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‘THERE IS A TRACE OF YOU IN THE AIR OF THAT ROOM’*

Practices of Coping With Separation From Friends in Late-19th-Century Finland

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Delving into 19th-century women’s letters, one soon becomes aware that friendship between women was often expressed in a different way than is common today. Women’s letters paint a multifaceted picture of intimacy between women—of its codes of conduct, its ways of expression and of the central place of friendship in women’s lives. Homosociality was a fundamental component in the lifestyle of the elites and women, therefore, naturally spent much time together. The term ‘elite’ is understood here as a very heterogenous group of people from baronage to bourgeois or civil servant families. Although many elite women organized at least parts of their lives around their friends, one could not always be with them. It was unavoidable that sometimes a life change such as a marriage, new position or a long trip separated even the closest of friends.[1]

This chapter explores the ways in which Finnish elite women coped with separation from their friends between 1870–1902. This is done by analysing letters of four pairs of female friends: Augusta Hisinger and Mimmi Meinander, Alma Husberg and Minna Forss, Charlotte Wirzenius and Jenny Nordgren, and Vera Hjelt and Cely Mechelin. Although the women lived in a specific geographical context, their experiences of separation can be seen as case studies from which generalizations for 19th-century European women can be made. The Grand Duchy of Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. The women lived in an age of fast societal change, as Finland was on its way of becoming a nation-state. The end of the century was redefined by economic liberalization, industrialization, urbanization, mass mobilization and the birth of civil society. Strict social barriers were lowering, and education, wealth and respectable lifestyle began to matter more than ancestry. The rising new elites started to occupy public offices and took a central role in the project of nation-building.[2] For the women studied here, born in the Swedish-speaking middle- and upper-class families, these widespread changes brought new educational and professional opportunities. Many of them were among the first to obtain formal teacher’s education from the newly established teacher seminaries. Boarding schools and seminaries were opportune spaces for the genesis of new, intimate friendships across the widening elite classes.[3]

Among the women at the centre of this study, the question of friendship aroused intense and tender emotions as it did with their peers across Europe. In their eyes, the value of friendship was high: a good female friend was a precious treasure and one of life’s guiding lights. Overall, these views were inherent to the social climate of the period, as the late 19th-century Finnish elites

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recognized friendship as a topic worthy of serious deliberation. In their view, a true friendship was something more than a pleasant leisure activity filled with casual familiarity. Instead, both women and men yearned for a bosom friend with whom they could identify and share all their joys and worries. The ethical ideals of friendship were highly elevated, as the pursuit of perfect harmony of souls and consensus on major values were seen as the key demands of intimacy. As elsewhere in the Western world, the language used in the letters of the Finnish 19th-century elites was lavishly emotional and affectionate. While this strong emotional intensity may seem startling, the contents of these letters cannot be reduced to mere rhetoric. As many scholars have argued, the textual choices made by letter writers played an important role both in dealing with one's own emotions and in building close personal relationships. Indeed, for the late-19th-century Finnish women as for women elsewhere, correspondence provided an arena in which notions of friendship and longing could be both interpreted and reproduced. It goes without saying that many of these intimate friendships would deserve a queer reading. Because we have no evidence of the lesbian nature of the relationships discussed here, we will make no such assertion. It must be mentioned, however, that it was considered customary for female teachers to live together to preserve decency.[4]

Temporariness characterizes the longing examined in this chapter. It can be described as a strong desire for a missing friend that could be felt very physically, as if something were out of place. The longing women were not necessarily lonely, nor alone. Many of the women had their other friends and family around them whenever they wanted. The loneliness they felt was generated from the feelings the absence of a friend created. The loneliness explored here was a space or a moment in time without a certain friend. It can be further argued that the longing experienced by the late-19th-century Finnish women was in part enhanced by the combined effect of the societal demands imposed on womanhood. As women were accustomed to a strong sense of community and being constantly in service of others, it is no exaggeration to claim that they did not easily develop tolerance for being alone.[5] For a woman dedicated to her adored friend, long separation was an upheaval that plunged everyday life off its beaten track.

