

The Discourse on Children's Reading from the 19th Century to Today

Moral, Empathy and Identification

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Dialogues with Children and Youth

1 November 2018

Tartu

Structure of this lecture

- Part I: From Reason to Empathy
 - Discussion on text samples (20 minutes)
 - Presentation (20 minutes)
- Part II: Reading Memories
 - Discussion on text samples (20 minutes)
 - Presentation (20 minutes)
- Questions, discussion, concluding remarks (10 minutes)

PART I: discussion

- Read the text fragments and discuss about how the relationship between the child reader and the text is constructed
- Focus on these four aspects:
 1. **What is the child reader like?**
 2. **How does reading affect the child reader? Through what kind of mechanism?**
 3. **On what kind of scientific apparatus do the writers rely? Psychology, biology or something else?**
 4. **What are the societal threats connected to reading? How about the positive outcomes?**

Analysis model borrowed and modified from Mitchell Dean:
Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society, Los Angeles: Sage,
2010 (originally 1999).

“In many fantasy lies, **children’s will to imitate and adapt** plays a substantial role. Children read and see in indecent literature and even more illustratively affecting films too **engaging** and **upsetting** adventures. These adventures **bring children’s fantasy into a constantly stronger action**, their **stimulating attraction** and influence increases, and in the end, **they cause a strong desire and aspiration to realize them in real life**. And so, the child wants to experience in real life, what he or she already has experienced in his or her thoughts with the help of imagination. Barth mentions (Die Elemente der Erziehungs- und Unterrichtslehre, p. 35) a few examples of **the suggestive power of modern cheap adventure literature causing as brutal crimes as matricide**. He tells, how a 13-year-old boy, whose teachers testified him to have been a good pupil at school, **murdered his own mother** because of the influence of **exciting** murder stories he had been reading. In Cologne, a 16-year-old young man **strangled** a boy with a rope, **excited** by Sherlock Holmes novels. And even in our newspapers, we have seen warning examples of the effect of especially films.” (Aksel Rafael Rosenqvist: Valhe ja eettillinen kasvatus [Lies and ethical education]. Helsinki: Otava, 1914, p. 129. Translation from Finnish IS.)

”The 10–14-year-old **boys who love to live in the world created by [James Fenimore] Cooper, [Edward S.] Ellis and [Edgar Rice] Burroughs** are not only charmed by the adventures and excitement in these books. They are probably also drawn to the atavistic romanticism that the stories express. **While reading, they experience life in the prehistorical surroundings, and one is enticed to assume that exactly this experience of healthy barbarism gives them deep pleasure.** **The attraction of primitivism that boys’ literary interests appear to testify of**, does not originate from pessimism and the tiredness of an old man that has driven adults to make a pilgrimage to Tahiti or Samoa, to experience barbarism in the natural life on the paradisiacal islands as a conscious contrast to the high culture of the modern social life. Rather, one can think that **boys are tempted to imagine the simple way of life in tundra and primeval forests because of their like-mindedness with savages. They recognize themselves in prehistorical characters** that trace the tracks of wolves or reindeers on the tundra and beat their enemies cunningly in the untouched forest. **Thus, they do not experience barbarism as an aesthetically effective contrast or as a philosophical idea. For them, it is a part of their own life and being.**” (Karl Bruhn: *Från Prinsessan Snövit till Kavaljererna på Ekeby: en studie kring folkskolålderns litterära intressen* [From Princess Snow White to the Cavaliers in Ekeby: a study about the literary interests of primary school children]. Helsinki: Söderström, 1944, p. 112. Translation from Swedish IS.)

“As work in **neurosciences** indicates, the acquisition of literacy necessitated a new circuit in our species’ brain more than 6,000 years ago. That circuit evolved from a very simple mechanism for decoding basic information, like the number of goats in one’s herd, to the present, highly elaborated reading brain. My research depicts how **the present reading brain enables the development of some of our most important intellectual and affective processes: internalized knowledge, analogical reasoning, and inference; perspective-taking and empathy; critical analysis and the generation of insight.** Research surfacing in many parts of the world now cautions that **each of these essential “deep reading” processes may be under threat as we move into digital-based modes of reading.**

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The possibility that **critical analysis, empathy and other deep reading processes could become the unintended “collateral damage” of our digital culture** is not a simple binary issue about print vs digital reading. It is about how we all have begun to read on any medium and how that changes not only what we read, but also the purposes for why we read. **Nor is it only about the young.** **The subtle atrophy of critical analysis and empathy affects us all. It affects our ability to navigate a constant bombardment of information. It incentivizes a retreat to the most familiar silos of unchecked information, which require and receive no analysis, leaving us susceptible to false information and demagoguery.**” (Maryanne Wolf: Skim reading is the new normal. The effect on society is profound. The Guardian 25 Aug 2018.

