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## Drinking on the screen. An analysis of a mythical male fantasy in Finnish films

### Introduction

The social significance of alcohol has recently attracted much attention and three different ways of studying it have emerged:

(1) It is central to an examination of the great changes which have taken place in alcohol consumption (Sulkunen, 1980).

(2) Conversely, alcohol consumption may be looked at as one, often strategic, area of daily life. From this point of view, the focus of interest is not so much alcohol consumption itself as the whole of the way of life it expresses (Falk, 1979, 1980).

(3) Sociological research into alcohol consumption in Finland has traditionally placed the study of popular attitudes towards drink within the context of a theory of norms (Allardt, 1957; Bruun, 1959). The findings of such studies may also be transposed into the language of social significance, and it is this tradition which is followed in Klaus Mäkelä's study of popular attitudes towards governmental control of alcohol consumption (Mäkelä, 1976).

When studying the social significance of something such as alcohol it can often be extremely difficult to obtain material. Surveys are generally too superficial to serve the purpose whilst

gathering material by means of anthropological observation methods is too time-consuming. There is therefore much to be said for the use of cultural documents such as films, and the opportunity arose when the authors of this paper were able to take part in a seminar arranged by Juha Partanen, entitled "Drunkenness in Finland as seen on the screen".

Those taking part in the seminar viewed scenes of drunkenness taken from ten Finnish films jointly chosen by Juha Partanen and the Finnish Film Archive. In addition, the participants were also shown a long (5 hours, 16 minutes) television version of Mikko Niskanen's film *The Eight Deadly Bullets* (*Kahdeksan surmanluotia*). A discussion followed the screenings and both extracts and discussions form the data basis for this article. (See Appendix for list of films.) Our analysis focuses on the second of the ways of studying the social significance of alcohol listed above, namely the theory which considers that alcohol consumption may be interpreted as an area of daily life—and in this instance as a particularly meaningful one.

### *Instrumental and mythical meanings*

We have attached great importance to the distinction between mythical and instrumental meanings formulated by Sulkunen (1980), since it is a distinction which helps to define an essential feature of our film material.

When objects are looked upon as a system of signs they have often been considered as a direct extension of the social meanings of daily life.

Barthes (1970, pp. 73-79, 133-135), for example, has analyzed objects in this way as having artificial use values or as symbols of social values. Thus, steak and chips is held to represent French identity (to the French); "plat garni" (meat or fish with vegetables) signifies wealth (to those who earn very little); interior decoration and dress indicate certain roles, etc. What is common to all these kinds of signification is that they stand in metonymic<sup>1</sup> relation to the social meanings of daily life. They are elements in the syntagmatic chain through which social relations are expressed in everyday existence. Drinking habits may be taken as an illustration of this relation.

When I offer *ouzo* to my guests I am indicating a number of

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things about myself: for example, that I have travelled abroad where I bought *ouzo*, that I am therefore someone who is able to travel, who has had experience of widely differing tastes, that I am someone who does not drink simply in order to get drunk, and so on. What is important is that exactly the same things could be said in words — and, indeed, this often happens. The language of objects and everyday language rely on precisely the same paradigms of meaning and can, for this reason, be combined in the spoken language. We have given the term *instrumental* to meanings of this kind which occur in the language of objects.

However, the language of the world of objects is not always a direct extension of ordinary language. For example, the way young people express their admiration for youth cult figures cannot be considered a direct extension of ordinary language as it relates to social relations in everyday life. The way they express themselves has a metaphoric<sup>2</sup> rather than a metonymic relation to ordinary language.

Similarly, the brawls which are often associated with alcohol consumption in Finland express a social significance attached to alcohol that cannot be interpreted as an extension of ordinary speech. We have described those social meanings which belong to a “different reality” (Sulkunen, 1980) or to a “different semiological system” (Barthes, 1970, p. 211) as *mythical* meanings.

All semiologists consider that myth is language, but attempts to define the difference between mythological and non-mythological languages have varied greatly, depending on the theorists involved. It is no part of our purpose to pass judgment on such definitions, and we shall simply restrict ourselves to the intuitive notion that when we interpret our film material we cannot always simply ‘read’ it as an extension of ordinary language, but we must also discover the mythological structure which exists within it and interpret that as well.

#### Method

As most of the social meanings of alcohol to be found in our material are mythical in the sense which has just been described (though with a few exceptions which will be discussed below), the main object of our research will be the interpretation of such mythical meanings. In order to do so, we shall make use of the

method developed by Lévi-Strauss for the interpretation of myth (1977, pp. 206-231).

According to Lévi-Strauss, because myth is a language, myths are made up of elements comparable to those in ordinary language. Lévi-Strauss calls these basic elements *mythèmes* and has shown that it is possible to discover the meaning of a myth by rearranging and analysing its *mythèmes*.