Thus, it cannot be denied that the women studied here were capable of suffering loneliness. Memory was for them a tool to alleviate their pain. In recent decades, memory has been a matter of intense scholarship; for example, Pierra Nora's concept *lieux de mémoire* has been useful to explore collective memory.[6] For the purposes of this chapter, individual memory is more central. To follow historian Dmitri Nikulin, it is the explicit or declarative memory of the longing friend that is in play. Nikulin writes,

> A widely accepted division of memory is that between the explicit (or declarative) and the implicit (or procedural), which parallels the distinction between thought and action. Within declarative memory, one distinguishes episodic memory of events of personal ('autobiographical') experience from semantic memory, which is the memory of facts and stands for knowledge that does not depend on a particular context or a concrete event in one's life.[7]

Hence, for the purposes of the present chapter, memory of autobiographical experience, episodic memory, is an analytical tool. A friend connects the memory of experience to 'those things, names and events that can be remembered'.[8] To remember we need techniques of memory, memorization and 'putting the remembered in imaginary loci'. Nikulin reminds us that this was

> well known and widely practiced in antiquity . . . putting an image representing the memorized thing in an imaginary place or location in a house, street, shelf or the like, in a certain order that corresponds to the order of things, events, or words to be memorized.[9]

Plato's concept of *anamnesis*, recollection, is also useful.[10] Recollection is needed because 'in order to be preserved, memory needs to be reproduced'.[11] To examine the process of recollection, this chapter separates the memory practices used by the 19th-century women in their letters into four categories. The first of them is letter-writing itself; the second mediated contacts with the longed-for person; the third is faith, dreams and astral ways; and the fourth category is emotional objects. We will explore these in order, beginning with letter-writing itself.

Correspondence as a Memory Practice

The lifelong friendship between a noblewoman[12] Augusta Hisinger (1841–1902) and a judge's daughter Mimmi Meinander (1838–1918) began when they, as children, studied at the same boarding school in Borgå (Porvoo).[13] In their youth, their friendship was fuelled by a lively correspondence and frequent visits. Their first major separation occurred in the late 1860s when Hisinger went on a study trip to continental Europe and then settled in Helsingfors (Helsinki). Both women stayed unmarried and ran their own schools for small children. Their professions made visits possible only during the holidays.[14] For Alma Husberg (1850–1905) and Minna Forss, née Rancken (1848–1931), teaching was both the reason for their separation and the vocation that originally brought them together. They became close during their studies at the teacher-seminary in Ekenäs (Tammisaari), and after they both graduated in 1875, they maintained their friendship through letter-writing. Husberg was a teacher in her hometown, Lovisa (Loviisa), and Forss in Nykarleby (Uusikaarlepyy) and Helsingfors.[15] Charlotte Wirzenius (1852–1934) and Jenny Nordgren née Jusélius (1853–1933) befriended each other as students in Heurlin's school for girls in Åbo (Turku). Their correspondence began in earnest after Nordgren concluded her studies and returned to Björneborg (Pori), where she worked as a teacher until she married a wealthy bank manager. Her friend Charlotte Wirzenius, a daughter of a judge, was orphaned at a young age. As with many other women in this study, she was one of the early graduates of the seminary in Ekenäs and made her life's work as a teacher.[16] Vera Hjelt (1857−1947) held a multitude of professional roles in her life; she, too, was an Ekenäs educated teacher. The recipient of Hjelt's letters, Cecilia 'Cely' Mechelin (1866–1950), was the only child of senator Leo Mechelin who spent much of her time taking care of her ailing parents and thus travelled much around Europe. Hjelt and Mechelin both lived in Helsinki and corresponded only when travelling.[17]

At the end of the 19th century, many practices of remembering were shared across the Western world. One of the most important was the active need to record daily life in letters, diaries, and memoirs. Even the most mundane memories were considered important enough to be captured and preserved for posterity.[18] As elsewhere in Europe, correspondence was a fundamental part of the lifestyles of the Finnish middle and upper classes. The responsibility for writing letters to maintain families' social networks was mostly left under women's purview. Letters were still written and read collectively, but as the century progressed, letter-writing became more and more private and intimate.[19] When friends rarely met each other, letters were crucial to the survival of the relationship. Even when the friends' separation was temporary, letters brought comfort and reminded both parties of the joy of future reunion.[20] This is why the present study not only uses letters as sources but also studies them and their writing as memory practice.

