





















One will alone is there for me to choose;  
now I know the better one I will find before me.

Preserved in a language that has since disappeared, translated into Latin and published in Frankfurt in the seventeenth century, *Moarsi fávrrot* depicts the musings of a young man in love. Through his eyes, we see a sun-drenched lake, Oarrejávri, on whose heathery banks his love resides. The song's speaker declares that he would gladly cut away any trees that would obstruct his view of the lake or don wings to fly to its shores. Yet, as the Sámi critic Harald Gaski (1996: 13–14) has noted, the song implies as well that the speaker has actually kept his beloved waiting for some time: “through the brightest of your days, the softest of your eyes, the warmest of your heart.” And after ambivalent images of chains that both bind and chafe, the speaker admits frankly the fickle nature of youth: “A boy's will, a wind's will, a young man's thoughts, long thoughts.” Realizing that his imaginings may lead him astray, the speaker seems in the end to resolve on a better course of action, presumably to journey to the side of his beloved forever more.

How are we to understand this lyric song, a work grounded not in an explicit narrative plot but in characterization, description, emotion? How are we to make sense of its content, appreciate its integrity, and evaluate its effectiveness as a communication or as a work of art? Fortunately, in approaching these questions, we can ask the singer himself. For we know that *Moarsi fávrrot* was performed in 1672 by Olaus Sirma, a young Sámi theology student from the Kemi region of northern Finland, then part of the Swedish empire. Sirma had come to the university at Uppsala that same year to study for the ministry, a calling that he eventually lived out in his home from 1676 until his death in 1703 (Henrysson 1993: 86). At the request of his German-born teacher Johan Scheffer, he sang, recorded, and rendered the song in Swedish along with one other lyric. Sirma did more than merely perform and translate his song; he also wrote an explanation of the musical tradition it represented. His words, written in Swedish and preserved in Scheffer's notes, are as follows:

These songs begin in this and other ways. Some sing more, others less, according to their own inclinations to create and compose. At times they repeat the same song over and over. Nor do they have any set tune but sing or *joik* this song, which is called *Moarsi fávrrot*, the bride's song, according to their custom and as it seems best to them to sing. (Quoted in Kjellström, Ternhag, and Rydving 1988: 11)

It is clear from this description that Sirma is describing the highly improvisational, melodically variable *joik* tradition, which is examined in more detail in chapter 3. In *joik* tradition, the same song could be sung with or without words, or with substantial variation in melody or style. In his brief description, Sirma seems intent on clarifying this aspect of *joik* for the reader of his song, and he uses the Sámi verb *joiga* (modern Northern Sámi *juoigat*) to distinguish the tradition from that of Swedes or Finns. The song had, in other words, a particular meaning as an exemplar of a specific musical genre known and valued by Sámi people. It was a genre that carried with it norms of style, content, and context. Of its stylistic features, we can survey today only those that left tangible marks in Sirma's text, for example, the artful way in which a word is first introduced in a general manner and then immediately followed up by a specification: "lake, Lake Orra," "wing, a duck's wings," "rope, a sinew rope." Undoubtedly, such typical turns of phrase, vocal performance style, and improvisational freedom were all readily identifiable features to Sámi audiences. Many of these same features persist in Sámi *joik* communities today.

In terms of typical context, as Sirma explained further in his notes to Scheffer, songs like *Moarsi fávrrot* were performed in the summer, in particular, when young men were staying in the mountains with their reindeer herds. Indeed, he termed the song explicitly a "summer song," contrasting it with his other lyric, which he termed a "winter song." For Sirma, this summer context seems to have been important in his understanding of the song and relates as well to the situation it describes in its lines. These generic considerations, then, in terms of style, content, and context, comprise a key interpretive axis by which a Sámi audience was able to place and appreciate the song, as Gaski's (1996) insightful reading of the text illustrates.

At the same time, it is clear that Sirma's song—like other exemplars of the *joik* genre that have been collected and discussed since Sirma's time—also accrues meaning through association with certain persons or beings. In Sámi tradition, people tended to sing about entities or individuals with whom they had a personal relationship. Thus, a song that mentions Oarrejávri in particular would most likely be sung by someone who knew the lake and its environs well or could in some way claim a personal connection to it. Oarrejávri, today known principally by its Finnish name Orajärvi, is a sizable lake to the east of the Tornio River. To its north are a series of mountains that served as grazing lands for reindeer herds. The lake's shores, forest area, and marshes supplied a variety of needs for the Kemi Sámi community as well. The meaning of the *joik*

as Sirma would have performed or experienced it in his life in the Kemi region would have emerged from an audience's appraisal of the relation between the singer and the song's named entities. This tendency is perhaps reflected obliquely in Sirma's remark, "Some sing more, some less, according to their own inclinations": one's personal input in a song was crucial for its outward form as well as its received meaning. These interpretations can be described as lying along the second axis of interpretation, the associative.

In addition to such personal associations, however, there is a further interpretive potential along the associative axis: that of second-person association, invocation. The great Sámi writer Johan Turi (1910: 91) described *joik* not as simple song but as "okta muitim konsta" (a way of recalling). To "recall" in this tradition was both to remember a being and to make it spiritually and imaginatively present to the performer and the audience for the duration of the song. It was to call the being back, and thus *joiks* frequently shift from third- to second-person address, as in *Moarsi fávrrot*. At times, the lyric speaker describes himself and his feelings or relates the beauties of the lake and bride in first-person or third-person terms. At other times, it is clear that he addresses her directly, for example, when he declares, "No matter how far you were to flee, I would soon catch you." The speaker now confronts the woman and conveys to her his strong feelings, despite the intervening space that separates them from each other. The song thus comes to function as a message, a communication. And this interpretive tendency too, as is discussed in chapter 3, was typical of Sámi *joik*.

Finally, *Moarsi fávrrot* can be examined along the third axis of interpretation, the situational. The inscribed situation here is of a speaker separated from his love and wishing to see her again. Ethnographically, we know that during the summers in the Kemi region, men were often engaged in herding, fishing, or hunting in the mountains, while women remained in the valleys, devoting their time and energy to the other farming or gathering activities essential to the community's survival. The welfare of the community necessitated periods of absence, but these were not always easy for young people in love. Sirma's song recalls this situation, allowing it to act as a source of meaning. Its images of surmounting obstacles, boundless yearning, cold feet, and impassioned resolve thus make more sense when one contemplates a speaker separated from his love by seasonal duties, though these were not without their own appeal. Together with the summer context for this song, it is easy to see it as a potential tool in courtship, and indeed, Scheffer published it not in a chapter on music

per se but rather in a description of Sámi courtship and marriage (see Scheffer 1704: 284–88). We have no way of knowing whether this song describes one specific man's lovesick musings (narrativization) or that attributed to young men in general in such a situation (proverbialization). Yet in either case, the situation itself would have helped a Kemi audience interpret and appreciate the song.

In short, then, the meanings of *Moarsi fávrrot* are arrayed along all three axes: the generic, the associative, and the situational. In each case, the song's text (and presumably also its vocal and other performance features now lost to us) were interpreted through reference to norms regarding how one sings, about whom, and about what. The range of feelings and ideas expressed in the song are complex and nuanced but also predictable and comprehensible to an audience that possessed a competence in the genre it exemplified.

