



CORNELIUS HASSELBLATT

Kalevipoeg Studies

The Creation and Reception of an Epic

Studia Fennica
Folkloristica

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Folkloristica 21

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Finnish Literature Society • SKS • Helsinki



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Preface

It was more than thirty years ago that I first heard of the existence of an ancient hero called Kalevipoeg. I was a third-year student of Finno-Ugric philology spending a year in Helsinki, where I was attending a course on the history of Estonian literature. I had read Elias Lönnrot's famous *Kalevala* at least once, and I may have seen some references to Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's *Kalevipoeg* in the comments of my German edition of the Finnish epic, but it was not until I heard the lectures of my Estonian teacher in Helsinki that Kalevipoeg really entered my consciousness. He never left it again.

One year later, in March 1984, I discovered in an East Berlin antique bookshop the famous German translation of the epic by Ferdinand Löwe – the first edition from 1900! In those times, it was strictly forbidden to export antique books from the socialist countries, but my eagerness to obtain the book was stronger than my fear of East German frontier soldiers. I put it under my sweater and boldly walked through the gates. No-one bothered me and I was the lucky owner of the complete Estonian epic translated into my mother tongue.

From that moment on, I began working continuously with Kreutzwald's epic, eventually re-reading it, giving lectures and publishing articles about it. As all of the articles have been published in German, in diverse venues and spread over two decades, I deemed it appropriate to have them published once more – this time as an English-language monograph and equipped with an introduction in order to create more coherence. For this new English edition, however, I have not simply translated my earlier contributions on the topic but have in fact rewritten and reorganised them, excising the places where they overlapped and filling some gaps that had remained owing to a lack of time, inaccessibility of sources or simply my own ignorance. If anything has taught me that we never stop learning, it has been my involvement with Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's epic.

It is a pleasure to thank Marin Laak, Pille-Riin Larm, Liina Lukas, Ave Mattheus, Kristi Metste, Ylo M. Pärnik and especially Frog and Lotte Tarkka for valuable information that has helped enhance this work. I am also grateful to two anonymous referees whose constructive criticism was very much appreciated. In addition, I would like to thank the Finnish Literature Society for accepting this book into its prestigious series, and, finally, I am extremely grateful to Frog and Clive Tolley for polishing the English of this text.

Zuidhorn, 1 November 2015
Cornelius Hasselblatt

Bibliographical Note

The following original articles, all written by Cornelius Hasselblatt, form the basis of the chapters of the book:

Die Bedeutung des Nationalepos *Kalevipoeg* für das nationale Erwachen der Esten. *Finnisch-Ugrische Mitteilungen* 20 (1996): 51–61. (second chapter)

Geburt und Pflege des estnischen Epos. Zur Funktionalisierung von Kreutzwalds *Kalevipoeg*. *Nordost-Archiv*. Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte. Neue Folge Band 16/2007. Lüneburg: Nordost-Institut: 103–26. (third chapter)

Latein, Deutsch und Estnisch. Sprache und Sittlichkeit am Beispiel einer Episode aus dem estnischen Nationalepos. In *Northern Voices*. Essays on Old Germanic and Related Topics, Offered to Professor Tette Hofstra. Ed. Kees Dekker *et al.*. Leuven etc.: Peeters 2008. Pp. 279–94. (fourth chapter)

Estnische Literatur in deutscher Übersetzung. Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2011. Pp. 56–77. (fifth & sixth chapter)

Von Folklore zu Literatur. Folkloristische Metamorphose bei der ausländischen *Kalevipoeg*-Rezeption. In *Finno-Ugric Folklore, Myth and Cultural Identity*. Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium on Finno-Ugric Languages in Groningen, June 7–9, 2011. Ed. Cornelius Hasselblatt, Adriaan van der Hoeven. *Studia Fenno-Ugrica Groningana* 7. Maastricht: Shaker 2012. Pp. 63–72. (seventh chapter)

The work of Kreutzwald and especially the *Kalevipoeg* are well represented bibliographically but the multitude of publications can easily become confusing. A basic bibliography was compiled by Herbert Laidvee and published in 1964: “*Kalevipoja*” *bibliograafia 1836–1961*. Tallinn: Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus 1964. 119 pp. (Personaalbibliograafiad I, 2). This is actually an offprint from the second volume of the critical edition of the epic published the previous year: Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald: *Kalevipoeg*. *Tekstikriitiline väljaanne ühes kommentaaride ja muude lisadega II*. Tallinn:

Eesti Riiklik Kirjastus. Pages 408–512 of this edition are identical with pages 13–118 of the 1964 bibliography, with one inserted empty page (90).

Laidvee continued his work and published a comprehensive bibliography on the author as well: *Fr. R. Kreutzwaldi bibliograafia 1833–1969*. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat 1978. 420 pp. (Personaalbibliograafiad I, 1). This volume has an appendix with a bibliography on the *Kalevipoeg* (pp. 339–421), in which only supplements are listed for the period 1860–1961 whilst the years 1962–9 are covered completely.

The next publication came in 1982 and was compiled by Vaime Kabur: *Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald 1803–1882*. Personaalnimestik. Tallinn: Eesti NSV Kultuuriministeerium, Fr. R. Kreutzwaldi nimeline Eesti NSV Riiklik Raamatukogu 1982. 95 pp. Although this book repeats all of the monographs from the earlier period already found in earlier bibliographies, it is important for the period 1970–81.

The next bibliography followed in 2004: *Fr. R. Kreutzwaldi bibliograafia 1982–2003*. Tallinn: Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu 2004. 164 pp. More recent publications can be found on the homepage of the Estonian Literature Museum: <http://kreutzwald.kirmus.ee>. The complete text of the epic is available on this site.

Kreutzwald's ample correspondence was published in six volumes between 1953 and 1979 (see KKV in the bibliography) and provides an extremely valuable source for Estonian cultural development in the nineteenth century. Most of the texts in this Estonian edition, however, are translations from German. The original versions are only partly published; most recently for instance the correspondence with Anton Schiefner, a member of the Academy in St Petersburg, was published in an edition by Horst Walravens (2013). Walravens also published the Berlin academic Wilhelm Schott's original letters to Kreutzwald (Walravens 2010/2011), which likewise had previously been published in Estonian (see Lepik 1961). Unfortunately, the letters from Kreutzwald to Schott have been lost. Other originals had partly been published in earlier editions, as Kreutzwald and Koidula (= KKV V) in the two-volume edition from 1910–11 (KKK), and Kreutzwald and Faehlmann (part of KKV I) in the 1936 edition by Mart Lepik.

In Estonian, there is no phonetic difference between <v> and <w>, the latter being the normal grapheme for the sound until the early twentieth century. Therefore the first edition of the epic was titled *Kalewipoeg*. In the alphabetical order of Estonian, <v> and <w> are treated as one letter.

All works quoted in this volume are listed in the bibliography (pp. 121–138).

Translations of quotations have been provided by the author of this book unless otherwise indicated.

1. Introduction

The objectives of this book

As a “core text of Estonian culture” (see Laak 2008, and in Kartus 2011: 9), Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald’s epic *Kalevipoeg* has been investigated thoroughly – what more can be said about it? The answer is that precisely owing to the enormous significance of the text within Estonian culture, the *Kalevipoeg* is constantly being reread, reshaped and reinterpreted by every new generation of Estonian readers, but also by every new generation of Estonian and international scholars. Therefore new treatments and reassessments are still to come. They will remain necessary, because new aspects of this first extensive text of modern Estonian literature will regularly be found and pushed to the fore. In this sense, the position of the *Kalevipoeg* within Estonian letters is comparable to the position of the *Kalevala* in Finnish literature, Shakespeare in English literature or Goethe in German literature.

However, the cultural situation of Estonia¹ in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was something quite different from Shakespearean England or the Germany of Goethe’s times. In the period in question, the Estonian population stood at a crossroads. How was it to continue: be absorbed among the Germans or develop into its own nation? This situation is well known to those familiar with Estonian cultural history, but nevertheless some key aspects of Estonian history should be mentioned here. (See Raun 2001 for an excellent English overview of Estonian history.)

The area we call Estonia today was conquered by Danes and Germans in the thirteenth century and from this time on was dominated by a linguistically different upper class. This top echelon, however, never formed more than roughly 5 per cent of the entire population (Miljan 2004: 121; Hasselblatt 2012a: 51). As a consequence, initially Estonian as a (peasant) language was not threatened. The same holds for the southern neighbour of the Estonians, the Latvians, and in some respects a similar

1 Wherever *Estonia* is mentioned in this book, it denotes the area where Estonian is spoken, so before 1918, for example, the correct terms would be Estonia and Northern Livonia.

This is the first English-language monograph on the poem *Kalevipoeg* (1857–1861), composed by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882). The poem is over 19,000 lines long, and is known today as the Estonian national epic. The epic was not a success story from the beginning, however. It took at least one generation before the text was received by the emerging Estonian intellectual class. In the meantime, immediately after the release of the bilingual Estonian-German edition, the text was received abroad more intensively than at home. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it is the most prolific text within Estonian literature, leaving its traces everywhere in Estonian literature and everyday life. The book includes a summary of the contents of the twenty tales of the epic and a comprehensive bibliography.

Cornelius Hasselblatt is a researcher of Finno-Ugric languages and cultures. He has published several monographs on Estonian literature and studies on Estonian linguistics and culture.



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