Letters served as a space where feelings of longing and loneliness could be grappled with concretely. After the death of her only sister Bertha, young Charlotte Wirzenius felt bereft and saw her future bleak. Despite the presence of many other friends, she missed her school friend Jenny Nordgren, who now lived in a different town. In her letters, Wirzenius reflected on the future plans they had made together and imagined how wonderful it would be to spend time together

again.[21] The longing Wirzenius felt for her friend was especially emphatic when she noticed the lack of her sister Bertha's constant presence:

> You know, when I sit here alone in the evenings, and the storm howls outside, it becomes so awful and empty around me, and though no one, no one can ever become what Bertha was to me, it would be fun to have a human being to talk to.[22]

Wirzenius' sorrow for her sister and her yearning for her friend became intertwined, and corresponding seemed to alleviate the pain of both.

At least from early modern correspondence onwards, much space in letters has been given to metatext, to comparing notes of sending and receiving letters.[23] In Vera Hjelt's case, this was also a way of remembering the friend. She gave much attention to longing for hearing from Cely Mechelin and, when she finally received a letter, to the immense joy she felt to be united with her friend in this way. Once Hjelt wrote that she was like a faithful dog, running along tracks to find the lost master, waiting, and never losing hope.[24] On another occasion, she wrote that after a letter from Mechelin had arrived she had walked around all day with the letter in her pocket. In her typical humorous way, she commented that she now had the very emancipated manner of walking with a hand in one's pocket (Figure 27.1, 27.2).[25]

Figure 27.1 Vera Hjelt (1857–1947).
Source: Helsinki City Museum.

Figure 27.2 Cely (Cecilia) Mechelin (1866–1950), 1890.
Source: Helsinki City Museum.

Letter-writing was conventionally interpreted as socializing and conversing with the letter's recipient.[26] Consequently, the importance of immediacy was emphasized in writing. Hjelt made a conscious effort to describe to Cely Mechelin the events that were taking place around her at the very moment she was writing. This was to make Mechelin part of the cosy homely activities, but also to bring Cely into those activities. Hjelt wrote about Anna shouting her greetings and Fanny popping in to say hello.[27] These women shared a home with her. The feeling of being part of loved ones' activities essentially eased longing. Historian Anne Ollila has written about the Finnish Hällström family who sat down to write letters together every Saturday. Thus, when the daughters were travelling, they knew how to connect with their family through the ritual of simultaneous writing. Sharing experiences through writing about them in their letters they increased the cohesion of their family.[28]

Timing was also of essence. Through letter-writing, women sought to ensure that separated friends were able to be present in each other's thoughts at the right time. In her letter, Alma Husberg, a recent graduate of the Ekenäs seminary, wanted to let her friend Minna Forss

know the most opportune time for a meeting of their minds. She wrote that if everything went well, she was going to meet three of their friends on the coming Sunday: 'think of us at that time, although our thoughts certainly always are with all of our beloved much-missed friends'.[29] Similarly, Vera Hjelt wanted to ensure that Cely Mechelin knew that, despite her absence, their group of friends was going to celebrate Cely's name day in the usual way during the morning coffee with the usual name day pastries.[30] Even if Hjelt's congratulatory letter would not reach her in time, she felt both Cely and the group would in this way join in the celebration, regardless of the distance. Although somewhat illusory, letters excelled as tools for cutting distances, diminishing the space between friends when they were separated. Much effort, as a result, was put into describing certain events to build up a sense of simultaneousness and acuteness.

