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Narrating the Nation: *Seven Brothers* envision Finland

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Introduction

By reading the end into the beginning and the beginning to the end, we learn to read time backward, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, the plot does not merely establish human action "in" time, it also establishes it in memory. (...) Yet the concept of repetition implies still more: it means the "retrieval" of our most fundamental potentialities, as they are inherited from our past, in terms of a personal tale and common destiny". (Ricoeur, 1981, 179).

I am sitting at my desk in the classroom. It is early sixties, and I do not fully understand the reasons for sitting there. Coming from a working-class family, I do not know our national inheritance well enough in order to be excited. I can recollect a bunch of recalcitrant boys reading aloud from *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi. The seven brothers seem to speak odd Finnish, and to do odd things, but I still do not understand why bother with this book. No matter if I preferred reading *Maigret* or *Dostoyevsky*, *Seven Brothers* was permanently out of my reading list. Indeed, Aleksis Kivi had written the first novel in Finnish, and now it had been elevated into the tomes of National Literature. The book was revered to death. All the nationalistic arguments for reading and adoring the book sounded dusty and void of current relevance. A book on learning problems of seven men had become so official and nationalistically sublime that reading it at school created severe learning problems for me and my classmates.

However, *Seven Brothers* was far from being celebrated in 1870 when it was first published. Public criticism was mostly murderous, and several notable Finnish nationalists (Fennomen) attacked the book. The leading opponent, professor August Ahlqvist, was hurt by Kivi's "misleading" image of the peasantry: "This peasantry is nowhere of the kind, nor has it ever been anywhere of the kind as the heroes in this book: quiet, stable people who have cleared away and who are still clearing away the wildwoods of our country before cultivation,
these people are of a completely different kind than the settlers of Impivaara" (Kinnunen 1987, 15). Another leading conservative Fennoman, Agathon Meurman complained of the sheer naturalism and lack of artistic edification in the book (Kinnunen, op.cit.,18). Quite apparently the book included something that was deeply insulting to the builders of a new nation.

At the moment of Finnish independence, in 1917, the reception of the book had changed altogether. From then on it was the first and the greatest of Finnish novels, and it was also was a story of the creation of the Finnish nation, literacy and education. It would be possible, of course, to reduce this change of reception from rejection to admiration into a romantic story true to "all good and challenging arts". Another way to approach the issue is to look closer at the story of the emerging nation and national consciousness in Kivi's novel. Is it really a solid *Bildungsroman*, a progressive story about the victory of mature consideration and modern self-control over the lazy and wild habits of youth?

In order to find answers to this problem, I need to discuss the theme of narrative closure versus "narrative discordance" (Ricoeur 1984). In short, I consider how strongly to interpret Frank Kermode's famous saying about the "sense of the ending". The contemporaries of Kivi apparently condemned the book because of the narrated wild episodes, the "discordance", and failed to reckon with the weight of the final resolution and the sense of the ending of the narrative. Nevertheless, I suggest that perhaps the leading 20th century readers have made the opposite mistake and emphasized too heavily the closure, the sense of the ending, and therefore have read a book which could possibly have been all too tame to irritate Kivi's opponents. To study the closure, however, is but one perspective to study the genuinely political aspects of a narrative. The novel has the capacity to give voice and to present competing voices.

This discussion necessarily leads to a few more theoretical and possibly more fundamental issues. On the most general level, the issue is about the nature and function of narratives. On a more practical level, I will argue for the necessity to acknowledge different narratives and different theories of the narrative. Linguistic, literary, mythical and philosophical theories of the narrative seem in part to offer different answers. Scholars often
use terms such as "narrative theory" too recklessly and without an accurate explanation of to which version of the narrative theory they are actually referring.

Finally, a number of comments by Benedict Anderson (1983) in his *Imagined Communities* were decisive in launching the idea of this paper. With a couple of examples from the Philippines and Latin America, Anderson illustrates the presence of newly "imagined communities" in the narration of nineteenth-century novels. Kivi, a committed Fennoman, certainly had an idea of the Finnish cause and nation when he wrote his novel. Still I think that Kivi's image of the nation was not so well formed as in Anderson's examples. The traces of nation are there, yet the book itself seems to tell the story of the recognition of the nation. Newspapers and print-capitalism are not there yet, and indeed the whole narrative deals with the passage from oral to literary culture. Therefore, it is useful to locate the key conceptual elements of the new nation. My focus is on concepts such as *fatherland, Suomi* (Finland), *nation* and *citizen*. From this point of view, I will ask whether and how this conceptual reading can be connected to the narrative reading of the novel.

**The Story of the Seven Brothers**

Right at the beginning we learn that the *Jukola Farm* has fallen "in to decay". The father of the brothers had preferred hunting to farming and was in the end killed in a fierce fight with a bear. The mother had been a devout Christian but without too much hope of getting the life of the seven wild sons in control. At first, the life of the brothers, who are now grown up or adolescent men, is carefree, adventurous and, apart from hunting, lazy. The situation changes completely when the parish gets a new and enthusiastic minister who wants to strictly supervise that every adult person learns how to read, at least the catechism. The men have to leave for the village and meet the churchwarden in order to learn to read. The brothers set out partly reluctantly, though in good faith, but get into a wild village fight before meeting their teacher. Due to the authoritarian and repressive ways of teaching, the brothers, locked in for practice, decide to break the window and escape back home. At home, they decide to rent out their farm and fields for the next ten years and to retreat to the remotest woodlands of their
farm. They build a new house on the slope of Impivaara ("The Virgin Hill"), and start hunting. At their first Christmas night, the eldest of the brothers, Juhani, insists on wrestling and testing their strength and nerves and in the process the house catches fire and burns down. Half-naked and barefoot, the brothers run in the snow and frost through the forests back to their old house in order to save their poor lives. Next spring, the men return to Impivaara in order to re-establish their house and household.

The peaceful course of events changes again when the brothers meet their appreciated friend and hunter Tinder-Matti. Matti tells them funny, brave and highly imaginative stories about his hunting adventures. Matti regularly finishes his narrated episodes by saying "and then we had a drink". Next morning, the brothers hurry to go hunting for ducks at the nearby swamp. However, inspired by Matti, Juhani suggests that a drink would not do any harm.

Lauri is sent to the Viertola manor to fetch a jug of spirits. On this trip, Lauri finds out that a bear has killed and partly eaten one of the Viertola bulls. Again, in good faith and with the best of purposes, the men decide to kill the bear first - just in order to protect the other precious bulls. After a fierce battle the bear gets killed but thanks to the noise their dogs have made, the brothers are soon chased by the whole herd of forty wild bulls. In pain and haste they succeed in escaping on to a huge rock, The Devil's Rock, where they spend the following three days, telling stories and quarrelling with each other, without food and nothing else to drink except the jug of spirits which Lauri keeps and drinks himself. Finally, the men realize that the only way to save their lives is by shooting the bulls. A massacre and bloodshed follows, and the brothers have an excess of meat.

This is the turning point of the story, because plain hunting in the remotest forests had lead the brothers into a social conflict with the Viertola master and the law. The harm done cannot be compensated for just by hunting, so the brothers finally decide to fell a part of their forest and clear the land after burning for cultivation of oats. Again, the work is done in one great spurt, almost in rage, and afterwards the heroes sleep for several days. Nevertheless, over the years the brothers have come to realize that their forests do not provide enough game.

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1 The translation is an obvious understatement. The original Finnish verb 'ryypätää' means severe drinking, and in this context has both humoristic and adventurous connotations.
for the seven men to live on comfortably only by hunting. They have to proceed in field
cultivation and found an entirely new farm in Impivaara and finally to plan their comeback in
their old home. The youngest and brightest of the brothers, Eero, is sent out to learn to read in
order to teach the others later on. Before their final return, the brothers know how to read and
have learned their catechism by heart. The end of the book is full of mutual forgiveness as the
brothers have firmly decided to settle all old conflicts, quarrels and regrets.

In the last chapter, the previously untamed outsiders of the village mature into
respectable members of the local community. Apart from Simeoni, all of the brothers get
married and proceed as masters of their respective farms. On Sundays Eero even reads a
newspaper. It is precisely at this point that the novel reaches its nationalistic apex: "The
country of his birth was to him no longer a vague part of a vague world, of which he knew
neither the site nor the character. He knew well where lay the country, that dear corner of the
earth, where the Finns dwelt in toil and struggle, and in whose bosom the bones of his fathers
rested (...) The whole picture of the land of his birth, its friendly mother-face, had sunk for
ever into the depths of his heart. And from it was born in him a desire to further the happiness
and prosperity of his country" (Kivi 1973, 337).

On another level, the whole story reflects the irrevocable transition from an oral into a
literary culture (Kinnunen 1987, 122). Many readers, who have neglected this point, have
been embarrassed by the abundance of the various stories that the brothers hear or tell to each
other, and which seem to abruptly break the proper narrative of the book. Kinnunen
convincingly argues that it is the inner world of the brothers which is full of these oral
narratives. The brothers' Weltanschauung is an aggregation of the Christian faith and
mythology as well as pagan fables and local folklore. They constantly imitate and repeat
people they have met. This rich world of myth, fantasy and narrative is replaced by literacy,
and, accordingly by a stricter religious understanding. This transition is most obvious with
Juhani, the eldest, whose stubborn and short-tempered mind used to ignite most of the fights
and comical events. He converts into a devote Pietist and assumes their formal and severe
attire and behavior. In the church, Juhani finds his place next to another devote Pietist and
master, whose hypocritical manners and regular drinking the narrator had previously made
fun of. Nevertheless, there is material enough to read the novel as a story of becoming conscious of one's own nation and inheritance.

The Concepts of an Emerging Nation

There is no doubt about Kivi's devotion to the Finnish cause. In what is left of his correspondence, it is evident that he was active enough to make comments on the proposals for the Finnish flag (Kivi 1984, 257), follow and comment the first meeting of the Estate Diet (op. cit., 268) and to express the need for a Swedish-language Fennoman newspaper (op. cit., 328-331). All this biographical background seems to make *Seven Brothers* fit well into the group of novels Anderson (1983) discusses. Nevertheless, the very composed narration of *Seven Brothers* makes a difference to the examples Anderson gives. The narrator is careful enough not to introduce words, concepts or theories which are too far away from the brothers' world. In order to study these conceptual aspects of the novel, I will apply strategies adopted from conceptual history (see Koselleck 1979; 1997; Richter 1995). The opening words of the novel are characteristic:

Jukola Farm, in the southern part of Häme, lies on the northern slope of a hill not far from a village called Toukola. Around the house the ground is studded with boulders, but farther down the slope are fields, where once, before the farm fell into decay, heavy-eared crops used to wave. (Kivi 1973, 13).

"Häme" is the only word crossing the brothers' immediate circle of life. Under the Swedish Rule up until 1809 "Häme" had been part of a different vocabulary, and in the novel no definite hints about bigger and more binding communities are present. So far, people beyond the borders of Häme might as well be foreigners.

In a similar way, the uncle of the boys is featured in old language. He is a significant and exceptional person because his travels have guided him outside the village and Häme:

A fine fellow was her brother, too, the boys' greatly admired uncle who in his youth had sailed the distant seas, a stalwart sailor, and had seen *many peoples* and cities (...) There (...) he would tell his nephews stories and describe to them
strange events that had happened in their *own country* or *foreign kingdoms*, or relate to them miracles and other things from the Bible. (Kivi 1973, 14, italics mine)

Their "own country" is contrasted with foreign "kingdoms", actually *valtakunnat* (Reich). At the time Sweden, Russia, and Austria were *Reichs* in this sense of the word, and consisted of several *peoples*. Anderson's quotation of the old Habsburgian titulature revealingly characterizes this old world of kingdoms and the "dynastic realms " (Anderson 1996 19-20).

The point of departure, then, is that the brothers are located in their province and village, and conceptually at the time of "dynastic realms". The practical way the *valtakunta* (kingdom) touched upon the life of the brothers was not, of course, discussed in terms *Government, civil service or state*, but in terms of the old metonymy *kruunu* (Crown). In particular, every violation of law threatened to push the "men of Crown" into action against the brothers.

The best evidence of the non-existence of an imagined community is the particular and archaic way the concepts 'nation' (*kansakunta*) and 'citizen' (*kansalainen*) are used by the brothers. Originally, the Finnish word for citizen was a direct translation from the Swedish 'medborgare', *kanssalainen*. Very soon the double 's' disappeared and the word received the beginning *kansa* (Folk, the people). The outcome of this process was that the Finnish concepts of both 'citizen' and 'nation' have now the element of *kansa* (the people) in them, as if they were derivations of 'the people'. However, Kivi uses both of these concepts in an archaic and non-nationalistic way. In the first instance, the expression is "Christian citizen" (Kivi 1973, 32), meaning Christian fellow-men. In present-day Finnish, we still have the word *kanssakristitty* (Co-Christian), with the double 's'. In the second case, this expression is directly used in the English translation:

Aapo: (...) And I know that even ten years of good and in every way respectable behaviour would scarcely be enough to raise us again in the sight of our fellow-man. (kansalaiset) (op. cit., 42, italics mine)

Above, Citizens (*kansalaiset*) are still fellow-men and not the 'peopler' suggested by the later and politicized nationalistic language use. At the end of the book, in the churchwarden's speech, the word *kansakunta* (nation) is similarly translated into 'fellow men" (op. cit., 303).
There is no connotation of belonging to a common people, folk or of having eternal blood relations. These fellow men are much like the local people in the same or similar social position.

The situation is not very different with the word 'fatherland' (isänmaa). I have found three instances where this concept is used, and all of them are related to the conflict between the brothers and the aristocratic master of Viertola. In two of these cases the translator Alex Matson has used "our country" instead of Fatherland:

Juhani: We chased a bear, a dangerous brute that would soon squash both you and your bulls. We killed the preying bear, and thus did our country (isänmaa) a great, a public service. Isn't this a public service: to weed wild beasts, bogies and devils out of the world? (Kivi 1973, 201)

Juhani: The meat would otherwise have spoiled and spread the itch and scab, plagues and sores over the whole Finland. We saved the country (isänmaa) from this ruin. (...) we did not want to commit so great a sin as to rob our Fatherland (isänmaa) and those set in authority over us of such strong, juicy fare as beef, especially if we remember that this year too so many lads have been forced to chew pinebark like goats. (op. cit., 212)

The brothers seem to have an oddly republican and militant Jakobinian? interpretation of fatherland. The humoristic comments by Juhani include a bitter political aspect because the novel was published just after the disastrous famine years of 1865-68. The general interest of fatherland or commonality of purposes do not exist beyond this very particular conflict, where the brothers and a powerful representative of local aristocracy are opposed. Fatherland is therefore a concept of contestation, a concept to contradict the narrow interests of the powerful. In spite of the presence of danger in this conflict the men of Viertola and the brothers nearly kill each other at first the constant comical element is there. For Juhani, it is in the best interests of the Fatherland "to weed wild beasts, bogies and devils out of the world". The author makes it absolutely clear that 'Fatherland' is not a holy word to be used only by serious people on Sundays.
The brothers know, however, that they live in Finland. After having the final and worst fight with the Toukola men, the brothers discuss leaving Finland or the "coasts of Finland" (Kivi 1973, 245). Lauri prattles about travels in Finland in his drunken speech on The Devil's Rock. Juhani notices, on their trip back to their old home, that Eero is no longer "among the smallest in Finland" (op. cit., 282). There is no doubt that these ways of using Suomi (Finland) are basically geographical, technical or humoristic, and lack all explicit references to an imagined community and identity. The conceptual reading of Seven Brothers gives then a negative answer to the question of the pre-existence of an imagined community. The age of orality does not yet recognize the nation and the belonging to an eternal community. This reading undoubtedly increases my admiration for the author Aleksis Kivi. Kivi-the-author does not enter into the novel as its narrator and introduce all of his political concepts and perspectives. Kivi was able, to an astonishing extent, to capture the originality of the language and political imagination of his pre-literate countrymen.

It is worth noticing that Kivi's narrative project would have been entirely different, if not outright impossible, in other parts of the former Kingdom of Sweden. The difference is not in the exact timing of the assumption of the general literacy. Indeed, Swedish literature and Swedish administrative language existed long before the ordinary farmers learned to read and consequently the spoken and written languages had a long period of time in which to blend into each other. In Finland the country had been governed and books been read for centuries in other languages and so the oral language had a life of its own in a greater extent than it was possible in countries where the elite wrote and the people spoke the same language.

By reading Kivi's novel conceptually, I have illustrated one strategy of using narratives in political science. I have earlier studied Kivi's similarly archaic and personal way of using the concept of 'power' (valta) (Hyvärinen 1998). Kivi's consequent project of recording the oral language makes his novel an extremely rich and valuable source of ideas and material for research on political language. Besides this general point, it is relevant to notice the close relationship between "conceptual" and "narrative" readings of novels. It is of course a radically different case if a concept is used by characters rather than the narrator of the novel.
One of the key contexts of a concept is always the narrative. It is necessary to identify the style, from romance to comedy and irony, before the use of a concept can be properly understood.

The Coherence of a Narrative

All discussions on narrative and politics face a number of unresolved and possibly unresolvable problems. To begin with what is referred by 'narrative'? What is the particular theory or discipline which is used as the basis of argumentation? Secondly, what is our conception of 'narrative coherence' or 'unity'? One way of solving these kinds of problems is to choose a very general outline: "One...feature of narratives or stories, as we may also call them identifies them as forms of discourse that place events in a sequential order with a clear beginning, middle and end" (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997, xv). In addition to its generality, this definition seems to me to include two possible dilemmas. Linguistics discusses narrative as one form of discourse and compares it, for instance, with 'chronicle' and 'explanation' (Linde 1993, 67-97). However, the complex, or 'higher-level' narratives that are studied in literature and philosophy apparently consist of multiple discursive materials. Narratives, therefore, can include (sub)stories, explanations, descriptions, documents, and possibly even chronicles. The other problem concerns the "clear beginning, middle and end". The opponents of the narrative approach typically use this formula to illustrate what a compelling structure a narrative is. The real paradox here is that the critics of narrative often 'condense' narratives to this theoretical formula, whereas the proponents of the narrative approach typically contrast purified theoretical laws with the narrative openness to concrete details, actions and human explanations (Hinchman & Hinchman op. cit., xiv; Nelson 1998).

My argument is that we do not only have different theories of narrative but we apparently have different linguistic or mental phenomena which are referred to as 'narratives'. William Labov (1972) deserves the credit for outlining the basic structure of the linguistic narrative. He starts his analysis by noting that in personal stories there are both "narrative" and "free" clauses. The order of free clauses in a story is basically arbitrary, whereas the order
of narrative clauses informs us of the order of events and even of the suggested causalities. I have an example:

1. Peter and Anne used to be married.
2. Anne found a new partner.
3. Peter left Anne.

The order of clauses (2) and (3) is apparently decisive for the understanding of the course of action. In reading Joyce, for example, this order does not seem to be relevant. However, when reading any episode or sub-narrative in Joyce, this methodology is certainly at work. Labov continues by noting that narratives do not exclusively consist of narrative clauses, but there are a couple of other elements as well. His scheme for oral narratives has six components:


It is obvious that the oral stories told in Kivi's novel follow this structure, but the novel itself does not have an abstract in a strong sense. In an oral setting, a story of this length would require strong explicit explanations why, in the first place, to listen to the narration. A novel needs several, possibly hierarchical orientations, that is, descriptions of settings of where, why and by whom the events take place. Nevertheless, the most evident difference between 'complex' and 'personal' (oral, linguistic) narratives concerns the clarity of the resolution. Oral narratives are told in an immediate interactional situation whereas novels are written over a longer period of time and without the immediate presence of an audience. In a novel, the characters and the narrator may offer competing resolutions. This pragmatic difference has undeniable political consequences. In actual interaction, the participants are in a number of ways confined by the rules of politeness and by maintaining each others "face". Anyone can

2 There is, however, an explicit narrator and his comment on the first page: "Such is the home of the seven brothers, whose fortunes I am about to relate". On the last page, we can find a coda: "But here my story ends. And I have now told of seven brothers in the backwoods of Finland; and what more could I relate of the day of their life and its course here on earth?" (Kivi 1973, 13, 342). The presence of abstract and coda is clearly connected to the use of an explicit narrator.
easily test this by trying to introduce a discussion on the 'power-relations' of their team, workshop or department.

"Thus face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction." (Brown & Levinson 1987, 61)

The further we proceed from oral and interactional stories, the more complex discursive elements narratives can include, and the less the play of politeness and face maintenance is at work and requiring coherent resolutions.

However, there is at least one other and partly different hierarchy of narratives. Some theoreticians claim that narratives are fictional and therefore occasion possibly unwarranted coherence to experiences which, without these narratives, would be chaotic or discontinuous (Bourdieu 1987). What is actually discussed here is the location of the narrative and the presumed 'pre-narrative' state of experience. I agree with Stephen Crites (1997) and David Carr (1986) when they argue that in some sense the human experience as such is temporal and narrative by nature. As a matter of fact, it is difficult if not entirely impossible to conceptualize action outside of narrativity. Narratives can then both precede and guide human action. In this sense, people are living and "acting out" narratives and the most various manuscripts. However, we cannot normally actualize our narratives as such because the unavoidable plurality and contingency of the human world (Arendt 1958): we get involved into other people's narratives, the course of events changes, and finally 'our' narratives are told by others. Human plurality means living in a world of competing narratives. So the brothers, inspired by the stories of Tinder-Matti, set out for hunting ducks (the world of absolute freedom), and end up killing bulls and finally burning forest and clearing land for cultivation (the world of economic necessity).

The theme of narrative coherence may now be approached from different angles. As regards immediate action, or capacity to act, it seems obvious that political actors cannot just declare the "discontinuity of reality" (Bourdieu) but must trust, at least temporarily, in some coherence of their narratives. But the pragmatics of telling stories after the event, immediately
increases the complexity of the situation. In addition to the need of offering a moral point and resolution (coherence), the stories must be reportable in the first place. The demands of reportability increase when the gap between the event and the story grows. The complication of action, the unexpected and extraordinary (discordance) in the events must be the greater the further we go from the event.

"Narrative, after all, is the other cultural form [besides musical style- MH] capable of expressing coherence through time, though its temporality is not so pure as that of music", argues Crites (op. cit., 29). As well as for Crites, narrative is a promise of coherence to Alasdair MacIntyre (1996) and several other scholars following him. It is characteristic that theorists in this orientation prefer to use the substantial forms of narrative "coherence" and "incoherence" as if they truly were tangible objects of study. "Like stories, identities may assume a "good" form a narrative coherence and consistence or they may be ill-formed", concludes Dan P. MacAdams (1988, 57). This approach prepares the ground for a rather normative way of reading narratives, asking how well the authors, communities and individual citizens have achieved a mature amount of coherence. I find this coherence-oriented study as a far too one-sided approach to the complexities of narrative.

As an alternative, Paul Ricoeur's discussion on narrative includes, to my understanding, a strategically important move from a substantive "coherence" to a verbal "emplotting", and, therefore, to the narrative processes (Ricoeur 1981, 1984). Ricoeur's emplotting is never a one-way road to coherence but a problematic attempt to deal with the heterogeneity of temporality. "Emplotment is never the simple triumph of 'order'" (Ricoeur 1984, 73). A similar attitude to narrative is expressed by Jerome Bruner (1991, 16) who says: "Narrative, I believe, is designated to contain uncanniness rather than to resolve it."

Political readings of narratives can always assume a number of different directions. The analysis may explicate the discordance, contingency, tension and plurality embedded in a narrative. On the other hand, it may assume a "mythic" perspective, looking for those common and persuasive elements of narrative which inform political ideas and vocabularies. As John S. Nelson (1998,144) has put it: "Myths are not just beliefs or systems of belief, let alone false ones. Instead myths are stories, tales, narratives. Therefore myth analysis attends
carefully to the plots, characters, settings, deeds, and consequences of argument-in-action (...)

Nevertheless, many a concept, reason, fact, or question makes little sense aside from an inspringing story”. It is easy to notice that Nelson's myths belong to the "sacred" narratives (Crites 1997) which are fairly coherent, recurring, persuasive and often inductive to political action. Below, I will suggest that a "mythic" reading may go hand in hand with the reading of "discordant" aspects of the narrative.

The Direction of Narrative Time

So far, we have learned that Seven Brothers tells the story of seven men  possibly a Bildungsroman  and the story of transition from orality to literacy, and the birth of the idea of nation. There is at least one additional macro level narrative effective in the book: the progress of economic rationality. During an astonishingly short period of time, in ten years, an economic transition from hunting and fishing over to cultivation by clearing and burning woodland and into standard field cultivation and regular every day work seems to take place.

This rapid economic development gives rise to some questions. The brothers actually lived in a fairly advanced region of the country, where cultivation by burning was generally forbidden, and practiced, therefore, only in the more backward areas. This is not the only sign of a backward move in time in the narrative. Later on in the novel it is told that the father of the illiterate men was himself a good reader. What is the progress like in this narrative?

In discussing Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, Ricoeur (1981, 180-182) maintains that some important temporal aspects of these folktales has been neglected in narratology. He continues:

Before projecting the hero forward for the sake of the quest, many tales send the hero or heroine into some dark forest where he or she goes astray or meets some devouring beast (...) These initial episodes do more than merely introduce the mischief that is to be suppressed; they bring the hero or heroine back into a primordial space and time that is more akin to the realm of dreams than to the sphere of action. (Ricoeur 1981, 181)
Without a need to push this similarity between *Seven Brothers* and Proppian folktales (Propp 1988) too far, the similarity of the regressive move should be recognized. The brothers do not rebel just against the severity of the churchwarden and the minister, they rebel against the whole economic rationality and every-day work required by the modern world. Only because of this initial regressive move is it possible to consider and describe such a profound social and economic change in ten years and within one generation.

Because of this backward move, and the search for the new start, *Seven Brothers* strangely reminds me of a number of pioneer novels I read as a boy, or even of a genre of daydreams I had in my early teens. To leave everything old behind, to get rid of all social obligations and to start a new economy from almost nothing has been a real and imaginary temptation for several generations of Europeans. My associations do not stop here. In my adolescence, I enjoyed reading Jack London's stories of the wilderness. In Kivi, I find the same passionate descriptions of life in the wilderness, the same enthusiastically written episodes of fight and hunting.

Kivi's descriptions of hunting, fishing and strolling in the forests are regularly thick of sensuality and detail. In general terms "narrative thickness" is a sign of particular relevance and the involvement of the narrator. The thickness of the narrative creates the illusion of presence, in contrast to merely glossed over events which stay emotionally further away from the reader (Hyvärinen 1998b). Kivi's hunted game animals are appreciated, they are dear, brave and cruel rivals, and never just food or some passive objects of economic harvesting. The best of the game receive their honored place in the fantastic adventure stories. I ignore the dramatic episodes of hunting, and quote a passage from the last part of the book, from the time when the brothers were accustomed to regular work:

> The brothers fished diligently on bright Lake Ilvesjärvi; and in their nets or on their hooks many a bull-necked perch and golden-ribbed rudd was caught. On the bank, in the shelter of a scented choke-cherry, they sat out the dawn of many pale summer morning, pulling out with their hooks the shining denizens of the lake. (Kivi 1973, 270)
Reading Kivi’s correspondence quickly reveals his constant appetite for hunting. Ironically, he once informs his mentor that the manuscript of *Seven Brothers* would have been finished had he not hunted for birds for the past months (Kivi 1984, 309). Similarly, in outlining his peaceful days of old age, the images of writing, strolling in the woodland, and hunting merge into a solid figuration of desirable activities.

The regressive story of the escape incorporates a strong mythic element. My point is not to diminish the literary value or originality of the novel by recognizing this mythic resemblance to folktales, pioneer stories or daydreams. I rather wish to emphasize the enormous emotional power of this backward move at the beginning of the novel. The brothers escaped in order to establish a life-style, which, in various ways, was what Kivi desired for himself. It is the oral world of folktales, myths and stories which itself is deeply circular in its understanding of time. During the men's journey to *Impivaara* time is not yet progressive or linear. Repeatedly, the brothers are fascinated by the epic time of adventure beyond all social time of the stories told by *Tinder-Matti* or *Aapo*. There has been a great time of adventures that the men try to retrieve, with consequences well known from Cervantes. According to Anderson, the conception of time was vital to the nation: "The idea of sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is a solid community steadily down (or up) history" (Anderson 1983, 26); or: "and also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (op. cit., 63). The brothers do not yet live the time of imagined nation.

The mythic new start is repeated several times in the book on a more problematic and political level, as a story of establishing fraternal polity (Hyvärinen 1998a). In the beginning, there is the problem of seven stubborn men, who should act in concert and in economically rational ways. Out of the pure fighting chaos, they try to establish order, legitimate power and create a capacity for dealing with their plurality. On the *Devil's Rock, Aapo* has one of his talks:

Note: this rock is a ship in a storm, the storm being that muttering, angry drove of bulls around our rock. Or shall I choose another picture? Ay, let this rock of
ours be a castle, which the enemy, cruelly armed with spears, besieges. Now if the besieged castle has no chieftain, no leader in discipline and defence, mutiny and disorder will spread amongst the men, and soon both castle and garrison are lost. And that is what will happen with us, unless we arrange and provide for ourselves differently, unless we set up lawful order in our midst. (Kivi 1973, 185)

The general sequence of events is that Juhani is nominated as the master and chief, but negotiations and fights are needed in order to reach an agreement on suitable punishments and their actual enforcement. In the regressive time of Impivaara, the brothers actually behave politically as a group, in open conflict, in negotiations, in trying to cope with the open world and its contingencies. These stories are repeatedly thick, intensive and impassioned. In contrast, the story of Eero's national awakening in the end of the book is a fairly abstract glossing as compared with these occurrences between the brothers.

Besides the optimistic narrative of the growing social and economic rationality, there seems to be a nostalgic undertone. Over their trip back to their old home and village, the brothers are gradually leaving the group of seven and entering a solemn and rational individuality. The men enter the socially adult life, which is without much fascinating content. Marriage does not open new rich worlds for the brothers. Encounters with bears are still described with fuller amount of detail and fervor than courting women. The rational and economically productive life of adults seems to lack most of the humor, excitement and adventure the brothers were able to enjoy as a group. In spite of the victory of the orderly and rational life, the literacy and linear time, and even in spite of the few enthusiastic lines on Eero's growing national consciousness, there is still much adoration and nostalgia for the oral culture, juvenile adventures, and physical excess.

The Reasons of Criticism

What elements of the book did annoy the intelligent contemporaries of Kivi so vehemently? I suggest a couple of slightly different and speculative answers. The general objective of
Finnish nationalists in the early 1870s was to prove that the Finnish language was rich enough to be learned and cultivated for intellectual, legal and administrative purposes. Kivi’s partly nostalgic appreciation for the comic richness of orality has apparently been difficult for his intelligent readers. The brothers are no longer epic heroes of folklore and they still speak and act independently. The Fennoman elite and its perspectives do not have a central place in the novel. "The quiet, stable people" (Ahlqvist), suddenly had a generous voice and acted on their own, behaving almost like a social movement. The whole literary culture is basically seen from the angle of the old oral world, and not from the privileged perspective of Kivi’s critics.

I also emphasize Kivi’s consequent conceptual horizons. For the educated and thoroughly nationalistic elite, the lack of imagined national community, which also meant the lack of ideal Suomi, lead by idealistic intellectuals, was of course a sign of brutality and sheer wildness. The "artistic edification" that Meurman expected would have required the incorporation of these "ideal" horizons of the elite. The novel was not situated within their own conceptual horizon, within progress and linear national time.

Even if the novel ends with the victory of literacy, Pietism and rational economic life, the parallel story of sensual impoverishment-cum-taming does not necessarily give the resolution the only perspective to the book. In his Confessions, Saint Augustine was extremely methodical in not attaching any thick details or mundane sensuality to the story of his sinful youth and adulthood. The thickest descriptions were always about the stories of conversion, and of his own moment of conversion in book VIII. Rhetorically, Kivi’s novel proceeds exactly in the opposite way. The details, the humor and the thick descriptions are all attached to the wild and carefree youthful life. This hesitant progressiveness was not something the Fennomen wanted to read from the first Finnish novel.

Source material:


**Literature**


Learn more about the history, traditions and health benefits of Finland's saunas. And read our first timer's guide. Dating back to the 11th century, saunas appear everywhere in Finnish culture, including a famous scene in the Aleksis Kivi novel Seven Brothers when the irresponsible brothers set fire to their sauna. In Finland, time in a sauna is not a luxury, nor is it something to be spent alone. Instead, saunas are a part of everyday life, used for socialising, relaxation and health. Semantic Scholar extracted view of "Narrating the Nation: Seven Brothers envision Finland" by Matti J. Hyvärinen. @inproceedings{Hyvrinen1999NarratingTN, title={Narrating the Nation: Seven Brothers envision Finland}, author={Matti J. Hyvärinen}, year={1999} }. Matti J. Hyvärinen. Published 1999. History. View PDF. Save to Library. Create Alert.