

Fifth International Conference on Finnish Studies in North America,
University of Toronto, May 16-19, 1996.

Toronto was an excellent choice for the venue of this conference, as the city is now the Finnish cultural center in Canada, sporting some eighty registered Finnish organizations. It was run with the expert hand of Börje Vähämäki, Professor of Finnish Studies at the University of Toronto, who had also directed the second one (1980) in the series when he was Professor in Minneapolis. With an unusually late spring in Toronto, the participants could experience a proper northern touch, which then on the final day of the conference blossomed into a "southern peak". Internationality comes in automatically as the continent includes the two countries (Canada and the United States) that have always been the main targets of Finnish emigration. Furthermore, the Finnish Ministry of Education, which co-sponsored the event, was also represented, both at the administrative and professorial levels. Also attending were representatives of the Washington and Ottawa Embassies and the Toronto Consulate, as well as one scholar from Sweden (Umeå) and one from Finland (Åbo Akademi). On the first evening, there was an opening reception, held in a historic and elegant room at University College, University of Toronto, sponsored by the Finnish Embassy in Ottawa and the Finnish Consulate in Toronto. Among those attending this reception were the Chair of Estonian Studies at the University of Toronto, and Hippe Saraste (who teaches Finnish language in the Finnish Studies Programme) together with her husband Jukka-Pekka, conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and among Toronto's most popular (and idolized) cultural figures. At the conference itself, twenty-four papers were presented, and there were four round-table discussions — on translating the literatures of Finland; Finland's new reality – Finland as a multicultural society; the role of Finland-Swedish literature and culture within the discipline of Finnish Studies; and Finnish Studies in North America and the Internet.

The central theme on the language side turned out to be a nice memorial to Robert Austerlitz (died September 9, 1994), with papers exploring Finnish affective vocabulary and Finnish derivation in the lexicon from

the vantage points he had started; a project to edit his collected works was also outlined. One paper dealt with Finnish numeral expressions in a construction-grammar mode. Many of the other papers could also be taken as a tribute to Austerlitz's memory, since they largely comprised folklore and literature. The high point of these was a paper on Värttinä (now a world-famous women's singing/musical group revamping traditional folk songs) and Lönnrot (the compiler of the national epic, *Kalevala*): re/presentation of folk culture to a willing audience. The main impetus in all this came from the University of Washington in Seattle, a newly emerging and very healthy programme, represented in Toronto by Thomas DuBois and a large number of energetic graduate students. The University of California at Berkeley has also recently made an entrance into the field, represented in Toronto by Susan Larson and two others. This is an interesting geographic shift on the west coast, as the University of California at Los Angeles has let its Finnish Studies die.

Finnish-Swedish literature was represented by one paper on a classic (Zachris Topelius) and one on a modern author (Irmelin Sandman Lilius). On the purely Finnish-language side, gender and purpose in the Kullervo cycle in the *Kalevala*, Aleksis Kivi's values today (and the lexicon of his *Seitsemän veljestä*), and imitation and tradition in Juhani Aho's *Papin tytär* were presented. The highlights here were two papers on the dramatist and feminist Minna Canth (1844-1897), largely because of the venue in the modern Robarts Library, at the site of a then-current photo exhibition on her life. (This huge library with its triangular labyrinthine design is notable for the fact that it was the model for the medieval monastery in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*.)

There was also a tour of the Toronto Finnish-Canadian Seniors Centre, Suomi-Koti ('Finland-Home'), where the multiculturalism theme was discussed. At various points in the conference an excellent Finnish catering service provided the refreshments, including the opening reception and a dinner in the hall of Suomi-Koti. This was a very emotional experience, particularly for those coming from Finland. This is a neat, efficient, well-run modern institution with all the official signage in English and Finnish, a library with practically only Finnish books (and saunas and a swimming pool). But particularly striking were the purely Finnish names and language skills of the inhabitants: this is the last generation of "pure" Finns in Canada (the ones in the US are already gone). Their proverbial difficulty in using English came out once again: A Filipino nurse was using Finnish to interact with them.

There was a pleasant and valuable information exchange at the conference, very important for scholars who work largely alone as cuckoo's eggs in strange nests over such a large continent. To increase coherence in this situation and to further Finnish Studies in North America (and in fact around the world to an English-speaking/reading audience), Börje Vähämäki announced the birth of a new journal he will edit, *The Journal of Finnish Studies* (published by University of Toronto Press). This is intended to carry original research relating to Finnish in language, literature, folklore, mythology, culture, history, etc. as well as reviews and any other kind of information or announcements useful for the readership. The review section will be important, run by Sheila Embleton of York University in Toronto. The easiest way to contact the editors is e-mail: borje.vahamaki@utoronto.ca and embleton@yorku.ca.

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