

Of Heroes, Maidens and Squirrels — Reimagining Traditional Finnish Folk Poetry in Metal Lyrics

Charlotte Doesburg

Charlotte Doesburg is a PhD candidate at University College London. She is currently finishing her thesis on the adaptation of Finnish folk poetry in metal music. She has previously published on the influence of the *Kalevala* on J.R.R. Tolkien's work and is the co-editor of the book *Multilingual Metal* (Emerald, 2020).

Abstract

The *Kalevala* (1849), the Finnish folk epic, has inspired all types of artists throughout the years. It could be argued that it was only a matter of time before Finnish metal musicians started adapting material from the epic in their music and lyrics. This article presents two case studies of two lyrics. The first is *Lemminkäisen laulu* 'Lemminkäinen's Song' (Hynynen, 2009) by Kotiteollisuus. This song is about one of the epic's main heroes, Lemminkäinen, and his unfortunate marriage to Kyllikki. It draws on poems 11-13 from the *Kalevala* and on the book *Seitsemän veljestä* 'The Seven Brothers' (1870) by novelist Aleksis Kivi. The second song discussed is *Rautaa rinnoista* 'Iron from the Breasts' (Annala, 2010b) by Mokoma. The lyrics for this song are inspired by the painting *Raudan synty* 'The Origins of Iron' (1917) by Joseph Alanen. This painting is based on the birth of iron poem from the *Kalevala*. The interpretation of the lyrics of both songs will show that artists in the same genre have a larger general awareness of other cultural products, including those inspired by the *Kalevala* and that they use the epic for different purposes. The two case studies will show that adaptation of Finnish folk poetry can be used for various reasons, such as to parody contemporary society or to voice personal ideas and worldviews. Furthermore, the analysis of these lyrics will show that the songs are connected to a sense of Finnishness and the topics and themes of metal music internationally.

Keywords

Folk poetry, Kalevala, metal lyrics, adaptation, Finnishness, ethno-poetics

Introduction

The Finnish folk epic, the *Kalevala* (1849) has inspired numerous artists. That the stories of the epic would eventually wind up in the lyrics of metal music should hardly come as a surprise, given the omnipresence of the epic in Finland (Piela, Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2008; Jaakkola *et al.*, 2005) and metal music's interest in mythologies and epics (von Helden 2010; Dornbusch & Killguss 2005; Trafford & Pluskowski 2007). The reworking of the *Kalevala* by a number of Finnish metal bands is also discussed in other articles and book chapters (Kärki, 2015; Karjalainen, 2020a; Karjalainen & Sipilä, 2016; Tolvanen, 2006; Immonen *et al.*, 2008; Neilson, 2015).

Most of the above-mentioned research focuses on lyrics written in English and this article aims to expand the knowledge available by focusing on two lyrics written in Finnish. It will also discuss some of the reasons for reworking the folk poetry and the case studies will be contextualised from two vantage points which show they fit into a national and international context. The lyrics will be discussed from the perspective of Finnishness (*suomalaisuus*: a

sense of Finnish national identity) by framing the lyrics in a historical perspective as the continuation of a process that started when the poems of Finnish folk poetry were first sung. The lyrics also fit in with the genre's international tendencies to create songs based on mythologies and folk stories. All translations from Finnish sources are my own unless otherwise stated. The two case studies of this article are *Lemminkäisen laulu* 'Lemminkäinen's Song' (2010) by Kotiteollisuus and *Rautaa rinnoista* 'Iron from the Breasts' (2010) by Mokomaⁱ. The lyrics, sources used for these songs, and the bands will be introduced in more detail later.

Methodological and Theoretical Approach

The method used to analyse the lyrics is ethnopoetics analysis. It was originally developed to study Native American verbal art (Blommaert, 2009: 268–272). From the 1990s, ethnopoetics has been applied to other types of verbal art, for example by Anttonen (1994) and DuBois (1995, 1994) to compare variants of Finnish folk poetry. Several scholars (Blommaert, 2009; Kroskrity & Webster, 2015:1; Hymes, 2006:68) argue that ethnopoetic analysis can be applied to a range of texts.

Lyrics are a type of text for which a specific analysis is not widely accepted (Frith, 1998; Ingham, 2017:324; Oksanen, 2007). Ethnopoetics' suitability for lyrics analysis stems from its theoretical background that texts are informed by the context in which they appear (Anttonen, 1994:113; DuBois, 1995:41). Frith (1998) and Oksanen (2007:160) argue that analysis of lyrics should take the context into account. Ethnopoetic analysis does this by including the cultural and social institutions to which the text refers and thereby placing it in a wider context (Anttonen, 1994: 132; Kroskrity & Webster, 2015:4).

