

TO BE PUBLISHED IN

*The Yearbook of Sociology, Oslo 1996*  
*Edited by Per Otnes*

Pekka Sulkunen:

#### TRUE CONFESSIONS FOR ONE MARK A PIECE

Music plays an important role in the public sociability that one finds in popular drinking places such as working class neighbourhood pubs.<sup>1</sup> The wealth of sound heightens the tavern's atmosphere and generates excitement. To the uninitiated, certainly, all this hubbub seems to have no purpose and is difficult to come to grips with. There is almost always music yet the row often drowns it entirely. Even then it relays an atmosphere of shared experience. But it has other specific functions as well. One of them is dancing. At weekends, the time of the week when women are in the habit of dropping in, music provides the participants with a way of achieving direct contact and a reason for doing so. Sometimes, again, a given song will have personal significance for a solitary drinker. And sometimes the mood and lyrics of a particular record will mesh with the listener's life. There is an entire category of tavern ballads which describe the feelings of the middle-aged as they look back on the successes and failures of their lives. Songs such as *On the Dance-Floor of Life* have melodies and lyrics which bring to mind the plaintiveness of intoxication when they echo from the juke-box on a weekday night. *On the Dance-Floor of Life*, composed by Toivo Kärki with lyrics by Vexi Salmi, narrates how transitory and treacherous are the revels and joys of life's dance-floors. But whilst the mirth cannot assuage real longing or replace true love, it can endanger true happiness.

The music has one thing in common with the other aspects of the tavern milieu — the establishment's name, the menu, how the tables and chairs are laid out, and the social ties. The songs also express the cultural points of view which the tavern-goers use to analyse their own reality. Employing semiotic concepts, one might say that the music models (Lucid 1977) reality in the same fashion as the morals of fairy-tales provide children with simplified mock-ups of the societal actuality the child has to adapt himself to (Bettelheim 1975).

Of course, the songs which play in the tavern are commercial in the extreme. What numbers become popular does not, however, depend purely on the clientele's idiosyncracies. It would also be a mistake to believe that record company personnel can engineer matters as they see fit. Most juke-boxes are controlled by the Finnish Slot-Machine Association and this official body

selects the music which they offer. Deliberate efforts are made to ensure that the selection closely matches the public's taste (Korhonen 1982). and the record producers are also anxious to come up with what their public wants. One consequence of this is that the ballads' lyrics, for instance, often manifest detailed knowledge of suburban life.

#### HITS DOWN AT THE "JUNIPER" AND "THE OFF DUTY"

We asked the Finnish Slot-Machine Association to supply us with a list for March and September, 1983 of the ten most popular songs in our target taverns. For purposes of comparison, we also asked the Association for details of March's top juke-box selections at eight other venues. The following tabulation gives the names of the most spun discs in English translation<sup>2</sup> and their performers.

#### MARCH

<i>The Juniper</i>	<i>The Off Duty</i>
Jailhouse Rock	I Needed Those Years
(Elvis Presley)	(Anita Hirvonen)
Open Up	Open Up
(Kake Randelin)	(Kake Randelin)
Tarja	If All the Lakes in Finland
(Kake Randelin)	(Suomi — Male vocal group)
Amor	Travellin' North
(Julio Iglesias)	(Juha Vainio)
Take Care of Yourself	Best Years of My Life
(Matti & Teppo)	(Jamppa Tuominen)
Spiteful Little Boy	Hey Hey Humppaa
(Tarja Ylitalo)	(Pauli Räsänen)
This Is Happiness	This Is Happiness
(Meiju Suvas)	(Meiju Suvas)
De Va Kookkoo De	Silver Moon
(Anita Hirvonen)	(Olavi Virta)
The Day Before You Came	Tango Nocturno
(Abba)	(Erkki Junkkarinen)
Tonic Ticks	Love Will Never Die
(Mika Sundqvist)	(Jamppa Tuominen)

#### SEPTEMBER

<i>The Juniper</i>	<i>The Off Duty</i>
Shared Destiny	Forgive Me
(Reijo Kallio)	(Tarja Ylitalo)
Air Hostess	When I Get a Pint
(Juha Vainio)	(Jukka Raitanen)
Take Me Back	I Tasted Life
(Kake Randelin)	(Reijo Taipale)
A Proper Man	Best Years of My Life
(Matti & Teppo)	(Jamppa Tuominen)
Open Up	Open Up
(Kake Randelin)	(Kake Randelin)

Saturday	Like I Wasn't Needed
(Berit)	(Jamppa Tuominen)
It Was a Gift I Got	God Willing
(Seija Simola)	(Markku Aro)
I Work Every Day	Somewhere, If You Want To
(Matti & Teppo)	(Eini)
I Had the Aces of Life	Home for the Summer
(Ahti Lampi)	(Kake Randelin)
Vamos a la Playa	This Is Happiness
(Rudsheisa)	(Meiju Suvas)

There were a few differences between the music heard in the two taverns. Three foreign language numbers made the top ten at *The Juniper* in the spring and another did so in the autumn, whereas all of *The Off Duty's* favourites were Finnish songs. Otherwise the ballads played in each of the establishments were much the same.

The one thing which stood out in our taverns' music was how extremely Finnish it was. In taverns favoured by young people foreign songs are much more popular — there were seven overseas hits in the top tens of the three discotheques of Tampere that we took as a point of comparison. The three foreign songs which were often played at the *The Juniper*, however, were somewhat out of date evergreens. It would appear that being fashionable and 'with it' are not important parts of the lives of our two taverns' regulars.

#### FROM IMAGINARY NARRATION TO EVERYDAY SPEECH

The lyrics form the central part of the music played in suburban taverns. There is a common denominator to almost all Finnish language hits; language and modes of expression. The phrases they use come straight from everyday speech and they often use the most worn of vernacular clichés. The songs played today differ from the music which was popular a couple of decades ago. Older ballads had a certain poetic quality and were characterized by imaginative narration. Even nowadays, the tavern-goer will still hear a song by the renowned Tapio Rautavaara from time to time. The lyrics will exemplify fundamental aspects of the mythology of Finnish manhood (Falk and Sulkunen 1983) — the ballad's hero will leave home with nothing but a knapsack and the evening star for company. All in all, however, such songs are now rarely played, at least in the taverns we studied.

Perhaps the march of time has affected the Finnish ballad in a more general sense, causing imaginative narration to gradually lose its importance. Still, it is surprising that the music which plays in suburban taverns rarely uses the third person to relate the mythical (Sulkunen 1983) adventures of its heroes. If it did so, it would transport the tavern-goer into the

alternative reality of the hero. The listener would find himself in a universe where, on the face of things, anything at all might happen, but one which would nevertheless have the same cultural tenets as the reality the tale emanated from. Since the suburban tavern is in itself an alternative reality, the other side of the coin of everyday life, it might be expected that tavern ballads would stress imagination, story-telling and mythical heroes.

An analysis of the lyrics of tavern ballads demonstrates that the links between the tavern and the routine of the suburb it serves are closer than an outsider would assume. It would also be a mistake to think of the regular patrons as constituting a kind of closed religious community which listens to tales of well-loved heroes while observing the rites of its faith. Instead, the regulars form an open congregation of profane comrades whose favourite activity is discussion and everyday events is its main topic.

The songs the patrons most like to hear fit in with their surroundings perfectly. The ballads not only provide discussion topics; they are sequels to what has already been said. In fact, the most popular format for the song's lyrics is a discussion, one character talking to another. The party addressed does not usually have 'lines', though outside of our corpus there are some ballads such as the *Week-End Father* by Chriss Johansson and *To the Week-End Father* by Vexi Salmi where dialogues do take place.

*De Va Kookkoo De*, the lyrics of which are the work of Chriss Johansson, is an excellent example of this type of song. The title and the refrain line is clumsy Swedish, meaning something like 'that's bullshit!' The word *kookkoo* does not, literally, mean anything in any language, but the context and phonetic composition of the expression render it unmistakable. This is only one example of the geniality of the song-writer. One can almost see the coffee cups on the kitchen table as the wife passes her remarks to her husband.

*De Va Kookkoo De*

De va kookkoo  
it just won't pay  
to move to Sweden,  
we wouldn't understand  
what people say.

De va kookkoo  
things won't get better  
if we slave our guts out  
to buy a Volvo  
on the never-never,  
de va kookkoo de!

Look what happened to Yrjö  
he bounced back like a ball,  
you've got a nerve to say  
we should follow him and all.  
Stop your noise, you sound  
like a busted cassette deck.

Can't you see the whole idea  
just could never work?  
And Lytti's lass who  
we used to see so often,  
she came back  
with a bun in the oven.  
If we went we'd all be  
on the skids.  
I'm not going nowhere  
and neither are the kids.  
Stay put where you are,  
you should know at your age.

No, I won't be uprooted  
it's too late at this stage.  
You remember what I say  
you wouldn't get on well there,  
your blood pressure would go right up  
and life would be a nightmare.

The lyrics are a monologue which takes the form of a dialogue. They are the kind of inner talk that is familiar to us all when we are excited or angry; they are ideas which we mull over as we prepare ourselves for a quarrel and think of what we intend to say. "And then I'll tell him . . .," or "That's what I should have said..." Yet songs like *De Va Kookkoo De* can be looked at in another way as well. The lyrics might serve to remind a husband of how humiliating and catty his wife was when he talked of his plans.

The neo-realism of the songs is full of stereotypes and ready-made patterns. It is no exaggeration to say that the song-writers strive for lyrics which are perfect duplicates of suburban attitudes to life. The most popular song-writers are astonishingly successful in resonating the sentiments of their audience. In the lyrics and moods of the ballads people look at themselves in the face, sometimes seriously and sometimes with a wink, sometimes voicing disappointment — even bitterness.

There is no need for story-telling and imagination here. Instead of using heroic figures to describe the human condition, the songs record the ordinary thoughts of the anti-heroes of real life. Neither is this form of expression limited to portrayals of the bickerings of family life. There are also many love songs which are outspoken manifestations of the private thoughts of

the man and woman in the street. When the singer is a woman, the lyrics are often invitations to bed; the numbers sung by men recount how marvellous it is to make love. Meiju Suvas and Kake Randelin are two of the best known and most popular artists performing such material. Meiju Suvas's *I Want You* is a very typical example. It begins by describing a dream where there are sandy beaches and lagoons. The dream, we are told, was "so real" — and what could be truer in the cold northern country of Finland than sandy beaches and blue lagoons! The metaphors continue: "My love for you makes a volcano of my heart", and "A never fading lava flows 'twixt us like Cupid's dart". Oh, the realism of those volcanoes and their eternal lava! Yet the sense of sexual desire the song conveys is real, strong and familiar.

Lyrics of this kind work because of their particular way of using metaphors and tropes. Having once gained currency in various origins, not uncommonly in poetic or even biblical verse, they have long since become part of ordinary current language as clichés. *I Want You*, for instance, talks of lagoons and sandy beaches: these can be seen as references to leisure and package holidays on the Costa del Sol. The lagoons, beaches and lava, however, may also be expressions which were first used in love poems yet long since entered the vocabulary of common parlance.

Nowadays, the use of such clichés is one of the hallmarks of popular ballads. Ballad lyrics penned in the early 1970s still resemble the verses which the Finnish poet, Kaarlo Sarkia, wrote more than fifty years ago (Apo 1974). The juke-box selections popular in the taverns we studied were chock-full of worn and old-fashioned phrases such as "heart of mine", "for ever and ever", "life of mine" and so on. The point here is not just that the lyrics are couched in the language of the verse of years gone by. The reason why the worn expressions are used is that they are now part of the popular everyday vernacular. The clichés are, as it were, anonymous figures of speech which everyone can use.

Naturally, poetry is not the sole source of the songs' lyrics. *De Va Kokkoo De* has little if anything in common with the verses of Sarkia's day. The clichés and metaphors come from diverse walks of life — "busted cassette deck", "bounced back like a ball", "blood pressure would go right up" — but each one is often heard in everyday speech. Numerous songs talk of the "greyness" of the everyday, of "promising the earth" or "promising the moon", and there are even lyrics that employ sociologisms such as "role-playing".

Tavern music has another feature which is tied up with its fondness for clichés and corny expressions. Almost every popular ballad employs the technique of double meaning used in puns. The lyrics' ambiguity gives the songs a humorous effect or an air of mystery.

A case in point is the stanza of *I Want You: Come and court me, where and when you like....* The verb used in Finnish for "to court" has the lexical meaning of "to propose marriage" but the sexual innuendo is unmistakable. *Spiteful Little Boy* is another example.

### *Spiteful Little Boy*

When I left the country and found myself your bride,  
I felt that I was nothing standing by your side.  
You charmed me with your words, you acted oh so fine,  
your diamond ring said the very stars would soon be mine.  
It was a warm summer evening when the church bells pealed,  
the first days of our marriage seemed too happy to be real.  
But grey autumn came and brought the end of my sweet dreams  
when every day you shouted, and every day I screamed.

::You're just a spiteful little boy, you can't be called a man,  
you've made your bed now lie on it, I've taken all I can.::

Run back to mummy's apron strings, it's all so clear to me,  
the only feeling you can feel is spiteful jealousy.  
You're just a spiteful little boy, you can't be called a man,  
you've made your bed now lie on it, I've taken all I can.

The childish way you act, there's got to come an end,  
oh your insane jealousy, it drives me round the bend.  
I was your ship in a bottle, you kept me like a prize  
from suburb to suburb we moved, from high-rise to high-rise.  
You locked me up at nights, safe from prying eyes,  
and went drinking with your mates — you seemed to have no ties.  
I tried to be patient, to keep everything hid  
to be your little doll wife in all that I did.  
But I couldn't keep it up, something had to give,  
I'm going back to the countryside where they know how to live.

::You're just a spiteful little boy ....::

(Lyrics and music: Veli-Pekka Lehto)

The song makes the assertion — or accusation — that "... your insane jealousy, it drives me round the bend", but says nothing about why the husband is jealous. And in the third stanza, we learn that the couple "moved from suburb to suburb". Is it too far-fetched to imagine that they moved so often because they wanted to leave old flames behind?

Ambiguity and hackneyed speech, clichés, have a quite definite function in the discussions which go on in taverns. The clichés create an atmosphere of familiarity and encourage people to talk about commonplace matters. Yet the corny phrases have a

different, active role to play as well. They make it possible to discuss private affairs using, as it were, inverted commas — the speaker can use words which are not his own and the audience will be aware that the phrases are of someone else's making. The lyrics of popular songs are often used to provide situational humour. Patrons pick amusing expressions from the lyrics and then use them as repartee in the oddest of contexts. People even employ lyrics as vehicles for analysing their own lives.

A man who seemed familiar was just leaving the tavern in the company of a blonde. 'Where are you taking that old machine?', an old man asked. 'Take care of yourself', the woman replied (the title of a popular ballad). It looked as if she knew the old bloke very well, however, and it is hard to believe that she took offence at his remarks. (The Juniper, Tuesday night)

On occasion, men and women alike used the refrains of popular ballads to describe their lives when they were being interviewed. People find it difficult to talk about their feelings and yet intimate matters and private emotions form the most popular discussion topic of tavern patrons. The worn clichés of familiar ballads provide a convenient way out of what would otherwise be an impasse.

#### THE WHOLE SPECTRUM OF THE CONJUGAL RELATIONSHIP

Of course, the songs we have been considering are heard in other places besides suburban taverns. Many of the ballads were among the Finnish numbers most often played on the radio. But when they are played in a tavern, they become invested with particular connotations that stem from the context. When we listened to the music played in the two taverns we studied, we found that the lyrics simply stressed a handful of themes. Not surprisingly, the most popular themes had to do with eroticism and love. Songs which portrayed relationships between men and women and talked of the happiness and antagonism couples experience were also highly thought of. The third most popular motif was separation and divorce; there was a large number of newer songs which described what happens when a relationship flounders and explored the feelings that the process generates.

Loneliness has for long been a classic topic in light music. One of the juke-box selections which was often played, *Shared Destiny*, was about how a divorced man finds himself a new romance. Adding this song to our list, we can say that the ballads covered the whole gamut of conjugality from falling in love to entering marriage, from being newly-weds to entering everyday routine, from the routine to divorce, loneliness, and finally the discovery of a new love. In fact, only five of the more than thirty songs we analysed do not fit into this scheme — and three of the odd men out were nevertheless about the



relationship between the sexes.

### *Love and eroticism*

The following juke-box favourites described the first meetings of a man and a woman, their falling in love and the excitement of sexual attraction:

Open Up (Kake Randelin)  
Tarja (Kake Randelin)  
This Is Happiness (Meiju Suvas)  
Tango Nocturno (Erkki Junkkarinen)

The ballads portrayed love and longing as erotic, even mildly sinful. This is quite evident when one reads between the following lines, even though Markku Aro, singing the lyrics of Raul Reiman, assures his audience that:

That night was my happiest ever  
and it's something I'll always remember.  
I know that our moments together  
were spotless, so good and so pure,  
they will always live in my heart ...

Kake Randelin and Meiju Suvas are perhaps the two most outspoken performers of this type of material. The eroticism of their lyrics is unmistakable and expressed in no uncertain terms.

The records which are popular in taverns may portray love as erotic, but they do not picture romance as a frivolous matter or a passing whim. People's first love marks them indelibly. Almost all love songs speak of the first romance as the only true love, a person's first amour is something which never loses its value and one's first beloved always remains in one's heart. Often, the authenticity is stressed by lyrics which refer to the world of childhood and youth. Summer and romance belong together. "I long to lie beside you under the birch so shady", but "the streets here are cold, the city fog is filthy" (Tarja, Kake Randelin).

Erotic love, first love especially, is one of the chief points the songs emphasize. Romance and its sexual aspects fill the world and are absolute necessities; once people find them, they want for nothing else. But no lover can arrange matters at will. Destiny lies in the hands of the Almighty. *We'll meet again, God willing*, (Markku Aro). Man is no more the master of his own fate in affairs of the heart than he is in any other important aspect of life. It is this element of chance combined with one's love being pre-ordained which makes love holy. And it is this randomness which also gives love its eternity: because one cannot fall in love at will, one should never attempt to arrange romance, or refuse or terminate an amour. I belong to you till

the end of time.

It is therefore striking that these praises of love regularly voice anxiety over the prospect of separation — or its actuality. The first love is unique and the only true love but it is by no means the only relationship in the course of life.

Tarja, at times I spy your eyes  
in someone who isn't you,  
they take me back to memories  
so real that they seem true.  
But then I awake  
and come to with a start,  
Tarja, no one  
can replace you in my heart.

Love's inexorability means that crises occur easily. Fate cannot be influenced by will. Whether a couple is destined to remain together or to part, the people concerned can do nothing about how Fortune deals the cards. One can rage against fate, one can hope, one can have trust, one can fear. But one cannot deliberately plan or bring into effect a desired future. A couple are aware of the risks involved in their romance on the very first day they declare their love. Life is a tempest, a journey, a conflict full of woe and tribulation. Love, however, is peace and completion, joy and the very goal of life. Amorous ties defy the outside world. The real life is intimacy, a meeting of two naked souls and joys whereas the outside world is a harsh, cruel, cold storm full of coercion and responsibility. The polarity between the private and the public is at its most extreme in erotic love. The public and the private do not merge until the couple enters matrimony.

### *Conjugal routine and bliss*

The songs which describe the reality and routine of connubial life are diverse and contain a wide range of elements. The following juke-box hits fall into this category:

It Was a Gift I Got (Seija Simola)  
Home for the Summer (Kake Randelin)  
I Work Every Day (Matti & Teppo)  
A Proper Man (Matti & Teppo)  
Saturday (Berit)  
De Va Kokkoo De (Anita Hirvonen)  
Take Care of Yourself (Matti & Teppo)  
Spiteful Little Boy (Tarja Ylitalo)  
Forgive Me (Tarja Ylitalo)

Not one of these songs gives just one picture of matrimony, critical or laudatory. Each ballad paints an identical portrait of the married state: an isolated nuclear family struggles to

rear children and cope with the demands of the world and each other. The ballads often reflect life's difficulties yet there are also some which point out that the spouse's efforts can have their rewards. Marriages also have moments of tenderness, tranquility, beauty, harmony and poetry, or at least these are goals which can be aimed for.

### *Take Care of Yourself*

Last night you slumbered in my arms,  
I couldn't get to sleep for hours and hours.  
You lay beside me with all your charms,  
dreaming of all this happiness of ours.  
I never knew such sweet peace in the past,  
oh how I pray that this bliss might last.  
If I lost you, I could never cope,  
there'd be no beauty, no joy, no hope.

Music: Matti Ruohonen  
Lyrics: Chrisse Johansson

Some would undoubtedly say that *Take Care of Yourself* is sickly sweet. Again, it is not impossible to imagine that the sentiments it voices are just what a man who loves his wife would say to himself when the conjugal tenderness is at its most poignant. Imagining feelings of separation is a way to appreciate fond tenderness; the joy of being together is climaxed in feelings of being loved, adored and taken for a figure of security for the other. Knowing that separation and divorce are possible makes devotion stronger even among lovers who have never experienced the loss. When, on the other hand, *Take Care of Yourself* is played in a tavern, many of the people who hear it will have first-hand knowledge of how painful it is when a relationship breaks up. The ambiguity of the lyrics is quite intentional; they were penned to serve as an emotive reminder of how good life used to be before the separation burned everything to ashes.

The love a man and woman feel for each other before they marry has an aspect of the supernatural about it and therefore entails uncertainty. Once the union has been solemnized, however, the love comes under direct threat. Indeed, the prospect of this threat even gives rise to sadness and a sense of longing before the ceremony takes place.

The duo of Matti and Teppo had another song on our list of most played juke-box selections, *I Work Every Day*. Its melody was composed by Matti Ruohonen; the lyrics, the work of Veli-Pekka Lehto, are a classic example of prosaic suburban versifying. Whilst it is less sentimental than *Take Care of Yourself*, it nevertheless illuminates the risks associated with connubial

love. Having to go to work each day is a sacrifice, but one which the man willingly makes for his beloved wife. Younger and less experienced than he himself, she is content to stay at home, yet the man would be unable to stand up to the regularity and pressures of the outside world without her support. This monologue-type song portrays a family where there is a conventional division of roles and the marriage is as stable as can be. And still, the threat of divorce is always there: "But why do I do it all, darling? — Because you keep putting up with me for better or worse." *Home for the Summer*, sung by Kake Randelin with lyrics by Raul Reiman, has the same theme but is couched in stronger terms. It features a man recounting the lonely coldness of the bare rented flat which will await him when he goes to work in a distant city in the winter. He assures his wife that he will stay faithful to her and dreams of the summer when he will be able to come home again.

The immensely popular Matti and Teppo have a third hit which secured a place in the tavern top ten, a number which examined matrimonial survival mechanisms from another point of view. In a somewhat ironic vein, the song states that *A Proper Man* always lives up to his wife's expectations (or to his own assumptions of what a wife should expect). He will take her out dancing even if he is exhausted. Instead of insisting that his wife spends all of her time at home, he allows her — within limits — to have some leisure pastimes of her own. Indeed, a proper man never says no or fends his wife off. Doubtless, there are many who truly believe that these qualities are the mark of the good husband. Nevertheless, the song's irony makes it clear that marriage is not just a bed of roses. The ballad's husband remarks that "it's strength of character which counts", yet a man can hardly be all that untamed or independent if he panders to his wife's every whim. On the other hand, perhaps the husband's great consideration is a mark of his strength — only someone completely sure of his power could be so amenable. The husband takes his wife out in rather the same fashion as others take their dogs for a walk. It seems likely that the ambiguity of the song enables listeners to construe the lyrics in two different and conflicting ways.

Berit's song *Saturday* — lyrics by Vexi Salmi, composed by Antti Hyvärinen — can also be thought of as a description of the joys of everyday married life. Like *A Proper Man*, *Saturday* also equates happiness with privateness. For Berit, though, happiness is the personal pleasure that springs from relaxation and free time as such; it does not depend on the pleasure and security another person can give.

Friday's ticking away, it's almost tomorrow.  
No more thoughts of work or sorrow.  
Oh Saturday morning, when there's nothing to do  
and no ordering boss I have to listen to.  
I'll plan my time-table myself,

won't hear anyone else.  
In the morning, I'll be my own master  
and we'll spend the whole day in laughter.  
The dreary week is past,  
it's Saturday at last.

The song mentions that the woman will share her Saturday with a consort, but the man is not really needed. If he is not just a necessary accoutrement, he will do no more than partake in the weekend's joys — he will not help to produce them.

*It was a Gift I Got*, originally composed by J.P. Millers, was given new lyrics in Finnish by Juha Vainio. Seija Simola sings the song as a eulogy to the joy of life and the sense of completion love gives. Yet the tone is even more self-absorbed than in *Saturday*. It does not praise only connubial happiness, it extols the joy of life in a more general sense. The wife, moreover, does not thank her husband for the way she feels, she voices gratitude to the Almighty instead. Happiness is created by one person, not by two people, or is rather a gift given by a nameless Deity. When men sing in praise of happiness, their gratitude is more fixed and concrete. Masculine eulogies, however, also manifest a dependence on and a subjugation to women.

The music which tavern-goers like to hear emphasizes happiness when it describes marriage. It also tends to voice hopes that the contentment be lasting. Nevertheless, there are many songs which express fear that the happiness may end, saying that the cruel outside world has the power to flay tranquil conjugal serenity. The ballads which portray marital crises and conflicts are astonishingly realistic in their refusal to mince words. Infidelity, of course, is a common source of matrimonial discord and a theme which tavern music returns to again and again. The juke-box selections we analysed contained narratives about unfaithful wives and husbands alike. Tarja Ylitalo's *Forgive Me*, the lyrics of which are by Raul Reiman, is a wife's plea that her adulterous one-night stand be pardoned. She admits everything, promises that it will never happen again, and affirms her ever-lasting love for her husband. The Ylitalo number which we talked of a short while ago, *Spiteful Little Boy*, is not any tamer. The wife is not content with accusing her husband of behaving with infantile jealousy; she also claims that he tried to keep her like a ship in a bottle and left her alone at nights while he did just what he wished. The wife's bitterness transforms her own jealousy into incriminations; her sneaking suspicions become anger and her longing a longing for divorce.

Marital dissonance has other causes besides infidelity. *De Va Kookkoo De* is one of the most dramatic songs to secure a place on our top ten list. Its connubial disagreement centres on a practical matter, one which has nothing to do with the spouses'

relationship to one another or their family. Nevertheless, it displays an ambiguity very little different from the rest of the songs in the tavern hit parade. From one point of view, it is a woman's anger at her husband's thoughtlessness, a sensible wife's wariness in the face of a threatened upheaval. But the song can also be construed as the husband's internal monologue, as a record of how humiliatingly his wife turns down a proposal which he makes seriously and in good faith. *De Va Kookkoo De* shows that lyric-writers are aware of how the coercions of the outside world affect people's private lives.

### *Divorce*

Best Years of My Life (Jamppa Tuominen)  
I Needed Those Tears (Anita Hirvonen)  
Somewhere, If You Want To (Eini)  
Take Me Back (Kake Randelin)

The songs which portrayed love and matrimonial happiness always at least hint at the possibility of divorce if not openly evoking it. Correspondingly, the ballads which depict divorce tend to pay tribute to the possibility that a man and woman's relationship can be permanent and happy. Four of the songs which were among the taverns' most popular selections were about divorce and three of them were laments for the happiness of the dissolved marriage. *I Needed Those Years* was the only song which took a different view. Anita Hirvonen's separation gives her peace and helps her to find balance, and the lyrics make it likely that the separation referred to is actually a divorce. The three other numbers laud the failed marriage and voice hope that reconciliation may prove possible. The format, once again, is a monologue which acts as a dialogue: the listener can either identify with the party the words are addressed to (the song's you), or feel empathy for the speaker (the I). Just as in real life, the men and women who divorce in the ballads feel very differently about things. The lyrics form a complex network of significations.

There are two categories of divorce songs and each one has a masculine and feminine version. *Somewhere, If You Want To* (Eini) and *Take Me Back* (Kake Randelin) exemplify the first of the two types. Both of the numbers have lyrics by Raul Reiman and they each refuse to admit that the divorce is final. Instead, they manifest a wish that the spouses will make a new start. In the women's version, however, the wife puts the divorce down to inexperience, whereas the masculine counterpart implies that everything was the man's fault. The husband's hope for a reconciliation is a request, a plea; the wife's wishes are more of a promise.

MAN  
*Take Me Back*

WOMAN  
*Somewhere, If You Want To*

Please, take me back,  
grant me forgiveness.  
You're the only one I want,

the others are all meaningless.  
Take me back, darling,  
that's my plea

- when I'm without you,  
my world's so empty.

We'll meet again,  
somewhere, if you want to.  
I'll be there, just tell me  
when.

I can live with you once more,  
somewhere, if you want to.  
Life can be good, just like  
before

when we've felt all our aches  
and made all our mistakes.

The ballads can be considered as a dialogue, as a man and a woman discussing shared experiences. The man has one set of opinions about the divorce, the woman another, and yet the two are in fundamental agreement. The man says that everything was his fault, whereas the woman declares that she was the victim of inexperience but has now grown stronger.

In a manner of speaking, the listener also plays a role in the songs, is one of the *dramatis personae*. The songs have built-in *listeners*, and it is through them that the real audience interpret the message in the lyrics. Ideally, the audience will enter into the song and identify with the *listener*, and this means that there must be something positive about the ballad. The lyrics have to enable the audience to find something good in situations which would usually be thought of as misfortunes and failures.<sup>3</sup>

The feminine songs abound in such elements. The singer tends to believe in her maturity and her ability to continue the relationship, and she also forgives the husband and agrees to make a new start.

Masculine guilt is also, strange as it may seem, really a manifestation of the man's good opinion of himself. *Take Me Back* begins with a husband confessing his adultery. He assures himself that he was guilty and can therefore be certain that he was not discarded through no fault of his own. Reading between the lines, it would be far worse if the marriage had ended because the wife fell in love with another man. It is up to the man to initiate matters, and men prefer to take responsibility for destroying a relationship rather than admit that their partners were not satisfied and left.

The lyrics have a male *listener* and a female one. The songs, in other words, enable the audience to think well of themselves even if they identify with the underdog. Once again, the music's intentional ambiguity comes into play.

Looking at matters from the woman's point of view, the man's guilt makes it possible to feel moral superiority and then grant forgiveness. When the man declares his love and places his wife on a pedestal, she can feel certain of her ability to love and

be loved. The husband, on the other hand, can see himself as appreciated and valued for the security he gives — so much so that his wife is willing to forgive his transgressions and stay with him. A wife does not love her husband less when he hurts her, she loves him more.

As was said earlier, there are two chief categories of divorce songs. The second type of ballad describes rifts where there is no hope of reconciliation and passes judgement on the marriage and the divorce. The men's songs are full of regret, whereas the women's manifest a sense of relief and the enjoyment of mature freedom.

MAN

*Best Years of My Life*

Why did I hide my true feelings,  
what made me shove you away?  
I hurt you so badly,  
in those days you still loved me,  
I remember the last look you gave.  
They were the best years of my life  
when I still had a loving wife.  
But I ignored the look in your eyes  
and I'm paying a terrible price.

WOMAN

*Needed Those Years*

I needed those years,  
had to see for myself.  
I'm not who I was then,  
I'm now someone else.  
Just to be back under skies so blue  
makes me feel like a new-born babe.  
But I spent those years as I had to,  
didn't have it in me to stay.

As can be seen, the man's reaction to divorce is desperate longing, guilt and the feeling of being a pawn in the hands of fate. To the woman, on the other hand, divorce means relief. She refuses to long for the past and is glad of the freedom which accompanies her new maturity. From the perspective of the speaker role, there is hardly any real difference between this pair of songs and *Somewhere, If You Want To* and *Take Me Back* other than that the man and woman have parted for good and there is no hope of reconciliation at all.

For the tavern-goers who identify with the speakers' roles, *Best Years of my Life* and *I Needed Those Years* provide an opportunity



to appraise oneself and feel satisfied with the result. The elements of positive self-appraisal are in fact identical in the two pairs of songs once the point of view of the speaker is adopted. The man's feelings of guilt are coupled with his acceptance of his fate — he accepts the divorce as a reality and goes on with his life notwithstanding. The woman, on the other hand, is proud of her ability to accept the divorce and the failed marriage which was its cause.

But the second pair of songs differs from the first if the audience identifies with the complementary role of the person the songs are addressed to instead of the speaker. The woman's view of the dissolved marriage and the divorce is different from the man's. The woman seems to say that the marriage was no more than an inevitable interlude; the man, while he does not rage against his fate, declares that his marriage gave him the best years of his life. Compared to the man who does not find anything gratifying in the new situation, the divorced woman appears strong, independent and realistic.

The woman's role the songs portray is much more unlikely to cause men to think well of themselves. Nevertheless, *I Needed Those Years* does provide the man with something positive. The first verse of the ballad (not quoted here) describes how the wife returns to Nature and the surroundings of her childhood after the divorce. The man may have committed adultery and may be guilty of the marriage's failure, but he still represents the grown-up world, adventure and experience. Without him, the wife reverts to her childhood state.

So the songs reveal a certain agreement regarding the roles men and women play when a marriage fails and how they behave and feel after the divorce. The divorce often seems to emphasize the continued existence of love. Even when it does not, however, the divorce and marriage are judged against the same yardsticks. The husband is always the dominant party and he also bears most of the responsibility for the divorce. He represents the outside world; home and marriage are a refuge. And while he may choose to stress his guilt, he is still the poorer for losing the conjugal home. The songs' lyrics imply that women can only accept divorce by becoming independent. The wife is a subjugated prisoner of her dreams; a woman cannot take a fresh look at her past until she is divorced.

### *Loneliness*

Our tavern hit parade included four songs about loneliness, and all of them were built around the same themes.

Like I Wasn't Needed (Jamppa Tuominen)  
When I Get a Pint (J. Raittinen)  
I Had the Aces of Life (Ahti Lampi)

## I Tasted Life (Reijo Taipale)

Loneliness in these songs is always regarded as a masculine problem. Whilst there are some songs which do not explicitly say that loneliness is a fate which follows divorce (*Like I Wasn't Needed*), the melody and overall melancholy make it clear that they are not talking of romantic, optimistic, youthful solitude.

My whole life's wasting away  
when I go on all alone,  
without warmth every day.  
Happiness passes me by,  
vanishing without a trace,  
slamming the door in my face.  
Every promise is really a lie.

The other ballads also laid stress on how it feels to be rejected and how pointless life seems when a man lives alone. But they talked of a lost love as well:

You left and I looked for someone else  
to help me forget my pain.  
But there never seems to be anyone there,  
so I fill up my glass again.  
Because the booze drives my tears away  
I sit in the pub, day after day.  
When I get a pint, I smile,  
a happy man once more — for a while.

Besides describing what it feels like to be rejected, the songs strongly imply that loneliness is a fate which cannot be altered. Whilst repentance will not help matters, one is still bound to repent to the bitter end. The singer of *I Had the Aces of Life* laments that he has played all his cards, his parents are dead and gone, and the woman in his life has run off with someone else. *I Tasted Life* reflects similar pathos. The song does not explicitly say that the marriage has ended in divorce, yet the singer says farewell to his wife and declares that the blows he suffered were not in vain. The marriage was worth the pain — it was almost a happy one because of the wife. The man confesses that he relied on his wife and that this was the basis of the entire marital relationship.

You shared it all with me,  
the joys and sorrows alike.  
The buffets and blows of the passage of time  
made me see what life really was like.  
I thank you dear, thank you deeply  
for having loved me and been with me.

*A new union*

The loneliness of the divorced man may be inescapable but it is not necessarily something that will last for ever. *Shared Destiny*, a song which the tavern-goers often chose when they put the juke-box on, brings this point out. The music is played in slow tempo and is actually an old-fashioned 'humppa' dance. The timbre of Reijo Kallio's voice and the quaintness of the lyrics indicate that the singer is an elderly working man. The song has an instructive message. The "I" tells his woman how marvellous it is to make a new friend when he is no longer young, vowing that it is wonderful to meet someone who has been through the same things as he has, understands grown-up love and is willing to respond to it.

From the moment I looked in your eyes,  
I hoped I could make a new start.  
Could this be real? Or was it just lies,  
this budding of hope in my heart?  
You said at first we should take things slow:  
you'd been taught by life,  
you had reason to know  
that love's built on caution  
instead of abandon.

Falling in love is a matter of fate and chance, and this also applies to the affections which lead to a second marriage. The man and woman who already know what it is like to fail in love are more cautious, but they are still very happy that they have found a new love. A new attachment is likely to be trusting and sensibly safe when the lovers have experience of how marriages can founder. The man does not rely on the woman and the woman does not subjugate herself to the man. The new union is balanced and emotions are reciprocated. At long last, there is harmony.

#### *Themes other than love and marriage*

As we have seen, most of the juke-box selections which were popular in the taverns we studied had to do with the conjugal relationship. There were, however, a small group of ballads which did not directly touch on the subjects of falling in love, being in love, divorce and falling in love again. These odd songs numbered five all in all.

Air Hostess (Juha Vainio)  
Travellin' North (Juha Vainio)  
If All the Lakes in Finland Were Filled with Alcohol (Male singing group "Suomi")  
Hey Hey Humppa (Pauli Räsänen)  
Tonic Ticks (Mika Sundqvist)

The first thing which makes these songs different from the ones we have already looked at is that the lyrics take another format. They are not monologues which act as dialogues. Two of

them are imaginary accounts of men on the road (*Air Hostess* and *Travellin' North*.) The third, *Tonic Ticks*, is a self-congratulatory lilt, and the fourth, *If All the Lakes in Finland Were Filled with Alcohol*, is a comic drinking song. *Hey Hey Humppa* is a number about the joy of dancing and is the only one which is not unmistakably masculine. The five songs tend to make use of masculine irony and their hallmark is humour and joviality. One of the traits which is poked fun at is, of course, men's fondness of the bottle, even though drinking is only hinted at in *Travellin' North*. The way in which men regard women as objects of sexual desire, however, provides the butt of many more jokes. *Tonic Ticks*, *Travellin' North* and *Air Hostess* abound in sexual humour. They seem to say that sex can be a real difficulty but laughingly underrate its seriousness.

After a bloke's reached a certain age,  
there's nothing he can do but gaze.  
He can forget about the women,  
since he can't do nothing with 'em.  
If he looks rough, he's not getting enough.  
(*Travellin' North*)

The songs not only point to the impotence brought about by age, they also talk of the difficulty of making advances in general. In *Air Hostess*, the joke is on two men who feel distant and powerless sexual attraction for an air hostess. Their feelings are ridiculed as infantile.

The air hostess made us feel forlorn,  
flaunting her body in her uniform.  
But we were only looking,  
there was nothing cooking,  
she made it clear there was nothing doing.  
She was a bit of alright,  
we dreamed of her at nights,  
she was the best of all the sights.  
That air hostess was one we couldn't forget,  
when you're abroad you need those home comforts.

The rest of the song relates how the men's sexual hopes faded into childish helplessness. Right at the beginning of the flight, they were belted into the front seats — the children's sitting area — and they were unable to obtain any service when the drinks trolley came round. A sad tale of impotency and want!

Instead of ridiculing impotency, song-writers can deal with this same subject by poking fun at excessive virility. The boasting *Tonic Ticks* is an example of a time-honoured type of wassail.

My ways with the women are something shockin',  
no other bloke even gets a look in.  
When I get there, the women are thirsting  
and the air echoes with buttons bursting.

This lad knows all the tricks,  
this lad here ain't no hick.  
If I see a woman, I make her mine  
and tonic ticks run up her spine.

#### EVERYTHING SAFE AND SOUND IN ITS OWN PLACE?

Unfortunately, the research team was unable to collect systematic empirical data about how tavern-goers interpret the music they hear and how they react to it. All of our comments on the lyrics are based purely on textual analysis; at no point have we attempted to interpret the ballads on anyone's behalf. We have looked at the songs as if they were schemes or patterns on the basis of which similar lyrics could be produced.

We examined these schemes by viewing them as descriptions of the various stages conjugal unions pass through. Whilst it is unusual for a song to chart the whole course of a marriage, the ballads often depict the profound emotions people feel at different times.

The songs are fragmentary and concentrate on the feelings held at one particular moment. Yet the lyrics often say a great deal about aspects of married life which lie outside their immediate scope. A song about being in love, for instance, will often talk of the possibility of divorce; indeed, the pains of separation are often used as a vehicle to highlight the ecstasy of tender togetherness. Divorce ballads frequently seek to heighten the melancholy they portray by talking of how happy the sundered union used to be, or by holding out hopes of reconciliation. The music played in suburban taverns has important symbolic value. Despite their superficial perfunctoriness, the lyrics speak volumes about relationships between men and women, about the risks involved and the ever-present threat of dissolution. Tavern ballads are the poetry of adult love and divorce, a poetry which uses everyday language and expresses itself in the vernacular of its audience.

The fact that the songs concentrated on love, marriage, divorce and loneliness and sometimes even touched on all four themes at the same time gives some indication of what the most important issues in tavern-goers' lives are. Today's Finnish suburb-dweller seems to be concerned about emotional relationships between men and women. Furthermore, it also appears that the conditions of suburban life hardly help the course of love to run smoothly. The lyrics of popular tavern ballads portray unions between the sexes as fragile in the extreme. On the one hand, there is a wish for true passion instead of the dreariness of conventional marriage; on the other, song-writers accept that the institutions of the family and marriage are the necessary back-drops to lasting relationships. Intimate love, we are told, is at variance with the demands of

society at large. Regularity, having to work, a couple's being obliged to spend some time apart irrespective of whether they want to or not and domestic duties all impede a true union of naked souls.

This is one area where the reality of the tavern is the expression of the reality of the everyday. Every suburban-dweller is familiar with the difficulties men and women face when they try to live together and many of the tavern-goers have first-hand experience. Almost every occupier of a seat in the tavern has seen divorce close up — a friend's or neighbour's if not his or her own.

The suburb where we carried out our research had such a high incidence of divorce, re-marriage and single-parent families that it sometimes seemed as if a new form of family were coming into being, one which we might term 'serial monogamy'.

Disagreements between men and women are part of the reality of suburban life even when they do not lead to divorce. One of the hallmarks of the songs which were popular in the tavern was a longing for tenderness. The lyrics did not dream of a shared home and they hardly ever even hinted at children. On the contrary, home and routine were seen as restrictions, as the enemies of true emotion. Marital conflicts are the result of the polarity between people's ideals and decent suburban life, the rift between two juxtaposed utopias. In the tavern, away from home, romance wins; yet everyday reality does not give in, it sits down at the drinker's table as an ever-present reminder of the difficulties of love.

Of course, these problems are by no means particular to suburban dwellers. It is no surprise that they should crop up, time and time again, in the music which comes from the juke-box. But suburban life gives the difficulties a new set of conditions and the suburban tavern acts as a new vehicle of expression.

Life changes. But do the cultural viewpoints people analyse life through change as well? In reality, relationships between men and women are being modified. The symbolic reality of the tavern, however, maintains that unions between the sexes are just as they always have been. Songs which had a masculine ego viewed love, marriage and divorce in one way, songs where the *I* was a woman in another. When a man and woman are in love, it is the woman who actively wants and the man who exerts willpower; when divorce comes about, the sexes exchange roles.

If the masculine and feminine songs are placed side by side, they form a dialogue. The two voices are very much in agreement despite the differences in their points of view. Considered as a lover, a man should bring the force of his will into play; the woman should succumb to his desire. The married man should dream, lay plans and try his strength in the outside world. His

wife should feel happiest at home, unaffected by the harsh unpleasantness which begins outside her door, and devote herself to ensuring that affairs are managed sensibly. When a couple divorce, the wife is proud of her innocence and the husband is pleased with his guilt; the husband begs the wife to take him back and she decides whether she is willing to or not. If there is no hope of reconciliation, the woman will feel glad of her independence while the man will congratulate himself on the way he accepts matters. It is generally agreed that men should be strong and decisive in marriage. Divorce is the opposite of matrimony and equitable with failure.

The songs which tavern-goers like to hear, therefore, are in fundamental accord about conflict between men and women. The lyrics provide cultural patterns, models, which every listener can use to recall his or her own experiences and appraise them. The models the songs provide may stand still, but they provide universal yardsticks for evaluating one's own life. They reflect how society believes its members should view and react to their own experiences and the outside world.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apo, Satu: Uudistuva iskelmäyriikka (Popular song lyrics in transition). In: Launonen, Hannu and Mäkinen, Kirsi (eds.): *Folklore tänään* (Folklore today). Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, Hämeenlinna 1974.

Bettelheim, Bruno: *The Uses of Enchantment & The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Random House, New York 1975.

Falk, Pasi and Sulkunen, Pekka: Drinking on the Screen. An analysis of a mythical male fantasy in Finnish films. *Social Science Information Vol. 22*: 387-410 (3/1983).

Korhonen, Jaana: *Levyautomaattimusiikki Suomessa* (Juke box music in Finland). Graduate thesis in folklore studies, University of Tampere 1982.

Lucid, Daniel (ed.): *Soviet Semiotics*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London 1977.

Sulkunen, Pekka: Mythologie, récit, sociologie. *Kodikas/Code Vol. 6*: 15-34 (June 1983).

Sulkunen, Pekka; Alasuutari, Pertti; Nätkin, Ritva and Kinnunen, Merja: *Lähiöravintola* (The Neighbourhood Pub). Otava, Helsinki 1985.

## NOTES

1. This article is based on research on working class pubs carried out in the early 1980s in Finland (Sulkunen, Alasuutari, Nätkin and Kinnunen 1985). The study looked at working class life through the microcultures located in these meeting places. It consists of semiotically oriented analyses of the pubs' milieus, the structure of the sociability, outsiders' views and interviews of participants. The following is an analysis of the most popular juke box songs in two working class drinking establishments here called "The Juniper" and "The Off Duty".

2. The lyrics and the song titles have been translated by Andrew MacCafferty.

3. It goes almost without saying that the voice speaking and the ears hearing depicted in the songs' lyrics do not refer to the real "authors" and "receivers" of these texts. They are rather speaker and hearer images that may or may not correspond to real people, and more often than not, it is the speaker of the song with whom the real listeners identify themselves. See also Sulkunen 1992.