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# The Narrative Self: Letters and Experience in Historical Research

*Reetta Eiranen*

## Abstract

My chapter discusses the comprehension of subjective experiences through letters in historical research. I approach the issue of the relationship between texts/letters and experience/reality by analysing the concepts of experience and narrative/narration. My considerations are rooted in the existentialist and hermeneutical traditions. I suggest that human beings are spatiotemporal creatures whose relation to their own being and lived reality is understanding. I analyse the constructed nature of experience through the concepts of immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) and reflected experience (*Erfahrung*) and suggest that the latter is grasped and expressed by narration. I also propose that human beings understand themselves and others, as well as their lived reality and temporality, through narration and that, in this sense, narration has ontological significance for a human being. Human existence is seen as narrating, 'being in a story and being as a story'.<sup>1</sup> In this theoretical framework, letters can be seen as a form of narrating oneself and one's experience. Writers not only narrate themselves but also the other, the recipient, and their relationship. I regard letters as 'writings of the self' in my analysis.<sup>2</sup> They are often fruitful sources for studying subjective experiences, but this requires methodological rigour. There is always a difference between the self of the letter and the lived self. Yet, letters afford a perspective on the person. I test my points in relation to examples from the correspondence of two nineteenth-century Finnish couples belonging to the gentry, the Snellmans and the Castréns. These letters illustrate how the writers construct and narrate themselves, the other, and their romantic relationship in this dialogical space.

**Key Words:** Historical research, experience, letters, narrative, narrative ontology, hermeneutics, understanding, biographical research.

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## 1. Introduction

The relationship between letters and experience, as also between texts and lived reality, is a complicated issue and an interesting question in the context of historical research. Is it possible to avoid reducing the texts to the level of mere discourse, without oversimplifying the relations between being, experience, and language?<sup>3</sup> What can the letters actually, or 'authentically', tell about the writer or the recipient? Relying on the existential and hermeneutical traditions, I try to clarify these issues by contemplating the concepts of experience and narrative/narration. My aim is not to engage in philosophical research as such, but rather to find useful tools and approaches for historical research by interpreting and shaping these ideas.

This chapter suggests that narration and construction of oneself and one's experience have a crucial role in human existence, and that human beings understand themselves, others, and their lived reality through narration. Letters can be seen as a form of self-narration. This self-narration takes place in a dialogical space with the other, the recipient. The writers narrate themselves but also each other and their relationship. Letters, which can be described as 'writings of the self', are especially interesting sources when one tries to grasp the subjective experiences of people of a bygone age.<sup>4</sup>

I illustrate and test my points in relation to concrete historical research, through examples from the letters of two nineteenth-century Finnish gentry couples, Jeanette and J.V. Snellman, and Natalia and M.A. Castrén. The examples belong to the romantic letter writing tradition, and the writers construct themselves, each other, and their relationship in relation to the ideals and expectations attributed to a romantic relationship and marriage.

These preliminary considerations are part of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, which focuses on a network of women and men of the gentry who were involved in the nineteenth-century Finnish nationalistic project, known as the Fennoman movement, and who were, moreover, connected to each other by close bonds of love, kinship, and friendship. In my doctoral research, I explore how the personal relationships and the ideological project intertwined and how they affected each other. My approach is biographical, and I am particularly interested in analysing the subjective experiences of these people through their private correspondence.

## 2. Narrative Self and Experience

As stated above, the question of interest here is how the connection between the letters/texts and experience/reality of the writer is established. The Finnish historian and scholar of letters Maarit Leskelä-Kärki formulates the issue as follows:

If we assume that the world is constructed in language, that all texts are always mediated and that only through language we can give meaning to the world, can we then say that we reach something that is real and genuine and something that concerns experience?<sup>5</sup>

Many scholars hold that letters and lived reality have a connection, however obscure.<sup>6</sup> I agree, and doubt that I should otherwise be interested in studying letters.

The first step on the route between letters/texts and experience/reality in this chapter is to make some claims regarding the being of a human being, relying on the existential tradition.<sup>7</sup> First, human beings are always already in a time and a place, thus they are *spatiotemporal* creatures. Second, *understanding* is part of the being of a human being. These claims are intertwined: we can say that human beings

understand that they are ‘there’. Their relation to their lived reality and their own being is one of understanding.<sup>8</sup>

I propose that *being* is constructed into *experience* through *understanding*. With a conceptual distinction between *immediate experience* and *reflected experience*, it is possible to sketch the constructed nature of experience. This difference is often expressed with the help of the German concepts of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Experience is not seen as a self-evident category, but neither are expressions of it reduced to the level of mere discourse or text, without a connection to the lived reality.<sup>9</sup>

Following previous interpretations of the works of the German nineteenth-century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, we can say that immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) is ‘the level of experience where the experiencing subject and the content of the experience are one’.<sup>10</sup> It is immediate consciousness, and the world is present for us in it. Immediate experience belongs to the pre-conscious sphere, and not even human beings themselves can grasp their immediate experience conceptually.<sup>11</sup> This immediate experience might even be dubbed *existence*. In comparison, a rock does not exist, it merely is. The world is not present for a rock, which does not understand that it is.<sup>12</sup>

Reflected experience (*Erfahrung*), on the other hand, is the form of experience we can grasp. It is immediate experience that has been conceptualised. It belongs to the reflective sphere and has been described as ‘a second level experience’.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is influenced by language. We might further assume that our lived reality is constructed through our experience in both of its forms.

If human beings are necessarily spatiotemporal creatures, we can argue that this also conditions their understanding. Our understanding is bound to temporality and to a point of view, and if being becomes experiencing through understanding, then our experiencing, too, is temporal.<sup>14</sup> I further claim that narration belongs to human existence. It connects two key features of the human being: understanding and temporality. Thus, narrating and experience are also connected.

