

SUFFERING DAUGHTERS AND WIVES. SENTIMENTAL THEMES IN FINNISH AND NORDIC REALISM

Saija Isomaa

Over the past ten years extensive research has been conducted on Finnish nineteenth-century realism, or naturalism, as some prefer to call it. The new interest in the period is connected to the reappraisal of Finnish *fin-de-siècle* literature that began with studies on Finnish symbolism and decadence in the 1990s.¹ Since decadence and naturalism are usually regarded as thematically and historically interconnected, recent research has focused on the naturalist, ‘Zolian’ features of the period’s literature.² As a result, the new accounts of French naturalism in Finland have enriched the field of study and increased our understanding of the period. However, the idea that Finnish – and more generally Nordic – realism be seen solely as a Nordic version of French naturalism is disputable, as I wish to show in this article.³ I suggest that to acquire a more balanced view of the period’s literature, one should also pay attention to the French sentimental tradition that offered literary models for the treatment of the ‘woman question’ for numerous Finnish, Nordic and Russian nineteenth-century writers, sentimentalist and realist alike.⁴

I shall begin by presenting a sentimentalist reading of a Finnish realist classic, *Papin rouva* (1893, ‘The Wife of a Clergyman’) by Juhani Aho. Since Aho (1861–1921) has been considered one of the most prominent Finnish realists, sentimental themes in his novels justify considering whether other realists applied the sentimentalist repertoire as well. I shall also more generally explore French sentimental aesthetics and consider some Finnish and Nordic ‘realist’ novels and plays that use sentimental themes in the treatment of the ‘woman question’. These include Henrik Ibsen’s play *Et dukkehjem* (1879, *A Doll’s House*), *Presidentens döttrar* (1834) and *Hertha* (1856) by Fredrika Bremer, *Amtmandens døtre* by Camilla Collett, *Papin tytär* (1885, ‘The Daughter of a Clergyman’) by Juhani Aho, *Hanna* (1886) by Minna Canth, and *Kommandørens døtre* (1886) by Jonas Lie.

The sentimental wife of a clergyman

Juhani Aho wrote two novels depicting the life of Elli, the intelligent but misunderstood daughter of a clergyman. The first novel, *Papin tytär* focuses on Elli’s childhood and school years, while the sequel, *Papin rouva* depicts Elli’s later life during one summer. In *Papin rouva*, Elli has married a simpleminded clergyman, Mikko Aarnio, and they live in a remote parsonage on a lake in the Finnish countryside. Elli is melancholic and spends her days at the lake watching the vessels pass by, dreaming of a better life. She, as *Papin tytär* reveals, did not want to marry Mikko Aarnio in the first place. Instead she had secretly fallen in love with the intelligent student Olavi Kalm, who had paid a visit with Mikko to her childhood home. However, after Olavi had moved on, and when Mikko was incessantly courting her, Elli, following her mother’s advice, finally accepted him.

As the daughter of a stern father who did not allow her to study, Elli did not have a genuine alternative to marriage. Moreover, living in the countryside, her opportunities for a suitable marriage were severely restricted.

Papin rouva is a love-triangle novel. Events begin when Olavi announces that he is going to pay a visit to Mikko and Elli's parsonage. Soon after his arrival, Olavi discovers that Elli is unhappy in her marriage, and starts spending more time with her, discussing the justification for marriage and divorce. The love triangle is formed, when Olavi realises Elli's feelings towards him. When pastoral duties call Mikko to another village, Elli and Olavi become intimate, and Olavi attempts to seduce Elli, but without success. Elli wants to keep her conscience clear, and she opts for Platonic love instead. In the middle of this, Mikko returns home and, simple man as he is, starts praising the virtues of his marital life to Olavi. Frustrated by his unbearable position, Olavi leaves the parsonage and travels away on the next boat. Elli is left broken-hearted, without any hope for a better future. In the final scene of the novel the disconsolate Elli must subject herself to her conjugal duties and return to her husband, who is already waving to her invitingly from their bedroom window.

Papin rouva has been called the Finnish Madame Bovary owing to its depiction of a love triangle and allusions to romantic texts, such as J. L. Runeberg's short epic *Hanna* (1836). However, differences between Juhani Aho's and Gustave Flaubert's novels have also been recognised (e.g. Lyytikäinen 1991). Even though both Elli and Emma are unhappily married and long for a better life, Elli does not commit adultery and end up taking her own life. Instead, she fights against her adulterous desires and consents to the idea of adultery in her mind only when it is too late and Olavi is already leaving. It has been argued that Elli's story should be grasped as a special case of French naturalism in Finnish literature, namely as representing static entropy (see Rossi 2007: 109). However, the interpretation that I want to defend here is that *Papin rouva* is a realist version of the sentimental love-triangle novel rather than a Flaubertian novel of female adultery. This is because the main features that separate Aho's novel from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* – Elli's chastity, her serious moral considerations and melancholic suffering – are typical of sentimentalist love-triangle novels such as George Sand's *Indiana* (1832).

Indiana tells the story of a nineteen-year-old creole woman named Indiana, who is unhappily married to a general three times her age. Indiana has moved to France with her husband, and her English 'foster father' Sir Ralph lives with them. During one soiree, a young man, Raymon de Ramière, sees the beautiful Indiana and falls passionately in love. Raymon attempts to seduce her, but is unsuccessful, despite Indiana not knowing – unlike the reader – that Raymon has caused the suicide of her beloved servant and foster sister Noun, who was pregnant by him. Even so, the romantic love that Raymon demonstrates to Indiana prevents her from dying from her marital misery. When Indiana finally leaves her husband to live with Raymon, she learns that Raymon has married a rich heiress. The unhappy Indiana and equally unhappy sir Ralph decide to commit suicide together, but they fail and end up living in a little cottage on Île Bourbon, helping the oppressed slaves.

The differences in plot between *Papin rouva* and *Indiana* are obvious. Indiana's story is more melodramatic and adventurous than Elli's domestic tragedy. Elli is tied to the domestic sphere, and there is no 'Sir Ralph' to ease her predicament. However, there are thematic similarities that cannot be ignored in a literary-historical study. Like Indiana, Elli must marry without love because of her weak social position, and her unhappy marital life causes her deep melancholy and spiritual suffering.⁵ Both novels portray their heroine watching the sea or a lake and dreaming of the world beyond it. Elli's secret place is Nuottakota near her home, while Indiana spends her imaginary moments on a peak on Île Bourbon, dreaming of Paris. Both Elli and Indiana dream of a man who would come to save them. As the potential saviour appears in their lives, both prefer Platonic love and resist erotic temptations. The presence of the beloved wipes away their desperation, and the heroines regain their health. Even so, the beloveds are not worthy of their love, and after realising this, the heroines fall again into despair.

My argument is that Aho's *Papin rouva* is better understood if the sentimental versions of the love-triangle scenario are taken into account.⁶ If the Sandian version is ignored and the Flaubertian model is stressed, Elli's melancholic suffering, chastity and moral considerations seem to be out of place. Elli's status as a victim of the rules of a patriarchal family and society is also difficult to grasp if read in a Flaubertian light, as Flaubert's novel does not attempt to make an emancipatory statement. It is worth noting that the resemblance between *Papin rouva* and *Madame Bovary* need not result from Aho's drawing his inspiration from Flaubert's novel only. The resemblance may also result from Aho's and Flaubert's being inspired by French sentimentalism.⁷

French sentimentalism

Sentimentalist aesthetics predates to eighteenth-century England and to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), which Lynn Festa (2002: 73-74) claims to be the first sentimental novel to incite "a pan-European consumer frenzy". Such remarkable eighteenth-century novels as Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767) and Goethe's *Leiden des Jungen Werther* (1774/1787) are also sentimental. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie* (1761) is considered to be the first sentimental novel penned in France, and French women writers such as Germaine de Staël soon began writing in its fashion.

Margaret Cohen has explored French sentimentalism in her study *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999). According to her, sentimental works dominated in France in the early nineteenth century and were both bestsellers and critical successes in their time, creating an idealised aesthetic community in which the political dilemma of the day, the accommodation of positive and negative notions of rights, was played out and resolved. When other social contradictions such as the problem of social inequality became more urgent in the years before and after the Revolution of 1830, sentimentalism lost some of its appeal. Yet it still served as a starting point for Stendhal and Balzac, who forged their realist aesthetic in a hostile takeover of the sentimental form, as well as for women writers like George Sand who wrote sentimental social novels. Whereas the twentieth century almost forgot French sentimentalism owing to its preference for

realism and literary history written from the standpoint of victors, sentimental writers had a wide impact in Europe in their own time. (See Cohen 1999: 10-13.) George Sand in particular was widely known and had a great impact on, for example, English and Russian literature (see Thomson 1977, Eidelman 1994, Genevray 2000).

The sentimental novel typically concentrates on depicting a virtuous female protagonist who must make a moral choice between opposing moral imperatives, collective welfare and individual freedom. According to Cohen (1999: 38), the main scenarios bringing these imperatives into conflict are those of adulterous love affair and familial barrier to marriage. In Sophie Cottin's *Claire d'Albe* (1799), for example, the young and virtuous Claire is married to an older man in accordance with her father's will, but falls in love with her husband's young cousin and is torn between duty towards her husband and the individual freedom to choose one's partner. In the sentimental novel, both positions are considered morally valuable. In contrast to the realist novel, the sentimental novel concentrates on inner ethical conflict, and hence omits detailed descriptions of surroundings and mutes reference to social difference. The setting is usually domestic: the action is typically situated in reception rooms, bedrooms and gardens. Other sentimental conventions include idealisation of characters, emphatic diction, authorial prefaces and analysis of the heart. (See Cohen 1999: 36-38, 48-76.)

The sentimental social novel retains most sentimental conventions, but also transforms the repertoire in an essential way. While still depicting mainly female characters caught in a conflict between collective obligation and freedom, collective obligation is no longer seen as positive but rather oppressive, serving the interests of the stronger. The protagonist is no longer torn between two equal moral imperatives, but resists the oppressive social code to secure his or her freedom. Contrary to the sentimental novel, the sentimental social novel takes notice of social classes and social and gender inequality. The protagonist suffers because she or he has an oppressed social position, and the novel dwells on his or her suffering. Sentimental social novels sometimes include more detail and portray historically specific social types that have been seen as realist features par excellence.⁸ (Ibid. 150.)

The sentimental social novel also takes an explicit political or social stance. Many of them are concerned with feminine condition, even if they advance a variety of ideas and values. The novel's basic idea can be expressed through the narrator's comments, authorial personae or spokesperson characters. The novel type also makes room for social and political debate on the protagonist's conduct: by presenting imperfect characters, it leaves room for debate and censure. (See *ibid.* 135-139, 159.) This aesthetics bears resemblance to the Brandesian ideal of *debatlitteratur* of putting questions under debate, and it is not that surprising to find the name of George Sand at the renowned Copenhagen lecture by the Danish critic Georg Brandes in 1871.

Brandesian *debatlitteratur* and sentimentalism

That a literature exists in our time is shown by the fact that it sets up problems for debate. Thus, for instance, George Sand debates the question of marriage; Voltaire, Byron and Feuerbach debate religion; Proud'hon private property; the younger Alexandre Dumas the relationship between the sexes; and Émile Augier societal relationships. For a literature not to raise any question for debate is the same as for it to set out to lose all significance. (Georg Brandes, *Main Currents* lecture, transl. unknown)

Despite Georg Brandes's ambivalent relationship to women writers and women's emancipation, he nevertheless was a critic who admired George Sand and defended her works against the critiques of French realist and naturalist writers in his *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de aarhundredes litteratur* (1872-1890).⁹ The first part of the series, *Emigrantlitteraturen*, was translated into Finnish and published in 1887 by Minna Canth and her friend Hilda Asp. The translation includes the famous Copenhagen lecture in its revised version, but also the renowned sentences in which Brandes claims that literature is alive when it 'sets up problems for debate'. What is noteworthy in this statement is that instead of referring to the prominent French realists (who are altogether omitted), Brandes (1872: 15) mentions first George Sand, a sentimentalist social novelist, as a writer who debates the question of marriage. Sentimentalism was known in the Nordic countries before the period of realism, and Brandes's choice of Sand's along with his admiring account of Madame de Staël in *Emigrantlitteraturen* was likely to reinforce its status.¹⁰ If a realist writer had wanted to follow Brandes's lead and discuss marriage or the relationship between the sexes (as in the Finnish version), he or she probably would have had to read Sand's novels to see how it could be accomplished. Brandes's preference testifies, in a way, to the respect that Sand enjoyed in the nineteenth century.

Did Nordic realist writers exhibit sentimental themes and conventions in their works? I have already pointed to the thematic similarities between Juhani Aho's *Papin rouva* and Sand's *Indiana*. The sentimentalist interpretation of *Papin rouva* can be deepened. It is worth noting that Elli and Olavi discuss their sentimentality while rowing a boat on a lake. Elli tells Olavi of her habit of going to watch the wake of a liner each evening and assumes that Olavi finds it rather sentimental, to which Olavi answers that he himself is very sentimental.¹¹ This can be interpreted as an allusion to sentimentalism, especially as the novel also applies sentimental stock scenarios – adultery and familial barrier to marriage – to raise the issue of conflicting duties. While Elli struggles morally with the option of an adulterous love affair with the man she loves, there is a happy couple living nearby who married against the will of the bride's family. The wife, Johanna, chose to marry beneath her social class and with her parents disapproving, but her marriage is a happy one. Elli did not fight for her personal freedom, and ended up unhappily married. The scenario is given weight by an allusion to J. L. Runeberg's *Hanna*, in which seventeen-year-old Hanna must choose whether to marry an old man

whom she does not love. With the help of her servant Johanna's advice, she chooses not to marry him. In both Runeberg's epic and Aho's novel, a character named Johanna serves as a proponent of marriage for love. Runeberg's Hanna later falls in love with someone more her equal, a young student, and they get engaged. In fact, the advice of the servant Johanna is the motto of *Papin rouva*, which underlines the importance of the issue in the novel.

Papin rouva draws attention to another Nordic realist work that deals with the theme of conflicting duties. Elli and Olavi discuss Henrik Ibsen's play *Et dukkehjem*, and after first condemning Nora for leaving her children, Elli gradually begins to understand the fact that Nora also has duties for herself, and not only for her family (PR: 119-120). The conflict of duties is thus an explicit theme in Aho's novel, but it is central also in *Et dukkehjem* as in other plays by Ibsen.¹² Despite some naturalist motifs in *Et dukkehjem*, the play concentrates on moral questions in a way that is alien to French naturalism but familiar to French sentimentalism.¹³ In the course of the play, Nora awakens to thoughts about the morality of her marriage. She comes to see the superficiality of her husband's feelings toward herself – there is no real love that would justify the marriage – and ends up questioning the traditional position of women in marriage and in society.

NORA. What do you consider my most sacred duties?

HELMER. Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

NORA. I have other duties just as sacred.

HELMER. Indeed you have not. What duties could those be?

NORA. Duties to myself.

HELMER. Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

NORA. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are – or, at all events, that I must try and become one. (*A Doll's House*, third act, transl. R. Farquharson and Eleanor Marx-Aveling)¹⁴

Instead of duties towards the family only, she also has duties towards herself, Nora declares to her husband.¹⁵ In Nora's case, the duties are in conflict, and Nora chooses her personal freedom, because she thinks that a doll-like wife cannot comply with her familial duties anyway. In Nora's case the 'sentimental' freedom of the heart does not present itself primarily as freedom to choose one's partner. Instead, Nora wants to become a citizen and understand the society in which she lives. She asserts her human rights and begins to act like a free person by leaving her 'doll's house'.

The conflict of moral duties is a central sentimental theme, as Cohen (1999) has shown, and in this respect Ibsen's play seems to be discussing the 'woman question' in a sentimental vein.¹⁶ The conflict between Nora and Helmer can also be seen as a conflict between two literary currents, sentimentalism and naturalism, since Nora voices the sentimentalist ideal of personal freedom and Helmer serves as a mouthpiece for deterministic, hereditary ideas, which Nora proves wrong by

her moral conduct.¹⁷ However, as Jules Lemaître noted in 1898, Ibsen's romantic individualism is more revolutionary than Sand's. The final scene of the play, Nora's departure, leaves plenty of room for social debate on the conduct of the character, and, as it was, the scene aroused debate all over Europe.

The sentimentalist challenge to Snellmanian gender roles

In the Finnish context, the literary treatment of the 'woman question' is traditionally related to nineteenth-century realism. Mikko Saarenheimo, for example, emphasised in 1924 its prominence in realist literature. However, as gender-oriented studies over recent decades have shown, the position of women in marriage and in society was a central theme in Finnish as well as Nordic literature in general already in the decades preceding realism.¹⁸ Such mid-nineteenth-century Finnish novelists as Charlotta Falkman and Marie Linder dealt with the position of women in the family and in society. Their novels have been related to the tradition of the sentimental social novel, yet other popular conventions at the time, such as the Gothic novel or melodrama, can also be observed in them. Such 'realist' issues as alcoholism, mental illness, adultery, seduction of lower-class girls, suicide, and venereal disease also occur in the novels of the pre-realist period. (Launis 2005: 90, Launis 2001, Grönstrand 2005: 25, 183.)

The Finnish proponents of the emancipation of women had a powerful opponent in Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806-1881), the leading Finnish advocate of Hegelian philosophy and the ideological leader of the nationalist movement, who defended traditional gender roles and family structure in his writings. Despite his otherwise progressive thinking, for Snellman a woman was first and foremost a wife and a mother, and passive dependency, emotional impulsivity and imprudent self-indulgence were natural for her, as they were for children and the uneducated. Hence, the domestic sphere was natural for women, just as the public sphere was for mature men. (See Jalava 2005, 2006.) As in some other countries, in Finland the proponents of women's emancipation had to face both Hegelian and clerical opposition to their cause.

J.V. Snellman participated in the literary discussion on the institution of marriage already in 1840 by writing a tendentious sequel to the Swedish writer Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's novel *Det går an. En tavla ur livet* (1839). In his *Det går an. En tavla ur livet. Fortsättning* (1840), Snellman writes an unhappy destiny for Almqvist's characters Sara Widebäck and Sergeant Albert, who chose to live together in an egalitarian love relationship without formal marriage and shared property. In Snellman's version, Albert rejects Sara and finds another spouse, Celestine, but his life is unhappy due to guilt, fears of Celestine's infidelity, and economic problems. After meeting his and Sara's son, a pedlar, Albert gives some money for his schooling and then kills himself. For Snellman, a free-love relationship based on the freedom of the heart did not present itself as a solid basis for family life and for a nation state.

The Snellmanian conception of ideal family structure and gender roles dominated for an extended period of time in Finland. Hence the women's rights movement was long seen as a threat to the bourgeois social system (Jalava 2006). However, a number of sentimental and realist writers seized on the problems that

they saw as resulting from the ideal, and the sentimental repertoire offered them themes and scenarios in which to treat these issues and to question the gender thinking that emphasised women's inferior status and familial duties.¹⁹ The portrayal of the distress and depression that an oppressed woman can suffer from was a strong argument against the oppressive social structures. Yet the theme of conflicting duties could be used in the service of conservative ideas, as J. V. Snellman's sequel to J. C. L. Almqvist's novel demonstrates.

The Finnish realist novels that depict the development of a girl in a patriarchal family, such as Juhani Aho's novel *Papin tytär* (1885) and Minna Canth's novel *Hanna* (1886), seem to be drawing on the Nordic 'daughter novel' tradition which includes both 'sentimental' and 'realist' works. Aho's novel already alludes in its title to the tradition exemplified by the Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer's *Presidentens döttrar* (1834), the Norwegian writer Camilla Collett's *Amtmandens døtre* (1854-55/1879) and the Norwegian writer Jonas Lie's *Kommandørens døttre* (1886).²⁰ The novels in this tradition are sometimes named after the protagonist of the novel, as *Hertha* (1856) by Bremer and *Hanna* by Canth.

As other novels in the tradition, the aforementioned Finnish novels depict the sufferings of girls in society, particularly in the patriarchal upper-class family. Aho's Elli and Canth's Hanna are sent to school to learn manners, skills and values that a woman of higher rank needs in order to lead an appropriate social and marital life. Both girls would like to continue their studies, but must submit to their father's will, in other words quit school, and find a spouse, and live the traditional life of a woman as wife and mother. As *Papin rouva* shows, this choice of destiny leads Elli to an unhappy marriage and deep suffering. In contrast to Elli, Canth's Hanna is able to reject the proposal of a loathsome suitor whom her father prefers; however, her lot is to fall into depression and live a joyless life as an old maid, serving her father and brother.

The 'daughter novel' tradition is thematically connected to the French sentimental social novel due to its portrayal of upper-class girls who struggle against the will of their parents and the social code that prevent them from making their own choices in life. For example, Bremer's Edla (in *Presidentens döttrar*) would, against her father's will, like to study, and Bremer's Hertha and Lie's Martha encounter family resistance to marriage. However, some of the daughter novels use sentimental techniques of narration while others prefer a realist or even naturalist repertoire. Fredrika Bremer and Camilla Collett, in particular, have been seen to mix realism and 'romanticism' (see e.g. Holm 1993: 244, 247; Garton 1993: 36). They use the sentimental convention of 'analysis of the heart' to explore a character's interiority and elicit readers' sympathy. By citing several letters, Sofie's diary and Margrethe's papers, Collett's narrator reveals the characters' problematic relationship to the social roles they are expected to adopt (on the 'analysis of the heart', see Cohen 1999: 61-62).²¹ However, such realists as Minna Canth and Juhani Aho did not adopt this convention. Instead of using first person forms of private writing to explore the inner life of their characters, they often use free indirect speech. Furthermore, Hanna and Elli are not idealised in the way sentimental protagonists often are.

Other resemblances, less pronounced, also relate the Finnish realist novels to the Nordic tradition. In Collett's novel, for instance, the mother tells her daughters that a woman can seldom marry the man she loves, but that her duty is to marry someone because the life of an old maid is most sorrowful.²² In Aho's novel, Elli gets a similar lesson when her unhappily married mother tells her that a girl seldom ends up with a man she wants but must anyway accept someone she can at least tolerate.²³ Both girls have fallen in love with a 'cold' man (Sofie with Georg *Kold*, Elli with Olavi *Kalm*), and both later marry others without love. To take another example, Canth seems to be referring to Bremer's *Presidentens döttrar* by naming one of her characters in *Hanna* after Bremer's Edla and by letting her encounter resistance when she violates gender-role expectations by aspiring to study philosophy and science.

