

Finland. Nationalism in the Arts

SLA200 Spring 2014, University of Toronto - Börje Vähämäki

Finnish History from 1157 to 1809

Crusades and Swedish settlers

Lutheranism, Gustavus Vasa and the Swedish Kingdom: Sweden-Finland

Sweden's wars against Russia, incl. 30 Years War 1618-1648; Finland's wars 1939-40; 1941-44.

Finland's New Reality (1809-1917)

Autonomous "nation" as Grand Duchy of Finland, under the Czar as Grand Duke

The issue: "Swedes we are no longer, Russians we do not want to become, let us be Finns"

The Challenges: 1. **Who are we?** National identity & soul; 2. **What are we?** Finnish nation/state

Geography, Demographics, Language reality, Culture -

German National Romanticism philosopher: Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744 -1803) "A poet is the creator of the nation around him, he gives them a world to see and has their souls in his hand to lead them to that world." The soul of a People (*Volk*) resides in their folk poetry."

"Finland's Founding Fathers": (Mikael Agricola (1500s)); E. Lönnrot, J.L. Runeberg, J.V. Snellman

Elias Lönnrot (1802-1888), collector of Finnish folk poetry and compiler of *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar*

Sohan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877) "*National Poet*" - *Tales of Ensign Stål* & epic & lyrical poems,

Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806-1881), philosopher, statesman, literary critic, and journalist

Swedish-language Finnishness - National Idyll-idealized Finnishness: Runeberg and Z. Topelius

Landscapes, "Tribes", and History-Translator's role?

Finnish language Finnishness - Aleksis Kivi (1834-1877) *Kullervo* (1864), *Cobblers on the Heath* (1865), *Seven Brothers* (1870);

Fennomen vs. Swecomen ~ Finns speaking Swedish vs. Finland-Swedes ~ Language struggle

Finnish Neo-Romanticism of the 1890s - Carelianism

Kalevala inspired Finnish literature, art, sculpture and music (A. Gallen-Kallela & Jean Sibelius)

"New Nation. Roots in the wilderness." Realism and Naturalism. Anti-Runeberg/Topelius

Kivi's People >>"The decline of the people" Juhani Aho, Minna Canth, "Further decline of the people (animals and beasts)": F.E. Sillanpää: *Meek Heritage* and Joel Lehtonen: *Putkinotko* and Elmer Diktonius *Red Emile*.

From Russification efforts to Finland's Independence 1899-1917

Väinö Linna's realism (*The Unknown Soldier* and *Under the North Star* /-///) and Nationalism

Women and Nationalism in Finnish literature?

Post-modern trends in Finnish literature: Parodying older Finnish nationalistic literature.

Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877)

Paavo, the Peasant (1830)

Unpublished translation. Original in the public domain.

Among the heaths of Saarijärvi
Paavo lived on frosty homestead,
Steadfast there he tilled the soil;
But the Lord, he knew, grants the harvest.
There he lived with wife and children,
with his sweat eked out their meagre bread,
dug new ditches, turned the land, then he sowed.
Spring arrived, snowdrifts melted,
and from that the sprouts were flooded;
Summer came, and forth broke hale and storm,
laying low half the ears.
Autumn came, the frost took all remaining.

Pulling her hair the wife exclaimed:
“Paavo, Paavo, man of great misfortune,
let us take the beggar’s staff.
God has us forsaken.”

Paavo took his wife’s hand and said:
“The Lord is only testing, he forsakes us not.
Half from bark now bake your bread,
I’ll dig twice as many ditches,
but the Lord, I know, will grant us our harvest.”
Half of bark the wife made bread,
Paavo dug out twice as many ditches,
sold the sheep, bought some rye, then he sowed.
Spring arrived, snowdrifts melted,
but with that the sprouts weren’t flooded;
Summer came, and forth broke hale and storm,
laying low half the ears.
Autumn came, the frost took all remaining.

Pounding her chest Paavo’s wife then spoke:
“Paavo, Paavo, man of great misfortune,
let us die, for God has us forsaken!
Death is hard, but living harder yet.”

Paavo took his wife's hand and said:
"The Lord is only testing, he forsakes us not.
Make your bread with yet more bark,
I will dig yet larger ditches.
But from the Lord I'll await the harvest."
The wife put twice the bark when baking,
the man dug two times larger ditches,
sold his cows, bought some rye, and sowed.
Spring arrived, snowdrift melted off the field,
but with that the sprouts weren't flooded;
Summer came, and forth broke hale and storm,
laying low no ears at all.
Autumn came, and the frost
stayed far away from field of rye
allowing it to shine of gold,
its harvester awaiting.

Paavo then knelt down and said:
"The Lord is only testing, he forsakes us not."
And his wife knelt down and said:
"The Lord is only testing, he forsakes us not."
But rejoicing she said to Paavo:
"Paavo, Paavo, in joy now use your sickle,
now it's time to live the good life,
now it's time to leave the bark,
and of rye alone make our bread."
Paavo took his wife's hand and said:
Woman, woman, only those may pass the test
who will not forsake their neighbour in distress;
Half from bark now bake your bread,
frozen stands our neighbour's field."

Translated by Börje Vähämäki

Elmer Diktonius (1896-1961)

Red-Emil - Ballad Anno 18

Unpublished translation. Original poem in the public domain.

I
Red-Emil was born
in a crofter's sauna
filth and sobs.
The girl clenched her fist
across the bastard's throat:
better for you
and better for me -
but she bled to death.
In his mother's dried blood
a squeaking child
saw the winter morning dawn.

II
Red-Emil herds
the estate's cattle.
His thick hair fluttering,
he runs
hunts
whips the cow:
damned mistress!
Charges the bull:
damned master!
He scratches himself,
plays in the clay,
tires,
falls asleep.
- The summer beautiful
around him.

III
Red-Emil is sweating
in timber forest,
sings:
There ain't no thing
but my fetters,
and the crown's sheriff
deserves nothing but a fart. -
Damned horse,
you Devil's beast;
you too know it well:
there is no food to be had
B'fore fifteen loads are delivered.
There ain't no thing
but my fetters -.
It is evening
there is hunger; there is hate.

IV
Red-Emil sits
at the Red's headquarters
with pistol and sword.
There is discord in the village;
At the estate
they have hidden grain,
smoked hams, cheese, what all,
while the people are starving.
- Ten men outside, quickly;
Move it! Move it!
We'll read them the law of the people
though not written in any book.
Forward: March!

V
Red-Emil rushes
Through the manor's door:
his eyes spitting fire
his pistol spitting lead -
The mistress didn't even get
to open her mouth
before she lay there
belly up;
And the master, flask in hand,
hurried in there
from the bedroom
he too got his ration.
Hey, boys! Take all you can find! -
Anything that's left over,
we'll burn to ashes!

VI
Red-Emil lies
Behind a rock, cursing:
now we're the Devil's own
now the Germans are coming!
He takes his rifle, fires -
a burning in his hand,
he runs out of bullets -
with knife in hand
he leaps out, wildly,
receives a blow to his head
from a rifle butt
and, cussing heavily,
falls head first in the snow.

VII
Red-Emil stands before
the war tribunal,
under bangs staring emptily
before him
- Confess, you bastard,
that you murdered, stole,
and headed up a death squad!
Well, fess up, you Devil,
or would you like the gun
to do the talking?
Under his bangs
Emil mumbles his own sentence:
I'd rather take the gun.

VIII
Red-Emil died
on the dump,
misery and filth.
The horseman hauled
the corpse
to the nearest swamp:
rest for you,
five markkas for me -
Want to swap roles?
Suits me fine.
A fading star,
above the mass grave's slushy soil,
witnessed the dawning of
the early spring morning.

Translated by Börje Vähämäki