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The Student as a Representation of Masculinity in Nineteenth Century Finnish Literature

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The student (ylioppilas in Finnish) was a central image of masculinity in Finnish culture in the nineteenth century. At that time, the young, male student was a ubiquitous character in Finnish culture and literature and students were the protagonists of many novels, particularly at the end of the century. But as a literary motif, they had already appeared in the early part of the century (Lappalainen 1999b, 51). In this article, I analyze the image of the student as a representation of masculinity.

The image of the student has attracted the attention of literary scholars interested in its representation in different literary trends: how it metamorphosed from an idealized figure in national romanticism in the early and mid-nineteenth century to a decadent philanderer in realist literature in the late nineteenth century (Molarius 1996, 2000, xvi–ii; also Lyytikäinen 1997). This drastic metamorphosis has been interpreted as a sign of a change in literary trends: the new, decadent student characters of the 1880s signaled the arrival of literary realism, adopted by a new generation of Finnish authors. However, turning the student into a self-centered, philandering man—the opposite of a national hero—was a sign of more than the adoption of a new, realistic view of students and student life or culture, particularly elite, upper-class (male) student culture. It has been argued that this metamorphosis was a reflection of political tensions within the Finnish nationalist movement: starting in the 1880s, the younger generation began critiquing the older generation for its conservatism and pushing for social reforms (Molarius 1996; Lappalainen 1999b, 51).

University students had played an important role in the development of Finnish nationalism since the early nineteenth century, and the image of the student as a patriotic hero had been created in the early decades of that century. Because the image of the patriotic student was so closely connected with Finnish nationalism, it took courage from the realist authors to strip away its heroic mantle. The contemporary audience did not embrace the realist student characters and could be quite critical of them. Though the connection between the student image and political struggles within the Finnish nationalist movement have been previously noted and are somewhat obvious, the ideological message that the realist student image was meant to convey is not entirely clear. This paper will primarily explore what the metamorphosis tells us about changes in the idea of masculinity in the nineteenth century. Because the student was always represented as a man, the contemporary view of masculinity was a central issue in this process.

Though the primary source material is literature, I argue from the perspective of a social scientist and historian. I seek to chart the history of the student image in the nineteenth century, but also to draw on theories of representation and masculinity to help understand how changes in a particular representation of masculinity were connected to changes in contemporary ideals of masculinity.

What makes analyzing representations both interesting and challenging is that images are recycled, recreated and reimagined in slightly different forms (e.g., Hall 1997b, 1997c, Nixon 1997). In writing the history of an image, it is important to situate it among other comparable images to understand what it is intended to convey. Since the student is a gendered image, the gender aspect cannot be excluded from this analysis.

But what does the gendering of an image mean, or why are images gendered?

Teresa de Lauretis explains that “gender is the representation of a relation, or, . . . gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities” (1987, 4). Joan Scott has argued that, in social relationships, “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (1999, 42). That is, when an image is gendered, it positions the represented “entity” within the gendered power order of that society. However, gender is intersectionally linked to other “entities,” such as class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and can never truly be separated from them (e.g., Crenshaw 1989, Hill Collins 1990). An intersectional approach to gender moves the focus away from comparing men with women as groups, and instead highlights the differences among women, as well as among men. This is particularly relevant here because, although I am interested in the gendered order of power in general, I am not focusing on the relation between masculinity and femininity, but on the relation between different masculinities. As many scholars of masculinity have argued, masculinities are primarily defined not in contrast to femininity, but in contrast to other masculinities (Mosse 1996, 12, 66–7, 74–5; Kimmel 2006, 5).

When analyzing relations among different masculinities, one can hardly overlook R. W. Connell’s (1996) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which is attractive because of its focus on the plurality of masculinities: the recognition that there is never just one but always many models of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846). However, this plurality is sometimes overlooked and too much emphasis is placed on defining and analyzing the “traits” of hegemonic masculinity, leading to the “treatment of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 847, 854). John

Tosh has noted that, in historical analysis, the most common way of using hegemonic masculinity is to equate it with “those masculine attributes which are most widely subscribed to—and least questioned—in a given social formation” (2004, 47). This kind of analysis ignores Connell’s argument regarding masculinity and power, as well as the meaning of the term hegemony. In short, Connell’s theory does more than identify different representations or types of masculinity; it is in fact rooted in an analysis of power structures and structural change (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 830–2; Tosh 2004, 42–3). Connell argues that there is a hierarchical relationship between different masculinities, as well as between men and women, and views the ongoing power struggle—the hegemonic group trying to maintain its position while others challenge it—as a dynamic process in which various means are used: hegemony is maintained as much by culture as by force (Connell 1996, 70–6; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846; also Tosh 2004, 52).

To an analysis of representation, the concept of hegemony can add an understanding of the power structure of society and, even if only in a crude manner, the dynamic behind the invention of new images. Hegemony shifts the focus to the politics of representation, which is important for an analysis of gendered representation. It is clear that images of masculinity and femininity are always political; they are never innocent in that regard (e.g., Hall 1997a, 6, 8; L-M. Rossi 2010, 262). For example, historian Anna Clark has argued that, in modern Western political culture, “different representations of masculinity [have] served as metaphors for different models of political authority” (2007, 4). As an example, she examines images of masculinity used in art during the French Revolution: while the King’s portraits depicted him as a patriarchal father who treated his

subjects like children, the revolutionary citizen was often portrayed “in the guise of a classical youth” showing off his muscles and as part of a band of brothers, representing “a different model of male authority based on fraternity, or on male bonding” (Clark 2007, 3–4). Thus, this paper asks: as the image of the student was recycled by different Finnish authors in the nineteenth century, how did the conveyed political message change and what politics were behind that change? In particular, I analyze the type of masculinity the student represented in different types of literature at different times.