Yet even while helping to preserve this song and ethnographic information, Sirma's German-born teacher seems to have missed much of its interpretive significance. Scheffer had asked his student for information on the musical traditions of the Sámi people because he was preparing a book he had been asked to write by the French-Swedish aristocrat Magnus de la Gardie. Sweden's warlike lord chief justice wanted a treatise that would inform Europeans about the true culture and customs of the Sámi, commonly rumored in the courts of central Europe to be supplying the Swedish Crown with supernatural aid in its various military exploits. Scheffer's tome *Laponia* brought ethnographic knowledge of Sámi culture—and the texts of the two songs performed by Sirma—to the reading public of educated Europe; it appeared in Latin in 1673, in English in 1674, in German in 1675, in French in 1678, and in Dutch in 1682 (Kjellström, Ternhag, and Rydving 1988: 106).

Through Scheffer's text, as Kjellström and colleagues note (110), *Moarsi fávrrot* became one of the first pieces of Swedish literature widely known outside of Sweden. Richard Steele composed a new English-language translation in 1712, complete with rhyme, iambic meter, and regular stanzaic form, bringing it in this manner to the general readership of the immensely popular London periodical, the *Spectator* (Wretö 1984: 49). There it was described as “a Lapland lyric not unworthy of old Greece or Rome,” an indication that the translator and his colleagues recognized some thematic or even formal link between this Sámi song and the lyric poetry of Mediterranean antiquity. The Scottish literary critic Hugh Blair, writing in praise of James Macpherson's newly published *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), praised Sirma's songs enthusiastically:

Surely among the wild Laplanders, if any where, barbarity is in its most perfect state. Yet their love songs which Scheffer has given us in his *Laponia* are proof that natural tenderness of sentiment may be found in a country, into which the least glimmering of science has never penetrated. (Blair 1765; Gaskill 1996: 351 n 9)

For Blair, then, such songs were useful not as signs of a complex interpretive tradition operating in Sámi song tradition but rather as signs of a “natural tenderness” that all human beings—even “primitives”—possessed. They proved that barbarity was “not inconsistent with generous sentiments and tender affections” (351). Such a proof was important in a European intellectual climate that was for the first time truly contemplating the diversity of human cultures, both in the distant continents now becoming known to Europe and on the very fringes of the Continent itself. With similar wonderment, Voltaire and Lessing wrote their own approving characterizations of Sirma’s songs (Kuusi 1963: 540). And the Baltic German literary critic and philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder included his own translation of *Moarsi fávrrot* as the second piece in his seminal *Stimmern der Völker in Liedern* (The Voices of Peoples in Songs, 1778–79: 3). Placed after a Greenlandic Inuit song and before an Estonian one, *Moarsi fávrrot* was intended to illustrate the national character (*Volksgeist*) of the far northern peoples and to awaken in Europe’s intelligentsia the realization that beautiful thoughts and sentiments lived in the breasts of even the cold-benumbed nature-folk of the north.

If imitation is the sincerest form of compliment, then it is noteworthy that admiring readers created their own renderings of Sirma’s song. The Finnish poet Johan Runeberg penned a Swedish translation in his *Färden till den älskade* (Journey to the Beloved One), and Goethe and Kleist mined the song for inspiration in their own poetry (Kuusi 1963: 540). In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1855 *My Lost Youth*, the song becomes an ironic rejoinder to the musings of an aging New Englander:

And a verse of a Lapland song  
Is haunting my memory still:  
“A boy’s will is the wind’s will  
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”  
(Longfellow [1855] 1985: 1285–86)

*Moarsi fávrrot* became the stuff of literary acknowledgment and allusion, yet the world chose to overlook the important question of how Sámi people interpreted it. Opting instead to use the song to answer questions of their own, scholars assimilated *Moarsi fávrrot* into a foreign interpretive framework built of notions of transcendent human sentiments and the search for the existence of these finer emotions among even the least of humankind. Had they attended to the interpretations that Sirma could provide, they would have discovered not only fine feelings but also sophisticated hermeneutics among the Sámi of Sirma's day.

**Case 2. *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi***

Jos mun tuttuni tulisi,  
Ennen nähtyni näkyisi,  
Sillen suuta suikkajaisin,  
Olis suu suen veressä;  
Sillen kättä käppjäisin,  
Jospa kärke kämmenpäässä.  
Olisko tuuli mielellissä  
Ahavainen kielellissä,  
Sanan toisi, sanan veisi,  
Sanan liian liikuttaisi  
Kahen rakkaan välillä.  
Ennempä heitän herkkuruat,  
Paistit pappilan unohtan  
Ennenkuin heitän herttaiseni,  
Kesän keskyteltyäni,  
Talven taivuteltuani.  
(Apo 1981: 60)

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If the one I know were to come,  
Were I to see the one I've seen,  
Upon his lips I'd press a kiss  
Were his mouth filled with wolf's blood;  
To him I'd stretch out my hand

Were a snake coiled in his palm.  
 If the wind could understand,  
 If the harsh wind had a tongue,  
 It would take a word, bring a word,  
 Carry an extra word  
 Between two loves.  
 I would sooner throw aside choice foods  
 Forget the roasts of the parsonage  
 Than throw aside my love,  
 The one I spoke with in summer,  
 The one I persuaded in winter.

Inspired by the publication of Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* and intent on describing the poetic traditions of the Finnish peasantry, Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739–1804) wrote down the above lyric twice from women in north-eastern Finland in 1765 (Hautala 1954: 62–66). As in *Moarsi fávrrot*, the song's speaker laments the distance that separates lovers and pledges devotion to her beloved come what may. Nothing, it would seem, can come between them, except the much-lamented physical space that currently intervenes. The song's images of devotion are startling even by twenty-first-century standards, as we hear an unknown subject filled with powerful emotions: longing, desire, defiance.

As with *Moarsi fávrrot*, we can examine the ways in which this song was interpreted along the generic, associative, and situational axes. Yet here the relative importance of each axis shifts somewhat, as we move from one culture of interpretation to another. On the generic axis, Porthan reported that *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* was characteristic of a particular genre of singing and a particular performance context and presented a portion of the song in Latin translation in the second volume of his dissertation, *De Poësi Fennica* (On the Poetry of the Finns; [1766–78] (1983): pt. xii, 83–86). He had heard both versions of the song as *jauhorunot*, work songs sung singly or by pairs of women as they performed the long, tedious, tiring work of operating millstones for grinding flour, a labor only then becoming replaced in Finland by water-powered mills. He writes: "The grinders sing songs to divert their minds in a particularly effective manner and to forget their heavy labor" (83). He noted that such songs are slow, and in content they vary from serious moral explorations to treatments of legendary or folktale motives. A great many treat of love, "as this occupies an important place in the thoughts of this sex" (84).



Later scholars collected the song throughout Finland and notated a variety of different melodies for it. D. E. D. Europaeus included a melodic transcription in his 1847 collection of Ingrian songs *Pieni Runon-seppä* (The Little Song-Smith) (Example 1.1, as reproduced in Ala-Könni 1986: 186).

