



CHAPTER 9

“The Whole World Had the Sound of the Barrel Organ”: Representations of Fairs in Finnish Newspapers and Fiction from the 1870s to the 1910s

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The fair—a celebration of drunkenness and mistreatment of animals—will take place next Thursday. All kinds of bagmen, most of whom are Russians and Tatars, have already arrived at our town. The merry-go-round, barrel organs and the like are already in full swing, and seem to make good money.
—*Tampereen Sanomat* 9/2/1884

This extract, published in a local Tampere newspaper in 1884, is an example of the ways Finnish newspapers treated fairs or “market days” (Finnish: *markkinat*; Swedish: *marknader*). Apart from reporting on selling and buying, prices, and the number of people attending such events,

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newspapers also used to describe the amusements offered there, often in disapproving or condemning tones. Such a negative attitude appears even in a piece of news on the fees decreed by the Tampere town council for vendors, merry-go-rounds, panoramas, barrel organs, street singers “and other rubbish.”¹

As a regular gathering of people for the purchase and sale of livestock and other commodities, the fair also figures in novels, poems, and plays. It is no wonder because Finnish literature has a strong tradition of portraying life at the grassroots level. Going to the fair was an important thing for ordinary country people, so it is natural that the topic appears in fiction. The fair provides a situation in which characters act in an environment different from their usual circles. As Diana O’Hara writes, the marketplace offered a place in which “the communication of ideas, gossip, news, and the experience of exceptional levels of noise and activity, might mediate changes in social relations and permit the negotiation of new relationships.”²

The extraordinary character of the fair is apparent in the great number of compound words connected to the event, such as ‘atmosphere,’ ‘amusement,’ and ‘noise’ (Finnish: *markkinatunnelma*, *markkinahuvi*, *markkinamelu*). O’Hara argues that it is possible to imagine the marketplace “as a liminal zone within formally bounded areas, where people from different communities met together outside their normal, daily pattern of life. Although participants in the market were ostensibly engaged in economic exchange, the marketplace with its social ambience was also a territory where social transactions were conducted.”³ O’Hara writes about medieval fairs in England, but her observation concerns Finnish fairs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, too. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *liminal* points to an intermediate state, phase, or condition, something that is “in-between, transitional.” Folklorist [Arnold van Gennep](#) used the term *liminality* in his famous study of rites of passage in the early twentieth century, and anthropologist [Victor Turner](#) developed the concept further in his investigations of ritual processes.⁴ In 1974, Turner coined the term *liminoid*, which refers to experiences that do not result in a change of status, like those in rites of passage. Play, playing and time of leisure characterizes the liminoid.⁵ There have been studies of liminality in various disciplines and fields, the latest of which include Critical Event Studies. In investigating the fair, this approach to liminality is most fruitful, as fairs can be compared with sports events and other large gatherings. However, in some texts, the first trip to the fair

figures as a kind of a rite of passage. In addition, the fact that the word *härkäpoika* (“bull boy”) was used for young men who had not yet experienced the event points to this ritual aspect of the fair.

My aim in this chapter is to analyze the factors that contributed to the liminoid experience at the fair, mainly from the point of view of rural common people, who comprised most visitors. I use the term “common people” to refer to individuals who earned their living by means of physical labor and handicrafts. Rural inhabitants coming to the fair included land-owning farmers and landless people, such as crofters, cottagers, craftsmen, and servants. My focus is on the representations of amusements, entertainers and petty traders in newspapers, magazines, and fiction. In this chapter, I ask what kinds of social practices were adopted at the fair? What type of information do the fictive and non-fictive texts offer on the producers and consumers of entertainment, as well as on traders and trading encounters? The third aim concerns the criticism of the fair, a recurring theme in many sorts of texts. For example, the governor of Häme sought to ban “all kinds of conjurers, rope dances and other tricksters” from the fair—so that only those who had something to sell or to buy would be allowed at the event.⁶ What lies behind these negative attitudes toward entertainment?

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND SOURCE CRITICISM

The timeframe of my inquiry covers the period from the 1870s to the 1910s because the role of entertainment at fairs seems to have been at its high point at this time. The Gutenberg Project has been helpful in locating fictive texts that include depictions of fairs, but most of the material—reports of a fair as part of newsletters, including articles, columns, news items, letters to the editor, and advertisements—originates from the Digital Collections of the National Library of Finland. As the terms *markkinat* and *markkina* (leading to many compound words) appear more than 110,000 times in the database during this period, it is not possible to study every hit. The word *markkinat* appears in the metaphorical sense (cf. “vanity fair”) or as part of the economic system, too. In addition to covering fairs in Finland, newspapers published travelogues with depictions of similar events abroad. To find information on fairs and amusements, in my searches I used compound words and terms indicating various types of entertainment. Due to the large quantity of material available, I concentrate on texts written in Finnish.