I analyze two important examples of national romantic literature from the early and mid-nineteenth century: J. L. Runeberg’s poem “Ensign Stål,” published in the collection Fänrik Ståls sägner (1848; The Tales of Ensign Stål) and Z. Topelius’ story “Vincent Vågbrytaren” (1860; Vincent the Wave Breaker). Though these two works were published more than a decade apart and represent different genres, they are both usually classified as national romantic (e.g., K. Laitinen 1997, Schoolfield 1998, Lyytikäinen 1999, 138–47). In addition, I analyze three realist novels from the late nineteenth century: Juhani Aho’s Helsinkiin (1889; To Helsinki), Arvid Järnefelt’s Isänmaa (1893; Fatherland), and K. A. Tavaststjerna’s Barndomsvänner (1886; Childhood Friends). But to situate the analysis in a socio-historical context, before further discussing these authors and their works, I examine the role of university students in the development of Finnish nationalism in the nineteenth century.

Students and Finnish Nationalism

University students had a central place in the Finnish nationalist movement from the first circulation of nationalist ideas in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Finland had

come under Russian rule in 1809 because of the War of Finland between Russia and Sweden, part of the Napoleonic wars sweeping across Europe (e.g., Jutikkala and Pirinen 2003, 276–98). During the Swedish period, there was only one university in Finland, founded in 1640 and located in the western coastal town of Turku (Åbo in Swedish). Under Russian rule, the university was renamed the Imperial Alexander University of Finland and moved to Helsinki, the new capital, in 1828 (Klinge et al. 1989). The number of students at the university was fairly low throughout the nineteenth century: only a little over 400 students in the 1830s and 1840s, about 650 by the late 1870s, and about 1250 at the turn of the century (Klinge et al. 1989, 303, 777). The majority of university students—almost two-thirds—came from the upper ranks of the society: the gentry¹ and the bourgeoisie (Waris 1940, 216, 227). The small number of students meant that they likely knew each other well. Also, the fact that most of the Finnish elite studied at the same university helped mold it into a coherent group (Alapuro 1988, 37).

The first decades under Russian rule were characterized by political repression: the Diet was not convened and all publications were censored (Jutikkala and Pirinen 2003, 299–307). It was partly because of this peculiar political situation that university students came to occupy an important place in Finnish political and cultural life, for it was only among the student body that new ideas, such as nationalism, could spread freely (Klinge 1967a, xiii; Klinge 1967b, 2–3, 28; Klinge 1980, 92–3; Klinge 1997, 162; Jutikkala and Pirinen 2003, 311).

Nationalist ideas came to Finland primarily from the German-speaking world, through philosophers such as Herder and Hegel. In the German variant, the “nation” is equated with an ethnically and linguistically united “people” (Pulkkinen 1999, 124–7;

also Snyder 1978, 59–62; Brubaker 1992, 9–10). In nineteenth century Finland, a majority of the “common people” spoke Finnish, but the language of administration had been Swedish for centuries and the elite mainly spoke Swedish. In the 1820s and 1830s, early proponents of Finnish nationalism began to promote the study and use of the Finnish language, and vested the university students with the task of building a truly “Finnish” nation.

Nationalist ideas quickly increased in popularity: already by the end of the 1840s, nationalist ideas had wide support among the students, and students were actively involved in spreading the nationalist message to the wider public (Klinge 1967b, *passim*; Klinge 1997, 147–8, 158). The 1840s was a watershed period in Finnish history: newspapers were founded, volunteer associations established, and for the first time, public discussion became possible (Karkama 1999, 84–94; Jutikkala and Pirinen 2003, 317). Moreover, students created their own tradition of celebrating “the great men of Finland.” By the end of the nineteenth century, students had become a common presence at all public celebrations. With their white student caps—adopted from the Scandinavian countries in the 1870s—they were an impressive and memorable sight. The image of students standing guard to honor national heroes has been part of Finnish nationalist iconography ever since (Klinge and Kolbe 1991, 58–68).

A review of nineteenth century Finnish literature indicates a deep-seated fascination with the student image. As with images of youth in general, the student represented hope for the future. National romantic literature of the early and mid-nineteenth century depicted the student as an idealized figure with noble intentions: he would fight for the good of the nation, putting aside his own comfort and desires. At first

glance, one might assume that the patriotic student represented hegemonic masculinity and that this was the most important representation of masculinity in national romantic works. However, a close analysis reveals a slightly different story: a variety of student images existed, as well as an image of the ever-present father figure.

National Romantic Images: The Student as a Patriotic Hero

Among early nineteenth century Finnish authors, two were particularly influential from both a literary and a nationalist point of view: J. L. Runeberg (1804–1877) and Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898). Both authors wrote in Swedish.

One of the more memorable students in the history of Finnish literature appears in Runeberg's poem "Ensign Stål," from the collection Fänrik Ståls sägner (1848; The Tales of Ensign Stål). It is a collection of epic poems on the War of Finland (1808–1809), which ended in the humiliating defeat of the Swedish army by the Russian aggressors. When he wrote the collection in the 1840s, Runeberg was already an established poet, and the public eagerly anticipated his new works.