Kuin mun - tut - tu - ni tu - li - si ja tu - li - si, — Ar - ma -  
 9  
 ha - ni as - te - lei - si as - te - lei - si.

EXAMPLE 1.1

Europaeus's transcription has seven beats per poetic line, obliging the singer to repeat the last part of each line when singing, as is evident in Example 1.1. More typical for songs in the trochaic tetrameter ("Kalevala meter") of Finland, Karelia, and Ingria, however, were melodies of four or five beats per line (Lippus 1995), as illustrated in a transcription A. Lähteenkorva collected of the song in the Karelian village of Tiiksjärvi in 1877 (Example 1.2, as reproduced in Launis 1930: no. 626, 225).

Jos mun tut - tu - ni tu - li - si Ar - ma - ha - ni as - te - li - si.

EXAMPLE 1.2

From the village of Liperi, Lähteenkorva collected another melody (Example 1.3, as reproduced in Launis 1930: no. 618, 222).

Kun mun tut - tu - ni tu - li - si! En - nen näh - ty - ni - nä - ki - si

EXAMPLE 1.3

Erkki Ala-Könni (1986: 186–87) suggests that Europaeus substituted the melody of the trio section of a popular Ingrian polska to provide his song with what he regarded as a more appealing tune. Perhaps Europaeus found the slower, more plodding, more typical four- or five-beat tunes too simple or monotonous for a lyric of such inherent beauty and power, despite their usefulness for women engaged in grinding flour. His substituted melody transforms the song essentially from a work song to a dance tune.

Porthan's views regarding the verbal text of the song were readily mined and paraphrased in Giuseppe Acerbi's remarkably successful *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland to the North Cape in the Years 1798 and 1799* (Acerbi 1802: 517–19). Acerbi draws on Porthan's text as a source and provides both a literal and a poetic translation of *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi*:

No inconsiderable number of runic songs, and those not of the least merit in point of composition, are of the production of the class of Finnish peasantry. Before the general use of wind and water-mills, corn was reduced to flour by the labour of the hands, either by pounding in mortars, or by grinding betwixt two stones. This was a daily task, and it fell to the woman's lot to perform it in Finland, as in other countries. During the long and dreary winters of that climate, they were engaged in this work at home, whilst their husbands abroad were either in pursuit of game, employed in the necessary business of seeking wood, forage, etc. To cheer their minds, and beguile their labour, such of the women as were unable to invent songs, studied the composition of new ones; whilst others who were not so happy as to possess that talent, sung those they had learned, whether new or old. In one of these a female peasant describes herself at work in these words

Paiwat pyörin perkeleissa  
Kiwen puussa kükuttelen.

—  
Fix'd to this mill all day I stand,  
And turn the stone with patient hand.

These songs, called *jouho runot*, or mill songs, are for the most part sung to a slow plaintive air. If two women are employed at the mill, they are sung in parts by both of them; but when they relieve each other, she only sings who works. These songs are composed on a variety of subjects; sometimes grave

and serious, at other times ludicrous and satirical; one a love story, and not infrequently the praises of some heroic action. Love which is the great business of their sex, is, as may well be supposed, the topic upon which the energies of the Finnish poetess are chiefly exercised; it is, however, not an easy matter to procure specimens of these songs, to which men are rarely or never admitted. (314–17)

While these generic considerations certainly helped to shape the song as Porthan experienced it, we may conjecture from Europaeus's melody, as from other ethnographic reports from later periods, that *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* was not limited to flour-grinding contexts alone. And further, the situation inscribed in the song does not appear explicitly linked with that of grinding in the same way that the situation in *Moarsi fávrrot* could be seen as related to the condition of summer mountain sojourns. Rather, the situation at the core of this song revolves around protracted male absence, the reasons for which are not made explicit. Perhaps the song related the specific experience of a particular woman whose beloved was separated from her for some long period for reasons known through an accompanying narrative. Such would be likely were this an Irish lyric. In examining interpretive tendencies within Finnish folk song tradition, however, it seems more likely that the song relates the typical—the proverbialized—experience of women in general who find themselves bereft of loved ones, due to conscription or disease or economic necessity or other unhappy circumstance. Leea Virtanen (1994: 338) has noted that such proverbialized meditations of sorrow were popular in Finnish folk song tradition and that explicit accounts of personal sorrows were far less common (see also DuBois 1996: 246). Senni Timonen (2004: 308 ff.) has characterized such tendencies as instances of collective emotion: generalized feelings that subsumed the personal into a powerful contemplation of the typical and collective. Village culture strongly shunned open complaint as injurious and unwise, and thus personal or specific misery often found expression in proverbial guise.

Porthan's notes seem to indicate that he assumed songs such as *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* had personal associations for his female informants. Yet, even while making this assumption, he laments his difficulty collecting examples of such songs from women, noting that he had success in this area only when approaching more mature farmwives. From a woman he describes as "elderly and childless, the wife of a bowlegged man," he collected a song that contains a few of the same lines as the above-quoted version but avoids altogether its images of

unstoppable love. From an exceptionally generous performer he describes only as “a bride,” he collected the more detailed version above. These difficulties collecting songs may reflect the same kind of self-censorship described above, as women who were young (and therefore more likely to be equated with the lyric speaker) avoided singing such songs to a man, lest they be accused of complaining about their own lots. In contrast, older women could sing the songs with more impunity, presumably because the possible linkage between their personal situations and those of the lyric speaker would have diminished over time. But even while surmising such personalization, Porthan does not appear to have asked his informants what they thought about the matter.

From the point of view of interpretive tendencies, then, *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* would seem to have been understood through interpretation along both the generic and the situational axis, that is, as a typical lyric song of unhappy separation and as the purported expressions of a woman in one such situation. In contrast, the associative axis (except, perhaps, through muted self-reflection) seems little used in this case. We find little indication in the song of the identity of the speaker or of the lover, and Seppo Knuutila and Timonen (2002: 256) have even pointed out that we cannot be certain of the speaker’s sex. If we assume the speaker is female (as did Porthan), then we must make that assumption on the basis of generic tendencies alone and not from any concrete evidence in the song itself. The associative axis, then, so prominent in the Sámi understanding of *Moarsi fávrrot*, seems barely used. Such was not always the case in Finnish folk song, however; attribution was occasionally operative in Finnish lyrics, as, for example, in the case of the famed traditional singer Larin Paraske (Timonen 1982; DuBois 1996: 255). Yet in terms of dominant tendencies, there is a markedly different hermeneutic strategy in Finnish lyric interpretation than in Sámi.

