

1. INTRODUCTION

kuumenen kun myönnyn vilulle toinen on nälkä joka tulee eteen
vaikka takaa en näe ei kuulu tai yhtä vähän höyhen siipisulaksi jos
en kuumota jos munat pääsevät pakoon jos jäähtyvät kuin hen
gitys nokassa jos nyt nokka on silmien edessä: joka hetkessä ede
ssä: josta edempänä valuu viileämpää kurkun alle suhinaa vettä tai
myrskymärkää suojojattom assa ilmassa silloin kun en
kun en paina mitään tai silloin kun painan kaiken
siementen tasaisella jos sa ei pääse varjoon pii
loon muualle kuin maa an alle kuuluvaksi ma
madoksi ääni pelottava ääntää niskasta yhtä nop
nopeasti kääntää varjo mu sta mustempi mustikkaa mus
suhauttaa suhahduksella kirkaiseee lopuksi vaikka loppua ei ole on
pakko älä pelkää nuku uutta laulua kuuntele on mun munat muna
kivi nämä nälät lapset kovat joille yksin olen jano metsä tai taivas
joka ei osaa liikahtaa pilven puoleen tai ruohon rinta ja oksien aallot
unettava unettavasti unettaa silittää sitä mitä tahtoo toistaa ei tiputtaa
pesästä pois myönnyn kun jysiö rasahdus risu särö yksi: kaksi kolme
(Tossavainen 2007)

I get heated when I yield to cold the other is hunger which confronts me
though I don't see from behind don't hear or just as little as down can be a
wing feather if I do not feel hot if the eggs escape if they cool down like breath
in a beak if the beak is before the eyes: in front in every moment: from which
further ahead flows something cooler under the throat rustling water or
storm-wet unprotected air when I do not when I do not weigh any
thing or when I press every thing with the evenness of seeds
in which you cannot reach the shade into hiding
elsewhere except to be come a worm that belongs
underground voice fright ening sounds from the neck
as fast turns a shadow a blue bluer blueberry whizzes with
a whizz screeches in the end through there is no end it has to be don't fear
sleep listen to a new song ego eggs egg stone these hungers children for
whom alone I am thirst forest or sky which cannot shift towards a cloud or

the breast of grass and branches of waves soporific soporifically puts to
sleep strokes what it wants to repeat does not drop out of the nest I yield when
a thump crackle a twig a crack one: two three

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

How does a bird manifest itself in a poem? The poem quoted above, from a collection by Jouni Tossavainen entitled *Kerro* [Tell Me] (2007), features a speaker that seems non-human. It feels heat and cold, hunger and tension, wind, rain and fear. Its thoughts turn again and again to eggs: they must be kept warm, they are in danger of falling, they begin to crack. Outside there is something dark, whizzing, screeching and threatening. The speaker is surrounded by the nest, branches, forest and sky; it speaks of a beak, a down feather, a wing feather and seeds. A bird is implied as the speaker not only by the bird-related vocabulary but also by the layout of the poem: in the middle of the text there is an oval void that is easy to see as a bird's egg. Inside it a new bird life is growing.

A trickier question is this: what is the relationship between the bird and the poem? Bird poetry cannot be written or understood without birds. The life of birds – with its signs, gestures, movements and sounds – the curious details of birds' bodies and the behaviour of groups and individuals capture the attention and are repeatedly featured in the imagery of bird poetry. One possible approach would be to discuss bird poetry from the representational aspect, considering birds and their characteristics as material to which the poet gives meaning and poetic form. This approach stems from the concept of the opposition of nature and culture, where the poet is an active human subject and the bird is a passive non-human object. Transplanting anything from the realm of nature to the realm of culture requires an active conferring of shape and meaning, resulting in products – such as the lines of a poem – that slip into the context of culture quite effortlessly. Nature itself, on the other hand, remains unchanged, passive and with no meaning in and of itself.

The idea of poets imitating birds, recreating their calls or describing their appearance and habitat is a convenient one: bird poetry or more generally nature poetry can in this view be regarded as representations of birds or of the natural environment in general, respectively. To be sure, ecocritical poetry criticism has rejected the concept of poetry imitating nature, but the idea of the crucial difference between the physical environment or objects and their descriptions has persisted even in ecocritical studies up until recently (see e.g. Gifford 1995, 15–17; Scigaj 1999, xiv–xv, 5–13; Gilcrest 2002, 39–59, 119–139). We may study representations of nature as producing or dismantling various kinds of

meaning, but this is still a contemplation of representations and their cultural conditions and consequences (e.g. Kerridge 1998, 46; Garrard 2005, 2–10). The result is that arts and culture scholars restrict their knowledge to the realm of culture. The problem with this restriction has been acknowledged for quite some time: real birds and real environments are the source for the representations and hence for the debate and concern about those representations (Coupe 2002, 2–5; Moe 2014, 5–17; see also Mason 2013, 195–213). It was this link to reality that ecocriticism was supposed to import into the agenda of literary critics. Focusing on cultural meanings was recognised as a problem: even if all the birds of the world were to disappear one day, the recycling, analysis, deconstruction and reinterpretation of their cultural meanings could nevertheless potentially go on for ever both in literature and in literary criticism. Nature, though, would again be excluded from it.

Finnish bird poetry is often linked in many ways not only to the cultural meaning of birds but also directly to the birds themselves – their properties, their life and their environment. This forces us to revise our conceptions about poetry and poetry criticism and, more broadly, to re-evaluate the relationship between texts and the world. I argue that in many cases bird poetry is actually permeated by a continuous stream of non-human influences which I will call non-human currents. This kind of bird poetry cannot be understood in terms of human artistic sovereignty but instead requires the acknowledging of a non-human poetic agency. Indeed, all creatures in the world (including birds) can be seen, heard and felt in poetry in a way that prompts us to contemplate the influences of the non-human on linguistic meanings and choices. Literature scholars and philosophers have previously mainly referred to the power of the subconscious, of social systems or of language in shaping the writing subject and his or her texts. For as long as nature was excluded from culture, poetry (being a cultural product) was in our minds isolated from the touch of the non-human.

Over the past few years, approaches in philosophy and arts theory re-evaluating the relationship of nature and culture and the status of humans have focused on non-human agency as an influence on culture. What is particularly noteworthy for ecocritical poetry scholarship is the emergence of what is known as material ecocriticism. Scholars combining ideas from new materialist philosophy to ecocritical analysis, such as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, have concluded that material objects, places and things are narrative in and of themselves (Iovino & Oppermann 2014, 1–10). Therefore, for instance, non-human creatures and places contribute actively to their meanings. Ecocritical scholars interested in birds, such as Aaron M. Moe (2014), Travis V. Mason

(2013) and Andrew Whitehouse (2015), have already offered interesting insights into the ways birds affect writing, reading and interspecies relations. Now that the boundary between culture and nature is finally being exposed for what it really is – a human artefact and as such capable of being redrawn or even dismantled entirely – poetry also is revealing additional facets of itself, its influences and its allies.

At this particular time, we must ask how material-semiotic processes of this kind occurring in the world and in its objects and phenomena generate texts in practice. The locations of the creative human subject and the non-human objects are being redistributed and renegotiated. What are the actors that actually contribute to the creating of a text?

Because I am writing the present study as an observer of birds and a scholar of poetry, my attention is repeatedly drawn to the meanings and material qualities of both birds and texts. The first thing that strikes the reader about the poem by Tossavainen quoted above is the plastic nature of its typographical material, how it adapts to a shape adopted from the avian world. Later, we will notice the same phenomenon in poems mimicking bird sounds. Language *as material* – as building blocks of meanings, sensory impressions and affects – supports non-human visual, auditory and semiotic streams. There is a third strong actor in avian poetry apart from birds and humans: language, a plastic element that supports the non-human currents or birdlike features.

I propose the term *avian poetics* as a label for the understanding and comprehension of the connections and interactions between the human and the non-human in poetry (cf. Mason 2013, xiv; Moe 2014, 10–12). Avian poetics may be construed as a branch of poetics where the writing and reading of poems is understood to happen in connection with real birds and through the medium of language. Avian poetics is *poiesis* in its original sense of ‘doing’: actions by birds, humans and language where the important thing is not intentionality but effectiveness (see Moe 2014, 10–11). In line with this, I propose the term *avian poetry* for poems that explicitly discuss birds as birds and consist of avian and non-human poetic influences. Avian poetics is about both a method for reading poetry and a theoretical description of how poetry works, based on the material *living context* formed by the appearance, behaviour, forms of living and living environment of birds.

That the context is qualified as “living” has to do with changes and differences between and within species and between individuals, both semiotically and materially (see Haraway 2008, 3–42; Abram 2011, 57–80). Emphasising changes and differences is important, because the birds that influence and are

linked to poetry do not constitute an immutable and representable category. Science philosopher Alan Marshall notes:

When I suggest that non-humans partake (in some small way) in the social construction of our stories about them I am not saying that there is some essence, some independent referentiality, that shines through from an animal or plant despite the various human to human social constructions of non-human nature but that our constructions can be influenced by the behaviour of those nonhumans. An animal like a bird, for instance, does not reveal itself via its own objective and intrinsic reality into our stories. The bird that we see in our scientific reports, in our novels and poems and myths, is not a mirrored reflection of some independent real bird. It is just that in some of the stories we have about birds, the “bird-ness” is negotiated into place with the help of the behaviour and activities of birds. (Marshall 2002, 234)

The term *negotiation*, commonly used in cultural studies to emphasise the open-endedness of meanings and their active production, is used by Marshall in a way that highlights the relativity of our information on and speech about birds. He cautiously denies the existence of any “independent real bird” and its reflection in speech about birds. In other words, Marshall declares that we cannot possess the truth about birds, but he does note that the actions of actual birds affect the ways in which we speak about them.

The notion of a living context requires us to understand the non-human, or nature, as something that is intertwined with culture in multiple and inseparable ways. That birds are meaningful in human culture is indisputable, but we are predisposed to think that this is a one-way cultural relationship. Human beings have observed, represented, hunted, imitated, eaten and depicted birds throughout history, appropriating birds into their culture through various material and immaterial ways. These human actions have been intentional and aimed at birds, the birds being construed as mere objects. Even if we admit that various species of animals have their own ways of communicating and organising their lives, *pre-cultures* or *imperfect cultures*, we find it difficult to appreciate that such proto-cultures or types of otherness might have any interaction at all with our own *full* culture. The very concept of culture is by definition such that it does not readily extend to the non-human dimension.

Social constructivism, the established vehicle for humanist and social research, has had an important role to play in this conceptual history of nature and culture. Constructivism rests on the notion that everything that we can observe or contemplate is shaped by our cultural and conceptual tools (Latour 2004, 32–41; Bryant 2011a, 13–24). The world is organised through the language and concepts we have learned and through complex ways of acting in and analysing the world: a raven is comprehended by us as a specific animal species (*Corvus corax*), a cultural symbol (omen of death) or a creature with a humanising trait

(an intelligent bird). We regard the non-human nature through cultural lenses that show us particular animals in particular ways. The concept of animal is in itself burdened with meanings, and my above image of cultural lenses is not as fanciful as one might imagine. After all, what we know and have observed about the reality of birds has largely been achieved through a variety of lenses: binoculars, microscopes, telescopes.

Interaction between humans and birds is an everyday thing. All scientific research concerning birds involves the grass-roots level: counting nests, ringing birds, recording sightings of ringed birds, weighing birds, measuring their wing feathers, collecting bird droppings, and so on. Nature conservation efforts are based on observations and experiences of bird populations in various natural and urban environments, the curious eyes of an alien species following birds around on river banks and open fields, on urban waste land and at construction sites. Humans catch and treat birds injured in various disasters, and the stories of these care efforts form part of the shared history of the birds and their carers. Observing birds, whether we are talking about serious birdwatching, migration observation or just noting birds on a morning jog, is a process of getting to know the bird populations of one's home territory and the changes in those populations. Even individual interspecies contacts may arise. Feminist scientist and philosopher Donna J. Haraway (1997) has discussed these overlaps between science and other aspects of society through the concept of *material-semiotic*: reality is thoroughly defined by mergers of factors both material and semiotic. Creatures and processes alike can be considered as material-semiotic with a view to the meanings and materialities that come together in them.

I believe that our culture regarding birds may be conceptually redefined to make visible and (ethically and politically) significant the material bond that links our means of expression to the features and actions of birds and the immaterial bond that links our ways of building our world to the ways in which birds build their world. I propose the concept *avian cultures* to describe this. Avian cultures concern the relationships between birds and human beings, from ringing to poetry and from hunting to birdwatching. These practical relationships and the intra-species and interspecies meanings shared in them can always be found in literature and other cultural representations of birds, from scientific studies to poetry or children's songs.

The concept of avian cultures is grounded in the term *naturecultures* coined by Donna Haraway (1997; 2008). This has become established as referring to the forms of interaction between human and non-human creatures and the shared reality generated in them. The term avian cultures also has Finnish roots.

Yrjö Sepänmaa, a scholar in environmental aesthetics, defines *animal culture* in two ways, firstly as “how an actual or imagined animal has been understood at various times and in various situations” and secondly as “how our relationship to the animal kingdom, its species and individuals, is organised, i.e. how we live with animals” (Sepänmaa 2009, 6).

The concept of avian cultures allows avian poetry to be seen in a reciprocal relationship with other cultural analyses involving birds, whether public discussions, writings (scientific, artistic or journalistic) or even concrete interactions with birds. Poetry is written and read on the basis of this diverse cultural exchange with birds and nature, and the meanings produced in poetry return to govern how we interact with birds and how we imbue them with meaning.

Various physical and material properties such as the corporeality of birds, the physical environments of birds and humans and the interspecies interaction in those environments, are essential for Finnish avian cultures and their literary representations. This material heritage is an essential component of Finnish poetry, even if it is scarcely recognised as such in the literary history and research of our language area. Avian poetics is the study and appreciation of poetry in the light of these material terms and conditions. Because we are here focusing on the nature-culture relationships of a specific geographical area, language area and culture, I will next need to discuss the essential features of Finnish avian cultures.

FINNISH AVIAN CULTURES

Metsästyskauden ajaksi miehet tulevat
hysteerisiksi laajoilla läänin aukeilla.

Vaaleansinisessä väreilevässä iltayössä
laukaukset pamahtavat, tukahtuneina, hitaasti
niin kuin Apollo nousee kuvaruudussa taivaalle.

Huutaen: taivas, ole kattomme.

Kalasääski on naulattu ladon seinään
siivet levällään kuin Kristus
se repsottaa harmaana kuin astronautin riekale.

(Haajanen 1991, 40)

During the hunting season men become
hysterical in wide open spaces.

In the pale blue, shimmering night
shots ring out, muffled, slow
like *Apollo* as it rises into the sky on a TV screen.

Crying: O sky, be our ceiling.

An osprey is nailed to the barn door
its wings spread like Christ
it dangles grey like a shredded astronaut.

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

In northern Finland, ospreys (*Pandion haliaëtus*) have been used as hunting talismans for centuries. In the poem by Timo Haajanen quoted above, the display of the osprey is associated with the crucifixion of Christ, while its grey and non-descript appearance is associated with another historic event, the first missions to the Moon: “it dangles grey like a shredded astronaut”. The manic hunters spread out in open country above which the pale blue night sky of the north extends. Comparing their gunshots to the ascent of the Apollo spacecraft on the TV screen elevates the hunt to a cosmic dimension. Firing guns and firing a spacecraft both come across as acts for reaching out to, controlling and appeasing nature. The cry associated with the hunters’ gunshots, “O sky, be our ceiling”, indicates that the sphere of human knowledge and influence extends beyond the previously unattainable birds, to space. On the other hand, even while aspiring to conquer space, human beings nevertheless desire their world to have limits, their sky to be a ceiling. The poem is also notable for its historical layering: a new age with TV and space flight is contrasted with traditional beliefs manifested in the osprey nailed to the wall; and the osprey prompts an image of the death of a holy man whose life forms the basis for the Western calendar. Moreover, the name of the spacecraft, Apollo, refers back to ancient Greece: Apollo was the god of archery, healing, prophesy and poetic inspiration, and as such is naturally linked to hunting and to reaching for the skies.

The concrete and symbolic dimensions of Timo Haajanen’s poem embody many of the meanings associated with birds in Finnish culture. The bird nailed to the wall by its wings may be read as an antithesis to the symbolism of the free and the unattainable and to the symbolism of the geographically limitless. The dead osprey also resonates with meanings of death and immortality: nailed to the wall, it turns the poetic notions of birds as symbols of immortality on its

head. The crucifixion analogy reinforces this. On the other hand, as a hunting talisman the osprey also has a survival meaning: it is an offering that guarantees that human beings will get food to eat. The hysteria of the hunters and their cries to the sky also allude to the meanings of bird poetry in reflecting human emotions and ideas: melancholic, ecstatic, spiritual, ideological and artistic bird poems have always formed an essential part of Finnish poetry.

As in all cultures, the meanings assigned to birds in Finnish poetry and folk tradition build on earlier cultural practices, beliefs and representations concerning birds. Bird traditions are layered. In Finnish culture, birds have established meanings of life and death, emotions, freedom, communications and geographical limitlessness, but these meanings acquire new forms and new interpretations in each new historical situation. The more recent layers of meaning having to do with moral, religious, artistic or national ideas or environments may be identified as developments or variations of the underlying ancient meanings listed above.

What links Finnish (or more broadly Finno-Ugric) culture to other world cultures is that birds are an important part of the human environment and an important element in human survival. Birds are also employed as a vehicle for understanding the world through various meanings shared orally, through images and later in literary form.

The most ancient layer in Finnish bird-related traditions has to do with fundamental issues such as survival, the relationship between the spiritual and the material, and birth and death. The symbolic links between birds and human life and death reach into all areas of human life: livelihoods, religion, world views and other conceptions about human beings and human communities. Ever since the Stone Age, birds have been an important source of nutrition and hence used as omens or talismans, besides being seen as messengers between this world and the hereafter. Representing the spirit or soul of a human being in the form of a bird is found in many pre-Christian and Christian cultures. Birds were also seen as omens of death, illness, war or other misfortunes (Järvinen 1991, 15–55; Mannermaa 2004, 41–43). Birds have been seen to predict the deaths of individuals or even of entire communities or peoples. One of the most ominous of all birds in this respect is the Eurasian eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*), whose symbolic significance may be explained by its curious sound, piercing stare and stealth hunting technique (see Järvinen 1991, 157).

According to current knowledge, the areas to the north of the Baltic Sea now known as Finland were populated immediately after the Ice Age ended. Early Finns settled along waterways, which were already populated by various

species of migratory and resident waterfowl. The close dependency of the early Baltic-Finnic peoples and other Finno-Ugric peoples on waterfowl has been explored for instance by Lennart Meri, former President of Estonia, who calls the Finns, Estonians and other Finnic peoples the “people of the waterfowl”. Apart from waterfowl – ducks, loons, mergansers, grebes and swans – the early Finns also found sustenance in game birds such as ptarmigans, grouse and capercaillie (Mannermaa 2004; 2008). Hunting on the water or in forests involved objects such as wooden decoys and spells for luck in hunting. The following are excerpts from a traditional spell that address the spirits of the forest and list the birds and hunting methods:

Metsän kultainen kuningas,
Salon herra höyhenhattu,
Metsän armas antimuori,
Eukko höyhtehen emäntä,
Metsän piika pikkarainen,
Sasuneiti parviainen,
Satasarjan kasvattaja,
Tuhatarparven tuuttaja,
Saata tänne sarjojasi,
Noita lintuparviasi,
[...]
Saata tänne tetriäsi,
Kulettele koppeloita,
Tetret puihin lentäköhöt,
Kuvulle kukertamahan,
Siihen metsot mieliköhöt,
Koppelit kohahtakohot!
Siivet siimoilla sitele,
Leperrytä lennottimet,
Jalat rihmoilla jamoa,
Varpahat vahalla kääri,
Siiven lentämättömäksi,
Jalan juoksemattomaksi,
Kunnes jousen jou'uttaisin,
Käsikaaren käännäyttäisin!

Linnustaissa, 27.a [Bird-hunting]

(*Suomen kansan muinaisia loitsurunoja* [Ancient Spells of the Finnish People])

Golden king of wildest woodland,
 Feather-hatted lord of forest,
 Lady fair of forest bounty,
 Mistress of the wild game kingdom,
 Lowly maiden of the copses,
 Servant-girl and mild flock-tender,
 Grower of the fowls by hundred,
 Nurturer of birds by thousand,
 Bring me hither of the bounty,
 Of the flocks of thy fair bird-kind,
 [...]

Bring the grouse within my reaches,
 Carry hither all the moor-hens,
 Into trees the black grouse flying,
 Onto branches with their chatter,
 Send thou all thy capercaillies,
 Forest-fowls with whoop and whistle!
 Bind their wings with thy sweet threading,
 Quieten their flying feathers,
 Ring a rope around their ankles,
 Make their toes in wax embedded,
 So they may not take to winging
 Nor upon their feet to running
 Till I aim my bow and arrow,
 Draw my bowstring true towards them!