Mediated Contacts as Memory Practice

While letter-writing brought great comfort to long-distance friends, it was not necessarily enough to alleviate their deep longing. Instead, many women strove to enshrine the memory of their friends through intentional and determined acts of recollection.[31] In their quest for remembrance, they attached value to various practices that can be called mediated contacts. A wide variety of objects or persons could be considered relevant, but the most important uniting factor was that they needed to have a significance in the absent friends' lives. Contacts with a friend's family members, or other blood relatives or friends, were helpful. This was the case, for example, with Alma Husberg who found much solace in the conversations she had by chance when she was on her way through the city of Borgå, where she visited an old seminary friend, Julia Winter, whom she had not seen in a very long time. To her surprise, Husberg also met Minna Forss' young fiancé there. Husberg found the visit wonderful in itself but explained in her letter to Forss that to hear her friend's fiancé talk about her added value to the meeting, as it helped Husberg cherish the memory of her dear friend.[32]

In friends' absence, the buildings, places and activities related to the friends' life carried similarly important meanings and acted as substitutes for the much-missed friend. A room could recall their presence. As a means of keeping the memory of a longed-for friend fresh, it was useful to fill a space with them. To accomplish this, Vera Hjelt would talk quietly to her absent friend Cely and read her letters repeatedly both aloud and silently.[33] She would go to the room where Cely had last been, as if a trace of her was indeed still there. In August 1901, when Cely Mechelin left Bromarv, where their group of friends had spent some joyful summer weeks, she left a huge void. Hjelt wrote that everyone had tried to fill it in their own ways. She herself sought solitude:

> When the horse took you, I hurried in. I resisted the invitation of the neighbours to have a cup of coffee with them. Instead, I sat on the red flowered couch on the veranda and contemplated in a warm and lively way of my darling Cely for an hour and a half until the maid brought me a cup of coffee.—Dearest Fanny was so happy that you had stayed in her room as she felt there was a trace of you in there left. This is what we often think when we go into that room.[34]

In October 1901, Hjelt wrote that she had been trying to find ways to alleviate her longing for Cely, given the long time she was spending in Stockholm. For this reason, she had visited Mechelin's grandmother's grave and had gone to see the dark windows of Mechelin's

empty apartment in Helsingfors.[35] A month later, she wrote that watching steamships in the harbour served as a way to meditate on Mechelin's absence. As the steamers were visible through her apartment windows, she could watch the ships from home. Sometimes she even used a pair of binoculars. The ships had a dual meaning—they had taken her friend away but would also someday return her.[36] She also attached much importance to the places connected to Mechelin's charity work with the blind. Mechelin, a typical only child of her high social class and time, dedicated her life not only to the well-being of her parents but also to philanthropic work. In her letters, Hjelt mentioned that she had decided to write an article for her Christmas magazine (*Julhälsning*) about the activities of blind people.[37] A bit later she and Anna Herzberg also visited the home for the blind people[38] that Mechelin had founded to leave a Braille version of a text translated by Herzberg, and noted that in there everything reminded her of Cely.[39] Perhaps surprisingly, learning English was a similar exercise in remembering, for Mechelin had taught Hjelt English in the past. Hjelt wrote, 'You cannot imagine how intensively I think of you when I study English. For me it is a memory of happier times. I have decided I will not let this dear memory fade.'[40] These less happy times referred not only to the friend's absence but also to the dire political situation in Finland, where everyone was on edge, wary of what they considered oppressive Russification. The Mechelins were in a precarious situation in leading the opposition to the emperor and defying censorship; sympathetic to the cause but less politically active, Hjelt conveyed subdued messages of the political climate at home and her personal sadness caused by her friend's absence in her letters.

However, as the letters indicate, the memory practices employed by the 19th-century women did not necessarily always fall within the scope of intentional memory, and thus, the link between a mediated contact and a much-missed friend could be elusive. Sometimes a tenuous situational resemblance was enough to prompt an act of remembrance. While on a holiday trip in the summer of 1875, Alma Husberg wrote to Minna Forss:

> Do you know that here lives a pastor Forstadius, whose family life in my opinion is very similar to your childhood home. I always think of you every time I am with them. It is, of course, my imagination that sets up this resemblance, but it is my pleasure to do so.[41]

As this quotation illustrates, not all mediated contacts began deliberately. Instead, they could come into being as a result of involuntary memory.[42] Husberg had most likely never visited the home of her friend's childhood, but the mental image of a lively parsonage that the Ranckens had inhabited was enough to delight her and alleviate the sorrow of their long separation. The similarity probably caught Husberg's eye, especially because the recent graduation and forthcoming entry into working life made the reunion with her seminary friends uncertain.

