ELISE NYKÄNEN

Mysterious Minds

The Making of Private and Collective Consciousness in Marja-Liisa Vartio's Novels

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To my sisters

Foreword

Mysterious Minds is the outcome of my decade-long work with one of the most enchanting figures in Finnish literary modernism, Marja-Liisa Vartio. Vartio's status as an innovator in the portrayal of human consciousness has long been acknowledged. This book is the first study that focuses on the presentation of fictional minds in her novels. By exploring the private and collective dimensions of fictional mind presentation in Vartio's narrative prose, I also attempt to pave the way for a richer account of modernism in literature. This book reassesses the idea of modernism as an "inward turn" by paying attention to the social and intermental aspects of consciousness presentation. Fictional minds are not only introspective, solipsistic, individual, and detached. They are also public, enactive, embodied, and engaged.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Finnish Literature Society for accepting my book to this international publication series. I am especially thankful to the editor, Virve Mertanen, for her cooperation and professionalism. I also wish to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their invaluable comments and suggestions. Special thanks are due to the Alfred Kordelin Foundation for funding the proofreading. I feel particularly indebted to translator Jill G. Timbers, who revised the translations of Vartio's texts. I thank Jill for the stimulating conversations we had during my trip to her hometown in Illinois, USA. I owe a great debt also to Glenda Gloss, who revised the English language of the manuscript at different stages of the project. The final choices relating to all translations and revisions remain my own, as do any possible infelicities.

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation, *Worlds Within and Without: Presenting Fictional Minds in Marja-Liisa Vartio's Narrative Prose* (2014). Readers interested in a more theoretically and methodologically oriented approach are welcome to inspect this doctoral dissertation. Earlier versions of parts of this book have also been published in the volumes *Dialogi kaunokirjallisuudessa* (Dialogue in Fiction, 2013) and *Reframing Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies: Theorizing and Analyzing Conceptual Transfer* (2014).

I hope that readers will find Vartio's fictional minds as captivating and this journey into her narrative worlds as rewarding as I have.

Helsinki, Finland October 2017

1. Introduction. Worlds Within and Without

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive account of the narrative tools, techniques, and structures that Marja-Liisa Vartio (1924–1966), the eccentric classic author of Finnish post-war modernism, used to construct fictional minds in her novels. By examining the theoretical challenges of Vartio's modernist narratives, this study makes a contribution to the academic discussion of the formal and thematic features of modernist fiction. I focus on the ways in which fictional minds in Vartio's novels work in interaction and in relation to the imaginary world in which they are embedded. In Vartio's hands, fictional minds are often layered in a challenging manner. Her characters often claim to "know" the contents of other minds, even if they do not know their own. The gradual multiplication of imaginary worlds generates mazes of fictional minds as a result of the characters' increasing fabulation. This complexity of interacting fictional minds is illustrated in Vartio's last novel, *Hänen olivat linnut* (Hers/His Were the Birds).[1] The neurotic widow of a country parson, Adele Broms, opens up to her maid, Alma Luostarinen:

> You have it good, Alma, since you don't grasp everything that's going on in another person's mind. You go through your life with your good sense under control, you suffer less than I do. When I was younger, I couldn't look people in the eye because I always knew what they were thinking and it made me ill, because what I saw they were thinking about me was not always favorable. (*PW*, 222)[2]

Adele's tormented mind perceives other minds full of hostile thoughts as she becomes unable to distinguish between facts and her inflamed, emotional responses to others. In general, the desire of Vartio's characters to know – themselves, other people, and the secret of human existence – pertains to the epistemological problem that enthralled modernist writers. How is an individual, locked in her or his own consciousness, able to obtain knowledge of the enfolding world, of another human being, or even of herself or himself? In this book, the metaphor of a "world" at the center of possible world poetics along with cognitive approaches to literature offer new ways to survey the conventions of modernist fiction. The narrative semantics

in Vartio's fiction are related to epistemological world-structures, which I explore by analyzing fictional minds as embodied, emotional, and social entities interacting within her storyworlds. The views of fictional reality are shaped and re-shaped in the interaction between the self, the outer world, and the other minds inhabiting the same storyworld.