As far as our own research is concerned, Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of myth suggests three important principles. The first is that *mythèmes* have no particular fixed order or arrangement, so that any one myth (the Oedipus myth, for example) may contain a number of *mythèmes* of equivalent significance. In order to interpret a myth, *mythèmes* of equivalent significance must be examined side by side; this is done by tabulating analogous *mythèmes* and then reading off the columns much as one would read an orchestral score.

The second principle is that “a myth contains all possible versions of itself”, and there is thus no original or “authentic” version. Old and more recent versions must therefore be considered as part and parcel of the same myth. This being so, the problem of how representative the material is ceases to have very much significance. If a myth has been correctly analyzed using all the available variants, new variants which may come to light cannot modify the interpretation in any fundamental way. This is also the reason why we are not very concerned by the fact that our material was selected not only by those who produced and directed the films, but also by the seminar convener Juha Partanen and the Finnish Film Archive. On the other hand, we might always be able to add to our interpretations by looking at further material.

The third and final principle is that *mythèmes* do not have a single meaning, in the same way as phonemes have no single, universal meaning. Thus a recurrent motif, such as that of flight, cannot be interpreted as it stands but must be placed in the context of other categories of *mythèmes*.

These principles mean that it is of little relevance to ask whether our material is representative. Nor do we consider it important that our material is made up of stereotypes portrayed by film directors rather than of authentic instances of drunkenness. Indeed, the research principles we have derived from Lévi-Strauss’s study of myth are useful because they enable us to make the analysis of stereotypes our objective, and to look at the myths which sur-

round alcohol rather than at the real effects of drinking.

Lévi-Strauss's studies of myth had a philosophical and anthropological bent. He set out, in his research, to discover the specific structures of the human mind and the laws which govern the way it works (Leach, 1970, p. 52). If we could discover the mythological structure of the mind of modern man it would be particularly interesting because it would allow us to understand its concrete, historical basis. The mythology of drunkenness may therefore explain certain aspects of alcohol consumption by showing that the mythical significance of alcohol is part of a more universal mythological structure. But it may also help us to analyze the relation between alcohol and everyday life and, perhaps, lay bare some of the elements which structure that everyday life.

Finally, before moving to an analysis of the material, it should be pointed out that there was one feature common to all the film extracts: they all showed events from a male point of view. It is also important to note that all the main characters were men and all the scenes of drunkenness were in fact scenes of male drunkenness. These common features allowed us to define our aim as the study of the mythology of drunkenness among men in Finland.

Our method was technically very simple. After the seminar had taken place we looked at the extracts again and took detailed notes on the events they portrayed. We then broke our notes down into mythèmes or units composed of incidents that were as limited as possible in their scope (some of them, in fact, consisted simply of replies that were spoken), and we transferred these mythèmes onto cards. By reorganizing and classifying these cards we came up with a simple and fairly consistent structure which embraced our material sufficiently well. We in fact ended up with such a large number of cards that for the purposes of this paper we have used those which are most expressive and easiest to describe without having to tell the story either of the extract or of the whole film in great detail.

#### Non-mythical (instrumental) drunkenness

In the material we studied, there were relatively few instances where alcohol had social significance of an instrumental kind. One such instance was, however, the extract from *Portraits of Women (laisenkuvia)* (1970), in which the main characters have a crayfish

party at which they drink a great deal without getting particularly drunk, though their speech becomes slurred and their behaviour less restrained. Here alcohol exaggerates rather than changes both the external social characteristics and the roles and attitudes of those at the party. (For example, the producer of pornographic films pretends to offer the genitalia of a crayfish to the woman sitting next to him at table.) Furthermore, the men and the women remain together at the table for a long time and such a thing is extremely rare in the material we viewed (see following paragraph). Even when the women do retire to the kitchen and begin their own conversation, this is presented merely as a prelude to the next mixed scene (in which the women describe the men to one another).

In this extract, the non-mythical use of alcohol is literally instrumental: alcohol serves to introduce the events which follow (wife-swopping) and as a ceremonial form of expression to define the situation and the roles (Saara rejects Pertti's advances by responding to his offer of a whisky, "I only drink the fruit of the vine.")

In *Unknown Soldiers (Tuntematon sotilas)* (1955), a non-mythical scene of drunkenness occurs side by side with one that is clearly mythical. The scenes involved are those in which the officers, on the one hand, and the crew, on the other, throw a party in honour of Marshal Mannerheim. The fact that the officers are officers is underlined as they sing the song "Die Fahne hoch", make speeches (of the "we are the backbone of the nation" variety) and discuss questions of patriotism. When Kariluoto becomes maudlin after having drunk a great deal, the others interrupt him by singing a German song, and when Koskela comes into the officers' dug-out looking for a fight, he is quickly overpowered, tied up and carried out.

By comparison, the behaviour of the crew is clearly mythical, especially when the men begin trying to fly. This point will be further discussed below.

The drinking scene from *Unknown Soldiers* is particularly interesting because it places mythical and non-mythical drunkenness in different social "classes". It is also interesting that the main characters in *Portraits of Women* are members of the middle classes.

