

Omar Daniel

Mehetapja

I Emal ol hulka tütereida...*(a mother had many daughters...)*

II Kui Meeli Mehele viidi...*(when Meeli was taken to be wed...)*

III Tuli homme, uusi päeva...*(The next day came, a new day...)*

IV Meeli läks joosetes kaevu juurde...*(Meeli ran to the well...)*

Ancient, pre-Christian Estonian ‘Runo-songs’ (*Regilaul*) depict many activities and rituals of the rural peoples who composed them and passed them down: work, harvest, love, games, cooking, death, the natural world. A particularly famous Runo-song is ‘The Song of Meeli’, which forms the basis of my ‘Mehetapja’

The archetype of ‘Husband killer’ in Nordic poetry and song is rather well represented throughout northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia. As is the case with all folk-song, the details may change from region to region or over time, but the essential storyline remains the same: a young woman is taken to be wed, kills her husband shortly after the wedding, flees into the forest, begs the natural world for shelter, and eventually disappears. Often there is a reason for the murder: the young woman has defended herself against a violent husband, for instance. However, in the Runo-song ‘The Song of Meeli’, the motive for the crime seems to be only that she misses her family. So, there appears to be no moral ground for her crime, even though the character of Meeli is, I believe, a sympathetic one. One of the most interesting structural characteristics of the ‘Song of Meeli’ version of the fable is the amount of time spent describing Meeli’s time in the forest after the crime: she begs for shelter (forgiveness) from trees, rocks, hills, bogs, streams—the sacred icons of her world. Finally, she finds refuge somewhere, and we are not certain if she is dead or has become part of the natural world.

My ‘Mehetapja’ uses principles of Estonian Runo song, as well as some actual material. Runo songs are often sung in groups, using call and response, homophonic or heterophonic textures. As well, they use rigorously metered, copious amounts of text set to short, endlessly repeated phrases.

I didn’t assign the singers to specific characters in a consistent way. Rather, the three female voices take on the personas of the characters in a collective way, sharing the story with each other in the spirit of ancient Runo-song.

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