My title for this introduction, "Worlds Within and Without," derives from Virginia Woolf's famous definition of the locus of modernist fiction: "[I]llumine the mind within rather than the world without" (Woolf 1958/1929: 121). The discussion of the true focus of modernist writing – whether it is on subjective reality or external objects in the world – has often been related to the question of the "inward turn" believed to be taking place in modernist fiction.[3] Modernist writers themselves often perceived the history of the novel as a move inwards, towards a narrative "with as little admixture of the alien and external as possible," as Woolf (1929: 189) wrote in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919). As the growing historical distance from the modernist period makes it increasingly possible to re-consider the accounts of contemporary writers and commentators, the claim of an "inward turn" may not turn out to be as great a break from realist tradition as was believed. In this study, I re-consider the modernist move away from the external world to subjective consciousness by analyzing the encounters between fictional minds and worlds in Vartio's novels.

Vartio's oeuvre serves as an interesting point of departure for approaching the schematizations of fictional consciousness. Specifically, her work challenges the scholarly tradition of considering fictional minds primarily in regard to conventions of transparency. In her novels, the duality of fictional minds, both as readable and unreadable entities, constitutes the very spell of her work. My analyses in this study show how Vartio developed as a portrayer of the human mind's complexity, its hidden structures, and its multifold processes related to the modernist epistemology of knowing. Her characters negotiate between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, the conscious and the unconscious, and the rational and the emotional. Vartio offers both internal and external perspectives on these efforts. The characters' actions and interactions revolve around their perceptions and sentiments as well as their dreams, delusions, and esoteric imaginings.

During her career, Vartio published five novels, which comprise the corpus of this study. Vartio's fourth novel, *Tunteet* (Emotions, 1962), was seen as a shift in her style. The critic Timo Tiusanen perceived this shift as originating in Vartio's own voice, which began to sound more forcefully in the novels. Compared to the "steady" and "toughening" female characters in *Se on sitten kevät* (This Then Is Spring, 1957) and in her second novel, *Mies kuin mies, tyttö kuin tyttö* (Any Man, Any Girl, published in 1958), Inkeri, the young protagonist of *Tunteet*, appears "flimsy" and "changeable," resembling the female protagonist in Vartio's third novel, *Kaikki naiset näkevät unia* (All Women Dream, 1960). This portrait of an absent-minded housewife, Mrs. Pyy, prefigures the future developments of Vartio's techniques of constructing fictional minds:

> In this way we can divide Vartio's novels into two groups […] In the newer works, the register has expanded toward increased humor while the vigor and unity have decreased as Vartio has let loose her inclination to spin tales, even to chatter on. It is as if the poetry and intensity that flash forth in specific details of the latest novels had been dammed up in the first two, coloring everything and carrying the whole which remained nonetheless plain, everyday. The central problem for Vartio, this wildly imaginative writer, seems to be dreams and images that do not fit everyday experience, do not take root. (Tiusanen 1962: 19)[4]

The ideas of an increasing amount of scatter and dream were also emphasized by critics of the novels *Kaikki naiset näkevät unia* and *Hänen olivat linnut* published posthumously in 1967. The more unorganized, unconstrained style was considered an indication of the "vivid imagination" of the author herself, which affected the style of writing. The change was not always welcomed. The most critical (and openly misogynist) review was penned by Erno Paasilinna, who considered *Tunteet* an artificial and affected popular romance: "I may be a hater of female writers. Allowing for that, I still argue that our female writers generally do not raise the level of Finnish literature, but rather use it calculatedly. […] One must take pain not to read them without reservations; we cannot afford to do so." (Paasilinna 1962: 559)[5] Attitudes such as Paasilinna's were reflected in the statements by the fictional character Napoleon in Pekka Kejonen's collection of short stories, *Napoleonin epätoivo* (The Misery of Napoleon), published in 1964, two years after *Tunteet*: "I do not believe a woman is capable of writing even a somewhat sensible novel. You just get things like *Mrs. Dalloway* and other muddled books" (Kejonen 1964: 48).[6]