In Paul Ricœur’s philosophy, temporality is bound together with narrativity, and their relationship is reciprocal. He takes ‘temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent’.<sup>15</sup> Ricœur makes a distinction between objective and subjective time, in other words, between universal and experienced time. Human time, the experienced time, is constituted through narrative. A narrative articulates the experience of time and brings time into language; through narrative, we understand the temporality of our own being.<sup>16</sup>

In order to understand the structure of narrative, we have to analyse the concept of *emplotment*. Plot gathers together multiple and heterogeneous elements, mediating between them and the unified story.<sup>17</sup> This means that ‘emplotment is a synthesis of the heterogeneous’.<sup>18</sup> Gathering multiple and heterogeneous elements ‘into a single story makes the plot totality which can be said to be at once concordant

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and discordant'.<sup>19</sup> From the temporal point of view, composing a story is 'drawing a configuration out of a succession'.<sup>20</sup> The understanding of this composition happens through the act of following a story.<sup>21</sup> The narrative does not need to be chronological or coherent, but it has to be sensible and meaningful. Contradictory elements are comprehensible as parts of the emplotted ensemble.<sup>22</sup> The heterogeneous elements of the narrative are understood in relation to the other elements and the narrative whole. The concept of emplotment is often associated with the study of fictional narratives, but it can be utilised in analysing narratives of lived reality, too.

The narrative model can also be applied to the question of identity. It suggests that human beings construct themselves as stories. Our narrative understanding of ourselves affords us the opportunity to avoid the choice between 'sheer change and absolute identity'. The narrative identity lies between them.<sup>23</sup> Subjectivity is 'neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution'.<sup>24</sup> Ricœur differentiates between character as a sedimented and rather stable part of the identity (sameness, *idem*) and one's ability to keep a promise (selfhood, *ipse*). The latter can be interpreted as permanence over time based on one's choice or will. We can argue that narrative identity mediates between these two aspects of identity. As in the general analysis of emplotment, in self-construction a narrative is a totality which can bear heterogeneous elements within itself, simultaneously discordant and concordant. It enables interplay between innovation and sedimentation through reinterpretation. The narratives we have adopted form a context for our will and our choices. Human beings are not completely free but not completely fixed either. A narrative offers an opportunity to think about an open-ended and dynamic process of self-construction, in which the choices are in principle free but still contextualised.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of narrative can also help us clarify the structure of our understanding. Following philosophers Paul Ricœur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, we can argue that human understanding has the form of a hermeneutical circle.<sup>26</sup> Ricœur, drawing from Aristotle, argues that every narrative is a *Mimesis*, an imitation of human action. He divides the *Mimesis* into three parts. *Mimesis I* refers to pre-understanding in everyday life and to the narrative nature of experience. It is the general capacity of language to express action symbolically and temporally.<sup>27</sup> In Gadamerian terms, human beings have a horizon of understanding which includes pre-judgements (*Vorurteil*). They always have a pre-understanding, since they are already in the world and in the cultural tradition.<sup>28</sup>

Ricœur's *Mimesis II* is the actual level of configuring the (textual) narrative, where the emplotment takes place. *Mimesis III*, refiguration, is the level where the reader appropriates the narrative into her own lived reality. The life and the story are intertwined in the act of reading. Refiguration is the equivalent in the Ricœurian framework of Gadamer's fusion of horizons. In the process of appropriation,

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Gadamer claims, the horizon of the reader is modified, but the place of the text within the tradition also changes.<sup>29</sup>

The Ricœurian model would suggest that narration is at the very core of understanding. The narrative and the act of emplotment connect understanding and temporality. We can even argue that we put all the 'input', experiences and lived reality, in relation to our existing horizon or pre-understanding through narration, and the pre-understanding changes in the process.

Tontti interprets: 'we understand the world, others and ourselves through narratives that we tell others and ourselves'.<sup>30</sup> The human existence is narrating, 'being in a story and being as a story'.<sup>31</sup> Narration mediates between universal time and the human being's own experience of time, between the human being and herself, and between the human being and her lived reality. Narratives are ontologically significant for human existence.<sup>32</sup>

It seems, however, that narrated experience is somehow always in the past, and I suggest that there is a temporal difference between immediate experience and reflected experience. Immediate experience is invariably connected to the present. When we try to catch it reflectively and to express it in language, it has already escaped to the past. It is impossible to catch the now. Narration appears to be targeted towards something that is not strictly speaking present. There is so much in every moment, in all the immediate experiencing, that it is impossible to empty it with language or with any mode of expression. And this is why reflected experience belongs temporally to the past.<sup>33</sup>

The ability to share experience is also important. Dilthey, for instance, proposes that expressions of life can be brought into a common sphere and thereby shared with others and understood. Dilthey holds that language is the most important means of expressing one's inner world.<sup>34</sup> Gadamer even states that 'being that can be understood is language'.<sup>35</sup> Reflected experience seems to meet these criteria. We can express it with language and narrate it to ourselves and to others. Even though language is usually the most explicit way of sharing experience, and the way of sharing experience in which historical research is most interested, I assume that experience can also be expressed in different forms, such as visual art or music. Bringing meanings and experiences into a common sphere is to construct the shared, social reality together. That is where understanding the other takes place.

There has been a tradition of considering immediate experience to be more authentic than experience couched in language. I certainly believe that conceptualisation and language affect the experience. When something is revealed, something else is hidden, we could say – in the spirit of Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*, which roughly means that truth discloses, but also suggests that while something is revealed some other aspects of the phenomenon in question are concealed. When one expresses one's experience in language, something of the immediate experience is hidden under the story told. Nevertheless, in its own way it also enriches the experience.

So far, this chapter has suggested that human beings cannot conceptualise their immediate experience that language is an important way of expressing one's experience to others, and that narration is ontologically significant within human existence. It seems that we are bound to narration and can find no authenticity beyond it – at least not in a form that can be couched in language. Written language always has its connection to both immediate experience and reflected experience, due to the constructed nature of experiencing. These questions concerning the relation between language and experience apply equally to spoken and written language, and also equally to present and past.

It also appears that the phenomena we call human and cultural stem from the human ability to express and share experience – that is, (at least mainly) from reflected experience. Immediate experience might be more 'authentic', if we are to talk in these terms, in the sense that it is closer to pure being. However, is pure being what historical research is interested in? I think not, because historical research seeks to comprehend human beings in their social, cultural and temporal lived reality.

### 3. Letters as Places of Narration

Above I discussed narration of oneself, the other, and experience/reality on a general level. Next, I examine special methodological issues concerning letters in the light of this ontological and theoretical framework. Letters, like other material used in historical research, can be considered evidence. They are traces of the past, produced by phenomena that are no longer within the reach of our consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Letters, however, are also narratives. They can be seen as a form of narration and construction of the story and the past which constitutes a person's self. They are small stories and episodes forming part of the bigger story (of the life story, some might say).<sup>37</sup>

There is a temptation to think that letters are somehow a more 'authentic' form of writing than many others. Yet, they are pieces of writing composed in a certain *context* with certain *motivations* – and within a certain language system. The lived reality of the writer must be carefully taken into account in historical research. Narration is never 'pure', because the human being is already in the world. Nevertheless, it appears that letters possess certain traits that make them especially interesting sources in research which seeks to grasp the subjective experiences, feelings, and thoughts of people of the past.

Letters that have been 'places for self-reflection' for the writer in particular can offer a deep and personal point of view on the person.<sup>38</sup> Letters and diaries, like memoirs and autobiographies, can be seen as forms of 'writings of the self', that is, as forms of self-narration. 'Writings of the self' can offer the writer a place in which to constitute, and reflect on, her identity. The popularity of texts of this kind increased remarkably during the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Connections between writing, subjective experience and identity were formed in this cultural context. The ideal of

a self-reflective subject was rising, as was the value of the ‘publicly performed self’.<sup>40</sup>

One feature that makes letters interesting in relation to the aim of analysing the subjective experiences of the writer is that, like diaries, they are usually *temporally closer* to the actual life lived than many other forms of ‘writings of the self’. Letters and diaries are often concerned with situations, events, and experiences which are current to the writer or which occurred in the very near past. Also, letters and diaries are forms of ‘everyday writing’, ‘fast reports’ in a sense, whereas autobiographies or memoirs aim at a larger, consciously produced, narrative whole, forming a coherent narration out of a life story. Some scholars even claim that people writing letters often react quite *spontaneously* to things in their lived present. Hence, letters not consciously written for posterity may be fruitful sources for historical research. Other forms of ‘writings of the self’, written after a long interval, may be composed more consciously. Yet, all ‘writings of the self’, like any text, are, I presume, inevitably affected by cultural conventions and practices.<sup>41</sup>

Letters are considered a *private* form of writing. The difference between public and private writing has not always been as clear-cut as it is nowadays. Even though the epistolary culture of the nineteenth century was already quite privatised, some letters may have been more public than others. Especially family letters, through which people could communicate their news to many relatives at once, were often shared or read aloud.<sup>42</sup> It appears that letters in the romantic letter writing tradition were more private. They were used by two people to express affection and strengthen their relationship. Likewise, in letters written to close friends one can find requests not to show the letter to any other person or even to burn the letter after it has been read.<sup>43</sup>

The question of the public/private nature of a text, or ‘writings of the self’, is obviously connected to the question of their intended audience. The only intended reader of a diary might be the writer; memoirs and autobiographies are often directed to a wider audience, in keeping with their more public nature. The audience of the letter, however, is the recipient. In letters, the writer is narrating herself and her experience as she wishes, and she can recount it to a *certain recipient* or *audience*. To a different recipient, the writer might well recount herself differently.<sup>44</sup>

Tom Villis’ chapter in this volume raises the question of whether privacy actually restores some kind of ‘authenticity’ to the letter. ‘Who is to say that the private self is more real than the public one?’, he asks. Does the private letter written to a friend while heavily drunk reveal a more ‘real’ person than a carefully considered public text?<sup>45</sup> In the context of romantic letters, we might easily assume that the writing is guided by an attempt to impart a good impression of oneself to the loved one. It is always important to analyse the context and motivations of the writer, and to combine and compare different kinds of evidence if possible. We might assume that in the context of drunkenness, a person narrates herself or himself differently than

in the context of sobriety. Private and public texts alike reveal something about the person, and they offer different angles on her or him.<sup>46</sup>

The dialogical and reciprocal nature of letters is also of utmost importance. Letters can form ‘as special space in which the self is constructed and shaped in a continuing dialogue’, which can be connected with the concept of ‘relatedness of identity’.<sup>47</sup> ‘Mutual correspondence constitutes a means both to narrate ourselves and to be narrated by others’, Leskelä-Kärki writes.<sup>48</sup> Ricœur states that we constantly reinterpret narrative identity ‘in the light of narratives proposed to us by our culture’.<sup>49</sup> We might also think that the person who is writing letters to us, and who narrates us in them, ‘proposes us narratives’, which then can shape our own composition of our story – that is of ourselves. The writer of the letter constructs and narrates *the other*, the recipient, as well as *herself*, and in addition to this, the *relationship* between herself and the other.

The narrating of relationships in letters can be connected to Shuhua Chen’s argument that the *qiaopi* letters written by Chinese emigrants were narrations of ‘home’, created by people who were away from home for decades. In Chen’s example, the emigrant Zeng constructs his idea of home through the letters written to his family and, in a sense, constructs home as a relationship with them.<sup>50</sup> The idea of narrating and constructing one’s reality and relations in letters may be useful when analysing different concepts and experiences in human life.

Overall, we are facing the question of the context and motivations of writing, which includes the issues of temporal closeness/distance, spontaneity/consciousness and private/public. It can be claimed that it is only possible to talk about *the people of the letters*, not *the actual people*. Letters do not ‘authentically’ tell us of the people or their feelings as such, but they offer one *perspective* on the person. People structure their experiences into stories that are understandable to themselves and to others. However, those stories are not in any way comprehensive or whole, let alone perfect. We have to accept that the people we are studying may have told themselves in other terms in different material.<sup>51</sup> We have to try to find the narratives that are relevant to the questions that interest us.

