



## ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

UDC 821 511+821.113.6

**Helena Soini**

*Institute for Language, Literature and History of  
Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences*

### FOLKLORE COMPONENTS OF FINNISH ROCK POETRY\*

**For citation:** Soini H. Folklore components of Finnish Rock Poetry. *Scandinavian Philology*, 2024, vol. 22, issue 1, pp. 79–94.  
<https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2024.105>

This article explores the folklore components of Finnish rock poetry in Finnish and Swedish. It highlights how Finnish rock culture has revived an ancient tradition where poetry and music were intertwined. While musicians of *Amorphis* reference “Kalevala” mythology in the songs like “Tuonela”, “Sampo” and “Kantele”, they do not explicitly mention the names of “Kalevala” heroes in their adaptations of runes. The themes of their lyrics seem to take on a universal quality and are set in modern times. The influence of folklore traditions on Finnish authors is evident even in their English-language works. Ville Sorvali of *Moonsorrow* interprets the runes, trying to understand the intention of their creators, believing that these lyrics resonate with people worldwide. Similarly, Jan Jämsen (Katla), a Swedish-speaking Finn, infuses his native Swedish lyrics for *Finntroll* with imagery of fantastical creatures and incorporates Sámi folk chants *joik* to emphasize their uniqueness. Modern Finnish rock poetry stands out for its multilingualism and references to mythological themes from Finnish and Scandinavian folk poetry. However, the resurgence of metrics and imagery from the “Kalevala” and “Kanteletar” in rock poetry was unexpected. Authors use figurative symbolism that may require a deep understanding of Finnish culture to fully appreciate, even in English-language works. Finnish rock poetry is a diverse and vibrant art form that resonates with universal themes and emotions.

**Keywords:** Finnish rock poetry, genre features, multilingualism, ethnic components, Kalevala mythology, Kalevala metrics, *Kanteletar*.

---

\* The study was carried out under state order of Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (2024).

The genre of art song, poetry meant to be sung, has long been developed in Finland, where the connection between poetry and music is widespread. In the article “On the Musicality of Finnish Literature” Heikki Laitinen’s paradoxical view is presented, suggesting that while poetry and music are distinct and incomparable art forms on their own, when combined in a song, a third element emerges that transcends both, creating something “greater than the sum of its parts” [Grünthal, Kainulainen, 2009, p. 5].

It is well-known that a significant portion of epic folklore was traditionally sung, with ballads and romances also being popular forms of musical expression. The term *ballad* itself originates from the Italian *ballare* ‘to dance’. Critic Ingrid Schellbach-Kopra further elaborates on this topic, noting that, “Music adds another layer of depth to the poetic work when set to music” [Schellbach-Kopra, 1984, p. 13]. She cites as an example lines from “Shepherd Poems” (Herdedikter, 1973) by Lars Huldén, a Swedish-speaking Finn poet:

Du kan bli en visa.	‘You can become a song.
Är det så farligt det?	Is it that dangerous?
Ja, det är mycket farligt.	Yes, it’s very dangerous
För har du blivit en visa	Cause once you turn into a song,
står du utanför varje möjlighet	You’re stuck in that moment forever.
till förändring. Visan har naglat	A song
dig som ett skinn på en vägg.	Will nail you
Man skall kasta knivar genom dig.	Like skin to the wall.
[Huldén, 1976, p. 124]	They’ll throw knives at you <sup>1</sup> .

According to the critic, song poetry should be taken very seriously. Indeed, a song can, in modern terms, nail you to the wall, influencing public consciousness, inspiring, or conversely, suppressing and intimidating individuals.

Finland’s contemporary poetry has closely intertwined with rock music. “Rock music has always been in development, and the picture has changed from year to year,” writes A. Kozlov in his book “Rock: Origins and Development” [Kozlov, 1998].

Rock culture didn’t really take off in Finland until the 1980s, but it soon established itself as a vibrant phenomenon on the global rock

---

<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter translations from Swedish and Finnish by V. Radolinsky.

scene. Many rock song performers were also writers, and in addition to their musical pursuits, they published and continue publishing collections of poems and novels. Notable figures include Ismo Alanko, Jukka Karjalainen, Kauko Röyhkä, Kari Peitsamo, Gösta Sundqvist, Jarkko Martikainen and Tommi Liimatta. Critic Samuli Knuuti suggests that the popularity of these writers' books was boosted by their lyrics for rock bands [Knuuti, 2013, p. 336].