Some critics shared Paasilinna's views of *Tunteet*. Yet despite their harsh criticism, these reviewers tended to acknowledge Vartio's skill. Even if "ironic distance" and "technical talent" were perceived as distinguishing Vartio from beginning writers, the sentimental content of the novel was considered to have taken a heavy toll. *Tunteet* was more "poorly" constructed than her earlier novels. Vartio, who had previously controlled her material with "austere vigor," had now loosened her grip and brushed on her colors "without a solid drawing plan." The result was "uninteresting," affected by "womanly fuss" and "girlishness." (M. N. 1962: 3)[7] According to Paasilinna (1962: 559), Vartio had calculated with her talent: "[B]ut these emotions, emotions! [...] This 'exuberant' view of life turns out to be merely technique lacking content; and the technique is merely an acquired property that does not necessarily contribute to the content," he wrote; "Even in romance novels one should achieve narrative flow in which expression is expression, not something squeezed into a Venetian corset."[8]

Paasilinna criticized Vartio for succumbing to the trends of women's literature in which the very technique (expression as mere expression) is restricted by the amplitude of emotional content.[9] Softness, passiveness, femininity, effusiveness, and chaos were the metaphors commonly used by Anglo-American Imagists, for instance, to convey the desire to rid poetry of sentimentality. The above-listed attributes were seen as characteristic of symbolist predecessors. They were replaced by "masculine spirit,"

hardness, order, and rigor.[10] Sentimental writing ("babble" and "blather") was conceived as being a risk to the intellectual vigor of modern literature, which was forced to confront vulgar, commercial, and simply bad popular writing, like romances (Gilbert & Gubar 1988: 132–135). The fragmentation of narrative coherence and order was often seen in the context of gender, and the emotional was considered equal to the feminine.

While accusing Vartio's *Tunteet* of being sentimental and chaotic, Finnish critics of the time ignored the influence of the Anglo-American modernism on Vartio's work. The first authors to experiment with the new techniques of portraying mental flow, including stream of consciousness, were authors striving to depict the imagination and experience of (female) characters. In an international context authors such as Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Henry James, and D. H. Lawrence were soon followed by writers, now canonized, like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, who famously portrayed the mental flow of Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* (1922). In the period of modernism in an Anglo-American context, intuition and the unconscious were preferred. It has been claimed that this "inward turn" simultaneously meant a move away from intellect and rationality (e.g. Stevenson 1998: 109). However, as the epistemological world-structures of Vartio's texts demonstrate, the emotional and the rational are complementary rather than exclusive phenomena in the characters' mental actions. Emotions do not defy reasoning, but accompany it.

Some critics have argued that female writers may have felt pressured to conform to the modernist ideals of objectivity and restraint in their work (cf. Clark 1991: 13). The condemnation of Vartio's new style by some critics seems to have originated in the ideals of intellectual discipline and perfection of form that prevailed in Finnish criticism during the 1950s. These ideals survived through the "golden age" of Finnish literature in the 1950s and led even Vartio herself to believe that the accomplishments of her first novel could never be surpassed. While writing *Hänen olivat linnut*, a masterpiece of Finnish post-war modernism, Vartio (1996: 189) confessed in her diary: "I'm a very minor literary talent, no one at all. A couple of poems, a couple of dream stories, 'Se on sitten kevät,' that's all."[11] According to recent biographical writing on Vartio, there are some indications in her manuscripts that her early editor, Tuomas Anhava, and her husband, the poet Paavo Haavikko, suggested some changes to "restrain" her expression and make it more concise (Ruuska 2012: 332). These changes, however, can be considered rather inconsequential with regard to the overall style and composition of Vartio's novels.[12]