Finally, it might be felt that, on one level at least, *The Patrol Group (Sissit)* (1953) also contains scenes of instrumental drunkenness in the sense that alcohol creates a context in which wartime

comrades can meet up again. However this scene is so external to the main action that the nature of the drunkenness is not well illustrated.

### The mythical structure of drunkenness

Our material contained an abundance of mythical elements, and this in itself presented problems. After several experiments, our classification and re-arrangement of mythèmes yielded a sort of triangle. The centre of the triangle represents drunkenness, and its points represent different aspects of the myth. The descriptions we initially gave to the three points were: (1) incompatibility between alcohol and women; (2) empty solidarity among the drinking men; (3) cosmic solitude of the man who is drunk. It would be interesting to see just how far we could take the analysis of our material using modern techniques of research into myth such as the *actant* mode of Greimas (1968). But as our experiment was more of a preliminary kind, the simple and rather crude classification we used was sufficient for our needs.

### Incompatibility between alcohol and women

This is the theme which was most frequently repeated and, perhaps, most successfully illustrated from the extracts we viewed, and it was treated in three different ways: alcohol was seen as compensating for women; alcohol excluded women; and women were given a role external to the main action, which is drinking.

*a) Alcohol as a compensation for women.* This treatment of the theme is most fully worked out in *The Village Shoemakers (Numtisuutarit)* (1923) in which Esko has his proposal of marriage rejected and is subsequently forced to drink until he gets drunk. This could be interpreted as the rite of initiation that enables Esko to become a man — since he cannot do so with the help of a woman he will do so with vodka. But in fact one of the reasons why Esko is rejected is because he is not yet mature.

The stereotype compensatory relation is clearly to be seen in an extract from the film *The Steward of Siltala (Siltalan pehtoori)* (1934) in which Lieutenant Mandelscrona, a caricature aristocrat

who speaks Finnish with an accent, has been rejected by a young woman and so gets drunk in order to drown his sorrows and restore his feelings of strength. Similarly, in *Jesters' Nights (Narrien illat)* (1970) the depths of intoxication are only reached after the women have refused to give themselves to the men, even though at the outset the women were treated as equal drinking partners. Sorrow is drowned in binges of drinking, to the extent that alcohol seems to be the main component of pleasure, with women as a mere afterthought.

In *The Two Victors (Kaksi Vihtoria)* (1939), all the fun of getting drunk is again seen as compensation for unsatisfactory relations with women, whilst in *A Man of Our Planet (Mies tältä tähdeltä)* (1958) the cliché "my wife doesn't understand me" is repeated by the hero who is a weak-minded alcoholic.

We noted that alcohol as a compensation for women was a recurrent theme in these extracts, and that it was generally presented in somewhat pathetic form, when drink was used in some way to overcome a disappointment. Either women are assimilated to alcohol because both belong to a different reality — both are difficult to procure and the possession of each is immediately a sign of power. (The theme of affluence and plenty is also relevant here and will be discussed further below.) Or women and alcohol are seen as alternatives; in which case further analysis reveals that in such scenes alcohol proves to be the better of the two, because it procures both freedom and pleasure, whereas entering into relations with a woman carries the possibility of loss of freedom and of being forced into submission.

*(b) The exclusion of women by alcohol.* Another noticeable feature is that women are generally excluded from the drinking circle. (This is hardly surprising when it is recalled that until the end of the 1960s alcohol consumption among women was extremely rare even in real life, and most of these extracts date from a period before the steep increase in alcohol consumption.) When a woman is included among the drinkers she is treated as a whore. In *Jesters' Nights* the men go from girl to girl as long as the girls remain in the group of drinkers. Even so, the girls are unkindly chased out before the drinking reaches its mythical stage because they try to free themselves from their prostitute role by initiating sexual contacts of their own choosing.

The same theme is symbolically presented in *The Village*

*Shoemakers* when Esko "kills" Antres the tailor by throwing him to the ground after having first made him adopt a woman's position. Before getting carried away, however, Esko makes Antres pull his hair three times — which is the same humiliating punishment that Esko's mother inflicts on Esko himself and on his father Topias.

(c) *The external role of women in relation to male drunkenness.* Although women are not admitted into the charmed circle of drinkers, they are nevertheless present in two ways. Firstly, the woman has control over the drinker. Martta pulls Topias's hair when he and Sepeteus are discovered draining the bottles that have been set aside for Esko's wedding (*The Village Shoemakers*). The waitress in a restaurant is both the person who brings the alcohol and the person who "disturbs" the drinkers ("Everyone who disturbs us will be shot — except the waitress") (*The Patrol Group*). She is also capable of threatening to stop the supply of drink (*A Man of our Planet*). Secondly, the sexual presence of women is common in scenes of drunkenness. However, it is interesting that women are sexually present in such scenes only as fictitious or anonymous objects of pleasure. Although drunkenness is often associated with sexual escapades, women were not in reality present in any of the extracts we viewed. Men make eyes at them (as in *The Sheep Eaters*) and proposition them, but often confuse even close women friends' names (*A Man of Our Planet*.) The anonymity and fictitious status of women is most striking in *The Sheep Eaters* (*Lampaansyöjat*), in which Sepe and Valtteri talk about sex while they are drinking together. They speculate on the consequences if human conception took place in the same way as with plants, through pollination. They try to imagine the comic results of this idea and refer to the loss of paternity rights and the fact that sexual activity would take place collectively. And at the end they give God full marks for not having arranged things that way".

