Becoming of a Memory Box: the Kalevala

Sung Poetry, Printed Word and National Identity

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In the year 1985 Matti Kuusi and Pertti Anttonen introduced a book titled *Kalevala-lipas* that translates into English as *Kalevala Box*.[1] This so called box contained almost everything one should know about the national epic of Finland. The *Kalevala* was written by Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) and compiled different folk poems he had collected during the first half of the nineteenth century.[2] The history and cultural influence of the epic has been a topic of research and discussion without end. New ideas and perspectives have emerged constantly as it has inspired art, literature, music and popular culture. And, of course, academic studies concerning the *Kalevala* are numerous. The national epic is read in Finnish schools and one would have great difficulties to find a Finn who could not name at least a few characters or stories which appear in the *Kalevala*.

As the title *Kalevala Box* already indicates, the *Kalevala* can be approached as a memory box. Telling the story of the epic's birth, going through its social and political influence and depicting the artworks inspired by the *Kalevala*, the book by Kuusi and Anttonen traces different openings of this memory box.[3]

1 KUUSI/ANTTONEN, 1985. A new revised edition was published in 1999. KUUSI/ANTTONEN, 1999.

2 The first edition of the *Kalevala* was published in 1835. The second revised edition was almost double in size and was published in 1849.

3 Drawing these different historical openings of the memory box *Kalevala* together, the *Kalevala Box* itself becomes one of them.

The *Kalevala Box* is a perfect specimen of the cultural memory which the epic entails and carries within. But how it is possible for the *Kalevala* to be a memory box? Created by means of literalising oral tradition, the *Kalevala* encapsulates one culture and is able to displace it into another one. Thus the epic is a culturally hybrid artefact; it belongs partly to rural and illiterate culture of Finnish inland and partly to the canon of western civilisation.[4] The aim of this article is to investigate the actual event of transfer that occurs from oral tradition into literary culture which creates this memory box and therefore does not concentrate on the content of the *Kalevala*. The article demonstrates how already the act of crafting a memory box to be opened later in history calls for cultural transfer.

Another aim of this article is also to clarify the material conditions of an artificial memory box which is in this case a printed book known as the *Kalevala*. I argue that it was exactly the materiality of a printed book which enabled the cultural transfer from oral stories to an artificial memory box.[5] As an artefact, a printed book is of a very peculiar sort. It is manufactured as any man-made object, but any copy of one book can be replaced with another one. Even if the text is individual, one of a kind, the medium in which it is presented is replaceable.[6] Therefore, it is not a single volume of the *Kalevala* but the literary work in printed medium which is the memory box of this article. In this memory box, constantly changing oral poems appeared in a new material form that is much more lasting than an orally told story. The *Kalevala* isolated parts of the oral tradition and fixed them to a permanent form. Questions of how this fixing was done, what constitutes the materiality of the printed book and what kind of new cultural practises of identification it enables are inspected in the course of this article.

4 As stated in the introduction to this book, Peter Burke has emphasised that cultural transfer and exchange are transcultural in nature, interaction between cultures diffuses the borders between reciprocal participants creating new forms of cultural practices that have not existed before.

5 The subject matter of creating the *Kalevala* is thoroughly researched. See e.g. well executed and versatile anthology *Kalevala ja laulettu runo* (2004) edited by ANNA-LEENA SIIKALA et. al. Yet, I maintain that in this article the concepts of memory box, cultural transfer and materiality produce an original and informative angle to the epic.

6 Of course, different editions can differ from each other. Also when the text is exactly same from one edition to another, e.g. more expensive binding materials or illustrations can bring new meanings to the text.

I am going to begin by giving some background information concerning the historical situation in Finland at the first half of the nineteenth century. I will especially make remarks on the heritage that Lönnrot received from the Academy of Turku emphasising the importance of the Finnish language and its historicity in the formation of the national identity in Finland. Then I shall continue with Lönnrot's act of compiling the *Kalevala* and the specific problems that the transcription of oral tradition to literacy presented to him. From the notion that the *Kalevala* is oral culture displaced into literacy, I proceed to the explanation of how the epic should be interpreted as a printed text. Then I shall further develop my interpretation of a printed text as material artefact and examine what happens when poetical language is transferred from oral culture to literary culture. I conclude with a discussion about the effects of these new material conditions to national identity.

Historicity, language and Finland in the nineteenth century

As is well known, the nineteenth century was a time of the new historical consciousness and also of the recently introduced historical sciences. For example, John Edward Toews has described how the historical approach had a very deep and also intentional impact on the culture politics of Prussia in the form of architecture and music as well as the new historical academic disciplines.[7] Historical aesthetics and sciences made the nation.[8] This historical identification did not appear suddenly, but had its roots deep in the eighteenth century. The case of nineteenth-century Finland had many similarities with Germany. Both had to actively ponder upon what it meant to be a nation and how the nation should be constructed. Even though in very different political situation, Germany and Finland both had a severe identity crisis, inventing themselves as nations with their own specific cultures. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have interpreted that the German problem with the national identity, or the German national subject as they write, traced back

7 TOEWS, 2004, see e.g. pp. xxf.

8 It is no wonder that historicism went together with nationalism, since the first assures the latter that there is no universal human nature and therefore could ground unique local and national identities. BEISER, 2011, p. 13.

especially to the little number of great literary works in German language, when they compared themselves to other nations.[9]

But the case of Finland in the early nineteenth century was even worse than Germany's case a hundred years earlier. After hundreds of years as a part of the Swedish realm, Finland gained autonomic status in 1809 as the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. Emperor Alexander I then proclaimed that Finland had now become a nation among nations. Yet, not long after the birth of the autonomy, a cultural conflict within the Finnish nation was discovered: The political, economic and cultural elite spoke and wrote in Swedish.[10] The majority of the population spoke Finnish; but for a long time the only greater works in their native language were the translation of the Bible and the Evangelic Lutheran hymn book. All other literary uses of Finnish were almost non-existent. The lack of literary culture was extremely problematic since literature really defined almost all institutions considered developed and civilised.[11]

One answer to this crisis was to collect oral folklore from illiterate common people. As shall be seen, almost paradoxically, those who could not read or write themselves came to the rescue when literature was most needed. For many it was unimaginable that the Finnish language of crude farmers from the

9 LACOUE-LABARTHE/NANCY, 1990, p. 299. See also the article by Asko Nivala in this book about the yearning of a German golden age of literature. Eric A. Blackell has made this notion and, according to him, the feeling of this shortcoming did not only concern the lack of literary works, both fictional and scientific, in German language but also the capability of the language itself to express educated ideas. Especially the philosopher G. W. Leibniz (1646–1716) suffered from the present condition of German language at the turn of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, feeling that Germany was culturally inferior especially to France. BLACKALL, 1959, pp. 2–4. Intriguing is that Leibniz himself wrote in French and Latin as he could not express himself in German, very similarly Finnish intellectuals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century had to express themselves in Swedish or Latin when they wished for better Finnish literary language and historical knowledge about Finland. See also footnote 10.

10 SOMMER, 2012, pp. 10, 13, 18, 21. Łukasz Sommer portrays excellently this paradox. From eighteenth century onwards, many academic intellectuals in Finland considered Finnish language as the most important and defining quality of Finnishness. Yet all what was said by these individuals was written in Swedish or Latin.

11 Following the eighteenth and nineteenth century contemporaries, in this article the term *literature* indicates to all written and printed texts and not exclusively to fiction.

inland[12] could be used in poetry, science or government. On the other hand, others thought that a new literary language and literary culture could and should be invented in Finland on grounds of the native Finnish language. Both sides shared the same conviction that the Finnish language was the key factor for the culture, civilisation and the nation's self-formation; disagreement considered the question if this was possible at all.

Elias Lönnrot and the heritage of the Academy of Turku

The Finnish language was developed to slowly meet the modern standards of literary language during the nineteenth century. Elias Lönnrot was one of the most important figures in the process of creating the new Finnish literary language. He was of course only one of many but, even in his lifetime, Lönnrot was considered as one of the leading authorities on Finnish language. Lönnrot was born in 1802 in south Finland to a Finnish speaking tailor's family. Regardless of his modest beginnings, Lönnrot managed to be educated to an extent that in 1822 he could matriculate into the Academy of Turku situated at the south west shores of Finland.[13] We do not know much about Lönnrot's studentship at the Academy but after his graduation in 1827 he took up two ambitions. First, he initiated postgraduate studies to become a medical doctor. Second, he began to make journeys into the Finnish inland in order to collect folklore and poems. These travels continued during the following two decades, producing a vast collection of different materials.[14] Why was Lönnrot so fascinated with oral poetry? He most likely came to know thoughts of such individuals as J. J. Tengström (1787–1858), J. G. Linsén (1785–1848) and other intellectuals yearning for Finnish literature.

When Lönnrot enrolled to the Academy of Turku, it was occupied with many young men fascinated with Finnish mythology, language and oral

12 In a very rough division, it was considered that the coast of Finland was more Swedish speaking, more European and, by the standards of the nineteenth century, more civilized.

13 The Royal Academy of Turku was founded in 1640 by Queen Christina of Sweden. After the Great Fire of Turku in 1827 the university was relocated to Helsinki, the new capital of the Grand Duchy, where it has situated since then.

14 His collections included myths, stories, lyrical songs, riddles, proverbs, spells etc.

storytelling tradition. They were, so to speak, infected with the historical fever – historical comparative linguistics was expected to provide knowledge not only of the Finnish language but also of the old customs, poetics and culture. As Tengström wrote:

> Those folk songs, folk memories and customs which could give a hint of or illuminate older circumstances [of the Finnish nation] have been […] cast away to the most far regions of our country, to the innermost parts of northern Ostrobothnia, Savonia and Karelia, where they should exist in their pure original form with many other characteristics of the Finnish nation.[15]

Regardless of the great interest in Finnish language and antiquity during the early nineteenth century, the contemporary condition of Finnish language made it very hard for many to imagine it being capable to operate as a language of literature, legislation, science or other literary institutions which were considered crucial for developed societies. Also Tengström made this remark. According to him, Finland is a unique nation, but it has no possibility to become a nation-state. Even if external political and material circumstances were favourable, the Finnish people would still lack more important internal qualities. The possibility of a Finnish nation was seen dependent on national history, literature and capability to form oneself according to them.[16]

Tengström made a strong argument for literary culture as the precondition for all sciences and arts. He applauded especially ancient Greeks who, according to him, had a very high or unmatched degree of culture without having the same material conditions that present day European powers possessed.[17] The great emphasis Tengström put into literary culture made his evaluation of the possibility of the Finnish literature that much grimmer: "[…] reading public in Finland is and always will be too few in order to uphold its

15 "Och de folksänger, de traditioner och plägseder, som kunde antyda eller upplysa äldre förhållanden, hafva vid culturens framsteg dels försvunnit, dels blifvit förviste till de aflägnaste trakterna af vårt land, till de innersta delarna af Norra Österbotten, Savolax och Karelien, der de dock ännu, jemte många originela drag af Finska folkets egna lynne, skola förekomma i sin urspungliga renhet." TENGSTRÖM, 1817–1818, p. 126. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by Juhana Saarelainen.

16 TENGSTRÖM, 1817–1818, p. 72.

17 IBID., pp. 99f.

own independent literature […]"[18] According to Tengström, Finns could not achieve that kind of educated literary culture which many other nations possessed. The only and very vague possibility he saw in ancient poems and mythology.[19]

Yet Tengström was not the only one who stressed the importance of ancient Finnish mythology and poetry. For example also Linsén emphasised literature and literary language as the precondition for creating the Finnish culture. He was also evidently more positive about the possibility of cultivating ancient forms of language to be modern literature. Linsén answered directly to Tengström's article and demanded literary institutions in Finnish language. In this sense his attitude was less antiquarian. He did not want to merely discover ancient poems but also develop their language towards modernity: "What can now be expected with all good reason is that Finnish poetry will receive a romantic echo, which is the soul of all modern poetry."[20]

This looking to the future and reaching for a utopian goal of modern Finnish literature, which could as well have failed[21], was made possible only by discovering and inventing historical Finland – history of its language, culture, storytelling tradition and mythology. These were crucial for Finland's identity as a nation since historiography, written documents in Finnish, were extremely hard to come by. Linsén wrote in 1819:

> The cultivation of the language has naturally the most nearest relation with the literature: the first cannot be thought without the second. Here one must only note the sequence ordained by nature. Literature first grows in shadowy groves of songs and poems. There it leans its delicate stem to religion and oldest traditions and memories of the nation[22]

18 "[…] Finlands läsande Allmänhet alltid vara och förblifva för fåtalig, att kunna underhålla en egen sjelfbestående Litteratur […]". TENGSTRÖM, 1817–1818, p. 125.

19 IBID., p. 128.

20 "Hvad man nu med allt skäl väntar, är att den Finska poesien får den romantiska anklang, som är själern i all modern poesie." LINSÉN 1819, p. 242.

21 COLEMAN, 2010, pp. 46f.

22 "Med språkets odling står naturligtvis *Litteraturen* i den aldranärmaste förening: den förrä kan icke tänkas utan den sednare. Dervid bör endast märkas den af naturen föreskrifna ordningen, att denna Litteratur först uppväxer i sångens och diktens skuggriga lundar, och der till stöd för sin späda stängel flätar sig tillsamman med Religionen och nationens häfder och fornminnen." LINSÉN, 1819, p. 241.

Poems that supposedly were still sung in deep Finnish inland were thought still to be in touch with the ancient Finnish religion and its mythology. Therefore they were expected to provide evidence of the history of customs, culture and the language itself. When the written sources were only few, Finnish oral language and folk poetry became a living document of Finnish culture and history.

It seems that the intellectual elite of Finland, which itself made these demands in Swedish, wanted someone who could deliver them the oral culture encapsulated in the artificial form of a written text. It was not actual oral folk poetry they wanted, but a transcribed version of it. The printed medium was to them more familiar, more developed and especially more civilised than the orally sung poems. The generation previous to Lönnrot showed great interest in Finnish folk poetry, but not without contradiction. Folk poems that were believed to be treasured in the Finnish inland ensured that Finland had its own national culture and literature. But the oral culture revealed itself as a disappearing tradition of old customs and stories. It was the memory of the ancient Finland that had to be preserved for modernity. What the learned intellectuals wanted could very well be described as a memory box which would transfer the tradition of Finnish antiquity from the deep inland to the shores of the Baltic Sea. It seems that Lönnrot answered these assignments very thoroughly.

Kalevala

From 1828 onwards, Lönnrot had few anthologies of individual folk poems printed, but by 1835 he had collected and compiled enough material to publish a full length epic called the *Kalevala or Old Poems from Karelia telling the Ancient History of the Finnish People* (Kalevala taikka Vanhoja Karjalan Runoja Suomen kansan muinaisista ajoista).[23] The epic consists of 32 poems and over 12,000 verses – or half of Homer[24] as Lönnrot himself wrote in 1833, describing the goal he had set himself.[25] It is a curious combination of

23 The subtitle illustrates perfectly the connection of the *Kalevala*-project and the need of a new historical consciousness in Finland. The second edition had no subtitle and was called simply the *Kalevala*.

24 *Iliad* and *Odyssey* consist together of ca. 27,800 verses.

25 SIIKALA, 2008, p. 315.

collected folk poetry and Lönnrot's own artistic instinct. Practically every verse of the epic was obtained from different folk poetry singers, but Lönnrot arranged all the verses to form a story that he had not heard from any individual singer. The *Kalevala* is one great narrative, from a Finnish myth of World's Creation to the emergence of Christianity, which was dreamed up and written by Lönnrot.[26]

The first edition of the *Kalevala* was not a bestseller – since almost nobody could read Finnish – but even so, it was met with great enthusiasm nationally and eventually also internationally. Even the renowned German scholar Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) was very excited over the *Kalevala* and gave an extensive lecture about it in the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1845.[27] The recognition from one of the most distinguished linguist and folklorist at the time did not go unnoticed in Finland.[28] For the first time it was thought that Finns had a literary work which could stand side by side with the canonical works of European civilisation.

Thus, when the mid-century was approaching, it seemed that, in fact, it might be possible to construct a Finnish literary culture from which the modern Finnish nation might follow. As folk poetry reassured that Finns had their own history, it also enabled imagining a shared future for the nation. This dialectic between the past and the future contributed to the creation of a national identity in the present. The need of ancient Finland was already revealed when looking into an early nineteenth-century public discussion prior Lönnrot, which was concerned with the question if a textualisation of Finnish oral culture and creating Finnish literature is possible at all. Lönnrot evidently

26 The fact that the *Kalevala* is a fictional literary work by Lönnrot has been thoroughly argued by folklorist Väinö Kaukonen with numerous publications from late 1940's onward. See e.g. KAUKONEN, 1990, p. 161, 164f. After the publication of the first edition, Lönnrot himself became even more aware of his own creative role. KAUKONEN, 1990, p. 162. As it has been suggested by Jouni Hyvönen, the fictional narrative of the ancient Finland was not the only aim of Lönnrot. He included all different kind of genres of folk poetry from myths and spells to proverbs into the *Kalevala*. Thus the epic forms an anthology gathering the whole spectrum of Finnish folklore in one volume. HYVÖNEN, 2008, p. 346.

27 See *Über das finnische Epos*. GRIMM, 1865 (1845).

28 The high praises from Grimm might well have encouraged Lönnrot to edit the thoroughly revised second edition published in 1849. WESTPHAL, 2011, p. 45. In Germany, Grimm's lecture about the *Kalevala* was received as the most important and influential notion of the epic. VOßSCHMIDT, 1989, p. 47.

took part in this discussion, not only in the pages of journals but also in the practical action of collecting, publishing and editing Finnish folklore.

Lönnrot presented the Finns with a literary epic which met the contemporary demands of poetic beauty and authenticity.[29] But there is a deep conflict in all of the world's traditional epics from the ancient *Gilgamesh* and Homer to the modern *Kalevala* of the nineteenth century. We know these epic poems as literature but their origin is in oral culture. *Kalevala* is one of the more recent textualisations of oral tradition. What was the cultural historical context of transforming Finnish oral culture into literary culture and its influence on national identity in the nineteenth century?

I argue that Lönnrot very well understood the difference between oral and literary culture and consciously pondered upon their relationship. When he collected and scribed folk poetry, he was simply faced with the dilemma that the stories of oral culture changed constantly but when they are transformed into written form, they stay constant. Lönnrot described changing language as a living being and compared the book bindings of classical dead languages to a "shroud of dead".[30] Thus he had to solve the question of how to record oral culture and simultaneously have it live on. How did Lönnrot confront this dilemma? The *Kalevala* has been interpreted to be a literary representation of the past and would therefore be merely antiquarian in purpose. Yet this was

29 The question of authenticity was crucial to any folklore anthology after the scandal that the *Songs of Ossian* published by James Macpherson (1736–1796) caused. Lönnrot himself noted in 1851 to Léouzon Le Duc, the French translator of the *Kalevala*, that the one who has doubts about the authenticity of the *Kalevala* can travel to the Finnish inland or search the archives and find all the collected verses there in, LÖNNROT, 1993, p. 472. (Apparently the total revision of the order of the verses was not considered as a problem by him) It was no wonder that Finns had no suspicions about the authenticity of the *Kalevala* since Lönnrot's journeys were well known to the reading public. Also the international audience was convinced. The depiction of Jacob Grimm is very revealing: "[…] Elias Lönnrot durch längeren aufenthalt in Karelien und Olonetz unmittelbar aus dem munde des volks und der kundigsten sänger eine reiche samlung solcher lieder treu und gewissenhaft zu stand brachte." [sic!] GRIMM, 1865 (1845), p. 78. It was Grimm's judgment that the *Kalevala* is an actual folk epic that had survived from the Finnish antiquity. See VOßSCHMIDT, 1989, p.73f. Of course, today definitions of folk poetry are very different from the notions of the early nineteenth century and one should be aware of the possible anachronisms when judging the past interpretations. See also footnote 26.

30 LÖNNROT, 1991, p. 116.

not Lönnrot's only intention. Bearing in mind the task of creating modern Finnish literature, he also aimed for a new literary language.

Already as young man, at the age of 28, when beginning his journeys Lönnrot wrote to C. A. Gottlund (1796–1875), an older college and one of the pioneers of the nineteenth century in the study of Finnish folklore, and explained his choices of writing down the oral poetry:

> I have selected over the other practices of writing the one that allows me to express myself so that I can mediate between Savonian and other Finnish dialects, and this I have done for that reason that Finns even from other provinces than Savonia and Karelia would be able to read and understand the Poems of their ancestors full of wisdom in their simple and powerful language.[31]

The letter depicts how the evident differences between spoken and written word were at the very core of folklore collecting. We can see how the findings in oral and aesthetical language from deep Finnish inland raised the question of how Finnish should be written. The scriber, may it have been Lönnrot, Gottlund or any other folklore enthusiast in the early nineteenth century, had to make many choices when oral poetry was transformed into written form. The task could not be done without the question: How should this transformation be done? The rules of writing had to be invented, since there was no Finnish standard language, grammar or orthography upon which a writer could rely. Very early on, Lönnrot was convinced that the written word should be made to be something else than oral culture. Literary culture should be shared by all Finns, in other words it should be more general than provincial oral culture.[32]

31 "Jag har dock framför andra skrifsätt valt den såsom, att jag så må uttrycka mig, en medlare emellan den Savolaxiska och de andra Finska dialekterna, och detta af det skäl, att Finnarne äfven på andra orter än i Savolax och Karelen måtte kunna läsa och förstå sina förfäders visdomsfulla Runor i deras enkla, kraftfulla språk." LÖNNROT, 1990, p. 18.

32 In his letter, Lönnrot defended his choice, since Gottlund was not in the favour of a standard language but thought that every dialect and even every writer should have their own grammar and orthography. Mark Sebba has argued that there is no writing system or orthography which could be neutral technology. They always have social and cultural connotations. SEBBA, 2012, p. 9. Nonstandard orthographies seem to be more expressive than standard orthography but it also seems that this quality is apparent only in comparison to the standard one. JAFFE, 2012, p. 221.

But simultaneously he also wanted to preserve the simple and powerful language of the oral folk poetry. In the *Kalevala,* oral culture is displaced from its origins in the rural and uneducated inland provinces of the Savonia and Karelia into literary culture of Finland's southern and western coastline. Clearly it can be argued that according to Lönnrot, the textualisation of folk poetry should be and was a preparatory work for a literary language which would be understood by all Finns and thus transcend provincial dialects. Based on this notion it is possible to study Lönnrot's *Kalevala* as a medium – or a material artefact – which tries to transmit, or mediate as Lönnrot writes, between inland's oral culture and the literary culture of modern Europe.

Materiality of oral tradition and materiality of literary tradition

The notion of the materiality of printed texts in this article is based on a simple remark that the folk poetry collected from illiterate singers and transformed into literature is displacing oral culture into literary culture. This transfer between different spheres of cultural practises is simultaneously transference between different material mediums. This transformation has irreversible effects on the content of folk poetry because the form and the content cannot be separated from each other. This has been stated in many different ways. For this article, I find interesting how Marshall McLuhan described a medium as the message. With this he means that how any medium, the form in which any content is represented, changes the content. According to McLuhan, new media – that is new technologies – contain aspects of older media. Writing contains the older medium which is speech. But speech in new written form is no longer the same.[33]

What is especially interesting in McLuhan for this case is his definition of new media as new extensions of human senses and other capabilities both individual and collective.[34] For example, writing enables communication over vast geographical areas in comparison to speech.[35] But we can also interpret writing as a material extension of the human memory. This approach is not new. Already Plato in his dialogue *Phaedrus* refers to writing as an

33 MCLUHAN, 1964, p. 82.
34 IBID., p. 35.
35 IBID., p. 85f.

externalised continuation of memory but also its corrupter, since it transfers the memory from human individual to letters outside of the individual.[36]

Like nineteenth-century Finns, also Plato considered himself being in a breaking point between oral culture and literary culture. Even though the canonical literary works of Homer were already 300 years old at the time of Plato and the technique of writing much older – so old that its origin had to be told with myth[37] – the process of literalisation of the culture was slow in Greek. In fact, it was the time of Plato which was the decisive moment for the emergence of literary culture, but even then written works lingered in the sphere of the spoken word since they were most often read aloud or performed to an audience[38], as happens also in Plato's dialogue. Yet Plato was in different situation than Lönnrot. In ancient Greek, all written documents were manuscripts which could not spread as widely and quickly as printed text. As Finnish became to be a written language at a very late point in history, Finns passed the time of manuscripts and began to write in the modern technological era of the printing.[39] The oral culture was not only transferred to written form, but this was done with the advanced reproducing capabilities of book printing. Therefore, we must consider the materiality of the printed book.

The *Kalevala* is a book written by Elias Lönnrot.[40] There are two sides to this notion. As it has been suggested by Lauri Honko, the *Kalevala* can be called a traditional epic in the sense that practically all of its content was collected from illiterate poem singers.[41] On the other hand, no singer had or could have had a recollection of that kind of extensive literary epic which Lönnrot constructed. When the amount of the collected folk poems and lore began to multiply, Lönnrot stated that he could have compiled seven such Kalevalas, all different from each other.[42] From all these possible seven unique

36 PLATO, *Pheadrus*, 275a.
37 IBID., 274c.
38 WERNER, 2012, pp. 183f.
39 Of course, there had been manuscripts in Finland before the invention of printing technology but Finnish language had not been used. Finnish as a literary language had to be created for the first time in the sixteenth century when the church in Sweden was reformed and the translation of the Bible was initiated by Bishop Mikael Agricola (1510–1557).
40 See footnote 26.
41 HONKO, 2002, p. 9.
42 KAUKONEN, 1987, p. 29. The publication of the first edition of the *Kalevala* infected many Finnish intellectuals with a folklore fever and they rushed to Karelia in order to provide supplements to Lönnrot's collections.

Kalevalas it is only the printed specimen which we know today – not the other possible six ones.

As folklorist Satu Apo has realised, the goal to reproduce the original oral poems cannot ever be reached since the oral singing of the poem and its literal representation are too different from each other.[43] Furthermore, Apo has systematically shown how the *Kalevala* is in many respects modern literature.[44] In fact, all literary representations of the Finnish folk poetry, from Lönnrot's *Kalevala* to the more current attempts, have the same tendency to always use the standards of literature. But the original oral presentations of Finnish folk poetry were performances that used sound, tones of voice and gestures. The singer would react to the audience according to their reception and would make up new verses as well as modify the recalled ones.[45] These all are material conditions of the singing performance. Unlike the ancient Greek reciters of Homer, Finnish poem singers had no written document to which the story would compare, so the stories would always change with every performance. For the illiterate poem singers every performance was new and unique. What was written and printed by Lönnrot does not change any more. Written word and printed book as media are in that way more inflexible as oral storytelling but also more permanent. What happens when a unique oral performance is transformed into literature?

According to McLuhan's posthumous work *Laws of Media* (1988) there are some questions that we can always ask from any medium. Two of these are: (1) What does the medium *enhance* or make possible? (2) What does the medium make *obsolete*?[46] Applying these questions to the current case, we can enquire what happens when oral medium of folk poetry is displaced into literature.[47] Interesting is that we do not need to make up the answers to these questions. We can ask Elias Lönnrot and let him tell us, since he has pondered upon the same problems in the documents he has left behind. He wrote in the Foreword to the *Kalevala*'s second edition:

43 APO, 2010, p. 19.
44 APO, 2002, see e.g. p. 108.
45 APO, 2010, pp. 19f. See also HIRVENLAHTI, 2004.
46 SANDSTROM, 2012, p. 4. The remaining two questions are: What does the medium retrieve? What the medium can reverse into? According to McLuhan, these four questions are the laws of media or the four effects that all media and also artefacts have.
47 And they should be applied, as Asa Briggs and Peter Burke have reminded that the consequences of new media and technologies are not necessarily the same in every different social and cultural context. BRIGGS/BURKE, 2009, p. 10.

> From now on [after the publication of the *Kalevala*] they [the amount of folk poems] will begin to reduce rather than multiply, since anyone who wants can have them in a form of the ready-made book, and in broader form than any individual memory can anything uphold. Therefore will the value of singing disappear from the memory and after the value has disappeared will also the singing itself be forgotten.[48]

Here Lönnrot takes the same position as Plato when he reveals the two-sided nature of writing as extension and corrupter of memory. According to Lönnrot, written word exceeds the capabilities of human memory – it is *enhanced*. Yet Lönnrot also sees the inventible consequences: As there is available a printed book, a new medium, in which the oral poetry is presented, the memory of individual poem singers fades as the words are externalised from the human memory to an artificial object – the older medium is made *obsolete*. Therefore it could be said that in this certain sense the *Kalevala* as a material product of printing technology has non-human agency or capability.[49]

McLuhan says that media are extensions of man. Plato describes how writing enhances memory with objective letters but degenerates subjective human memory. Both lack an extensive analysis of objects superseding the individual human life span. If not explicitly then implicitly, Lönnrot takes this into consideration when he describes how folk stories are in constant change when they pass from one singer to another and especially from generation to generation. Lönnrot acknowledges very precisely that his book will end this variation – which has led to ever growing multiplicity of folk poetry. This multiplicity, Lönnrot writes, will now begin to decline. But as McLuhan writes, content of any medium is another medium. And the content of written text is speech but also human thought and memory.[50] Writing generates almost Hegelian *Aufhebung*[51]: that which is left behind is not cast away but found in a

48 "Tästälähin alkavat ne taas pikemmin supistua, kun uusilla lisäyksillä enetä, sillä kun, ken ikänänsä tahtoo, saapi ne valmiina kirjana käteensä, ja täydellisempänä, kun minkä kenen erinäinen muisto kannattaisi, niin katoaa muistolta laulamisen arvo, ja arvon kadottua itse muistolta laulaminenki." LÖNNROT 1993, p. 411.

49 This is not to say that it is an intentional or conscious agent but insofar as it has capability to produce effects in social and material reality, it has certain kind of and amount of agency.

50 MCLUHAN, 1964, pp. 23f.

51 G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) is known among other things for his philosophical method of dialectics. He claimed that in the historical process of all phenomena there is rational logic in which previous contradictory categories of reality are

new form in the next step of historical process. Therefore, the memory of oral culture is encapsulated into this literary work and preserved there as it would be in a box.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt has written that an artificial object manufactured by men lasts beyond the makers' lifetime.[52] Thus artificial objects create stability and continuity for the human world and preserve it over generations.[53] Also, or perhaps especially, written and printed texts have this quality. As already Plato noted, written word and human memory have a relationship whether one wanted that or not – once a technology such as writing is invented, there is no returning to the time beforehand. It is not far from revolutionary how writing supersedes spoken communication. Thoughts and ideas can be communicated over vast distance, both in place and time. Thinkers, poets and scholars long dead still share their words with us today. Technology of printing multiplies the possibilities of distributing and receiving these ideas. Lönnrot seems to be aware of this when he describes how printed medium exceeds the individual memory. But he also takes into consideration that printed text prevails over generations. In a Swedish literary review *Litteraturblad*, Lönnrot wrote with the title "Remarks to the new *Kalevala* edition" (1849) that he cannot believe that the folk poems of the nineteenth century would be the same as in ancient times. He explains that in his experience, one poem goes through significant changes if it passed over ten different singers, and continues:

> If I now change the mentioned ten singers to ten centuries through which the poems of the Kalevala could have come to us, I should not have to add anything else to declare my opinion about the character of present day poems in comparison to the original ones.[54]

united "in such a way that they are not only preserved but also abolished (to use Hegel's term of art for this paradoxical-sounding process, they are *aufgehoben*)." FORSTER, 1993, p. 132. The German noun *Aufhebung* and verb *aufheben* have many different meanings indicating simultaneously preserving and abolishing something.

52 ARENDT, 1958, pp. 167f.

53 IBID. For Arendt it is the work of art that culminates the property of lasting in artefacts.

54 "Förvandlar jag nu de nysomtalte tie sångare till de tie sekler, genom hvilkas mun Kalevala sångerna kunna havfa kommit till oss, så torde jag ej behöfva tillägga något ytterligare, för att tillkännagifva min tanke om deras närvarande beskaffenhet i förhållande till den ursprungliga." LÖNNROT, 1993, p. 407.

Lönnrot acknowledges that oral folk poetry presented by individuals cannot create as vast an amount of works of poetry as literary culture, but he also has notion that for the same reason – inefficiency of individual memory – the oral culture experiences constant change. Poetical works in literary culture on the contrary stays constantly the same. Once the *Kalevala* was written, printed, published and distributed there was no more need to sing the poems. According to Lönnrot, the change of oral culture will disappear and the printed version of the poems will become canonical.[55] It is the materiality of the printed book which enables this. Even if the technology by which it is created and the meanings that are assigned to it are man-made, the printed medium has, so to speak, a life of its own which cannot be entirely controlled by human intentions.[56] On the contrary, a printed book has the capability to affect the socio-cultural world of men by, for example, enabling a creation and distribution of a national epic and on the other hand obsoleting oral performances of folk poetry singers.

Conclusion

Written and especially printed words are artificial objects produced by human technology. Yet, due to their material characteristics, they have non-human qualities. They are more precise and in large numbers more extensive in memory than humans. Even further, they can spread language, poetry, news, ideas, science etc. over a vastly greater geographical area than individual person. With the notion by Hannah Arendt that artefacts prevail beyond human life, one can realise that they thus do not spread widely merely in space, but also in time. As the text is an extension of a memory that lasts over human generations, it becomes a vehicle for historical consciousness and may

55 According to Jan Assmann, both oral and literary societies have had their experts to carry and uphold the cultural memory of the society's mythical origin. In oral societies this was the task of poets. ASSMANN, 2008, p. 114. It was Lönnrot's conviction that the literalisation of the oral tradition belonged its normal life cycle. HYVÖNEN, 2004, p. 329. Thus it was only natural that in one point of history the oral culture would transform into literary one.

56 This, of course, can also apply to other material artefacts (as well). Also it should be remembered that it is not only the materiality of the medium which has effects but also the thoughts and ideas by men that fill the pages of printed books. BRIGGS/BURKE, 2009, p. 19.

contribute i.e. to the national thought as it did in the nineteenth century. When a memory is engraved in artefacts that last longer than organic life, it is very easy to imagine that this kind of memory must then belong to a subject which transcends individuals. Thus the new historical consciousness made possible by printing technology was able to renew the metaphor of body politic. Nation could now be perceived as a body *with* spirit, capable to remember the past and imagine the future and therefore having subjectivity of its own. It was not by chance that the so called memory institutions, such as library, archive and museum, were developed to their modern form in the nineteenth century.

In Finland, the *Kalevala* had functions similar to all these institutions. For the contemporaries, it was a library of oral poetry, an archive for events in ancient history and museum of old customs and culture. This entire ancient culture was encapsulated in a little book which could be multiplied and distributed endlessly. It could be said that the *Kalevala* was made to perform as a memory box. It displaced ancient oral culture and transformed it into modern literary culture. As a memory box it transferred between different cultures and thus transcended them. It merged two cultural spheres by being a culturally hybrid artefact. Lönnrot had the dilemma that he wanted both, the ancient, powerful and living language of the oral Finnish tradition and also the modern European literary language. The concept of memory box can explain how he managed, or at least presumed that he could, to simultaneously preserve the past and create something new for the future.

It was possible for the *Kalevala* to become a memory box because the creation of this artefact was an event of cultural transfer itself. The epic as a memory box was filled by Lönnrot with memories from the (imagined) ancient Finland. As the oral poems were expected to inform the modern people about the ancient culture of the Finnish nation, it became a carrier of those memories. The *Kalevala* was perceived to encapsulate in written form the Finnish antiquity documented and engraved to the "simple and powerful language" of the poem singers of the Finnish inland. Thus the cultural transfer that created the memory box of the *Kalevala* was twofold. First, it transferred the sung poems from the Finnish inland to the shores of Baltic Sea and into literary culture. Second, the cultural transfer happened also from ancient past to the present day, the modern age of book printing, literature and science. Therefore, culture is transferred in the *Kalevala* both geographically as well as in time from the ancient past to the present modern day – and of course for the future of the Finnish nation.

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