In the early 80s, Röyhkä left Oulu and went to Helsinki in search of intense experiences, seeking “an antidote to rural melancholy” [Knuuti, 2013, p. 339]. In his song “Shit City” (1986), Röyhkä talks about the railway line leading south and highlights that conforming to mediocrity leads to failure; if one fails, the only option left is to “get out of here” [Knuuti, 2013, p. 339]. Röyhkä-writer clearly expected to win.

In any case, in Finnish rock culture, literary content is as crucial as the music itself. Lasse Koskela believed that some of the best rock poetry emerged in the 1980s: “In fact, all the so-called ‘finnrock’ of this decade (e. g. Dingo, Eppu Normaali, Pelle Miljoona and Juice Leskinen) had rich lyrics” [Grünthal, Kainulainen, 2009, p. 81].

Elias Lönnrot, the compiler of the “Kalevala” and “Kanteletar”, held a negative view on separating words from music. He felt that “the ancient unity of word and tune disintegrated in modern times to the extent that the word became the dominant force in literary poetry (essentially becoming mere text)” [Lönnrot, 1985, p. 10–11]. Finnish rock culture revived an ancient syncretic genre, a tradition where poetry and music were inseparable. And, as we know, the runes of “Kalevala” were sung.

Ismo Alanko and A.W.Yrjänä have successfully revitalized the seemingly forgotten “Kalevala” metric, employing it in their poetry that reflects contemporary themes. In his poem “Kun Suomi putos puusta” (“When Finland Falls from the Tree”) from 1990, Alanko provocatively portrays Finland with the lines “The swamp, the hoe and Jussi, / Martin Luther and the plastic bag...” [Alanko, 1990]. His album of the same title, along with *Paleface's* “Helsinki — Shangri-La”, offer significant insights into the events of the 1990s–2010s and capture the spiritual essence of that era. These albums underscore the critical capacity of Finnish rock lyrics.

In 1982, Martti Syrjä penned “The Land of Sad Songs”, his magnum opus that both parodies and encapsulates the core elements of Finnish blues. His couplet “Unemployment, drink, ax and family / Snow hook,

policeman and the last mistake” exemplifies how “adjectives are unnecessary when the nouns are robust and meticulously chosen” [Knuuti, 2013, p. 335].

Rock music emerged as a form of protest, representing a musical counterculture embraced by individuals with unconventional views on life.

In the 1980s, while observing music fans, Paul Zumthor reflected: “After ten years of liberating parties and tens of millions of fans worldwide, with such a wealth of experiences, nothing can ever return to its former state. <...>. However... the industry emerged victorious. When rock music generates billions of dollars, the voices in our world are muted” [Zumthor, 1983, p. 277–278].

Rock lyrics are multifaceted. On one hand, they encompass topicality, protest and sharp criticism of consumer society. On the other hand, Finnish rock poetry, particularly in the 1990s, is a departure from modernity towards medieval ballads and legends.

It is worth noting a significant characteristic of these works — the vast majority of song lyrics are exclusively in English, with only occasional instances of Finnish compositions. The primary creator of music and lyrics for *Nightwish* is Tuomas Holopainen, who skillfully brought back to life legends and fairy tales featuring dragons, wizards and heroic figures.

Unexpectedly, Finnish rock musicians delved into epic poetry masterpieces such as “Kanteletar” and the “Kalevala”. By incorporating and interpreting universal themes of rock and metal music, these Finnish artists embraced literary traditions. Their lyrics are seen as successors to old folk songs, with the performers likened to “Kalevala” singers participating in a singing competition.

“Kanteletar” (1840–1841) truly embodies the creative essence of the people, fueling and inspiring contemporary poets. Elias Lönnrot approached the folk songs featured in “Kanteletar” with greater caution than he did the “Kalevala” runes; he refrained from taking too many liberties with the composition, avoiding alterations to line placements or name unifications. Lönnrot was concerned about the risk of forgetting everything, emphasizing the urgent need to document lyrical, epic and narrative songs promptly.

Nevertheless, the performers themselves, or rather female performers, believed that once a song was crafted, it would endure. The creators

of songs and ballads found in “Kanteletar” were predominantly women, including Arhippa Perttunen’s sister, Moarie Perttunen. R. P. Remshuyeva, daughter of performer Sandra Remshuyeva, expressed a somewhat unexpected notion in folklore studies by challenging Elias Lönnrot’s views: “We can also affirm that ancient songs do not fade as swiftly as scholars presumed” [Remshuyeva, 1993, p.6]. However, Lönnrot was undoubtedly correct in advocating for the inseparable unity of word and melody in ancient folk songs. According to Eino Karhu, Lönnrot referred to the ancient syncretic genre where “the song had not yet been divided into text and melody, poetry and music” [Karhu, 1979, p.172]. V. Ya. Propp highlighted in his article “Folklore and Reality” that “epics are meant for singing, not reading; singing seeks freedom and fluidity, while epics remain static...” [Propp, 1976, p.311]. Karhu argued that what renders it “static” is the literary format: “the form of functioning of book poetry in general” [Karhu, 1979, p.172].

However, the cultural gap between written and oral traditions should not be overstated, as noted by S. Yu. Neklyudov, since often the same individuals served as carriers of both forms when they intersected [Neklyudov, 2009].

The oral tradition has not vanished and continues to evolve alongside its written counterpart, following its unique set of rules. The documentation of epic poetry does not always signify the end of the oral tradition. As Paul Zumthor stated, “When the oral tradition of the past fades from view, its manifestations, however significant, can only be tentatively assessed and utilized by referencing the characteristics of the present-day oral tradition. The knowledge they offer is secondary and inherently problematic” [Zumthor, 1983, p.62]. Zumthor believed that the recording of the “Kalevala” in 1835 served as inspiration for the rune singers, leading to a significantly expanded version of the “Kalevala” in 1849. It is now evident that the existence of a written codex, numerous translations and scholarly studies did not hinder the progression of the oral tradition. Rather than being preserved as mere artifacts, folklore was revitalized and transformed into new genres and even different languages. The resurgence of interest in folklore can be attributed to various factors, including, as Neklyudov suggests, “challenging the established canons of verbal art that have become outdated and restrictive... the rejuvenation of literary content and the emergence of fresh artistic forms and stylistic registers” [Neklyudov, 2009].

*Amorphis*, a unique Finnish band that sings in English, has embarked on a fascinating musical journey in search of its own sound. They have transitioned from heavy death metal to a distinctive style that combines elements of progressive, folk, doom metal and rock, with hints of 1970s psychedelic music. Central to the band's artistic expression are mythological themes from the Karelian-Finnish epic "Kalevala", folk tales, songs and the natural world, reflected in song titles like "Tuonela", "Sampo" and "Kantele". The unexpected and undeniably successful fusion of ancient epic poetry with diverse rock styles positions *Amorphis* as a leading force in the global rock and metal scene, influencing the development of these genres.

Established in 1990, the band initially embraced the heavy and orthodox death metal style prevalent at the time. However, folk music elements began to emerge as early as their first full-length album. Despite being titled "The Karelian Isthmus" (1992), the lyrics by Esa Holopainen and Jan Rechberger are heavily based on Celtic mythology.

I shall have a son,  
out of Cornwall shall he come,  
that shall be a wild boar,  
bristled with steel...  
he shall be a man most brave and  
noble in thought.

[Holopainen, 1992]

The exception for this album can be considered the instrumental intro and the eponymous "opening statement" by Holopainen, labeled in the booklet as:

The sound of thousand warriors  
The fields of thousand battles  
Still, in our hearts we can hear  
the great hymn of Karelia.

[Holopainen, 1992]

The second album, with the telling title "Tales from The Thousand Lakes" (1994), is full of translations of "Kalevala" runes into English. Thus, after the traditional instrumental introduction follows the song "Into Hiding", which retells the story of one of the heroes of the "Kalevala", the brave Lemminkäinen. Lemminkäinen was not invited to the

wedding of the blacksmith Ilmarinen, held in Pohjola. Offended, Lemminkäinen comes to the wedding uninvited and, after much bickering, kills the landlord. The infuriated landlady, the old woman Louhi, gathers an army, but Lemminkäinen manages to escape. The names of Lemminkäinen and Louhi are not in the text of the song. For comparison, we will provide the same story in the original:

The islander slips into hiding  
and takes to his heels  
out of dark Northland  
the murky house of Sara  
he whirled out of doors as snow  
arrives as smoke in the yard  
to flee from bad deeds.

[Holopainen, 1994]

Jo nyt Ahti Saarelainen  
Itse lieto Lemminkäinen,  
Pistäiksen on piilemähän,  
Painaikse pakenemahan  
Pimeästä Pohjolasta,  
Sangasta Saran talosta.  
Läksi tuiskuna tuvasta,  
Savuna pihalle saapi  
pakohon pahoja töitä,  
Pillojansa piilemähän.

(XXVIII: 0–10)

[Kalevala, 1975, p. 289]

As we observe in *Amorphis*' interpretation of the "Kalevala" verses in the 28<sup>th</sup> track, and throughout their other songs, the heroes' names are notably absent. This absence lends the stories a universal quality that resonates with contemporary times. Only occasional place names subtly allude to the "Kalevala" text, such as "murky house of Sara" (Sara being a river in Pohjola), indicating the enduring presence of myth in the present. Unlike ancient rune-singers like Lönnrot, author Esa Holopainen does not position himself as such, instead portraying events from his own experiences in the modern world.

The narrative of the drowned maiden may appear as a universal lament in terms of genre if not for its mythological roots. In the song "Drowned Maid", recounting Aino's demise, the author avoids directly naming the lyrical heroine, referring to her as a hen, a common motif in Lönnrot's work and traditional folk verses: "And there I, a *hen*, was lost." This narrative revolves around Aino, whom her brother Joukahainen pledged to Väinämöinen as a bride after failing to outwit the elder in magical contests, leading to Aino's tragic death.

I went to wash at the shore  
I went to bathe in the sea

and there I, a **hen**, was lost

<...>

Such the death of the young maid  
end of the fair little **hen**.

[Holopainen, 1994]

In W.F. Kirby's classical English translation of the "Kalevala", where the requirements of equimetry are adhered to, alliteration and caesurae are utilized. However, the translator diverges from the original text by referring to Aino as a dove, possibly due to a sense of propriety in not wanting to label a girl as a hen.

Thus the youthful maiden perished  
And the **dove** so lovely vanished.

(IV: 371–372)<sup>2</sup>

[Kalevala, 1923, p. 44]

In contrast, in *Amorphis*' interpretation, equimetry is not strictly followed, yet the term *dove* is not employed. The author refers to Aino as a hen, drawing upon the oral traditions familiar to him from childhood. This choice seems to align with Neklyudov's notion that "any carrier of cultural tradition possesses a much deeper 'folklore' understanding than commonly believed (and than he may realize), acquired through children's readings and speech imbued with phraseological and proverbial forms, through the echoes of oral texts which inevitably reach everyone" [Neklyudov, 2009]. Even in English-language texts, Finnish authors' ethnic perspectives are discernible. Russian translators L. P. Belsky, Armas Mishin and Eino Kiuru mirror Lönnrot by depicting Aino as a hen in their renditions of the "Kalevala".

Menin merta kylpemähän,  
Sainp' on uimahan selälle;  
Sinne mä, **kana**, katosin,  
Lintu, kuolin liian surman.

(IV: 331–334)

[Kalevala, 1975, p. 38]

'I ventured to the sea for a swim,  
Drifting on the sea's gentle waves.  
I, a little **hen**, tumbled down,  
The poor bird met its end.'

---

<sup>2</sup> The numbers of runes and verses are in the parentheses.



*Amorphis'* album "Elegy" (1996) marked a significant evolution. They delved into national poetics, drawing inspiration from "Kanteletar, taikka, Suomen kansan wanhoja lauluja ja wirsiä" ("Kanteletar, or Old Finnish Folk Songs and Poems"), the younger sibling of the "Kalevala", comprising around 700 pieces. The band also maintained the tradition of doom metal style, evident in the opening track "Better Unborn". The following text is adapted from the original in "Kanteletar" by Esa Holopainen:

Better it would be for me  
And better it would have been  
Had I not been born, not grown  
Not been brought into the world  
Not had to come to this earth  
Not been suckled for the world.

[Holopainen, 1996]

Parempi minun olisi,  
Parempi olisi ollut,  
Syntymättä, kasvamatta,  
Ilmahan sikiämättä,  
Maalle tälle täytymättä,  
Ilmoille imettämättä.

