

The Narrator's Voice in *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg*

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Ossian, himself, appears to have been endowed by nature with an exquisite sensibility of heart; prone to that tender melancholy which is so often an attendant on great genius; and susceptible equally of strong and of soft emotions. He was not only a professed bard, educated with care, as we may easily believe, to all the poetical art then known, and connected, as he shews us himself, in intimate friendship with the other contemporary bards, but a warrior also; and the son of the most renowned hero and prince of his age. This formed a conjunction of circumstances, uncommonly favourable towards exalting the imagination of a poet. . . . In such times as these, in a country where poetry had been so long cultivated, and so highly honoured, is it any wonder that among the race and succession of bards, one Homer should arise; a man who, endowed with a natural happy genius, favoured by peculiar advantages of birth and condition, and meeting in the course of his life, with a variety of incidents proper to fire his imagination, and to touch his heart, should attain a degree of eminence in poetry, worthy to draw the admiration of more refined ages? (Blair 1765/1996:352-53)

So writes Hugh Blair in his early and influential essay on the apparent narrator / author of James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*. Blair focuses attention on the figure at the very heart of the epic as conceptualized in his day. Imagined as a historical author whose perceptions and social backgrounds left their marks on his songs—a Homer or Virgil—this bard became a figure of intense interest to antiquarians and romanticists alike. Blair's "Critical Dissertation," and the epic it celebrates, were to have a profound impact on European arts and letters during the latter half of the eighteenth and bulk of the nineteenth centuries. The folklore-derived literary epics that would follow Macpherson's breakthrough work, sometimes fearlessly, sometimes with greater skepticism, hold singular significance not only in the cultural but also in the political history of European nations. Beginning with a body of localized oral tradition—be it song or tale collected only recently or culled from manuscript finds—and the contention that every great national literature needed at its foundation a great

national epic, the writers of these works set out to create (recover, “textualize” [Honko 1998]) texts that would serve at once both aesthetic and political functions. Key to the entire enterprise were the twin concepts of the native spirit—a people’s innate and unique way of experiencing the world, reflected in their songs—and the bard, the great Homer or Ossian who had transformed the limited thoughts of native genius into a masterpiece of transcendent value sometime in the past. A great nation *produced* a great bard, and he in turn gave noble form to the rude and lovely sentiments of the nation. And it fell to the scholar to recover both native spirit and bard in the compilation and presentation of the epic in print, reconstructing it, if necessary, from the scattered shards of present songs.

Given the loftiness of this task, it is no surprise, then, that the great epic writers of the nineteenth century were often treated with esteem, even outright adulation by the broader intelligentsia (and eventually also the masses) of their nations. The same grandeur of task sometimes, of course, attracted instead the envy of literary contemporaries. The lives of Elias Lönnrot and Friedrich R. Kreutzwald are similar in these ways. Both are best known today for the folklore-derived epics they authored: Lönnrot’s Finnish national epic *Kalevala* (1835, revised 1849) and Kreutzwald’s Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1857). But these epic authors—although similar in product, intent, and reception—differ in precisely what role they assumed for themselves in the sacral reembodyment of the national soul. By looking at one of the most important aspects of any such epic of the era—the narrator’s role, usually equated with the persona of the bard—I believe we can perceive different strategies for handling and organizing the traditional material these nineteenth-century scholars had as their sources and different attitudes regarding the relation of scholarly editor to the epic bard of the past. We can glimpse differing implicit images of the role of the literary redactor in the great transaction underway between traditional performers and a modern reading audience, images indicative of areas of ambiguity in the literary enterprise of epic-making.

The Authorial Voice of the Introductions

The complex role of the narrator in these two national epics finds its first indications in the prefaces to each work. Here, each author / editor’s voice comes necessarily to the fore, as he enunciates the principles and goals that he has pursued in producing the text. An audience of the nineteenth century would have no more left the preface or introduction unread than we today would leave the ending of a movie unwatched; it is here that the

purpose of the work becomes clear and the keys to its provenance and interpretation are given. It is the voice and tone of this authorial figure, carefully crafted and rhetorically deployed, that we often expect to find whenever a narrator's voice comes to the fore in the subsequent text. Such an assumption is accurate only in *Kalevipoeg*, however, and even there only to a limited extent, as we shall see. But in the introductions to both *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg*, we find stated attitudes that relate directly to the role of narrator as it eventually emerges in the texts.

In the Introduction to the 1849 *Kalevala*, as in his earlier Introduction to the 1835 first edition, Elias Lönnrot (1802-84) makes clear his intention of foregrounding the songs rather than the editor. Certainly, the success of his epic in Finland and abroad had convinced the writer to lessen the expressions of humble self-doubt and inadequacy that close the 1835 Introduction: "The starting point from which many others get encouragement from their activities is quite different from mine, namely, the hope of achieving a complete and adequate piece of work. In my case this hope is totally lacking. Dubious, to say the least, of my ability to produce something suitable, I have occasionally been plagued with doubt to such an extent that I have been on the verge of throwing the whole thing into the fire."¹ But the 1849 reprise wastes few words on self congratulation or posturing.² Rather, Lönnrot uses the opportunity to focus attention on issues raised by the songs themselves: their possible order, origin, historical and mythological significance. The earlier Introduction's extended discussion of prosody and language is reduced to a briefer discussion of difference between the text's Karelian and the reader's likely Finnish dialect. The Introduction closes with a listing of contributors of source songs and a careful tabulation of the new text's lines and their relation to the earlier edition. Judgment as to the success of the new text's ordering is left, deferentially, to the reader: "Whether, in the order of the poems and in other internal matters, this one is better than the previous edition is a matter left for each reader to decide for himself."³ We are left, then, with the (illusory) feeling that the editor Lönnrot has now departed entirely and that we will be left henceforth to meet the songs alone.

Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's (1803-82) Introduction, in contrast, is far more personal and anecdotal, and we come to suspect that this

¹ Magoun 1963:373-74; for original, see Majamaa 1993:189-90.

² Magoun 1963:374-79; for original, see Majamaa 1993:409-17.

³ Magoun 1963:369; for original, see Majamaa 1993:417.

garrulous editor will never leave us alone with the text. Kreutzwald is partly obliged, of course, to supply more details regarding the genesis of his work, since the process involved so many more people and events. These included his fellow doctor and friend Friedrich Robert Faehlmann (1798-1850), who began the work of creating the epic but died before advancing the project to completion; Dr. Georg Schultz-Bertram of St. Petersburg, the prime instigator of the project and advocate for Kreutzwald's efforts; several other collectors in the Võru region of Estonia; the membership of the Learned Estonian Society (Õpetatud Eesti Selts), who served as the work's publisher and immediate audience; and the pastor Carl Reinthal, who produced the facing-page German translation of the text. But Kreutzwald also goes further in his personal relation of the stages of his work, opining on the declining nature of the Estonian imagination, cataloguing the difficulties involved in writing the epic, and defending himself in advance against a host of likely criticisms, particularly regarding the names and natures of his characters. In recounting some of the more severe vicissitudes of his work, Kreutzwald laments (Kurman 1982:296):

I began my work without expecting results from the request to the public (i.e., to assist in the undertaking with suitable communications) which had in the meantime been issued. As I might have foreseen, this request was in fact not only unsuccessful but also provoked utterances in public media that attempted, in many ways, to cast the entire project and the parties concerned with it in an unfavorable light. But such indifference or else ill will on the part of the public was not able to hinder the continuation of the project, as I not only possessed as abundant material as I could for the moment desire, but I also was already so deep in the subject so as not to be bothered further by minor—even though sometimes quite malicious—taunts and gibes not pertinent to the matter.

The effect of these intimations is to foreground the editor as a sensitive and fervent writer, wholly different from the retreating, seemingly detached editor persona presented in the introductions to *Kalevala*. And thus, although Kreutzwald covers many of the same scientific issues as Lönnrot, the overall effect of his Introduction is to bring the reader into personal engagement with a writer whose voice we will come to recognize repeatedly in the epic. We are prepared to expect his voice and persona to bleed into the epic itself, as indeed proves the case, at least in part.

The Epic Begins, the Bard Appears

Once these scholarly introductions have been made, both epics can launch into their songs themselves, but not, however, without first introducing a fictive folk narrator, who takes the place of the editor persona as the seeing “I” of the narrative. Both the Finnish-Karelian and the Estonian ancient song traditions contain verses pertaining to singing itself, the singer as a character, and the sources of his or her words. And both authors make use of these traditional lines to erect a narrator / bard persona, who takes center stage at the outset and, in the case of *Kalevala*, at the closing of the epic. In *Kalevala* (Poem 1:1-108) the epic’s opening lines portray an aging singer who addresses a male childhood friend and exhorts the latter to join hands in singing (1:12-21):

Veli kulta, veikkoseni,
kaunis kasvinkumppalini!
Lähe nyt kanssa laulamahan
saa kera sanelemahan
yhtehen yhyttyämme,
kahta’alta käytyämme;
harvoin yhtehen yhymme,
saamme toinen toisihimme
näillä raukoilla rajoilla
poloisilla Pohjan mailla.

Dear brother, my brother,
beautiful companion of my youth!
Come sing with me,
let us begin to recite,
now that we’ve come together,
arrived from two directions.
Seldom do we see each other,
or come together,
in these wretched districts
in these pitiful Northern lands.⁴

The singer recounts learning songs at both a father’s and a mother’s knee in childhood and notes further songs learned while working as a cattle-herd. In lines that are added to the 1849 version of the epic, the very landscape is portrayed as having given up songs to the learning singer, all of which were carefully stored away (1:65-78):

Vilu mulle virttä virkkoi,
sae saatteli runoja,
virttä toiset tuulet toivat,
meren aaltoset ajoivat
linnut liitteli sanoja
puien latvat lausehia.
Ne minä kerälle käärin,
sovittelin sommelolle,
kerän pistin kelkkahani

The cold told me a song,
the rain brought poems,
the winds carried another song,
the sea’s waves drove another,
birds added words,
the treetops sentences.
These I wound into a ball,
arranged into a skein,
I stuffed it in my sled,

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

sommelon rekoseheni;
 ve'in kelkalla kotihin,
 rekosella riihen luoksi
 panin aitan parven päähän,
 vaskisehen vakkasehen.

the skein into my sleigh,
 I brought it home by sled,
 by sleigh into the barn,
 I put it up in the loft
 in a copper box.

The singer will now uncoil this carefully preserved ball of lore optimally in exchange for beer. But as the singer declares in both editions of the epic, the song will out in any case, even without a drink (95-102 = end of poem):

Kun ei tuottane olutta,
 tarittane taarivettä,
 laulan suulta laihemmalta,
 vetoselta vierettelen
 tämän iltamme iloksi
 päivän kuulun kunniaksi,
 vaiko huomenen huviksi
 uuen aamun alkeheksi.

If no beer is brought,
 no ale arrives,
 I'll sing with a more meager mouth
 and croon on water alone,
 for the joy of this, our evening,
 to the honor of this great day
 even to brighten the morrow
 the beginning of the new morn.

Lönnrot's use of traditional song lines creates both a narrator persona here and an inscribed context for the epic's performance: what is to follow is to be seen as the stored-up words of an elderly singer, performing in a farmhouse for the entertainment of an old friend and all others who may wish to listen. Given the lengthy discussion of Arhippa Perttunen as a prototypical singer in the preface to the 1835 *Kalevala*, it is easy to imagine this textual narrator as a bearded elder, tramping the woods and fields of Karelia and meeting with a companion of old. Lönnrot's opening lines in neither edition of the epic, however, explicitly identify the singer as male, balancing both the singer's sources of lore (mother and father) and childhood activities. What is most important, it seems, is the singer's age, the traditional sources of the singer's words, and the traditional context in which the epic is supposedly being performed. The first poem appears designed to furnish a quasi-ethnographic account of the typical epic singer and song situation.

Similarly, the ending portion of Poem 50 (513-620) returns to the persona of the narrator to provide a closing, seemingly ethnographic portrayal of the traditional singer and context. The brief 29 lines of first-person narration that close the 1835 *Kalevala* are expanded in the 1849 revision through the addition of lines gleaned from lyric and lyric-epic songs, creating a poignant 107-line soliloquy. The singer now asks whether it is time at last to stop, predicting that the audience will eventually tire of the song (50:535-36):

Mieli on jäämähän parempi
kuin of kesken katkemahan.

It is better to end on one's own
than be cut off in the middle.

The narrator then launches into a sorrowful defense of the performance itself, attributing shortcomings to the singer's own impoverished and disadvantaged youth, the details and tone of which seem to contrast with that of the narrator portrayed at the opening of the epic. Orphaned at a young age, the singer / narrator of the 1849 *Kalevala*'s final song was obliged to wander about the countryside, suffering the effects of wind and weather (50:575-82):

Sainpa, kiuru, kiertämähän,
lintu, kurja, kulkemahan
vieno, maita vieremähän
vaivainen, vaeltamahan,
joka tuulen tuntemahan
ärjynnän älyämähän,
vilussa värisemähän,
pakkasessa parkumahan.

I, a swallow, had to wander
a poor bird, traveling about,
a gentle one, crossing the countryside
one beset, tramping about,
knowing the feel of every wind
the sting of every gale,
shivering in the cold,
weeping in the frost.

This is a singer who knows the harshness of criticism, and plaintively recounts familiarity with every sort of mean word (50:583-92):

Moni nyt minulla onpi,
usea olettelevi:
virkkaja vihaisen äänen,
äänen tuiman tuikuttaja;
ken se kieltäni kirosi,
kenpä ääntä ärjähteli,
soimasi sorisevani,
lausui liioin laulavani,
pahasti pajattavani
väärin virttä vääntäväni.

Now I have many,
with whom I often meet:
a scolder of angry voice,
a deliverer of harsh voice;
such a one cursed my tongue,
roared at my voice,
faulted my verses,
exaggerated my singing,
as poorly delivered
or wrongly wrought.

The beset and unhappy singer promises now to wind the songs back up and store them away in a barn, resigned to the inevitable criticism that will follow the performance and noting again the poverty and lack of opportunity that have caused the song's imperfections. Nonetheless, the singer notes in closing, the performance has blazed a trail for other singers in the rising generation, singers who may take up the folk harp (*kantele*) that Väinämöinen has just left for the benefit of the Finnish people.

Kreutzwald creates a similar, albeit more Macphersonesque, image of the singer in his opening Invocation, Introduction, and first poem, drawing again on traditional lines from Estonian folksong. In the epic's opening Invocation (*Soovituseks*; German *Anruf*), the singer boldly asks Vainemuine (the Estonianized rendering of the Finnish Väinämöinen) to lend his harp (*kannel*) and recalls a similar combination of homespun and nature-born sources for the verses to come (Soovituseks 21-24):

Mis mina kodunurmelt noppind, kaugelt võõral vääjel künnud, mis mulle toonud tuulehoogu lained lustil veeretanud	What have I gathered from my home pasture sown into distant foreign fields? What have the winds brought to me the whirling waves carried to me? ⁵
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Significantly, however, and in contrast to the narrator of *Kalevala*'s opening, this is a singer whose childhood friends lie buried, and who is about to sing forth alone for strangers (Soovituseks 29-40):

Seda ma lauluna lõksutelen võõra kuulijate kõrva; armsamad kevadised kaimud varisenud mulla alla,	I will sing these out as a song, into the ears of listening strangers, my springtime companions are settled beneath the soil,
kuhu mu lusti lõõritusi kurvatuse kukutusi ihkava meele igatsusi koolja kuulmesse ei kosta.	to where my hoping rhymes my sad trilling the yearnings of a mournful spirit cannot be heard by the dead.
Üksinda, lindu, laulan ma lusti, kukun üksi, kurba kägu, häälitseen üksi igatsusi, kuni närtsin nurmedella.	Alone, a bird, I sing out I trill alone, a poor cuckoo, I give voice to my yearnings until I wither on the meadow.

In this way, Kreutzwald creates a mournful, wistful narrator, more in keeping with the narrator of *Kalevala*'s end than that of the *Kalevala*'s beginning. He also creates a more evidently aware persona: one who is conscious of the readerly audience and compelled despite present sorrows to perform the repertoire learned in youth. It is tempting, too, to hear Kreutzwald's own voice in this resignation, as he cryptically recalls the deaths of treasured friends (including Faehlmann) and his own daughter (Kurman 1982:269, n.1).

⁵ Translation my own. Some translations of Kreutzwald are from Kurman 1982, as noted in text.

In the 318-line Introduction (*Sissejuhatuseks*) that follows this opening, Kreutzwald's narrator again recalls the narrator of Lönnrot's epic, recounting the places in which the songs of old had become hidden and the singer's own reveries into which the songs had eventually intruded. Kreutzwald's narrator locates the origin of the songs much more emphatically in the natural landscape, as well as in the mythical world of Uku, Mardus, and Vanataat, and depicts the singer's work as a quintessentially skilled act of decipherment (79-85):

Kõiges kuuleb targa kõrva,
mõisteliku õrna meeli
lustilugu, leinanuttu,
kiusatuse kiljatusi,
kuuleb kõiges muistset kõnet,
märkab muistseid mõistatusi,
salasõni sõlmitusi.

In everything the keen ear,
that tender, thoughtful sense,
hears tales of joy along with dirges
and cries of anguish;
in everything ancient words,
olden riddles, are sensed and heard
in the knots of secret phrases.

(Kurman 1982:6)

But the singer does not dwell only on personal memories and the experience of learning songs from one's environment. Defiantly, he or she speaks out toward the assumed reader, challenging the latter to a contest of knowledge and worth (97-104):

Poeg, kas tunned pilve põues
sala peitelikku sisu?
Pikse välgud, müristused
rõhutavad raheterad,
lume paksud puistatused,
äikese ähvardused
magasivad pilve rüpes
petteliku põue peidus.

Son, do you know the secret
hidden inside the stormclouds?
The flash of lightning, and crashing din,
sounds of thunder
deep pilings of snow
peltings of hailstones,
that lie in the lap of the cloud
hidden inside the stormcloud's bosom?

(Kurman 1982:6)

Unlike the inscribed male reader, the skilled singer at the heart of the text takes the messages of this turbulent and awesome nature and transforms them into artful song (116-27):

Laulik, luues lugusida,
veeravaida värssisida,
võtab pihu võltsivallast,
tüki teise tõsitalust,
kolmandama kuuluküllast,
laenab lisa meelegaekast,
mõttemõisa magasista.

The bard, in building tales,
in reciting rolling verses,
takes a fistful from fraud's country,
picks a second from truth's homestead,
still a third from rumor's village;
borrows still more from the senses' silo,
the granary of thought's manor.

Näitab kuju kulla nägu,
 kõne kaunis tõe karva,
 tõe karva, tarka arvu,
 siis on laulik osav looja,
 laitemata sõnaseadja.

Now should the creation glow golden,
 the tale gain the fair hue of truth—
 show truth's hue and good sense—
 then this bard's a skillful maker,
 a singer beyond reproach.

(Kurman 1982:7)

Here, then, the bard comments on the very act of composition that has brought forth the present epic, attributing all that follows in the text to this unique and canny artistic project of a traditional singer / author. In so doing, Kreutzwald's bard parallels the images of grandeur and lofty vision attributed to Macpherson's Ossian in Blair's essay. Like Blair, we are to feel ourselves in the presence of a uniquely accomplished singer, one whose words represent a mystical translation of the ancient natural and mythic past of the nation. And somehow, through a now invisible editor, this bard has come into face-to-face interaction with readers, thanks to the publication of the text.

Finally, at the outset of Poem 1, this imposing bard, now life-weary and withered upon the heath, remembers anew the stirring summer of youth and directs our gaze toward the first scene of the epic (1:36-52):

Kaugelt näen koda kasvamas,
 Kalevite kaljulinna,
 tammed müüridel toeksi,
 kaljurahdnud seina katteks,
 toomingad toa tagana.

From afar I see the home rise
 the stone fortress of Kalev's people
 oaks used as a stockade
 boulders bracing its walls
 choke-cherry trees behind.

This strikingly visual depiction places us not only in the audience of the bard but by the singer's side, viewing the heroes' stronghold of old. Time and space are mystically removed, as we are able to transcend all mortal boundaries through the singing of the bard. Yet the bard will never abandon us entirely to the experience of the scene, returning frequently in interjections, assurances, and explications.

In this sense, then, both Lönnrot and Kreutzwald draw on much the same kind of source material at the outset of their epics, erecting aged narrator personas possessed of lifelong experiences and the hoarded repertoire of many years. Lönnrot's narrator is more diffident, cognizant of the rarity of encounters with friends at the start of the epic and accustomed to mean treatment and constant criticism at the end. Kreutzwald's singer shows more braggadocio, locating sources in the very mystical fabric of nature and asserting expert skill in the interpretation, creation, and performance of songs. This is a singer who dares us to try to compete,

confident in a wisdom unmatched by the inscribed reader's book learning, an instance of which the present epic represents. But the differences between the two narrator personas here are more of emphasis than of substance, and the source poetry and epic lines used in each text echo each other frequently. It is easy to see why Kreutzwald opens his Invocation with an exhortation to Vainemuine—indeed, we can almost imagine the ancient singer of Lönnrot's epic and the present Estonian bard clasping hands across the celebrated Finnish bridge (*Soome sild*) to regale each other with their treasured songs.

The Narrator in the Epic's Core

If these bracketing details create an image of continuity between *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg*, the subsequent treatments of the two narrators within the body of the epics themselves reveal a striking contrast. The narrator of *Kalevala* dissolves immediately into depersonalized, vague interjections, largely of rhetorical questions. Such lines usually derive directly from traditional songs available to Lönnrot and are subordinated entirely to the guiding perceptions and voices of the epic's main characters. The narrator of *Kalevipoeg*, in contrast, asserts control of the text repeatedly, commenting in detail on the foibles of the epic's characters and providing explication of the plot's outcomes and images. The bard decides what we will see and when, prescribing the epic's pace and often demonstrating control over the flow of the narrative by interrupting scenes to shift from one setting or moment to another.

It is noteworthy that Lönnrot silences his narrator through the bulk of his epic, even at junctures where some sort of narrator intrusion might be welcomed, as in the abrupt scene changes between various strands of the epic's interwoven narrative or at especially poignant moments, such as the death scene of Aino (Poem 4) or the suicide of Kullervo (Poem 36). Consider the refrained and perfunctory nature of the apparent narrator interjection after the latter scene (36:343-46):

Se oli surma nuoren miehen
kuolo Kullervo urohon,
loppu ainakin urosta
kuolema kovaosaista.

That was the death of the young man
the demise of Kullervo the man
the end at last of the man
the dying of the unlucky one.

To be sure, Lönnrot's text does not fail to provide moral commentary on this as other similar moments, but it does so through placing the words in the

mouths of observing characters rather than in the persona of a narrator. Here it is Väinämöinen who is quoted at the end of the Kullervo cycle, warning people to raise children well and prevent the development of waifs like Kullervo in the future (36:347-60). In erecting this “chorus structure,” as Rafael Koskimies has termed it (1978), Lönnrot makes use of two-week old babies, old men lying on ovens, even rabbits at various points in his text. In contrast, Kreutzwald does not hesitate to award these musings to his bard, whose opinions become abundantly clear through the text.

In Kreutzwald’s epic, we can see the dramatic effects of the bard’s intrusive interruption technique in the handling of the Great Oak episode. Since this narrative is treated in both Lönnrot’s and Kreutzwald’s epics, and since it draws in each case on native songs collected from traditional singers, an examination of this event helps focus our observations concerning the different narrator techniques of each literary epic. Lönnrot incorporates the myth-song of the giant oak that blots out the sun and its eventual felling by a tiny man from the sea into the 1849 *Kalevala*’s second poem, where it plays a part in the establishment of agriculture and the world as we know it under the direction of the young-old hero Väinämöinen (2:47-204). The entire 158 lines of the episode are presented as a block, immediately following the development of burn-beat technology and preceding the advent of barley cultivation. Throughout its length, we find few overt interjections by a narrator, although its scenes and content are clearly guided by the perceptions of the key witness and instigator of action, Väinämöinen. It is he who perceives the danger of the too-massive tree and calls upon his mother to send a feller to dispatch it; it is he, too, who looks incredulously at the tiny man who rises from the sea only to transform into a giant a moment later. And at the end of the passage, when we are told of the magic tools that derive from the felled Oak itself (good fortune, wizardry, love, magic arrows), we have moved only subtly and without fanfare from the eyewitness persona of the hero sage to an unmarked narrator voice (2:191-96):

Kenpä siitä oksan otti,
se otti ikuisen onnen;
kenpä siitä latvan taittoi,
se taittoi ikuisen taian;
kenpä lehvän leikkaeli,
se leikkoi ikuisen lemmen

Whoever took a branch from there
took eternal luck;
whoever crafted a treetop from there
crafted eternal magic;
whoever severed a leafy branchlet
severed eternal love

Here, the third-person singular form of the verbs presents the aftereffects of the felling with matter-of-fact clarity, despite the wondrous details of the

uses made of the primordial oak. The narrator uses a rhetorical catalogue technique typical of the folk song tradition, with little or no further editorial comment on the part of either the inscribed singer or the implicit scholarly editor. We are by no means led to notice the nineteenth-century author through whose mind and hands the song has passed in arriving at this juncture in the epic, nor are we made aware of any perceiving entity in the text besides the omnipresent Väinämöinen, who becomes portrayed as the source and performer of many such songs both in the Joukahainen episode (Poem 3) and in the wedding ceremony (Poem 21:253-438). Although a narrator exists outside of Väinämöinen, this figure is left a simple, omniscient voice, providing no real competition for the narrative's central prime-mover.

In *Kalevipoeg*, on the other hand, the Oak episode is forcibly divided into two parts by an intrusive and irresistible narrator. The Oak song appears in the aftermath of the fourth poem's rape scene and the victim's desperate suicide, a parallel to the death of Aino in Poem 4 of the *Kalevala*. At the outset of Poem 5, the transgressor Kalevipoeg has arrived on the shores of Finland, exhausted from his swim and other activities. Then our narrator intrudes upon the text, putting the hero to sleep and diverting our attention back to the island of disgrace. The narrator intones (5:107-13):

Kalevite kallim poega!
Seni kui sa selilie
kaljukünkal koidu-unda
lased kiirelt laugudelle
vaatab laulik vaimusilmil
sinu teede käikisida
radasida Soome rannas.

Dearest son of Kalev!
while you are sprawled
on that hard boulder
with dawn-drowse light on your lids
this bard, with mind's eye
will view your courings,
your career on the Finnish shore.
(Kurman 1982:60)

After describing another (Macphersonesque) storm flashing about the sleeping hero, the narrator takes us back to the island, calling to the character below (5:128-32):

Puhka väsind keha, poega!
Lauliku tiivad lendavad
nii kui päike taeva servas
ilupaistel kõrgemalle,
lähvad teiste luhtadelle.

But rest your tired limbs, my boy!
like the sun on the sky's edge
this bard is borne on shining wings
higher to a farther flood-plain.
(Kurman 1982:61)

Under the control and interpretive presence of this powerful narrator, then, we watch the events that form the outset of the Oak song. The

deceased girl's parents recover the oak tree from the sea and plant it as a memorial to her loss. The mother also saves an eagle's egg, which eventually matures into an eagle under whose wing the little man with the axe awaits. Then, after introducing these details, the narrator again interrupts and redirects the song, leaving us suddenly with the mysterious image of the little axe-man to ponder. The 125-line passage thus ends suspensefully, while the narrator again addresses Kalevipoeg directly, revives him, and sends him forth on his adventures in Finland (5:264-74):

Kalevipoeg, hella venda,
tahtsid aga tunnikese
tukul' lasta laugusida
tahtsid pisut puhatelles
koidu-unda keerutada;
aga väsimuse võimuse
võitnud ettevõtetemised,
kütkenandanud kangelase.
Puhkasid sa terve päeva
uinusid pika öö pimedada
tükike veel teista päeva.

Kalevipoeg, dear brother
you intended for your eyelids
to drowse for only an hour;
you wanted to rest a bit,
just doze at dawn.
But the weight of your weariness
did away with these intentions
and shackled your strong limbs.
You drowsed for the entire day,
slept through the long dark night,
even dozed a spell on the second day.
(Kurman 1982:62)

In this way, the unobtrusive omniscient narrator of *Kalevala* becomes in *Kalevipoeg* an equally omniscient but now wholly personified narrator character, who interacts both with us as readers and with the characters of the plot. The interruption and resumption of plot lines underscores the narrator's empowerment and reminds us of the narrator's constant presence in the text.

We now witness—at this narrator's overt instigation—Kalevipoeg's pursuit of his mother's wizard-murderer, Kalevipoeg's purchase of a wondrous sword, the hero's drunken bragging about the rape, and his final slaying of the Smith's son when the latter upbraids him (Poem 6). Only at this moment, with the curse now placed on the sword in revenge for the son's slaying, does our narrator return to the island and to the tale of the Oak's felling (6:765-73):

Laskem laululaevakene
pajataja paadikene,
lustikandja lodjakene
saare randa seisemaie,
parve äärde puhkamaie.
Lähme saare lagedalle
vana tamme vaatamaie,

Let's leave the ship of our song,
the boat of a teller of tales
our good barge, standing
on the shore of the island,
resting by a seabank;
let's step to the island clearing
to see the old oak tree

mis seal enne toodud merest,
lainetesta oli leitud.

that had been raked from the sea
found earlier in the waves.

(Kurman 1982:69)

Only now do we hear of the attempts to fell the tree, the successful act of the little man and the products made of the wood, including a bridge to Finland, houses for a town, a sauna, a poorhouse, an orphanage, and — quintessentially—a home for the singer (6:907-10):

Sealt saab tena laulutuba,
laulija lustikamberi
kus neid sõnu seadeldakse
laululõngaks liimitakse.

From that can be made a song hut,
a house of joy for the singer,
where these words are being woven
this skein of song is being spun.

(Kurman 1982:80)

Here, then, we are brought forcefully not only into the presence of the narrator / singer, but into the very hut in which the song is being performed, a hut of meager size but grand content. And in the final lines of Poem 6, the narrator mocks those of us who underestimate the wonders and power of this abode and the shining yarn that the singer has produced. Both hut and song are shown to dissolve to encompass the entirety of nature, the source, as the bard stated before, of all the included words (6:926-35):

See on lauliku toake,
kehva mehe kambrikene,
vaese mehe varjukene.
Kuu on uksena eessa,
päike laella läikimassa,
tähed toassa tantsimassa,
viherkaar vibuna varjuks.
Siin need laululood loodi,
sõnasõuded sünnitati,
keelekeerud korrutati.

This is the singer's shack,
a poor man's chamber,
a pauper's refuge!
The moon serves as a door
and the sun shines from the ceiling;
stars are dancing in the room
and the rainbow curves for a roof.
Here is where these tales were wrought
where the tongue's twine was doubled over
and the winged words brought forth.

(Kurman 1982:80)

While the singer thus attributes the structure of the poem and its contents ultimately to the landscape, the epic lines also remind us of the powers of the bard to perceive and harness these communications. The Oak song becomes not a myth standing on its own, but a proof and example of the narrative art of an inscribed narrator, one stridently calling for our attention and respect.

It is this pervasive and powerful narrator that distinguishes Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* so markedly from Lönnrot's *Kalevala*. Certainly, Lönnrot also practices a plot interruption technique, most obviously in his

segmentation and distribution of the Sampo episodes (Poems 7, 10, 39, 42, 43) and in his interrupted coverage of the Lemminkäinen songs (Poems 11-15, 26-30), both pieces of his epic, we know, that he originally composed as entirely separate units and only subsequently wove together. But in the 1849 *Kalevala*, Lönnrot links these surreptitiously, through the purportedly innocuous editorial act of “ordering” the songs rather than the invasive, spotlighted enunciation of narrative control evinced by *Kalevipoeg’s* narrator. And, we might point out, as Matti Kuusi demonstrated in his classic analyses of both the Sampo and Lemminkäinen cycles (1977, 1980), Lönnrot often follows natural fault-lines in the narratives themselves, possibly reflecting the boundaries of once-separate songs synthesized in the past by folk redactions. Lönnrot does not as a rule interrupt a song in midstream only to create greater suspense and highlight an empowered singer figure; instead, he attempts to order the songs in a roughly chronological order, shifting scenes only at the beginning and end of distinct poems and worrying aloud in the Introduction to his work over the effectiveness of his editorial decisions.

Nor can we say that the narrator of *Kalevipoeg* is entirely foreign to Estonian oral tradition, although Kreutzwald’s creation shows a clear reliance on nineteenth-century images of Homer and Ossian. The narrator’s assertions of control and skill are drawn recurrently from traditional songs as well as narrator devices typical of prose folk narrative throughout Northern Europe. And the narrator’s self-confidence bears strong resemblance to the persona of Väinämöinen himself as presented in first-person passages throughout Lönnrot’s epic. And thus we can say that while Lönnrot gives us the Väinämöinen figure as a narrative character, Kreutzwald gives us much the same persona as a narrator, in whose capable hands we fly across the sky and history of Estonia. In so doing, it becomes difficult, however, to fully distinguish this wondrous narrator from the nineteenth-century compiler-poet, Kreutzwald himself.

Kreutzwald also shifts to first-person narration several times in his epic without explicitly tagging the lines as belonging to any particular character or to the established narrator. In Poem 1, for instance, while describing the wedding of Kalev and Linda, we suddenly find ourselves in the presence of a mistreated servant woman who complains of her hard conditions without reference to her own identity or any attempt to insert her into the overall narrative (1:756-82). Similarly, in Poem 9, Kalevipoeg’s written orders to his army are destroyed by the messenger he dispatches, whose thoughts and perceptions fill the final 158 lines of the poem. While Lönnrot, too, makes frequent use of such first-person narration in his epic, he always identifies the speaker of the lines in a manner that ties the figure

unambiguously to the plot and its events. In so doing, he clarifies his text for the reader but loses some of the abruptness and aesthetic effect of traditional lyric and lyric-epic songs, which confront the audience centrally with an unknown speaker whose identity we must puzzle out. Kreutzwald's terse additional first-person passages add further texture to his work's narrator niche and create a work both evocative of traditional Estonian lyric and aesthetically pleasing to a modern reader.

Despite the prominence of the *Kalevipoeg* bard, Kreutzwald refrains from reintroducing the character at the end of his epic. Thus, while the stirring moment of the *Kalevala*'s Poem 50—the departure of Väinämöinen and the leaving of the kantele to the people of Finland—is undercut by the return of the humble and self-deprecating folk narrator in the final lines of the text (Poem 50:513-620), the final stirring image of *Kalevipoeg*—the promise of Kalevipoeg's eventual return and renewal of Estonia—is allowed to stand as the text's final word. Compare the key lines in each epic:

Sinne puuttui pursinensa
venehinensä väsähtyi,
jätti kantelel jälille
soiton Suomelle soorean
kansalle ilon ikuisen
laulut suuret lapsillensa.

(*Kalevala* 50:507-12)

There he stopped with his boat
tired with his craft,
he left the kantele behind
fine instrument for Finland
everlasting joy for the people
great songs for his children.

Aga ükskord algab aega
kus kõik piirud kahel otsal
lausa lähvad lõkendama;
lausa tuleleeki lõikab
käe kaljukammitasasta—
küll siis Kalev jõuab koju
oma lastel' õnne tooma,
Eesti põlve uueks looma.

(*Kalevipoeg* 20:1047-54 = end of poem)

But one day an age will dawn,
when all spills, at both their ends,
will burst forth into flame;
and this stark fire will sever
the vise of stone from Kalevipoeg's hand.
Then the son of Kalev will come home
to bring his children happiness
and build Estonia's life anew.

(Kurman 1982:266)

Lönnrot's stirring moment comes well before the actual close of his epic; Kreutzwald lets his image close his text. This difference seems to encapsulate the diverging goals of the two authors. Lönnrot, ever seeking a more complete text, finds it necessary and desirable to use traditional lyric lines in the closing of his epic. Kreutzwald, ever attentive to the dramatic needs of his work, chooses a more stirring ending over the possibility of a more complete catalogue of Estonian folklore, balancing this choice with a more invasive narrator in the prior nineteen poems. The two authors prioritize differently but respond to the same dual demands of the folklore-

derived national epic: to present their nation's folk song tradition with a degree of ethnographic, scientific completeness and to create a literary work capable of captivating a domestic and even international audience. Who succeeds better in either regard is an issue of inevitable debate.

It is tempting, on the basis of the evidence presented above, to describe Lönnrot summarily as a would-be man of science and Kreutzwald as a would-be man of letters. Lönnrot hides his persona well behind his poems, drawing on traditional lines and images for almost the entirety of his work and concealing his artistic control of the narrative and its images. Kreutzwald, in contrast, appears willing and eager to swagger into the epic, describing rosy dawns, directing our gaze and interpreting his characters' motives, albeit in the folksy persona of an aged singer. But neither characterization does these authors justice. For Lönnrot exercises aesthetic and substantive control over his epic in myriad ways, albeit without loud fanfare or even clear statement of the fact in his Introduction or text. And Kreutzwald, for all his aesthetic apparatus, begins his Introduction with a quotation from Jakob Grimm deploring the attempts of men of letters to "improve" on the native charms of true folk epics: "It was desired at one time to improve on the national saga, but this has never been accomplished. Even when it appears in fragmented form, supplementation must not be attempted since this would destroy its charm as would even a few strokes of whitewash over old ruins" (Jakob Grimm quoted in Kurman 1982:293). Kreutzwald would hardly have invoked such a statement as his Introduction's epigram if he believed that he had really erred along the lines so forcefully and pejoratively described by Grimm. Kreutzwald the aesthete hoped equally to create a work of science, documenting the ancient national imagination of the Estonian people, just as Lönnrot the man of science was equally interested in creating a work of aesthetic appeal—the product of a man of letters. That these motives seem difficult to reconcile in the minds of twentieth-century scholars derives, I believe, from the latter nineteenth century's development of distinct disciplinary boundaries and the resultant disparagement of earlier forms of now stigmatized "amateurish" intellectual holism. But for the tiny cadres of men of learning in the remote corners of nineteenth-century Europe—men who met together to plot and produce their peoples' national awakenings—such imposed limitations of thought and action were of little use. It was a time that needed national epics, and Lönnrot and Kreutzwald supplied them. And we are forever enriched by their efforts.

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