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The Recalcitrant Nation of *Seven Brothers*
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Abstract

It is a commonplace to study the novels of the 19th century in the context of nation-building projects and imagined nations. This is particularly true with novels that have later achieved such a national, mythical position as Aleksis Kivi's Seven Brothers in Finland. In this paper, I suggest several ways to re-read Kivi politically. In terms of conceptual history, I demonstrate how Kivi's concepts of "nation" and "citizen" belong to a time prior to imagined nations. Moreover, I study Kivi's "fatherland" as a republican, anti-aristocratic concept. In terms of the political geography of the novel (Moretti), I show the uniqueness of the "national novel without the capital". Finally, I contrast the Lockean free individuals of the beginning of the story to the disciplined subjects under a new pastoral power at the end of the day. My argument is that Kivi was able to postpone his images of nation, to study skeptically the ongoing historical change, and outline political futures that were neglected by the Finnish nationalist movement.
1. Nation and the novel

The relationship between the novel and the emerging nation and nationalism has inspired a huge amount of scholars since Benedict Anderson published his *Imagined communities* (Anderson, 1991). As Timothy Brennan (1990, 49) has it: "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 literary, 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 sees this process of imagination in more clearly geographical and perceptual 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" (Moretti, 1998, 17).

Novel and nation. No doubt, there is an intricate relationship worthy of study and speculation. In this paper, 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-maniacs'), right from the beginning of the movement (at least, from the 1840s onwards). The whole tradition of "national sciences" (ethnography, Fenno-linguistics, Finnish history, Finnish literature, Finnish x.) 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 conveniently 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, 138). Quite probably, like the institution of historiography, the unifying - *ism* raises critical questions. Is the nation advanced by Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872) at all a version of the winning nationalism that now keeps telling the story of the national author Kivi? Is it true
at all that *Seven Brothers* imagines a national community, and if it does, what are the possible qualities of this particular community?

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 purpose of this exercise is to explicate the ways Kivi's characters themselves understood their political world, and what they conceptually imagined. The purpose of the conceptual history is to restrain the history of the winners, that is, to read old texts only in the horizon of the realized 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?

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, 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 all education, even the Finnish names typically had to be 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, above all Swedish.

When the Finnish national movement gathered momentum since 1840s, the issue and even reference to the "nation" was far from resolved. For some representatives of the Swedish-speaking elite, the real cultural home was still 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 Finnish nationalists thematized the emerging nation specifically in terms of the Finnish language. Both of these extremes, thus, understood the nation in terms that significantly differed 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, 

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1 Current overviews on the conceptual history (or, history of concepts, as many prefer), see Richter (1995), Hampsher-Monk, Tilams & van Vree (eds.)(1988).
my strategy is to compare *Seven Brothers* to other nationally relevant novels of late 19th and early 20th century.

Homi K. Bhaba 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" (Bhaba, 1990, 297). Bhaba's distinction resembles a much older theme in republican theory, the issue whether the (French) National Assembly performed the nation, or just re-presented an already existing, eternal nation (Kurunmäki 2000). This is just one way to pose the question: novel and - which kind of a nation?

In various ways, *Seven Brothers* is a case worthy of further study -- not least because the book has been the most celebrated Finnish novel over the last hundred years, and an integral part of all nationally-spirited education. The book was published decades before the standardization of the Finnish language was even preliminarily finished. The novel and its author - a poor student of the University of Helsinki - were extremely controversial at the time of the first publication. According to the standard explanation, Kivi's realism in describing the Finnish people was a shock to some of the nationalist elite, and its more romantic taste. The fierce attacks by professor cum poet August Ahlqvist, were partly inspired by the conflict between Kivi's use of dialect versus Ahlqvist's urge to standardize the language (Kohtamäki, 1956). But these canonical explanations, save the romantic story about the great misunderstood artist under attack, hardly explain the fierce accusations about brutality. As Ahlqvist wrote to the Society of Finnish Literature, the would-be publisher: "This incredible brutality cannot be translated into any civilized language". To him, the novel was, in "describing brutishly brutality, in fact ugly". Ahlqvist was not the only Finnish nationalist that rejected the description of the common people. "The people have never been like this", assures the irritated Fennoman leader Agathon Meurman. Ahlqvist understood the book as a "malicious defilation of our Finnish common people", and continued that "the common people has nowhere been such as the heroes of this book" (Ahlqvist/ Kohtamäki, 1956, 269-270; Kinnunen 1973). The leaders of the informal Finnish party disagreed on the book. J.W.Snellman (1808-1881), the oldest and most celebrated figure, recommended the publication of the novel. Agathon Meurman (1826-1909), the most conservative of the leaders, wrote an absolutely devastating critique of *Seven Brothers* and offered it to *Kirjallinen*
Kuukausilehti. Meurman's friend and leading figure of the party, Yrjö Koskinen (1830-1903), simply rejected the text, thus probably rescuing Meurman's future political career and saving him from the later role of national villain bestowed to Ahlqvist.

The institutions of literature and national politics were not two separate worlds in Kivi's time. As a matter of fact, Kirjallinen kuukausilehti (Literary Monthly Review) was one of the key publications of the Fennomen movement in the 1860s. Most of the key figures of nationalist politics publicly took part in literary discussions and published reviews. Literary disputes were issues of nationalist politics, therefore the later, almost purely aesthetic though psychological interpretations of the debate cannot give full credit to Kivi's performance in Seven Brothers.

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, 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" (337). It is this mystery of the last "tame" chapter, and the short section about Eero, which has later on created the fame of the book as a narrative of the emerging nation. While the contemporary critics decried the "brutality" of the brothers, it was still his coeval supporter J.W.Snellman who set the tone of the later canonical interpretation: the book was a Bildungsroman. Kivi "did not let any of the brothers to end up on the gallows" (Snellman/Koskimies, 1974, 228). "Seven Brothers is now the best-known and most loved book in Finland" (Laitinen, 1981, 220)

On a more general level, the book recites the historical movement from oral to literary culture. In the beginning, brothers live in a wild 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 hierarchically or rationally organized wholes. The brothers use allegories, but understand them either as realistically as any other story, as miracles or allegories proper. Therefore, the narrated move into the literary culture also includes an overall growth of rationality. Still, the new adopted culture is less a national, secular world than pietism in a local context.
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 in the novel? Is the nation already an obstacle in listening to Kivi?

2. Nation, citizen and Finland

The novel begins with a detailed description of local geography: the farm is located in "southern part of Häme", "not far from a village called Jukola". Häme, indeed, is now a Finnish province, but the word could earlier belong to different vocabularies (say, one of the eastern areas of Sweden before 1809, or a province of the Russian realm). 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 travelling people met are the only signs of the unseen world. That is the space before nation, newspaper, and novel.

Anderson calls the political entities that precede nation-states as 'dynastic realms' (Anderson, 1991, 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, 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 world of realms abroad. He had indeed 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 thus very careful in locating the beginning of the story at the time of the 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 (Ball, 1988, 15-16; Farr, 1989, 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 history 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'. In short, both 'citizen' and 'nation' seem to be derivations of the same word, which means both 'folk' and 'the people'.

However, the history of kansalainen is a bit more complicated. Before codification of the Finnish language, the forms kansa and kanssa were interchangeable. In current language, kanssa simply 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. 1840-1880), 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 kansakristitty, 'fellow Christian', or kanssaiahminen, '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 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. (42, italics mine)

Alex Matson puts it nicely: Kivi’s citizen is a fellow man. Kivi uses the current word (with only on ’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'. The word has no romantic connotation at all. On the other hand, this concept is neither a distant relative of 'citizen' or Stadtbürger in the meaning of republican participation or active political citizenship. All these formulations emphasize citizenship specifically as a Christian citizenship. It is essential to be decent and appropriate as regards 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, 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 Mattson:

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 (...) (Kivi, 303, italics mine).

Kivi does not exactly talk about 'fellow men', his word is simply kansakunta (nation). Both of these key words 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 ideologists 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 right 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 statue 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 seems also to include 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 a neighbor's bull. In good faith and with the best intentions, the men decide to go and kill the bear in order to protect the other bulls - only to find themselves chased by the whole 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 else to drink except for 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, the owner of the bulls and a noble man, does not want to touch the meat but instead 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" (200, italics mine).

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 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?" (201, italics mine).

Again, it is the concept of "fatherland" that Kivi uses instead of 'country'. Matson's translation
indicates that Kivi's "fatherland" has a different meaning, which cannot be easily 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 brothers' decision to eat the beef. 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."

And a few sentences later:

"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" (212, italics mine).

"Fatherland" is now a concept that can protect 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 did, of course, know well 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, 122-144). However, he was totally 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 many ways, the story is located 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 than 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. This indicates that the relation between nation and novel may be much more contingent than is generally presumed.

3. The Geography of Seven Brothers

Franco Moretti, who has convincingly argued 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 often 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 conceal the nation's internal divisions, but manages to turn them into a story (Moretti, 1998, 20). In Austin'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" (Moretti, 1998, 18).

Walter Scott represents a clear contrast to these "internal marriage markets" recounted by Austin. Scott is fascinated with borders, in particular with the internal border between England and Scotland. According to Moretti, this internal border "is not so much a politico-military demarcation, as an anthropological one" (Moretti, 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..."(Moretti, 1998, 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, Arvin 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 of these novels is the true Finland, even though it is not genuinely interested in the Finnish nationalism. In the case of Järnefelt, these two worlds almost fall apart, unmediated. Aho, in turn, has his enlightened vicarage in Eastern Finland as an intermediary between advanced ideas and peasant experience. In Aho's map, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, village, the woods and the lakes form a long chain of political influence vs. 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 Swedish language, and the conflict between the languages.

Seven Brothers deviates from this later model sharply. To begin with, Helsinki and the whole national elite do not surface in the whole novel. Do we witness a nation without its head? Even the newspaper that Eero had subscribed to was published in Turku. Perhaps, this is an indirect allusion to the imagined time of the novel, suggesting the 1830s. The ambivalence between 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! (Kivi, 310).

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

During the narrated time, the brothers cross the borders of the village only once. In order to pay their debts to Viertola Manor, the brothers had to start growing rye. However, they got more grain than they needed, and started distilling spirits. This lead to new ideas:

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 titbits were to be bought for the coming feast: rum, bottled beer, eels, salt herrings and wheaten bread. (Kivi, 224)

It is the excess of grain and need for some luxury that sends two of the brothers out of the village for a nearby town, Hämeenlinna. The outcome is miserable: Eero and Simeoni drink their whole harvest, and return to the farm late and in a sordid state, Simeoni hallucinating. The message is quite clear: distant 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 sheltered farm and village.

While the brothers did not travel, they still imagined distant countries. Simeoni, after his perilous drinking trip to Hämeenlinna, had 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 (Kivi, 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 long binge they had confused Sunday with Monday, and are ridiculed and soon end up in a new village struggle. Afterwards, filled with the contrition, 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 St.Peterburg, or as sailors "towards England" and "away from Finnish coast" (Kivi, 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 by no means have any recognized limits when the brothers 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. Their travel to the woods, to Virgin Hill, takes place within their own village and even on their own premises. Still, this journey to north is much more than a days trip within their own farm. Economically, they travel backwards in history, the same way as Moretti described Waverley's trip to Scottish Highlands. From regular agriculture, the brothers move back to the pleasures of hunting and to the cultivation by clearing and burning. This journey creates an odd ambivalence about the genre: are we reading a fairy-tale where orphans are sent to the woods to survive on their own, or an adventure novel about comical, fighting boys, or do we have here a pioneer novel?

4. Dream, beginning and action

In discussing Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Paul Ricouer 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 to 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. (Ricoeur, 1981, 181)

The realm of dreams. At this point Kivi’s critics seem to be quite right: this novel is not at all a thoroughly realist description of the life of ordinary Finnish farmers. Kivi creates this dream-like original state, just in order to give the brothers the possibility to be pioneers, to start an entirely new life and economy. Within a bit more than ten years, the brothers perform an 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 it is not the only indication of new start in the novel. To begin with, the seven men are brothers and 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 non-existence of the capital, the marginality of towns and elite in general, is part of the same geography than the retreat to the woods. It was the pressure by the minister, the local representative of hierarchy, literacy and administrative elite, who 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 resemble the concept of moratorium, which was often used in context of student movements. On the verge of adulthood and its obligations, Kivi’s brothers take a leave to do something else, as so many activists have done differently.

For Hannah Arendt, beginning and natality were vital aspects of politics. Beginning creates the space of action, contingency and unexpected. The existence of the free group of seven makes the Arendtian action possible: in addition to the necessary work, the brothers need all the time reasoning, negotiations and struggles in order to get to any joint conclusion. (Arendt, 1958; Guaraldo, 2001, 34-36). A normal space of even a big family does not allow this kind of reasoning, precisely because the traditional 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 also admired Shakespeare, Cervantes as well as Shiller, all of them authors who were not inclined to stay within the confines of everyday work and its descriptions.
Kivi's picture of the brothers is neither romantic nor idealized; instead he notices the 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 painfully long. Instead, 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 for them, boring) dialogues. The narrator does not tell what and how the brothers think and feel, and what poor creatures they are, he confines himself in describing their deeds and action. Besides this, it is the speech of the seven men that we can follow. 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.

Aarne Kinnunen (1973, 15-19) has presented a fascinating comparison between 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 - his list of sins was endless. Of course, the book and its description evoked no public polemic, even though the tone was much more naturalistic and critical than in Seven Brothers. For Kinnunen, this indicates that Kivi was both moderate and accurate in his description, and that the audience evaluated different genres differently. This is correct but yet enough as an explanation.

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 gave his men a fresh start - at Virgin Hill - and capacities to act which in real life were reserved only for the 'educated estates'. Meurman was among the first to limit the franchise of the peasants for the biggest owners. The whole project of Finnish nation-building was thought to be a Hegelian project, lead by highly learned and much earned intellectuals. Kivi's novel has nothing much to do with this pedagogical vision. It celebrates freedom before education, self-government before guidance of virtuous leaders, action before assiduous work.

5. Pedagogy, performance and free individuals

As regards 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 points out, how "important to the imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (Anderson, 1991, 63).

With the brothers, we forget everything else happening in other locations. That makes it extremely difficult, to locate *Seven Brothers* realistically in exact, chronological time (my current estimation is between the 1830s and the 1850s). Again, this means that the novel does not start with the presumption of a nation-as-chronological-time, and then fixing the brothers and the events into this matrix. Nation has a much more contingent and marginal role in the novel. Kivi's novel gives no credit to the idea of nations as eternally existing quasi-subjects of history.

Barry Hindess (1996) has discussed a similar problem of individuality and pedagogy in the work of John Locke and Michel Foucault. "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" (Hindess, 72).

The paradox that Hindess so elegantly profiles brings us very close to the political provocation of *Seven Brothers*. The way the men speak, act, reason, eat, and drink reminds of the state of human body before the Foucauldian disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1979). The lack of self-control and tendency to excess is a permanent theme in the novel. The discipline, however, was for Foucault a counterpart of parliamentary reforms. For the 19th century liberal theorists of general franchise, the people like the seven brothers were the first excluded (Kurunmäki 2000). The Finnish nationalist leaders were far from liberalism, sharing more eagerly quasi-Hegelian and romantic political ideas. Even the highly regarded leaders of peasant estate, like Agathon Meurman, could not imagine of extending the right to vote to such backward creatures.

Kivi's novel, in contrast, considers the brothers as free agents, as a matter of fact, agents that struggle profoundly for their freedom of action. It is the disciplinary institution of church school that provokes the whole retreat. However, the narrator listens to these backward, ignorant, and undisciplined men. He even 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, Juhani. (Hyvärinen, 1988). In terms of Bhaba, this reasoning and struggle can be seen as a miniature image of a nation-as-performance. Elite is not needed or invited into this process of self-administration. It is typical that the brothers learn to read by sending Eero to learn first, and to teach the others afterwards. Eero is not free from ridicule or attempts to discipline, however the older brothers have the freedom to react to his arrogance and wittiness by corporal punishment: the standard relations of power can thus be turned upside down.

However, the last chapter of the novel leads the brothers back to 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, replaced by ordinary village life of slightly comical brothers. For several reasons, I do not interpret this ending from the perspective of a national success story. As adults, the brothers assume too many self-important features. Eero experiences his national awakening, however, he is depicted as a humorless man who wants to show 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" (314). However, it was precisely Juhani who had earlier on ridiculed the hypocrisy of religious men who loved drinking, and used the habits of the master of Härkämäki as his prime example - and not forgetting his self-important way of clearing of his throat.

Instead of a national success story, I suggest the relevance 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 lot of pacification at the end: even 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 does not necessarily lead to any 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.

To conclude, there are 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 argued. The variations of national imagining and the resistance to the romantic nationalism need to be read more clearly, in order to avoid the acceptance of the too easy nationalistic saga of heroic, misunderstood national authors.

Literature:


Material:
