



LAURA STARK

The Limits of Patriarchy

*How Female Networks of Pilfering and Gossip Sparked
the First Debates on Rural Gender Rights in the 19th-Century
Finnish-Language Press*

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P.O. Box 259

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Jyväskylä, the 11th of October

Laura Stark

Notes on Translations and Referencing of Texts

Principles of translation

All translations from the Finnish are mine unless otherwise stated. The translation of the texts cited as examples in this study represents a compromise between preserving as closely as possible the original meaning of the text and making it comprehensible to English-language readers who are not necessarily familiar with the Finnish language or culture. A direct, word-for-word translation has not been possible due to the considerable differences in grammatical and semantic structures between Finnish and English, and because the use of the Finnish language in the 19th-century press by writers who had little or no formal education differs considerably from modern standard Finnish. In certain cases, the term *paraphrase* would more accurately describe the renderings in English given here. This is due to the impossibility of presenting the original narratives and descriptions word for word in English in a way which would capture the most important connotations present in the original, without greatly increasing the already large number of explanations and footnotes in this study. In a few cases I have had to make an informed guess regarding the meaning of a word or phrase based on contextual cues, gained from a preliminary reading of the corpus of source texts as a whole. In addition, certain terms of address (nicknames, terms of respect or affection) have no equivalents in standard English and therefore could not be rendered verbatim. In many cases I have added terms like 'parish' or 'district' to place-names whose classification would not have been automatically understood from the text by non-Finnish readers. Grammatical and stylistic structures particular to Finnish oral speech (mixed tenses, non-standard verbal forms, gaps and 'missing' information to be supplied by the listener from context, etc.) have been modified so as to be comprehensible to the English-language reader. In many cases I have added punctuation marks such as periods, question marks and quotations marks in order to facilitate readability. Perhaps most significantly, texts in divergent Finnish dialects have all been rendered in standard English, which means that the linguistic and stylistic differences among these texts, as well as the richness of their expression, has been greatly reduced in translation.

Referencing of source texts

The referencing of articles and letters appearing in newspapers adheres to the following format: date of publishing, name of newspaper, issue number of newspaper, title of article or letter in quotes, and the name or pen name of author in parentheses. References to original texts housed in the collections of the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives contain information in the following order: the district or locality in which the folklore item was collected; the year the folklore item was received by the Folklore Archives, the collector's or sender's name, with his or her personal data in parentheses, sometimes followed by the acronym for the collection series (KT, KJ), as well as the number under which the folklore item is housed in manuscript form. The series of numbers following the collection series acronym (e.g. KT 24:18) indicates the volume number of the collection series (24), and the item number within that volume (18). The final entry, preceded by a dash (-), is information relating to the informant (gender, occupation, marital status, age at recording or year of birth, etc.), if different from the collector and if known. For ethical reasons (see Chapter Four), names of informants are not shown.

I

Background, Theory and Sources

1. Introduction

A major aim of this book is to contribute to current efforts toward critically rethinking the history of gender in Finland.¹ Gender scholarship within Finnish history, ethnology and folklore studies has emerged from an historical context which is unique even to Scandinavia. Finnish women were the first women in Europe to receive not only the vote but to be allowed to stand for Parliamentary elections in 1906. In this year, nearly 10 per cent of the parliamentarians elected were women. According to historians, these events occurred with little debate or fanfare, and women won these rights with apparent ease. The social and cultural factors behind this distinctive achievement are still being debated, but many researchers have surmised that 19th-century gender relations in the Finnish countryside, where over 90 per cent of the Finnish population resided, had a significant impact on this turn of events.

What precisely were the gender dynamics in the Finnish 19th-century countryside which might have left their mark on the politics of later decades? Historians, ethnologists and folklorists have already mapped out the broad contours of family relations within Finnish farming households.² They have shown us that the 19th-century farm master in Finland was entitled to considerable legal rights as head of the household, administrator of its material goods, and legal guardian of his wife, children and servants. They have pointed out that we must look beyond these formal and institutional privileges to the reality of daily life, where it is evident that the necessity of women's labour contribution for the maintenance of the farm meant that power had to be negotiated between farming men and women within the household. Men's and women's dependency on each others' labour skills, and the authority delegated to the farm mistress as head of the domestic sphere, resulted in an uneasy gendered balance of power within farming households. Yet significant gaps remain in our knowledge of how gendered

1 See Östman 1996; Markkola 1997, 2002a, 2003a; Honkanen 1997; Koivunen 1998; Juntti 2004.

2 See: Heikinmäki 1981, 1988; Markkola 1990, 1994; Räsänen 1992, 1996; Apo 1993, 1995; Rantalaiho 1994; Pohjola-Vilkuna 1995; Löfström 1998; Stark-Arola 1998.

rights were understood by 19th-century contemporaries, how perceptions of men and women were affected by the massive social changes which occurred toward the end of the 19th century, and how gendered power was experienced by members of rural farming families who may have left behind few written records.

Within Finland, recent gender history research has tended to focus on women from the middle- and upper-classes, or on working-class women in towns or cities. This research has provided valuable insights into women's roles in the public sphere³ – in politics, waged work, organizations, and collective movements. But while the public sphere has been the context in which women's agency has been easiest to identify, the majority of 19th-century Finnish women resided in the countryside, engaged in the less visible sphere of unpaid labour inside the farm household.⁴ The vast socio-economic and cultural distance which prevailed in that century between urban and rural lifestyles has meant that research into agrarian women's lives and gender relations does not always fit comfortably inside the frameworks provided by historical research on Finnish women's public roles in wage work and voluntary organizations. For this reason, Finnish ethnologists studying rural gender in the past have had to construct their own contextual frameworks, and these have centred on the *farm* as the basic unit of production and consumption in the countryside, the unit which organized economic and social relations. For most women born into the estate of the landed peasantry, the farming family was the governance structure which coordinated and monitored their work throughout their lives. It was in the context of the farm household that small storms began to brew, conflicts of interest that burst onto the public scene in the 1850s and 1860s due to the rise of the Finnish-language press. An examination of these conflicts helps fill the gaps in our knowledge of gender dynamics in the last half of the 19th century.

Long before there was any discussion of women's right to vote, before the 'women's question' was raised in the early 1880s regarding women's university education, before the rise of voluntary civic organizations and movements, even before the law allowing public primary schools in 1866, Finns were publicly debating the rights of rural women in the press. In this discussion participated not only educated elites but also landowning peasants and even farm women. The discussions began as the public condemnation of a practice known as 'home thievery' (*kotivarkaus*), in which household members and especially farm women secretly pilfered and sold the products of their farm behind the farm master's back. However, writers and meeting

3 I follow rhetorical theorist Gerard Hauser in defining the public sphere as 'a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgement about them' (Hauser 1998: 21).

4 Finland during the 19th century was primarily an agricultural economy in which forest resources were exploited. In the first half of the 19th century, roughly 90 per cent of the Finnish population at that time gained their livelihood directly from agriculture and related occupations, and by 1890 this number had dropped only slightly, to roughly 75 per cent (Talve 1997: 50).

In the mid-19th century, letters to newspapers in Finland began to condemn a practice known as home thievery, in which farm mistresses pilfered goods from their farms to sell behind the farm master's back. Why did farm mistresses engage home thievery and why were writers so harsh in their disapproval of it? Why did many men in their letters nonetheless sympathize with women's pilfering? What opinions did farm daughters express?

This book explores theoretical concepts of agency and power applied to the 19th-century context and takes a closer look at the family patriarch, resistance to patriarchal power by farm mistresses and their daughters, and the identities of those Finnish men who already in the 1850s and 1860s sought to defend the rights of rural farm women.



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