The daughter novel tradition can be seen as a subgenre of the novel that has its roots in sentimentalism and that has retained some of its central themes and points of view even if later members of the literary family are casted under the impact of realist or, in case of Minna Canth, even naturalist aesthetics.²⁴ By portraying girls whose freedom of choice is restricted and who are therefore suffering, the realist versions still retain the thematic core of the sentimental social novel. The sentimental legacy is probably one of the reasons why even the less tendentious versions of the daughter novels seem to carry an emancipatory message.

Conclusion

By examining Juhani Aho's *Papin rouva* and some other Nordic works that make use of sentimental themes, my intention has been to show that the sentimental tradition should be taken into account in the study of Finnish and Nordic realism. Even if sentimentalism has not been widely discussed or appreciated in twentieth-century scholarship, nineteenth-century writers and critics were familiar with it, and many of them were also sympathetic. Finnish realists such as Aho and Canth seem to have been acquainted with some of the French sentimentalists and their Nordic successors, and recognising the sentimental legacy in their works increases our understanding of their oeuvre and of the period.

However, it is worth noting that each literary work has its own unique way of responding to different literary trends, movements and genres, and this variation should be appreciated in the analysis. This is particularly important when dealing with Finnish realism, because in addition to European literature, Russian literature had a deep impact on it. It is unlikely that any single author or movement can be used as an interpretive key to all literary phenomena in the period's literature. Even so, there are some literary traditions, both generic and quasi-generic, that can be reconstructed from the literature with these reservations in mind.

Further study is needed to determine the repertoire of Nordic sentimentalism and the extent to which sentimentalism has influenced realist literature. One could begin by examining the depictions of love triangles, the sufferings of women in patriarchal families and in forced marriages, the double standards and hypocrisy in society, discussions of moral duties, and the depictions of strong women and weak men. These themes and topics can all be related to the sentimental tradition.

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¹ See Lyytikäinen 1996, 1997, 1998.

² See Kantokorpi 1998, Rossi 2007, Maijala 2008, Rossi 2009. Päivi Lappalainen (2000) mentions the need to explore naturalist features in Finnish literature.

³ In recent research into Finnish realism, the role of Georg Brandes as the leader of Nordic realists has been contested, as well as the idea that Nordic realism differs essentially from French naturalism. This new standpoint is promoted especially by Rossi (2007: 59-63, 89), who refers to the traditional conception using the designation 'le mythe nordique', the Nordic myth. According to Rossi (ibid. 61), the treatment of the 'woman question' can be considered as inspired by Zola. In the present article, this conception is reconsidered against the sentimental tradition.

⁴ On the 'woman question' in nineteenth-century Russia and Russian literature, see e.g. Stites 1978 and Eidelman 1994. Both testify to George Sand's great influence on the discussion. In his renowned history of Russian literature, D. S. Mirsky (1958: 178) considers Sand to be the mother of Russian realism, and Gogol its father. According to Mirsky, Russian realism is a mixture of sentimental realism and satiric naturalism. Genevray 2000 gives a detailed account of Russian writers' relation to Sand's literary works. MacFadden (1999: 76–83) discusses Sand's influence on European feminism.

⁵ Indiana is so weak that she is dying. Her melancholy might also be seen as depression, because she is willing to commit suicide at the end of the novel. In this light, the relation per se between sentimental and naturalist depictions of women's sicknesses would be worth analysing. Minna Canth's depictions of women's depression and mental illnesses have been analysed in the light of Zola's theory of the experimental novel (see Maijala 2008), but as Canth makes an emancipatory point with her use of the motifs, one could also consider Canth's relation to the sentimental tradition.

⁶ The Tolstoyan version is also central in the analysis of *Papin rouva*, because *Anna Karenina* is mentioned in the novel. I emphasise the importance of the Sandian version of the love triangle, because it has been neglected in the research. However, in contrast to *Emma Bovary*, *Anna Karenina* is also struggling hopelessly in a conflict of duties, even if she commits adultery as *Emma*.

⁷ See Booker (2003), who discusses the possibility that Flaubert is writing against Sand's *Indiana* in *Madame Bovary*.

⁸ That detailed description and historically specific social types also occur in sentimental social novels complicates the question of literary descent: a writer using these conventions could have learnt them not from a realist novel but from a sentimental social novel. This possibility should not

be overemphasised, but if one wishes to discuss ‘realist’ novels that have sentimental features, one should take it into account.

⁹ See especially the fifth part of the series, on the ‘Romantic School’ in France, in which Brandes mocks ‘the School of Balzac’ for furthering conventional morality and prefers Sand’s bold treatment of moral questions instead. For Brandes, the French realists and naturalists are insignificant as thinkers and moralists. (Brandes 2006: 143.)

¹⁰ On the reception of sentimentalism in Nordic literatures before the Modern Breakthrough, see e.g. Møller Jensen et al. 1993, Grönstrand 2005, Launis 2005, Stenwall 1979: 23–24. I refer to Dahlerup’s (1983) discussion of Brandes’s relationship to women writers and women’s emancipation.

¹¹ – Se on aina kesäaikoina minulle jokapäiväistä musiikkia. Ne tulevat tuonne nuottikodan alle saakka ja minä menen melkein joka ilta niitä sinne vastaanottamaan. Teistä se varmaankin on hyvin senttimenttaalia.

– Minä olen itsekin senttimenttaali.

– Oletteko?... Minusta on niin hauskaa, kun ne vyöryvät sieltä aivan hiljaa ja sitten yhtäkkiä murtuvat rantakiville ... kuuletko, nyt ne ovat jo siellä. (PR: 97)

In Swedish; ‘– Det är min dagliga musik om sommaren. De komma städse ända dit fram under nothuset, och jag går dit nästan hvarje kväll för att taga emot dem. Ni tycker säkert, att det är mycket sentimentalt?’

– Jag är själf sentimental.

– Är ni? Jag tycker det är så underligt, när de komma rullande helt sakta och plötsligt brytas mot strandstenarna. Hör ni, där äro de redan!’ (Aho 1893b: 116–117.) There is no English translation of the novel.

¹² I refer in particular to Ibsen’s play *Fruen fra havet* (1888) in which the mermaid figure Ellida suffers from an earlier love affair while married. As her beloved returns to take her with him, Ellida defends her freedom to make another, this time free choice of a spouse, and given that opportunity, she chooses her husband. According to Toril Moi (2006: 297), the play closes the investigation of marriage that Ibsen had begun in *Et dukkehjem*: freedom of choice makes marriage possible. However, Ibsen’s Nora and Helmer are not the first characters in the nineteenth-century Nordic literature to debate women’s duties; already the first-person narrator of Bremer’s *Presidentens döttrar*, mamsell Rönkvist, discusses the issue with her employer, the president.

¹³ Zola aimed at a ‘scientific’ observation of characters and hence paid attention to the physiological, hereditary and environmental factors determining their behaviour. A genuine discussion of morals is difficult or impossible in this strongly determinist way of thinking. Furthermore, Zola also concentrated on depicting the lower classes while the French sentimentalists and a number of Nordic realists focused on portraying upper-class life.

¹⁴ *Nora*. Hvad regner du da for mine helligste pligter?

Helmer. Og det skal jeg behøve at sige dig! Er det ikke pligtene imod din mand og dine børn?

Nora. Jeg har andre ligeså hellige pligter.

Helmer. Det har du ikke. Hvilke pligter skulde det være.

Nora. Pligtene imod mig selv.

Helmer. Du er først og fremst hustru og moder.

Nora. Det tror jeg ikke længere på. Jeg tror, at jeg er først og fremst et menneske, jeg, ligesåvel som du, – eller ialfald, at jeg skal forsøge på å bli’e det. [– –] (Ibsen 1879: 171)

¹⁵ Already Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Julie in the novel of the same name feels as if she is caught between opposing duties, ‘*devoirs opposés*’ (Cohen 1999: 36).

¹⁶ Toril Moi (2006: 236) has remarked that the figure of the doll in Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne* has affinities with Ibsen’s use of it. As Nora, de Staël’s *Corinne* also dances the tarantella. Ibsen is known to have read de Staël’s novel. (Ibid. 125, 83.) See also the discussion between Jules Lemaître and Georg Brandes in 1896, 1897, and 1898. Among other things, Lemaître claims to have found the central ideas of Ibsen already in the works of George Sand and Alexander Dumas *filis*, even if Ibsen himself denied having read any of Sand’s novels. (Brandes 1897, Shepherd-Barr 1997: 163–166.)

¹⁷ Ross Shideler (2000: 76) has remarked that Helmer is the mouthpiece for the ‘scientific’, e.g. hereditary ideas in the play. Yet, as a rather negatively portrayed character, he is not a reliable interpreter of the events in the play, quite the contrary. By letting Helmer voice ‘scientific’ ideas, Ibsen is contesting their validity rather than accepting them. The other representative of ‘scientific’ thought, Dr Rank, is incapable of curing his own inherited disease even if he is able to diagnose it and other ills in society (see Shepherd-Barr 2006: 156–158). These two versions of scientific thought cannot contribute to the improvement of the position of women in society in the play, and Helmer’s version of it is rather the reason for Nora’s sufferings. Nora must act herself.

¹⁸ I refer to e.g. Møller Jensen et al. 1993.

¹⁹ This seems to be the case also in Ibsen’s *Et dukkehjem*, as Nora is pleading for her personal freedom vis-a-vis familial duties. Toril Moi (2006: 245–247) has suggested that the play in fact contests the Hegelian gender roles, as Nora comes to reject the domestic role given to women and insist on her right to be a citizen.

²⁰ Janet Garton (1993: 37) has remarked on the relation between Bremer’s and Collett’s novels. As Garton (ibid. 12) notes, Jonas Lie’s novel *Kommandørens døtre* (1886) also belongs to this tradition in its title and subject, but because it was published in 1886 it could not offer a model for Aho’s *Papin tytär*.

²¹ Cohen (1999, 63–64) writes: ‘To solicit the reader’s sympathy, sentimental novels also employ first person forms of private writing exploring interiority [...]. In the analysis of the heart, protagonists examine the concrete ramifications of the novel’s underwriting moral conflict in vivid if not excruciating detail’.

²² ‘det næsten aldrig falder i en Kvindes Lod at ægte den, hun elsker, og dog er det hendes Bestemmelse at ægte Nogen, da den ugifte Stand er den allersørgeligste’ (Collett 1879: 165–166).

²³ – [...] Jonkun kanssahan sinun täytyy sinunkin kerran mennä naimisiin ja saada turvaa maailmassa.

[–] Jos menen naimisiin, niin menen jonkun kanssa, jota oikein rakastan.

– Sinä tyttö parka et tiedä, että maailmassa hyvin harvoin tyttö saa sen, jota oikein rakastaa ... usein hänen täytyy tyytyä siihen, jota voi sietää. (PT: 131–132)

In Swedish: – [–] Med någon måste väl också du engång gifta dig för att få ett skydd i världen.

– Om jag någongång gifter mig, så blir det med en, som jag riktigt älskar.

– Stackars min flicka, du vet icke att det är mycket sällsynt här i världen att en kvinna får den hon riktigt älskar ... ofta får hon vara nöjd med en som hon kan fördraga.’ (Aho 1893a: 139, autoriserad översättning.) There is no English translation of the novel.

²⁴ For a naturalist reading of Canth’s works, see Maijala 2008. Also some other Nordic works such as *Pengar* by Victoria Benedictsson can be interpreted in the light of sentimentalism.

Biographical note

Saija Isomaa has obtained her doctorate in 2009 at the University of Helsinki, where she is currently working as a post-doctoral research fellow. Her ongoing research focuses on rhetorical genres in literature, in particular the tendentious novel and play in Finnish nineteenth-century literature and literary debate. Her publications include the doctoral dissertation *Heräämisten poetiikkaa. Lajeja ja intertekstejä Arvid Järnefeltin romaaneissa Isänmaa, Maaemon lapsia ja Veneh’ojalaiset* (SKS, 2009) and an article entitled ‘Genre Theory after the Linguistic Turn. An Anti-Essentialist, Hermeneutic Approach to Literary Genres’ in Pirjo Lyytikäinen (ed.), *Genre and Interpretation* (forthcoming). She is interested in genre theory and social issues in literature.

Email: saija.isomaa@helsinki.fi

Home page: http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/mimesis/Isomaa_eng.htm

Summary

This article examines sentimental themes and scenarios in Nordic nineteenth-century literature, focusing on Finnish realism. The main claim of the article is that the treatment of the Woman Question in Nordic literature is thematically connected to French sentimentalism that depicted upper-class women caught in the conflict between personal freedom and familial duties. Typical scenarios were family barrier to marriage and love triangle, in which an unhappily married woman fell in love with another man. French sentimental social novels took a stance on the position of women. Similar themes and scenarios can be found in Nordic nineteenth-century novels and plays. The ‘daughter novel’ tradition from Fredrika Bremer’s *The President’s Daughters* (1834) to Minna Canth’s *Hanna* (1886) depict the sufferings of upper-class girls in patriarchal family and society. *A Doll’s House* (1879) by Henrik Ibsen centers on the theme of conflicting duties, depicting the moral awakening of a doll-like wife, and *Papin rouva* (1893, ‘The Wife of a Clergyman’) by Juhani Aho concentrates on the sufferings and moral considerations of the unhappily married Elli. The article suggests that the sentimentalist legacy informs the Nordic nineteenth-century literature and should be taken into account in the scholarship.

Key words

Realism, sentimentalism, naturalism, romanticism, Georg Brandes, George Sand, Henrik Ibsen, Juhani Aho, the Woman Question, daughter novel, love-triangle novel