Faith, Dreams and Astral Ways as Memory Practices

In the 19th century, women who missed their loved ones commonly attempted to find solace in the spiritual realm. For example, Margaret Fuller, an American journalist and author, envisioned that the distance between her and the man she loved could be pierced with telepathy and angelic intervention.[43] Similarly, women in the Grand Duchy of Finland used the power of their

imaginations and faith to cope with separation from their friends. Although secularization began to increase in Finnish society towards the end of the century, religion still played a key role in women's lives as a source of comfort and support—and as elsewhere, in Finland, too, it took new forms.[44] Both men and women considered true friendship an irreplaceable and rare gift from God which needed to be tended carefully. So believed, for example, Augusta Hisinger, who, in her old age, described friendship as a compensation that she had received from God for the family members she had lost too early.[45]

Western ideas of friendship were so intertwined with Christian beliefs that a friend's love could be perceived as a type of grace and prayer as a way of deep bonding.[46] Many Finnish epistles of the period included heartfelt wishes that a distant friend would remember to pray on behalf of the letter writer. For example, in July 1875, Alma Husberg wrote wistfully of her hope that her 'Beloved Minna' would sometimes remember Husberg in her prayers. She expressed how reassuring it would be to know that she had a friend who would pray for her even when her own strength was running dry.[47] Prayer could thus be understood as a joint activity with the power to connect the minds of the separated friends and even ensure that they had a regular chance to reminisce about each other simultaneously—for example, during their evening or Sunday mass prayers.

Vera Hjelt was a Theosophist and therefore considered dreams and perhaps even astral ways a viable way of being in contact with her friend Cely Mechelin.[48] The descriptions of these devices were accompanied with humour as there are hints that Mechelin was not always equally enthusiastic about Hjelt's esoteric views. In 1899, Hjelt wrote how much she missed Mechelin and regretted that her clairvoyance did not reach beyond the Tiroler Alps—where the friend was travelling. She noted that she had dreamt of Mechelin and her family, and the vision had made her worry that they were not well.[49] However, not all dreams caused worry. In November 1901, she had dreamt how a large and beautiful bird had wrapped its wings around Mechelin and embraced her repeatedly. Hjelt had contemplated how well Mechelin deserved this act of love.[50] In July 1900, she was delighted to receive Cely's letter, and wrote that 'when you learn to read in astral light, you will see how I kiss the letter and am so, so happy!'[51] In 1901, when she was sitting in the steamship *Torneå* returning from Sweden, she wrote that Cely was more dear to her than ever. When she wrote, a drop of ink fell onto the paper. She considered the drop as an oracle answer that Vera's confessions of her feelings were welcome to Cely.[52]

When separated, close friends described numerous imagined ways to cross the long physical distances between them. This was not only specific to women—men also wrote how they could almost feel their missing friends' presence near them.[53] Many letters contained fantasies of flying or of instant transfers. For example, in 1879 Alma Husberg wrote to Minna Forss that if she could transfer her body directly into her friend's chamber, she would do it most gladly.[54] Similarly, writing from her terminally ill little sister's sickbed in 1871, Charlotte Wirzenius imagined a way to meet her school friend Jenny Nordgren:'Do you know how willingly I would be a little bird so I could fly there and see you at your home, but I would like to be invisible so you wouldn't notice me.'[55] This flight of fancy was prompted both by the yearning for an absent friend and by the fatigue and pain caused by the hopeless state of an ill sister. In her helplessness, Wirzenius longed for a moment's reprieve from the burdens she was carrying. Even for a moment, she wished to be free as a bird and find peace in the presence of her beloved friend. The imagined invisibility was to ensure that Wirzenius could have seen her friend at home in her most relaxed state—stripped of any needless social pretences (Figure 27.3).

Figure 27.3 Jenny Nordgren née Jusélius (1853–1933), 1894, carte de visit.
Source: Courtesy of Åbo Akademi University Library.