(Transl. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

In addition to hunting spells, ancient Finnish orally transmitted bird lore included origin spells, meaning a recounting of the origin of a particular species (of bird, for instance) or phenomenon, the rationale for this being that if one knows the origin of a thing, one can control that thing. The following is an origin spell for the raven (*Corvus corax*), a bird associated in Nordic mythology with knowledge but in the Finnish tradition also with malevolence:

Hoi sie korppi koito lintu,
 Korppi kolmen Lemmon lintu,
 Maassa on sinun majasi,
 Koivussa sinun kotisi;
 Kyllä sun sukusi tieän,
 Kanssa kaiken kasvantosi:
 Koottu oot koan noesta,
 Tulipuista tukkueltu,

Sysilöistä synnytetty,
Pantu kaikesta pahasta,
[...]

Korpin synty 18b [Origin of the raven]
(*Suomen kansan muinaisia loitsurunoja* [Ancient Spells of the Finnish People])

[...]
Ho thou raven, bird ill-favoured,
raven, bird of three death-omens,
in the ground thou hast thy dwelling,
in the birch tree hast thy nesting;
well I know thee and thy kin-folk,
well I know thy sire and lineage:
made thou art of soot of smoke-tent,
born of embers of dark firewood,
woven from the blackest charcoal,
and of evil all collected,
[...]

(Transl. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

The origin of the raven is identified with the accoutrements of Hiisi, the spirit of death, and with other dark or evil things such as soot in a tent or the axe of a with. The origin of another, completely different bird, the tit (probably *Parus major*), is identified with a particular tree, the willow:

Tieän mä tijasen synnyn,
Mist' on tehtynä tijanen,
Lintu pieni pistettynä:
Paju ensin puita syntyi,
Paju puita, mätäs maita,
Otsonen metsän omia,
Ilman lintuja tijanen.
Papelo pajusta lähti,
Rutta raiasta putosi,
Aholle alastomalle,
Siit' on tehtynä tijanen,
Lintu pieni pistettynä.

Tijasen synty 43 [Origin of the Tit]
(*Suomen kansan muinaisia loitsurunoja* [Ancient Spells of the Finnish People])

Well I know the tit-bird's origin,
and I ken what tit is made of,
tiny bird thus put together:
willow was the first of tree-folk,
and the bog of land the eldest,
and the bear the forest-creature,
but the tit the bird of air-realm.
Fell a bud from off the willow,
from the willow branch a seedling
down unto the naked meadow:
from that thing was born the tit-bird,
tiny bird thus put together.

(Transl. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

Spells are a vehicle for human beings to interact with nature and with the spirits that control creatures in nature. Their purpose is to secure a livelihood and hence survival, although origin spells also serve as a compendium of information about the living environment and about the non-human species that inhabit it. Bird traditions from the early Finnish hunter-gatherer culture and from the newly emerging agriculture feature extensively in the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, compiled and edited from traditional Finnish folk poetry sources by linguist and physician Elias Lönnrot in the 1820s and 1830s. The underlying poems were preserved as an oral tradition for centuries, particularly in eastern Finland and reflect the worlds of both hunter-gatherers and farmers. In the first “runo”, or canto, of the *Kalevala*, birds are identified not as objects of origin lore but as sentient beings:

[...]
Vilu mulle virttä virkkoi,
Sae saatteli runoja,
Virttä toista tuulet toivat,
Meren aaltoset ajoivat,
Linnut liitteli sanoja,
Puien latvat lausehia.

[...]

(*Kalevala* 1)

[...]
Then the Frost his songs recited,
And the rain its legends taught me;

Other songs the winds have wafted,
Or the ocean waves have drifted;
And their songs the birds have added,
And the magic spells the tree-tops.
[...]

(From the English translation of the *Kalevala* by W. F. Kirby [1907])

The *Kalevala* opens with the conceit that the recitation of the entire narrative is the notion of a single singer, who invites his brothers to join him and identifies the poems to be chanted as a continuum in time back to the mythical ancestors of the Finns, the mythical wonder-working device known as the Sampo and the nemesis of the epic, Louhi (Mistress of the North). The above poem identifies forests and fields as the origins of the lore, including nature itself: even birds are “joining words together”. Birds symbolising communication can thus be found in the earliest layers of Finnish avian cultures.

Birds were also seen as symbols of life and new beginnings. Cosmologies where the world comes into being from the egg of a bird are known in various cultures all over the world, and Finnish folk tradition is no exception. For the *Kalevala*, Lönnrot selected a version of the tale where the mythical ur-bird, described as a *sotka* (in today’s terminology this would be an auk, but the bird in question is actually identified as the common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), lays eggs on the knee of Ilmatar, the goddess of the air. As the bird broods on the eggs, the heat becomes intolerable, and Ilmatar twitches her knee. The eggs shatter and roll into the water, turning into the earth and various heavenly bodies.

In ancient Baltic-Finnic poems – the folk poetry stock from which the *Kalevala* was derived – birds also had a specific role in reflecting human emotions. Lönnrot collected poems expressing this into the *Kanteletar*, the companion collection of lyrical poetry first published in 1840. The poems in the *Kanteletar* do not form a narrative; they describe social customs and experiences, often in a very subjective and emotional way. A large percentage of the poems in the *Kanteletar* describe the lives of women. The following, the best-known poem in the *Kanteletar*, describes the feelings of a newlywed young woman having moved in with her new family, who are strangers to her:

Alahall’ on allin mieli
Uiessa vilua vettä,
Alempana armottoman
Käyessä kylän katua.

Vilu on vatsa varpusella
Jääoksalla istuessa,
Vatsani minun vilumpi
Astuessani ahoja.
Syän kylmä kyyhkysellä
Syöessä kylän kekoa,
Kylmempi minun sitäi
Jäävesiä juoessani.

(*Kanteletar*, I.26)

How the waterfowl is weary
As she swims in chilly water,
Unloved one is yet more weary
Walking down the village pathway.
How the sparrow's cold in belly
Sitting on an icy tree-limb,
But my belly is yet colder
Walking on the many meadows.
How the dove is chilly-hearted
Eating at the village grain-house,
But my heart is even colder
Drinking at the icy waters.

(Transl. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

In the ancient Finnish tradition, the meanings of birds are closely connected to the concrete interactions and natural circumstances associated with them: the birds seen as omens of death were predators or carrion fowl, the birds reflecting wistful emotions had a melancholy song, eggs symbolised birth both at the individual and at the universal level. Although in art poetry the meanings of birds began to proliferate and become more abstract, they nevertheless link back to the original symbolic meanings and on the other hand to the new concrete interactions that emerged with the development of natural sciences, for instance. Alongside the continuity and variation of old-established symbolic meanings, a literary development may be observed in Finnish bird poetry from the Romantic and symbolic representations of the 19th and early 20th centuries to the modernism of the 1950s and the environmental awakening of the 1970s, where birds began to acquire meaning as enigmatic animals known to science, represented in the arts and suffering from environmental problems.

That birds in poetry have become more concrete is not just a matter of interpretation or perspective. The time period from the 1950s to the 1970s

brought a transition in conceptions about both nature and poetry, and this is clearly visible in the representations of birds in poetry. Non-human nature and its winged inhabitants acquire an otherness and suffer; they become a problem. It is impossible to assign meanings to birds using the Christian-ethical, aesthetic-symbolic or Romantic-nationalist frameworks that were dominant until the early 20th century. Developments in poetry, then, problematised the search for universal truths and the system of established symbols and allegories. The debate on literal imagery in Finnish poetry in the 1950s and 1960s and of poetry becoming mundane and approaching spoken language served to bring birds down to earth, so to speak. The concretisation of birds has to do with both themes and imagery: birds are assigned new meanings, and the poetic imagery of those meanings changes. In terms of themes, the focus shifts from human-oriented to animal-oriented, and in terms of rhetoric the literal image challenges the symbol.

The swan is one of the most frequently mentioned birds in Finnish bird poetry. There are three species of swan currently nesting in Finland: the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), the whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) and the tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*). When a swan is referred to in poetry, it is almost always understood to be the whooper swan, which is also our national bird and the symbol of the Finnish nature conservation movement. The *Kalevala* features the swan of Tuonela, a bird that swims in the river separating the realm of death (Tuonela) from the realm of the living. The whooper swan has been a taboo in Finnish culture: hunting it was not acceptable except for special sacrificial meals. Later, swans have been hunted out of necessity during famines. Considering swan motifs is particularly useful for illustrating the layers of tradition in Finnish bird poetry and the concretisation development regarding birds in poetry.

The roots of swan symbolism in Finnish art poetry go back not only to the ancient folk tradition but also to legends of Antiquity. One of these is the Greek tale of Hyperborea, a utopian land in the far north whose inhabitants worship Apollo, the god of poetic inspiration who travels in a chariot drawn by swans and plays a golden lyre. Among Romantic poets, Apollo had become established as the god of song and poetry, and the swan was his symbol (Nummi 2004, 137–138). The utopia of the north often takes on a nationalist flavour in Finnish poetry featuring swans, since swans return to Finland to nest every summer. One of the most iconic Finnish bird poems is “Svanen” [The Swan] by Johan Ludvig Runeberg, who wrote in Swedish. The swan is described as praising the northern land:

Från molnens purpurstänkta rand
Sjönk svanen, lugn och säll,
Och satte sig vid elfvens strand
Och sjöng en juniqväll.

Om nordens skönhet var hans sång,
Hur glad dess himmel är,
Hur dagen glömmes, natten lång,
Att gå till hvila der.

Hur skuggan der är djup och rik
Inunder björk och al,
Hur guldbestrålad hvarje vik,
Och hvarje bölja sval.

Hur ljuft, oändligt ljuft, det är
Att äga der en vän,
Hur troheten är hemfödd der,
Och längtar dit igen.

Så ljud från våg till våg hans röst,
Hans enkla lofsång då,
Och snart han smög mot makans bröst
Och tycktes qväda så:

Hvad mer, om än din lefnads dröm
Ej sekler tälja får?
Du älskat har på nordens ström,
Och sjungit i dess vår.

(Johan Ludvig Runeberg 1954, 29)

From cloud with purple-sprinkled rim,
A swan, in calm delight,
Sank down upon the river's brim,
And sang in June, one night.

Of Northlands' beauty was his song,
How glad their skies, their air;
How day forgets, the whole night long,
To go to rest out there;

How shadows there, both rich and deep,
'Neath birch and alder fall;
How gold-beams o'er each inlet sweep,
How cool the billows all;

How fair it is, how passing fair,
To own there one true friend!
How faithfulness is home-bred there,
And thither longs to wend!

When thus from wave to wave his note,
His simple praise-song rang,
Swift fawned he on his fond mate's throat,
And thus, methought, he sang: --

What more? though of thy life's short dream
No tales the ages bring,
Yet hast thou loved on Northlands' stream,
And sung songs there in spring!

(Transl. Eiríkr Magnússon & Edward Henry Palmer, in Warner et al. 1917)

Maila Pylkkönen is a poet rather less well known than Runeberg, only recently emerging as a subject of interest for scholars. In her debut collection *Klassilliset tunteet* [Classical Emotions] (1957), she explicitly addressed the traditions of Finnish and European poetry (see Seutu 2009, 47–49). The following poem is set in a northern spruce forest dotted with wood-sorrel flowers that comes alive in the summer. Unlike in the ancient tale referred to above or Runeberg's "Svanen", the north is here a place of nightmares and pain. The good land is to be found in the south, from where the birds arrive:

Kevään hyvät metsät, helpotukseni;
puut näen vielä niin kuin lapsena alta päin,
tutkin ketunleivän kukkia kuusten alla;
mieheni, väsynyt mies minun ikäiseni
syntyy keväisin, jaksaa hengittää,
ei puhu historiasta, joutsenista me puhumme
ja viimeisestä sielulintujen runoilijasta,
puhumme hyvästä maasta josta joutsenet lähtivät
tänne missä ihminen kuoleminen kivussa
voi ääntää niin kuin joutsen,
tänne missä historia, menneen ja tulevan,
on pahan luettelo, ei etsi hyviä maita;
eivätkö joutsenet ole kodittomia.
Meidän kotimme
on nähdä painajaisunta, pidättää hengitystä
kun suvi hetkeksi saapuu.

(Pylkkönen 1957, 43)

The good forests of spring, my relief;
 I still see trees from below as I did when a child,
 I examine wood-sorrel flowers under spruces;
 my husband, a tired man of my age,
 is born in spring, is strong enough to breathe,
 he doesn't talk of history, we talk of swans
 and of the last poet of soul-birds,
 we talk of the good country the swans left
 to come here where a man in death throes
 can sound like a swan,
 here where history, past and future,
 is a catalogue of evil, it doesn't seek good lands;
 are not swans homeless?
 Our home
 is to have a nightmare, to hold our breaths
 when summer comes for one instant.

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

Pylkkönen's poem juxtaposes the good place elsewhere with the bad place "here". The lines "to come here where a man in death throes / can sound like a swan, / here where history, past and future, / is a catalogue of evil, it doesn't seek good lands; / are not swans homeless?" clearly juxtapose with Runeberg's poem "Svanen", which Jyrki Nummi (2004, 149–150) sees as an expression of the poet's patriotism and his patriotic duty as a poet. Pylkkönen's homeless swans and vision of history as a catalogue of evil bring a pessimism into the metalyrical ethos of the poem that may be seen to extend to the notion of home and perhaps even of fatherland: "Our home / is to have a nightmare, to hold our breaths / when summer comes for one instant." In the poem, relief comes not from mythology or symbolism but from the nostalgic tint of the natural environment in spring and summer as observed by the speaker in the poem.

Spring is a familiar enough *topos* symbolising a new beginning, but in Pylkkönen's poem the describing of trees and plants gives a more concrete meaning to spring. The goodness and relief associated with the forest seem to be concentrated in the wood-sorrel flowers under the spruce tree – something that is real and can be perceived by the senses. In Runeberg's poem, the natural environment is described in broader strokes, reinforcing its *topos* character as either a new beginning or the never-ending spring of the classical Golden Age (Nummi 2004, 140; see also Ekman 2004, 66). Unlike in Runeberg's poem, no swans appear in Pylkkönen's poem; they are only mentioned. Yet the poem specifically involves a reinterpretation of swan symbolism, the homelessness of

Pylkkönen's swans deliberately clashing with the homecoming of Runeberg's swan. In the lines "to come here where a man in death throes / can sound like a swan", Pylkkönen also alludes to the notion of the swan song. This goes back to the play *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, where the cry of a dying person is compared to a swan's song (Nummi 2004, 135, 137–139; see also Lyytikäinen 2004, 215). Pylkkönen's poem also connects to the swan tradition of Finnish poetry by mentioning the "last poet of soul-birds".

The birds in Pylkkönen's poem are metalyrical, but the evocation of nature in the poem creates concrete meanings that may involve swans too. The symbolism of the poem is at a turning point through the explicit comments on the symbolic meanings of birds and the concrete description of nature. It is interesting to compare Pylkkönen's metalyrical swans with older metalyrical swans by a poet who, like Runeberg, has entered the forefront of the canon of Finnish poetry. The following poem, "Joutsenet" [The Swans] is from the collection *Säkeitä* [Verses] (1905) by Otto Manninen:

Yli soiluvan veen ne sousi
ne aallon ulpuina ui
kun aurinko nuorna nousi
yöt pohjolan kun punastui.

Lumikaulat kaartehin ylpein
veen kuulton kuvia loi
povet aamun kullassa kylpein
ne outoja unelmoi.

Kohos siiville kerran ne sitten
suvi kun oli muistoja vain
kukat laulavat lainehitten
unet valkeat ulappain.

(Manninen 1905, 23–25)

Over rippling water, unrushing,
they swam like live lilies pure white,
as the sun crept up timid and blushing,
and the night of the North did grow light.

Snowy necks raised sinuous, bold,
reflected in water's gleam
and bathing in morning's gold
in a strange and wondrous dream.

And presently far they fled, winging
with the fading of summer's glow,
the white living lilies flew singing,
the water-dreams whiter than snow.

(Transl. Jaakko Mäntyjärvi)

The primacy of an image reflected in the water over the actual reflected object can be traced back to the poetics of Romanticism where reflections that augmented light were considered more real and more perfect than the objects that they reflected (Heffernan 1984, 202–219). In Finnish scholarship, most notably in the research of Pirjo Lyytikäinen, Manninen's poem has been interpreted in the framework of Symbolist poetics, viewing the underwater realm as a symbol of death and the unconscious and the surface of the water as a symbol of the conscious mind or surface of the mind where everything that is seen and experienced is recorded. The observed swan represents at once a poetic dream and the poet's self-reflection (Lyytikäinen 2004, 215–217). At the end, Manninen's swans fly away, a gesture understood as an experience of nostalgia: the image of a wing remaining on the surface of the water for a fleeting instance indicates a momentary grasp of beauty that is then immediately and inevitably lost again (Lyytikäinen 2004, 218–219). According to the principles of Symbolist poetics, the level of concrete nature description is only a channel or a means for conveying and understanding symbolical meanings. The central meaning of Manninen's poem cannot be directly represented, but its message can be conveyed through the swan and other symbols in the natural environment. Once the symbolic connotations of the swans have been revealed, the birds can no longer be viewed as animals.

The nature description in Maila Pylkkönen's poem has a different function: its purpose is to disrupt the symbolic interpretation and to reinstate the possibility of comprehending the birds as concrete animals. It may also be a critique of Symbolist poetics. Although the swans do gain a symbolic meaning commenting on the nature of poetry, the reader is also always compelled to return to the concrete meaning of the swans and the natural environment. After Pylkkönen, a whimsical intertextual rewriting of the swan tradition was undertaken for instance by Arto Melleri and Jarkko Laine, whose poetry incorporates plenty of influences from Beat poetry, the underground movement and popular culture dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Melleri's poem "Utopiat" [Utopias], from the collection *Ilmalaiva "Italia"* [Airship "Italia"] (1980), begins thus:

Joutsenten kaitsijat,
vapauden nimessä te olette
joutsentenne isäntiä, yksin itsellänne
tahdotte pitää kaartuvakaulaiset kuvajaiset
iltaan tyyntyvässä vedessä
...yön tultua te kaitsette kalkkunaa,
kynittyä, lommoisella vadilla:
se on teidän tehtävänne kun juhla-ateria tarjotaan
[...]

(Melleri 1980, 10)

Keepers of swans,
in the name of freedom you are
masters of your swans, you want to keep to yourself
the reflections with curved necks
in water that gets calmer as the evening nears
...after nightfall you keep an eye on a turkey,
it lies plucked, on a dented dish:
it's your job at the serving of a festive meal
[...]

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

Melleri's "reflections with curved necks" clearly alludes to Otto Manninen's aforementioned poem, where the birds are described thus: "Snowy necks raised sinuous, bold, / reflected in water's gleam" (Manninen 1905, 23–25). The line "in water that gets calmer as the evening nears" may be seen as an allusion to the first stanza in Runeberg's aforementioned poem: "From cloud with purple-sprinkled rim, / A swan, in calm delight, / Sank down upon the river's brim, / And sang in June, one night." (Runeberg 1954, 29) The calm water and the swan are replaced by a dented dish – a rather poorer reflector – and a prosaic turkey after nightfall. Melleri reminds us that birds are not only food for thought in Symbolism but also actual food.

A gastronomic commentary on swan symbolism may also be found in the catalogue-like poem "Säkeitä joutsenesta" [Verses on a Swan] in the collection *Villiintynyt puu* [Feral Tree] (1984) by Jarkko Laine. It contains a more direct reference to the nutritional use of the swan than Melleri's "Utopiat". Laine's poem begins thus: "A swan, a noble animal. But in the cookbook / *ravis ava*." (Laine 1984, 43). After this muddled Latin phrase, the poem goes on to list a number of cultural and private meanings that have been assigned to swans.

As the swan poems by Pylkkönen, Melleri and Laine demonstrate, the Romantic and Symbolist tradition represented by Runeberg and Manninen was rewritten quite bluntly. The modernist movement that flourished in Finnish poetry brought a liberation of rhythm and sound, a rejection of conventional symbolism and the introduction of spoken-language expression and everyday topics into poetry (Polkunen 1967; Laitinen 1981; Niemi 1999). In bird poetry, the swan was an excellent vehicle for the poets' need to write in a multi-layered style that was aware of tradition but at the same time free of it. Their swan poetry was in free verse and colloquial, and its content was humorous and in some cases grotesquely material.

As I noted above, the process of rendering birds concrete had to do with a sea change not only in poetry but also in the conception of the natural environment on the part of the public at large. The swan made its first appearance in environmentally conscious prose in Finland in 1950 with the publication of *Laulujoutsen, Ultima Thulen lintu* [The Whooper Swan, Bird of Ultima Thule] by Yrjö Kokko, a book that made a crucial contribution to saving Finland's whooper swan population. It was not until the turn of the 1970s that concern about birds and other environmental issues began to appear in poetry, in tandem with the emergence of public environmental debates. One of the most environmentally conscious of all Finnish poets, Sauli Sarkanen, wrote this about swans in his collection *Miksi annan ääneni* [Why Do I Lend My Voice] (1975):

Vuoriröykkiöt joutsenia, siivet repeytyeinä,
rinta veressä, korvissa kaikuu niiden kaikkien
surkea valitus, hosuvat katkenneilla siivillään ja
kuolevat paikalleen.

Ja niiltä revitään valkoiset silkkiset höyhenet
ja niiden lihat joutuvat ihmisten patoihin ja luut
kulkukoirien suihin,
eikä niitä enää ole.
Iänikuiset koirat louskuttavat.

Kaikkialta soi suuri ylistys Tahdolle ja ihmisten
Hyvyydelle, se soi ja raikuu
miljoonissa
ohuissa ja leikkaavissa
langoissa pallomme pienessä tilassa
ahdas minulle, meille, ja joutsenille
meidän kauttamme.
[...]