#### 4. The Snellmans: Epistolary Openings

Next, I want to explore how epistolary material can be analysed, by reading it through the theoretical considerations presented above. In my examples, I will study the construction of the self and the other in the framework of romantic relationships, through the correspondences of two gentry couples, the Snellmans and the Castréns, who lived in mid-nineteenth-century Finland.<sup>52</sup> The men in these couples were actively involved in the Finnish nationalistic project known as the Fennoman movement.

I will begin by exploring the question of self-narration, or construction of identity, as seen in the letters written by Jeanette Snellman (1828-1857). I will show that re-narration opens up an opportunity to reconstruct ‘new reflective insights and

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viewpoints'.<sup>53</sup> I wish to illustrate how telling and retelling layers the experience. Applying the theoretical framework presented above, we can argue that the writer of a letter is in a hermeneutical circle. First, the writing of the letter is conditioned by the pre-understanding of the writer. Second, the actual act of writing is a means of narrating and constructing one's experience. Third, the letter offers an opportunity for self-reflection. The writer can examine the narrated experience anew, and this affords an opportunity for new interpretations and self-understanding, bringing us back to the beginning of the circle.

Jeanette Snellman was married to the Finnish philosopher J. V. Snellman (1806-1881), who was one of the leaders of the Finnish nationalistic movement. Her husband, who was twenty-two years older, had strong ideals about building the Finnish nation, and about women and family as part thereof. Jeanette was withdrawn and shy, and communication between the couple was difficult. They had also experienced drama during their courtship in the summer of 1845, when the then seventeen-year-old Jeanette had accepted the proposal of marriage, then withdrawn her consent, and asked for forgiveness three times. These problems cast a shadow over the spousal relationship. The Snellmans addressed the issues in letters written during the husband's travels. For Jeanette, letters provided a space in which she could ponder on her experiences and feelings; new insights emerged through written reflection.

While her husband was away, Jeanette spent the summers at Iisalmi vicarage, as a guest of the family of vicar Frosterus. She had lost her own mother when she was only thirteen years old and found a substitute mother figure in the vicar's wife, Nanny Frosterus, whom she called 'Aunt' in her letters. This was important for Jeanette, who had been somewhat lonely during her youth. From Aunt Frosterus, she received comfort and acceptance she had not experienced in years.

Jeanette began to reflect on the meaning of her own motherlessness, and it appears that this was due to changes in her lived reality. Letters provided new writing opportunities, circumstances in Iisalmi vicarage differed from those of her normal daily life, and a close relationship had evolved between her and Aunt Frosterus. Now, two years after the engagement, Jeanette found an explanation for her conduct during the summer of 1845 in her motherlessness. She reflected on the past and had profound regrets. She begged her husband for forgiveness, writing.

[...] I just wish you could forget everything, I did not do it out of spite, but out of stupidity and childishness, since I did not have a Mother who would have warned me, as so many others did.<sup>54</sup>

The situation had been difficult for the young girl, who had had no-one to advise her. In addition, there was another suitor in the picture, and Snellman's ideals about marriage and the role of woman were demanding.

Writing letters enabled Jeanette to reflect on her past anew, and the support she received from Aunt Frosterus made her realise that motherlessness was a key issue in the problems experienced during Snellman's courtship. It might be said that the new situation changed Jeanette's pre-understanding, so that she found new ways of narrating herself and her past. In the letters, she narrates new sense and meaning into the events of the summer of 1845. Thus, she adds new aspects and interpretations to the past, rendering it comprehensible in the present. This new interpretation of the past became a part of the narrative that constituted her and a part of her new pre-understanding.

Two years later, in 1849, Jeanette returned to the vicarage of Iisalmi. She still took up the subject of the courtship in her letters to her husband, but there was a new element in them, since now she also linked her motherlessness to her reticence. In the summer of 1847, Jeanette could not yet answer her husband's question about why she was so quiet. She said that she did not know, but she hoped that with God's help it would change.<sup>55</sup> Now she explained: '[...] I did not have a Mother in whom I could have confided and instead I had to carry everything inside me, since I did not have anyone else.'<sup>56</sup>

After a few years, in the 1850s, Jeanette took up the subject of her motherlessness underlying her problems again, and it seems to have become a solid explanation in her life's narrative. Now she reflected on her childhood in general:

During my childhood so many things that should have been done were neglected, in a way that during the very years when I would have needed it the most, I was left without a Mother, and since I did not have any motherly friend whom I could have turned to, I became so reticent, and now it is harder to make it better.<sup>57</sup>

Interpretations of life change over time.<sup>58</sup> This is rendered possible by the new experiences that affect and alter our pre-understanding. In Jeanette's letters, her reflections and interpretations of the mother-theme evolve over the years, which constitutes an example of how narration and reflection layer experience. It does not necessarily mean that these interpretations are artificial or untrue, but that they are true from the perspective of the person's current pre-understanding and narrative. They explain and structure the person's experiences and past – in other words, the self.

The effect of the letters, and of her husband's expectations, on Jeanette was significant. Their correspondence might be an extreme example of how narration and construction of the other are conducted in letter writing. An important factor was that the letters were exchanged between a married couple.