The first step in ethnopoetic analysis is to organise a text according to narrative units which reveal its meaning: what is told emerges out of how it is told (Anttonen, 1994:113; DuBois, 1995:43). For lyrics, the basic unit is the line. The lines can be grouped in larger units which form structural/thematic units. The structuring of texts helps to achieve the main aim of ethnopoetic analysis: to interpret its meaning and function in performance (Anttonen, 1994:115; Dubois 1994:41). It allows the researcher to focus on specific units, as long as this is later contextualised with the whole text. A final advantage of ethnopoetic analysis is its suitability in comparing different texts, in this case the source material(s) with the lyrics. Without losing the connection to the whole text, it offers the possibility to compare source text with reworking in terms of structure, meaning and performance to provide a better understanding of the text's adaptation.

The two case studies of this article show that the lyricists are aware of the continued influence of the *Kalevala* and other sources important for Finnish national identity. The use of other sources that are not connected to the epic, such as Kivi's classic novel *Seitsemän veljestä* 'The Seven Brothers' 1997[1870]) in the first song analysed, shows that the artists' awareness on their culture goes beyond the epic and its reworkings. The second song *Rautaa rinnoista* 'Iron from the Breasts' (2010b) by Mokoma is based on the painting *Raudan synty* 'The Birth of Iron' (1917) by Alanen. This painting is an adaptation of the 9th poem of the *Kalevala* which tells of the origins of iron. This case study exemplifies a multimodal process, "the coexistence of more than one semiotic mode within a given context" (Gibbons, 2012:8). Both lyrics show that the lyricists have a greater cultural awareness and hint at a sense of Finnishness.

The reasons for the continued reworking of the *Kalevala* are, varied and to some extent dependent on individual artists. I would argue that one of the reasons is to distinguish from other (non-Finnish) bands whilst at the same time to fit in with global developments of metal

music. The decision to use material from the *Kalevala* is likely partly influenced by the international popularity of bands such as Bathory and Enslaved who rework Norse mythology (von Helden, 2017). Another reason for the *Kalevala*'s reworking in metal music could be connected to the nation's continued reworkings of the epic in various cultural disciplines. Other reasons can depend on the person adapting the epic. In my interview with Jouni Hynynen of Kotiteollisuus he stated that he reworks the epic because: "nowadays I mirror the *Kalevala* more to modern times. The same themes still apply" (personal communication 15.10.2020). Marko Annala of Mokoma stated that he used the *Kalevala* because it was part of his own culture: "it is easier to look at our own past and history than to look at Greek mythology [...] It is easier to ponder and to mull over what is holy for Finns – Finnish gods – than something from another, foreign culture" (personal communication 19.07.2019).

I argue that the adaptation of the epic is a continuation of a greater movement that Honko has called the *Kalevala*-process (1985:16; 1990:183). It started when the poems were first sung and continued with the collection of the poetry and the *Kalevala*'s publication. Honko argues that the *Kalevala*-process is ongoing until the epic is not read or referred to anymore (1985:16; 1990:183). It is unclear whether he included the epic's many reworkings. However, it is through these reworkings that the *Kalevala*, and the folk poetry that came before it, live on. The poems were from the very beginning subject to change and the reworking of the *Kalevala* in metal music is another iteration of that same process. The reworkings of the *Kalevala* and the *Kalevala*-process fit in with a sense of Finnishness. This concept is defined by Jokinen & Saaristo (2002:260) as follows: "Various cultural products give us an understanding of what Finnishness is. Art, products of popular culture and the television renew perceptions of Finland, what kind of country it is and what it is like to live in Finland".ⁱⁱ The *Kalevala*'s myriad reworkings show how important the epic has been and still is for Finland.

The *Kalevala* as a source of reworking

The *Kalevala* can be considered a work of adaptation as it draws on a folk poetic tradition that is 3000-3500 years old (Pentikäinen, 1987:111). The poetry was sung in small communities by Finns, Ingrians, Karelians, Vepsians, Votians and Estonians (Laaksonen, 2005:12; Pentikäinen, 1987:111; Laitinen, 1991:17). Due to the remoteness of these communities, there was little contact between villages resulting in distinct developments of poems. Even though there were many varieties of the same poems, the poetry is unified by the commonality of its stylistic aspects, such as alliteration and parallelism (DuBois, 1995:14).

The collection of folk poetry happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Elias Lönnrot was a collector who travelled in Finland, Karelia and Ingria. It is probably in 1834 that Lönnrot first got the idea to create an epic based on the poems (Pentikäinen, 1987:34). The epic that resulted has a clear beginning with the creation of the world, the poems based on the sampo in the middle, and the arrival of Christianity and the departure of the protagonist, Väinämöinen, at the end. The sampo is a mysterious object that brings wealth and prosperity to its owner. It is forged by the smith Ilmarinen and it has a brightly coloured lid. The nature of the sampo is a subject of debate for modern scholars with various interpretations given (cf. Anttonen, 2002; Kuusi, 1986; Siikala, 2002; Tarkka, 2018).

The epic has played an essential role in the formation and subsequent evolution of Finnish national identity throughout the past centuries through numerous reworkings in various cultural disciplines. One of the most productive periods of reworking coincided with the popularity of the romantic and symbolist movements in Europe in the late nineteenth century. It brought forth the paintings by Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Albert Edelfelt, the compositions by Jean Sibelius and plays, poems and novels by Aleksis Kivi, Juhani Aho and Eino Leino (Piela,

Knuuttila & Laaksonen, 2008; Jaakkola *et al.*, 2005). The epic has remained an important source of inspiration for many artists after this period.

The *Kalevala* and associated concepts can also be found in other instances, such as in street names (Lönnrotinkatu in Helsinki); companies (Kalevala koru); or person's names (Aino after one of the epic's maidens). Eventually, the *Kalevala* found its way to popular culture. The book *Koirien Kalevala* 'The Canine Kalevala' by Mauri Kunnas reimagines the epic with dogs. It also featured in a special edition of the Donald Duck, centred on the sampo-myth. It has been reworked in Finnish television series, such as *Rauta-aika* 'The Iron Age' (1982), and in movies, for example *Sampo* 'The Day the Earth Froze' (1959). It also inspired Finnish rock musicians such as Ismo Alanko and CMX in the 1980s and 1990s (Knuuti, 2005).

The start of the reworking of the *Kalevala* in the lyrics of Finnish metal music can be pinpointed to 1993. In this year, Amorphis and Sentenced released albums that featured songs reworking the folk poetry. After these initial releases, other metal bands started to rework the material too. The first lyrics adapting the *Kalevala* in Finnish was *Jäljet pelottavat* 'The daunting traces' by Kotiteollisuus, and appeared in 1998. More lyrics reworking the *Kalevala* in Finnish started to appear in the new millennium.

An Ancient Story as Analogy for Contemporary Society – *Lemminkäisen laulu*

The lyrics for *Lemminkäisen laulu* (2009) are written by Jouni Hynynen, singer of the band Kotiteollisuus (1991-present). The band's name is a Finnish noun, *kotiteollisuus*, which can be translated to 'cottage industry; homemade crafts'. How the band arrived at this name is unclear. Kotiteollisuus won the prize for best hard-rock/metal album of the year at the Emma-gaala (annual Finnish music gala, similar to Grammy awards) in 2003. The band has worked with several other Finnish artists, such as Tuomas Holopainen (Nightwish) and CMX.

Kotiteollisuus' lyrics are written in Finnish. Several songs feature references to cultural products closely associated with Finnishness. The song *Minä olen* 'I am' (2003) reworks the first sentence of Väinö Linna's classic trilogy *Täällä pohjan tähden alla* 'Under the North Star' (more information on Linna's classic: Laitinen, 1991:541–547). It reads as follows: *Alussa olivat suo, kuokka – ja Jussi*. 'In the beginning there was the swamp, the mattock – and Jussi' (Linna, 1959:7). The second verse of the song starts in similar manner: *Ja sen mies, Jussi, seisoo yksin suon laidalla / on kuokka pudonnut, räkä valuu hikisellä poskella* 'And that man, Jussi, stands alone at the swamp's edge / the mattock has fallen, the snot drips on his sweaty cheek' (2003). The connection between Linna's classic and *Minä olen* is easily made through the use of the name, Jussi, the location, *suo* 'swamp', and the object, *kuokka* 'mattock'. It is also clear that the adaptation has altered the meaning of the original by adding that Jussi is alone, the mattock has fallen and by describing how snot drips from his cheek.

The reworkings of Finnish culture by Kotiteollisuus also include several lyrics that adapt the *Kalevala*. The song *Lemminkäisen laulu* gives a clear indication of this connection by referring to one of the epic's protagonists in its title. Hynynen writes in *Muistikuvia* 'Remembrance' (2018,168) about the song: "From the characters of the *Kalevala*, Lemminkäinen is closest to me and the reason for that is obvious: one woman is not enough for that man, he always has to have more".ⁱⁱⁱ Before comparing Lemminkäinen's story to the one from the song, I will provide a short summary of the epic's version and give some information on the poem adapted from the book *Seitsemän veljestä* (Kivi, 1997).

Lemminkäinen is introduced as a Don Juan or Casanova-type in the *Kalevala*. He is handsome and enjoys flirting. Other characteristics of Lemminkäinen can be associated with traditional masculine norms such as partying, drinking and seeking adventure (Harvilahti & Rahimova,

1999:97). Lemminkäinen is a unification of different heroes with similar characteristics from the traditional poetry that preceded the epic, such as Kaukomieli and Ahti Saarelainen (Kuusi, 1990:152; Harvilahti & Rahimova, 1999:97).

The song adapts a small part of Lemminkäinen's story from the epic. Lemminkäinen abducts the maiden Kyllikki and marries her. They set out marital vows but upon thinking Kyllikki has broken hers, Lemminkäinen breaks his and leaves. He travels to Pohjola, the land in the north, and woos the maiden there. Lemminkäinen wants to marry again and asks the girl's mother for permission. The mother sets three tasks. The final task is shooting the swan on the river of Tuonela, the land of the dead. Lemminkäinen arrives at the river but does not know that someone he has betrayed earlier waits for him in hiding. When Lemminkäinen is ready to shoot, he is killed by this person. His body is divided into several parts and thrown into the river. Lemminkäinen's mother finds out about her son's death and eventually brings him back to life.

The second source used is a poem from the book *Seitsemän veljestä* (1997). The book is hailed as Finland's first novel in Finnish and first classic (Laitinen, 1991:218;220). It features several poems and stories told by the brothers to which the title refers. The poem that is reworked for the song is told by Timo. It is not named in the book, but it has become popular under various names. The title *Makeasti oravainen* 'Sweetly the Little Squirrel' occurs in the poem's text and is reworked in *Lemminkäisen laulu*. The original poem tells of a squirrel that creates a hiding place for itself. From this cosy spot, it can see out over the world and eventually drifts into a peaceful slumber.

In the first lines of *Lemminkäisen laulu*, an idyllic picture of the couple is painted as the song opens with 'they loved each other yesterday and they promised to love tomorrow'^{iv}. At the end of the first verse problems emerge as the couple is unable to understand each other. The second verse makes it clear that others disapprove of their union. However, the song's second verse concludes with the blissful metaphor of the couple as two squirrels sleeping sweetly on their beds of moss, everything is seemingly well again. The squirrel metaphor is taken from Kivi's poem, the words are only changed slightly from the original. The main deviation is that in *Lemminkäisen laulu* there are two squirrels instead of one, likely to represent Lemminkäinen and Kyllikki.

In the song's final two lines, the squirrel metaphor is mentioned again. Now, there is one squirrel lying under the black earth. It might seem like these lines are closer to Kivi's poem, because there is only one squirrel. However, this might not be necessarily the case. The last two lines of Kivi's poem: *Saattaa hänen iltasella / Unien Kultalaan* 'usher him [the squirrel] into the night / to the golden land of dreams' (Kivi 1997:92) can be interpreted in different ways. It could mean that the squirrel is sleeping. Yet, sleep often symbolises death. This symbolism might be known from Shakespeare and it is commonplace in classical and biblical literature (Viswanathan, 1979:49). The poem's writer was an avid reader of the classics, especially Shakespeare (Laitinen, 1991:212; 218). Therefore, it is possible that the last lines of Kivi's poem can be interpreted ambiguously. *Lemminkäisen laulu* plays with the poem's ambiguity by using both possibilities. The first time it is clear that the squirrels are sleeping; their story continues. The final referral makes it clear that the remaining squirrel has died. The squirrels act as a metaphor for Lemminkäinen and Kyllikki and their love. The death of the squirrel at the end indicates the death of their love as stated by Jouni Hynynen in an interview: "The squirrel is both, man and woman. It's some kind of metaphor for the love they had." (personal communication 15.10.2020).

The chorus of *Lemminkäisen laulu*, which details the couple's wedding, introduces elements foreign to the *Kalevala*, such as the groom's clothing. A groom wearing a black suit seems to

fit more with our times than with the distant past. Another unusual element is the priest conducting the wedding ceremony. The *Kalevala*'s compiler removed traces of Christianity from the epic (Kaukonen, 1979:66–67; Kuusi, 1990:152). Therefore, the inclusion of a priest, so clearly connected to Christianity, is a first indication that *Lemminkäisen laulu* is not a simple, straightforward retelling of the *Kalevala*'s story. The priest's words do not seem to carry the gravity that is associated with weddings. Instead, the words are 'intoned to the wind'^v and are 'exactly the same words that have been spoke to millions already'^{vi}. This perhaps implies criticism on marriage and the emptiness of the ceremony, whereby nowadays couples declare their everlasting love only to, in many cases, divorce later. The song's chorus, with the groom's clothing, the inclusion of the priest and the apparently meaningless words, seems to act as a bridge to bring Lemminkäinen's story to modern times.

The third verse of the song further diminishes the connection with the original poem and the comparison of the epic's story to modern society is consolidated. The mention of 'war' might not seem out of character for Lemminkäinen. What is unexpected is the use of the plural illative case over singular. A Finnish listener would expect to hear *Ja sitten lähtee sulhanen sotaan* 'and then the groom left for war', instead of *Ja sitten lähtee sulhanen sotiin* 'and then the groom left for the wars' (line 19). This uncommon use of the plural might imply a generalization. This points towards an interpretation of the song in which Lemminkäinen not only represents a character from folk poetry but also modern Finnish men. This interpretation is strengthened when the remaining narrative of the song and its context are considered.

The verse's following line clarifies the type of war meant. These are not the battles Lemminkäinen would have fought in the *Kalevala*. The 'war' consists of pub brawls and excessive drinking, which is implied by the words *baarin pöytiin* 'to the bar's tables' and *kusiputkiin* 'to the pissers' (line 20). The change to a metaphorical war consisting of pub brawls and drinking has two effects for the interpretation of the song. Firstly, the original story is updated, making it more accessible for a modern audience. It is more likely that someone has been inebriated, witnessed or took part in a bar fight than fought in a war. At the same time, the use of the word 'war' means the connection to the original theme of Lemminkäinen's story is not lost. Lemminkäinen is a fighter and prone to violence. The warfare theme in connection to Lemminkäinen predates the *Kalevala*'s publication. It can be glimpsed from surviving poetry fragments which eventually become Lemminkäinen's story. The themes of these poems is men's desire for adventure, war, sea-faring and excessive drinking (Apo 1981:28).

If the indirect connection to the surviving poems and the explicit referral in *Lemminkäisen laulu* to bars are combined, it makes a further explanation of the lyrics pointing to alcohol addiction/excessive drinking likely. Alcohol has had a problematic status in Finland for decades. During the nineteenth century, people referred to *Kuningas Alkohol* 'King Alcohol' (Salmi 2016:32) reigning over the country. The production and sale of alcohol was forbidden from 1919 to 1932. Ever since the legislation of alcohol, distribution has been regulated and sale is heavily taxed (*Finlex 2018*). Despite this legislation, Finland still ranked sixteenth out of 190 countries on alcohol consumption in 2011 according to WHO (2011:274). The themes of war and excessive drinking are central to the poems concerning Lemminkäinen and these remain intact in the reworking. These themes are also typical of metal music (Oksanen 2011).

The introduction of modern concepts in the song does not mean that the connections to the folk poetry are lost. On the contrary, combined with the uncommon use of the plural for the word 'war', the lyrics seem to generalise and equate the modern Finnish men to Lemminkäinen. When the folk poetry was sung, men were lured by war, drinking and seafaring. In modern society, men's deeper desires have not changed much. The battles and seafaring adventures

have made place for drunken pub brawls. The function of these lines from *Lemminkäisen laulu* is to lift the reworking of Lemminkäinen's story from a straightforward adaptation to an analogy. Lemminkäinen can be interpreted as a representative for males, both from his own time and from contemporary times. During my interview with the writer of the lyrics, Jouni Hynynen agreed with this interpretation when he stated that:

“Lemminkäinen is all the stupid men who like to sit in bars and/or work more than stay at home with their women or families. And *sotiin* [‘to the wars’] means that every time a man goes to a bar or plays gigs (or just normal work, Finnish men are workaholics), it's a war. Against what? Against nothing! They just ruin their lives and still think “this is a very important thing to do, more important than my family”” (personal communication 15.10.2020)

That Jouni Hynynen also includes himself in this depiction of Finnish men was already clear from his book *Muistikuvia* (Hynynen, 2018). During the interview he elaborated on the topic:

“Well, at the time of writing we did a lot of gigs and Janne [Hongisto: fellow bandmember] sat in bars and drank A LOT. Later, I realised that I was doing the same. [...] maybe we thought: we are at war against something, but don't know against what or why.” (personal communication 15.10.2020)

It becomes clear that the lyrics satirise and criticise a number of contemporary societal aspects. It offers a critique on the emptiness of marriage, usually associated with loaded meaning. It also criticises modern society and the society of the *Kalevala* through satire. The song starts out positively, describing a happy couple in love. However, cracks soon appear; the subsequent marriage is deemed void of meaning. This empty act is further emphasised in the final verse where the husband, seemingly with ease, leaves his wife.

It is mainly in the last verse that the satire on modern society is visible, as it becomes clear that Lemminkäinen can be interpreted as a representative for the men of his own fictional time and for contemporary non-fictional men. Satire of Finnish society, past and present, fictional and non-fictional, is not new in Finnish popular music. According to Knuuti (2005:134), pop/rock singer Ismo Alanko and rock band CMX utilise a similar method with the same result. The use of satire in *Lemminkäisen laulu* is not only connected to Finnish popular music, and perhaps even a sense of Finnishness, but also to an international tendency within metal music to satirise itself and the society in which it exists (Farrugia, 2020; Kennedy, 2020).

The use of satire to critique society and traditional norms is not unknown to Kotiteollisuus either. The music video for the song *Mahtisanat* ‘Words of Power’ (2009) also satirises the *Kalevala* and modern society. Throughout the video, the familiar stories of the epic's characters in the setting of contemporary city life are played out. The storytelling of the video features recreations of various famous images inspired by the *Kalevala*, e.g., Gallen-Kallela's painting *Lemminkäisen äiti* ‘The mother of Lemminkäinen’ (1897). The band's singer portrays Väinämöinen, a character that is highly respected in the epic. In *Mahtisanat*, Väinämöinen/Jouni Hynynen is a begging homeless man playing the kantele, a traditional Finnish instrument which is similar to boxed zithers found in the Baltic area. In the epic, Väinämöinen plays the kantele and it moves everyone to tears because of the music's beauty.

In the video this event is contradicted as no-one pays attention to the homeless man playing the kantele in a Finnish city's high street.

The introduction of modern elements in the lyrics of *Lemminkäisen laulu* aims to satirise modern society. This interpretation is arrived at through the previous discussion of satire of modern life by the use of the *Kalevala* as a tool used by Finnish popular artists (Knuuti 2005:134), the use of satire and parody in the international metal scene, previous use of satire by the band, Jouni Hynynen's statements and the interpretation of the lyrics given here. The satire and analogy of *Lemminkäisen laulu* shows that even though time has passed since the folk poetry originated, Finnish society has not fundamentally changed. *Lemminkäisen laulu* compares the fictional times of the *Kalevala* to our own, non-fictional, time and does not find a difference in this particular aspect of life. The song not only ties in with national (satire through the use of folk poetry) and international (satire in international metal acts) movements, but also with previous works by the band. The examples of other songs given in this chapter show how the band often reworks aspects of Finnish culture in words and images. The reworking of these different sources shows that the band is aware of Finnish culture. They continuously display aspects of Finnishness through the reworking of cultural sources to express ideas on Finnish society, both past and present.

The Multimodal Process – *Rautaa rinnoista*

The second case study focuses on *Rautaa rinnoista* 'Iron from the Breasts' (2010) by Mokoma (1996-present). The noun *mokoma* that makes up the band's name translates to 'bastard' or 'accursed'. Marko Annala, the band's singer and lyricist explains that the name comes from an ex-girlfriend's grandmother who used to say *voi siuta mokomaa!* 'oh you bastard!' as a catchphrase (Peltola 2006). The lyrics for Mokoma are all written in Finnish. The majority of their albums have an overarching theme (Tolkki 2018). The album *Sydänjuuret* (2010), on which *Rautaa rinnoista* appears, deals with ideas on Finnishness and belonging (Panula, 2010). The album's songs refer to the folk poetry multiple times. Annala writes the following on the album's theme in *Värityskirja* 'colouring book' (2017:151): "I told Tuomo that I was inspired by ancient Finnishness and Karelianism and was thinking about taking a theme from these topics for our forthcoming album".^{vii} A literal translation for the noun *sydänjuuret* 'the bottom of one's heart' does little justice to its use as the album's title. The word is connected to the overarching themes. *Sydänjuuret* is a compound noun, combining the noun *sydän* 'heart' with the plural noun *juuri* 'roots'. The literal translation of these 'heart roots' creates a better idea of what the title implies and connects it to the main themes.

The initial inspiration for the song *Rautaa rinnoista* came from the painting *Raudan synty* 'The Birth of Iron' (1917) by Joseph Alanen. Annala writes in his book (2017:151–152) how the painting inspired him:

The work 'The Birth of Iron' by Joseph Alanen had a big influence on me thematically and compositionally. If only I would be able to create a song that would give the listener the shaking experience in the whole being as Alanen's painting gave me^{viii}

The painting by Alanen is a reworking of the origins of iron story from the epic's ninth poem. Ukko, the main Finnish deity of rain and thunder (Salo 2005:170), makes three maidens to create iron. The eldest maiden gives black milk, the middle one white milk and the youngest red milk. The different milks represent types of iron. The iron flows into the earth and a fire

banishes it to the swamp. Eventually the smith Ilmarinen finds iron and uses it. The painting by Alanen depicts the three maidens at the moment their milk flows from their breasts into the earth. It is remarkable that Alanen’s painting has inspired this reworking, as the artist and his works are relatively unknown (Ojanperä, Itkonen & Bonsdorff, 2009:95). Alanen’s works are completely absent from the book *Kalevalan kulttuurihistoria* ‘The Kalevala’s Cultural History’ (Piela, Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2008) which is centred on the influence of the epic in art.

The strong indications towards Finnishness can be glimpsed from other songs found on the album. The title song *Sydänjuuret* (Annala 2010b) asks whether happiness can ‘be hidden behind locks’^{ix}. This is reminiscent of the locks Louhi uses to secure the sampo (*Kalevala* 10:427) as this is a device that brings prosperity, connected to happiness. The connection made with the *Kalevala* in *Rautaa rinnoista* is different as it is made indirectly through Alanen’s painting. The song’s title does not refer to the painting’s title but instead puts the painting’s visuals into words. It is put in the context of the lyrics’ narrative through their repetition at the end of the chorus. At the same time, the words used for the lyrics are reminiscent of that of the folk poetry.

The narrative of the lyrics is not a description of the painting or a synopsis of the story from the *Kalevala*. Perhaps unexpectedly, the lyrics narrate a personal story. The song’s protagonist seems to realise that they are the one responsible for their life. Ultimately, the protagonist renounces destiny: ‘I don’t believe in fate at all’ and chooses ‘to trust will and choices’^x. The overall sense this song conveys is rather bleak and lonely. It is about finding one’s power but, at the same time, there is an unmistakable sense of melancholy and isolation from others.

I would argue that this mood resonates with the poems of the *Kalevala* and perhaps even more with the *Kanteletar* (Lönnrot & Bosley, 1992), the epic’s sister collection. The *Kanteletar* is not written as a cohesive epic. It is a collection of poems on a range of topics from everyday life, such as childbirth, marriage and death. In some cases, the titles of the poems already point to their melancholic content such as *Toivoton rakkaus* ‘Hopeless love’ (ibid.: 1:6). Another argument for the mood of the poems can be found in the original melody of the poems had a waveform of “descending pentatonic melodies” conveying melancholy and gloom (Jaakkola *et al.*, 2005:124; 139). These moods of sorrow and melancholy are closely connected to Finnish culture (cf. Immonen *et al.*, 2008:492; Valijärvi, 2017; Kärki, 2015:132). The same type of mood is evoked in *Rautaa rinnoista*. At the same time, this type of mood is also often connected to lyrics in metal music from other countries too, especially Scandinavia (Sellheim, 2016; Lind, 2020).

Other aspects of the song which resemble Finnish folk poetry, lie in the importance of nature (Jämsä 1999:350–351) and similarity in semantics. The chorus of *Rautaa rinnoista* echo the emphasis on nature also found in the poetry. This is best exemplified by comparing several lines from the lyrics with lines from the poem *Usiahuolinen* ‘Cares’ (*Kanteletar* 1:54).

Table 1: A comparison between *Rautaa rinnoista* (Mokoma) and *Usiahuolinen* (*Kanteletar* 1: 54; including translation)

<i>Rautaa rinnoista</i> (lines 22-25)	Translation	<i>Kanteletar</i> , 1: 54 (lines 5-11)	Translation, Bosley 1989
Etsin	I seek	Usiampi mull’ on huoli,	More plentiful are my cares

		kuin on kuusessa käpyjä,	than cones on a spruce
suojaa pensaasta	shelter from the shrubs	katajassa karpehia,	beard moss on a juniper
vettä kivenkolosta	water from the cavity between the stones	petäjässä pirpasia,	gnarls upon pine bark
ravintoa kaarnasta	food from the bark	närehessä nästyröitä,	knobs upon a fir
rautaa rinnoista	iron from the breasts	päässä heinän helpehiä,	husks on a grass-top
		oksia pahassa puussa.	boughs on a bad tree.

Both texts have a first-person narrator. In *Rautaa rinnoista* the narrator seeks different things in nature. In *Usiahuolinen* the narrator compares the multitude of their worries to things found on trees. Both texts use nature to tell a story, albeit for different purposes. There is a lexical similarity between both texts. In the Finnish versions, most lines exist of two words. The lines feature the object in the partitive case (e.g.: *suojaa* ‘shelter’; *käpyjä* ‘cones’) and the other word in a locative case (relative for *Rautaa rinnoista*: *pensaasta* ‘from the shrub’; inessive for *Usiahuolinen*: *kuusessa* ‘on a spruce’). The order of the words is inversed. In *Rautaa rinnoista* the word in the partitive is always placed first. In *Usiahuolinen*, the partitive-word is placed last in most lines. The similarity in both texts also lies in the repetition where something – ‘shelter’ or ‘cones’ – is found on or from something else – ‘bark’ or ‘fir’.

That some of the lines of *Rautaa rinnoista* are similar to those of the folk poetry is perhaps not too surprising when the opinion of their writer is taken into account. During my interview with Marko Annala, he repeatedly spoke about how the folk poetry influenced him even on a subconscious level: “It is something that is part of the artist, even if it is not always on a conscious level. [...] I feel that it is similar in my own literary art” (personal communication 19.07.2019). About the use of stylistic aspects and the melancholy mood of the poetry he said: “I have used alliteration very often and we have a *Kalevalainen* [Kalevala-like] death-sense all the time” (ibid.). It became clear that the death-sense referred to by Marko Annala was also closely connected to nature for him:

“I wanted to write just such a text which would depict that Finnish mindset, nature and the Finnish person through its nature. But then I had that style and brought it along with the text and then this lament, song about death, even the album’s title [*Sydänjuuret*] is taken from a Karelian song, one of those laments to which I made small references throughout” (ibid.)

The connection to nature is not exclusive to Finnish culture and it is a trope found in metal music from other countries as well (von Helden 2010). However, the repeated invocations of nature, the gloomy, melancholic mood and the lexical similarity to the example poem from the *Kanteletar* connect the song *Rautaa rinnoista* to the folk poetry and a sense of Finnishness whilst at the same time connecting it to international topics often found in metal music.

All in all, even though the majority of the lyrics of *Rautaa rinnoista* does not directly rework a story from the *Kalevala* or the visuals of Alanen's painting, the lyrics stay close to the poetic tradition from which it draws through the conveyance of a similar mood of sorrow and melancholy, its emphasis on interactions with nature and the lexical similarity with the folk poetry. These similarities between the song and the folk poetry from which it is indirectly derived are because of what Marko Annala calls: "the collective unconscious of Finnish songwriters" (Karjalainen, 2020b). He continues his statement by explaining that Finnish lyricists are: "the messengers of Väinämöinen" and have "A sort of sense of belonging together, we are all under the same spirit" (ibid.). When I asked him about this aspect, he explained that it is also connected to the language:

"the Finnish language is a little bit different to write in. When you write in Finnish, it immediately gets a more serious tone than when something is written in English [...] We have this written history in the *Kalevala*. It provides us with a fundament and we, modern folk singers, have a sort of responsibility to it." (personal communication 19.07.2020)

The "collective unconsciousness" explained by Marko Annala can be interpreted as another iteration of a sense of Finnishness and an awareness of one's own culture to such an extent that the lyricist can rework various cultural aspects to create a new story based on the age-old stories from the *Kalevala* and other artworks that are inspired by it.

Conclusions

The various reworkings of the *Kalevala* consolidate its place in culture and also make it accessible to different types of audiences, both nationally and internationally. One such group of artists reworking the folk poetry are Finnish metal music's lyricists. The reasons for reworking are diverse, ranging from differentiating from other bands to feeling a deeper connection with one's own culture and a feeling that the themes of the epic are still relevant today. The ethnopoetic analysis has shown that the songs are firmly rooted within the context of international metal music and Finnish national identity. Further research could contrast the findings of this article with lyrics written in English by Finnish bands or with lyrics that adapt other mythologies from non-Finnish bands.

Lemminkäisen laulu interweaves Lemminkäisen's story from the epic with the poem *Oravan laulu* by Aleksis Kivi. The result is a song that is satirical and critical of the society of the *Kalevala* and modern Finland. Contemporary norms of masculinity are compared to those of the epic past. Ultimately, the song seems to suggest that even though centuries have passed since the folk stories were sung, norms of masculinity and male behaviour have not changed in all those years. Whilst the song can easily be described as typically Finnish, it also connects to international metal music through its main themes of alcoholism and fighting, and through the use of satire to convey its message.

The multimodal adaptation of Joseph Alanen's painting in *Rautaa rinnoista* by Mokoma does not compare between eras nor criticises society. Instead, *Rautaa rinnoista* narrates a personal story about renouncing fate and following one's own choices. The song seems to stray far from its source material. Yet, at the same time, through the conveyance of the melancholic mood, the importance of nature, and the lexical similarity with the *Kanteletar*'s poem *Usiahuolinen*, it is also remarkable close to the tradition which it reworks via Alanen's painting. *Rautaa rinnoista* fits in the international context of metal music through the emphasis of the lyrics on nature and its melancholic mood.

The adaptation of the *Kalevala* and other sources, whether connected to the epic or not, shows that the artists of the two case studies possess a cultural awareness connected to Finnish national identity. This awareness allows them to use the different sources to convey a new message which is connected to Finnish culture and to the international metal scene. The question remains whether the artists negotiate between the folk poetry and the general themes of metal music to write lyrics that fit within both contexts. I would argue against a type of negotiation between contexts because the case studies of this article have shown that the themes and moods of the folk poetry are similar to those of the metal scene. It is perhaps for that reason that adapting Finnish folk poetry happens rather frequently in Finnish metal. The artists are not necessarily negotiating between one or the other. Rather, they might be drawn to both metal and Finnish folk poetry for the very same reasons, their gloomy, melancholic moods and heavy subject matter.

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ⁱ The Finnish lyrics for both songs can be found online. *Lemminkäisen laulu*: <https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Kotiteollisuus/Ukonhauta/223800> ; *Rautaa rinnoista*: <https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Mokoma/Sydänjuuret/265653>

ⁱⁱ “Erilaiset kulttuurituotteet tuottavat meille ymmärrystä siitä, millaista on suomalaisuus. Taide, populaarikulttuurin esitykset ja televisio uusintavat käsityksiä Suomesta ja siitä, millainen maa Suomi on ja millaista on elää Suomessa.”

ⁱⁱⁱ Hynynen 2018: ”Kalevalan hahmoista Lemminkäinen on minulle läheisin ja syykin on ilmeinen: sille miehelle ei yksi nainen riittänyt, aina piti saada lisää.”

^{iv} Hynynen 2009, line 1-2: *Rakastivat toisiaan eilen / ja lupasivat rakastaa huomenna*

^v Hynynen 2009, line 15: *lausuu tuuleen sanoja*

^{vi} Hynynen 2009, lines 16-17: *niitä aivan samoja / joita lausuttu jo on miljoonille*

^{vii} Annala 2017: “Kerron Tuomolle inspiroituneeni varhais suomalaisuudesta ja karelianismista ja pohtivani tulevalle levyllä kenties teemaa tästä aihepiiristä.”

^{viii} Annala 2017: “Joseph Alasen teos Raudan synty teki aiheellaan ja sommitelmallaan minuun suuren vaikutuksen. Pystyisinpä jollain sävelteoksella luomaan saman koko kehoa ravistelevan kokemuksen kuulijalle kuin Alanen kuvallaan minulle.”

^{ix} Annala 2010b, line 22: *voiko piilottaa lukkojen taa*

^x Annala 2010a, lines 55-56: *En vain usko koko kohtaloon / Luotan tahtoon ja valintaan*