[Kanteletar, 1985, p. 17]

The 46<sup>th</sup> song of "Kanteletar", titled "Parempi syntymättä" ("Better Unborn"), is found in the chapter "Songs Common to All," making it suitable for both male and female voices. However, it leans towards the lament of a bride on her wedding day.

Esa Holopainen composed "Better Unborn" for male vocals, aligning with the male-dominated rock lineup. While the song could have been sung by female vocalists, the next track, "Against Widows" (arranged by Olli-Pekka Laine), appears more suited for a male lament, depicting a young man's reluctance to marry a widow.

The Devil weds a widow  
Death another's leftovers.

[Olli-Pekka Laine,  
Holopainen, 1996]

*Amorphis'* musicians often gravitate towards the most tragic songs in "Kanteletar". Despite language and metric changes, Esa Holopainen maintains the essence of "sorrow" present in the original collection. It is worth noting the significant song "Kantele", which opens the "Kanteletar" collection and was released as an EP titled "My Kantele" in 1997.

Truly they lie, they talk utter nonsense  
Who say that music reckon that one kantele  
Was fashioned by a god  
Out of a great pike's shoulders  
From a water-dogs's hooked bones:  
It was made from the grief  
Moulded from sorrow

<...>

So it will not play, will not rejoice at all  
Music will not play to please  
Give off the right sort of joy  
For it was fashioned from cares  
Moulded from sorrow.

[Holopainen, 1997]

Ne varsin valehtelevat,  
Tuiki tyhjeä panevat,  
Jotka soittoa sanovat,  
Arvelevat kanteletta  
Väinämöisen veistämäksi,  
Jumalan kuvaamaksi,  
Hauin suuren hartioista,  
Veen koiran koukkuluista;  
Soitto on suruista tehty,  
Murehista muovaeltu:  
<...>  
Soitto ei soita suosioksi,  
Laske ei laatuista iloa,  
Kun on huolista kuvattu,  
Murehista muovaeltu.

[Kanteletar, 1985, p. 3]

The absence of Väinämöinen's name in the arrangement is noteworthy, although references to the pike, water dog and kantele itself are made. In "Kanteletar", it is mentioned that Väinämöinen created the musical instrument: "Arvelevat kanteletta / Väinämöisen veistämäksi". In the arrangement, Väinämöinen's name is omitted, stating that the kantele "was fashioned by a god". However, themes of endless sorrows, grief and sadness are common to both the original and Holopainen's English adaptation. Alongside Holopainen's lyrics, we will provide excerpts from the original text where the song is titled "Eriskummainen kantele" ("Marvelous Kantele"). The melancholy that fills "Kanteletar" is the basis of many folk songs.

In 1999, *Amorphis* released another album with "Kalevala" themes titled "Tuonela". The depiction of the land of death, Tuonela, feels vague and lacking in specificity, almost as if it does not truly capture the essence of Tuonela. The mythological foundation remains elusive and intangible, with the lyrical content intertwined with the musical elements, a reflection of music's integral role from the outset. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing sense that it was the underlying national mythological backdrop that propelled the band to the forefront of the global heavy music scene.

While *Amorphis* continued to draw inspiration from "Kanteletar", in 1995 the metal band *Moonsorrow* emerged on the Finnish music scene. In contrast to many Finnish musicians, Ville Sorvali, one of the band's

founders and a permanent member, prefers writing in his native language, with most of *Moonsorrow's* songs written in Finnish. The band's lyrics draw heavily from Finnish mythology and poetry, although Sorvali offers interpretations rather than mere retellings of myths in an effort to grasp the artistic intentions of their creators.

Pagan deities often feature prominently in Sorvali's poetry. In 2001, *Moonsorrow's* debut album, "Suden uni" ("Wolf's Dream"), was released. The very first song on the album, "Ukkosenjumalan Poika" ("Ukko's Son"), refers to Ukko, the supreme god in Karelian and Finnish mythology associated with harvest, thunderstorms and weather. The song narrates the tale of Ukko's son who was disgracefully banished from heaven due to his inability to control his newfound power. Ukko reappears in Sorvali's composition "Rauniolla" ("On the Ruins"), where the lyrics mention "Ukon voima sydämessä" ("Ukko's strength is in my heart"), depicting Ukko's encounter with a bear.

In the song "Kivenkantaja" ("Stonecutter") from the eponymous album, the theme of stone emerges. Stone, a prevalent motif in Finnish poetry, symbolizes the essence of the North and appears frequently in the art and literature of northern peoples. Ancient Icelandic sagas and North Russian epics depict the transformation of heroic figures into stone. Finnish poets contribute to this "gallery of stones". Sorvali's Stonecutter sits solitary on a rocky cliff. He curses the fate carved in stone, "kiveenhakatun kohtalon".

The concept of a harsh destiny carved in stone alludes to ancient rock drawings and memorial boulder engravings. This imagery reappears in the song "Jotunheim". The narrative revolves around Jotunheim (Jötunheimr), one of the nine realms in Scandinavian cosmology, home to the giants. These lines may allude to Kari, the ancient Scandinavian giant personifying the air driven by the wind.

In the song "Mimisbrunn" ("Mimir's Well"), Hell is "filled with snakes" ("Käärmeitä täynnänsä") [Sorvali, 2016] for a reason. These mythical creatures consume the lives of those who have angered the gods, akin to the fate of Yggdrasil's roots. However, a blade capable of piercing the heart stands against the "serpent's tongue" ("vastaan käärmekieltä").

The term "serpent tongue" may refer to Gunnlaug, an Icelandic skáld from the "Saga of Gunnlaugur Serpent-Tongue" who got that nickname for his sharp-tongued verses.

The mention of snakes becomes a harbinger of doom, as confirmed by the following lines:

Vaan eivät sankarit enää nouse raunioille ja laulumme tuuli vie.	‘No more heroes will rise from the ruins, and our songs will be gone with the wind.’
[Sorvali, 2016]	

In 1997 emerged *Finntroll*, a unique phenomenon on the Finnish music scene. Its distinctiveness lies in blending the traditional *humppa* genre (Finnish polka) with heavy music (symphonic black metal) and lyrics. The band’s founder, Jämsen (Katla), chose to sing in his native Swedish, giving their compositions an authentically “trollish” flavor. The songs’ lyrics, reminiscent of underground dwellers’ speech to European ears, are rich in mythological themes.

Med skrik och skrån som tusen korpars rop Vi sliter oss fram ut ur berg och grop Klor vassa som svärd, käftar lik ulvens Fram kommer vättar, smaka vår eld Vi dricka ert blod, vår livets saft Så mycket av det, vi inte på årtusenden haft Blod och lik nordens kanter randa Vi är här, vi är här. Vätteanda Ögon lysa bland skuggor, näbb och klo Kött skall slitas för okristen tro Ofött barn och havande kvinna de smaka bäst i nattens dimma Riv, bröder, riv!	‘Screaming and screeching like a thousand crows, We crawl out from mountains and holes. Claws sharp as swords, jaws fierce as wolves. Here come the <i>vættir</i> <sup>3</sup> , taste our flames. We drink your blood, our life essence. So much of it, we haven’t had in millennia. Blood and corpses streak the edges of the North. We are here, we are here. <i>Vættir</i> . Eyes shine through shadows, beaks and claws. We rend flesh for the unholy faith. Unborn child and pregnant woman, They taste best in the night’s mist. Tear, brothers, tear!’
[Jämsen, 1999]	

The lyrical motifs of *Finntroll* intertwine with the pagan themes found in the songs of many black metal bands such as *Mayhem*, *Burzum*, *Satyricon* and *Bathory*, which also challenged the Christian tradi-

---

<sup>3</sup> The *vættir* are supernatural beings and nature spirits in Norse mythology [Hellquist, 1922, p.1178–1179].

tion in favor of the original pagan beliefs. Notably, this genre along with its associated subculture originated in Scandinavian countries (initially in Norway with *Mayhem*) in the 1980s, opposing Christianity not only artistically but also through real-life actions such as satanic and pagan rituals, shrine desecration, church burnings, etc. In contrast, *Finntroll's* rebellion was primarily expressed through external elements like distinctive attire which could fit modern trolls, elongated “trollish” ears and subtle makeup.