The female characters in these extracts may thus be divided into two categories: those who represent control and who are actually present at scenes of drunkenness, and those whose presence is merely a fiction and who are there as imagined sexual objects. The former represent the normal state of affairs in everyday life, conventions and discipline. Their presence serves to articulate the contradiction between getting drunk and everyday social responsibility. The latter, on the other hand, those women who are the ob-

jects of sexual interest, are nothing more than a distant dream of unattainable pleasure, a dream which has been achieved by setting aside those human and social qualities which prevent them really being present in scenes of drunkenness.

#### *The empty solidarity of drinking men*

It was perhaps the mythemes which expressed the relations among men in a group of drinkers which provided us with some of our greatest surprises. People generally believe that conversation among drinkers touches on things that are not usually discussed, sources of resentment as well as friendship, and that such discussions take place in an atmosphere of intimacy, solidarity and confidences. But our material did not bear out these assumptions. The mythical themes in this material may be divided into four categories: "letting one's hair down"; alcohol as a solidarity rite; indifference; and meaningless confidences.

(a) "Letting one's hair down" The fundamental rule of mythical drunkenness, which provides that alcohol transposes the social significance of everyday relations onto a different plane of reality, can be literally verified in the relations among the members of a group of drinkers. The external social rules of the group are neither observed nor obeyed. People cease to stand on ceremony and call each other simply by their first names or nicknames. Such familiarity is explicit in *The Steward of Siltala*, in which the Lieutenant uses the familiar "you" form to the farm worker and embraces him, whilst in *The Village Shoemakers* Topias and Sepeteus are equals when they are drinking together, despite the threat of female wrath.

In *A Man of Our Planet* familiarity is expressed in a more complicated way. The men's occupations in life are known, but it is also clear that these are completely irrelevant when they are drinking together. For example, the poet who goes to sleep at the table is the group's mascot rather than a poet. In the same way, there are no reminders of the individuals' professional status and the respect that might therefore be due to them (as in the case of the journalist). However, what the men do for a living is emphasized with appreciation when dealing with relations between the group of drinkers and the outside world. (When he takes the phone call ask-

ing the night revellers to make a little less noise, the host answers "Captain Lampinen speaking", *A Man of Our Planet*.)

Some roles develop inside the group of drinkers, but the differences between the various roles are based solely on actions and rites associated with drinking. Heroism or charisma, for example, have to be proved by alcohol-linked exploits. In *Jesters' Nights* the group leader boasts that he can down a bottle of vodka in two, while the reason that Captain Lampinen takes on the role of leader in *A Man of Our Planet* is that he can offer the group a place to meet and protect it against the outside world. Sepeteus similarly makes use of this external position of authority to chase away a disturber (Martta).

(b) *Alcohol as a solidarity rite.* The solidarity of the group depends exclusively on the men's qualities as drinking companions, and it is demonstrated through simple and almost imperceptible rites. Here are some examples: drinking from the same bottle (*Jesters' Nights*); drinking from the same glass (*The Two Victors*), he who buys the drinks drinking first; everyone paying for a round (*A Man of Our Planet*); using identical receptacles to drink from (*The Sheep Eaters*). The strength of the solidarity produced by such rites is to be seen in scenes where the men protect themselves against the outside world, and the fact that they always do so means that they can go on drinking (see (a) above).

As well as warding off threats from outside, solidarity is also necessary in order to withstand attempts at normative control from within, manifested in feelings such as guilt. Mikko Viikastus threatens to leave Esko alone if he refuses to drink (*The Village Hoemakers*). In *The Blue Week* (*Sininen viikko*) (1954) Usko Iltanen seeks solidarity and forgiveness from the person whom he has betrayed by offering him a drink (and, later, confiding his betrayal).

(c) *Indifference.* Perhaps the most surprising of our observations is that the only thing a group of drinkers have in common is drink and the ability to go on drinking. Similarly, the only exchanges which take place are ponderous, ritual discussions and the most imperceptible rites mentioned above. Indifference of this kind demonstrated to quite a striking degree in *A Man of Our Planet*.

In this film, the group shows no interest in the efforts its members make to tell a story or to talk about their difficulties. In the same

way, the scenes in the film *The Sheep Eaters* are relatively long, but even there, discussion of what is going on in the world is confined to a few commonplace remarks. What bears most resemblance to real discussion is talk about sex. In *Jesters' Nights* there is no conversation at all, except when the group leader makes a bet, and even here the replies are less replies than exclamations.

(d) *Insignificant confidences.* When one looks at the kinds of things the men confide in each other one comes away with similar impressions. First, these confidences always take place between two people, never more than two. Thus in *A Man of Our Planet* they take place in the restaurant toilets or, more generally, at some distance from the other drinkers. Secondly, such confidences are never of more than superficial interest, and never amount to a revelation of real problems or secret delights. The men talk only of dreams and illusions and never expose themselves to their interlocutors. They talk only of things which happened in the past, or things about which they can generalize in a philosophical manner. Thus the partisans in *The Patrol Group* reminisce about the war, while in *A Man of Our Planet* the alcoholic hero and Captain Lampinen get together in the "gents" to talk despairingly about their wives and to philosophize about life and death.

The group of drinkers is consequently an extremely strange society. The unusual significance of alcohol, which links it to a different reality, is further emphasized by isolation, by the refusal to accept the roles and norms of the outside world, and by the fact that outsiders to the group are considered troublesome and a threat against drunkenness. However, the only solidarity which exists among the members of the group is that which they derive from drinking together. Such solidarity has no content to it: the men do not unbutton themselves to each other, nor do they communicate in any other way. Among drinkers, each individual ultimately remains alone with his joys and sorrows. The function of the group is thus to allow each man to drink in peace and to share his guilt.

#### *The cosmic solitude of the man who is drunk*

A third dimension must be added to the social relations — or lack of social relations — in the mythology of drink. It is a dimension which is less clearly defined and which can only be interpreted with



great difficulty. However, it may prove the most important element in the mythology.

We have called it the *cosmic* dimension because it reflects an unconscious feeling about the origin of man, about his cosmic situation and about the contrast between life and death, illustrated in a particularly interesting way. We have distinguished two levels in material relating to this theme: the contrast between life and death, and feelings about nature.

(a) *Life and death*. In several extracts drunkenness is presented as a flight which must inevitably lead to a fall or, as with Esko in *The Village Shoemakers*, to death. Indeed, Esko says that he is dying just as he is "taking off", he shouts that heaven and earth are turning somersaults. In *Unknown Soldiers* the men pretend to be aeroplanes in a dogfight, while in *Jesters' Nights* the leader of the group stands on a chair to make good his word and, after having drained a bottle, climbs a tree and goes to sleep. If one considers that song and dance have the same symbolic value as flight, then this theme is present in several further extracts. It does seem justifiable to assimilate song and dance to flight, at least when they express similar feelings of giddiness as in *The Two Victors*. In this film the husbands have a couple of drinks, after which they start dancing and singing from Léhar's *The Merry Widow*. Their sense of euphoria is simultaneously a fear of falling, so that feelings of rappiness go hand in hand with the consciousness that death is just around the corner and, possibly, that happiness has to be seized from the clutches of death.

b) *Nature*. Though the theme of life and death is similarly treated in all the extracts, the relation between man and nature is presented as a cluster of themes which may be divided into two categories. (1) Drinking often takes place in natural surroundings (such as a forest, an island or a garden). This is the case in *The Village Shoemakers*, *The Steward of Siltala*, *Jesters' Nights*, *The Sheep Eaters* and *Unknown Soldiers*. The natural origins of alcohol are frequently an associated theme. In *The Eight Deadly Bullets* there is an extremely detailed description of how to make "liquor", just as in *Unknown Soldiers*, brewing strong beer "in a natural setting" is the subject of some interest. (2) The relation between man and nature takes the form of an opposition between aggression and submission: this is, in fact, an opposition between submission to and

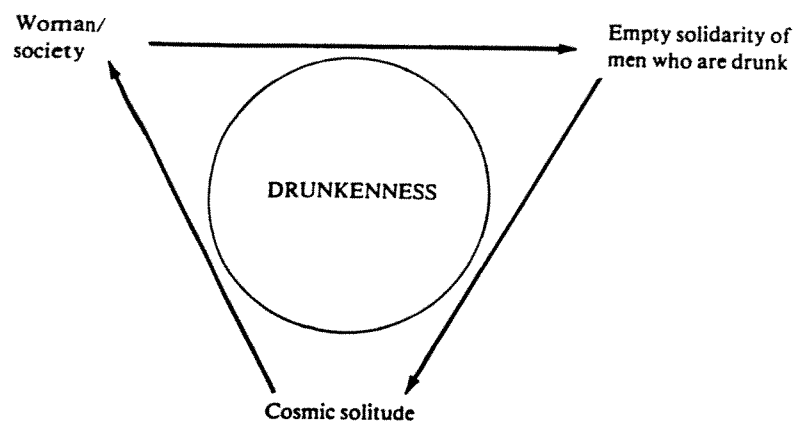
identification with the forces of nature, on the one hand, and the submission of the forces of nature to man, on the other. In *The Sheep Eaters*, for example, Sepe drinks outside while it is raining and reflects that one has to suffer in order to be happy. Sepe and Valtteri also kill sheep (which are semi-wild animals) but not, for example, cows or chickens. In *The Village Shoemakers* Esko deliberately bangs his head against a pine tree and uproots fir trees, whilst in *The Steward of Siltala* the Lieutenant refers to himself as a lion (a beast which belongs to nature and is its lord).

Submitting to the forces of nature is associated with the theme of abundance, and in these extracts the fact that alcohol is plentiful is frequently emphasized — as is the disquiet when it appears to have run out.

Thus man's contact with nature seems to be contradictory and is presented in the form of simultaneous oppositions. Man is part of nature: he is born of it (life) and he will go back to it (death); but nature is also an enemy which has to be defeated (either by exploitation, as in the manufacture of liquor, or by defiance) — an enemy which is simultaneously threatening, formidable and restrictive.

#### *The internal structure of the mythological triangle*

We have tried to build up an overall picture from our material by dividing mythèmes into three categories which we have called myth motifs. These are: the opposition between alcohol and women; the empty solidarity of men who are drunk; and man's cosmic loneliness. These motifs can be inter-related in the following way. A man who is drunk (1) leaves social normality, represented by woman; (2) depends on the collective solidarity of a group of drinkers to ward off both those from outside who wish to disturb him, and his own feelings of guilt; (3) thus, he ends up in a state of cosmic loneliness. Cosmic loneliness may be interpreted as the revelation of a common everyday experience translated into the mythical language of drunkenness. Hence, the structure of male drunkenness may be illustrated by the following triangle:



The lumberjack lyrics of the famous Finnish folk singer, Tapio Rautavaara, are particularly apt as a model text for this myth. In Rautavaara's ballads a man leaves his home with tears in his eyes, but sets off to seek his fortune with hope in his heart.

The mythological triangle must be interpreted historically in order to be comprehensible. The key to its interpretation is, in our view, to be found in the way the extracts illustrate the relation between women and male drunkenness, and this is something which also justifies our assimilation of women and society in the above triangle.

We have already noted that women are presented in two reciprocal and complementary positions in relation to men: as mothers/wives and as sexual beings. Drunkenness has the effect of driving a wedge between these attributes so that the two positions normally resolve into a tragic dualism. As mothers and wives women are merely figures of authority for men; they stop them drinking and act as the representatives of society, of normal life and of convention. As sexual beings, on the other hand, women are only present in drunkenness fictitiously and anonymously, the distant objects of unattainable pleasure.

These extracts make extraordinarily depressing viewing for those who look for signs of friendship or, indeed, tenderness, between men and women.

Such findings also surprise us, for we might rather have expected men to be present in such mythologies as part of nature, as

mothers and life-givers, etc. However, this peculiarity did provide us with the key to an historical interpretation of the mythology of drunkenness.

The opposition between women and alcohol is pure logical necessity at the level of the structure of the myth, since drunkenness in it appears external to society, an activity which avoids integration into ordinary life because authority and alcohol, society and drunkenness are incompatible. Escape becomes possible thanks to the collective solidarity of the circle of drinkers. But this is an empty solidarity, the only links between the drinkers being the bottle and the fact that they are male. What therefore remains on the side of society is a non-man without a bottle — in other words a woman.

#### Outline of a historical interpretation of the mythology of alcohol

Does the discovery of a mythological structure of this kind in the collective consciousness of Finnish society amount to proof of narcissistic awkwardness, or of a mutilated national character, or of some trauma which is peculiar to the male sex in general? Or alternatively, is this, as Lévi-Strauss would have it, something that is found in the universal mythological consciousness common to all human societies?

We reject none of these possibilities outright. However, we are particularly interested in the fact that the film-makers whose work we viewed, at the same time as they portrayed the mythology of drunkenness, also recorded forms of consciousness which relate to a specific historical state of Finnish society.

#### *Male fantasies and the crisis of patriarchy*

The extraordinary mythological position of women who represent social relations means that this study now enters the difficult area of the effect of social relations, and particularly those under capitalism, on relations between the sexes. This is, of course, a central question in the sociology of the family and is a theme which runs through much male and female writing today.

No author departs significantly from the view that whatever transformations capitalism in the course of its historical evolution



may have brought about in the relations between the sexes, it has not been able to break down conventional and normative relations. However, several interesting hypotheses have been put forward having to do with the relation between patriarchal norms and the condition of the salaried worker, especially under modern capitalism. Kiselberg (1979) distinguishes two "historical male identities" — the "traditional male role" and "manliness" (*mandighed*). According to Kiselberg, the former was typical of the bourgeois, patriarchal family in the pre-capitalist period. The head of such a family was strong-willed, argumentative and powerful. He fed the family and ruled over his wife. In the traditional male role, patriarchy was a reality (see Parsons's theories about sex roles within the family). However, the manly identity is, in Kiselberg's view, linked with the development of monopoly capitalism at the beginning of this century. It is based on the creation of a wage-earning class and on the power of the monopolies which effectively destroyed illusions as to the existence of an autonomous bourgeois subject or of an independent entrepreneur. Loss of power was felt not just at work but also in the family. The foundations of the traditional male role therefore began to crumble. At this stage women, marriage and the family were no longer the domain of an independent man but part of a social system to which man was subjected.