Emotional Objects as Memory Practices

Objects great and small could also serve as reminders of the tenderness between close friends and relieve the pain of a long parting. These so-called emotional objects, the fourth category in memory practices discussed here, gathered a manifold of emotional meanings and were used to create, negotiate and strengthen interpersonal relationships. According to Martin Lyons, love letters, locks of hair or similar items could become 'fetish-objects' that were caressed, kissed and, as we saw with Hjelt keeping Mechelin's letter in her pocket, carried around on one's person.[56] Such emotional strategies were not common only in heterosexual relationships, but also in intimate female friendships.

During major life changes, emotional objects provided feelings of security and happiness. After moving to her first own home in Helsingfors, Augusta Hisinger hoped to keep her dear childhood friend Mimmi Meinander close to her heart. One remedy for her longing appeared in a form of a lamp mat which Meinander had woven and gifted to her. 'That you knitted in a lot of kind thoughts and shared memories—that I know, and it seems as if my little lamp shines brighter whenever it stands on this mat', wrote grateful Hisinger in December 1870.[57] For Hisinger, it was important to furnish her new home with objects which reminded her of one the most important friendships in her life. With the power of shared memories, her new home seemed brighter and more comfortable.

Emotional objects were not only reminders of the feelings pertaining to friendship, as they could also represent a much-missed friend herself.[58] A good example was a pen that Cely Mechelin gifted to Vera Hjelt sometime in the spring of 1902. Hjelt went so far as to call the pen Cely and noted that[59]

> at these times when I have written so much, I have such great delight in the swan pen. You don't know how often I thank you for it. Just to think that you have given me two such things as Annie Besant's portrait and the pen. I look at the portrait daily with seriousness and warmth, and the pen I have nearly always in my hand. I don't have any other things to which I devote myself to as to these![60]

The importance of an emotional object was naturally emphasized when friends were separated from each other.[61] In separation overflowing affection for a friend needed to be channelled in a new way—devotion to an object could be seen as devotion to a friend. Hjelt's devotion to the pen was bodily—when holding the pen, she embraced her friend. Her closeness was further enhanced when she could look at Cely in a photograph. Indeed, photos were extremely important and certainly perhaps the most common emotional objects once photography became common. Compared to paintings, they were quick to prepare and less costly. Photographs were also often considered to be lifelikenesses. When Hjelt received new photographs of her friend and her adored parents, she promised to buy a triple frame for the pictures and set the frame up on her desk so that her eyes would then be able to rest on that esteemed and beloved group.[62] She clearly did what she promised and later wrote, typically again speaking to her friend in the third person, 'here I sit and watch Cely's photograph, and wink at her at times. One has to have some imagination, without it one would be completely poor!'[63]

Elizabeth Edwards points to photographs' 'relationship with their referent, their reality effect and their irreducible pastness, photographs impose themselves on memory'.[64] As if to emphasize the meaning of photographs as emotional objects, Hjelt returned to the triple photos in the following letter, and wrote that looking at Cely's father, Leo Mechelin, made her feel strong, looking at her mother Alexandra Mechelin made her feel noble, and looking at Cely made her feel warm.[65] Interestingly, she wrote that she wanted a new photo of Cely for Christmas. Cely was urged to tell the photographer that she must face the camera: 'I like portraits in which the sitter *looks at me*, not shows coiffure'.[66] This seems to suggest that Hjelt also wanted to keep up with the appearance of the friend, to keep her own remembrance of her realistic as time passed.

For Edwards,

> photographs are perhaps the most ubiquitous and insistent focus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century memory. The photograph infuses almost all levels of memory, even those of which it is not directly part. It constitutes a meta-value of memory construction, its tentacles spread out, blurring and constructing memory in its own insistent image.[67]

Photographs filled up the empty space that a friend's absence had created. While examining Naemi Ingman's diary entries from 1879, Ollila has observed how photographs of dear relatives were put in the place of absent loved ones on the Christmas Eve dinner table. The pictures were present for viewing purposes only, but it could still be imagined that the absent ones participated in the Christmas party and were present through their pictures.[68] As Edwards

posits, 'photographs express a desire for memory and the act of keeping a photograph is, like other souvenirs, an act of faith in the future'.[69] In Hjelt's thinking, this was expressly present as well. The distance to the friend, the narrow waters between Sweden and Finland, would soon carry her friend back.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the multivalent experience of loneliness by examining the ways in which the late 19th-century women made their friends present in their lives regardless of their physical absence. The women, who wrote the letters analysed here, were mostly, in Finnish terms, early women professionals, teachers who had the means to support themselves and thus to mould their lives to the direction of their own choosing. They made a myriad of different life choices which influenced their friendships. However, the freedom of steering one's own destiny did not always guarantee the possibility of staying corporally present in a friend's life. In addition to the traditional restrictions created by marriage and travel, entering the workforce brought with it its own unique challenges.