[https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf.](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf))

PART I

From Reason to Empathy: Children's Reading, Moral and Identification from the 19th Century to Today

From “the Pale Children of the Streets” to Vigorous Hunter-gatherers: Attitudes towards Children’s Reading in Finland, 1900–1965

- As material I use pedagogical literature, library inspection reports and reading memories
- What happened to the fear that (wrong kind of) reading could be dangerous to children?
- What changed, when – and why?



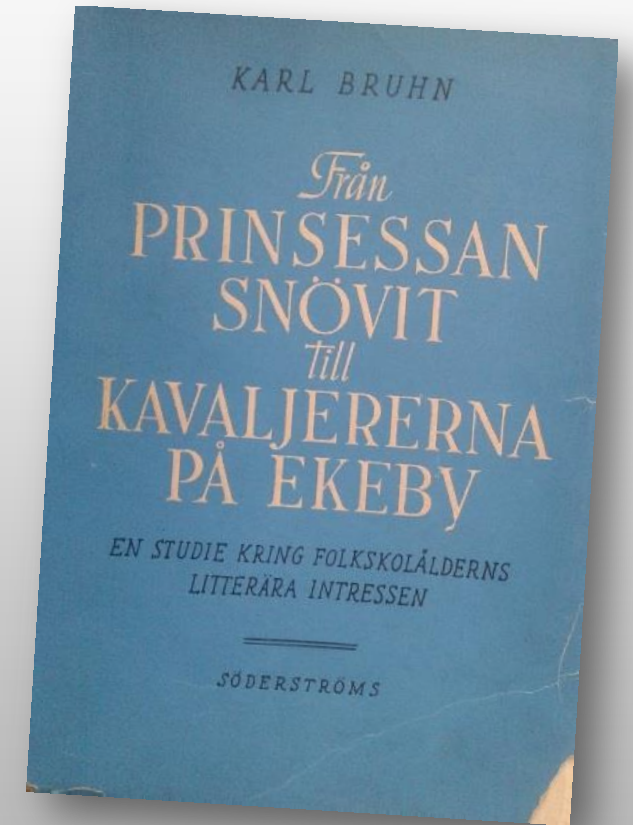
Signe Brander 1912
Helsinki City Museum



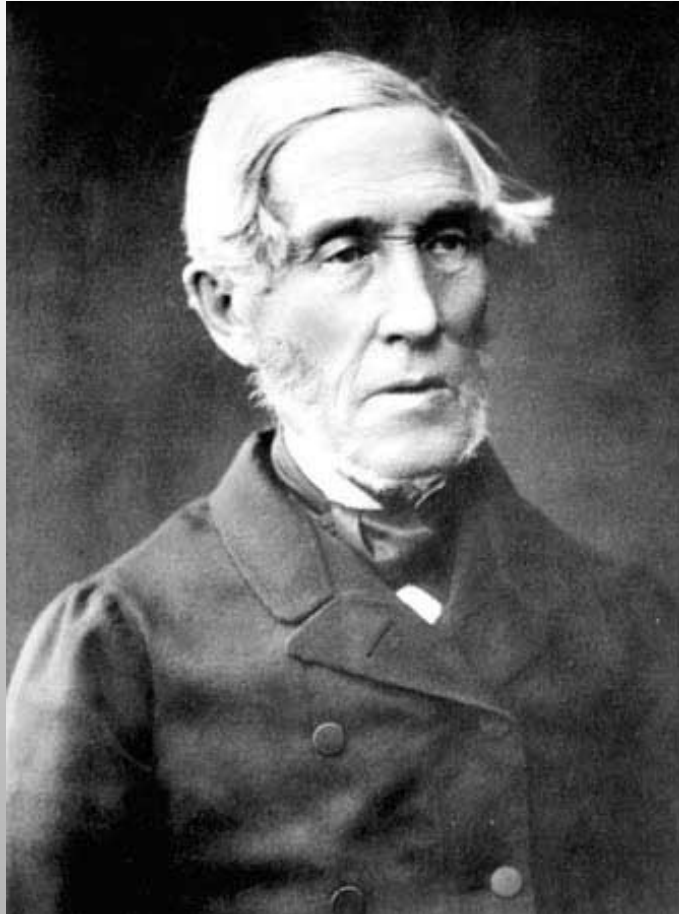
Väinö Kannisto 1945
Helsinki City Museum

Karl Bruhn: "From Princess Snow White to the Cavaliers of Ekeby" (1944)

