and Lemminkäinen set out to steal the Sampo from Pohjola. In the course of the journey, their boat runs aground on the shoulders of a giant pike. Väinämöinen kills the pike and fashions a kantele from its jawbone. No one else is able to play the instrument, but Väinämöinen holds all living things spellbound with his playing.
- 42-43 Väinämöinen puts the people of Pohjola to sleep with his kantele playing and the Sampo is taken to the travellers' boat and rowed away. The people of Pohjola awaken and Louhi, the mistress of Pohjola, sends obstacles in the path of the raiders to hinder their escape. The seafarers survive, but the kantele falls into the sea. Louhi sets off in pursuit and transforms herself into a giant bird of prey. In the ensuing battle the Sampo is smashed and falls into the sea. Some of the fragments remain in the sea, but others wash ashore and bring Finland good fortune and prosperity. Louhi is left with only the worthless lid of the Sampo and an impoverished land.
- In vain, Väinämöinen seeks the kantele which fell into the sea. He makes a new kantele from birchwood and his playing once again delights the whole of creation.
- Louhi sends diseases to destroy the people of Kalevala, but Väinämöinen cures the sick. Louhi sends a bear to attack the Kalevala cattle, but Väinämöinen slays the bear. The people of Kalevala organize a bear-killing feast.
- The mistress of Pohjola hides the sun and the moon inside a hill and steals the fire as well. Ukko, the supreme god, makes a new sun and moon by striking fire, but the fire falls to earth, into the belly of a giant fish. Väinämöinen asks Ilmarinen to go fishing with him. They catch the fish and place the fire in the service of humankind.
- Ilmarinen forges a new sun and moon, but they do not shine. After battling the people of Pohjola, Väinämöinen returns to ask Ilmarinen to fashion a set of keys with which to release the sun and moon from Pohjola's mountain. While Ilmarinen is forging, Louhi sets the sun and moon free to return to their places in the sky.
- Marjatta conceives a child from a whortleberry. Her baby boy is born in the forest, but soon disappears, to be found finally in a swamp. Väinämöinen condemns the fatherless child to death, but the child speaks out against the sentence and is christened King of Karelia. Väinämöinen departs in a copper boat with the prediction that he will be needed again someday to make a new Sampo for the people.

to bring new light and play new songs.

National Romanticism and the Golden Age of Finnish art

From the very beginning, enthusiasm over the Kalevala was linked to the question of the epic's Karelian roots. Karelia was seen to be a treasure trove of poetry, an idyllic sanctuary of ancient myth and lifeways.

Romantic interest surrounding Karelia, the Kalevala, and Finland's distant past is known as Karelianism. This interest peaked in the 1890s but continued into the 1920s.

Folk poetry collectors and ethnographers travelled throughout Karelia, bringing back with them new and exciting finds after every journey. They also described their experiences in travel journals and in the press. For artists in particular, Karelia soon became a pilgrimage site, and the Kalevala became an extremely valuable source of inspiration and subject matter.

Soon after the Kalevala's publication, researchers emphasized that while most of the Kalevala's text is indeed based on authentic folklore, as an overall work it is the composition of a single man, Elias Lönnrot. In the Karelianist movement, however, the Kalevala represented ancient Finnish reality.

For the Karelianists, the landscape and people of Karelia were the present-day representatives of the world depicted in the Kalevala. In the European thought of the day, groups living in isolation from social and cultural centers were often seen to directly reflect the life of earlier eras.

In 1919, the Karelianists founded the Kalevala Society. One of the Society's

aims was to establish a Kalevala House which would be a centre for Kalevala art and research.

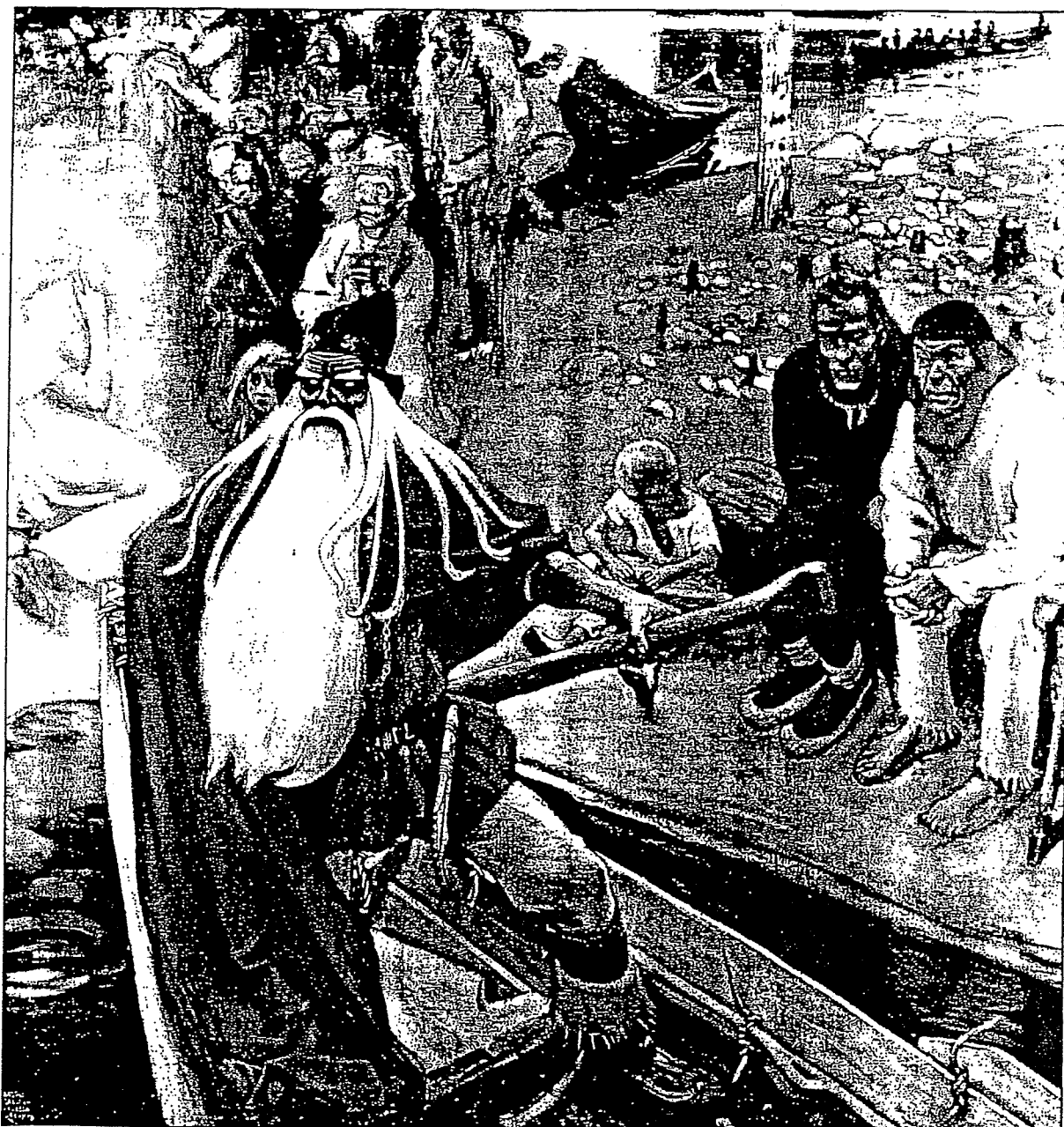
In the 20th century, enthusiasm for Karelia and the Kalevala has sometimes waned, with Karelianism criticized for being an example of folklorism and over-romanticized escape from reality.

Now, however, on the brink of the new millennium, the Kalevala and folk poetry have once again become subjects of interest. In a way, we have come full circle, since after more than half a century it is once again possible to make trips to the folk poetry lands of Archangel Karelia.

At the turn of the century, during the period of National Romanticism, a new outpouring of creativity could be seen in all areas of the arts in Finland. This creativity took its inspiration from Finnish sources, above all the Kalevala. These works are still considered the cornerstones of Finnish art.

For example, poet Eino Leino, composer Jean Sibelius, painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela, sculptor Emil Wikström and architect Eliel Saarinen went to Karelia in search of persons and primordial landscapes to use as models in their poetry, music and art. The world of the Kalevala was a symbol through which artists strove to convey the deepest experiences of humankind. The influence of the Kalevala on later works of art has been less noticeable, it has manifested itself more as an interest in ancient, mythical wilderness landscapes than as Kalevala-themes per se.

Originally, Kalevala metre poetry was performed by singing. Only after the Kalevala itself appeared in print did the poetry begin to be recited. The fact that the Kalevala was sung and that its themes



The Departure of Väinämöinen (1896-1906) by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. - Hämeenlinna Art Museum. Photograph by Douglas Sivén, Gallen-Kallela Museum.

dealt with the fundamental questions of human existence have contributed to the fact that the Kalevala quickly became a significant source of inspiration for Finnish composers.

In 1890, Jean Sibelius was converted to Karelianism by the music of Robert Kajanus. He also received inspiration from meeting folk poetry singer Larin Paraske. The symphonic poem *Kullervo*, finished in 1892, was Sibelius' first composition with a Kalevalaic theme. He had already made a trip to Karelia that same year.

Quite soon after the publication of the Kalevala, the question of how the epic should be illustrated began to be discussed in Finland. Competitions were even organized for an illustrator, but in the opinions of the judges none of the candidates had captured the true spirit of the Kalevala in their artwork.

In 1891 another Kalevala illustration competition was organized, and this time Akseli Gallen-Kallela was quickly recognized as the most noteworthy illustrator of Kalevala themes. The characters and events of the Kalevala are still popularly perceived through the images he created.

The Kalevala around the world

The Kalevala has been translated into more languages than any other work of Finnish literature. It has been translated into 51 languages, not all of which have yet been published. All in all over 150 translations, abridgements and adaptations of the Kalevala exist.

The earliest translation appeared in Swedish as early as 1841. The first translation of the New Kalevala was in German and appeared in 1852.

Most of the Kalevala translations have been made on the basis of the Finnish original, but translations existing in English, German and Russian have also served as departure points for many translations.

Why, despite the fact that the language of the Kalevala is archaic, the poetic metre ancient, and the Finnish cultural sphere relatively small, is the Kalevala translated into other languages? There are several possible explanations. First, the Kalevala is part of the world's literature, and as such, it inspires interest and makes itself felt across the boundaries of space and time.

Second, in recent years it has been pointed out that the Kalevala's impact on Finnish national identity brings it closer to those groups wishing to promote their own cultural self-awareness and national or ethnic independence.

Who translates the Kalevala? How is it possible to interpret the Kalevala for another language and culture? Some translators consider the transfer of precise and detailed meaning, that is, ethnographic or linguistic authenticity, to be the most important; these translators are usually researchers. Other translators, on the other hand, wish to interpret the Kalevala so as to make it attractive to the receiving culture. For these translators, who are usually writers and poets, it is the mental reality of the Kalevala which is significant: the epic's northern exoticism is merely a veneer which masks the myths common to all peoples.

Forty-six different language translations of the Kalevala have been published. Below, these languages are listed alphabetically, with the year of publication in parentheses.

American English (1988)
 Arabic (1991)
 Armenian (1972)
 Belorussian (1956)
 British English (1888, 1989, among others)
 Bulgarian (1992)
 Catalan (1997)
 Chinese (1962)
 Czech (1894)
 Danish (1907, 1994, among others)
 Dutch (1940, 1985, among others)
 Esperanto (1964)
 Estonian (1883, 1939, among others)
 Faeroese (1993)
 French (1867, 1930, 1991, among others)
 Fulani (1983)
 Georgian (1969)
 German (1852, 1914, 1967, among others)
 Greek (1992)
 Hebrew (1930)
 Hindi (1990)
 Hungarian (1871, 1909, 1972, among others)
 Icelandic (1957)
 Italian (1910, 1941, among others)
 Japanese (1937, 1976, among others)
 Kannada/ Tulu (1985)
 Komi (1980)
 Latin (1986)
 Latvian (1924)
 Lithuanian (1922, 1972, among others)
 Moldovian (1961)
 Norwegian (1967)
 Polish (1958, 1974, among others)
 Romanian (1942, 1959, among others)
 Russian (1888, 1970, among others)
 Serbo-Croatian (1935)
 Slovakian (1962, 1986, among others)

Slovenian (1961, 1997, among others)
 Spanish (mm. 1953, 1985)
 Swahili (1992)
 Swedish (1841, 1884, 1948, among others)
 Tamil (1994)
 Turkish (1965)
 Ukranian (1901)
 Vietnamese (1994)
 Yiddish (1954)

The Kalevala in many forms

The Kalevala has been published in dozens of different Finnish-language editions not only within Finland but also in Archangel Karelia and in the United States.

The Finnish Literature Society, which published the first Kalevala in 1835, has published later editions as well, in which Lönnrot's introductory notes are included as a preface. Many publishers have enlivened the text through illustrations.

The most powerful influence on Kalevala illustrations has been artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela. The Kalevala in its entirety has also been illustrated by Matti Visanti (1938), Aarno Karimo (1952-1953) and Björn Landström (1985).

Numerous abridgements and prose editions of the Kalevala have appeared for children and young people. The Kalevala began to be read in schools in 1843, when Finnish became a subject of study. Lönnrot himself edited an abridged version of the Kalevala for schools in 1862. By the 1950s, dozens of different school-book versions of the Kalevala had appeared. The most recent *condensed version of the Kalevala*, edited by Aarne Salminen, appeared in 1985.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, there have also been Kalevala stories for small children. Aili Konttinen's *A Child's Golden Kalevala* and Martti Haavio's *Kalevala Tales* appeared in the 1960s.

Children of the present generation found their own Kalevala in 1992, when writer and illustrator of children's books Mauri Kunnas published his *Canine Kalevala*. The illustrations in this book have been inspired by the art of Akseli Gallen-Kallela.

In his preface Kunnas tells how, after having heard the yapping of dogs for years, it occurred to him that they wanted to tell him something. - "So I packed my knapsack and set out on a collecting trip among the neighborhood canine community... So similar are these stories to those of the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala, that I decided to name this saga and its bold heroes and damsels in accordance with it."

Virtual Kalevala?

We are not yet at the stage where we could, simply by the power of Kalevala magic, move through the poetry lands of the Kalevala, participate in the battle for the Sampo or listen to the kantele playing of Väinämöinen, but we are perhaps moving toward this sort of experience.

In addition to the Kalevala in printed form, one can also become acquainted with the world of the Kalevala on tarot cards, through role-playing games or by CD-rom.

The text of the Kalevala, as well as information concerning, among other things, translations, illustrations and the folk poems behind the epic can also be

located through the Internet from the Finnish Literature Society's home page at <http://www.finlit.fi>.

The Kalevala in modern Finland

The Kalevala has left its mark on many areas of Finnish life. "Kalevalaness" has established itself firmly in Finnish culture, a fact which can best be seen in our nomenclature.

The names of city quarters, streets, businesses and products draw continually on the distinctiveness of the Kalevala. The Kalevala is a unique trademark in the marketing world.

The use of names from the Kalevala was particularly widespread at the end of the last century, nowadays it is more sporadic. Nonetheless, the distinctiveness of Finnish products and handicraft is still emphasized by choosing a Kalevala-related name for the product.

The modern Finnish couple Aino and Ilmari Pohjola live in Oulu on Kalevalankuja Lane, earlier they lived in Espoo's Tapiola. Mornings they read the newspaper Kaleva.

The family is insured by the Pohjola insurance company. When guests come to visit, the table is set with Sampo pewter dinnerware, and Aino Pohjola wears her Väinämöissweater.

Ilmari Pohjola works for the Lemminkäinen asphaltting company, Aino Pohjola at the Kalevala-Koru jewelry boutique. Ilmari Pohjola's father worked as a young man on the icebreaker Sampo.

Aino Pohjola, on the other hand, is from a farming family, and the crops on the farm were harvested with a Sampo harvester. Her family belonged to the

► *Pellervo Society, and were insured by the Kaleva insurance firm.*

The Pohjola family have a summer cottage in Hiidenvesi. Evenings they light the fire in the fireplace with Sampo matches.

According to the Kalevala, he who possesses the Sampo receives prosperity and all good things. The loss of the Sampo, on the other hand, portends ruin.

Over the last 150 years the question of what the Sampo actually is has occupied not only Finnish researchers from nearly every field of study, but also non-Finnish experts on the Kalevala. There are as many solutions to the riddle of the Sampo as there are persons interested in it. The possibilities are endless.

Could the puzzling nature of the Sampo be one reason why it is possibly the theme from the Kalevala which is used most often in the names of firms and businesses?

The Kalevala in modern art

The Kalevala interests modern Finns today not only because of its symbolic value, but also because of its content. The epic itself, like folk poetry and folk music, is the focus of intense, ongoing study and interpretation.

The 150th anniversary of the Old Kalevala in 1985 began a new Kalevala renaissance in the Finnish art world. The Kalevala has been "taken down from the shelf and dusted off" for re-use.

When modern artists utilize the Kalevala, they are not merely re-telling or re-illustrating the Kalevala's stories, rather, they wish to address, through the mystical world of the Kalevala, the eternal ques-

tions facing humanity: life, death, love, and survival.

The Kalevala thus lives on in Finnish culture. From a perspective of nearly 200 years what is significant is that each generation has interpreted the Kalevala from its own standpoint, using what went before and creating something new. The Kalevala has not gathered dust on a pedestal but has been present in both everyday life and celebration.

In the 1990s, the Kalevala has inspired, among others, photographer Vertti Teräsvuori, who stretched traditional boundaries of Kalevala interpretation with his multimedia exhibition *Pre Kalevala*. This exhibition consists of photographs, film footage, jewelry, objects, clothing, etc. It is a depiction of a world in which the power of the magical word still influences everyday life.

In 1997, after an interval of roughly a decade, the theatre once again took up the theme of the Kalevala, this time using new ideas. For example in the Kalevala as performed by the Finnish National Theatre, a picture was created of Väinämöinen which was more comic than heroic. In this performance, commonalities were sought between present-day Finland and the ancient era described by the Kalevala.

In Finnish music with Kalevalaic themes, the tragic tale of Kullervo has inspired a number of composers, beginning with Sibelius. On Kalevala Day (February 28) 1992, the opera *Kullervo* by composer Aulis Sallinen made its debut in Los Angeles. In Finland the opera's opening night was in November of 1993.

Aulis Sallinen tells why he selected the theme of Kullervo for interpretation: - "This story would hardly deserve to be told if not for one song which stands above

the rest. This is theme of Kullervo's mother. Within the figure of a human monster, an wretched man, his mother perceives a small boy, lost ages ago, with shining boyish hair of linen-gold. Having finished this work I am still of the same opinion. That is exactly what he became."

In addition to the Kalevala's Aino and Kullervo, the Sampo is another theme which has guided artists to the themes of the Kalevala. In music, artists have striven to express the mystery of the Sampo in a more spectacular manner.

Of the modern Finnish composers, Einojuhani Rautavaara defines the attainment, *theft*, and destruction of the Sampo during its theft as the key to the Sampo's mystery. It must be lost in order for it to be an object of longing. In Rautavaara's work the tales of the Kalevala are distanced from realism and its events approach legendary status.

The Kalevala and its tales open up possibilities for endless interpretation. Perhaps it is this which explains the longevity and vitality of the Kalevala, which even in today's world show no signs of diminishing.

KALEVALA - THE FINNISH NATIONAL EPIC 1835 - 1849 - 1999

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