The friendships studied in this chapter were of significant length which served to strengthen the emotional ties between the friends—and made loneliness, being without the friend, certainly even more intense. The long duration of the friendships also helps when we ponder whether the expressions of longing were mere rhetoric. They were not: even if they followed their culture's customary patterns and rhetoric guidelines and moved within the allowed scale of feeling and intimacy, they found personal, intimate and witty expressions for their longing.

Loneliness and longing for an absent friend are recurrent themes in the correspondence of the women studied. The letters convey a wealth of memory practices to which the women resorted both in order to alleviate their loneliness and to surpass it. Correspondence itself served as a link, even though it sometimes took days to reach the travelling friend. Correspondence was an important means to alleviate the pain of longing. The culture of friendship was transnational and widely shared in the Western world—for example, through literature.

In many ways, the techniques of memory the women revealed in their letters were tangible. As Nikulin reminds us, a practice known from the antiquity, 'putting an image representing the memorized thing in an imaginary place or location' is exactly what these women did. Through this ancient idea it becomes clear that convention is a tool for expression, not a prison. Instead of looking into the friend's eyes, the women would look into the eyes of a friend in a photograph and strengthen their friendship regardless of the physical distance between them. Similarly, there were memorabilia, emotional objects, to remember friends by and physical spaces where the friends' presence had left its marks, be these concrete or imaginary, engendering a forceful emotional spatiality to work against loneliness. There were the rooms where the friends had slept, the apartment buildings in which they lived, and the friends' relatives or even people who just happened to remind them of their friends.

As this chapter has shown, absence did not necessarily need to mean lack of intimacy even though it caused loneliness. It is rather that absence required intimacy to change its forms. In a way, mediated intimacy, such as staring at portraits and holding a pen, brought back the desired state of presence even though it was an illusion and strengthened friendship in situations where it otherwise would have been in danger of dissolving. In this way, loneliness was a means to bring oneself closer to the absent friend, create a space where one could interact with memories and perhaps use various objects to narrow the geographical gap between friends.

Notes

* This chapter is based on the conference presentation by MK at the ESSHC Belfast 2018; the overall conception and the case of Vera Hjelt originates from that paper and her work. MV has further developed the ideas and brought the other pairs of friends into the discussion.

1 Eva Helen Ulvros, *Fruar och mamseller: Kvinnorna inom sydsvensk borgerlighet 1790–1870* (Lund: Historiska Media, 1996), 195, 209; Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 39–40.

2 Kaarlo Wirilander, *Herrasväkeä. Suomen säätyläistö 1721–1870* (Helsinki: Suomen historiallinen seura, 1974), 395–8; Irma Sulkunen, 'The Mobilisation of Women and the Birth of Civil Society', in *The Lady with the Bow: The Story of Finnish Women*, ed. Merja Manninen and Päivi Setälä, trans. Michael Wynne-Ellis (Helsinki: Otava 1990), 42–53; Hanna Elomaa,'Suomi 1800-luvun loppupuolella', in *Rakkautta, ihanteita ja todellisuutta: Retkiä suomalaiseen mikrohistoriaan*, ed. Katriina Mäkinen and Leena Rossi (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1996), 15–21.

3 Anne Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus.Virkanaisena 1800-luvun lopun Suomessa* (Helsinki: SKS, 2000), 123–6.