The poem "Ensign Stål" tells the story of an old soldier. It is the first poem in the collection, and its narrator is a student writing down the stories told by Ensign Stål. The student is thus the narrator of the whole collection and the author's alter ego. The student, who only appears in the first poem, encounters the old soldier while working as a tutor in a countryside manor house. At the beginning of the poem, he expresses delight over his carefree existence:

O tid af guld, o lif blott tändt
för nöjet och behagen,

då man är ung och är student
och har fullt upp för dagen
och ingen annan sorg försökt,
än att mustaschen växer trögt! (Runeberg 1951, 11)

<LINE#>

O age of gold, O life that gleams
With purest joy and pleasure,
When one is young, and student dreams
Fill every right of leisure,
And one's worst worry is the fear
That one's mustache will not appear! (Runeberg 1952, 7)

Initially, the student regards himself superior to the old soldier who is living as a ward in the manor house; he even participates in pranks at the old man's expense.

Runeberg did not invent the character and the setting. First, the student motif already existed in Finnish literature, and Runeberg himself had used it in his earlier work, Hanna (1836), an idyllic epos about a young girl's first love. Second, same as many other students, Runeberg had worked as a tutor in the Finnish-speaking countryside in Central Finland. Thus, it was not accidental that he chose a student as his alter ego. In addition, by the 1840s it had become common for students to travel around the country to collect Finnish oral poetry and observe Finnish folk customs, often sponsored by the Finnish Literature Society, which was founded in 1831. In other words, the scenario of a student interviewing ordinary people and writing down old stories was familiar to contemporary

audiences. The novelty of Runeberg's poem was that the person narrating the stories had been a soldier in the Swedish army and was reliving his memories of the war of 1808–1809. Prior to the 1840s, not much had been written about the war, and the public had mostly forgotten the ordinary soldiers.

The student does not remain a carefree, arrogant figure throughout the poem. To fight boredom, he accidentally picks up a book about the war and learns of the heroic battles waged against the invading Russian army. He then humbly goes to see the old soldier and asks him to share his stories about the war. The stories of sacrifice awaken the student's own sense of patriotism, and he is transformed. In the last stanza, he offers the stories he has heard as his gift to his "native land":²

De sägner, här i sång jag satt,
Från gubbens läpp de stamma,
Jag hört dem mången stilla natt
Vid pärtans matta flamma.
De tala några enkla ord,
Tag mot dem, dyra fosterjord! (Runeberg 1951, 17)

<LINE#>

These tales I've sought to give in rhyme
Are what the ensign told me;
Beneath his flaring pine-torch, time
And time again they'd hold me.
Here in the simplest words they stand.
Take them, beloved fatherland! (Runeberg 1952, 13)

In effect, the student has become a soldier himself, but his sword is the pen.

The poem thus references two different images of students. In the beginning, the student is a carefree, arrogant prankster who is not serious about life or his studies. That was a commonly held view of students in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in university towns where students were a permanent element (Klinge and Kolbe 1991, 30–4; Häkkinen 1996, 88–92). In contrast, at the end of the poem, the student appears as a humble figure ready to put the needs of his country before his own. This is the Finnish national romantic image of students, and Runeberg's poem is one of the more memorable examples of it. Instead of seeing students as a general nuisance, national romanticism viewed them as patriotic heroes who could rise above everyone else (e.g., Molarius 1996, 12).

However, compared with previous representations of masculinity, this was not an entirely new image, rather one built on earlier heroic images of warriors and kings. In effect, the patriotic student was a classical hero (Campbell 1988). Elevating students to the status of patriotic heroes was not a uniquely Finnish phenomenon; it was common in other European countries, particularly in the German states where students had participated in fighting against Napoleon's army in the early nineteenth century and subsequently acted as a central force in the development of German nationalism (Lutz 1971, Zwicker 2009, 398–401). Nevertheless, in other countries, other images were the focus of nineteenth-century nationalism. For example, in Prussia, the image of the soldier, transformed into a citizen-soldier fighting for the nation, was central in the nationalist imagination (Hagemann 2000, 189–91). In Sweden, both past and current

kings were important in nationalist iconography and were frequently featured in patriotic songs (Enefalk 2008, 198, 202). But in Finland, students had a symbolically central status because, during the early period of Russian rule, Finland lacked other heroes: Finland did not have a king of its own, the army had been demobilized after the war, and no other public figures could serve as “national heroes.” It is very telling that when university students began looking for “the great men of Finland,” the first person they chose to celebrate was Professor H. G. Porthan (1739–1804), well known for his interest in Finnish history and folklore, by organizing a festival in 1839 on the centenary of his birth (Klinge and Kolbe 1991, 58–60).

Though the image of the student as a patriotic hero was born, it was never the only student image. Other, older images, such as the carefree prankster from the beginning of Runeberg’s poem, continued to exist in parallel to the heroic image. In fact, only when the patriotic student is set against these older student images are the heroic qualities of the patriotic student revealed. These student images are well represented in Topelius’ story “Vincent Vågbrytaren,” meaning “Vincent the Wave Breaker,” originally published in 1860 as a serialized story in the newspaper Helsingfors Tidningar, which Topelius edited.³ It is a story about student life in the 1830s—the decade when Topelius himself studied at the university.