While these specific interpretive norms can be seen in this, as in many other, Finnish lyrics, Porthan, Acerbi, and those scholars who came after them approached the song’s meaning in decidedly different ways. Rooting their analyses largely or entirely in a reading of the song’s text, they found an endless set of possible interpretations (Knuutila and Timonen 2002). Porthan, for his part, was not actually interested in exploring deeply the emotional lives of peasant singers. Rather, he was intent on describing the *poesi fennica*—the poetry of the Finnish people as a whole. He opines that some of the songs performed by peasant women are “inherited from our forefathers, while some have been composed at a later time” ([1778] 1983: 83). For him, as for romantic nationalists in the next

century, folklore became the collective property of a nation, the inheritance from common “forefathers” along with contributions from later members of the nation as well. When Acerbi arrived in Åbo in search of adventure and exotica, Porthan’s student and friend Bishop F.M. Franzén enthusiastically penned a Swedish translation of the song to share with him as an example of “Finnish song.” Acerbi took it as such, although also attributing it to a specific peasant author:

Mr. Franzen, of Åbo, presented me with a song, the composition of a country girl, a native of Ostro-Bothnia, and the servant of the magister or the clergyman of the village, where she had constantly resided. It is composed on the occasion of her lover’s absence, in a style of natural simplicity, strong sentiment, and bold figure, to attain which, more cultivated understandings sometimes labour in vain. The thought in the second stanza, if not altogether new to poetry, has something in it very striking, is prettily introduced and well turned. This little piece, considered: as the production of a girl who could neither write nor read, is a wonderful performance. It is nature’s poet delivering the dictates of her heart in the words which love has suggested, and “snatching a grace beyond the reach of art.” This Finnish Sappho, amidst all the snows of her ungenial climate, discovers all the warmth of the poetess of Lesbos. (1802: 317–18)

The struggle between assumptions of national origin for songs and the equally compelling notion of individual creation was to rage in folkloristic scholarship for much of the next century.

For some, like Porthan, the mournful but defiant speaker of *Jos minun tut-tuni tulisi* became a specifically “Finnish” voice, a trope of national distinctiveness that obscured any reference to local or lived realities. The national imprint of *Jos minun tut-tuni tulisi* remains evident in Johann Goethe’s literary translation of the song in 1810. Goethe titled his poem *Finnisches Lied* (Finnish Song), placing it alongside similarly reworked songs from German, Swiss, Sicilian, and Romany.<sup>2</sup> The national significance is also evident in the Swedish writer C.G. Zetterqvist’s odd literary tribute to the lyric. Zetterqvist, clearly transfixed by the song and intrigued by the notion of translating it, set out during the years 1842–59 to create an anthology of translations of the text into all the world’s languages; he amassed some 467 translations before abandoning the project in exhaustion (Kuusi 1963: 389).

As poets enshrined the song's lines as embodiments of the Finnish character, composers made similar bows to its melody. Collections of folk songs, arranged for piano accompaniment and published under national rubrics, became popular items for the bourgeois or aristocratic sitting rooms of Europe. Europaeus's appealing Ingrian melody was soon being performed heartily as a "Finnish melody" in Finland, Sweden, and Denmark and found its way into a variety of parlor and school anthologies, including H. A. Reinholm's *Suomen Kansan Laulantoja* (1834–76) and Karl Collan and colleagues' *Valituista Suomalaisista Kansan-Lauluista, Pianon muka-soinnolle sovitettuja* (1857–71). This national function of music has by no means ended, in Finland or elsewhere in northern Europe. In the case of Finland, Tina Ramnarine's fine study *Ilmatar's Inspirations* (2003) charts the continued nationalizing functions of contemporary folk-derived music in the ongoing construction of a modern Finnish identity, and similar observations could be made in connection with music in many other parts of northern Europe (e.g., Goertzen 1997). The effects of such music publications on folk musicians during the era in which folk songs were first being recorded—a crucial element in this case—is examined in detail in chapter 6.

*Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* thus became an emblem of a Finnish national character, a tool in "imagining" a community that would eventually become its own nation-state (Anderson 1983). One of the great architects in this process, Elias Lönnrot, included a version of *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* in his 1840–41 anthology, *Kanteletar* (Bk. II, no. 43), a lyric sequel to his seminal epic *Kalevala* (1835). Describing the composition of lyric songs in general, he wrote: "They are not made, but rather they make themselves, forming, maturing, and acquiring their final appearance without the attention of any single composer" (1841: "Alkulause," iii). As the song reflects a national consciousness, in other words, so it also arises from a collective creation, one that makes the folk song truly the property of the nation as a whole. In Lönnrot's view, individual ideas and impressions pass from one person to the next like water vapor in the air, until, at last, they coalesce, falling to the earth, like rain, in the form of a completed song. The theory of "communal creation" would remain central in folk song scholarship for the rest of the century, gaining an authoritative garb in the writings of Francis B. Gummere (1901). Still, in 1915, John Lomax could describe the folk songs he collected unproblematically as the collective creations of the young American nation. Crucially, this collective view contained within itself a nascent theory of

folk reception: the song is purportedly formed by the collective aesthetic and formal decisions of the community at large, not by the conscious decisions of a singular composer.

Acerbi's musings on the Finnish Sappho, however, also had their followers. The communal creation theory gradually came under fire. In the historical-geographic research that followed, the question of reception became obscured, as scholarship shifted toward reconstructing the identity, era, and circumstances of the putative composer(s) of each item of folklore. This shift toward origins became a grounding principle in studies of the first half of the twentieth century, rendering audiences and their reception of songs merely imperfect implementations of "transmission." In the area of Finnish lyric research, Väinö Salminen (1917) initiated this trend in his study of western Ingrian wedding songs. He attempted to determine the place of origin and historical development over time for each song in his study. Kaarle Krohn applied his historical-geographic method to lyric only late in his career, after extensive work on epic, folktales, and charms. His 1931 work, *Tunnelmarunojen tutkimuksia* (Studies in Lyric Poetry), focuses on songs about the act of singing and posits origins for them in either western Finnish clerical circles or among illiterate southern Finnish and Estonian peasant women. With respect to *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi*, Matti Kuusi (1963: 391) compared the characteristics of a wide array of versions to conclude that its composer was a well-educated female poet of the late medieval period. Kuusi argued for according lyric composers the respect that they deserve as artists: where nineteenth-century scholars saw pure unlettered emotion, Kuusi discerned artful authorial choice. Yet the historical-geographic method left little room for valuing folk audiences, which became synonymous with processes of distortion and decay.

### Case 3. *Casadh an tSúgáin*

Chorus:

Má bhíonn tú liom, bí liom,  
     A ghrádh gheal mo chroidhe  
 Má bhíonn tú liom, bí liom,  
     Do ló gus d'oidhch,<sup>7</sup>  
 Má bhíonn tú liom, bí liom,  
     Gach orlach ann do chroidhe

'S é mo leun a's mo lom  
nach liom trathnóna thu mar mhnaoi.

An g-cluin tu mé a ghiolla, tá ag iarraidh grádh,  
Fill a-bhaile arís a's fan bliadhain eile mar táir,  
Tháinig me asteach i dteach a raibh grádh geal mo chroidhe  
A's chuir an chailleach amach ar chasadh an tsugáin mé.

B'ait liom bean a d'fhanfadh a bliadhain le n-a grádh  
B'ait liom bean a d'fhanfadh bliadhain uile agus a lá,  
Níor bh'ait liom an bhean bheidheadh leat-sa agus liomsa arís ar ball.  
'S í mo ghrádh an bhean a d'fhanfadh ar an aon stáid amháin.