(Sarkanen 1975, 72)

Mountainous heaps of swans, wings torn,
breasts bloodied, in our ears the miserable lament
of them all, they flap their broken wings and
die where they are.

And white, silken feathers are plucked off them
and their flesh ends up in people's pots, and bones
in stray dogs' mouths,
and they are no more.

Eternal dogs go on yelping.

Loud praise rings out everywhere for Will and men's
Goodness, it rings and reverberates
in millions
of thin and cutting
wires in the small space of our globe
cramped for me, for us, and for the swans
through us.

[...]

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

The death of swans is so firmly welded to human actions in the poem that the birds turn into a new kind of death symbol: they symbolise the plight of their species in the face of human actions. Sarkanen's poem demonstrates just how far poetic swans have come, from the philosophical-cum-artistic fantasies and utopian lands of human beings to a dystopia heralding the extinction of their own species. Yet in Sarkanen's poem as in many others, the swans are fictional: at the end of the poem, the swans take revenge on humans for their cruelty.

In the course of the 1970s, questions concerning nature poetry and environmental issues were occasionally linked together. The following two texts are an interesting manifestation of this. The first quote is from an essay by author and journalist Pekka Suhonen published in the literary periodical *Parnasso*, "Muuttolintujen runous" [Poetry of Migratory Birds]. The second is a poem by an anonymous writer published in the birders' magazine *Lintumies* [Bird Man] :

Whoever finds joy in and has curiosity for birds, or in the best case is inspired to write a line of poetry because of them, must understand the grand scheme of nature that shows itself in the migration of birds. Kilometres, grams of fat, meteorological minutiae and test descriptions are means for measuring and explaining it. (Pekka Suhonen, *Parnasso* 2/1980, 100)

Lapinharakka

runoilu ei sovi ornitologille
– miksi
on parempi täyttää kallis tila
havisvihkon sivuilla – minulle kerrottiin
on keksitty sana tiede – ei sille merkitystä
nuoret janoavat tuota sanaa
ja vanhatkin
on myös sana elämä – atavistinen muisto
mutta liian harvat kokevat sen tänään
töhrityt paperit ovat arvokkaampia
kuin tajuisuus aivoissa
– sinä rakennut paperille piirtyneistä todisteista

lyhyet kesät liukuvat ohitse
pian niiden kokeminen on mahdottomuus
linkolan–hailan -linja on harvojen omaisuutta
eikö ole enemmän täyttää keuhkonsa tuomen tuoksulla
satakielen laulussa
kuin mitata säkeitä sekuntikellolla
nauttia yhden viitakerttusen laulusta
kuin fillaroida itsensä näännyksiin
– löytääkseen kymmenen
sillä tiede on vain kuiva tulkinta elämästä
– jos sitäkään
se on akateemista näpertelyä maailmassa
jossa kaksi kolmasosaa näkee nälkää
maailmassa
jossa sotia ei saada loppumaan

runoilu ei sovi ornitologille
ornitologia ei sovi ihmiselle
ihmiset eivät sovi keskenään

(Anonymous, *Lintumies* 1/1971, 3)

The Northern Shrike

Versification doesn't agree with an ornithologist
– why
it's better to fill the valuable space
on the pages of an observation pad – I was told
the word science was invented – no meaning for it
young people thirst for that word
as do the old

there's also another word: life – an atavistic recollection
but too few experience it today
soiled papers are more valuable
than consciousness of the brain
– you are built from evidence drawn on paper

short summers glide past
soon experiencing them an impossibility
the Linkola–Haila doctrine is only for the few
isn't it more to fill our lungs with the scent of a bird cherry
in a nightingale's song
than to measure verse
with a stop-watch
more to enjoy one reed warbler's song
than to cycle till you drop with exhaustion
– in order to find ten of them
for science is just a dry interpretation of life
– if that
it's academic tinkering in a world
in which two thirds are starving
in a world
in which we cannot put an end to wars

versification doesn't agree with an ornithologist
ornithology doesn't agree with man
men don't agree with each other

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

From the beginning of the 1970s to the turn of the 1980s, there were diverse discussions about birds in both the arts and the sciences, employing both poetic language and scientific discourse. Suhonen claims that avian poetry is always based on knowledge, experience and understanding of birds. What is interesting about Suhonen's essay is its ornithological slant. He brings real birds and ornithological research into the realm of literature. By contrast, the anonymous author of "Lapinharakka" [The Northern Shrike] addresses the relationships between ornithology, poetry, experiences of nature and the environmental movement. The poem thematises the relationship between poetry and reality, concerning which a lively debate emerged in Finnish literary circles in the early 1960s (see Laitinen 1981, 570, 577, 581, 585; Niemi 1999, 175–177).

In the poem "Lapinharakka", life appears as "a word" and "an atavistic recollection" supplanted by scientific and artistic representations. The hierarchy of reality and art is emphasised in the notion that it is better to fill the "valuable

space” of paper with bird observations than with verses about birds. The phrase “valuable space” may be read as a criticism of the forest industry, which became Finland’s dominant industry in the post-war reconstruction era but whose increasingly destructive environmental impacts were becoming public knowledge at the time (see e.g. Roiko-Jokela 1999, 60, 66–68). The same theme appears with Sauli Sarkanen. The following is an extract from a lengthy poem in his début collection, published in 1975:

[...]
Vähennän paperin käyttöä. Harjoittelen laskujen
taakse runoja. Satavuotiset männyt jäävät
pystyyn?

[...]
(Sarkanen 1975, 34)

[...]
I reduce paper consumption. I practise poetry
on the back of bills. Century-old pines remain
standing?

[...]
(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

Sarkanen, described as an “ecological poet” in contemporary reviews, associates the ecological and economical meanings of saving with writing. A budding writer needs to practice, and to save paper the speaker writes on the reverse side of bills. He then contemplates whether such frugality can help save the primeval forests. On the other hand, the question mark signals ambiguity that prompts a Finnish reader to understand the conclusion as the Finnish colloquial idiom meaning “to remain in someone’s debt”. Writing poetry exercises on the back of bills reinforces this impression. Perhaps the trees are now in the poet’s debt? More concretely, the environmentally aware poets of the turn of the 1980s were aware of the material requirements of their work: a writer needs paper, which is made from trees.

The poem “Lapinharakka” and Suhonen’s essay show that birds, poetry and the environment were intertwined in scientific, artistic and journalistic discourses in many ways in Finland in the 1970s and early 1980s. Bird poems were published in literary magazines and poetry collections but also in ornithological publications and environmental pamphlets. Reciprocally, ornithology and environmental awareness also began to manifest themselves in literature and

writings on literature. Immediately following Suhonen's essay in issue 2/1980 of *Parnasso* there was a review by Anto Leikola of *Toisinajattelijan päiväkirjasta* [From the Diary of a Dissident] (1979), an anthology of writings and lectures by deep ecological thinker Pentti Linkola, and of the public reception of Linkola's extremist environmental philosophy.

In the 1970s, there were many partly intermingled political and ideological debates going on in Finnish arts and sciences. A new generation had emerged both in poetry and in sciences such as ornithology, and their views did not necessarily coincide with those of their seniors. Poetry and even ornithology were subjected to politicising tendencies through the introduction of social and environmental-ethical perspectives. This development is apparent in the above poem "Lapinharakka". Although it opens with science rising above poetry as an approach to writing about birds, the poem eventually questions the meaning of science and research, emphasising instead the primacy of experience. The speaker of the poem sarcastically refers to the value of writing on paper as opposed to "consciousness of the brain", noting: "you are built from evidence drawn on paper". It is difficult to say whether "you" here refers to birds or human beings. In the second stanza, the importance of science is called into question even more unambiguously: "for science is just a dry interpretation of life / – if that / it's academic tinkering in a world / in which two thirds are starving". The poem builds an interesting paradox between experience, art and science, concluding that science cannot attain true, experiential information about birds: "isn't it more to fill our lungs with the scent of a bird-cherry / in a nightingale's song / than to measure verse / with a stopwatch". The word "verse" probably refers here to the periodical nature of birdsong, but in the context of a critique of art it can also be seen as referring to poetry. "Lapinharakka" condemns both poetry and science as failures in the perceiving of reality; yet this very critique is deliberately presented in the form of a poem!

The poem "Lapinharakka" demonstrates the link between poetry and the environmental movement that emerged and strengthened in the course of the 1970s; it contains motif and figures typical for nature poetry and environmental poetry of the era. In addition to the motif of the bird ending up on paper, we have the *topos* of multi-sensory experience of birdsong. Commonly birdsong is associated with light in Finnish nature poetry, but here we have the scent of the bird-cherry as well. There is also a colloquial feel to the language that is typical of 1970s poetry in general (Niemi 1999, 176; Laitinen 1981, 574). The poem opens with the claim "Versification doesn't agree with an ornithologist", and on the very next line the speaker demands an explanation: "–why[?]" In

the following lines, the dash comes to be seen not so much as an indicator of dialogue [a dash is conventionally used to indicate direct quotes in dialogue in Finnish prose. – Transl.] as a marker of the rambling of the speaker's thoughts. Absent punctuation except for the dashes and containing colloquial words not found in formal language, the poem comes across as a representation of freely flowing speech.

“Lapinharakka” also contains elements that connect it to the broader environmental debate in public spaces at the time. The lines “short summers glide past / soon experiencing them an impossibility” evoke an apocalyptic vision of the end of time, a typical dystopian view found in talks and writings on environmental problems (Garrard 2005, 93–96). Another connection to contemporary debate is found in the phrase “the Linkola-Haila doctrine”. Pentti Linkola was the benchmark for radical deep ecological ideology in Finnish environmental debate in the 1970s, while “Haila” is naturalist and environmental philosopher Yrjö Haila, who was a writer for *Lintumies* and an active participant in the public environmental policy debate since the turn of the 1970s.

So, the nature poetry of the 1970s emerged from a transition in poetry and in conceptions of nature. While the topics of poetry became more mundane and poetic expression drew closer to spoken language and the style of the media, the threatened natural environment came to be seen not as a collection of individual animal and plant species to be protected but as an integrated entity involving both human and non-human creatures, the environment (see e.g. Laitinen 1981, 574, 587–589; Nienstedt 1997, 16–28). In the 1970s, many poets concerned with the state of the environment began to write nature poetry in a broader style and more closely addressing environmental problems. At the same time, the meanings of death and human emotions assigned to birds in the Finnish tradition acquired a new angle: birds came to symbolise the vulnerability and transitory nature of their species in particular or the non-human world in general, and the suffering of birds reflected the fear, sorrow and guilt of humans when faced with the destruction of nature. Environmental issues addressed in public debate, such as intensive forest management, industrialisation and environmental toxins became central topics in the poetry of poets such as Matti Paloheimo, Anne Hänninen and Hannu Salakka. Criticism of environmental policy manifested itself as horrific images of extinction, environmental pollution and total deforestation, but also at the level of lexical choices. Poets borrowed terms from ecology and environmental literature to link their thoughts and writings to concrete environmental problems and the related public debate.