The story begins in Helsinki in 1835. Readers are introduced to seven students who have just entered the university. However, most of the story focuses on the adventures of the protagonist, Vincent, and his best friend and foster brother, Mouse. At the beginning of the story, the seven students drink the “brother’s toast” and promise to devote their lives to their country. However, when the remaining three meet again

twenty-five years later, in 1860, we learn that, except for Vincent, they have led very ordinary lives.

Vincent is described as a man with extraordinary qualities. Since boyhood, his natural abilities have placed him far ahead of the crowd:

Han var en lång, smärt yngling, starkt byggd . . . hela hållningen frimodig och medfött överlägsen, utan att göra anspråk därpå. . . . Men i skolan var han lekarnas självskrivne kung; ingen kunde slå en lyra som han, skrinna som han och, I nödfall, slåss såsom han mot en hel armé gatpojkar. (Topelius 1925, 21)

<LINE#>

(He was a tall, slender youngster, strongly built . . . his entire posture was bold and naturally superior without him having to strive for it. . . . At school he was the self-evident king of any game; no one could hit a ball as well as him, skate as well as him and, if required, fight as well as him against a whole army of street boys.)⁴

Vincent clearly represents the ideal man within student circles: most of his fellow students would have chosen to be like him. He is depicted as a born leader; his physical prowess and loyalty to his friends are emphasized. His fellow students even call him the King. His mysterious background further underlines his exceptionality among the students: his mother was Greek, “the daughter of Hellas,” from an old, important family, and his father was a Finn who had served as an officer in the Russian fleet on the Black Sea. However, both died in the Greek War of Independence and foster parents brought up Vincent in Finland. As the story unfolds, Vincent is expelled from the university for fighting against a group of soldiers, and he decides to become a sailor and leave the

country. Eventually, he becomes an officer in the Greek army, thus following in his father's footsteps. Since the author, Topelius, like all students in the early nineteenth century, had been trained in classical Greek literature, the allusions to Greece were not incidental: Vincent was modeled after the Homeric heroes.

The function of Mouse, Vincent's foster brother, and all the other students in the story is to highlight Vincent's bravery and generosity. Though Mouse is academically gifted, he is physically weak—hence the nickname Mouse—and no match for Vincent's athleticism. As students, Vincent and Mouse are both in love with the same woman, but Vincent gallantly foregoes the chance to express his feelings to her so as not to rob his brother of the chance to marry her.

Besides Mouse, the only other student who stands out from the group is Pasha: he is the third party to arrive for their twenty-five-year reunion. His quick-witted humor and social skills earned him his rather grandiose nickname in high school. His father is a poor tailor and lacks the financial means to support him; therefore, Pasha is always in debt. Due to his drinking and partying, he also fails in his studies and ruins his chances for a career.

Pasha fits the stereotype of the perennial student (ikuinen ylioppilas): one who never graduates, but stays in academic circles and survives by working odd jobs. The stereotype was an old one and also appears in the literature of other European countries. In Finland, it was already familiar at least in the early nineteenth century (Häkkinen 1996, 88). The perennial student was often conflated with the peasant student (talonpoikaisylioppilas): one who comes from the countryside and lacks the sophisticated social manners of the bourgeois and gentry students. As Päivi Lappalainen explains, the

peasant student was a typical social climber, trying to rise through his own efforts, but in Finnish literature, the peasant student was often portrayed as a tragic figure (1999b, 52).⁵

Behind these stereotypes are real, historical persons and such stereotypes inform us about the social conditions in which university students lived in the nineteenth century. Since many perennial students were originally from the countryside, conflating the two stereotypes is understandable. However some perennial students also came from wealthy families (Waris 1940, 224, 226; Klinge and Kolbe 1991, 78–82). However, becoming a perennial student was particularly hazardous for those peasant and working-class students who could not rely on their families to eventually bail them out of debt. For them, succeeding in their studies was the only way to rise in society.

A common trait for both types of students was being stuck in-between two social worlds: the world one had grown up in and the world one was attempting to enter through education. The tragedy of such situations was that, for example, although Pasha could move in two different worlds, he was not held in high esteem in either, and remained marginal in both.

The role of the perennial student is to be a mediator between these different worlds. When Vincent and Mouse meet Pasha twenty-five years after their student days, Pasha reports what has happened to the rest of the group: due to his financial needs, he has moved in a variety of social circles. The perennial student also provides a direct contrast to the patriotic student, as exemplified by Vincent. The perennial student is the countertype discussed by George Mosse: the function of the countertype is to highlight the virtues of the ideal type (1996, 6, 56–60).

If the heroic–patriotic student is considered the ideal type of man, does this image

also represent the hegemonic ideal of masculinity of early and mid-nineteenth century Finnish culture? There is evidence in the story that it does not, for there are other representations of masculinity—other male characters—that carry more weight, even if they are peripheral in the story itself. . These are the fathers, both Vincent’s real father and his foster father. The fathers are not discussed much, but their influence on Vincent and his brother is evident: Vincent becomes an officer like his real father and Mouse ends up working in his father’s business. It is interesting that the national romantic student’s relationship to his father’s generation does not seem contentious, but rather they share a common ideal of patriarchal masculinity. Though the students occupy center stage in the story, behind the scenes the older generation is in control, yet with a benevolent attitude towards the younger generation and its patriotic pursuits.