4 Mimmi Meinander's collection, vol 1, Hisinger to Meinander, Wasa, 25 Mar. 1867, Åbo Akademi University Library (ÅAUL), Manuscript Collections (MC); Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus*, 133–5, 199–28; Vesa Vares, *Helmi Krohn 1871–1913. Naisen velvollisuusetiikka ja yksilön ratkaisu* (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 2005), 73–5; Anu Lahtinen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen and Kaisa Vehkalahti,'Kirjeiden uusi tuleminen', in *Kirjeet ja historiantutkimus*, ed. Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, Anu Lahtinen and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 9–27 (15–16); Reetta Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi: Aate, tunteet ja sukupuoli Tengströmin perheessä 1800-luvun puolivälissä* (Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto, 2019), 25–6, 37, 195–201. For a queer reading for Vera Hjelt's friendships, among others, Rita Paqvalen, *Queera minnen. Essäer om tystnad, längtan och motstånd* (Helsingfors: Schildts & Söderströms, 2021).

5 Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus*, 104–13.

6 Dmitri Nikulin,'Introduction', in *Memory: A History*, ed. Dmitri Nikulin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14–15.

7 Ibid., 5–6.

8 Ibid., 17.

9 Dmitri Nikulin,'Memory in Ancient Philosophy', in *Memory*, ed. Nikulin, 35–84 (35–6).

10 Ibid., 44.

11 Ibid., 59.

12 In the Finnish context, nobility refers to the wide class of nobles, not only the high aristocracy. The nobles had their privileges and served as an estate at the Diet.

13 Since the women studied here were Swedish-speaking, Swedish placenames are used throughout, and when mentioned for the first time, the Finnish equivalent, if one exists, is given in brackets. *Bromarv* and *Viitasaari* are written in their modernized form.

14 ÅAUL, MC, Mimmi Meinander's collection, vol. 1, Augusta Hisinger to Mimmi Meinander, Lausanne 1869; Helsingfors 8 Oct. 1870; vol. 2, Biographical note 1 and 2. The envelope for the notes; 'Mimmi Meinander', *Borgåbladet*, 5 Sept. 1918, no 73; Mia Grönstrand, *W.R.B.G.: Walter Runeberg: elämä ja taide* (Norderstedt: BoD-Books on Demand, 2021), 142.

15 Gunnar Forsander, *Ekenäs seminarium: Matrikel 1871–1971* (Ekenäs: Ekenäs seminarium, 1971), 80, 129; Henrika Zilliacus-Tikkanen, *När könet började skriva. Kvinnor i finländsk press 1771–1900* (Helsingfors: Finska vetenskaps-societeten 2005), 148–54; Miira Vuoksenranta, 'Ystävyys kuin virvatuli—löystyvät ystävyyden siteet entisten Tammisaaren seminaarilaisten kirjeissä 1870-luvulla', *Ennen ja Nyt: Historian tietosanomat* 21, no. 1 (2021): 22–43 (25).

16 Göta Tegengren, 'Matrikel över lärare och elever i Heurlinska skolan i Åbo', in *Heurlinska skolan i åbo, en minnesskrift: 1961* (Åbo: Heurlinska skolan, 1962), 105–315 (209, 311); Forsander, *Ekenäs seminarium*, 164.

17 Marjo Kaartinen,'Vera Hjelt and the Calling of Theosophical Universal Work, 1894–1904', *Approaching Religion* 1 (2018): 17–30.

18 Tutta Palin, 'Kuvia menneisyydestä. Muistojen tuottamisesta 1800-luvun loppupuolen säätyläiskulttuurissa', in *Aina uusi muisto: Kirjoituksia menneen elämisestä meissä*, ed. Katarina Eskola and Eeva Peltonen (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 1997), 254–5; Anne Ollila, *Aika ja elämä. Aikakäsitys 1800-luvun lopussa* (Helsinki: SKS, 2000), 64.

19 Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, *Kirjoittaen maailmassa. Krohnin sisaret ja kirjallinen elämä* (Helsinki: SKS, 2006), 64–5; Ulvros, *Fruar och mamseller*, 23–8.

20 Ollila, *Aika ja elämä*, 58–9.
21 ÅAUL, MC, Jenny Nordgren's collection, Charlotte Wirzenius to Jenny Nordgren, Åbo, 23 Oct. 1872; Åbo, 21 Jan. 1873.
22 ÅAUL, MC, Jenny Nordgren's collection, Wirzenius to Nordgren, Åbo, 21 Jan. 1873.
23 Ulvros, *Fruar och mamseller*, 27–8; