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Part I

Topics and Issues in Charms Studies
1

The Charmer’s Body and Behaviour as a Window Onto Early Modern Selfhood

Laura Stark

Some years ago, in researching images of the human body in traditional Finnish magic, I came across the following text recorded in northern Finland from a male sorcerer born in 1835. This text gave me my first glimpse into the dark side of life in traditional rural Finland, one rarely portrayed in folkloristic and ethnological research:

If someone commits a terrible wrong against me, then I seize an iron rod and run into the forest, to the sort of place which is half peat bog and half dry land, to the boundary between them. Then I make a hole in the ground with the iron rod and put a live frog in the hole, cover it with peat and step on it three times with my left foot and say:

Te maassaa asuvaiset ja maanhaltiat, You who live in the ground, Tarttukaa tuota perkeleen roistoa Seize that devil’s villain and kivuttamaan, make him suffer, Niinkun tuo sammakko kituu tuolla! Just as that frog suffers!

One should have terrible luonto [=inner supernatural force], anger, and clenched teeth when one does this. Then illness and pain come to the other person. So that they do not see another day of health. At times they are racked with aches in their head, arms and legs, at times with sharp pains in their chest (pistos). Even a person who can set the dead and underground beings in motion cannot cure him. Only the person who has bewitched him using the earth can cure him.

This account is just one of thousands of descriptions of magical harm dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although usually associated with the period of the witchcraft trials (sixteenth–eighteenth centuries), magic continued to live a robust life some two hundred years later, as recent research on Britain, Scandinavia, and Continental Europe has emphasized (e.g. Davies 1999; de Blécourt 1999; Gijswijt-Hofstra 1999). Nearly all rural nineteenth-century Finnish villages appear to have contained witches, healers and quarrelsome neighbors who believed they were able to cause each other magical harm. In some parts of rural Finland people continued to use magic rites to bring harm to their enemies as late as the 1950s (see Stark 2006: 47–9).

Descriptions of magic and sorcery housed in the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives in Helsinki provide rare glimpses into the kinds of social pressures and tensions people experienced in their everyday lives. They also serve as windows onto the nature of early modern personhood. The envy and vindictiveness, fears of magical harm bordering on paranoia, and lack of ability to identity with others’ suffering which are all evident from these descriptions would appear to most twenty-first-century Europeans as irrational and even pathological. This is because these are no longer the means of achieving the rational long-term aims held by most modern individuals. Yet any scrutiny of what has constituted reasonable behavior in other historical periods must take into account cultural-specific notions of self and agency. How individuals define themselves and what they are seen to be entitled to, as well as whatever culturally constitutes the ‘good life’ will determine what sort of behavior is viewed as rational versus irrational.

Behaviors and beliefs linked to magic did not disappear from daily life simply because people were educated in new scientific belief systems or materialist modes of thought. It was not simply a mentality or world view that changed, but the very conditions and circumstances which made magic a reasonable strategy in nineteenth-century social life. When these conditions changed, so did modes of thought and experience.

From contemporary reports of persons living in the nineteenth-century countryside, it appears that rural life was characterized above all by poverty, endless toil, and high personal risk. Nineteenth-century rural Finns lived in communities where hunger and disease were common, and there were few formal social institutions to guarantee safety and well-being. Health care was usually unavailable and poor relief too ineffective to prevent mass starvation in times of famine. Rural inhabitants had very little material protection from the harsh natural environment: if they were landowners, they possessed only the farm and its fields carved
from the forest through human labour, as well as the minimal technologies of knife, axe, scythe, and horse-drawn plough which extended the body’s capabilities. The landless population possessed even less. Severe poverty meant that in many cases there was a sense of competition, rather than cooperation, among neighbours. Policemen were few, criminal detectives unknown, and the courts could not always compel persons to appear before them. As a result, vandalism, theft, assault, fraud and slander often went unpunished and left victims feeling helpless in the face of their neighbors’ malice.

It is no surprise, then, that descriptions of magic recorded in rural Finland paint a vivid picture of persons who perceived themselves to be vulnerable and unprotected. In modern society, the individual is protected by laws, practices and institutions which safeguard personal boundaries. These include laws against fraud, defamation, slander, assault, battery, intimidation, violation of privacy, and more recently in some Western societies, laws against sexual harassment, stalking, and the physical punishment of children. Early modern individuals, by contrast, had to protect themselves from threats, and magic provided one means of doing this. Those who spread the word that they were magically powerful could sleep more soundly at night believing that because of their dangerous reputations, they were safer from thieves, vandals and other evil-doers.

The lack of institutional protections experienced by rural inhabitants also seems to have led to a perception of the outside world as containing countless dangers waiting attack the human body. The body was not depicted as separate from its surroundings, but as extremely porous, its boundaries weak and fuzzy. Ordinary persons were expected to go to great lengths to protect themselves from magical harm, hostility, and the curses of others. If they suspected that acts of magical harm had already been carried out against them, they hastened to perform counter-sorcery. Even children learned from a young age the importance of guarding themselves against the envy of others by participating in the counter-measures carried out by their parents (Stark 2006: 211–13).

Tietäjä: specialist in magical protection

The person whose behavior best expresses this ideal of self-protection was the tietäjä (literally, ‘one who knows’). The tietäjä was a specialist in magic – including sorcery, healing and divination, and was assumed to have secret knowledge others did not possess. Although the majority
of tietäjäs appear to have been men, some were also women, particularly in the northern areas of Finland.

Minor witches and household healers were abundant in early modern Finland, but it was the tietäjäs who possessed the most elaborate knowledge regarding the structure of the supernatural and magical worlds. The tietäjä was seen to have the ability to divine the source of illness through dreams, to staunch the flow of blood from a wound, to force thieves to return stolen goods, to battle illness-agents and to send dangerous animals back to the witches who had originally summoned them to attack humans or livestock. Tietäjäs were thus the highest level of professionals versed in knowledge of folk illness and supranormal entities. It was they who preserved, in their enormous repertoires of rites and Kalevala-metre charms, knowledge which was partly the legacy of a shamanistic past. The tietäjä institution had inherited many features of Eurasian shamanism including altered states of consciousness and the use of helper-spirits and animal spirits. Tietäjäs also possessed knowledge of the illness-agent’s true origin and essence, of the topography of the other world, and of which supranormal beings to call upon for assistance (see Siikala 2002: 86–90, 178–234). Unlike shamans, however, tietäjäs did not need to journey to the worlds of the spirits or the dead in order to communicate with them. Tietäjäs instead recited lengthy incantations to invoke, threaten or placate supernatural entities such as the dead, nature spirits, illness-demons, and various deities both Christian and pre-Christian.

The tietäjä’s authority derived from his ability to convince others of his superior knowledge. He did this through his feats of memory in reciting lengthy incantations, his ritual performance technique, his use of secrecy and possession of mysterious objects such as human skulls, parts of animals and even so-called ‘black Bibles’, which were thought to contain black pages with white print, or to be written with unfamiliar characters. The authority of tietäjäs in magic rituals was thus based in part on a sense of mystery: tietäjäs emphasized their possession of secret knowledge and used actions and objects which were often baffling and opaque to participants.

In nineteenth-century Finnish rural communities, the use of magic functioned to create a sense of security and protect personal boundaries. Constant vigilance and self-protection against magical and supernatural harm were a way of life for many rural inhabitants, but tietäjäs took this behavior to new extremes. When tietäjäs drove illness-agents from the bodies of suffering individuals and performed counter-sorcery against other magic-workers, they were often in a state of agitated excitation.
or frenzied anger. When they wished to paint a picture of themselves as quick to defend any encroachment upon their personal boundaries, tietäjäs became enraged and displayed this rage for all to see. Anger was a cultural performance acted out in order to emphasize the performer’s readiness to take action against any perceived threats.

In his work *Mythologia Fennica* (1786), Christfrid Ganander depicted the state of the ecstatic sorcerer as follows: ‘Nobody dares to disturb these masters who know everything, for they become enraged, gnash their teeth, their hair stands on end, in their frenzy they leap into the air, mumble some words, stamp their feet and behave totally as if in a fit of rage, for which reason they are called “men of frenzy” (intomies)’ (in Siikala 2002: 243). A more detailed description can be found from the early nineteenth-century writings of folklore collector and compiler of the *Kalevala*, Elias Lönnrot: ‘the tietäjä 1) becomes enraged, 2) his speech becomes loud and frenzied, 3) he foams at the mouth, 4) gnashes his teeth, 5) his hair stands on end, 6) his eyes widen, 7) he knits his brows, 8) he spits often, 9) his body contorts, 10) he stamps his feet, 11) jumps up and down on the floor, and 12) makes many other gestures’ (ibid. 2002: 244). Similar descriptions were still being recorded from northern and eastern Finland as late as the 1930s. In 1921, a man from rural Eastern Finland wrote down the following written recollection of an event which took place in his childhood. In it, he depicts the ecstatic frenzy of a sorcerer who bathed his family in order to release them from the magical harm perpetrated by an unknown witch:

... And so the sauna was heated and the entire group of us, from the father of the family to the smallest child, went to the sauna with the sorcerer. There the demon-frightener first bathed us, slapping each of one of us separately with the sauna whisk made of birch leaves, and at the same time reciting an incantation so that he foamed at the mouth. Then he put each of us three times through a hoop fashioned from the blades of three scythes, first by lowering the hoop over each of us from head to foot two times, and then one time from bottom to top. While doing this trick, the sorcerer was in an extremely agitated state the entire time, but that was still nothing compared to what happened next. Now, you see, the sorcerer encircled each of our heads with a hunting knife, two times clockwise and one time counterclockwise, and then in a fit of frenzied rage, hurled the knife into the sauna whisk lying on the floor, and then, holding the knife, flung the whisk out of the sauna window and against the cooking hut so that the wall of the cooking hut reverberated. Apparently in this way he flung
out our tormentor, supposedly pierced to the core by the knife, thus sending the dog to its own home to bite and gnaw the person who had ‘broken’ us . . .

A tietäjä’s power or magical force was seen to come from his wrath, and fear of that wrath ensured that few deliberately dared to offend him. One story tells of a farmhand who, despite warnings from onlookers, vandalized a bird-trap set by an elderly tietäjä. The narrator, himself the famous tietäjä Pekka Tuovinen, recounts: ‘at this the old man became furious. And later, when the farmhand went insane for the rest of his life and the old man was asked to grant mercy, he said, “I became too angry, he cannot be saved”’. In another account, a man who verbally offended the tietäjä known as ‘Doctor Hirvonen’ (=Juho Hirvonen, 1866–1930) died of a haemorrhage the same night: ‘Doctor Hirvonen said of himself that the person at whom he became angry would die right away.’

**Steeling the self against magical harm: bodily ‘hardness’**

In addition to cultivating reputations for being quick to react aggressively in the face of danger, tietäjäs created imagined zones of magical invulnerability around the self. They did this by invoking supernatural protection when reciting incantations. In the incantation below, a tietäjä from Archangel Karelia asks water spirits for protective armour against malicious magic-workers living in his vicinity:

... Anna mulle rauta takki, ... Give to me an iron coat,  
Rauta takki, rauta lakki, Iron coat, iron cap,  
Rauta hattu hartijoille, Iron mantle for my shoulders,  
Rauta kihtthahat käteen, Iron mittens for my hands,  
Rauta saappahat jalkoin, Iron boots for my feet,  
Joilla astun hiien maita, With which I shall enter the Hiisi’s lands,  
Maita lemmon leyhyttelen, Move about in Evil’s realm,  
Ettei pysty noijan nuolet So that the sorcerer’s arrows will not penetrate,  
Eikä velhon veitsirauvat, Nor the wizard’s knives,  
Ei asehet ampumiehen Nor the shooter’s weapons,  
Eikä tietäjän teräkset. Nor the tietäjä’s blades.  
(SKVR I4:2. Kiimasjärvi. 1888. Meriläinen 52 – Risto Nikitin)

It was believed that one of the most important qualities that enabled tietäjäs to triumph in struggles against harmful forces and agents was a ‘hard’ or ‘strong’ luonto. The term luonto referred to an inborn
supernatural force used to heal, harm, or make magic rites more effective. It was thought that a tietäjä possessed a hard luonto if he had been born with teeth. Since teeth are the hardest part of the human body, the tietäjä’s possession of teeth from birth was a sign of the innate ‘hardness’ of his being. Numerous accounts also describe how elderly tietäjäs needed to have a full set of teeth in order to perform magic. When they lost their teeth, it was believed that they had also lost their supernatural powers:12

Whoever has a full set of teeth can work magic, and otherwise he should be “in all ways strong and powerful in his being”, so that the only thing that can cut him is a bullet.

(Kuusamo. 1938. Maija Juvas 486 – A certain old man, 70 years old)

Tietäjäs were also thought to have the ability to physically ‘harden’ their bodies in order to withstand the blows of whips and sticks. For instance, it was told of Vagrant-Eeva, a witch from Satakunta, that she could ‘make herself so that she felt nothing, even if she were struck with an axe …’.13 Behind beliefs in the tietäjä’s ability to harden his or her body against whips lay a deeper cultural fascination with persons whose bodies were reported to be hard or invulnerable to the heat of fire, freezing temperatures and even the sharpness of metal objects applied to their skin.14 There appears to have been no shortage of such persons in the late nineteenth- and even early twentieth-century countryside, and particularly from Southwestern Finland come reports of locals who walked barefoot on the sharp edges of scythes, or allowed others to strike them with hard objects. It was not uncommon for such persons to have performed feats demonstrating their bodily hardness in front of onlookers who might pay a small fee to watch the spectacle.

The means by which tietäjäs and others ‘hardened’ their bodies varied, but one common method was to keep in one’s mouth a bullet which had killed a person or animal, or to wear a shirt in which a corpse had been buried (which required digging up the corpse).15 As one informant from Western Finland described,

Soldier Alatt had been in the 1808–1809 war … Alatt had said that in the war he had brushed handfuls of bullets off his chest when they didn’t penetrate his skin. He had sacrificed himself to the cemetery. Before he went off to war he had dug up a consecrated corpse from the cemetery. He took off its shirt and wore it when going off to battle. Then the bullets didn’t penetrate him …

(Länsi-Teisko. 1938. K.H. Färm KT 44:18)
Another man, born in 1842 in Eastern Finland, reported having heard from his grandfather, who was a famous tietäjä, how to make oneself hard before leaving for war. According to the grandfather,

When leaving for war, one takes a shirt from a buried corpse and exchanges it for one’s own, a corpse which has died honorably and has been buried, and is older than the person exchanging shirts. Then, when one comes to the battlefield, one says:

Veijon ukko, kultahelma, Old man, friend, golden-hem,
Vettä vänkillä vetäse, Draw water with all your might,
Ettei ruutit rupsahaisi, So that gunpowder will not blast,
Pahat jauhot paukahaisi, The evil powder will not boom,
Ettei lyijy miestä löisi, So that lead will not strike this man,
Tinapalli paiskovaisi! ... The ball of tin will not hit! ...

Then the bullets will not penetrate, even if one is shot at all day long, they will go through other clothes, but not the shirt. If one wears a second shirt over the first, then the bullets will collect inside it [above the belt]. They should be put aside for safekeeping; they are needed when making salve for animals suffering from bloating or witches’ shot: when you scrape bits of them into water, then nothing more is needed than to give [the animal] that water.

(SKVR XII2:7926. Suomussalmi. 1888 – Jeremias Seppänen, 46 years old. Heard from his grandfather ... The narrator had seen these bullets still in his father’s keeping ...)

**Reputations for magical harm**

In an age before law enforcement, a reputation for revenge and dangerous sorcery discouraged others from attempting to cheat, harm or steal from the tietäjä or his property:

In former times lumber was transported to the city of Pori. When they reached their lodgings, the men transporting the lumber took their belongings inside so they would be safe from thieves. But the tietäjä Tilli [=Nikolai Lamminsivu, 1863–1948] left his mittens on top of the load. Nobody dared to touch Tilli’s belongings ...

Many tietäjäs strove to draw a boundary of untouchability around themselves by cultivating reputations as persons not to be trifled with. Informants from various regions of Finland remarked on local tietäjäs as follows: ‘Tilli is a mighty sorcerer, with whom it does not pay to fool around’;\textsuperscript{16} ‘… with Hiltunen there was no sense in being cheeky’;\textsuperscript{17} ‘it wasn’t a good idea to make Oskar angry.’\textsuperscript{18} Some magic-workers were even said to have boasted with pride – and without remorse – how their sorcery had brought injury, illness or death to their victims:

The girl from Pannula farm went blind because she called me a thief. A piece of straw happened to go into her eye and when she went from the fields into the farmhouse, she had already lost her sight. She injured her other eye on a bundle of leaf-fodder and it went blind too. That’s what happened, when she accused me.

(Perho. 1930. Samuli Paulaharju b)14575 – Maija Sivula, old woman cottager, tietäjä, 83 years old)

\ldots My father had already been married for twenty years or so, I myself was seventeen, the third child of ten. I went with my father to the remote log-floating site near Haapavaara farm where he worked, and I was there for a week and lived at Haapavaara farm. Tiina [Lyhykäinen] was the mistress in charge of the farm, for she had married a man from somewhere on the Russian side of the border. As a life companion he didn’t turn out to be much to write home about. Then Tiina told me the story of her youth and how she had taken revenge on my aunt, since my aunt had not let my father marry her. My aunt had twelve children, of which only three girls were left. Many of the children had drowned and all the boys had died, and my aunt’s husband had drowned. Tiina said that it was because of her that this had happened to my aunt’s family and said that she had carried out sorcery so that it would happen in precisely that way. After she said this, she added: “Mark my words, your aunt herself will die by drowning.” Two years went by and then my aunt, while out fishing on Midsummer’s Eve, fell into the water and drowned. Only then did I realize what dreadful things could be concealed in that simple, ordinary person’s story.


Impoverished and itinerant members of the community, both men and women, were also able to arouse fear and respect in others by presenting themselves as quick to take offence, telling stories of their frightening
feats of sorcery, and carrying around ‘magic’ bundles and pouches. A man from Eastern Finland who wrote to the Finnish Literature Society in the 1920s described the typical contents of such magic pouches as: ‘small bones, three snake heads obtained in spring before St. George’s Day, a snake’s assembly stone,19 snakes’ skin, teeth and claws of a bear, bear grease, the herb asafoetida, arsenic, incense, and Ukko’s soil.’20 He also said of such persons: ‘A magic worker (welho) who travelled about with a magic pouch was terribly dangerous and terrible to look upon as well. It wasn’t good for anyone to make him angry, rather, he was someone to be flattered and fawned over.’21 Another narrator from South Savo recalled an elderly beggar who visited his childhood home at the end of the 1870s: ‘she had been married to four men and then remained a widow and roamed about, begging and telling the most frightening tales of her magical abilities, so that farm mistresses, in their fear, put all kinds of things in her begging-sack . . .’.22 A third account from Ostrobothnia tells a similar story:

I remember how dreadfully afraid we were of the sorceress named Pykly. I was a small girl on my home farm of Emoniemi. It was a completely different time than now, there were no railroads, nor anything else that was modern. The old beliefs were still alive. Every once in a while our home farm was visited by a tiny, old, extremely dark-complexioned woman with a bundle in her hand. She was the dreaded sorceress Pykly, with her magic objects in her bundle. “Pykly is coming”, it was said, “now children, behave.” Cold shivers ran up and down my body. I would have wanted to run away, but there was nothing to do but remain in the farmhouse and be good, so that Pykly wouldn’t work her magic. The adults tried to curry favour when dealing with Pykly. She was fed and given drink and gifts. Pykly was a malicious old woman, from whose brown face blazed a pair of keen black eyes. And she was capricious and quick to anger. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when she left the farm. Many people used Pykly’s “services” during their lifetime. Pykly was in fact a capable sorceress, so it was said.

(Valtimo<Pyhäjärvi. 1955. Siiri Oulasmaa 3116 – Lempi Suurkoski)

Making the self inviolable

In nineteenth-century rural Finland, individuals had to take steps to ensure that other persons did not violate the boundaries of their body and self. Supernatural attacks on enemies, the cultural performance of
anger, self-hardening and supernatural self-protection against attacks
were practices which promoted a sense of agency, autonomy and invio-
lability. From the perspective of our modern society, it may be difficult
to understand why individuals strove to display their vindictiveness and
pride in causing others’ suffering. Yet if nothing outside the self guaran-
tees individual rights, then the individual must contain within himself
the means to secure these rights, and the result is a very different sort
of self.

From the early modern perspective, disorder and threat were almost
never located within the individual. The illnesses cured by tietäjä in
nineteenth-century Finland were seen to come primarily from some
external alien essence intruding into the body, whether a curse, a witch’s
arrow, or supernatural ‘contagion’ from the forest, water, or cemetery.23
By contrast, social and cultural historians have emphasized that as
European societies were transformed by modernization and industrial-
ization, the focus of people's anxieties shifted to an internal world of
self-awareness. Individuals underwent an ‘introspective turn’ toward a
mental and emotional landscape that had never been experienced before
in the same way. This ‘interior space’ of the psyche was now viewed as
the dark realm which threatened social and individual well-being. In
the pre-modern era, evil spirits were thought to reside in external real-
ity. With the rise of Freudian psychoanalysis, however, the dark corners
of the subconscious came to be seen as the source of mysterious distur-
bances in self and society. Disorder in the modern self is conceived as
a problem in the internal organization of the personality and behavior,
and Western individuals in the modern era have come to fear the inner
workings of their minds: their emotions, desires and impulses. This is
because they are expected to internalize an unprecedented amount of
physical and mental control (e.g. Elias 1978; Foucault 1977; Spieren-
burg 1991). Modern persons must submit themselves to the regimens of
educational institutions which, it is hoped, will instill in them modern
social conventions to such a degree that the suppression of desires and
impulses becomes automatic and unconscious.

We should not, however, assume that just because early modern per-
sons did not exhibit our familiar forms of self-control in their behaviors,
that they failed to internalize any self-controls at all. Their self-discipline,
internalized at a young age, was just as rigorous as ours, but its attention
was focused in the opposite direction: in the older rural culture, individu-
als did not direct their attention inward to their psyche but rather
concentrated on the outer boundaries of the self and body. Individuals
were forced to maintain constant vigilance over the perimeter of
their person in the face of external threats (magical harm, supernatural forces, other people’s anger and envy). They did this by performing magic rites to protect their person, farm and livestock, and by cultivating reputations for magical violence and revenge in order to discourage their enemies from attempting harm in the first place.

The modern Finn is careful not to let uncontrolled behavior escape from the body, whereas his or her great-grandparents would have been more concerned about not letting uncontrolled forces from the outside in. An individual living in Eastern Finland in the nineteenth century, for instance, might find our modern body practices horrifyingly lax and unrestrained. We care little where we dispose of the cuttings of our hair and nails, we stand on thresholds, we turn our backs to the fire in the hearth, and pregnant women and small children walk freely in public without fear of the evil eye. We are unconcerned with the order in which we put on our clothes or with which foot we enter a room, not to mention countless other behaviors whose violation was seen to open oneself to the threat of supernatural harm. In the modern period, the personal protections given to us by a wide range of societal institutions have reduced the experience of violence, risk and unpredictability so prevalent in earlier times, allowing us to turn our attention away from the outside world in order to focus on another kind of vigilance: the monitoring of our internal orderliness, and the repression of our impulsive behavior.

Notes

1. The research upon which this study is based was funded by the Academy of Finland and the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.
2. Finland underwent the processes of modernization relatively late, and during the entire period of industrialization and nation-building (1860–1950), older beliefs and practices continued to survive in rural areas where a significant portion of the population resided. The nineteenth-century rise in Finnish national consciousness, first among the cultural elite and later among the ordinary populace, resulted in popular campaigns to record for posterity the oral–traditional heritage of Finnish speakers. This undertaking was highly successful and resulted in some three million recorded folklore texts, including thousands of descriptions of magic rites.
3. These descriptions were first recorded by educated collectors starting in the 1830s, and from the 1880s onward also by tradition enthusiasts coming from the ranks of the rural population. The latter ‘writing folk’ collectors sent their written recollections and those of their neighbours and kin directly to the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives in Helsinki, where they are still housed today. My analysis in this paper is based on over
1,750 archived memorates and folk narratives recorded from informants throughout Finland, most of who were born between 1850 and 1890.

4. The term *tietäjä* is therefore roughly equivalent to the term ‘cunning folk’ used in early modern England, since according to Owen Davies (2003: viii) the term ‘cunning’ derives from the Anglo-Saxon *cunnan*, meaning ‘to know.’ Like the English cunning-man or -woman, the *tietäjä* was assumed to have secret knowledge others did not possess (cf. ibid.).

5. Over 52,000 variants of Kalevala-metre magic incantations were recorded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the agrarian populations of Finland and neighbouring Karelia. Thirty thousand incantations were published in the 34-volume series *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (Ancient Poems of the Finnish People). For more on Kalevala meter, see Siikala 2002: 32–34; Stark 2006: 464, note 27.


8. When a *tietäjä* performed counter-sorcery to punish the perpetrator of magical harm, it was believed that the magical harm itself (referred to as a ‘dog’) would find its own way back to its sender or ‘master,’ even if this sender had not been identified by the *tietäjä*. The ‘dog’ was thought to attack its master or mistress even more furiously than it had attacked its original victim, causing sudden pain, illness, or even death, according to the *tietäjä*’s instructions.


11. *Hiisi* was another name for the forest spirit, but sometimes had the connotation of ‘evil spirit,’ or ‘devil.’


15. Some *tietäjäs* in the 19th century also worked as gravediggers, and thus had easy access to corpses.


19. Another man from Eastern Finland explained the idea of a snake’s assembly stone as follows: ‘When I was a child the old people told how snakes would gather to hold their general assembly in a fixed place where there was a round, egg-shaped stone. The person who found and took possession of such a snakes’ assembly stone would have a powerful tool for magic.’ (Nilsiä. 1961. Aatto V. Korhonen TK 37:51 – Collector’s father Adolf Korhonen, died 1935).

20. Ukko was the ‘highest god’ in the pre-Christian Finnish pantheon and was associated with thunder (*ukkonen*). According to the narrator, ‘Ukko’s soil is the sort of earth taken with an important person’s knife from under one’s left heel when thunder rumbles for the first time in spring.’ (Kitee. 1921. Pekka Vauhkonen VK 107:1, p. 25).


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