Self-taught farmers and rural craftsmen formed the majority of the so-called country correspondents, who sent newsletters to papers interested in covering local news.⁷ In many cases, they were either unsigned or published with initials or under pseudonyms. Reports do not always include mentions of entertainment, but it is difficult to know if this was because there were no amusements at those fairs or if the writer did want to cover them in a short space. The disparaging voice in many of these texts belonged to advocates of *kansanvalistus* (literally “enlightenment of the common people”; Swedish: *folkupplysning*; German: *Volksaufklärung*). As country correspondents dealt with issues like the overuse of alcohol, it was not in their interest to depict the fairs in a positive or neutral light. It is likely that people like Lutheran clergymen sent letters to the editor in which the sinful life at the fair was criticized. Editors of papers, representing the urban middle classes, also wrote about fairs in the spirit of popular education.

Newspapers and magazines also published longer depictions and reminiscences of the fair as well as fictive stories. These texts, mostly published with initials or under pseudonyms, include information on the mores and customs related to the event. A critic commented on the popularity of the fair as a topic in his review of a collection of Kasimir Leino’s short stories that included “Härmänmäkeläisten markkinamatka” (“The Härmänmäki Folks at the Fair”): “So much has been written on fairs that one knows these ‘trips’ thoroughly. There is nothing new in this story. People swarm at the marketplace and on the streets, things are bought and ‘comedies’ visited.”⁸ Although the story seems to be true to life, its value diminishes because of the commonness of the topic, or so goes the argument in the review. In his letter to the editor, the pseudonym P. A. criticized literary realism for its aim to record real life. With the shorthand method of writing and the phonograph becoming more widespread, it will be possible to know exactly what “farmhand Matti and maid Liisa talked at the fair,” wrote the pseudonym in 1891.⁹ In her article on the use of fiction in the study of history, Marja Vuorinen states that one can start from the assumption that writers had knowledge of the phenomena, customs, and social norms of their times.¹⁰ Naturally, the information included in both newspapers and fictive texts cannot be taken at face value, but it is evident that depictions of the fair had their origin in the observations and experiences of authors. It is important to pay attention to the types of texts and their conventions. For example, stories that warn readers of the dangers of the fair emphasize different aspects than texts whose main function is to amuse readers.

APPROACHING THE LIMINOID

Everyday life in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural Finland was austere. For the majority, life consisted of hard physical work, simple food, and confinement to one's household and nearby surroundings. Especially in central, eastern, and northern Finland, distances between villages were great, and even going to church was a rare event. The fair was a welcome break in a monotonous life. "If youngsters have to stay at home during the fair, they feel like prisoners in Siberia," remarks a character in a story by Juho Reijonen.¹¹ When farmhands and maids negotiated their terms of employment with their masters, they tried to make sure that they would be allowed a trip to the fair at least once a year. Some servants would even accept smaller wages if they were granted that "golden journey."¹² In Kasimir Leino's story, mentioned above, a maid is willing to pay for a substitute so that she can leave for the fair.¹³

The fair was an important topic of conversation as the event came closer.¹⁴ Preparations started with loading carriages with products to be sold as well as provisions needed during the trip. In Lapland, the northernmost part of Finland, the trip to Rovaniemi could even take a week for those who lived in the farthest villages. Depending on the season, the means of transportation included sleighs, boats, skiing, and walking.¹⁵ The journey to the fair represented a pre-liminoïd phase. Overnight stays offered opportunities for interacting with other people heading to the same event. In J. Krumberg's feuilleton, a young woman eagerly listens to the more experienced girls talk about amusements, anticipating the pleasures ahead.¹⁶ In a story by Minna Canth, a young man called Antti travels to the fair for the first time in his life. His friend Matti sings a song about a boy who drinks rum there and has a girl sitting on his lap. Matti blames Antti for his lack of *markkinailo*, the proper spirit one has to adopt at the fair and forces him to take a slug from his bottle. Ritualistic behavior also appears in the following custom: whips cracking, horse racing, and men hollering a song about the fair when the town is in sight.¹⁷

Drinking and racing were part of male bonding and peer ranking.¹⁸ Alcohol enabled men to act in ways that were different from their normal behavior. According to an individual writing under the pseudonym Tiitus Tuiretuinen, *raaka ilo* ("wild/raw joy") on the way to the fair manifested itself in screaming, swearing, and the flogging of horses.¹⁹ It is strange to see how the Finnish peasant, "usually so quiet and mute like a fish, yells and makes noise at the fair," remarked an anonymous writer in 1873.²⁰

