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The Recalcitrant Nation of *Seven Brothers*

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ABSTRACT:

Political science has never been as active in qualitative research as sociology or cultural studies. What methods do we then have available, if we try to re-read nationally elevated and politically interpreted 19th century literature? In order to avoid conveying an anachronism, a certain methodological distance is needed. I suggest conceptual history and “geographical reading” as possible ways of analyzing political ideas in fiction. My case is the first Finnish novel, Aleksis Kivi's *Seven Brothers* (1870). Scholars have emphasized the role of 19th century novels in imagining the nation. However, Kivi postponed the images of nation and outlined radical political futures that were neglected by the Finnish nationalists. A methodological reading, thus, can challenge the canonical understanding of Kivi as a nationalist icon. The merits of conceptual history would be widely useful in social research.

Nation and the novel

The relationship between the novel and the emerging nation and nationalism has inspired numerous scholars since Benedict Anderson (1991) published his *Imagined Communities*. As Timothy Brennan (1990, p. 49) observed: "It was the *novel* that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles. Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encouraging literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility."

The novel, then, seems to present the national plurality as a whole, map the borders, and link the opposites. It also has to do with the standardization of language. "But it did much more than that", continues Brennan, "Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation." Franco Moretti (1998) sees this process of imagination in more clearly visual and geographical terms: "But nation-state? 'Where' is it? What does it look like? How can one *see* it? And again: village, court, city, valley, universe can be visually presented - in paintings, for instance: but the nation-state? Well, the nation-state found the novel. And vice versa: the novel found the nation-state. And being the only symbolic form that could represent it, it became an essential component of our modern culture" (p. 17).

Moretti's words open interesting opportunities. The nation-state *found* the novel and the novel *found* the nation-state. To be able to do so, there must have been an original distance and indifference between novel and nation. I take this moment – however short it was – as permission to imagine a novel that has not yet adapted itself to the symbiotic life with nation-state.

Novel and nation. No doubt, this is an intricate relationship worthy of study and speculation. In this article, I have one particular concern with this argument. The importance of literature and the novel was well recognized by the Finnish nationalists, '*Fennomen*' (from 'Fenno-maniac'), right from the very beginning of the movement (at least, from the 1840s onwards). The whole tradition of "national sciences" (ethnography, Fenno-linguistics, Finnish history, Finnish literature) which endured until the 1960s, celebrated the key national role played by a number of 19th century novels, above all the first Finnish novel *Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi (1870). My concern is whether this new understanding of the role of the novel overlaps a bit too neatly with the old, nationalist saga, and re-writes the history of the winners. "It is becoming a commonplace that the institution of literature works to nationalist ends" (During, 1990, p. 138). Quite probably, but the same is largely true for the institution of historiography as well.

It is the unifying *-ism* that raises critical questions. Is the *nation* advanced by Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872) in any way a version of the victorious *nationalism* that continues to tell the story of the national author Kivi? Is it really true that *Seven Brothers* imagines a national community, and if it does, what are the possible qualities of this particular community?

To rephrase my question: are we now at all competent to read the political ideas of these kinds of 19th century novels, given the hundred years' hegemony of nation as a self-evident frame of political thinking?

In answering these questions, I read the novel from various perspectives. I start as a conceptual historian and read the ways Kivi uses the key concepts of nation, *Suomi* (Finland), citizen and fatherland. The aim of this exercise is to explicate the ways Kivi's characters themselves understood their political world, and what they conceptually imagined. The purpose of this conceptual history is to restrain the history of the winners, that is, to read old texts only in

the horizon of the later history. My critical question is, whether Kivi's concepts are in accord with the horizon of nation and nationalism, as presumed. Next I proceed to the geographical reading inspired by Franco Moretti. How does the geography of the *Seven Brothers* reflect the Finnish national entity? - There are two separate English translations of the novel, by Alex Matson (Kivi, 1952) and Richard A. Impola (Kivi, 1991), which makes the study of conceptual change easier.

But first a few words about the national context. Before 1809, the current Finland was a province of the Swedish Empire. 'Finland' was not a colony, though, because people living in 'Finnish' territory had equal rights of representation as other subjects of the Swedish kingdom. However, during the 17th and 18th centuries the dominance of the Swedish language grew in importance. Swedish was the language of education, thus even Finnish names were changed when Finnish-speaking children went to school. When Russia occupied the current Finnish territory in 1809, and created the Grand Duchy of Finland, the languages of the elite were Swedish, German, and French.

When the Finnish national movement gathered momentum after the 1840s, reference to the "nation" was far from resolved. For some members of the Swedish-speaking elite, the real cultural home remained the Swedish nation, hence the Swedish culture and language was seen as the only meaningful counterforce to the Russian impact. Not quite differently, some of the leading Finnish nationalists thematized the emerging nation in terms of the Finnish language and coined the slogan "one language, one nation". Both of these extremes understood the nation in terms that differ from the current understanding of the 'bilingual nation of Finland', a fact that once again confirms the contingent nature of nation. This is the first moment of re-thinking novel and nation. How exactly does the novel work in a radically bilingual context? How does it cope with the

problem of 'one, yet many', if the question of 'many' is about language itself? Here, my strategy is to compare *Seven Brothers* to other nationally relevant novels of late 19th and early 20th century.

Homi K. Bhaba (1990) offers a useful distinction for my use: "In the production of nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation" (p. 297). Bhaba's distinction resembles a much older theme in republican theory, the issue of whether the (French) National Assembly *performed* the nation, or just *re-presented* an already existing, eternal nation (Kurunmäki, 2000). This is just a way to pose the question: novel and - which kind of a nation?

In various ways, *Seven Brothers* is a good case worthy of further study. Rephrasing Moretti, I presume that this novel was written *before* novel and nation really found each other in a Finnish context. On top of that, the book has been the most celebrated Finnish novel for the last hundred years, and an integral part of all nationally spirited education. It is a national icon and enigma at the same time, still calling for new interpretations. The book was published before the standardization of the written Finnish language was completed; yet its language has remained fresh. At the core of the national enigma, however, resides the fact that the novel was harshly attacked at the time of its publication, and none of the leading *Fennomen* stepped forward to advocate for Kivi in the face of attacks by the conservative professor-cum-poet August Ahlqvist.

"*Seven Brothers* is now the best-known and most loved book in Finland", says Laitinen (1981, p. 220) in accordance with the prevailing consensus. But how was the original conflict possible at all? The standard national saga sets Ahlqvist as a conservative Fennoman against the radicals like Kivi. This argument does not hold because the rest of the nationalist elite was either

silent or against the book. Another explanation emphasizes Kivi's new realism against the elite's more romantic conception of the arts and the people. Kivi's persistent use of dialect annoyed the academics who pursued the standardization of the Finnish language (Kohtamäki, 1956). But these canonical explanations, save the romantic story about the great and misunderstood artist under attack, hardly explain the fierce accusations of brutality, or the lack of advocates in the debate. The conflict was not just between the mediocre Ahlqvist and the brilliant Kivi: the conservative Fennoman leader Agathon Meurman (1826-1909) also wrote a devastating critique of the novel. Meurman managed to save his later political reputation only because his friend and colleague Yrjö Koskinen declined to publish the review, so the role of the villain of the nation was later bestowed only to Ahlqvist.

The critics agreed on four major defects in the novel. Firstly, it does not depict the real Finnish people. Secondly, the book and its language are thoroughly brutal and ugly. Thirdly, the novel does not have a proper plot or structure. And finally, it contains far too much tedious dialogue to be a novel (Lehtonen, 1931; Kauppinen, 1966). The critics, actually, took the position of true realists by comparing the novel with the prevailing perception of the people. As Ahlqvist has it: "The common people has nowhere been such as the heroes of this book; *silent, stable* people, which has cleared and is still clearing the wildwoods of our country for farming" (Lehtonen, 1931, p. 248, italics mine). To him, the novel was, in "describing brutishly brutality, in fact ugly" (p. 238).

Of course, there were differences of opinion within the nationalist elite. The celebrated philosopher J. V. Snellman (1808-1881) ultimately recommended the publication of the novel. While the critics decried the "brutality" of the brothers, Snellman set the tone of the later canonical interpretation: the book was a *Bildungsroman*. Kivi "did not let any of the brothers end

up on the gallows" (Lehtonen, 1931, p. 282). The problem with the hegemony of this interpretation is that Kivi was then exclusively seen within the perspective of later developments in nation-building. He became a martyr and the genius of nationalist writing, which does not imply that he was read more accurately than before.

In the beginning of the novel, seven orphan brothers live a lazy and wild life with their farm in decay, until they receive official orders from the new parish minister to come to learn to read. After the rough conduct of the churchwarden, their teacher, the brothers decide to escape into the woods to continue their wild life for the next ten years by hunting, fishing, and establishing a new farm. Even in the woods, the brothers are not able to avoid conflicts with their neighbors. In the end, mercy, reconciliation and religious pietism win, and Eero, the youngest of the brothers, even becomes conscious of the emerging nation, and "the whole picture of the land of his birth, its friendly mother-face, had sunk for ever into the depths of his heart" (Kivi, 1952, p. 337). It is this mystery of the last "tame" chapter, and the short section on Eero, which later created the book's reputation as a narrative of the emerging nation.

On a more general level, the book recounts the historical movement from oral to literary culture. In the beginning, the brothers live in a muddled world of biblical stories, gossip, myths, and fairy tales - everything that they have happened to hear. But this orality is far from the celebrated Hellenic orality of tight communities: the stories the brothers recount in various situations form no rationally organized wholes. The brothers use allegories, but understand them either as realistically as historical narratives, as pure miracles or allegories proper. Therefore, the narrated move into the literary culture also includes the overall growth of rationality.

At the end of novel, Eero finds the nation, and imagines its community. But through a much longer story, the emerging nation adapts the novel, and turns the quest of the brothers into an

essentially Finnish cause (Finns preferring, for instance, the solitude of the woods over the noise of the world), celebrating the novel as its own *Bildungsroman*. Novel and nation: harmonious life over a hundred years. But how is the nation depicted in the novel? Is the nation already an obstacle in listening to Kivi?

From concepts to geography

Why conceptual history as a way of reading novels?

Novelists were regarded as key political thinkers until the beginning of 20th Century. Then the efforts to create a distinctively political “science” pushed the study of novels almost entirely to literature and the humanities. If the later heyday of behaviorism witnessed a profound methodological similarity between sociology and political science, the same seems not to be the case after cultural, linguistic, constructivist and narrative turns. For various reasons, qualitative research does not, yet, flourish in political science as much as it does in sociology or cultural studies.

In this particular setting, the history of concepts approach offers one way of bringing political studies methodologically closer to cultural and social studies, and providing qualitative inquiry with new possibilities. The history of concepts shares the basic presumptions of the linguistic turn, but emphasizes the relevance of the conceptual level. Its idea is that all political and scholarly concepts are both historical and contested. Rather than continuing the pointless search for correct definitions, this way of thinking emphasizes the contingent and local nature of any definition. It resists the idea of “eternal debates” and coherent traditions; instead it undertakes to interpret past debates on their own, local terms.

Conceptual history links history, cultural studies and politics in a new way by maintaining that a political culture can only be comprehended by understanding its particular ways of using its key concepts. Conceptual history can itself be seen either as a form of doing history, “a style of political theorizing” (Palonen, 2002), or a reserve of methodological tools. Conceptual changes occur constantly, and even the current changes can be studied (Ball, 2002). Recent overviews of conceptual history include Richter (1995), Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans & van Vree (1998), see also Tully (1988) and Ball (1988).

Accordingly, concepts do not possess essential meanings, rather they can be properly studied only in their use. Three linguistic aspects are significant: the use of synonyms, counter-concepts, and parallels. Together with typical idiomatic formulas, these aspects form what is called a *semantic field*. Novelists seldom define their concepts, nevertheless, they are experts in contrasting the semantic fields and surroundings where various concepts surface in their work. *Translations* can also be used as a method of conceptual history.

The history of concepts offers perspectives on the history of social research as well. For example, the recurrent term ‘narrative turn’ implies that the meaning and scope of ‘narrative’ has changed profoundly in recent years. A previously methodical concept has sometimes turned into a metaphor (“living out narratives”). More phenomena than before are referred as narratives, and the narrative approach has sometimes received a programmatic or normative aspect (Kreiswirth, 2000; Atkinson, 1997; Bochner, 2001). The method of inquiry is now also a method of writing (Richardson, 1998; 2001; Ellis and Berger, 2001). Rather than trying to fix the correct meaning of ‘narrative’ or ‘narrative turn’, a conceptual historian would look more carefully at the actual changes that have occurred over the last few decades, asking if some perspectives have been lost or marginalized in this process.

In a similar way, a conceptual historian might approach the accusations of “Romanticism” in narrative studies from the perspective of *asymmetric counter-concepts*. The participants of political, religious and academic debates often try to get the rhetorical upper hand with asymmetric counter-concepts by contrasting, for example Christians and pagans, specific and generic terms. In this case, the counter-concept of “Romanticism” is not defined (for example, as classical universalism, or compulsive methodism), so the opposite is understood to be adequate research as such. Finally, conceptual historians argue that every scholar of social, political and cultural phenomena should be sensitive to the history of his or her own key concepts. All in all, conceptual history aims at an alternative way of social and political thinking and historical theorizing, admitting the “critical silences” (Gurevitch, 1998) we meet in seeking a dialogue with past authors or simply with thinkers from diverse discursive backgrounds.

As for the history of Finnish concepts, Kivi’s position is outstanding. Because the elite had used Swedish for centuries, the Finnish language changed slowly and lacked the hierarchical dominance of the written language. Kivi managed to record much of the old oral world, which did not survive long after his work.

Franco Moretti’s (1998) notion of the “geographic reading” of novels is pertinent to this picture, because geographical names as such are important concepts. Following Anderson (1991) and Moretti, I point out three levels of imagining the nation: 1) conceptual imagination of nation, 2) parallel, national time, 3) narration that unites geographical sites to a national whole. Moretti’s move from concepts to geography and landscape is significant: he invites studies on the role of landscape painting, film and photography in narration of the nation.

Nation, citizen and Finland

The novel begins with a detailed description of local geography. The farm is located in the "southern part of Häme", "not far from a village called Toukola". Häme, indeed, is now a Finnish province, but earlier the word could belong to different vocabularies (say, one of the eastern areas of Sweden). As a rule, the geography is described merely as far as one can see from the highest hills. This is precisely the locality Moretti described above, the locality that is possible to understand *without* reading novels and newspapers. The brothers are situated into the local landscape. The immediate limits of this tangible community are transgressed only in ways known in oral culture: the stories heard and traveling people met are the only signs of the unseen world. This is the space before nation, newspaper, and novel.

Anderson calls the political entities that precede nation-states 'dynastic realms' (p. 19-22). We meet these realms right at the beginning of the novel. The brothers have heard eloquent stories from their uncle, a former sailor, "who in his youth had sailed the distant seas, a stalwart sailor, and had seen *many peoples* and cities". Therefore, he was able to "tell his nephews stories and describe to them strange events that had happened in their *own country* or *foreign kingdoms [realms]*" (Kivi, 1952, p. 14, italics mine). To be precise, Kivi's original term here is indeed '*valtakunta*', realm. The uncle had traveled out of the realms of Sweden and Russia, and met similar realms abroad. He had met "foreign peoples", but these peoples are not yet the teleological and political entities of the nationalistic discourse: realms and cities can easily host a number of peoples. Kivi is very careful in locating the beginning of the story at the time of dynastic realms, at the time *preceding* nation states.

If we look at the central vocabulary of 'nation', we can recognize that Finnish words for 'citizen' and 'nation' occur a few times in the novel. But do the concepts occur as well?

Conceptual historians have often referred to cases when a writer has a concept without a particular term or word to express it (Skinner, 1988; Farr, 1989, p. 27). The history of new written languages offers a plenitude of opposite cases: the word for a current concept is often much older than its recent conceptual use. This is the case with the Finnish concepts of nation and citizen, and Kivi's location in this story is exciting. My method of verifying these changes of meaning is to use the 20th century English translation by Alex Matson (1952): if the meanings have remained unchanged, the translator can translate the words like current concepts.

In contemporary Finnish, the words people, folk (*kansa*), citizen (*kansalainen*) and nation (*kansakunta*) form a linguistically tight family. *Kansalainen* (citizen) is free from any European reference to cities or republican participation, and a good mock translation of it would be 'folkler', a member of the 'folk' or 'the people'. *Kansakunta* (nation) might have the meaning 'everyone that belongs to a folk/people'. Both 'citizen' and 'nation' are derivations of the same word, which means both 'folk' and 'the people'.

However, the history of *kansalainen* is a bit more complicated. Before the codification of the Finnish language, the forms *kansa* and *kanssa* were interchangeable. In current language, *kanssa* means 'with' or 'fellow'. *Kanssa-lainen* can thus have the meaning 'one of those who are with you, your fellow'. In this way, one could argue that the pre-nationalistic 'people' consisted of people who lived 'with' or around, without any explicit connotation to common origin, language or race. The Swedish word for citizen is *medborgare*. Again, the beginning *med* has the same meaning of 'with' and 'fellow', the word meaning literally 'fellow burgher'. Thus, it is quite possible that the old *kanssalainen* has referred more to the Swedish 'fellowness' than to any direct membership of the folk. Through the codification of the literary Finnish language, which was a fairly short and politically led project (ca. 1840-1870), *kanssalainen* lost the extra 's', and the

intuitive meaning of the world grew closer to 'folk'. In contrast to this development, the Finnish language still has words like *kanssakristitty*, 'fellow Christian', or *kanssaihminen*, 'fellow human being' - both words that do not carry along any intuitive connotation of 'folk' or 'the people'. To my reading, this morphological and semantic choice, 'survival of the fittest', is a wonderful example of the intermingling of ideology of the national project and the selection of forms of language.

Kivi's position in this process is revealing. At the end of the first chapter, Aapo, the brother who represents rational, moderate reasoning in the story, uses the term "Christian citizen". A few pages later, Kivi (1952) again uses the Finnish word for 'citizen'. But here, the translator Alex Matson takes another expression. I quote:

Aapo: Remembering the idle and often wild life of our youth, people hardly expect anything good to come of us. 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*. (p. 42, italics in quotations mine)

Alex Matson puts it nicely: Kivi's citizen is a fellow man. Kivi uses the current word (with only one 's') in the old meaning. This concept is pre-political in a double way. To begin with, there is no connotation of belonging to an eternal, noble or chosen 'people'. On the other hand, this concept is neither a distant relative of 'citizen' nor *Stadtbürger* in the meaning of republican participation or active political citizenship. All formulations emphasize citizenship as a *Christian citizenship*. It is essential to be decent and appropriate with regards to the law and the authorities. The focus is not at all the activity in creating laws or supervising the authorities. This is the world governed by *Obrigkeit*, or the world of religious community (cf. Anderson, 1991, p. 12-19).

This archaic vocabulary is not reserved only for the brothers. When the brothers have returned from their ten years withdrawal to the woods back to their village, the churchwarden himself gives a powerful speech. He says, according to Matson:

For see the wonderful trick played by fortune: these brothers left the abodes of men, their neighbours and *fellow men*, and trotted off into the night of the forest. (p. 303)

Kivi does not exactly talk about 'fellow men', but his word is simply *kansakunta* (nation). Both of these key terms of national imagery, thus, were clearly on a pre-political, pre-national, and pre-conceptual level. The brothers and the churchwarden did not yet imagine a political-cum-historical subject *kansakunta* (nation), as Kivi's coeval and nationalist ideologist Koskinen so programmatically did (Koskinen, 1879).

With regard to the concept of citizenship, *Seven Brothers* does not have a national horizon. Citizenship simply means *membership in a parish* and the proper behavior in it. In this sense, the book is not at all written in the horizon of Finland or nation. The brothers grew into respectable members of their parish, learned to follow the rules, and to be decent and properly regulated. There is no need to push this difference between religious and political community too far, because the parish was the precursor of the municipality. Municipal self-government dates back to the statute of 1865, which separated the secular issues from the local church administration, making the conceptual distinction between 'municipality' (*kunta*) and 'parish' (*seurakunta*) meaningful. Still, the point of the book is to situate the brothers into a *strictly local* and 'parishian' context, without too many traces of national imagination.

However, the novel also includes a clear alternative to this moderate, 'parishian' citizenship. The first alternative is offered by Kivi's concept of 'fatherland' (*isänmaa*). The concept springs up after one of the most popular episodes of the book. On an innocent hunting trip, the brothers

discover that a bear has killed their neighbor's bull. In good faith and with the best of intentions, the men decide to go kill the bear in order to protect the other bulls - only to find themselves chased by the herd of forty wild bulls. The brothers spend the next three days on *The Devil's Rock*, telling stories and quarrelling, without food and nothing to drink other than one jug of spirits. 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 get a huge excess of meat. However, the master of *Viertola Manor*, a noble man and the owner of the bulls, does not want to touch the meat but only to charge and punish the brothers. During this heated conflict, on the verge of mutual violence between wild peasants and a nobleman, important concepts appear. Against the threat of violence and legal action, Juhani declares:

There is *common law* for all of us, before we stand as *equals*. From the womb of a woman you came, and as naked, just as naked, a lad not an inch better than I. And your noble birth? Our old filmy-eyed cock can do a little trick on that. (p. 200)

Juhani invites now common law and equality before the law as arguments against the local authority and arrogance of nobility. This liberal argument is supported by traditional Christian equality: "From the womb of a woman you came." All of this is needed to ground Juhani's rude, popular ridicule of the nobility. A bit later, Juhani continues:

We killed the preying bear, and thus did *our country* [fatherland] a great, a public service. Isn't this a public service: to weed wild beasts, bogies and devils out of the world? (p. 201)

Again, it is the concept of "fatherland" that Kivi uses instead of the more neutral 'country'.

Matson's translation indicates that Kivi's "fatherland" has a different meaning, which cannot be used in 20th century translations.

A few days later, the brothers have to explain their behavior to the local authorities. Now the issue is about the brothers' decision to eat the meat. Juhani maintains:

The meat would otherwise have spoiled and spread the itch and scab, plagues and sores over the *whole Finland*. We saved the country from this ruin. (...)

We did not want to commit so great a sin as to rob our *Fatherland* 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. (p. 212)

'Fatherland' is now a concept that protects peasants against the caprice of nobility. 'Finland' as a distinct political entity and Fatherland are invited into the discourse only during this contestation. If the citizenship attached to the parish meant obedience, then the fatherland authorized the protection of popular interests. Alarmingly enough, this 'fatherland' resembled the radical anti-nobility fatherland engendered by the French Revolution - not the fatherland of romantic nationalism. Kivi was, of course, very familiar with the romantic patriotism of the celebrated, Swedish-writing 'national poet' J. L. Runeberg (1804-1877), and there is no doubt of his personal commitment to the Finnish cause (Tarkiainen, 1916, p. 122-144). However, he was completely devoid of the national idealism that his literary coevals shared.

To conclude, *Seven Brothers* does not offer an unequivocal conceptual horizon of imagined nation. In various ways, the story is positioned in the time of dynastic realms. A national horizon is not a self-evident background of the events, rather it seems to be a resource that can be invoked coincidentally. The novel is able to recount the story of *the birth* of national imagination instead of just locating the story within the national context.

The geography of *Seven Brothers*

Franco Moretti (1998), in elegantly arguing for the special role of the novel in advancing national imagery, has outlined various geographical patterns used in the 19th century novel. In his maps, he presents the geographical locations of the beginnings, ends and narrative complications. Jane Austen's Britain, for instance, is limited to the southern parts of England. Novels begin and end mostly in the countryside, whereas London and southern coast are privileged locations for the narrative complication. Even if Scotland, Ireland and Wales are excluded, Moretti concludes that Austen's England is not one. "The novel functions as the symbolic form of the nation-state (...) and it's a form that (...) not only conceals the nation's internal divisions, *but manages to turn them into a story*" (p. 20). In Austen's case, "the family abode is usually on the verge of being lost - and [her plots] rewrite it as a seductive journey: prompted by desire, and crowded by happiness. They take a *local* gentry, like the Bennets of *Pride and Prejudice*, and join it to the *national* elite of Darcy and his ilk. They take the strange, harsh novelty of the modern state - and turn it into a large, exquisite home" (p. 18).

Walter Scott represents a clear contrast to these "internal marriage markets" recounted by Austen. Scott is fascinated with borders, in particular with the internal border between England and Scotland. According to Moretti (1998), this internal border "is not so much a politico-military demarcation, as an *anthropological* one" (p. 37). The relation of time and space becomes utterly fascinating when Scott's hero Waverley "travels backwards through the various stages of social development described by the Scottish Enlightenment: the age of Trade, of Agriculture, of Herding (...) and finally of Hunting..."(p. 38).

Moretti's idea of geography as "the foundation of narrative form" is tempting. If we look at two other remarkable Finnish novels of ideas, Arvid Järnefelt's *Fatherland* (1893) and Juhani

Aho's *Spring and Winter Again* (1906), we meet a basically similar geography and map of languages. The painful travel between the idealistic (or economically greedy) capital Helsinki, and the pragmatic and religious countryside forms the basic tension of these novels. The countryside is the true Finland, even though it is not fully interested in Finnish nationalism. In Aho's map, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, the village, the woods and the lakes form a long chain from political influence to pure Finnishness. The national theme, thus, is clearly embedded in the sensitive relationship between the new Finnish elite and reluctant countryside, or the unity between Finnish national intellectuals and the Pietist awakening. The geography of these novels reflects the imagined community, or, rather, the ways of imagining the community. In both novels, Helsinki is also the location of the Swedish language, and the conflict between languages.

Seven Brothers deviates from this model sharply. To begin with, neither Helsinki nor the national elite appear in the novel. Kivi is strictly local and does not introduce the conflict between two languages, nor the national issue at all. Do we witness here a nation without its head? Even the newspaper that Eero subscribed to was published in Turku. The ambivalence between the Swedish and Russian Realms and Finnish nation is nicely reflected in the last chapter of the book. Juhani, then a married man, praises his wife Venla:

Scold me but not my wife! She is a wife the like of which there is only one in the whole kingdom of Sweden! (p. 310)

What we see here is again a piece of Kivi's sense of humor. Juhani repeats an old, popular saying, the meaning of which has, of course, changed since Russia occupied Finland. Be that as it may, 'Finland' is not the only possible point of reference.

During the narrated time, the brothers cross the borders of their village only once. In order to pay their debts to Viertola Manor, the brothers had to start growing rye. They get more grain than they need, and start distilling spirits. One thing leads to another:

Michaelmas drew nearer, and the brothers felt like enjoying this holiday in high fashion. A rich load was hauled together to be taken to town, and with the proceeds tidbits were to be bought for the coming feast: rum, bottled beer, eels, salt herrings and wheaten bread. (p. 224)

It is the excess of grain and need for some luxury that sends two of the brothers out of the village to a nearby town, *Hämeenlinna*. The outcome is miserable: Eero and Simeoni drink the proceeds from the harvest, and return to the farm late and in a sordid state. The message is quite clear: towns are dangerous sites of unknown temptations for men with such weak self-control. A good and controlled life is best achieved within the confines of one's own farm and village. City life is neither described nor integrated into any national whole.

While the brothers did not travel, they still *imagined* distant countries. Simeoni, after his perilous drinking trip to Hämeenlinna, has a hallucinatory dream. Satan himself had taken him to the moon. From there, Simeoni had marvelous views:

I saw the whole circle of the earth, the Kingdom [realm] of England, Turkey, the town of Paris and the land [realm] of America. Then I saw the Grand Turk rise and work terrible havoc; and in his tracks walked the great horned Mammon, driving the race of man from end to end of the earth like a wolf does a flock of sheep. (p. 233)

In Anderson's terms, this is a thoroughly dynastic dream. Simeoni sees cities and realms, not nations, states, or peoples. After this shocking experience, the brothers decide to leave for church, but after such a great binge they had confused Sunday with Monday, are ridiculed and soon end

up in a new village struggle. Afterwards, filled with deep contrition, the brothers are convinced of a harsh future in jail. To avoid it, they speculate on routes of escape. And what do they contrive: to go as shepherds to Ingria, as doormen to Saint Petersburg, or as sailors "towards England" and "away from [the] Finnish coast" (p. 245). This is something we might call 'imagined geography', or possibly, orally transmitted geography. The brothers think of and imagine the places they have heard stories of. The Finnish nation or Finnish citizenship create no recognized limits when they reason their possible escape.

What is, then, the real geography of the novel? Except for Eero and Simeoni, the brothers do not leave their village over the narrated time. Not surprisingly, the brothers marry local peasantry. Their travel to the woods, to *Virgin Hill*, takes place within their own village and even on their own premises. Still, this journey to the north is much more than a day's trip within their own farm. Economically, they travel backwards in history. From regular agriculture, the brothers move back to the free pleasures of hunting and to cultivation by clearing and burning. This journey creates an odd ambivalence about the whole genre: are we reading a fairy tale where orphans are sent to the woods to survive on their own, an adventure novel about comical, fighting boys, or do we indeed have a pioneer novel?

Dream, beginning and action

In discussing Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Paul Ricouer (1981) suggests a new interpretation for the initial phases of the studied fairy tales, an interpretation that is surprisingly appropriate to the *Seven Brothers*: "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. Thanks to this preliminary disorientation, the linear chain of time is broken and the tale assumes an oneiric dimension that is more or less preserved alongside the heroic dimension of the quest. Two qualities of time are thus intertwined: the circularity of the imaginary travel and the linearity of the quest as such” (p. 181).

The realm of dreams. At this point Kivi's critics are quite right: this novel is far from a realistic representation of ordinary Finnish farm life. Kivi creates this dream-like original state, precisely in order to give the brothers the possibility to be pioneers, to start an entirely new life and economy. Within ten years, the brothers undergo a huge economic transformation from hunting to organized farming, a change, which historically took hundreds of years. The move to the woods makes a fresh start possible, but this is not the only indication of a new start in the novel. To begin with, the seven men are *orphans*; they are freed from the whole pedagogical network of family lineage. Thanks to the wisdom of their ancestors, they are economically free enough, and can retreat to the woods they own themselves.

The absence of the capital city, the marginality of other towns and the urban elite in general, are parts of the same geography as the retreat to the woods. It was the pressure by the minister, the local representative of the authorities that originally pushed the brothers to their desperate retreat. Kivi worked hard to release his brothers from all ties of hierarchy. The ten years spent in the woods surprisingly resembles the concept of moratorium, which is often used to characterize student movements. At the threshold of adulthood and its obligations, Kivi's brothers take leave to do something else, as so many movement activists have done.

For Hannah Arendt (1958), beginning and natality were vital aspects of politics. Beginning creates the true space of action, contingency and the unexpected (Guaraldo, 2001, p. 34-36). The existence of the free group of seven makes the Arendtian action possible: on top of the necessary work, the brothers need to reason, negotiate and struggle in order to arrive at any joint conclusion. The space of a big, traditional family does not allow this kind of fighting and reasoning, precisely because the relations of authority are already there. Rather than describing the ordinary life of Finnish farmers, Kivi managed to create a distinctly exceptional space of action.

Kivi's picture of the brothers is neither romantic nor idealized; instead he notes the abrupt vacillation of emotions and thinking, the poor knowledge of the surrounding world, the lack of moderate reasoning in encounters with villagers and authorities... the list is long. What is particular and provocative in Kivi's approach is the *way* he looks at his brothers. It is not incidental that his critics complained of the long and "boring" dialogues. The narrator does not tell how the brothers think and feel, or what poor creatures they are. He confines himself to describing their deeds and actions. As Karkama (1985, p. 74) has it: Kivi did not address his brothers "like the master addresses his maids and farm-hands" but he discussed with them, and let them speak for themselves. The "crudeness" and "ugliness" of the novel has its roots in these narratological choices: the brothers are not moralized, rectified, ridiculed or punished. Instead they are reserved with voice, freedom of choice, liberty - in a word, a space of action. Kivi undeniably "gave a voice" to the previously "silent, stable people" (Ahlqvist), and this giving a voice was a political move against the Romantic understanding of the people: the way of narration changed the concept the people.

Aarne Kinnunen (1973, p. 15-19) has aptly compared *Seven Brothers* and a pedagogical work from 1865, Matthias Putkonen's *Christian Ethics for the People*. Putkonen's description of

the ordinary Finnish people was merciless: sheer cruelty, mischief, outrage, fornication, criminality - the list of sins appears endless. Of course, the book and its description evoked no public polemic, even though the tone was far more naturalistic and critical than in *Seven Brothers*. This indicates that Kivi was reasonably moderate and accurate in his description, and that the audience evaluated different genres differently. This is correct but not yet enough.

Putkonen, of course, gave neither the voice nor the role as free agents to his sinners: they were others, sheer subjects of discipline and ethical pedagogy. Kivi instead gave his men a fresh start - at *Virgin Hill* - and capacities to act which in real life were reserved only for the 'educated estates'. The whole project of Finnish nation-building was understood as a Hegelian project, led by highly learned intellectuals. Kivi's novel has nothing to do with this pedagogical vision. It celebrates freedom before education, self-government before guidance of virtuous leaders, action before assiduous work. For his conservative critics, this lack of pedagogy signified a lack of plot and structure.

Pedagogy, performance and free individuals

If we look at the whole novel, the Finnish nation does not exist as a geographical or conceptual horizon. The one and half pages in the epilogue tell exactly that only one of the brothers became conscious of the existence of the nation. The novel outlines the extremely narrow geography of countryside life, a narrowness that is mostly overcome by the stories of occasional travelers. The same can be said about the time of the novel. Anderson (1991) points out, how "important to the imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (p. 63). With the brothers, we forget everything else, and there are no parallel events elsewhere, which makes it

extremely difficult even to locate *Seven Brothers* realistically in precise time. Again, this means that the novel does not start with the presumption of a nation-as-chronological-time, and then fix the brothers and the events into this matrix.

Barry Hindess (1996) has discussed a similar problem of individuality and pedagogy. "What is of interest for the present discussion [on conceptions of power] is the relation between, on the one hand, the idea of the citizen as an independent agent, and, on the other, the argument that government should promote the development of suitable capacities and attributes on the part of its citizens for the good of each of them and for the collective good of the entire citizenry. Citizens are regarded both as free and independent agents and as potentially subject to government regulation of their characters" (p. 72).

Hindess' paradox brings us very close to the political provocation of *Seven Brothers*. The way the men speak, act, reason, eat, and drink is reminiscent of the state of the human body *before* the introduction of Foucauldian disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1979). The lack of self-control and tendency towards excess is a permanent theme in the novel. The discipline, however, was for Foucault a counterpart to parliamentary reforms. For the 19th century liberal theorists of universal franchise, people like the seven brothers were the first excluded (Kurunmäki 2000). Finnish nationalist leaders shared this exclusive and hierarchical conception of the people. Even the leaders of the peasant estate could not imagine extending the right to vote to such backward creatures.

Kivi's novel considers the brothers as free agents, as a matter of fact, agents that struggle fiercely for their freedom of action. It is the disciplinary institution of the church school that provokes the whole retreat. However, the narrator listens to these backward, ignorant, and undisciplined men. He gives them once and again the opportunity to ridicule all local authorities.

Three times, the men discuss the issue of establishing a unitary power and rational economic order by conferring the highest power to the eldest brother (Hyvärinen, 1998). In terms of Bhaba, this reasoning and struggle can be seen as a miniature image of a *nation-as-performance*. An elite is not invited into this process of self-administration. It is telling that the brothers learn to read by sending Eero to learn first, in order to teach the others afterwards. The impact of elite is minimized. Eero himself is far from being innocent of attempts to ridicule and discipline his brothers, however they have the power to react to his arrogance by corporal punishment, so the relations of power can be turned upside down.

However, the last chapter of the novel leads the brothers back to a disciplined life within the parish. The farm is divided, and the egalitarian group of brothers dissolves. At the same time, the sphere of extraordinary action disappears and is replaced by the ordinary village life of slightly comical brothers. For obvious reasons, I do not interpret this ending from the perspective of the great national success. As adults, the brothers assume too many self-important features. Eero experiences his national awakening, though he is depicted as a humorless man who wants to assert his authority over his wife. The great humorist Juhani becomes a Pietist, and stops laughing himself. In a revealing way, he is described sitting in the church: "Awe-inspiring in his solemnity, he sat in the place kept for him beside the solemn master of Härkämäki, now and again clearing his throat in imitation of his companion" (p. 314). However, it was precisely Juhani who had earlier on ridiculed the hypocrisy of religious men who loved drinking, and used the master of Härkämäki as his prime example - not forgetting his self-important way of clearing his throat.

Instead of a national success story, I suggest the significance of balance between dream and realism. The last chapter of the novel documents the closure of the exceptional, the end of the dream, the victory of the real. There is a lot of pacification at the end: after the free action and

wildness, the brothers are able to adapt to the normal, agrarian life in a Pietist parish. However, this reads also the other way round: liberty and free action do not necessarily lead to a catastrophe. The brothers are pacified but the dream can live with the narrative. This is one of the reasons why the peaceful ending was not enough for Kivi's conservative critics.

The problem remains: why the attack in the first place, and then the canonization of the book? In 1870, the Finnish nation-building was just beginning, and the elite could not be too sure of its position in the project. Towards the end of 19th century, popular mobilization was already on its way, and the national elites had secured their position. Most importantly, the imagination of the nation had grown so hegemonic that even Kivi's novel could be understood in this perspective. The whole conflict was personified as the problem of August Ahlqvist, and Kivi was re-interpreted as the hero of the nation.

To conclude, there are good reasons to read *Seven Brothers* as a critical narrative with regard to the Finnish, realized nation-building project. The novel, and its suspended imagination of nation, indicate that the relation between novel and nation *can* be and *has* been much more contingent than generally assumed. The variations of national imagery and the resistance to nationalism need to be read more carefully, in order to better understand the political potentials of the novel and arts in general, and to resist the acceptance of the hegemonic nationalistic saga of an heroic, misunderstood national author.

This analysis suggests that if we want to take the political aspects of the novel seriously, narrative, concepts and geography offer together one useful set of research perspectives. Which kinds of geography, which kinds of concepts and narrative are needed in order to resist the hegemony of national imagery?

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