In the nineteenth-century context, the husband was usually the stronger and older party in the marriage; he had power to shape his wife's identity. Many women were actually looking for an advisor in life. In the Snellmans' correspondence, an

important theme was the husband's aim to shape Jeanette into an ideal wife, an aim which was connected to his nationalistic thinking. The most important task of the wife was to create a peaceful and loving home for her husband and children, regardless of possible economic hardships. She was to be an understanding and cultivated companion for her husband, interested in the common good for which the husband was striving. At the same time, the power structure of marriage, in which she was the subordinate, had to be maintained.<sup>59</sup>

In her letters, Jeanette narrates herself in relation to these expectations. She expresses her gratitude to her husband, who had transformed her, 'created a new Person of her'.<sup>60</sup> The man had guided her to a road which earlier was unknown to her.<sup>61</sup> She directly expressed her desire 'to become just like you wrote'.<sup>62</sup> Even though Jeanette expressed this strong urge in the letters, it appears that she could never fully satisfy her husband's demands. This was partly because Snellman was so exacting that it would have been virtually impossible to satisfy him, and partly because Jeanette's background, with scanty education and a lonely youth, did not offer a very good starting point for becoming the cultivated and adept ideal spouse. The development of the mother-theme in Jeanette's letters can be seen as an attempt to account for the difficulties encountered in meeting her husband's requirements. In a way, the epistolary Jeanette was narrated according to the husband's wishes by both spouses, while the lived reality fell short of the epistolary ideal.

As Leskelä-Kärki writes, 'letters do offer a different venue for relationships than do face-to-face encounters'.<sup>63</sup> For the Snellmans, letters were an important place for constructing their relationship, since they had problems communicating with one another face-to-face. The open epistolary Jeanette differed from the withdrawn Jeanette of the lived reality, and only in letters could she really express herself, to both her husband and her friends. The husband felt that only from her letters could he learn what Jeanette thought and felt. This situation also created uncertainty between the two spouses: it seems that Snellman was unsure of his wife's feelings towards him, which had ramifications for the couple's life. However, in letters, they narrated their feelings into being and into the awareness of the other, and this was very important for both of them. On the other hand, even though the letters were full of anxiety, the lived reality may have been different. It might be that the space of self-reflection opened up by the letters tempted the writers to address the issues which in everyday life would have remained beneath the surface.

## 5. The Castréns: Epistolary Idealisations

The correspondence of the Castréns illustrates especially how a couple constructs and even idealises itself. In January 1850, nineteen-year-old Natalia Tengström (1830-1881; Castrén after her marriage) became engaged to the celebrated linguist and explorer, M. A. Castrén (1813-1852). Castrén was to be the first professor of the Finnish language and literature, and he had built a reputation by travelling in Russia, especially in Siberia, studying kindred languages of Finnish. The couple

became engaged in January 1850, and they corresponded during their engagement from February to September whenever they were separated. They married in October of the same year.<sup>64</sup>

During the Castrén's engagement, letters were an important means of communicating feelings and discussing the future, as well as the expectations they had of each other as spouses. The opportunity to construct their relationship through correspondence must have been important to them, as shortly after the engagement M. A. Castrén's scientific work took him to St. Petersburg for some time. The letters offered a place to consolidate the newly established relationship.

As in the case of the Snellmans, the man expressed his expectations more openly, and M. A. Castrén's wishes for his future wife were similar to Snellman's. The woman should be modest and kindhearted; these were common ideals in nineteenth-century Europe, as, according to Heather Moser and Amanda Kelley's chapter in this volume, they already had been in ancient Rome.<sup>65</sup> The Fennomans also expected a wife to be capable of comprehending her husband's virtuous political activities.

Letters were not only a means for articulating one's own expectations, but also for expressing one's concerns about the other's impressions. Natalia was worried that her betrothed perceived her in too idealistic a light, and she tried to modify some of his expectations.

[...] How can I be so fine and good as I both should and want to be, I am so childish, unwise and impatient. Yes, God grant that I could make you as happy as you wish, and I wish that from all of my heart; but then you cannot either make too great demands of me, you do not know how inept I am! I am really ashamed of myself sometimes.<sup>66</sup>

Natalia tries to give a more realistic picture of herself or even deprecates herself. This, of course, needs to be seen in light of the contemporary rhetoric, customs, and expectations, which prescribed that a good woman was modest. Judging from her letters, it is obvious that Natalia was anxious about marriage – not because she did not love her future husband, but rather because of the enormous change it would bring in her life.<sup>67</sup>

In the Castrén's correspondence, the couple's emotional bond was narrated in relation to the nationalistic ideals concretely embodied by the husband's scientific work. Patriotism, science pursued for Finland, and the future spouse merged into an idealistic whole, for which both partners should be ready to sacrifice themselves.

Castrén constructed himself as an ideal man, with grand plans and ambitions for the common good. He would not give up these aims even for Natalia, and he needed a woman who would never ask him to do so. He believed that he had found her. He wrote that Natalia 'would rather suffer the worst with me than make me betray the cause of science and the fatherland'.<sup>68</sup> Castrén appears to have been quite convinced

of his own importance, and to his betrothed he emphasised the difficulties he had had to endure in his life. He even implied that he thought that Natalia's love was God's reward for his efforts.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly enough, 'the founding fathers' of Finnish nationalism also confirmed that Natalia's personality was ideal for a man like Castrén. He wrote:

I have loved in you the glad temperament, the warm heart, the high feeling for truth, for knowledge, for the fatherland, for everything noble and good, and You have, according to what both Snellman, Runeberg and my own conscience tell, You have loved in me the spirit that has shown to be ready, according to its measure, to be roused for everything true and noble.<sup>70</sup>

As Castrén's letter shows, it was important that they loved each other for the right reasons. Thus, their relationship was based on the proper motives, and they were living up to the ideals.

The man's task was to 'make himself' and be respected by other men; the woman had to be sure of his ability to do so when choosing a spouse.<sup>71</sup> While constructing Natalia as the ideal woman, Castrén was also constructing himself as the ideal man – otherwise Natalia would not have chosen him. The husband was strengthening his own identity as a virtuous and unselfish man by constructing the wife as an ideal woman, whom he – being such a man – would need by his side. The identities and ideals of the husband and the wife were mutually dependent: a certain kind of man needed a certain kind of woman and vice versa. This 'relatedness of identity' can also be seen in the Snellmans' correspondence.<sup>72</sup>

If we want to add one more twist to this line of thought, we can also consider Natalia's efforts to reduce the man's expectations from a new perspective. It seems that she did not completely agree with the ideal picture he painted of her. However, it might be that by expressing and narrating herself modestly, she was merely meeting the expectation of female modesty, thereby proving herself worthy of the praise after all.

The Castréns' marriage lasted for only one and a half years due to M.A. Castrén's untimely death. Natalia was only twenty-one years old when she was widowed. For many years she fell under the shadow of sorrow, and in her letters to her sister she expressed her anxiety in strong words. 'My joy of life is gone, I cannot be happy any more', she wrote.<sup>73</sup> She described her loss as irreplaceable, and never remarried.<sup>74</sup>

However, it appears that there is a difference between *recounting* sadness and *being* sad. The solution might be found in the temporal structure of the human existence. Being sad, or existing in a state of sadness, belongs temporally to the present, but the recounted feeling of sadness belongs temporally to the past. The present, the immediate experience, cannot be recounted. Once it is told, it has already receded to the past.

Natalia held dear the memory of her late husband, idealised the man and the marriage, and described their love in words that would put any other relationship in the shade. She wrote that during their short marriage she had experienced more happiness than many did during the longest of marriages: ‘[...] it may be that nobody has had so many big, beautiful, lovely and happy memories to reminisce and to live for as I do [...]’.<sup>75</sup>

In her writing, the nationalistic idea and the memory of the husband, his career and goals, seem to intertwine.

[...] I can still as before be happy for the happiness of others, everything big and beautiful that takes place in the world and before anything in our own beloved fatherland. And I would not be worthy to be called Castrén’s wife if I could not [do this].<sup>76</sup>

I suggest that Natalia in her letters is narrating herself as Castrén’s wife. She is narrating the love and the relationship into existence even though they have long been gone. It is interesting that she uses the word ‘wife’ and not ‘widow’, which would seem more appropriate. It was important to her to remain Castrén’s wife and to be worthy of him even after his death. I assume that the nationalistic cause symbolised Castrén and his life’s work to Natalia. In this way, his work continued even though he was gone. Natalia narrated herself as Castrén’s wife because she wanted to hang on to and sustain the identity and the love, which in the physical world were lost. Nonetheless, they were still a part of her lived reality and by narrating them to herself and to others she wanted to continually construct their existence, in order to prevent them from fading into the past.

## 6. Conclusion

The main subject of this chapter has been the relation between letters/texts and experience/reality. I have addressed the issue by reflecting on the concepts of experience and narrative/narration, considering how they can be utilised in concrete historical research.

I have regarded the human being as a spatiotemporal being, whose relation to her own being and lived reality is understanding. I have suggested that being is constructed into experience in understanding, and I have analysed the constructed nature of experience by drawing on the concepts of immediate experience and reflected experience. Further on, I have proposed that human beings understand themselves, their lived reality, others, and the temporal aspect of their existence through narration. In this sense, we can hold that narrative has ontological significance for human existence.

From the point of view of narrative ontology, it can be stated that, in letters, one narrates oneself as something to someone else. Human existence is being in a story and being as a story, and letters are a part of the narrative into which people construct

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their lives. In narration, human beings express their experience. The concepts of narrative and narration offer tools for analysing epistolary material, which enables one to approach the relation between texts and experience.

Letters can be fruitful sources for a scholar interested in studying the subjective experiences of people of the past. Often the letters that are especially interesting are private, and the recipient, that is the audience of the letter, is someone close to the writer, someone in whom the writer wishes to confide. These letters are in many cases temporally close to the subjects they treat, and they are not necessarily very carefully considered; sometimes, they include a certain amount of spontaneity. Some letters may be described as ‘places for self-reflection’.

Nevertheless, even if we claim, on a theoretical level, that people narrate themselves in their letters, we have to be methodologically sensitive to the exact nature of the material we are using, and analyse the context and motivations of the narration. However, the effect of context, conventions, traditions, and cultures on letters might actually be seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle to understanding the spatiotemporal human being, since letters and experiences are constructed under the same social and cultural conditions as the human beings themselves.

In letters, the writer constructs herself, but also the recipient, and their relationship. This was illustrated through examples from the correspondence of the Snellmans and the Castréns. In both cases, the men especially narrate the women in an idealised manner, but at the same time they narrate themselves as the counterpart of that ideal woman, that is, as an ideal man. The women express admiration rather than demands, and they are concerned about not meeting the idealistic picture constructed by the man. This can, in itself, be seen as a trait of an ideal woman: modesty was an essential characteristic of genteel womanhood in the nineteenth-century context. The couples also narrated love and intimacy into their relationship. The correspondence was a means of strengthening the emotional bond, and, at least for the Snellmans, it served to establish the functioning dialogical connection which they had been unable to build in their everyday life.

The selves in the letters are not identical with lived selves, but they are nevertheless fascinating. Letters, or other ‘writings of the self’, afford one perspective on the person, and this is valuable even if it is incomplete. In our pre-understanding, without further reflection, we take for granted who we are and who our loved ones are. However, if we reflect more deeply, we present narratives about different aspects of our being. A person or a phenomenon is not exhausted in any narrative or even in a collection of narratives. However, through narration and through following the narratives of others we can understand different aspects of ourselves, others and the world around us.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Jarkko Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste: 1900-luvun hermeneutiikan päälinjat,' *Tulkinnasta toiseen: Esseitä hermeneutiikasta*, ed. Jarkko Tontti (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2011), 74. Translation Reetta Eiranen (RE). From now on I will refer to my own translations with my initials only.
- <sup>2</sup> Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices: The Writing Krohn Sisters (1890-1950),' *Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 15 (2007): 22.
- <sup>3</sup> See Ville Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves: Finnish Soldiers' War Experience, Trauma, and Military Psychiatry, 1941-44* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University, 2013), 59.
- <sup>4</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 22.
- <sup>5</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa: Krohnin sisaret ja kirjallinen elämä* (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 73. Translation RE.
- <sup>6</sup> Christina Douglas, *Kärlek per korrespondens: Två förlovade par under andra hälften av 1800-talet* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2011), 39-40; Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 30-32; Liz Stanley, 'The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences,' *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004): 212, 223.
- <sup>7</sup> I have also addressed the existential premises and the concept of experience in my Master's thesis. See Reetta Eiranen, 'Ihanteen varjossa: Jeanette Snellman ja filosofin vaatimukset' (Master's thesis, University of Tampere, 2012).
- <sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Leena Kakkori, *Heideggerin aukeama: Tutkimuksia totuudesta ja taiteesta Martin Heideggerin avaamassa horisontissa* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2001), 19, 34; Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 52-58. These propositions are, of course, linked to Martin Heidegger's philosophy.
- <sup>9</sup> See also Kivimäki, *Battled Nerves*, 52, 59. Erlebnis is often translated as 'lived experience' and Erfahrung merely as 'experience'. However, I think the distinction between the two concepts in my usage is more clearly conveyed by the terms 'immediate experience' and 'reflected experience'.
- <sup>10</sup> Erna Oesch, 'Wilhelm Dilthey ja eletty kokemus,' *Kokemus*, ed. Leila Haaparanta and Erna Oesch (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2002), 296. Translation RE.
- <sup>11</sup> Oesch, 'Wilhelm Dilthey ja eletty kokemus,' 295-296.
- <sup>12</sup> See Eiranen, 'Ihanteen varjossa,' 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Oesch, 'Wilhelm Dilthey ja eletty kokemus,' 295-296.
- <sup>14</sup> Compare Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 55, 74-75. He argues that *how* Dasein is conditions what it can do. He also points out that understanding as a constituent of being differs from conscious interpretation, in which something is understood as something.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul Ricœur, 'Narrative Time,' *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 169.
- <sup>16</sup> Paul Ricœur, 'Mimesis, viittaus ja uudelleenahmottuminen,' trans. Antti Kauppinen, *Tulkinnasta toiseen: Esseitä hermeneutiikasta*, ed. Jarkko Tontti

(Tampere: Vastapaino, 2011), 164-165; Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 72; Jarkko Tontti, *Right and Prejudice: Prolegomena to a Hermeneutical Philosophy of Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 69-70.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricœur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1992), 21-23.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Ricœur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 72-73.

<sup>23</sup> Ricœur 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Pekka Kaunismaa and Arto Laitinen, 'Paul Ricoeur ja narratiivinen identiteetti,' *Jaettu jana, ääretön raja*, ed. Petri Kuhmonen and Seppo Sillman (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1998), 175, 184, 188-193. See also Ricœur 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 32-33; Paul Ricœur, 'Narrative Identity,' trans. David Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1992), 188-192.

<sup>26</sup> This should be regarded as a theoretical model, which might help us understand how we understand. In the lived reality, I assume, understanding is a constantly ongoing process which is part of our existence, fluid rather than fixed. Only models are fixed, lived reality never is.

<sup>27</sup> Kaunismaa and Laitinen, 'Paul Ricoeur ja narratiivinen identiteetti,' 181-183; Ricœur, 'Mimesis, viittaus ja uudelleenahmottuminen,' 166; Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 73-74; Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 62-64.

<sup>28</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutiikka. Ymmärtäminen tieteissä ja filosofiassa*, ed. and trans. Ismo Nikander (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2005), 29-39, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Kaunismaa and Laitinen, 'Paul Ricoeur ja narratiivinen identiteetti,' 182-186; Ricœur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 26-27; Ricœur, 'Mimesis, viittaus ja uudelleenahmottuminen,' 166; Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 73-74; Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 62-64.

<sup>30</sup> Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Tontti, 'Olemisen haaste,' 74-75. Translation RE.

<sup>32</sup> See also Hanna Meretoja, 'Narrative and Human Existence: Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics,' *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 89-109; Ricœur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 26-31; Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 66, 69-70.

<sup>33</sup> Tontti points out that in Ricœur's later work the past has a primary position in the temporality of the human being, compared to the present and the future. Every interpretative and narrative activity is rooted in the past, 'historicity is the unavoidable, key constituent in all interpretative situations'. See Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 69. Emphasis original.

- <sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. H. P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 191-192, 249.
- <sup>35</sup> Gadamer, *Hermeneutiikka*, 213. Translation RE.
- <sup>36</sup> Marc Bloch, *Historian puolustus*, ed. Elina Suolahti, Martti Berger, trans. Lena Talvio, Ossi Lehtiö. (Helsinki: Artemisia edizioni, 2003), 100-101.
- <sup>37</sup> See Hanna Elomaa, *Idylliä etsimässä: Identifikaatiot ja itseymmärrys tammisaarelaisessa sivistyneistöperheessä 1880-luvulta 1930-luvulle* (Turku: k&h, 2006), 54; Kaunismaa and Laitinen, 'Paul Ricoeur ja narratiivinen identiteetti,' 192.
- <sup>38</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 25; Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 65-66.
- <sup>39</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 22; Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 57-58.
- <sup>40</sup> Marja Jalava, *Minä ja maailmanhenki. Moderni subjekti kristillis-idealisisessa kansallisajattelussa ja Rolf Lagerborgin kulttuuriradikalismissa n. 1800–1914* (Helsinki: SKS, 2005), 18-19; Nina Säaskilahti, *Ajan partaalla. Omaelämäkerrallinen aika, päiväkirja ja muistin kulttuuri* (Jyväskylä: Nykykulttuurin tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 105, Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2011), 29-30.
- <sup>41</sup> Elomaa, *Idylliä etsimässä*, 53-54, 58; Jyrki Nummi, 'Aleksis Kiven elämät,' Aleksis Kivi, *Kirjeet. Kriittinen editio* (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 26-27; Säaskilahti, *Ajan partaalla*, 26-27. See also Stanley, 'The Epistolarium,' 208, 217, 223, passim.
- <sup>42</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 22.
- <sup>43</sup> Eiranen 'Ihanteen varjossa,' 35-36; Reetta Eiranen 'Kirjeet kohtauspaikkoina. Ihanne ja eletty todellisuus Jeanette ja J. V. Snellmanin välisessä kirjeenvaihdossa,' *Sukupuolentutkimus–Genusforskning* 27.2 (2014): 10. Compare Douglas, *Kärlek per korrespondens*, 36-37, 134-146.
- <sup>44</sup> See Leskelä-Kärki 'Narrating life stories in between the fictional and the autobiographical,' *Qualitative Research* 8 (2008): 329; Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 70, 73, passim; Säaskilahti, *Ajan partaalla*, 58.
- <sup>45</sup> Tom Villis, "'I've written this very late at night and after some whisky – so forgive it's [sic] horrible balls.": The Methodological and Ethical Dilemmas of Tracing Personal Politics in Private Letters,' in this volume.
- <sup>46</sup> Compare Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 73-74.
- <sup>47</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 58. Translation Virginia Mattila; Leskelä-Kärki, 'Narrating life stories in between the fictional and the autobiographical,' 329.
- <sup>48</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Narrating life stories in between the fictional and the autobiographical,' 329-330. She refers to Adriana Cavarero's concept of 'narratable self'.
- <sup>49</sup> Ricœur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 32.
- <sup>50</sup> Shuhua Chen, 'Making Home, Making Sense of The World: Archival Research with *Qiaopi* Letters,' in this volume.