Vartio's technique of constructing consciousness in particular, diverges in many respects from the tempered and relatively late Finnish modernist prose, especially in her later novels. Over the years, Vartio forged a style that was completely her own: "[T]here are no tricks supplied, they have to be invented by oneself," she wrote.[13] One of these "tricks" was the technique of embedded fictional minds, which was an innovation in her early novels and elaborated on later. The multiple layering of minds – fictional minds reading other fictional minds potentially rushing into recursive re-readings – is a defining feature of Vartio's novels. As Aatos Ojala (1976: 134) observed,

"Vartio's characters are to each other like 'signs' that they are trying to interpret to the best – or worst – of their ability."[14] The challenging task of tracing the origin of characters' thoughts attaches Vartio's work to the tradition of modernist texts, for instance, Woolf's stream of consciousness novels (cf. Zunshine 2006: 37). The overly self-conscious, affective quest for (self)knowledge by Vartio's characters turns the epistemic worlds into complex and even paranoid constructs.

The tension between the private and the public realms of fictional minds is related to the dream-driven and dark psychology of Vartio's characters. The focus on fabulating, mysterious minds culminates in *Hänen olivat linnut*. The novel shows the delusive quality of human imagination. By and large, the characters' growing imaginations lead to a growing distance from the representation of the external, mimetic worlds. The compact, well-focused composition in Vartio's early, "neutral" narratives was followed by more kaleidoscopic and multilevel world-organizations that reflect the less constrained imaginations of the characters in her later novels. The more convoluted the constructions of fictional minds become, the more sophisticated and innovative are Vartio's tools – and the mastery of her craft.

The Worlds of Modernism(s). The Mind as a Limit

Before I proceed to a more detailed analysis of the construction of fictional minds in Vartio's novels, it is necessary to shed more light on the intricacies of Finnish post-war modernism, which serves as the immediate context for this author's fictional writing. Vartio's career as a professional author began in 1952, when her first collection of poems, *Häät* (The Wedding), was published. Another anthology of poems, *Seppele* (The Garland), appeared the following year. With their fierce, archaic imagery, both collections were seen as continuing the tradition of Finnish-Karelian folk poetry. The poems were perceived as oracular visions with a modernist twist. A collection of short stories entitled *Maan ja veden välillä* (Between Land and Water, 1955) resorts to imagistic narration, fusing the boundaries between poetry and prose. Many of the dream stories in the collection drew on material from Vartio's dreams. Her poems and short stories received critical nods, but *Se on sitten kevät*, published two years later, met with wide approval. *Se on sitten kevät* was considered one of the novels that ultimately launched the renewal of prose fiction in Finnish literature, long after the full bloom of the modernist novel in the Anglo-American context.

Even though Vartio gradually distanced herself from the ideals of restraint and the "unsentimental" poetics of the 1950s, there are certain techniques of detachment that were elaborated in her novels to serve the portrayal of her characters' mental lives. As previous studies on Finnish modernism have emphasized, post-war literature in the Finnish context did not constitute a uniform school of modernism, but diverged into several strands of (modernist) poetics, co-existing simultaneously.[15] Modernism in general has been perceived as consisting of various currents rather than being any single international movement (Whitworth 2007: 4–5; Fokkema

& Ibsch 1988: 1). The following section focuses on the Finnish "new novel," also known as the "new realism." Its principles have been articulated largely in the writings of Tuomas Anhava, a critic and a leading editor in Finnish modernism – the "literary brain" (*kirjallinen aivo*) as Vartio called him.[16]