However, so far Finnish literary history has mostly focused on another type of nature poetry that emerged and became common in the 1970s. This austere style often focusing on an individual landscape, is commonly described as “poetry of nature”. Described as miniatures and mini-poems in their day, they were identified as an independent sub-genre of nature poetry, not only because of their brief and syntactically simple form but also because of their sensory immediacy and appealing imagery: their descriptions of nature can often be understood literally (Laine 1973; Virtanen 1975; Launonen 1977). On the other hand, these nature poems play with the meanings of words and the anthropomorphic treatment of animals and plants, thus opening up new perspectives on natural phenomena and the environment. Nature poetry is seen as one of the heirs of modernism in Finnish literary history, and its unanimously accepted master is Risto Rasa (Launonen 1977; Kirstinä 1987; Niklander 1987; Paavilainen 1987). The following poems are from Risto Rasa’s début collection, *Metsän seinä on vain vihreä ovi* [The Forest Wall Is But a Green Door] (1971):

Metsän seinä
on vain vihreä ovi
josta valo
ohjaa ystäväänsä

(Rasa 1971, 12)

The forest wall
is but a green door
through which a light
guides its friend.

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

Puut ovat täynnä
lintujen valtakuntia.
Puut ovat täynnä
metsiä joissa asutaan.

(Rasa, 1971, 33)

Trees are full
of avian realms.
Trees are full
of inhabited woods.

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

Contemporary critics were quite receptive to poetry of nature in the early 1970s. However, by the end of the decade the deliberate eliminating of the human voice or viewpoint and the naivist style, seen as apolitical, began increasingly to irritate critics. As Kari Levola incisively put it in a review (1987), “eroded by inflation, birdsong lyrics were soon headed for bankruptcy”. Poetry of nature began to seem banal and empty, particularly as critics failed to see its connections with the more political environmental poetry of the day or even the Green movement that was just becoming established in Finland in the 1970s. The term “poetry of nature” itself comes from an extensive article discussing poetry on nature subjects, written by Pertti Lassila and published in *Helsingin Sanomat* on 11 May 1975. In this article, entitled “Lyriikan hiljainen kriisi” [The Silent Lyrical Crisis], Lassila criticised poetry of nature as being a conventional “youth fad” latching on to ideals. He described that these writers used nature as an eschatological refuge from social and personal problems, an idyll where “an atmosphere of sanctity and inviolability reigns”. Lassila’s exaggerated view of the poetry of nature has not been discussed very much at all in literary history or poetry scholarship. On the other hand, towards the end of the 1970s critics began increasingly to recognise the environmental policy dimensions of nature poetry (Lassila 1976; Tuomarila 1976; Niklander 1987; Kirstinä 1987).

The debate on socially conscious poetry, especially poetry of nature, in the 1970s reflects both political expectations towards poetry and the then current narrow views about the forms in which a political consciousness might manifest itself. Taking nature as a topic in a poem was seen to be detached from social reality; writers who did depict nature were expected to delineate their subject carefully and to employ an austere aesthetic. It was partly because of these reasons that environmentally conscious voices began to fade in Finnish poetry as the 1980s progressed, and bird images became less frequent and more subjective in meaning, i.e. subjective for each individual poet. Then again, birds have made a comeback in poetry, as indeed in prose, in the 2000s. Interestingly enough, birds reappeared at the same time as there was a new influx of environmental subjects in other media. The avian poetry of the 2000s consciously and obviously seeks to avoid the stigma of “cuteness” associated with nature poetry. Birds are seen as perplexing, fascinating and strange threatened creatures, and their existence is juxtaposed with the worsening and interlinked challenges caused by climate change, environmental pollution, chemicalisation, increased land use and loss of biodiversity.

SIX BIRD POETS

Kui trititii! Finnish Avian Poetics is a study of one strand in Finnish avian cultures that is particularly interesting for both today's ecocritical research and today's global environmental issues. I refer to avian poems where birds being agents or subjects is unambiguously described as a problem and a challenge for the poet himself/herself and the reader. This may have to do with manifesting the sound, appearance, behaviour or ecological success of a bird in the theme, rhythm, vocabulary, phonemes or visual appearance of a poem. On the other hand, we may find manifestations of birds, the evolution of their habitats and their past and future forming part of the world of the poem as well as the world outside the poem.

The issue of what the relationship of real birds to poetry written about them might be was voiced by Laurence Coupe in the foreword to *The Green Studies Reader* (2000), of which he was editor:

But is it so naïve to ask whether Clare's poetry and Vaughan Williams's music will have the same significance when the cereal monoculture of intensive agriculture (aided by inappropriate housing developments) have finally destroyed all the habitats of these creatures, and there is nowhere for them to live? Does the devastation of bird populations not matter because they are, after all, only referents? (Coupe 2000, 3)

Although this issue has been a current one in research for quite some time, and although poets have been addressing it since the 1970s (and in some cases even earlier), there is relatively little research focusing on the relationship between avian poetry and actual birds. Literary scholar Travis Mason combines methods of ecocritical literary criticism and ornithological knowledge in his book *Ornithologies of Desire: Ecocritical Essays, Avian Poetics, and Don McKay* (2013). In his both theoretically and scientifically perceptive work, Mason presents a reading of the avian poetry of Don McKay that is at once bird-oriented and text-conscious. Another scholar working in the field of poetry criticism, Aaron M. Moe, presents a convincing and inspiring theory of non-human poetic agency in his book *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* (2014). Though he does not focus solely on birds, his analyses of the poetry of Walt Whitman, e. e. Cummings, W. S. Merwin and Brenda Hillman offer many useful tools for avian poetics, too. Musician and non-fiction author David Rothenberg, in *Why Birds Sing: A Journey Through the Mystery of Bird Song* (2005), discussed birdsong from the perspective of science and various branches of the arts, including representations of birdsong in poetry. Birds and the cultural meanings of birdwatching are also discussed by Jeremy Mynott in *Birdscapes: Birds in Our Imagination and Experience* (2009) and by Jonathan

Rosen in *The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature* (2008). Both touch upon the significance of birds for poets.

Arts scholarship on the link between Finnish avian poetry and real birds is virtually non-existent, apart from a handful of articles and my own doctoral dissertation, published (in Finnish) in 2010: *Poliittinen siivekäs: Lintujen konkreettisuus suomalaisessa 1970-luvun ympäristörunoudessa* [Bird Politics: The Concreteness of Birds in Finnish 1970s Environmental Poetry]. There have been and are numerous poets in Finland writing about birds; indeed, to discuss the entire gamut of Finnish bird poetry would require a broad general presentation of its own, tailored for an international audience.

There are some poets who stand out from the crowd by having focused on issues of the poetic agency of birds or their effective historical existence, either in an individual collection or in their entire output. Out of these poets, I have selected for this study Eero Lyyvuo (1904–1977), Maila Pylkkönen (1931–1986), Timo Haajanen (1946–1984), Sauli Sarkanen (1951–), Jouni Tossavainen (1958–) and Antti Salminen (1983–). None of them have so far become established in the canon of Finnish literature – they are relatively unknown to the public at large in Finland, although to be fair this applies to the large majority of poets. They represent different eras and hence different conceptions of poetry and nature, and also different concrete literary and environmental contexts. The time span of the poetry I discuss ranges from the mid-1940s to the 2010s, a time that saw a transition from rhyme and metre to free verse and experimental typographical designs.

Eero Lyyvuo only ever published one poetry collection, and that was all about birds. Entitled *Pieniä laulajia* [Little Singers], it was published in 1946 and was noted almost exclusively by nature enthusiasts, even though it was inspired by and the poet was endorsed by one of the great classics in Finnish nature and bird poetry, Aaro Hellaakoski. It says something about Lyyvuo's stature that he merits a mention in the book *Unohdettuja kirjailijoita* [Forgotten Authors]. Maila Pylkkönen, who published nine collections between the 1950s and the 1970s, is better known, but her fame rests mainly on the development of the Finnish role-based poem. She also wrote humorous, sometimes absurd poems and minor prose. One dissertation has been written in Finland on her role-based poetry, and she is included in most literary histories of Finland. Sauli Sarkanen published three poetry collections almost in consecutive years in the 1970s and a fourth one just recently, in 2016. His poems are about the relationship of humans and nature, particularly birds; his poetry was recognised as ecological by contemporary critics. Sarkanen wrote in a minimalist style of en-

vironmental poetry that was openly political and even apocalyptic. Still, he has been excluded from literary histories. But even more obscure than Sarkanen is Timo Haajanen who, like Sarkanen, was acquainted with birds from a scientific aspect. His poems, originally published in newspapers and anthologies, were published in a posthumous collection entitled *Rigor mortis* in 1991. The collection contains a large percentage of poems on birdwatching and ringing written by Haajanen in his youth in the 1970s.

Jouni Tossavainen, like Maila Pylkkönen, has a more extensive output. To date, he has published 12 poetry collections and eight prose works, besides other works and texts. He is an acknowledged performing poet, and sounds, sonorities and rhythms play an important role in his only collection to date to focus on birds. Antti Salminen has published two poetry collections at the time of this writing; one of them, *Nollankuori* [The Zero's Shell] (2013), has a strong ecological slant. Salminen is also a literary scholar and philosopher specialising in experimental and post-fossil thinking.

Of these poets, Eero Lyyvuo and Jouni Tossavainen give voice to the various sounds and songs of birds. In transliterating birdsong, they experiment with the flexibility of the rhythmical, sonorous and typographical properties of the Finnish language and poetic idiom in representing non-human means of vocal expression. In Lyyvuo's case, the literary context of his *Pieniä laulajia* collection is set by the birdsong descriptions of Jussi Seppä (a pioneer in developing descriptions of bird sounds in Finnish ornithological literature) and the extensive output of ornithologist A.E. Kivirikko; Lyyvuo shared the aesthetics of 1940s poetry that still relied on regularities of metrics and sonority. But by contrast, he dismissed the idealistic and anthropocentric bird allegories of Romanticism and Symbolism, relying instead on science and observation. He does include some anthropomorphic characterisations, though. In Tossavainen's poems too, birds appear as vehicles for linguistic experimentation and for pushing the envelope of aesthetic norms in poetry. In his collection *Kerro* [Tell Me], an unbroken stream of birdsong, the sound of rain, cows mooing, people speaking and many other sounds flows across the unnumbered pages in exceptionally long lines. This design stems from typographical experimentation that emerged among Finnish poets in the 2000s, both in individual poems and in entire collections, in printed matter and in digital publications, and even in stage performances.

The avian poetry of Sauli Sarkanen is in many ways representative of its era. His collections contain minimalist poetry of nature focusing on individual observations and their interpretation on the one hand and political editorials typical of the poetry of the 1970s on the other. Many of his poems are environ-

mentally conscious and even political, where the expression is more florid and colloquial, its vocabulary more familiar and referring to topical issues. What is interesting about Sarkanen's avian poetry is not only the poet's profound scientific knowledge about his subjects but also his experiments with first-person narration and its potential for reflecting something of the needs and experiences of birds. Similar aspirations may be found in the poetry of Maila Pylkkönen, although with her the speaker is always a human being. In Pylkkönen's poems and minor prose (with her, it is difficult and in fact irrelevant to distinguish between the two), birds are an object of wonderment: childlike observations and perspectives become generalised into a general bewilderment in the face of an animal of another species, and the encounters described always involve multiple ethical and aesthetical aspects. The poetry of Sarkanen and Pylkkönen demonstrates in the best way what happens when the subjects of poetry, in this case birds, are rendered mundane. Rather than remaining in the background as quaint details in a landscape or cityscape, animals – for all their presumed ordinariness – emerge as the centre of attention, as objects for a new kind of knowledge and observation.

Knowledge about and observation of birds are also key elements in the avian poetry of Timo Haajanen, which is contemporaneous with that of Sarkanen and Pylkkönen. Like the two latter, Haajanen was almost obsessively interested in birds and their existence or appearance. Haajanen spent his summers on the island of Hailuoto (Luoto in local parlance) off the city of Oulu in northern Ostrobothnia in north-western Finland, ringing and observing the birds that nested on and migrated through the island. He wrote poetry of multiple voices about these birds. With Haajanen, "multiple voices" means a blend of styles or discourses, different ways of discussing birds: ornithological slang, scientific terms, colloquial expressions and poetic images mingle in his verse in a way that reflects the multitude of ways in which we regard birds. A very different approach, though similarly anchored in the environment and its material circumstances, is found in the avian poetry of Antti Salminen, whose collection *Nollankuori* may be read as an epic poem of the world to come. Here, birds are generally placed in a situation where the status and place of humans in the world has become uncertain, threatened or even a thing of the past. Containing a variety of environmental-philosophic allusions yet very concrete and simple, Salminen's poetry is difficult to read without reference to the context of his post-fossil experimental philosophy that likewise predicts an overwhelming change in the human experience and human life in the (near) future. Whereas (Western) humans will lose their customs and habits and perhaps their existence to boot, birds will survive in all their non-human birdness.

TOWARDS AVIAN POETICS

In Western culture, to talk about birds as birds is generally understood as scientific discourse. Poetic discourse, on the other hand, is normally judged as anthropomorphic, sentimental and therefore misguided or even false. (Mynott 2009, 5–6, 15, 22–27; Rosen 2008, 8, 24–25) The premise of avian poetics as a vehicle for understanding avian poetry is not to subject animal characters in literature to a conceptual vivisection imposing a dichotomy of scientific and sentimental discourse, pejoratively dismissing ethical perspectives as sentimentalist and anthropomorphic and hence condemnable. What is much more productive for understanding literature about birds such as avian poetry, and indeed birds themselves, is to bring together the various perspectives and ways of speaking, writing, knowing and observing. Different discourses and practices regarding birds can function alongside and within one another (Mason 2013, xvi–xvii). The focus, after all, is on birds: the meanings they confer on us and the meanings we assign to them.

The method of avian poetics consists of active, conscious and highlighted connections between texts, birds, our conceptions of birds and our actions regarding birds. The key concept underlying this kind of reading is the close relationship or interaction between the world and the text, or more broadly the notion that all meanings that outline reality stem from relationships. Such relationships exist within language (at the level of letters, words or clauses, or indeed of phonemes, stresses and durations), within texts (linguistic, juxtapositional, rhythmical, intertextual) and between sign systems (intertextual relationships, relationships between different languages and discourses, even relationships between visual and textual idioms and between the means of communication of different species). What is also important for meanings are the social and physical relationships between creatures (such as poets, birds and readers), or more generally actors; these are both semiotic and material. We must remember that every relationship is defined by a group of preceding assignments of meaning (in both linguistic and physical communication and contact) but that each of these assignments of meaning relies on previous relationships experienced, observed and reinforced through interaction.

My manner of reading, in collecting various material and immaterial components of meanings, is closely related to the *compositionism* of science scholar Bruno Latour, by which he means a collating method of thought and research. Composition puts things together while retaining their heterogeneity. In discussing the term *composition*, Latour lists several meaningful references for

compositionism: composition in the musical sense, composure, compromise (diplomacy) and compost (beneficial decay) (Latour 2010, 473–474). As Travis Mason notes (2013, 159), Bruno Latour often does not link his political ecological ideas to the arts. However, he has said something about the potential of arts research. In his manifesto on compositionism, Latour discusses the agency of non-human creatures as a precondition for a new relationship with nature. After mentioning animism, he concludes:

A question which humanists and literary studies are actually better equipped than most social sciences to deal with, thanks to their attention to the complex semiosis of human and nonhuman fictional characters [...]. The redistribution of agencies is the right purview of literary studies [...]. (Latour 2010, 489, endnote 25)

Latour is here of course thinking of fiction texts as a new vehicle for philosophy, but a critical gesture such as this also changes the way in which we understand the relationship between non-human creatures and literature: creatures that are objects, such as birds, are also now perceived as actors.

So, the characteristics and lives of birds and the various connections between humans and birds influence writing; and writing and reading model observations, experiences and future encounters and actions. What we have here is also the joint impact of birds, people and texts, as a result of which we may discuss avian cultures, avian poetics, avian agency and birdlikenesses in poetry. As explained above, by avian cultures I mean all kinds of concrete nature-cultural and material-semiotic interactions between birds and humans. Avian poetics is a subset of avian cultures, an area of writing and reading poetry and of influencing writing and reading where birds and humans function together (see also Steiner 2007; Mason 2013). Avian agency is agency conveyed by language and signs, and through this the sounds and other characteristics of birds influence the texts about and interpretations of birds formulated by writers and readers. “Birdlikenesses” are characteristics that may be heard, seen and sensed in poetry, deriving from birds and being about birds, their environments and their history. Sometimes it is the content of the poem that can be characterised as birdlike: there may be descriptions of the bodily movements or sensations of a bird, for example. These I will call thematic avian perspectives.

The principal question in my study is: how do birds exist and exert influence in Finnish poetry? The first part of the study, “Beings”, discusses the other-earthliness of birds in relation to humans and corporeality or materiality as a channel for knowing about birds and a foundation for the meanings we assign to them. The second part, “Languages”, focuses on relationships between languages and communication systems. I first discuss the naturalcultural roots of

human language and bird discourses influencing poetry on a general level. Then, I move on to discuss the translation of birdsong into the language, structure and content of poetry. The third part, “Environments”, begins with a discussion of textually built bird environments and then of the life of birds on a planet profoundly changed by humans. My source material is divided among these chapters on the basis of my sub-questions. In other words, instead of arranging my discussion by poet, I have grouped the poems of the various poets according to their thematic and formal characteristics.

My key concepts – avian cultures, avian poetics, avian agency and birdlikenesses – are the result of my research into the meanings of birds and other non-human creatures and their impact on various cultural texts and works. The theoretical influences in this work come from approaches described as ecocritical, new materialist or post-humanist and from their proponents. The agency of birds, then, comes from the constantly expanding debate on non-human agency. I describe birds as *other-earthly* beings, my point being to underline the general significance of differences between species but also differences in experiences or existence between species and even between individuals. In this sense, my research draws on human–animal studies and also on scholarship that is more phenomenologically oriented on the one hand and more semiotically oriented on the other, above all the ethology of Jakob von Uexküll.

Object-oriented philosophy is the most important theoretical context for my research. I see connections between birds, humans, environments and signs and the resulting avian culture and poetics as translations or tunings, relationships where various semiotic and material beings – or, to be precise, beings manifesting semiotic and material aspects – interpret one another and create new objects. The birdlikenesses and other non-human currents found in the language of poetry or in its typography are traces of such encounters between beings (traces that could in turn be described as new objects). The object-oriented approach to poetry was developed particularly by Timothy Morton, whose concepts and views I will be returning to in the present study on several occasions. Object-oriented philosophy is in my research a toolkit for exploring and understanding the relationships between the various beings creating, producing and interpreting poetry. Because I am investigating the influence of birds on poetry and their agency just as much as the solutions adopted by poets in creating birdlikenesses and, finally, how language and the environment participate in these processes, I feel that I am looking at relationships between beings that differ from one another in quite radical ways. Avian poetics is ultimately about relationships between beings.

My research approach thus differs from the view outlined at the beginning of this introduction, namely that avian poetry exclusively or principally consists of cultural representations of birds. I base my view on the ideas expressed in the context of object-oriented philosophy, particularly the thinking of philosopher and arts scholar Levi Bryant. In *The Democracy of Objects* (2011), Bryant makes an extensive argument against the view that non-human beings are considered symbols and representations that acquire meaning from other cultural symbols and representations. Bryant considers that today's philosophy and theory continue to place the human subject and culture in the realm of the meaningful, necessarily excluding nature from that realm. He writes:

The catch is that in treating the object as what is opposed to the subject or what is other than subject, this frame of thought treats the object in terms of the subject. The object is here not an object, not an autonomous substance that exists in its own right, but rather a representation. As a consequence of this, all other entities in the world are treated only as vehicles for human contents, meanings, signs, or projections. (Bryant 2011a, 21–22)

Bryant writes that we should see non-human beings as “perturbing the world in their own way”. Regarding more practical issues of scientific research and critical thinking, he notes: “the point is to expand the domain of what can be investigated, not to limit it.” (Bryant 2011a, 283)

One of the core tenets of object-oriented philosophy is the concept of the withdrawal of beings. This means that we can only perceive a particular appearance at a time of any given being: we see all other beings, and we as beings are seen, always in a restricted and limited way – from a certain perspective, in a certain light, at a certain point in time, and so on. The nature of objects, what they actually are, withdraws, i.e. evades detection. As in my earlier research, in the present study my starting point is that the birdness of birds, birds *qua* birds, are ultimately unknowable things. We may talk about birds in various ways (in various discourses) and understand them as pets, as food or as indicators of the state of the environment, and we can study their anatomy, their movements, their breeding or the sounds they make, but we can never perceive any individual bird as it actually and comprehensively *is*. The essence of every bird is unique, constantly manifesting itself and withdrawing from our perception; every bird is a mystery. I see avian poetry as circling this mystery and being nourished by it. Avian poetics as scholarship is likewise fuelled by the mystery of birds.

In the chapters of this study I draw on various special concepts related to the key issues of each chapter. I will explain these concepts as they come up. My method of reading is generally object-oriented and material-semiotic. In other

words, I read avian poetry not just in view of the information on, conceptions of, observations of and cultural meanings assigned to birds but also with a view to their material properties and circumstances. Every bird poem is created in the real naturalcultural contexts of the poet and the birds featured in the poem, and these contexts have to do with both literary history and natural history. The actual, historical individual birds involved can never be traced, as indeed cannot the poets' original intentions (at least not in most cases), but a reading sensitive to beings and relations between them can, I believe, reach the poetics of avian poetry in a way that is meaningful for today's poetry and for our relationship with nature in general and birds in particular.

Before proceeding to the first chapter, a few words about the characteristics of the Finnish language are in order.

NOTES ON READING, LISTENING TO AND TRANSLATING FINNISH BIRD POETRY

METSÄKIRVINEN ESITTÄYTYY.

Didididi, nimeni on Anthus trivialis,
mulle kelpaa kasvokset ja metsästäjän saalis.
Iiit_{pryy} iiit_{pryy}, hyyⁱ hyyⁱ, tsiidul_{tsiidul}, tshat_{sa},
kaiken minä sulatan, on mulla hyvä vatsal

Dii_{tsa} dii_{tsa}, dii_{tul} dii_{tul}, dii_a dii_a, hii_{ta},
kotini on metsäaukee, metsän reuna, viita.
Vaimoni on lempeä di, zyⁱⁱ zyⁱⁱ, hii_{ta},
jonka kans' ei koskaan vielä ole tullut riita.
Dii_{tsa} dii_{tsa}, dii_{tul} dii_{tul}, dii_a dii_a, hii_{ta}

(Lyyvuo 1946, 50–51)

A Tree Pipit Introduces Himself

Didididi, my name is *Anthus trivialis*,
I'll make do with plants and a hunter's catch.
Iiit_{pryy} iit_{pryy}, hyyⁱ hyyⁱ, tsiid_{ul} tsiid_{ul}, tshat_{sa},
I digest it all, I've got a good stomach!

Dii_{tsa} Dii_{tsa}, diit_{ul} diit_{ul} dii_a, dii_a hii_{ta},
my home's a clearing, a forest's edge, a thicket!
My wife's gentle di, zyⁱⁱ zyⁱⁱ, hii_{ta},
never had a quarrel with her yet.
Dii_{tsa} Dii_{tsa}, diit_{ul} diit_{ul} dii_a, dii_a hii_{ta}!

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

The tree pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) has a high-pitched song that varies in melodic shape and pace. In the poem by Eero Lyyvuo quoted above, its song is represented in a way that Finns find more or less accurate. Lyyvuo's "bird words" are partly based on the transcriptions of Jussi Seppä, a pioneer in transcribing the song of Finnish birds. His rendering of the song of the tree pipit is as follows:

didididi didi djidjidjidjidi
diitsa diitsa diitsa diitsa diitsa, tsidul tsiidul tsiidul tsiidul,
tsiidul, djia djia djia djia djia, / diit_{ul} diit_{ul} diit_{ul} diit_{ul} diit_{ul}
iidr iidr iidr iidr / iitpryy iitpryy iitpryy iitpryy
hyyi hyyi hyyi hyyi
tsitsitsitsitsi / sisisisi iii

(Seppä 1945, 126)

In a newer bird manual specialising in birdsong descriptions, Kai Linnilä and Sari Savikko render the song of the tree pipit thus:

tssi tssi tssi tssi tssi tssi tsiidul tsiidul tsiidul tsiidul tsiidul tsiidul
hyyi hyyi hyyi hyyi
si si si si si iii

(Linnilä & Savikko 2004, 88)

In *Aaaaaw to Zzzzzd: The Words of Birds*, John Bevis gives us this for the tree pipit:

seea-seea-seea, srihb, sip, sipsipsipteezeteezeteeze, teez

(Bevis 2010, 99, 100, 102)

Comparison between the Finnish and English renderings is complicated by the fact that Bevis put his words in a glossary, separated from one another. However, we may note that in both languages the vowels [i] and [a] and the consonants [s], [r], [p] and [t] (and [z]) are used. As Bevis notes, the consonants [s], [t] and [z] are pronounced without using the lips and thus mimic the actual sounds produced by birds (Bevis 2010, 27). If we note that the vowel 'ee' in the English transcription is pronounced the same as the Finnish 'ii', the similarity is further reinforced. On the other hand, we must also note clear differences between the renderings: in the Finnish, many of the elements in the song of the tree pipit begin with [d], a consonant softer than [t], while in the English [d] is not seen at all.

The purpose of this preliminary comparison is to point out not only the differences in birdsong renderings in different languages but also to the pronunciation of Finnish. The Finnish language is principally pronounced as it is written, on a one-symbol-one-sound principle (although there are special cases particularly among consonants). The vowel sounds in Finnish may be approached as in Latin:

a [a] ('a' in the word 'car')

e [e] ('e' in the word 'let')

i [i] ('ee' in the word 'seen')

o [o] ('o' in the word 'or')

u [u] ('oo' in the word 'book')

y [y] (no equivalent in English; 'ü' in the German word 'für' or 'u' in the French word 'lune')

The Finnish Umlaut vowels "ä" and "ö" do have phonetic close equivalents in English:

ä [æ] ('a' in the word 'rat')

ö [ø] ('i' in the word 'bird')

There are both indigenous and foreign consonants in Finnish. The indigenous consonants are pronounced as follows:

d [d] ('d' in the word 'dot')

h [h] ('h' in the word 'hot')

j [j] ('y' in the word 'yes')

k [k] ('k' in 'skin', no aspiration)
l [l] ('l' in the word 'let')
m [m] ('m' in the word 'milk')
n [n] ('n' in the word 'not')
ŋ] (this sound appears in 'nk' in the word 'sink' and 'ng' in the word 'sing')
p [p] ('p' in the word 'spit', no aspiration)
r [r] ('r' in Finnish is always rolled)
s [s] ('s' in the word 'sit')
t [t] ('t' in 'stop', no aspiration)
v [v] ('v' in the word 'vine')

Foreign consonants are pronounced as follows:

b [b] ('b' in the word 'bin')
f [f] ('f' in the word 'fit')
g [g] ('g' in the word 'get'; always a hard 'g' in Finnish)
š, sh [ʃ] ('sh' in the word 'show')
w [v] ('v' in the word 'vice')
x [ks] ('x' in the word 'taxi')
z [z] (usually 'ts' in the word 'rats', but sometimes 'z' in the word 'zebra')
ž [ʒ] ('s' in the word 'pleasure')

Finnish pronunciation differs from English also in word stress. In Finnish, stress is always on the first syllable of a word, with secondary stresses on odd-numbered syllables thereafter. Although in compound nouns the stress falls according to the component words, not regularly on every other syllable. Because of this, in Lyyvuo's bird poems the placement of lines across several lines of type may imply not only pitch but also syllable stress. Jussi Seppä (1945, 126–127) solved the problem of stress by adopting a practice formerly used in poetry analysis, by marking stressed syllables with a subscript dot:

Because stress in Finnish is closely related to stress in German, the poetic metres used in Finnish poetry are largely borrowed from German poetics. Because of the length of Finnish words, iambic-anapestic is far more common than pure iambic, while dactylic or trochaic-dactylic are far more common than pure trochaic. In poetry mimicking birdsong, words tend to be short, and variation in word stress lends a lilting rhythm to the poetry. In order to illustrate how

the stress pattern of Finnish works in Lyyvuo's poem, I quote it here again but now with primary stress in bold and secondary stress underlined:

Didididi, nimeni on **Anthus** trivialis,
mulle kelpaa kasvikset **ja** metsästäjän **saalis**.
Iitpryy iitpryy, **hyyi** hyyi, **tsiidul** tsiidul, **tshatsa**,
kaiken minä sulatan, on **mulla** hyvä **vatsa!**

Diitsa diitsa, **diitul** diitul, **diia** diia, **hiita**,
kotini on **metsänaukee**, **metsän** reuna, **viita**.
Vaimoni on **lempeä** **di**, **zyii** zyii, **hiita**,
jonka kans' ei koskaan vielä ole tullut **riita**.
Diitsa diitsa, **diitul** diitul, **diia** diia, **hiita!**

Following the progression of primary and secondary stress, we may note that the typographical layout of the lines in Lyyvuo's poems contradict stress rules, particularly in the words that represent the song of the tree pipit. On the final line, for instance, there should be no secondary stresses at all according to the rules of Finnish, but the second syllable of each word, being placed at a lower level, tends to acquire stress, partly in imitation of the song of the tree pipit. However, there are also typographical deviations in lines consisting almost entirely of ordinary Finnish words. Single-syllable words, which normally always receive a primary stress, now come across as having only a secondary stress. This may be explained by the profusion of the words employed to imitate birdsong – *bird words*, to use Bevis's term. They create stress and sound patterns in the lines that break the typical patterns of Finnish words in their unconventionality. They also generate hiatuses that change the metre in mid-line: "**mulle kelpaa kasvikset** | **ja metsästäjän saalis**" or "**kaiken minä sulatan**, | **on mulla hyvä vatsa!**"

Even a brief example such as the poems I have quoted above suffices to demonstrate that words in Finnish are on average much longer than words in English. Applying a language rich in vowels and long words to describing birdsong is a challenge. On the other hand, Finnish has a large stock of onomatopoeic words to compensate.

Finally, I should address the obvious problem in presenting a discussion of Finnish poetry to a foreign audience: translation. Although translating poetry is always a challenge because of the sounds and visual properties of poetic language, some poems are particularly difficult if not impossible to translate in a way to do them any justice. Poems experimenting with expression and sound,

in my material particularly those by Eero Lyyvuo and Jouni Tossavainen, transmorph into completely new texts in translation. In analysing such poems, I aim to discuss the features of the original poem in as much detail as possible while also explaining the relationship between the original poem and its translation. Although my material is tough to translate, my feeling as a scholar is that the impossibility of equivalence in translation with these poems is highly significant. No exact equivalence can be found between the Finnish and English languages in general or their poetic registers in particular – but then again, neither can we translate or understand the sounds or songs of birds. There is also a school of thought that considers that even to paraphrase the content of a poem is to destroy it: a poem cannot be expressed in any other words.

I myself believe in the affective properties of naturalcultural noises and voices and in experimental dialogue between beings, sounds, languages, signs and texts. There is always a partial conveying of content, and messages can be somehow understood even across species. The notion of the impossibility of translation may in fact conceal the notion of a complete separation and incompatibility of thought between languages or between beings – a notion that I find ethically suspect.

Even if you do not know a single word of Finnish, try to listen to the rhythm and sound of the poems in the original. I also recommend getting to know the species of birds named herein, especially as regards their typical sounds and songs. Avian poetry, whether written in your native language or a foreign language, becomes strange and novel when it employs “bird words”. Reading such a poem is always experimental, sketchy and subject to interpretation – as indeed is our knowledge of birds.