But although social change shattered the illusion of an autonomous bourgeois subject, it could not completely get rid of it. Thus the manly identity was transposed to an ideological level which was both imaginary and mythological. Traditional male qualities, such as decisiveness and independence, survived, but they were foisted onto mythological beings (such as Tarzan, Superman, the heroes of Westerns) who were detached from daily life. This in turn gave rise to male fantasies and new male communities to sustain them.

Theweleit's vast study of "male fantasies" (1980, pp. 1-11) links the male myth of the hero to man's historical loss of power (*Männlichkeit*) in a very similar fashion. The subject of Theweleit's work is the psychoanalysis of fascism; he therefore examines particularly closely the peculiarities of a military society. He analyzes the army as a particular kind of male community inside which male power is re-established and women and female qualities are repressed. Military communities and those which resemble them serve to sustain patriarchal norms which specifically emphasize the

power of men, and this is so not because patriarchy has always existed but, rather, because it has entered a state of crisis. Theweleit criticizes Prokop (1976, p. 328) for the somewhat simplistic view that patriarchy is disappearing from modern society, and suggests instead that "patriarchal habits and fantasies survive despite the disappearance of patriarchal relations...the fantasies survive, perhaps for the very reason that such relations are disappearing in reality".

There are some weak points in Kiselberg's theory. In particular, the social base of the "traditional male role" and of actual patriarchy in the pre-capitalist period is badly presented and difficult to follow, especially as far as the working class is concerned. The definition of patriarchy and its abolition in terms of power is also very vague. Finally, great problems are posed by situating patriarchy historically within the bourgeois family. However, both Kiselberg's and Theweleit's theories about the critical phase that patriarchy has entered, and the male fantasies created thereby, remain extremely interesting and tend to be borne out by our analysis of the film material. This material proves that male drunkenness is a fantasy of some kind, a dream in which social control and the women who represent it are eliminated, and men encounter the cosmos and nature in their own right without intermediaries.

*A case study in the crisis of patriarchy:  
"The Eight Deadly Bullets"*

One excellent attempt to give concrete form to this fantasy is to be found in Mikko Niskanen's film *The Eight Deadly Bullets*. This film may be thought of almost as a theoretically rigorous analysis of a social situation in which a conflict between man and society changes into a conflict between a man and a woman.

The film lasts over five hours and is based on real events. It describes the life and doings of a smallholder from Pihlajavesi in central Finland. The film's atmospheric build-up is extremely impressive and is an excellent illustration of the developing crisis that ends in violent conflict between the smallholder and the police.

In an extraordinarily skilful way, Niskanen links the downfall of Pasi, the smallholder, to alcohol and his wife. Pasi lives on a state-subsidized smallholding and he is extremely hard-working. He cuts wood, grows crops, gathers the harvest. He comes face to face with

nature everyday and he is strong. However, his efforts are increasingly seen to be in vain; he has hardly any money and is forced to live off nature.

Pasi also distils "moonshine". To begin with, this is just a hobby, something he does in slack periods when he is not working on the farm. But things go from bad to worse so that the liquor — and his consumption of it — rapidly become more than a hobby. At the end, this illegal activity is the only one which seems economically worth doing, and his other daily tasks take second place to making, selling and drinking the liquor.

Niskanen cleverly shows the way in which the time spent on moonshine is inevitably associated with the way in which the property slips from Pasi's hands. He shows how the gradual dilapidation of the farm affects the husband much more than the wife. Although other activities gradually come to a halt, the home continues to function. Niskanen is equally successful in showing how Pasi gradually moves away from his wife as moonshine becomes his exclusive preoccupation. In the end, she stops trying to save him — and the farm — and allies herself with the police against her husband (woman as an agent of control). For example, there is one scene in which the wife pretends to Pasi that he had been so drunk the previous night that he beat her and the children and drove them out into the cold. The wife constantly stresses that Pasi is violent when he is drunk and a threat to the children, even though Pasi is in fact touchingly gentle and good with his offspring, whether sober or drunk. Thus the final tragic scene has initially nothing dramatic about it. But with the help of her neighbours his wife calls the police, and this is what makes Pasi get out his gun to defend himself.

Niskanen's description of the relation between man, woman and alcohol corresponds in many respects to the mythological triangle which we sketched out above. The intimacy between a man and a woman, which almost seemed like friendship at the beginning, comes more and more strained until it finally degenerates into a man tragedy. It becomes an opposition between the controller and the controlled.

Alcohol and drunkenness are described in a number of symbolic ways — as procuring feelings of a cosmic nature, as an expression of primitive force, as the fantasy of a solitary and independent man. Thus when Pasi goes to check his liquor still, for example, he suddenly takes his gun and says he is going hunting.

The group of drinkers also plays an interesting part in terms of the film's plot development. The group noisily and openly defies the orders of the owner of the forest and the arrival of the police. However, Pasi is left alone at the end: his relation with society is transformed into an encounter with life and death, and he kills.

In this way, Niskanen incorporates into his film the mythological triangle at a certain stage of historical development, that of the disappearance of small agricultural producers and their culture. Niskanen's film shows how the relations of production in a peasant family are gradually broken, beginning with the man, since his activities are the first to cease, whilst the house and home continue to exist. The man is pushed out of these relations — and out of the family at the same time — and is thus pushed out of society.

### Conclusion and discussion

Our analysis of scenes of drunkenness in eleven films revealed some extremely interesting features of the social significance of drunkenness in Finnish society, and it opened up the possibility of linking the "Finnish way of drinking" to the recent social history of Finland.

In the light of these extracts, it would appear that, for a Finn, getting drunk is a mythological expression of the disappearance of peasant culture and of the creation of a class of wage-earners. This myth expresses the antagonism, in the male consciousness, towards the fact that capitalism is crushing peasant civilization and towards the way of life that capitalism brings.

How far can an antagonism of this kind be interpreted as a male fantasy in reaction against the destruction of patriarchal society of the kind suggested by Kiselberg and Theweleit? And how far would we be justified in calling this myth especially typical of Finnish society?

It is not surprising that the disappearance of a peasant civilization figures so strongly in the consciousness of the Finnish people. Between the two world wars Finland was one of the most agricultural countries in Europe (Alapuro, 1980) and this situation did not substantially change until the agricultural collapse of the 1960s. If Kiselberg's theories about patriarchal relations of production during the pre-capitalist period can be applied to peasant civilization, then the mythology of drunkenness could quite easily

be interpreted as a mythological expression of the destruction of patriarchy.

But here we run up against two problems. The first is that one of our "texts", *The Village Shoemakers*, is set in a period before the disappearance of peasant society, or rather in a period when that society was in the early stages of its development. It might also be added that the novel, *The Seven Brothers*, the nineteenth century masterpiece by Alexis Kivi, could equally well serve as a text illustrating the mythological triangle. The second problem arises when it is realized that one cannot assume that peasant society was particularly patriarchal. A smallholding is, in fact, a very egalitarian community in which the work is strictly divided out among all the members of the family, and in which the man has no more opportunities than the woman of taking decisions on his own about how the farm should be run.

It would therefore seem more useful to draw attention to the fact that in Finland, life on small farms is centered around the nuclear family. Whatever degree of patriarchy is to be found within this community, its crisis is also that of the family. And when a nuclear family is concerned, one which is already fairly isolated on the farm, the result is often that it is the man who becomes excluded from this community. The same phenomenon has been noticed among problem families in isolated suburbs (Kortteinen, 1982). Thus, although the disappearance of peasant civilization cannot explicitly be interpreted as the destruction of patriarchy, it nevertheless causes the position of men to deteriorate.

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## Notes

1. What we mean by metonymy is a verbal association in which sign and meaning belong together by convention or because both fall naturally into the same semantic category ("the Crown lands", smoke as an indicator of fire) or when a single element stands for a whole ("my hands' labour") (Leach, 1976, pp. 12-15).

2. What we mean by metaphor is a verbal association in which sign and meaning belong to different semantic categories ("the king is like the sun") (Leach, pp. 12-15).

## Appendix

*List of films referred to, in chronological order*

- Nummisuutarit* (The Village Shoemakers). Prod. Suomi-Filmi, 1923, Dir. Erkki Karu.
- Siltalan pehtoori* (The Steward of Siltala). Prod. Suomi-Filmi, 1934, Dir. Risto Orko.
- Kaksi Vihtoria* (The Two Victors). Prod. Eloseppo, 1939, Dir. Nyrki Tapiovaara.
- Sininen viikko* (The Blue Week). Prod. Suomen Filmitoimisto, 1954, Dir. Matti Kassila.
- Tuntematon sotilas* (Unknown Soldiers). Prod. Suomen Filmitoimisto, 1955, Dir. Edvin Laine.
- Mies täältä tähdelta* (A Man of Our Planet). Prod. Veikko Itkonen, 1958, Dir. Jack Witikka.
- Sissit* (The Patrol Group). Prod. Fennada-Filmi, 1963, Dir. Mikko Niskanen.
- Naisenkuvia* (Portraits of Women). Prod. Fj. Filmi/Jörn Donner Productions, 1970, Dir. Jörn Donner.
- Narrien illat* (Jesters' Nights). Prod. Mark-filmi, 1970, Dir. Tapio Suominen.
- Kahdeksan surmanluotia* (The Eight Deadly Bullets). Prod. Yleisradio (Radio Finland)/Televioteatteri (Television Theatre), 1972, Dir. Mikko Niskanen. (Length of original TV version: 5 hours 16 minutes.)
- Lampaansyöjät* (The Sheep Eaters). Prod. Filmi-Assä Oy, 1972, Dir. Seppo Huononen.

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