The liminoid character of the fair supported the challenging of social boundaries, too: “Give way, masters (*herrrat*) are coming,” shout men driving to the fair in a novel by I. A. Vatanen.²¹ A line in Larin-Kyösti’s poem “Markkinoilla” (“At the Fair”) captures the same feeling: “the tenant farmer is now a lord.”²² The anonymity of the fair made it possible for the underdog to shatter power relations governing social behavior, and the event allowed different rules regarding drinking. According to Satu Apo, households and communities controlled the practices of drinking in everyday life.²³ On one hand, men were expected to drink at fairs, but destructive behavior like squandering one’s property was disapproved of.²⁴

Arriving at the destination, the first thing was to find lodgings in households of merchants or other townspeople. According to a report published in *Savo*, the yards of houses were so full of sleighs that one had to zigzag around them to get in the building. The walls of the common room were full of bags and coffers, and coffee pots were brewing on the stove all day long. At night, straw on the floor served as a mattress for communal sleepers.²⁵ Naturally, this kind of situation differed from that at home, where the number of people in the household was much smaller and there were no strangers present. Richer visitors rented rooms of their own in order to have more comfort and privacy. Not much time was spent in one’s lodgings, however; wearing their best clothes, visitors headed for the marketplace where they encountered a dense crowd. Writers compared the throng of people to a swaying cornfield, a human snake with a thousand heads and a restless beehive.²⁶ For people who were used to knowing most of the people present at a gathering, this kind of scene was extraordinary indeed.

THE FAIR AS A LIMINOID EXPERIENCE

In addition to the density of the crowd, auditory experiences characterized the liminoid experience at the fair. “Wilho” begins his report by remarking that he can still hear the cries of horse dealers and the sounds of their whips, the tunes of barrel organs, and the songs of street singers.²⁷ In Juhani Aho’s feuilleton, a young man loves the thundering sound of the crowd and the tinkles of jingle bells and cascabels.²⁸ In a story by an anonymous writer, two young people, Katri and Matti, go to the fair to buy engagement rings—a customary thing for the recently betrothed—and things for their future household. When they reach the marketplace, they are amazed at the sight: “What a racket and buzz! What a crowd of

people! There were amusement makers at every corner, and the whole world had the sound of a barrel organ."²⁹ According to the pseudonym "Y," the experience of merging into the crowd, as well as seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting things different than usual, makes one melt into "pure sensations."³⁰ Thanks to alcohol and the unwritten rules of the fair, young people embraced freer modes of behavior. Several writers mention that young people walked hand in hand and hugged in public.

Many texts point to the fact that drinking at the fair was a social practice or even a cultural norm. A man who is not intoxicated during the fair is "a useless poor thing, not fit to be in other men's company," wrote the pseudonymous Poskeinen: "You have to look drunk. You have to torture your horse as much as possible; you have to yell so that your neighbor's years are blocked, you even have to try the sharpness of your knife on other people."³¹ The majority of visitors were men, and especially the scene at the horse market was an exaggeratedly masculine one. The behavior at the fair could include instances of boasting, brashness, and extravagance. In Johannes Linnankoski's novel, a wealthy farmer adopts something of the spirit of *potlatch*, the gift-giving practice involving giving away or destroying wealth or valuable items in order to demonstrate a leader's wealth and power. People heard tales of things that the farmer did in town: how he treated a crowd of people on the merry-go-round or drove straight into the restaurant with his horse and carriage. However, he did not touch drink: "A ferocious man of the fair who does not hit the bottle—what kind of a man was he?"³²

The liminoid character of the fair had an effect on social distinctions, too. In his depiction, the pseudonymous Tiitus Tuiretuinen paid attention to the equality of people there: gentlemen and ladies, burghers and craftsmen, farmers and farmhands, Roma and Finns, Tatars and Russians go ahead "in one big flurry."³³ In his study on the fair in Mikkeli, Matti Varsta writes about the dissolution of boundaries. Things like creed, class and ethnicity were forgotten when "the spirits of commerce and entertainment" ruled.³⁴ These call to mind Victor Turner's concept of *spontaneous communitas*, the experience of togetherness.³⁵ Contrary to usual circumstances, equality and anonymity ruled at the fair, at least to a degree. In this way, the marketplace became a liminoid space in which social encounters that were different than usual ones could take place.

When the fair was over, memories lived on. In a poem by Joel Lehtonen, men returning from the town talk about merry-go-rounds, the prices of things, horses, the Roma people, and so on.³⁶ Young people who had

made new friends started to look forward to the next journey to town. In Kauppis-Heikki's novel, a farmer's daughter received letters from boys she had met at the fair.³⁷ The journey was present in the stories people told, sometimes long afterwards. A man in Niilo Kivinen's novella brags about his exploits: "Once I was at the fair in Vaasa, somebody was trying to steal my pipe. I kicked his face so hard that he flew several yards and landed on his back."³⁸ In Maiju Lassila's novel *Tulitikkuja lainaamassa* ("Borrowing Matches"), the protagonists talk about a fellow who was so strong that the police had to get extra hands to take him to the drunk tank.³⁹ Stories of this kind have their counterparts in folktales in which strongmen perform extraordinary feats of strength.⁴⁰

AMUSEMENTS AND ENTERTAINERS

In the following, my aim is to give a brief overview of the amusements that contributed to the proper atmosphere of the fair, leading to liminoid experiences. The merry-go-round (*karuselli, karusell*) was one of the most important ones; a round platform with seats often in the form of horses, lions, and other exotic animals, it revolved about a fixed center, first operated with the help of stallions and later with steam power. Decorations could include pearls, trinkets, shining bits of cloth, tussles, small mirrors, and lanterns. For a newcomer from the countryside, a sight of this kind was something new and wonderful. The pseudonymous Topias Toivovainen depicted "plump young people" riding on a wooden horse, legs astride, smiling more blissfully than at church, as well as boys sitting in a revolving sleigh, arms entwined around the waists of girls.⁴¹ Young people usually appear in texts as the regular customers of the merry-go-round, but in a story by Juho Rauta, a boy attending the fair for the first time sees a grown man sitting on a crocodile.⁴² Maiju Lassila's humorous novella *Kilpakosijat* ("Rival Suitors") includes an episode in which a middle-aged couple asks bystanders to hold their animals—a bull and a pig—while they take a ride.⁴³

Barrel organs (*posetiivi, posetiv*) played a seminal role at the fair, too. Among other things, they contributed to the acoustic ambiance of the fair and provided background music for merry-go-rounds and other amusements. The barrel organ consisted of a small pipe organ played by turning a handle, which rotated a cylinder studded with pegs that opened the valves to produce a pre-set tune. Like in many other countries in Europe, during the period under investigation, the operators were mostly Italian or of Italian origin.⁴⁴ They earned their living by selling little pieces of paper

called *onnenlehti* (“slips/leaflets of fortune”) to the people who had gathered around them to listen to the tunes. When one placed a coin on top of the barrel organ, a bird or a monkey picked a piece of paper that told one’s fortune (see Fig. 9.1). In the story about Katri and Matti mentioned above, the young couple buy a slip of fortune that promises them five sons and seven daughters “who flourish like the branches of olive trees and cedar trees on the mountain of Lebanon.”⁴⁵

The “revolving *panorama*” was a long strip of painted fabric wound between two vertical cylinders and unrolled before an audience. The intended effect was to make viewers feel as if they were standing amid images. Panoramas often included scenes of great wars and views of big cities. In 1875, there were four panoramas at the fair in Kajaani; barrel organs, violins, drums, and harps enhanced their attraction.⁴⁶ Tours of waxworks and anatomical museums sometimes coincided with the time of the fair. According to another anonymous writer, some of the things displayed were obscene.⁴⁷ Advertisements included the mention “for adult



Fig. 9.1 Amusement-maker with an organ grinder and a monkey in the Tampere marketplace in Finland, 1908. (Unknown photographer. The Finnish Heritage Agency)

males only.”⁴⁸ No doubt this pointed to the sexual nature of some of the works, which acted as an extra attraction for some visitors. Very short or tall individuals, as well as people of color, were also exhibited at the fairs.⁴⁹

Kometiia (“comedy”) was a colloquial expression for various types of performances. In Joel Lehtonen’s novel, a dark man dressed in leotards, decorated with red and silver stars, cries in broken Finnish: “Everybody come see this program. Big rope king. Ring of death. Magic tricks.”⁵⁰ The entertainment included a show of gymnastics and a female snake charmer performing magic, among other things. There were occasional mentions of tightrope dancers, sword swallows, ventriloquists, and clowns.⁵¹ Fire-eating also figures as a form of *kometiia* in J. Krunberg’s feuilleton.⁵² In a reminiscence on a fair, the foreign artists have “pale and hungry faces” spoiled by maquillage, dressed in thin and dirty rags, trying to coax people to enter their tent, with their piercing cries in the cold autumn rain.⁵³ Performers at the “comedies” were often racialized. They looked different, they spoke differently, and they did things that did not belong to the ordinary lives of Finnish common people.

Itinerant menageries visited the fairs, too. For example, “Karamatti” exhibited dancing dogs and monkeys during the fair.⁵⁴ Bartolomeo Caramatti (1848–1920) toured Finland in 1879, 1882, and 1889–1892.⁵⁵ An advertisement signed by L. Bono boasts a sea lion and a lamb with five legs.⁵⁶ Elisabeth Bono, an Italian citizen, received a permit to exhibit a collection of live animals and a shooting gallery.⁵⁷ According to an anonymous writer, the audience saw a bear who danced and wrestled with a man, a camel who bowed politely, and a monkey dressed in a red hussar’s uniform: “Young people looked at these animals like miracles. These beasts probably figured in their dreams and stayed as a lasting recollection from the famous Kuopio fairs.”⁵⁸ This comment shows that menageries, like other “foreign” amusements, produced exciting experiences that were not possible in everyday life.

VENDORS AND BUYERS

Town shopkeepers had stalls at the marketplace during the fair. For example, goldsmiths sold engagement rings, pocket watches, and jewelry.⁵⁹ Artisans and farmers offered their wares from their carriages or sleighs, while townspeople made money by feeding visitors and young boys by selling cigars. Sellers of chapbook songs (*arkkiveisut*, *skillingvisa*) were a regular sight at fairs. In addition to love and courting, the topics of songs

included accidents, natural disasters, and crimes. Unlike barrel organists and most performers at the "comedies," chapbook vendors were Finnish. During the golden age of chapbook publishing from the 1870s to the early twentieth century, the production and distribution of popular songs were in the hands of the common people. However, the number of men who earned their living from this trade was rather small.⁶⁰ At the beginning of Juhani Aho's novella *Muuan markkinamies* ("A Man at the Fair"), the narrator is standing at the marketplace, observing the way "the old Leppänen, that ancient seller of songs, an ex-soldier" sings and interacts with his audience.⁶¹ This character was not fictional: Aleksanteri Leppänen (1851–1886) earned his living by selling chapbooks.⁶² Aho's story depicts an encounter between a chapbook vendor and his clients. According to the narrator, people who had gathered around Leppänen wanted to buy a particular song or demanded something new. The demeanor of the "Song Master" reflected the moods of his listeners: "He knew many songs and could choose the one that suited each customer. He sold a lot and was known at every fair."⁶³

Another well-known producer and seller of chapbooks, Paavo Putkonen, figures in a memoir of Aleks Seppänen sent to the Finnish Literature Society in the 1930s. It highlights the interaction between the vendor and his audience, revealing both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. When people asked about the prices of songs, Putkonen did not quit his performance but included his answers during singing. When he sang about love, boys and girls exchanged glances and those holding hands started swaying, and when the song was finished, they purchased the chapbook, wrote Seppänen.⁶⁴ It is apparent that the vendor skillfully took advantage of the amorous atmosphere when selling his wares. There is also an interesting depiction of a blind man and his family performing at the fair in Jyväskylä. Father and sons formed a small band consisting of violin, bass, and triangle, while the mother of the family sang with a basket of chapbooks hanging around her neck. The audience was captivated: "The hearts of women and girls melt into song. They, too, start to sing, and when the song is finished, they take 10 pennies and buy the text," wrote an anonymous reporter.⁶⁵ These examples demonstrate that encounters at the fair between sellers and buyers were multifaceted and involving interaction, among other things.

Vendors of manufactured clothes and accessories offered their wares at the fairs, too. There are several depictions in fictive texts of young men buying fashionable long scarves and sporting them during the fair. In a

story by Juhani Aho, two young women, Liisa and Kaisa, shop for overcoats. Vendors eagerly served their clients, and onlookers took part in the encounter, too:

Liisa was in a flurry: first, she was dressed as a fine lady, wearing an overcoat and a silk scarf, then she stood in her green dress, bareheaded, her hair all messed up. Some gentlemen were watching the event. They laughed, joked, and commented on the girls in a racy way, amused by their own words. They encouraged the girls to buy the coats and said that they fitted well. Another Jew had taken Kaisa's arm and soon she was in the grip of a similar spell as Liisa.⁶⁶

The presence of various kinds of sellers of refreshments and trinkets was vital in creating the atmosphere at the fair. The liminoid worked in their favor, too. Special baked goods called *Viipurin rinkeli* were consumed and bought as gifts. There was even a special word (*markkinaiset*) for presents purchased for those who had to stay at home during the fair.⁶⁷ Boys invited girls to drink coffee or *varimakea*, a hot drink made out of water, treacle, and spices. Buying trinkets from vendors at the fair had a role in courting rituals, too. According to the pseudonymous Nyyrikki, every young couple sported a balloon and a red *markkinakukka*, a brooch in the form of a flower.⁶⁸ These kinds of accessories acted as tokens of belonging to a special group among the wider crowd.

CRITICISM OF FAIRS

Misuse of alcohol is a recurring feature in reports, letters to the editor, and fictive stories. Newspapers used to comment on the general drunkenness during the fair or mentioned the number of people detained. The pseudonymous Rätty wrote that nearly everyone at the horse market in Oulu was drunk, and even those who were sober pretended to be intoxicated. A drunken man tried to climb into his carriage but failed, even with two men giving him a hand. Another man fell from his carriage, and a third man coaxed his horse, even though he was sitting in an empty wagon, wrote Rätty.⁶⁹ According to Tiitus Tuiretuinen, screaming, swearing, lewd words, obscene manners, arguments, quarrels and fights, and the sounds of whips and rattling carriages constituted the auditory scene of the fair.⁷⁰ Criticism of the mistreatment of horses often figures in reports and letters to the editor.

Readers were repeatedly reminded about the misfortunes to which drinking could lead. For example, a young man had spent a lot of money on drink, but on his way home he fell asleep on a frozen pond, which resulted in the amputation of a leg.⁷¹ In Minna Canth's cautionary story, Antti ends up in a drunk tank and his friend Matti dies after having taken part in a fight.⁷² The pseudonymous Ville observes a group of young women who entered a restaurant with young men. The girls are a little hesitant when the first drink arrives, but the second and the third go down without effort. When port changes to brandy, lewd songs are sung, writes Ville.⁷³ In newspapers and magazines, criticism of fairs overlaps with criticism of popular songs. Like alcohol and amusements, they arouse desires in dangerous ways: songs of love and courtship result in immoral behavior, the writers argue, and those depicting famous criminals lead young men to imitate the conduct of these "heroes."⁷⁴

The underlying argument in many texts is that drinking eased the visitors' engagement in various kinds of amusements that aroused, titillated, and excited the wrong sentiments. In a letter to the editor, an anonymous writer declares that the dangers of the fair include the loss of female innocence.⁷⁵ Country correspondents also frowned upon the dances that were sometimes organized during the fair. In Rovaniemi, they started in the morning and went on until late in the evening.⁷⁶ According to someone writing under the pseudonym Nyyrikki, some girls did twelve-hour shifts at a dance hall in Oulu without any trace of being tired.⁷⁷ Juxtaposed against the values of diligence and hard work widely espoused in Finnish rural society at the time, this kind of behavior was frivolous indeed. Marriages based on relationships established at fairs do not always end well, warned the pseudonymous Tiitus Tuiretuinen.⁷⁸ Newspapers did not openly write about prostitution, but it undoubtedly increased then. According to Jouko Heinonen, there were prostitutes who traveled to Rovaniemi for the fair. Professional pickpockets, thieves, and swindlers also took advantage of the fair.⁷⁹ In Joel Lehtonen's poem, a young lumberjack mourns for the pocket watch and wallet that he had lost after playing cards with two Russian horse dealers.⁸⁰ In a story by the pseudonymous Päiviö, two young men who take to drink lose their horse.⁸¹ "How many people are killed or become crippled, how many thefts and fights are the results of the fun at the fair?" asked the pseudonymous Kansalainen in his letter to the editor.⁸²

Insofar as there is no smoke without fire, it is true that excess drinking caused problems. On the other hand, it seems that writers felt that they

had to cover the theme, no matter what. When there were no harmful occurrences, this fact was also included in reports. Middle-class journalists, who themselves were used to drinking in bars or among gatherings of friends, seem to have accepted the condemnation of alcohol as a necessary part of reports and news, as did the country correspondents. Naturally, not every fairgoer followed the expected modes of behavior. For example, supporters of revivalist movements could meet during the event, and there were numerous fairs at which nothing extraordinary happened: business was slow, the crowd was small, the weather was bad, and due to bans or restrictions on selling alcohol, there were few offenses.

Time after time, newspapers reproved people for spending their hard-earned money on amusements and trinkets. According to the pseudonymous Markkina-Matti, the slips of fortunes promising happy marriages, long lives, good-natured in-laws, and unexpected inheritances sold like hot cakes. In particular, it was noted, servants should not squander their wages on “nothing.” Even worse, writers reminded their readers, the profits went into the pockets of foreigners. When you buy a slip of fortune from the barrel organist, “the dark-haired Italian laughs at the stupidity of our people,” wrote the pseudonymous Markkina-Matti.⁸³ Both newspaper reports and fictional texts took a negative attitude toward “foreign” traders selling manufactured and used clothes. There are instances of racialization in texts depicting vendors, too. “Children of Israel” sell worthless rags, claimed the pseudonym “N – I.”⁸⁴ In Minna Canth’s story, mentioned above, Antti buys a jacket from a Jewish vendor. When it begins to rain, the cloth looks old and blotchy. Criticism of Jewish and Tatar vendors comes up in Juho Reijonen’s story as well.⁸⁵

The ideals of modesty and frugality, promoted by popular education, motivated the critique of spending money on ready-made clothes and showy accessories as well as amusements. Religious reasons were apparent, too: dressing in fancy clothes was a sign of worldliness. Criticism of the common people who wanted to buy “luxurious” products not suitable for their status was a recurring theme in newsletters of country correspondents in general.⁸⁶ In one piece of news, the merry-go-round is called *Riettaan mylly*, “the Devil’s mill.”⁸⁷ The underlying idea behind this designation is that the mill usually grinds grain, but at the fair, it robs frivolous people of their money. Newspaper reports and letters to the editor reminded their readers that the pleasure produced by amusements, sweets, and trinkets is a fleeting one, and so people should save their money or use it in a more sensible way.

Some writers also resented the shattering of social boundaries that took place at the fair. Fine restaurants turned into cabins filled with smoke; "now the (common) people have the power," stated an anonymous writer in his long depiction of the fair.⁸⁸ *Odi profanum vulgus* ("I hate throngs of commoners"), a quote from Horace, came to the mind of the pseudonymous Aapeli when he saw the "idle, drunken crowd at the fair, living like there's no tomorrow."⁸⁹ The debate surrounding universal suffrage in the early twentieth century is present in the report of the pseudonymous Juntta. He starts his depiction with the cacophony of barrel organs, various musical instruments, and the cries of entertainers, and ends it with the following question: "Does one really have to grant the right to vote for every man and woman in this noisy and surging bunch of people, and have a say in affairs of our country?"⁹⁰ This comment, given *from above*, exemplifies the fear that many in the middle or upper classes felt before the change that would shatter the old class society.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering both fictional and non-fictional texts dating from the 1870s to the 1910s, the fair was a secular feast in which economic exchange provided the ground for social activity. Sellers and buyers, entertainers and their audiences, townspeople and visitors formed a crowd that enabled liminoid happenings. At the fair, one could experience things that did not belong to one's quotidian life. In particular, the fair was important for young people as a scene of courting. The dizzying feeling of the merry-go-round, the loud tunes of barrel organs, the thrill of magic tricks and acrobatic shows, and the happy futures promised by fortune-telling—amusements of these kinds—transported people from the monotonous cycle of everyday life. Trading laid the ground for entertainment—and vice versa. Both activities contributed to the special character of the fair. However, the point of view of entertainers and petty traders is barely visible in the material analyzed in this article. More specifically, writers did not see the producers of amusements as subjects, nor were their activities considered as labor, unlike farming and craftsmanship. The emphasis of the texts is on consumers, representing the great majority of Finnish people from the 1870s to the 1910s.

The supporters of popular education and the temperance movement encouraged people to stop spending their money on drinks, amusements, fashionable clothes, trinkets, and chapbook songs. In particular,

farmhands and maids were the targets of this kind of criticism. According to folklorist Satu Apo, some ethnographers have also depicted the landless people as carefree and prone to following their desires by spending their money.⁹¹ The disdain for foreign entertainers and vendors representing ethnic minorities is present in many kinds of texts as well. This originated from the fear of the “Other” and from the nation-building project espoused by many kinds of writers.

The criticism of the amusements was part of the struggle between the “high” culture of the elite and the “low” culture of the common people, manifest in dichotomies like theater versus *kometiia*, concerts versus street singers, and poetry versus chapbook songs. Alternative forms of entertainment were organized to provide more elevating ways to spend evenings during the fair. For example, there were soirées with speeches and choral singing.⁹² Interestingly, images of popular entertainers did not rouse opposition when there was a need to raise money for good causes. For example, a seller of chapbooks and a barrel organ grinder figured at a masquerade organized by university students for the benefit of ethnographic research.⁹³ Few people can resist the temptation of the fair, remarked an anonymous writer in 1897.⁹⁴ Many journalists who wrote about the entertainment of the marketplace in a critical way, undoubtedly enjoyed the buzz of the fair. Voices of understanding and sympathy appear in the stories and novels of Juhani Aho, Teuvo Pakkala, and Kasimir Leino, among others. It is no wonder, for the event offered a chance for courtship, humorous incidents, and misadventures.

NOTES

1. *Aamulehti*, 9/5/1885.
2. O’Hara 2000, p. 139.
3. O’Hara 2000, p. 139.
4. Victor Turner. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*.
5. Turner 1974, pp. 66–69.
6. *Hämeen Sanomat* 1/27/1885.
7. Laura Stark. 2013. “Sanomalehtien maaseutukirjeet.”
8. *Keski-Suomi* 10/2/1889.
9. *Aura* 7/17/1891.
10. Vuorinen 2014, p. 70.
11. Reijonen 1900, p. 665.
12. *Uusi Suometar* 2/9/1874.
13. Leino 1889, p. 10.

14. Heinonen 1984, p. 106.
15. Heinonen 1984, pp. 108–109.
16. *Kaiku* 6/14/1888.
17. Canth 1878, p. 5.
18. Apo 2001, p. 185.
19. *Laatokka* 9/23/1884.
20. *Hämäläinen* 1/30/1873.
21. Vatanen 1913, p. 68.
22. Larin-Kyösti 1913, p. 52.
23. Apo 2001, p. 108.
24. Apo 2001, p. 168.
25. *Savo* 1/19/1889.
26. *Savo* 2/5/1887; *Kaiku* 3/5/1913; Leino 1889, p. 17.
27. *Tapio* 1/24/1874.
28. *Keski-Suomi* 2/18/1886.
29. *Uusimaa* 10/8/1895.
30. *Keski-Suomi* 1/1/1894.
31. *Wiipuri* 3/3/1901.
32. Linnankoski 1907, p. 32.
33. *Laatokka* 9/23/1884.
34. Varsta 1946, p. 107.
35. Turner 1969, p. 132, pp. 134–140.
36. Lehtonen 1912, p. 26.
37. Kauppi-Heikki 1889, pp. 119–121.
38. Kivinen [1889] 1987, p. 12.
39. Lassila 1910, p. 115.
40. Simonsuuri 1963, pp. 503–505.
41. *Savo* 1/31/1914.
42. *Karjalatar* 6/6/1890.
43. Lassila 1913, p. 75.
44. Karvonen, 2020, pp. 26–55.
45. *Uusimaa* 10/8/1895.
46. *Usi Suometar* 1/29/1875.
47. *Tampereen Sanomat* 9/12/1876.
48. *Ilmarinen* 2/18/1882.
49. Ville Sutinen. 2019. *Kääpiöistä kolosseihin. Kummajaisten historia Suomessa*.
See also Maren Jonasson’s article in this volume.
50. Lehtonen 1920, p. 155.
51. *Päijänne* 9/13/1878; *Aura* 19/21/1878; *Kansan Tahto* 9/29/1909.
52. *Kaiku*, 6/14/1888.
53. *MDS*, 2/1902, p. 53.
54. *Tampereen Sanomat* 9/12/1876.

55. Maren Jonasson, 2019. “Inte vilken ‘karamatti’ som helst: om hur en kringresande släkt slog rot i vårt språk.”
56. *Savo-Karjala* 3/2/1898.
57. *Wiipurin* 8/19/1896.
58. *Savo-Karjala* 1/17/1890.
59. *Inkeri* 9/27/1891.
60. Kuismin 2020, pp. 47–48.
61. Aho 1884, p. 22.
62. Laurila 1956, p. 164.
63. Aho 1884, p. 21–22.
64. Laurila 1956, p. 167.
65. *Keski-Suomi* 9/20/1879.
66. *Keski-Suomi* 2/25/1886.
67. Vuorela 1979, p. 268.
68. *Kaleva* 9/26/1908.
69. *Kaiku* 10/2/1886.
70. *Laatokka* 7/22/1884.
71. *Savo* 3/9/1889.
72. Canth 1878, p. 57, pp. 12–13.
73. *Savo* 10/2/1888.
74. Hanna Karhu and Anna Kuismin, 2021. “‘Rekiviisujen’ halveksunta ja houkutus: Keskustelu arkiviisuista ja rekilauluista 1870-luvulta 1910-luvulle.”
75. *Kaiku* 10/8/1897.
76. Heinonen 1984, p. 217.
77. *Kaleva* 9/26/1908.
78. *Laatokka* 1/28/1884.
79. Heinonen 1984, pp. 131–133.
80. Lehtonen 1912, p. 26
81. *Laatokka* 1/28/1893.
82. *Oulun Lehti* 10/11/1884.
83. *Lahden Lehti* 11/13/1901.
84. *Unsi Suometar* 1/20/1875.
85. Reijonen 1900, p. 666; see also Wassholm and Östman 2017, pp. 24–25.
86. Kajander 2020, p. 57.
87. *Karjalatar* 11/8/1902.
88. *Savo* 1/19/1889.
89. *Kaiku* 3/5/1913.
90. *Keski-Savo* 9/23/1905.
91. Apo 2001, p. 170.
92. *Savo-Karjala* 1/17/1890.

93. Hanna Karhu and Anna Kuismin, 2021. “‘Rekiviisujen’ halveksunta ja houkutus: Keskustelu arkiviisuiista ja rekilauluista 1870-luvulta 1910-luvulle.”
 94. *Kaiku* 10/8/1897.

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