- "Tell me what you read and I will tell you who you are!" (Bruhn 1944, p. 17)
- An empirical study on reading preferences of 1381 9–16 year old children and adolescents
- Tolerant attitude towards children's leisure reading and entertainment literature
- Children's development process at the focus
- Prehistorical speculations
- Vigorous, healthy child readers
- Gender roles



Siveellisyy, sedlighet, Sittlichkeit



- Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881)
- Sed (Sitte) = custom
- To be “sedlig” meant to conform to the customs of the community, but it also contained an idea of political activity (Pulkkinen 2011)
- The role of reason in Snellmanian upbringing (Ojakangas 1997)
- Reading and the Fennomian ideology (Mäkinen 2015)
- After Snellman’s times the meanings of both siveellisyy and sedlighet began to narrow
 - Control of sexuality

Evolution

- Charles Darwin
 - The Origin of Species, 1859
 - The Descent of Man, 1870–1871
 - The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals, 1872
- Thiodolf Rein (1838–1919)
 - A Snellmanian idea of “sedlighet” combined with empirical psychology (Jalava 2011)
 - Evolutionary feature in Rein’s thinking

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SPECIAL EXPRESSIONS :

CHAP. V.

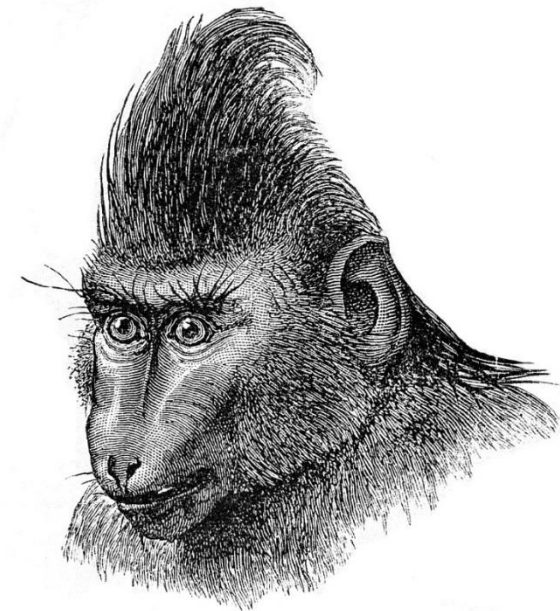


Fig. 16. *Cynopithecus niger*, in a placid condition. Drawn from life by Mr. Wolf.

From The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals, drawn by Mr. Wolf.

The biogenetic law



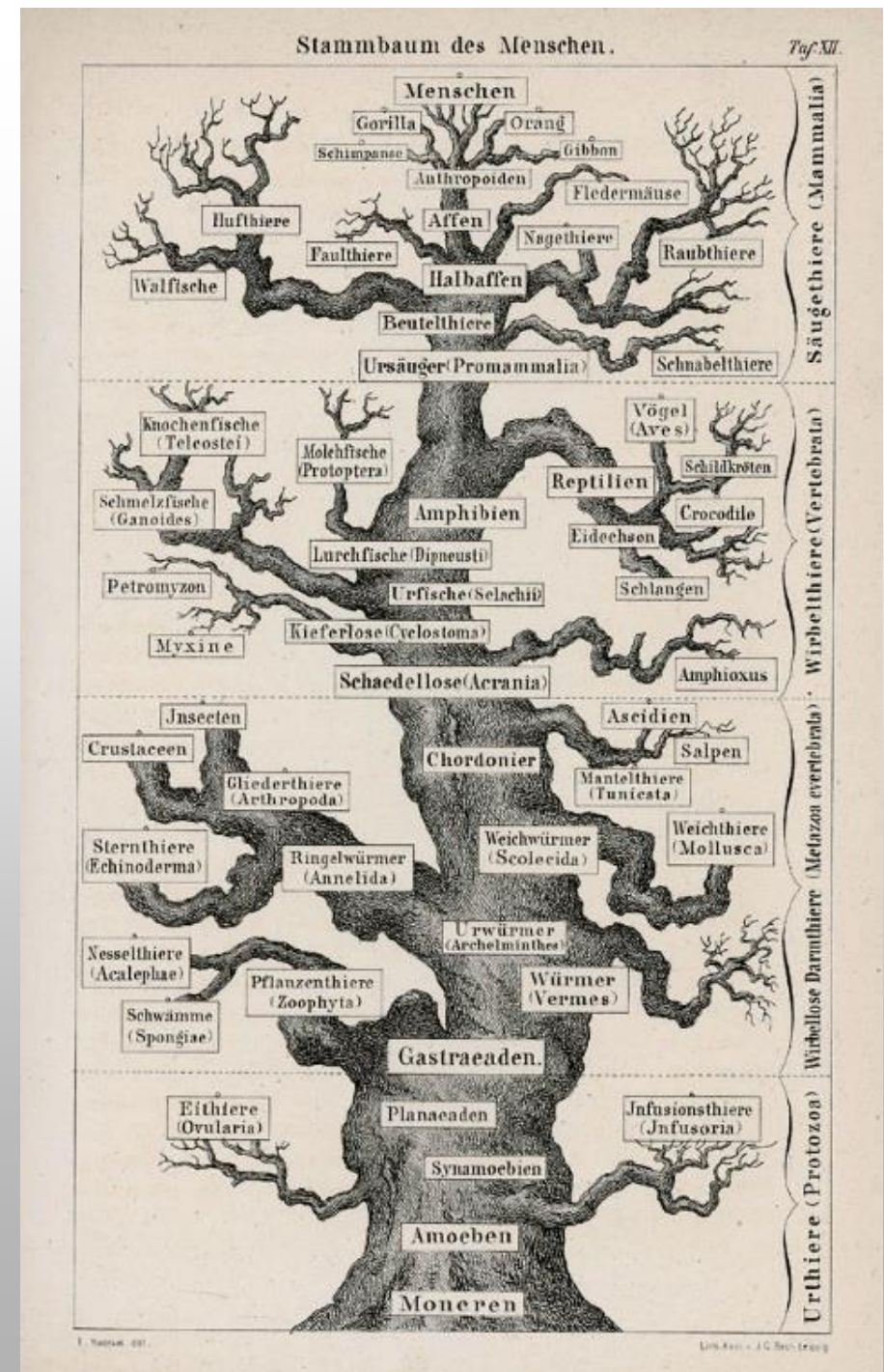
J. G. Bach (after drawings by Haeckel). *Anthropogenie oder Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen*. Leipzig: Engelmann, 1874, plates IV–V.

- Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919)
- Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny
- Variations of recapitulation theory in child psychology (Shuttleworth 2010)

Human evolutionary tree

- Romanticism
- Monism (Richards 2008)
 - Haeckel's attempt to bring his idealistic and materialistic tendencies together

J. G. Bach (after a drawing by Haeckel).
*Anthropogenie oder
 Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen.*
 Leipzig: Engelmann, 1874, plate XII.



Finnish pedagogy and the recapitulation theory

- To Finland the biogenetic law has travelled in the form of Johann Friedrich Herbart's and Tuiskon Ziller's theories
- Mikael Soininen (1860–1924)
- Pedagogical literature on children's reading had evolutionary traits already in Soininen's time, but the early 20th century theories were still committed to the concept of "sedlig" literature
- Interest in anthropology and child psychology among Finnish pedagogues



Anthropology



- Edvard Westermarck (1862–1939)
- Emotions as the basis of moral
- Westermarck’s moral has characteristics of both relativism and absolutism
 - Biology (*The History of Human Marriage*, 1891)
 - Subjectivity:
 - “[T]he moral concepts are based upon emotions, and [---] the contents of an emotion fall entirely outside the category of truth.” (*The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, 1906, p. 17)

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PART II: Discussion

- Read the text fragments and discuss about the use of the third person singular in autobiographical childhood stories: why choose she/he instead of I?
- For example, how does the use of the third person singular affect
 - the relationship between the narrator and the protagonist?
 - the relationship between the reader and the protagonist?
 - the frame of the story as authentic memories/fiction?

PART II

Reading Memories: Stories of Nostalgia, Desire and Despair

Childhood agency and reading

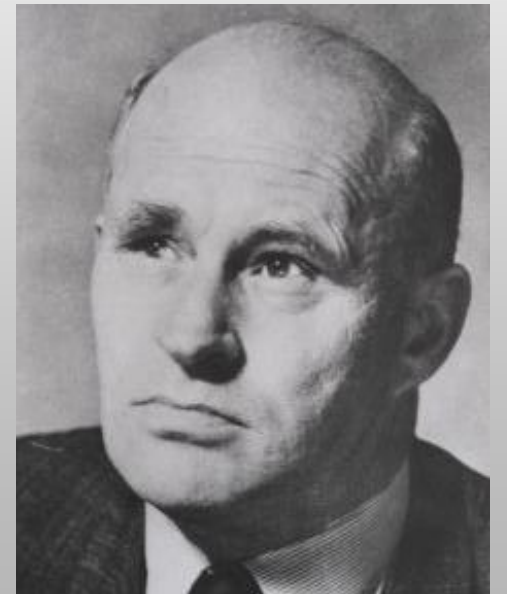
- Separating the narrating I (the adult) from the experiencing I (the child) in autobiography (Gullestad 1996; Hatavara 2013)
- Discussion on agency, authenticity and voice in childhood studies (Prout & James 1990; Hendrick 2000; Lee 2001; James 2007; Komulainen 2007; Ryan 2008; Spyrou 2011; Lancy 2012; Gleason 2016)
- Reading promotes agency in several ways:
 - It advances skills that are focal in modern society
 - Reading and emancipation (women, children, working class)
 - Reading as a central aspect of modern subjectivity (Mäkinen 1997)
- Then again, reading has been thought to threaten subjectivity
 - Losing oneself in a book
 - Reading transcends boundaries between reality and fictional world, subject and object

Material

- Library memories
 - Kirjastoperinne [Library tradition]. 1983–1984.
 - Kirjasto elämässäni [The library in my life]. 2000.
- Toivo Pekkanen: My Childhood. 1966/originally 1953.
- Pedagogical research by Karl Bruhn:
 - De växandes estetiska liv [The aesthetic life of adolescents]. 1920–1921.
 - Från Prinsessan Snövit till Kavaljererna på Ekeby [From Princess Snow White to the Cavaliers at Ekeby]. 1944.



Karl Bruhn



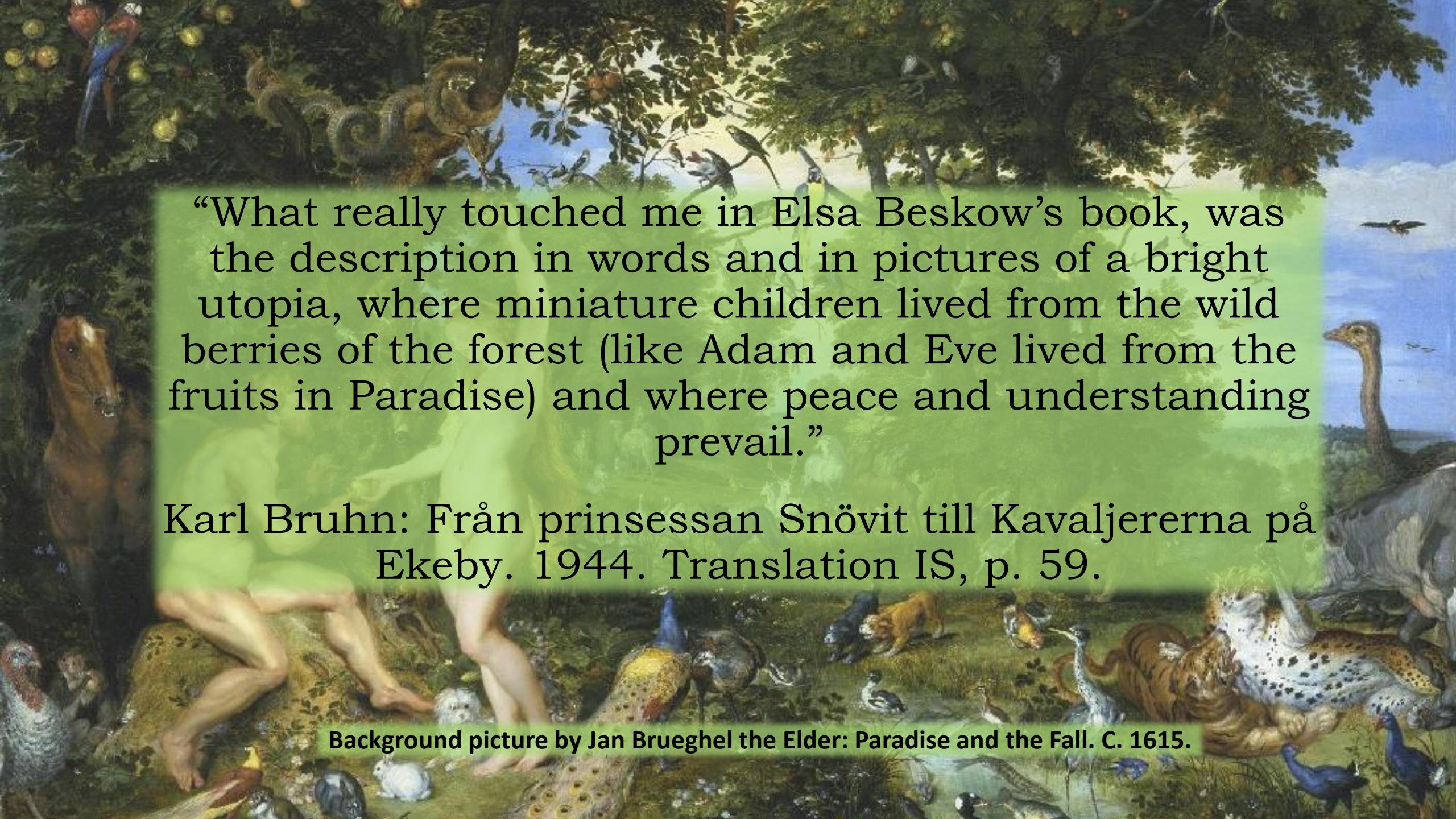
Toivo Pekkanen

Prelapsarian dreams

- Childhood as a paradise of unrestricted reading
- Reading in nature
- No knowledge of good or bad literature
- Fiction leaks into reality
 - A pedagogue in the Blueberry land



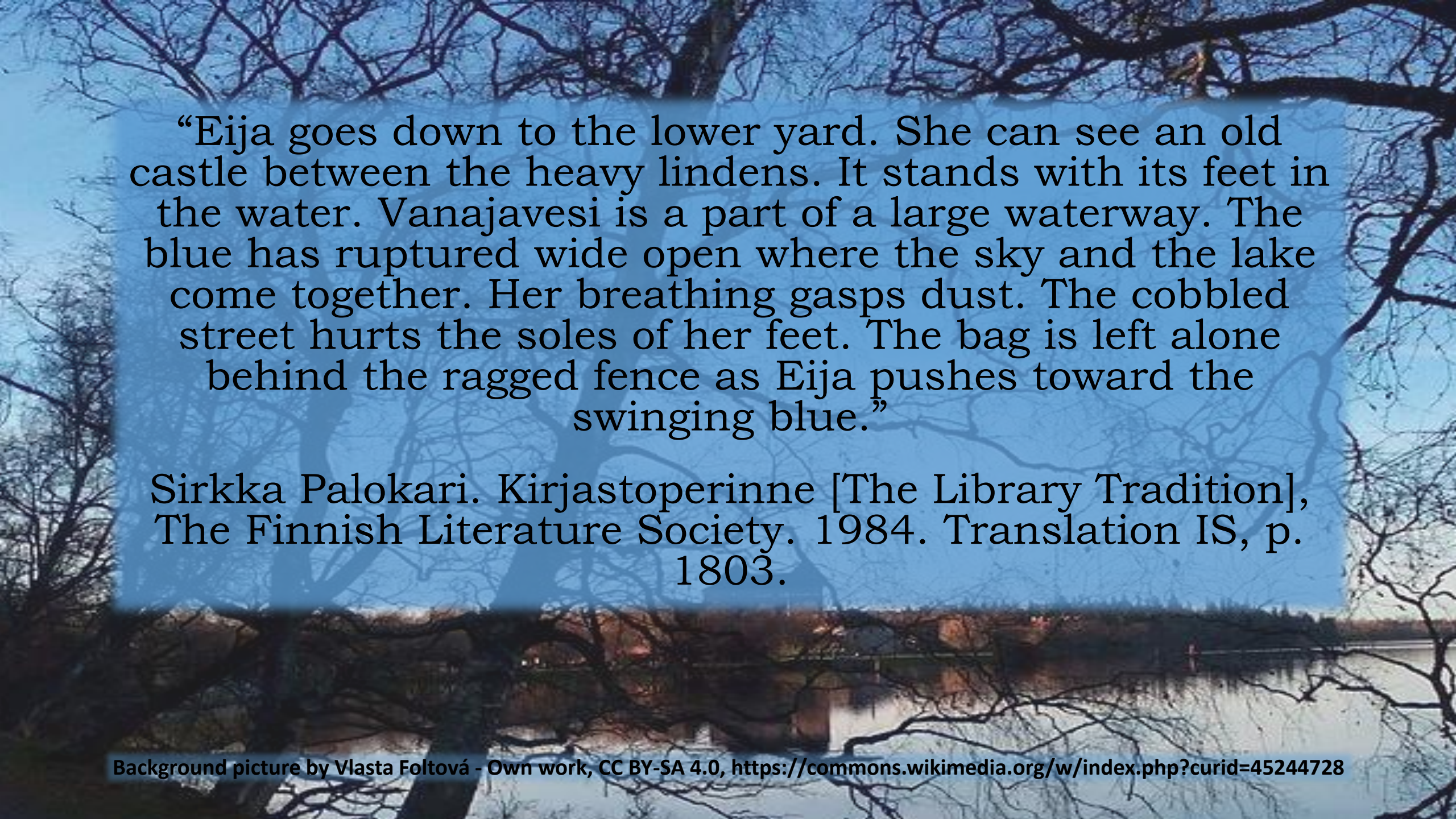
Elsa Beskow: Puttes äventyr i Blåbärsskogen, 1901

The background is a complex Renaissance painting. In the center, a nude female figure is seated on a rock, her legs extended. She is surrounded by a variety of animals, including a peacock, a dog, a rabbit, and several birds. To the left, a large tree with thick, gnarled branches is covered in fruit, with a colorful parrot perched on a branch. In the foreground, a large, spotted animal, possibly a deer or a wild boar, is lying down. In the background, a large, long-necked dinosaur-like creature stands near a body of water. The sky is filled with various birds in flight. The overall scene is a rich and detailed representation of a natural world, likely a garden or a utopian landscape.

“What really touched me in Elsa Beskow’s book, was the description in words and in pictures of a bright utopia, where miniature children lived from the wild berries of the forest (like Adam and Eve lived from the fruits in Paradise) and where peace and understanding prevail.”

Karl Bruhn: Från prinsessan Snövit till Kavaljererna på Ekeby. 1944. Translation IS, p. 59.

Background picture by Jan Brueghel the Elder: Paradise and the Fall. C. 1615.

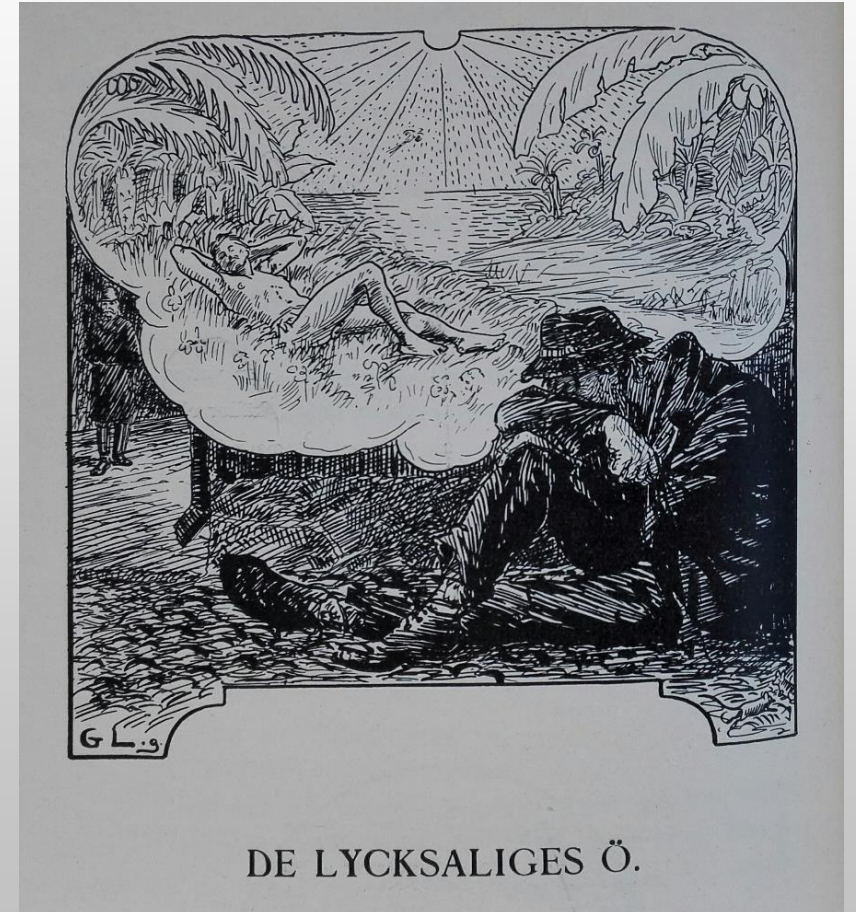
A blue-tinted photograph of a lake with bare trees in the foreground and a distant shoreline. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent blue rectangle in the upper half of the image.

“Eija goes down to the lower yard. She can see an old castle between the heavy lindens. It stands with its feet in the water. Vanajavesi is a part of a large waterway. The blue has ruptured wide open where the sky and the lake come together. Her breathing gasps dust. The cobbled street hurts the soles of her feet. The bag is left alone behind the ragged fence as Eija pushes toward the swinging blue.”

Sirkka Palokari. Kirjastoperinne [The Library Tradition], The Finnish Literature Society. 1984. Translation IS, p. 1803.

The wanderer in the dark: Pekkanen's *My childhood* and the intense isolation of reading

- Use of the third person singular
 - The lonely one, the wanderer, the yellow, the sickly yellow...
 - Distancing the narrating adult from the experiencing child
 - Detest and pity
- Starvation
 - Physical hunger forces the child reader to devour books
- Societal awakening
 - Why still feel alone after discovering fellow sufferers?

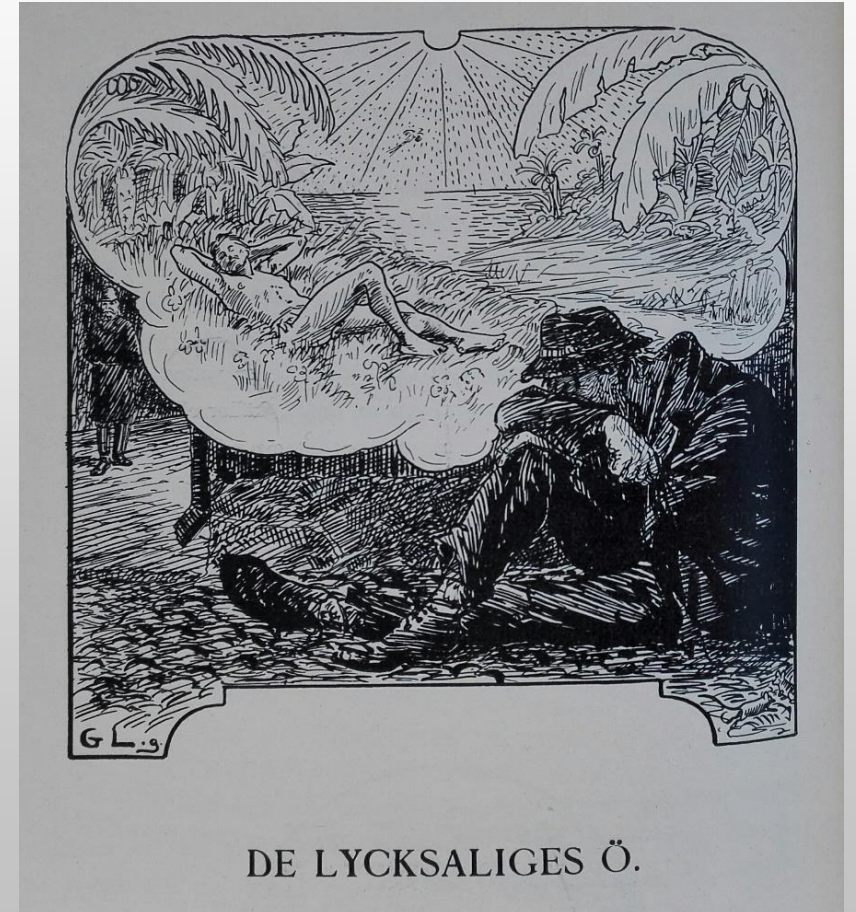


”I had to swallow bigger and bigger mental doses so that the wretched material portions could not force me to reflect on my real position, and with this goal ahead of me my wobbly heart had to work at full speed.”

Toivo Pekkanen: My Childhood. 1966/1953.
Translation Alan Blair, p. 153.

The wanderer in the dark: Pekkanen's *My childhood* and the intense isolation of reading

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”Sometimes he would shut the book quickly and go to the window, looking out into the dark or at the winter sky lit by the stars. He felt that something was about to happen to him and he waited for it. But for some reason his expectation was never fulfilled, and he had to hurry back to the book, more eager than ever. There was no one with whom he could have talked about this matter. Father, and Mother too, had given up reading the Bible long ago. Their thoughts lurched about blindly in their need and distress. Here, too, the lone wanderer had to be alone.”

Toivo Pekkanen: *My Childhood*. 1966/1953. Translation Alan Blair, p. 155.

“[T]he wanderer in the dark was reminded in every step that Mother was sitting beside him patching his torn trousers, Father was mending shoes and, on days of intense cold outside, all the other children were indoors and crawling about the floor. The smell of the drying alders pricked his nostrils with every breath he took. And in his stomach the pains, that had been twisting and turning, griped more severely than ever. The strange book never let him forget reality for a moment. On the contrary, this was the one thing it forced him to look at and think of.”

Toivo Pekkanen: *My Childhood*. 1966/1953. Translation Alan Blair, p. 172.

Natural childhood reading?



Winslow Homer: Reading by the Brook, 1879.

- The official developmental life story of a reader
 - From untamed childhood reading to controlled adult reading
 - Rousseauian noble savages escaping the pressures of culture to nature/fiction
 - Gradual increase of agency supported by reading
- Displeasure of reading connected to the realization of lack of agency
 - Does reading necessarily emancipate the child?

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Thank you!

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Walter Firle: Das Märchenbuch. 1929.