Thus, it is the fathers’ generation that represents hegemonic masculinity and the patriotic student acts as his apprentice. Even the “fraternity” of students with their comradery and “brother’s toasts” does not pose a threat to the older generation; rather they continue a ritual in which many generations before them have participated.⁶ Moreover, the fraternity of students seems unequal, as shown by the different fates of the students. As in the case of Runeberg’s student, upon discovering the heroic deeds of his forefathers, he honors them rather than turn against them. This harmonious relationship between fathers and sons is remarkable in contrast to the contentious father–son relationships in the realist literature of the late nineteenth century.

Realist Student Images: Challenging Hegemony?

In several works of fiction published in Finland in the 1880s and 1890s, university

students acted as the protagonists. However, these protagonists were presented in a critical light: the earlier heroism was gone and even ridiculed. The characters were also much more complex; they were neither exclusively good nor bad, but displayed a more ambiguous moral character—a common feature of realist literature. These characters also signaled the arrival of the first modern subjects of Finnish literature: they were self-reflective individuals rather than representations of collective subjectivity, which had been common in Finnish literature until then (Molarius 1996, 23).

I discuss the novels Juhani Aho's Helsinkiin (1889; To Helsinki), Arvid Järnefelt's Isänmaa (1893; Fatherland), and K. A. Tavaststjerna's Barndomsvänner (1886; Childhood Friends).⁷ All three novels tell the story of a student who comes from a small, provincial town or the countryside to Helsinki to study at the university.⁸ Both Järnefelt's Isänmaa and Tavaststjerna's Barndomsvänner are bildungsromans; they are concerned with the development of the modern subject (Karkama 1997, x; Nummi 2003a, 85–9). But the protagonists are very different, and their respective journeys take different turns. Aho's novel Helsinkiin has some elements of a bildungsroman, as well, but the story only covers the student's trip from his hometown to Helsinki—that is, the moment of transition (Lyytikäinen 1997, vii–ix).

The three authors were members of the same generation who knew each other. Aho and Järnefelt, in particular, were close friends: they met as students in Helsinki and their friendship continued throughout their lives. Though all three authors knew Finnish and Swedish, Aho and Järnefelt wrote their literary works in Finnish, whereas Tavaststjerna wrote his in Swedish.⁹ Despite his language choice, Tavaststjerna was part of the group of young Finnish authors who adopted the realist style in the 1880s, and can

be regarded as part of both the Finnish and Swedish language literary traditions in Finland (K. Laitinen 1997, 239–44, 265–6; see also Koli 1999, 75).

Published near in time to one another, the three novels were thematically part of contemporary discussions on Finnish nationalism and social questions such as problems caused by industrialization and urbanization, poverty, and the “woman question” (e.g., K. Laitinen 1997, 215–8; Lappalainen 1999a, 8–13; 1999b). In addition, the theme of student life links them to the Scandinavian “university novels” published in the late nineteenth century (Ahlund 1990; Lappalainen 1999b, 51–3). The best-known Scandinavian author to write about student life was August Strindberg, and his short stories published in the 1870s probably functioned as a catalyst for other authors (Ahlund 1990, 92).¹⁰ Norwegian author Arne Garborg’s Bondestudenter (1883; Peasant Students, translated into Finnish as Talonpoikais-ylioppilaita 1891) was one of the earlier Scandinavian novels on this theme. The Finnish authors were of course familiar with these Scandinavian works (Lyytikäinen 1997, x; Lappalainen 1999b, 51).

I begin by discussing the kind of masculinity the student protagonists represent. Then, I analyze the contrast between the student protagonists and their fathers and the kinds of masculinity they each represent.

The Student as a Critique of Normative Masculinity

None of the realist student protagonists are heroic in the way the national romantic protagonists were. In Aho’s novel Helsinkiin, Antti, a young man from a provincial town, travels to the capital to enroll in the university. On his way, he meets other students and joins them in drinking and card playing. The story ends when he arrives in Helsinki and

disappears into the night with his new friends. In short, Antti is corrupted during his trip to the capital.

Järnefelt's Isänmaa tells the story of Heikki Vuorela, a farmer's son and the first of his family to study at the university. He gets involved in nationalist student politics and is torn between becoming a farmer—staying among “the people”—and pursuing an academic career. Though he does not succumb to the usual temptations of student life—drinking, gambling, and prostitutes—he is easily persuaded by his friends and wants to please everyone. In his own view, he is too soft, too idealistic, and too “feminine.” Heikki goes through a long inner struggle before finding his place in life. In the end, he chooses personal happiness over duty: he gives the farm to his foster sister and continues his academic career.

In Tavaststjerna's Barndomsvänner the protagonist, Ben Thomén, is not interested in politics. Instead, he joins a student choir and becomes the star tenor, which offers him many opportunities to party, and he begins to neglect his studies. Ben struggles to choose between a career in singing, his true passion, and a career in law, which is what his father wants. When he decides to study singing, he knows it means breaking off his relationship with his father. In addition, though he gets engaged to the woman he loves, she breaks it off to make it easier for him to go to Paris. Though he makes what initially seems the right choice—following his dream—he betrays the people closest to him. Due to his reckless life in Paris, Ben loses his voice and is forced to return to Finland and start over. In the end, Ben settles for a quiet life as a stationmaster in a remote village, living with his mother. The novel ends in a sense of resignation.

These realist student protagonists are very different from the national romantic

heroes who put duty and loyalty before their own feelings. Particularly Antti in Helsinkiin and Ben in Barndomsvänner lack will power and succumb to temptation. Though much stronger, Heikki in Isänmaa is full of self-doubt, and he takes a long time to find his way.

To contextualize these student characters, we need to first consider the genre of literature to which they belong. Realism became influential in European literature starting in the early nineteenth century and arrived in Finland particularly through French, Russian, and Scandinavian influences in the 1870s and 1880s (Lappalainen 1999a, 8–13; also 2000). Realism took its subject matter from ordinary life, and realist protagonists were often ordinary people with flaws. Moreover, Finnish authors were predominantly influenced by naturalism, a subgenre of realism based on a worldview that a person's faith was determined by circumstances and "blood" rather than by his or her own actions (Lappalainen 1999a, 11–12; R. Rossi 2009, 10, 20–24). In general, flawed and sometimes even decadent or repulsive characters were common in realist literature and, in this way, the realist student characters Aho, Järnefelt, and Tavaststjerna were typical of the genre (Molarius 2000, xvi–ix; Nummi 2003b, xix–xx; R. Rossi 2009, 23, 229–30, 237–9).

But the realist student characters also need to be seen in the context of political developments in Finland: they are a product of the growing opposition movement within the Fennoman (Finnish nationalist) party in the 1880s. Päivi Molarius argues that the change in literary student protagonists reflects the fracturing of the Fennoman identity and the political split within the nationalist movement into young Fennoman and old Fennoman (Molarius 1996, 23). The split within the nationalist movement was both generational and ideological. The young Fennoman had liberal views on social issues and

were critical of the older generation's conciliatory policies. The old Fennoman ideology was based on the idea of a united Finnish nation, which underemphasized and even idealized socio-economic differences, and it was never translated into a well-defined political program to tackle social problems (Rommi and Pohls 1989, 114–8; Vares 2000, 28–57).

Authors such as Aho, Järnefelt, and Tavaststjerna belonged to the young generation of activists who advocated for social reforms in the 1880s. As authors, they turned to realism, attracted by its potential for influencing readers by presenting uncomfortable truths and shocking characters (R. Rossi 2009, 235–6). As part of their “rebellion,” they challenged the values of the earlier generation of Finnish nationalists by creating an alternative image questioning the heroism, patriotism, and idealism of the national romantic era. Though, on one hand, this was a collective undertaking by the younger generation, on the other hand, it involved conscious “doing” by individual authors. The authors themselves were aware of the potential risks and the damage their artistic choices could cause their careers. Juhani Aho in particular came under attack.

Prior to publishing Helsinkiin, Aho was regarded the rising star of Finnish literature. However, his previous novel, Papin tytär (1885; Pastor's Daughter), though generally well received, had been criticized because of its unflattering depiction of the student character that the pastor's daughter falls in love with. One critic called him a “detestable egoist” (Tudeer [1894] 2000, 370; Aho 1951, Part I, 424–7; Molarius 2000, xvi–ix). The novel Helsinkiin took realism a step further and was not well liked by the critics. The realist style, which attempted an objective view, was seen as cold and detached, and the student protagonist came across as unlikable (Niemi 1985, 80–1;

Lyytikäinen 1997, xii–xiii).

Järnefelt's and Tavaststjerna's novels did not provoke the same reactions, though their depictions of student life—with its parties and visits to prostitutes—were too “realist” for contemporary taste. Nonetheless, critics generally reacted positively to Järnefelt's Isänmaa, perhaps because in the end the protagonist, Heikki, is a reformed man (Niemi 2005, 269–70). Tavaststjerna's Barndomsvänner was not widely disliked, but one influential critic wrote a very negative review of it, criticizing the novel not because it was too realistic, but because it was not realistic enough. Most importantly, the novel did not discuss contemporary social or political problems and focused too much on the individual development of the protagonist (Nummi 2003a, 85–88; N. Laitinen 2016). This affected how others viewed the novel.

Realist works were generally not well received by the Finnish public due to the Fennoman view that literature should be “national” and promote the cause of Finnish nationalism and be written in the national language (Finnish). To the contrary, realist fiction was critical of Finnish nationalism, and the student protagonists failed to meet public expectations of them as nationalist icons (R. Rossi 2009, 11–13, 232, 238–9, 247–8). Both Aho's Helsinkiin and Järnefelt's Isänmaa portrayed Fennoman politics in a critical light. In Tavaststjerna's novel, the issue is not directly addressed, yet it remains in the background.

As discussed earlier, images are profoundly political. In creating a new student image, the authors were making a political statement. Besides being generally anti-authoritarian and against the old Fennoman politics, what was the political message the realist student image was meant to convey? Thinking in terms of Connell's theory of

hegemonic masculinity, can we read this as an attack on the contemporary hegemonic masculinity, as an attempt to replace it with a new ideal type?

The contemporary, negative reactions to the student characters in Aho's novels indicate that the realist, decadent student did not represent the ideal masculinity of the time (Niemi 1985, 80–1; Lyytikäinen 1997, xii–iii; Molarius 2000, xvi–ix). This is also evident in the three novels themselves, not only in the critical self-reflection of the student protagonists, but also in how the other male characters regard them. In the novels, ideal masculinity—or hegemonic masculinity—is represented by the father figures, as well as other students who provide a contrast to the student protagonists.

Contrasting Images of Masculinity

In the novels, the fathers are seen from the student protagonists' points of view, and the fathers' inner thoughts and feelings are usually not revealed. They remain distant, even stereotypical. However, they have a profound influence on their sons' lives.

In Helsinkiin, Antti's father is a civil servant. We learn that he is a trustworthy family man who does not show his feelings. Antti sees his father as serious and confident (vakava and varma in Finnish; Aho 1997, 9). Though Antti wishes to be like his father, he resents his father's demands. In Barndomsvänner, there are two father figures: Ben's own and his fiancée's father. They resemble Antti's father in Helsinkiin: established middle-class men with careers, families, and responsibilities, living financially secure, yet uneventful lives. Ben's father exists only in the background, but Ben has real contact with his fiancée's father. They both expect Ben to study for a career with good financial prospects, and Ben lets them both down by choosing to become a singer. In contrast,

Heikki's father in Isänmaa is a traditional farmer, a quiet, hard-working man opposed to modern ways. He wants Heikki to continue farming and sends him to school only reluctantly. In Heikki's eyes, his father is a demanding figure:

Heikki tunsi isänsä ja näki hänet nyt ihan kuin elävänä silmiensä edessä,—hänen varman, tasaisen, mutta peräytymättömän luontonsa. Siinä ei auttanut muu kuin totteleminen.

(Järnefelt 1997, 40)

<LINE#>

(Heikki knew his father and saw him now as if he were standing right in front of him—his confident, steady, but unyielding character. There was no other choice but to obey him.)

Heikki himself is not able to master such confidence and steadiness. Yet, like the other student protagonists, he is aware that these are the qualities valued by society and he has likewise internalized them. Thus, the student protagonists' relationships with their fathers are ambiguous. Especially regarding Antti in Helsinkiin, who wants to emulate his father in certain respects, such as drinking hard liquor and projecting a confident and serious demeanor, but he does not have a warm relationship with his father. In general, the fathers are depicted as old fashioned and patriarchal, and the sons resent them for that.

Overall, the fathers represent what was considered normative masculinity in late-nineteenth-century Finnish society. In his study of middle-class nineteenth century masculinity in Sweden, David Tjeder argues that the tacitly approved ideal was “the married man of character, leading a life of moderation, of mastery over his passions” (2003, 274). Likewise, according to Arja-Liisa Räisänen, in Finland at this time the ideal

man was “hard-working, honest, morally above reproach and, above all, a temperate family provider who found his masculine identity in his work” (1995, 274). All of the fathers in the realist novels fit these descriptions, even the peasant father of Järnefelt’s Isänmaa. Compared to the fathers in the national romantic works, they are not different in essence, but in their relationships with their sons. Whereas Runeberg’s student learns to respect the sacrifices of his ancestors and Vincent decides to follow in his father’s footsteps, the realist student protagonists want to rebel against their fathers and their fathers’ values.

The student protagonists are also shown in contrast to other student characters that represent familiar student “types.” But they serve the opposite purpose in the stories than in the national romantic works. Instead of highlighting the student protagonists’ heroism, they show their flaws. For example, one of the characters in Isänmaa is a patriotic student leader, Antti, whom Heikki admires because of his confidence and steadiness—the very same qualities Heikki sees in his father but does not find in himself (Järnefelt 1997, 124). In Helsinkiin, a similar contrast is made between the protagonist, Antti, and his sister’s fiancé, Pekka, who is an ideal student and, according to the women of the family, an ideal son-in-law. However, the more the family pushes Antti to be like Pekka, the more Antti resents him. In other words, in the realist student novels, the student protagonist is the one in danger of becoming “ruined.” This also happens to Ben in Barndomsvänner, and in Helsinkiin, it seems that Antti is headed that way. In Isänmaa, Heikki manages to steer away from the worst trouble, but a fellow student in whom Heikki confides, Olli, goes from being an exemplary medical student to becoming a drunk; had Heikki followed his advice to suppress his feelings and continue partying, Heikki could have met the same

fate.

In choosing to depict flawed student protagonists, the realist student novels confounded the previous order. The novels critique the protagonists and present the old-style patriotic heroes and their political activities with sarcasm. In addition, those who fit the normative idea of masculinity, such as the fathers, are seen through hostile eyes. Thus, the overall message of the novels regarding masculinity is ambiguous.

In terms of Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, it can be argued that the realist authors depicted different representations of masculinity to create a new, alternative student image to challenge the values of their fathers' generation, including the dominant ideal of masculinity. However, contemporary reactions to the novels suggest that this was not the message the wider audience received, as the nature of masculinity was not a focus of interest at this time. The novels were judged mostly through a nationalist lens: how the works fit the Fennoman's idea of "national" literature.

Because representations of masculinity reference models of political authority, the father figures in both national romantic and realist literature represented the old authoritarian, patriarchal political system. But the student images in these genres do not have identical meanings. Whereas the national romantic imagery referred to classical heroism, the realist imagery questioned whether such heroism was possible, or even desirable. In the national romantic novels, the message was "nationalist," broadly speaking, but in the realist novels, the political message is less overt. However, since these novels were part of a larger cultural conversation, it is possible to infer the political message. The young Fennoman ideology of the 1880s called for social reforms, for example, improvements in workers' conditions and women's position. They were also

critical of the older generation of Fennoman leaders, who by now had established social positions and seemed resigned to the status quo (Rommi and Pohls 1989). As confusing as the realist student images—particularly in Aho’s novels—might have seemed to the contemporary audience, they generally convey a humanist and anti-authoritarian message that was also profoundly connected to masculine ideals.

In retrospect, the realist novels suggest a more flexible definition of masculinity. In the world depicted in the novels, the limits of masculinity are defined through femininity—masculinity was “not-femininity”—which was equated with emotionality: the steady and confident man was not supposed to be emotional. But the time had not yet come for an explicit discussion of gender roles and the gender order; this began only in the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹ Accordingly, only since then have historians identified the end of the nineteenth century as a period of crisis in, or redefinition of, masculinity (e.g., Bederman 1995, 10–20; Mosse 1996). I suggest that the reshaping of the student image in the late nineteenth century was an early attempt to renegotiate the limits of masculinity. Though masculinity per se was not an explicit topic of discussion in the same way the “woman question” was at this time, the realist student novels did question the contemporary definition of masculinity.

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, the student was an important image of both masculinity and nationalism in Finnish literature. Authors such as J. L. Runeberg and Zacharias Topelius, among others, were instrumental in creating the image of the patriotic, or national romantic, student. This image was based on earlier images of

students and of heroic masculinity, such as warriors or kings. The patriotic student was like a Homeric hero, and the image was gendered: the student was a man, and his role was to lead the nation. Though students may earlier have been considered the future hopes of their countries, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Finland and many other European countries, nationalist ideology molded them into national heroes. In Finland, students played a particularly important role in the nationalist movement, both concretely as actors and as symbols.

In the late nineteenth century, a new generation of authors, following the literary trend of realism, took on the image of the patriotic student to critique its national romantic underpinnings. The student protagonists of Finnish realist literature were not heroic; they were full of self-doubt, uncertain about their directions in life. Compared with the certainty of the Homeric heroes, the realist student protagonists—the first modern subjects of Finnish literature—appeared weak, fragile, and even decadent. This new version of the student proved unappealing for the audience, and critics viewed it unsympathetically.

I have argued that the change in the student image in the late nineteenth century was an attempt to question the limits of masculinity. The realist novels were part of a broader cultural conversation in which the younger generation of Finnish nationalists questioned the authority of the previous generation. The question of masculinity was at the center of this conversation, even if it was not directly “named.” Nevertheless, the realist novels changed the student image in the eyes of the public: from then on, it was impossible to put him on a pedestal without a hint of irony. But, a deeper discussion of the definition of masculinity did not take place. If anything, the realist student

protagonists with their many shortcomings deflected criticism from the real target, the hegemonic ideal of masculinity that defined the ideal man as serious, confident, and hard-working, but also non-emotional.

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¹The term "gentry" is a rough translation of the Finnish term säätyläiset and the Swedish ståndspersoner, meaning "people of status," which originally referred to the upper ranks of society, including "the nobility, the clergy, and their social equals" (Alapuro 1988, 26). The wealthiest burghers and peasants who had been educated or had acquired significant wealth could also be considered "people of status" (Jutikkala 1968, 182–4).

²In the original Swedish, the word used is "fosterjord," which denotes "native land" rather than "fatherland," which is used in the English translation.

³The story was later published as a book designed as a Swedish language reader for high school students. It was reissued a number of times and was in use at least until the 1940s

(see, e.g., Topelius 1925).

⁴Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁵Though the perennial student and peasant student were often represented as tragic figures, they could also have comical aspects. One well-known comical rendition in Scandinavian literature was by Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). His play Erasmus Montanus eller Rasmus Berg depicts a student who comes from a peasant background but wishes to cover it up by appearing upper class in manners and clothing, as well as by cultivating foreign words that he, however, uses incorrectly. The play was translated into Finnish as Anttonius Putronius eli Antto Puuronen and published in a Finnish language newspaper in 1846 (Kanava, No. 1–11, 1846). See Kiuru (2000).

⁶For discussion of the meaning of “brother’s toast” in Swedish student culture in the nineteenth century, see David Tjeder (2003, 115).

⁷The novel was translated into Finnish only in 1975 as Lapsuudenystävät, by Kari Jalonen, and was first published in Tavaststjerna’s Valitut teokset (1975; Selected Works). The same translation was published separately as a book in 1985.

⁸There were many other novels and short stories dealing with the same theme published in the 1880s and 1890s. For example, in Finnish, Santeri Ivalo’s Aikansa lapsipuoli (1895; Stepchild of His Times), K. A. Järvi’s Peräkammarin ylioppilas (1893; Student of the Back Room), and, in Swedish, Anders Allardt’s En framtidsman (1888; The Man of the Future). For a thorough discussion on Finnish student novels of the 1880s and 1890s, see Lappalainen (2000, 168–79).

⁹Many of Tavaststjerna’s works were translated into Finnish during his lifetime, often by Juhani Aho. Tavaststjerna also translated some of Juhani Aho’s works into Swedish.

¹⁰August Strindberg's short stories on student life in Uppsala were published in the collection Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken (From Fjärdingen and Svartbäcken) in 1877.

The title refers to two old town districts around the university in central Uppsala.

¹¹This binary notion of gender was typical of modernity and was criticized by late twentieth century feminists. For a short discussion, see e.g., Owen 2000.