A counterpoint in the band's work is the juxtaposition of playful, almost toy-like musical motifs with harsh, militant and sometimes violent lyrics. The songs are filled with evil prophecies, clichés and intimidation. While Sorvali's lyrical hero laments his inability to stifle the anger in his soul, the musicians of *Finntroll*, on the contrary, seek to evoke anger and hatred in their listeners. Unlike anonymous folk songwriters, the musicians show a complete lack of compassion in their hearts and willingly sing about the death of their lyrical heroes. Guitarist Somnium and vocalist Katla discussed this aspect in an interview about one of their most revealing compositions, “Slaget vid Blodsälv” (“Battle of the Bloody River”):

Somnium: I just realized myself that the more joyful and happy we sound like, the more gruesome and frightening our lyrics are[,] as a matter of speaking. Some of them have been done [on] purpose and I guess that's something [Finntroll] is all about. We wanna tell people stories about some startling topics which honestly even frighten us from time to time...

Katla: “Slaget...” is about a battle of encirclement where a legion of crusaders get slaughtered by a great bunch of fierce trolls that were lurking to kill them by the river. That's where the name for this song came from [Finntroll Interview].

*Finntroll's* songs focus more on creating myths than traditional mythology. They explore a deep primordial horror, depicting unknown forces embodied in unseen and bizarre creatures. This theme is enhanced by musical refinements — from symphonic orchestrations reminiscent of Edvard Grieg's academic expressionism (e. g. in compositions like “Svampfest” and “Bakom Varje Fura”), inclusions of Sámi folk chants joik (Sámi *juoigan*, *luohti*, norv. *joik*) to the use of instruments uncommon in Finnish music like banjo (for instance, in “Tomhet Och Tystnad Härska”). Throughout the band's career from 1997 to 2013, the

lyrical content remains consistent: telling various poignant stories about trolls, goblins, nature's forces and human interactions with them, all set to heavy yet upbeat and sometimes playful music.

Female rock bands have become a prominent part of contemporary Finnish rock culture. However, paradoxically, they are moving away from folklore (as we previously mentioned, the songs of “Kanteletar” were predominantly sung by women).

In present-day Finnish rock poetry, personal and social motifs are prevalent, with notable characteristics being multilingualism and references to mythological subjects from folk poetry, both Finnish and Scandinavian. The unexpected resurgence of “Kalevala” meters and imagery from the “Kalevala” and “Kanteletar” in rock poetry is noteworthy. There have also been numerous poignant poems created for rock bands that raise universal questions relevant to everyone.

This suggests that rock poetry has indeed brought about a revival in Finnish verbal art.

## REFERENCES

- Alanko I.K. *When Finland Falls From the Tree*. 1990. Available at: <https://www.ismoalanko.com/sanoitukset/kunsuomiputospuusta> (accessed: 14.03.2024).
- Finntroll Interview*. Metal-Rules.com. Available at: <https://www.metal-rules.com/interviews/Finntroll.htm> (accessed: 12.03.2024).
- Grünthal S., Kainulainen S. The Musicality of Finnish Literature. *Jahrbuch für finnisch-deutsche Literaturbeziehungen*, 41, 2009. P.75–88.
- Hellquist E. *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1922. 1414 p.
- Holopainen E. *Amorphis Lyrics*. Available at: <http://www.darklyrics.com/a/amorphis.html> (accessed: 14.03.2024).
- Huldén L. *Långdansen. Dikter. 1958–1976 Urval*. Jakobstad: Schildts, 1976. 166 s.
- Jämsen J. *Finntroll Lyrics — album “Midnattens Widunder” (1999)*. Available at: <http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/finntroll/midnattenswidunder.html> (accessed: 12.03.2024).
- Kalevala*. Koonnut ja laatinut E.Lönnrot. Petroski: Karjala-kustantamo, 1975. 520 p.
- Kalevala*. Available at: <http://nebu.finlit.fi/kalevala/index.php?m=1&s=70&l=1> (accessed: 12.03.2024).
- Kalevala. The Land of Heroes*. Transl. by W.F.Kirby. Vol. I–II. London; Toronto: J. M. Dent & sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Vol. I: 1923. 328 p. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/25953/pg25953-images.html> (accessed: 12.03.2024); Vol. II: 286 p. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/33089/pg33089-images.html> (accessed: 28.05.2024).

- Kanteletar. E. Lönnrot's composition. Petrozavodsk: Kareliia Publ., 1985. 448 p.
- Karhu E. G. *History of Finnish Literature: From the Origins to the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Leningrad: Nauka Publ., 1979. 509 p. (In Russian)
- Knuuti S. Pop-pop-pop-tekstejä. *Suomen nykykirjallisuus*, 1, 2013. P. 336–346.
- Kozlov A. *Rock. Origins and Development*. Moscow: Mega-Servis Publ., 1998. 192 p. Available at: [https://royallib.com/read/kozlov\\_aleksey/rok\\_istoki\\_i\\_razvitie.html](https://royallib.com/read/kozlov_aleksey/rok_istoki_i_razvitie.html) (accessed: 12.03.2024).
- Lönnrot E. *Alkulause. Kanteletar*. Petrozavodsk: Kareliia Publ., 1985. 448 p.
- Neklyudov S. Yu. *Traditions of Oral and Book Culture*. 2009. Available at: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/neckludov6.htm> (accessed: 12.03.2024). (In Russian)
- Propp V. Ya. *Folklore and Reality*. Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1976. 328 p. (In Russian)
- Remshuyeva R. P. *Karelian Folk Ballad and Elias Lönnrot's Kanteletar*. Petrozavodsk: KSC RAS, 1993. 111 p. (In Russian)
- Schellbach-Kopra I. *Still wie Licht in windloser Gegend. Lyrik aus Finnland*. Karlsruhe: von Loeper; Helsinki: SKS, 1985. P. 5–15.
- Sorvali V. *Moonsorrow lyrics*. Available at: <http://www.darklyrics.com/m/moonsorrow.html> (accessed: 12.03.2024).
- Zumthor P. *Introduction to Oral Poetry*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983. 320 p.

**Елена Сойни**

*Институт языка, литературы и истории Карельского научного центра РАН*

#### **ФОЛЬКЛОРНЫЕ КОМПОНЕНТЫ В РОК-ПОЭЗИИ ФИНЛЯНДИИ\***

**Для цитирования:** *Soini H. Folklore components of Finnish rock poetry // Скандинавская филология. 2024. Т. 22. Вып. 1. С. 79–94. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2024.105>*

В статье рассматриваются фольклорные компоненты рок-поэзии Финляндии на финском и шведском языках. Доказывается, что в финской рок-культуре возродилась древняя традиция, когда поэзия и музыка были неразделимы. Музыканты группы Amorphis обращаются к калевальской мифологии («Туонела», «Сампо», «Кантеле»), но в переложении рун «Калевалы» они не упоминают имен калевальских героев. Сюжеты их лирики приобретают универсальный характер и происходят в современности. Вилле Сорвали, автор песен для Moonsorrow, интерпретируя руны, пытается понять замысел их создателей и считает, что эти тексты могут относиться к любому человеку на свете. Ян Ямсен (Katla), шведоязычный финн, пишет песни для Finntroll на родном шведском языке, воплощая в текстах образы причудливых существ, подчеркивая их необычность вкраплениями народных саамских песнопений «йойк». Современную финскую рок-поэзию характеризуют мультязычие и обращение к мифологическим сюжетам

---

\* Исследование выполнено по госзаданию КарНЦ РАН 2024 г.

народной поэзии Финляндии и Скандинавии. Однако возрождение калевальской метрики и образов из «Калевалы» и «Кантелетар» в рок-поэзии стало неожиданным. Финские авторы даже в англоязычных произведениях используют образную символику, понятную только носителям финского языка. Рок-поэзия Финляндии разнообразна, изобилует яркими стихотворениями и затрагивает вопросы, волнующие каждого человека.

**Ключевые слова:** финская рок-поэзия, мультиязычие, фольклорные компоненты, калевальская мифология, калевальская метрика, *Кантелетар*.

### **Helena Soini**

Dr. Sci. in Philology, Leading Scientist,  
Institute of Language, Literature and History  
of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences,  
11, Pushkinskaya ul., Petrozavodsk, 185910, Russian Federation  
E-mail: elenasoini@gmail.com

### **Елена Григорьевна Сойни**

доктор филологических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник,  
Институт языка, литературы и истории Карельского научного центра РАН,  
Российская Федерация, 185910, Петрозаводск, ул. Пушкинская, 11  
E-mail: elenasoini@gmail.com

Received: March 1, 2024  
Accepted: March 16, 2024