<sup>51</sup> See Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 30-31; Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa*, 73-74; Stanley, 'The Epistolarium,' 212-214, 223.

<sup>52</sup> The discussion about the Snellmans is largely based on the research for my Master's thesis. See Eiranan, 'Ihanteen varjossa', and on an article, which also focuses on Jeanette and J. V. Snellman, see Eiranan 'Kirjeet kohtauspaikkoina'.

<sup>53</sup> Tontti, *Right and Prejudice*, 64.

<sup>54</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' August 1847, quoted in J. V. Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849* (Helsinki: Stadsrådets kansli, 1996), 659. Translation RE. See also Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 27 August 1847, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849*, 664. Jeanette does not explicitly mention the courtship or the engagement but it can be inferred from the context and the expressions that this is what she is referring to.

<sup>55</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 27 August 1847 and 15 July 1849, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849*, 665, 788-789.

<sup>56</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 8 July 1849, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849*, 786. Translation RE.

<sup>57</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' probably 13 December 1853, quoted in J. V. Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VII 1850-1856* (Helsinki: Stadsrådets kansli, 1996), 496. Translation RE.

<sup>58</sup> See Elomaa, *Idylliä etsimässä*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> See Kai Häggman, *Perheen vuosisata. Perheen ihanne ja sivistyneistön elämäntapa 1800-luvun Suomessa*. (Helsinki: SKS, 1994), 86-87, 100-101; Jalava, *Minä ja maailmanhenki*, 190-198.

<sup>60</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 27 August 1847, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849*, 664.

<sup>61</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 15 July 1849, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten VI 1847-1849*, 789.

<sup>62</sup> Jeanette Snellman, 'Letter to J. V. Snellman,' 27 July 1847, quoted in Snellman, *Samlade arbeten V 1845-1847* (Helsinki: Stadsrådets kansli, 1995), 700.

<sup>63</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, 'Constructing Sisterly Relations in Epistolary Practices,' 30.

<sup>64</sup> See Gunnar Castrén's släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland; Venla Sainio. 'Castrén, Natalia (1830-1881): Professorin rouva,' *Kansallisbiografia* (2003). Viewed 27 August 2014, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/7399/>; Tapani Salminen, 'Castrén, Matthias Alexander (1813-1852). Suomen kielen ja kirjallisuuden professori,' *Kansallisbiografia* (2002). Viewed 27 August 2014, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/3164/>.

<sup>65</sup> Amanda Kelley and Heather Moser, 'Words between Lovers: The Appearance of Spousal Love in Roman Letters,' in this volume.

<sup>66</sup> Natalia Tengström, 'Letter to M. A. Castrén,' 17 September 1850, Gunnar Castréns släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. Translation RE and Virginia Mattila.

<sup>67</sup> Natalia Tengström, 'Letter to M. A. Castrén,' 17 September 1850, Gunnar Castréns släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland; Natalia Tengström, 'Letter to Sofi Kellgren,' 22 September 1850, Coll. 99.3, Kellgreniana, The National Library of Finland.

<sup>68</sup> M. A. Castrén, 'Letter to Natalia Tengström,' 17-19 February 1850, Gunnar Castréns släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland.

<sup>69</sup> M. A. Castrén, 'Letter to Natalia Tengström,' 17-19 February 1850, Gunnar Castréns släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland.

<sup>70</sup> M.A. Castrén, 'Letter to Natalia Tengström,' 2 July 1850, Gunnar Castréns släktarkiv, SLSA 1185, The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. Translation RE and Virginia Mattila.

<sup>71</sup> Jalava, *Minä ja maailmanhenki*, 186.

<sup>72</sup> See Leskelä-Kärki, 'Narrating life stories in between the fictional and the autobiographical,' 329.

<sup>73</sup> Natalia Castrén, 'Letter to Sofi Kellgren,' 1 January 1854, Coll. 99.3, Kellgreniana, The National Library of Finland. Translation RE. Emphasis original.

<sup>74</sup> Natalia Castrén, 'Letter to Sofi Kellgren,' 26 December 1853, Coll. 99.3, Kellgreniana, The National Library of Finland.

<sup>75</sup> Natalia Castrén, 'Letter to Sofi Kellgren,' 26 December 1853, Coll. 99.3, Kellgreniana, The National Library of Finland. Translation RE.

<sup>76</sup> Natalia Castrén, 'Letter to Sofi Kellgren,' 1 January 1854, Coll. 99.3, Kellgreniana, The National Library of Finland. Translation RE.

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