The atmosphere of Finnish realism in the 1950s has been portrayed as a "no man's land," a metaphor that conveys the feelings of doubt and skepticism which the Finns experienced after World War II (cf. Viikari 1992; Rojola 2008). The country's geographical position between east and west made life particularly difficult during the first and second world wars, as well as during the Cold War that followed. Compared to the more cosmopolitan avant-garde movements and high modernism in Europe, the path chosen by the Finnish "new school" writers was relatively conservative. Finnish modernists pulled away from the chaotic world and retreated to objective, matter-of-fact attitudes and to their reserved and disciplined styles. A neutral and prudent stance was more suitable for wanderers in no man's land, in the space in-between. (Hökkä 1999: 71; Hormia 1968: 73, 80)[17]

The essential aim of the modernists was to create a "new language," a more truthful way of portraying the subjective, immediate experience of changing reality. For Finnish modernists, Wittgenstein's philosophy seemed to offer new methods of approaching the problem of representative language.[18] Wittgenstein's solution was "to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use," to make the words be more at home (Wittgenstein 1958: 48[e]). The principles of clarity and empiricism were appealing in a world that was experienced as chaotic and fractured. The practice, that is, the everyday use of language, was the element that seemed to give words their significance. "[W]hat can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence," Wittgenstein (1961: 151) wrote, articulating the principle of accuracy. If reality could not be changed, then at least the ways of perceiving it could be.

For Finnish modernists, "conventional" language signified obscurity that could be avoided by relying on restraint and accuracy. By molding conventional language anew – clear, hard, and concrete – authors could make words regain their meaning. The ideals of accuracy and precision resulted in the "odd optimism of communication" (Viikari 1992: 50) manifested in the writings of the period. Finding "one's own voice," "precise expression," or "the eradicative mediation of experience" (ibid.) were clichés that characterized the vocabulary of the time. In his essay "Optimistinen tutkielma" (An Optimistic Study, 1963), Anhava discussed the ideals of preciseness:

> Their [the modernists'] attention focuses primarily on language, not for the language itself but in order to know it at a deep level and train themselves, because their aim is to express their subject as precisely as possible. Which requires personal knowledge not only of the language but also of the subject to be expressed; for this reason they have to limit themselves to their own direct experience. In their work they are completely without any desire to trade it for ideals, truths, and hierarchies, e.g. generalities and systems of generalization, which cannot have exact, personally experienced meaning as anything other

> than something to describe, rather than the described thing itself. Instead they expend enormous effort to make their work precisely correspond to what they have experienced of reality and language. (Anhava 2002/1963: 540–541)[19]

The main interest of the modernists, according to Anhava, is language, not for its own sake but because of the need to control the technical tools that aim at precision. His rules of art-making stressed four aspects. The first principle was the sharpened description of experienced reality. Secondly, the new style called for restraint on sentiment in representing subjective experience. Thirdly, the expression had to be precise and austere to convey reality and language as they were experienced by the artist. Fourthly, the exactitude of language required absolute devotion and discipline. Words needed to be studied and practiced, for every artist must know her or his material. Plain diction and clarity were seen as indications of discipline. Obscurity, by contrast, was considered a mask of weakness, a cover-up for a badly constructed work of art (cf. Painter 2006: 96).[20]

As the influences of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language gained more ground in the poetics of the 1950s, fiction-making itself was often conceived as a struggle against "the spell of words" (Viikari 1992: 47).[21] The need to determine foundations for knowledge that were clear and certain defined the climate of post-war culture and made many thinkers of the period wary of the uncontrollable conjectures of mental speculation and forced them to rely instead on knowledge gained by empirical observation (cf. Toulmin 1990: 70). One of these thinkers was Anhava, Vartio's editor. His ideals of emotional restraint and perfection of form stemmed from his interest in the poetic principles of Imagism, the "pure," "hard," and "dry" poetry of Ezra Pound, Thomas Hulme, and early T. S. Eliot. The influence of Asian short poetry, French post-classicism, and paradigms of the New Criticism found their way into Anhava's writings about prose fiction. These influences can be considered among the reasons why the modernist revolution in Finnish narrative prose took such a moderate form. Its main inspirations came from the wing of the modernist movement that Kirsten Blythe Painter has called "tempered modernism" in the context of such poetic schools as Imagism and Acmeism.

Tempered modernism is characterized by three features that distinguish it both from the simultaneous avant-garde movements and from the symbolism that had preceded it. First of all, it is neoclassical in the sense that it stresses the balance of form and content by relying on concision and austerity instead of fragmentation and discontinuity. Its principles include compressed form and clarity. "Perfection of form" is sought by using exact, even laconic, language and simple diction. Second, the tempered modernists' main concern was the sharpened depiction of external reality, the texture of the concrete things of everyday existence. The view of the world derives not from the non-representationalism of avant-garde or symbolist ideal dream worlds, but from rendering the objects of ordinary reality as if seen anew and for the first time. (Painter 2006: 1–3, 8)

Tempered modernists never rejected the traditional idea of using language to represent external reality.[22] The recognition of words' arbitrary

and outworn quality resulted in an attempt to create an aesthetic style that at least aimed to generate a vivid illusion of the "thingness of things."[23] The works by tempered modernists often evoke the mundane and commonplace. Depiction of nature still plays a role. Their focus was on objects that the human mind usually encounters habitually without paying much attention to them. The aspiration to render concrete things vividly meant rejecting abstract concepts and explanation. Instead of articulating ideas of the world and processes of perception – in other words, approaching the world conceptually – they sought to capture an illusion of the experience of the perception itself in their texts (cf. Painter 2006: 113–115).[24] Third – and here we come to the focal point of this study – the tempered modernists represented the self as subdued and oblique. The impersonal, objective style rejects precise explanation, sentiment, and the outpouring of subjectivity.

Even if the expression is subtle and controlled, the method of detachment does not mean eradication of the self. The goal is to "balance poetic self and concrete thing, so that the latter – the real things of the world – can come to the fore with more clarity" (Painter 2006: 1). The aim is to "offer a way to *see anew*" rather than "insisting on *being new*" (ibid.). The notion of "seeing anew" refers to Wittgenstein's words on empirical knowledge and understanding. He tried to find new perspectives in looking at familiar things. These new ways of seeing are related to the private psychology "as confusion and barrenness." An awareness of the limits of introspection serves as the motivation to restrict the "picture of reality" to the ways in which the mind relates to the world "as it is," as if the subject itself were excluded from that world: "The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world," Wittgenstein (1961: 117) argued. To illustrate the mind-dependence of the world, he compares the mind to a book in which no subject can be mentioned: "There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. If I wrote a book called *The world as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc. […] there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book" (ibid.; emphasis his).

The idea of the private psychology "as confusion and barrenness" is reflected in Anhava's essay "Virginia Woolf." Anhava sets out to examine Woolf's stream of consciousness novels, but ends up producing an introduction to modernist narrative techniques overall. This becomes a rather normative guideline addressed to contemporary Finnish writers:

> Providing an account of one's own stream of consciousness, particularly at greater length, is almost an insuperable task. Presumably, it is even harder to depict the flow of someone else's inner experience. In general, it seems that the fictional rendering of half-conscious experiences, whether they be one's own or someone else's experiences, must of necessity alter their nature, and in many cases, *the only reliable way to render them is to allow them to be intuited from the narrated actions and incidents*. (Anhava 2002/1949: 57)[25]

Marja-Liisa Vartio (1924–1966) is considered one of the foremost innovators of consciousness representation in Finnish post-war modernism. *Mysterious Minds*, the first study to examine this subject in depth, explores the portrayal of fictional minds in her novels.

The volume suggests alternative methods for reading Vartio's fictional minds not only as private, solipsistic, and self-reflective consciousnesses, but also as social, collective, and interconnected entities. These intermental minds sometimes remain unreadable and mysterious even to the characters of her novels themselves.

The volume is an enjoyable and beneficial read both for students and scholars sharing an interest in recent cognitive and affective narrative studies, and for anyone interested in Vartio's work.

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