A's cad é an cat marbh do sheól ann san tír seó mé  
A's a liacht cailín deas d'fhágbhaidh mé mo dhéigh,  
Ní truíde mise sin, s ní buaileadh orm é,  
A's gur minic do bhain bean slat do bhuaileadh í féin.

A's shíos i Sligeach chuir me eólas ar na mhnáibh,  
Agus shias i nGaillimh d'ól mé leó fá mo sháith etc.

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Chorus:

If you are mine, be mine,  
    White love of my heart;  
If you are mine, be mine,  
    By day and by night;  
If you are mine, be mine,  
    Every inch in thy heart,  
And my misfortune and misery  
That you are not with me in the evening for wife.

[The maiden answers:]

“Do you hear me, gilly, who are seeking love?  
Return home again, and remain another year as you are.”



[The harper says:]

“I came into a house where the bright love of my heart was,  
And the hag put me out a-twisting of the suggaun.

I would like a woman who would wait her year for her love;  
I would like a woman who would wait a whole year and her day;  
I’d not like the woman who would be with you and again,  
    on the spot with me:  
My love is the woman who would remain in the one state only.

And what was the dead cat which guided me into this country,  
And the numbers of pretty girls I left behind me?  
I am not the heavier for that, and I was not beaten by it,  
And sure a woman often cut a rod would beat herself.

And down in Sligo I gained a knowledge of women,  
And back in Galway I drank with them my enough, etc.  
(Hyde 1893: 74–75)

Under the title *An Súisín Ban* (The White Coverlet) Douglas Hyde provides the first translation of a lyric that was to play a key role in the dramatic and literary history of Ireland. His notation, included in Hyde’s seminal work, *Love Songs of Connacht* (1893), is not, however, the song’s first instance in print. James Hardiman had included a transcription of several of its verses in the first volume of his 1831 *Irish Minstrelsy; or, the Bardic Remains of Ireland* ([1831] 1971: 195–96). The song there is placed in an addendum to a lengthy account of the life and repertoire of the famed Irish harper Carolan (see chap. 6). After discussing itinerant music making and gentlemen poets in some detail, Hardiman closes his addendum with this statement: “From among the many sprightly songs which once were favorites with the roving fraternity . . . the following are selected for the Irish reader” (194). After providing three verses of *Casadh an tSúgáin*, Hardiman adds: “The foregoing are given only as specimens of a class of song formerly fashionable with the ‘Ranting Irishman,’ a character somewhat resembling the ‘Drunken Barnaby’ of our English neighbours, but now rather rare in Ireland.” It is clear from these statements that Hardiman sees the song as belonging to a specific thematic group within Irish lyrics and as integrally

associated with a particular kind of wandering musician-performer. This is, in other words, an attributive interpretation, finding meaning through associating the song with a particular poet or type of performer. Presumably the viewpoint within the song—its inscribed speaker—refers to that sort of character, one whom Hardiman describes elsewhere in his study:

A race of gentlemen, as they call themselves, who, too poor to support themselves, are, however, much above any commercial or manufacturing profession. I have known some of them without home, wander for months together from house to house, without the ceremony of an invitation. They ate and drank freely every where, and it would be deemed a great infraction of hospitality to shew them by any indication that they were not welcome. ([1831] 1971: 170).

Hardiman attributes this negative view of itinerant gentlemen to a “modern writer,” refraining from identifying the person specifically. It would seem that he assumes that the class of men he describes, as well as their favorite lyrics, are very familiar to his Irish-speaking audience. And in this light, the importunate tone of the song’s text takes on deeper meaning, as we hear both the demands and the boasts of a speaker who seems to hold himself in particularly high regard but who does not seem to be finding a welcome in his present situation.

In contrast to Hardiman’s cursory and rather cryptic remarks, Hyde’s account provides substantially more discussion of the song and its meaning. In his translation, Hyde breaks up one of the stanzas into a dialogue, labeling the interlocutors “The maiden” and “The harper.” He also provides a narrative explanation of the situation in the song:

Tis the cause of this song—a bard who gave love to a young woman, and he came into the house where she herself was with her mother at the fall of night. The old woman was angry, him to come, and she thought to herself what would be the best way to put him out again, and she began twisting a suggaun, or straw rope. She held the straw, and she put the bard a-twisting it. The bard was going backwards according as the suggaun was a-lengthening, until at last he went out on the door and he ever-twisting. When the old woman found him outside she rose up of a leap and struck the door to in his face. She then flung his harp out to him through the window, and told him to be going. (1893: 75–77)

Here, then, we are given a narrativized interpretation that subsumes Hardiman's more general attribution under the rubric of a particular narrative figure, an unwelcome harper. Specific textual details in the account match specific details in the song: we know through the prose account who the "hag" is (i.e., the disapproving farmwife) and why she set the speaker to twisting a hay rope (i.e., as a ploy to get him out of the house). Some details remain unclear—for example, "the dead cat which guided me into this country," why the woman must resort to such an elaborate ruse to rid herself of the guest, and what sort of maiden it is he is courting. Yet the specificity of the narrative is such that it seemingly trumps all more general interpretive avenues, leading one to feel that herein lies the *real* meaning of the song, even if, in some ways, the explanation raises as many questions as answers.

*Casadh an tSúgáin* is a favorite instrumental piece as well, and many performers, past and present, play its air, or one of several airs that go by the name, without any recourse to the song text. Geraldine Cotter (1983: 40), for instance, provides the following transcription of the tune for the tin whistle (Example 1.4).



EXAMPLE 1.4

Richard Robinson (2004) offers a somewhat different version of the air in his collection of folk song melodies (Example 1.5).



EXAMPLE 1.5

The piece is popular among Irish fiddlers as well, as Hugh Shields (1993: 71) notes in his study of Micky Doherty, a twentieth-century performer from Donegal. Although Doherty did not know any words to his air, he did know a story about it, one very similar to the explanation that Hyde provided. Shields summarizes the tale as follows:

A traveling fiddler—an undesirable guest in a house with only two women—was got rid of before nightfall by their asking his help to twist a rope, giving him the end that made him back out of the door as the rope got longer, and shutting it on him once he was outside. (1993: 71)

Shields notes that Doherty regularly told this tale whenever he performed the air. In a performance situation that included only the melody, then, the narrative was still offered as a means of understanding and appreciating the song. Even when the words that would help to elucidate it are absent, in other words, Irish performers and their audiences found narrative explanations important to provide. It is also interesting to note that Doherty and his narrative's hoodwinked fiddler share the same profession. This may indicate some degree of personalization in Doherty's experience of the song, recourse to the associative axis that would complement but not displace the narrativized interpretation on which it relies.

These observations regarding the interpretation of *Casadh an tSúgáin* map well, in fact, the hermeneutic norms operative in Irish lyric tradition. As Shields has pointed out (1991; 1993: 58 ff.), Irish lyric singers and audiences—both in English and in Irish—relied heavily on the situational axis of interpretation, especially on narrativized explanations. Songs such as *Casadh an tSúgáin* were as-

sumed to relate to some story, termed variously *míniú* (explanation), *bri* (force, meaning) or *údar* (authority), which could be solicited from the performer before or after the song itself (Shields 1991: 48). The associated narrative makes sense of the song's details, explicating, as the collector Enrí Ó Muirghessa put it, "all the circumstances which are merely hinted at in the verses" (Shields 1993: 71). Often, the narrative contains details that go well beyond what one could reasonably glean from the song text alone: for example, the names and homes of the characters may be specified, their precise relations described, the events leading up to the lyric moment or following it recounted. A good audience—like a good performer—is expected to know the tale behind a song. And if audience members do not, they should know to ask, so as to become properly informed. So intimately associated are song, melody, and commentary that Shields describes them not as separate entities but as a single unity, a *chantefable* (58 ff.). It is a unity, however, in which the commentary need not be enunciated at the time the song is performed; it is enough that the commentary exists, and that people know it—or know to expect it—when listening to the song.

This robust reliance on narrative interpretations is shared in varying degrees by a number of other lyric traditions in northern Europe, including Scottish Gaelic, as I discuss later. The title of John Shaw's (2000) fine study of the Gaelic songs of Lauchie MacLellan is illustrative in itself: *Brigh an Òrain: A Story in Every Song*. It is also easy to imagine, as Shields (1993: 58–69) demonstrates in his study, that prose commentaries could develop within a lyric tradition as a formerly narrative song evolves toward lyric content and form. As details of plot give way to a more heightened focus on characterization, emotion, or dialogue, an accompanying narrative could furnish the elements of the story no longer evident in the song. In his 1957 study of the Anglo-American ballad *Mary Hamilton*, Tristram Coffin theorizes that ballads undergo such evolution from their original compositions to their eventual attainment of aesthetic "perfection." In the initial stage, a ballad could be seen as an individual's creation, possessing some valuable or lasting elements and a clear plot but also possessing "frills of a poetic style that are too 'sophisticated' for the folk" (313). In the second stage, oral transmission by successive singers "wears away" that which is substandard, creating an aesthetically honed, effective work. In the process, narrative detail is lost, while "emotional core"—or lyric quality—is enhanced, so that a ballad "embodies a basic human reaction to a dramatic situation" (311). In the final "degenerate" stage, the ballad develops into either a full-blown lyric or a nonsense song, its narrative core too "decayed" to balance its emotional

content. Coffin sought in his theory to chart a middle way between the outdated notion of communal creation and the equally confining focus on textual history alone. The strength of his theory lies in its integration of individuals and tradition: both play a part in the evolution of a folk song. And integral to his model is the notion that audiences shape content, if only through how they reperform the songs that they hear.

While Coffin's theory may work for ballad in some cases, the Irish tendency toward narrativization appears less compensatory than compulsory. Shields (1993) makes several points that illustrate the prominence of this interpretive strategy in particular. He recounts cases in which a spoken commentary accompanies a song even when the text of the song (e.g., a ballad) is entirely comprehensible on its own (64). And he notes a case in which his informant felt compelled to improvise a commentary where he did not know one before (72). Such details indicate a view in which song and narrative are seen as inextricably linked, twin embodiments of the Irish ideal of traditional knowledge, *seanchas*.

In contrast to the first two cases presented in this chapter, the scholarly interpretation of *Casadh an tSúgáin* appears, as the above accounts of Hardiman and Hyde indicate, to follow the established folk hermeneutics rather closely. Where *Moarsi fávrrot* and *Jos minun tuttuni tulisi* were subjected to markedly different interpretive regimes by elite scholars, scholars of *Casadh an tSúgáin* appear to have been content to quote or summarize the tales told to them by performers and audiences, embroidering them only somewhat. Perhaps this openness derived from the later era of their studies (the late nineteenth century as opposed to the mid-eighteenth century), or the Irish nationalist interest in celebrating collective wisdom and heritage as an emblem of national worth. Perhaps, too, the readiness of performers to supply such explanations and the seeming aptness of the narratives as keys to understanding otherwise cryptic song details played a role as well. Whatever the case, we find scholarly and artistic renderings of *Casadh an tSúgáin* more in line with the notions of pastiche or reproduction than with more extensive processes of reinscription or co-optation.

William Butler Yeats adapted the song's narrative background as the basis for his short story *The Twisting of the Rope* (1897). From the very beginning of his career, Yeats took a powerful interest in the figure of the Celtic bard, as the title of his first collection of poems—*The Wandering of Oisín and Other Poems*—makes clear (Forkner 1980: 79). In his 1897 short story, the bard becomes embodied in the figure of Red Hanrahan, an incorrigible drinker and womanizer who nonetheless holds a mystical power in his poems. Hanrahan arrives at a

house where he is greeted by the farmer but immediately distrusted by the farmer's wife. The local populace fears Hanrahan's temper and the damage he can do through his vituperative poetry (an allusion to medieval accounts of bardic satires and later continuations of that tradition, as discussed in chapter 6). Hanrahan makes a beeline for the farmer's lovely daughter, Oona, who is soon beguiled by his dancing and fair words, as he recounts for her the story of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna (see chap. 2). After more of Hanrahan's words of romance and his recitation of a fine love lyric, Oona is completely taken in. As if to answer the incompleteness of the typical narrative explanation, Yeats has Oona's vexed mother and her friend enunciate the reason for the clever ruse that will finally rid them of the bard:

Oona's mother was crying, and she said, "He has put an enchantment on Oona. Can we not get the men to put him out of the house?"

"That is one thing you cannot do," said the other woman, "for he is a poet of the Gael, and you know well if you would put a poet of the Gael out of the house, he will put a curse on you that would wither the corn in the fields and dry up the milk of the cows, if it had to hang in the air seven years." (Yeats [1897] 1980: 79)

Fearing this supernatural repercussion—which appears to hold only if the poet is bodily expelled from the house rather than stepping outside of his own accord—the women hatch the hay-rope ploy. The entire household plays along as the farmwife asks Hanrahan for help in twisting a rope to repair some thatch on the farm's haystack. Wishing to further impress his Oona, Hanrahan twists his rope prodigiously until he finally crosses the threshold. The farmwife slams the door in his face as thanks. Yeats writes:

He sat down on a big stone, and he began swinging his right arm and singing slowly to himself, the way he did always to hearten himself when every other thing failed him. And whether it was that time or another time he made the song that is called to this day "The Twisting of the Rope," and that begins "What was the dead cat that put me in this place," is not known. (81)

In the end, Yeats depicts Hanrahan resisting the advances of the queen of the fairies at Slieve Echtge, a sign of his high intrinsic worth but also fated ill luck in his dealings with human women.

Yeats's rendering depicts the bard as a good deal more mystical and serious than he appears in the narrative explanations quoted above. Nonetheless, it is clear that Yeats relies on the folk tradition for the core of his story. His portrayal of the duped suitor as a powerful poet parallels the personalizing tendency of the fiddler Micky Doherty to see the suitor as a fiddler: that is, Yeats's story uses the character and narrative to aggrandize his own calling as a poet. In this way, Yeats seems to elide folk and elite interests into a single interpretive community, a single tradition: an act that itself had profound implications not only for the study of Irish folklore but also for the political and cultural aspirations of the Irish nationalists.

This program of embracing Irish folk tradition, even among Anglo-Irish intellectuals who may have had little prior knowledge of these materials, came to a head in the works of Yeats, Hyde, and Lady Gregory and the founding of the Abbey Theatre. It was in the interest of creating the new theater's first play that Hyde—later president of the Republic of Ireland—read and adapted Yeats's story into his own *Casadh an tSúgáin* (1901). In Hyde's play, Hanrahan and Oona are joined by a jealous suitor, Sheumas O'Heran, who helps the farmwife (Maurya) and her friend to carry out their plan against Hanrahan. Maurya's husband, on the other hand, is now dead, as she explains. In fact, the old bond of friendship between the husband and Hanrahan is what has drawn the poet back to the locale. Drawing in part on stray details from other versions of the song *Casadh an tSúgáin*, Maurya declares (in Lady Gregory's translation):

He was a schoolmaster down in Connacht; but he used to have every trick worse than another; ever making songs he used to be, and drinking whiskey and setting quarrels afoot among the neighbours with his share of talk. They say there isn't a woman in the five provinces that he wouldn't deceive. He is worse than Donal na Greina long ago. But the end of the story is that the priest routed him out of the parish altogether; he got another place then, and followed on at the same tricks until he was routed out again, and another again with it. Now he has neither place nor house nor anything, but he to be going the country, making songs and getting a night's lodging from the people; nobody will refuse him, because they are afraid of him. He's a great poet, and maybe he'd make a rann [doggerel] on you that would stick to you for ever, if you were to anger him. (Hyde [1901] 1903: 204–5)



Hanrahan and Oona perform an extended poetic dialogue full of elaborate compliments for each other (and drawn from other lyric songs Hyde had collected), while the frustrated Sheumas and Maurya look on. In the end, however, Hanrahan falls for the trick, walks through the doorway and is shut out as a result. Oona is distressed, but will feel better tomorrow, all agree, once the poet's spell has worn off. As with Yeats's version, then, Hyde's play adds details to fill out the story, yet it introduces relatively little that lies outside of either the song text or the usual narrative explanations. Significantly, however, as in Yeats's rendering, the song itself is not included in the play: narrative, melody, and song text can seemingly all be simultaneously invoked by mention of any one of the three.

#### TOWARD A RECEPTIONALIST APPROACH TO FOLK LYRIC

As the three cases discussed above amply illustrate, lyric interpretation varies considerably from culture to culture, while relying ultimately on a limited number of interpretive axes. Norms exist within communities as to which axis of interpretation takes precedence and how the axes interrelate. A knowledgeable audience learns how to interpret a lyric properly within its culture just as it learns how to appraise the song's outward form and verbal or musical details. In a certain sense, all lyrics are what Shields (1991) refers to as *chantefables*: complex works that encompass both a fixed text and performance style and a more nebulous background and meaning that accompanies the song. The exact content of this background follows traditions within the community that performs and values the lyric.

The approach to the lyric presented here draws on the research findings of many scholars. On a certain basic level, it relies on the structuralist explorations of scholars of the 1970s and after who sought to uncover the stable, predictable elements of verbal art. Aili Nenola (1974) offers a Proppian analysis of elements in Ingrian wedding laments, and Vaira Vikis-Freiburgs (1989) analyzes Latvian lyrics to discover their formula types. Lauri Harvilahti's (1992) study of generative formulas within the Ingrian lyric tradition demonstrates the ways in which recurrent structures can give rise to new structures in the same vein. Further structural studies present typologies of depicted situations and speakers in the songs (Krnjevič 1991; Propp 1993) and investigate the possible relation between

the lyric's speaker and its probable composer (Bragg 1993). Formal characteristics, such as the use of first-person pronouns, have also received careful and enlightening examination (e.g., Harvilahti 1992; Timonen 1989). While these studies focus primarily on outward form or textual logic of the performed lyric rather than delve into its interpretive apparatus, they demonstrate cogently the orderly and coherent manner in which folklore is constructed and handled within living communities. If a song's very structure is shaped by tradition—as these studies clearly indicate—then we should not find it surprising to discover that its interpretations are likewise determined by traditional norms.

This structuralist approach can be combined with an earlier scholarly interest in function, a topic that brings the relations of performer, folklore, and audience into sharp focus. Functionalist scholars of the twentieth century maintained that folklore operates in the context of performer-audience interactions, in which both sides may use the item of folklore to exert control or influence over the other. Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio (1935), Lauri Honko (1963, 1974), and Aili Nenola (1974, 1982), for instance, contribute valuable perspectives on the performance and functions of lyrics within Finnish, Karelian, and Ingrian communities. From this perspective, it is not hard to arrive at the idea that audiences possess interpretive norms for evaluating folkloric performances, norms that help to determine their responses and shape the roles that such performances could play. The current study seeks to chart more particularly the shared aesthetic and hermeneutic values that help performer and audience to make sense of each other and of their lyrics as they perform them.

The attention to the meaningfulness of lyrics in performers' personal lives signaled by a number of researchers (e.g., Abrahams 1970; Porter 1976; Pentikäinen 1978; Renwick 1980; Timonen 1989, 1990; Ilomäki 1990) provides a further valuable foundation for a broader receptionalist approach to lyric meaning. Given that a performer is in a very real sense also an audience member, one who expresses an evaluation of a song simply by performing it, such a focus brings to light wider issues of interpretation and hermeneutics. Thus, such examinations not only highlight the personalizing interpretations of the associative axis, they also open the door to the study of interpretation in general, as I show. These folkloristic works join a vein of analysis initiated earlier in medieval studies, for example, Dorothy Whitelock's perceptive *The Audience of Beowulf* (1951). Whitelock sought to use the medieval text as a key to making judgments regarding the creator of the poem and his audience. Although later scholars (e.g., Baum 1960)

took issue with Whitelock's conclusions, the notion of reconstructing audience knowledge became an accepted part of medieval scholarship.

These various strands of ethnographic inquiry have been united powerfully in the works of John Miles Foley, a folklorist, classicist, and medievalist who has written a broad range of studies in the area of oral tradition. In his seminal work, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (1991), Foley develops a set of terms and methods that make the receptionist study of oral tradition possible. While looking at the structurally stable formal elements of oral epic traditions—recurrent formulas and story patterns, memorable characters around whom certain kinds of narratives cluster, and so on—Foley recognizes a rich stock of associations or understandings that an audience may bring to bear on a given song's content or devices. The very mention of a name within a song, or the use of a typical turn of phrase, may set off a process of association in the minds of knowledgeable audience members that deepens and adds nuance to the performance. Foley terms this set of interpretive resources *immanence* and its application to any particular instance of song *traditional referentiality*. By attending to aspects of meaning that may be triggered by song content but that ultimately reside in the audience's competence in receiving the song, Foley's work calls for serious attention to the question of how one should "read an oral poem," a notion he explores in a more recent study of that title (2002).

While Foley's overarching theories provide an ideal foundation for my study, the work of scholars engaged in the analysis of particular song traditions have proved invaluable for examining lyric interpretation in northern Europe. Especially noteworthy in this respect are the fine works of Hugh Shields (1981, 1991, 1993) and Senni Timonen's (2004) comprehensive study of lyrics in the Kalevala meter. Shields documents with great precision and interest the hermeneutic practices of Irish lyric tradition, providing a framework that can be compared fruitfully with the song traditions of other areas. Timonen examines in detail the layers of personal and communal meaning associated with lyric songs in Karelia and Ingria, furnishing insights and examples that have greatly enriched this study. While my work differs from these in its comparative perspective, it relies on the culture-specific studies of earlier scholars in the area of folklore studies, ethnomusicology, and medieval studies. With these various studies in hand, we are able to examine lyrics cross-culturally from the perspective of folk reception, that is, to examine the sophisticated and nuanced ways in which traditional audiences in northern Europe have made sense of traditional songs.

The chapters that follow, then, draw on this rich tradition of research to explore lyric interpretation in a variety of places and times. Each chapter, just as each case above, illuminates different aspects of the generic, associative, and situational axes of interpretation, thereby underscoring the specificity of interpretive traditions in various cultures. At the same time, the perspectives together suggest a range of choices within which lyric interpretation may occur, sketching a delimited field of meaning-making common to northern Europe lyric traditions in general.

Chapter 2 looks at lyric songs, in particular, formal laments, as they appear in medieval manuscripts containing prose or epic poetry. I argue that the relations of these lyric “interludes” and their surrounding narratives act as models of norms for lyric interpretation existing in the medieval era. Interestingly, despite outward similarities in both the laments and the kinds of heroic narrative in which they are found from culture to culture, these interpretive norms seem to vary, with strongly narrativized lyric hermeneutics in medieval Scandinavian and Irish texts but more proverbialized understandings in Old English. Further, by looking transhistorically at Irish materials, we are also able to gauge the degree to which such lyrics and their associated narratives could exist independent of one another. Rather than see lament and narrative as integrally and inextricably linked, in other words, we find that the two elements could become uncoupled over time, with new lyric interludes or new narrative contexts substituted in response to changes in the form or content of the surviving element. What this situation suggests is the existence of norms of interpretation that helped medieval compilers and their audiences to *expect* varying kinds of linkages between lyric and narrative. The relation endured, while the specific components linked in the relation could change.

Chapter 3 looks at lyrics of varying kinds that contain second-person address forms, what I have termed *invocation*. Looking at the interpretation of such typically invocational lyric genres as the Sámi *joik*, I survey their complex meanings and mechanisms. I also compare them to other types of vocal communications in northern European tradition, for example, stylized calls used by Scandinavian and Karelian herders to communicate over long distances and ubiquitous magical charms intended to compel entities to behave in ways advantageous to the human performer or a client. Mourning laments addressed to the deceased and wedding songs addressed to bride, groom, or other family members are also discussed. Finally, the Scottish *piobaireachd* is compared to *joik*. Here we find again a highly lyrical, emotive variety of invocation but one

understood typically via a narrativized rather than a proverbialized interpretation. Together, the various kinds of invocational lyric explored in this chapter shed light on the nuances of direct address as an aesthetic choice, communicative device, and mystical act.

Chapter 4 draws on the observations of the previous chapter to examine a body of lyric songs related directly to Christianity in northern Europe. The religious lyric, which diffused into northern Europe from the south along with the Christian faith itself, possessed its own complex norms for interpretation. In early medieval hymns, this hermeneutic is largely narrativized or attributional, but gradually more proverbialized interpretations come to dominate. The individual experience, as well as the individual entreaty, is couched in the collective through the shaping words and images of the lyric. Following the arguments of medievalists in the well-documented area of the English religious lyric, I suggest that these norms of interpretation diffused into secular lyrics as well, creating new possibilities and new expectations within the secular song traditions of the region. The rich cross-fertilization between religious and secular lyric in late medieval music is surveyed as a measure of the spread of both aesthetic form and interpretive norms in musical traditions.

Chapter 5 examines interpretation along the generic axis. I argue that the highly predictable formal and thematic features of medieval and postmedieval secular lyric—its recurrent images, standardized descriptions, and stereotyped speaker personae—could actually constitute a powerful and effective interpretive framework in which to locate any given performance or version of a song. I look for the ways in which audiences of the Elizabethan era were expected to receive and interpret such lyrics by examining the musical interludes and their functions in the plays of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare uses characters' attitudes toward lyric songs as a key means of shedding light on their personalities, foibles, and convictions. His lyrics, some already familiar to his audience from contemporary song culture, others apparently composed specifically for the play, set the tone for scenes and advance the narrative in certain directions. In so doing, I argue, Shakespeare provides both positive and negative models for how persons *ought* to relate to lyric songs in the estimation of a playwright who made his living playing to the aesthetic and emotional tastes of his audiences.

Chapter 6 examines figures of third-person attribution from the medieval down to the early modern era in a range of northern European cultures. Medieval bard figures such as the Welsh Taliesin or Dafydd ap Gwilym or the Irish mad Suibhne are compared to the Swedish troubadour Carl Michael Bellman,

the Irish harper Toirdhealbhach Ó Cearbhalláin (Carolan), the Irish fiddler Antoine Ó Reachtabhraigh (Raftery), and the Finnish kantele player Kreetta Haapasalo. The discussion explores how each of these figures used interpretive norms within their respective musical traditions to maintain and propel their careers, while their audiences drew on interpretive norms of attribution to comprehend and appreciate their songs. As in the previous chapter, we find stylization here not as a source of falsity or inferior quality but rather as a powerful and effective means of evoking meaning in a performer-audience situation unfolding in briefer encounters and tied to the exchange of hospitality or remuneration.

Finally, chapter 7 allows us to return to the issue of personalization and its relation to other kinds of interpretation in the performance and experience of lyric songs. By looking at the songs of one traditional singer, Michael Lyne of Tandragee, West Meath, Ireland, and the ways he and his wife, Lizzy, discuss his songs, I am able to suggest some of the rich complexities of personalization as a process in lyric interpretation. Personal meanings underscore certain aspects of a song and realign some of its details, sometimes to the point of contradicting the song's text. While intensely personal, these meanings are not necessarily private, nor are they necessarily fleeting or temporary. Rather, they may act as a foundation from which all other aspects of the song's meanings are viewed, justifications for the hard work of building, maintaining, and performing a repertoire of songs over time.

In a field that has privileged narrative genres—epic, ballad, legend, tale—the question of interpretation of non-narrative genres offers interesting alternative avenues for the exploration of the workings of folklore in daily life. Lyric songs in northern Europe are no simple matter, even if their outward form sometimes makes claims for simplicity, transparency, and spontaneity. In fact, as I hope the following chapters demonstrate, lyric songs possess their own complex rules not only for composition and performance but also for interpretation, rules that competent performers and audiences alike acquire as they become familiar with the genre. These traditions, these norms for receiving and evaluating lyric songs, operate as ambient systems of meaning, common ground from which individual performances arise and through which each individual performance is understood. Ranging from the medieval to the modern, and from Ingrian to Irish, the lyrics surveyed in this study serve as illustrations of a wider reality: the complexity and nuance of meaning-making in oral tradition.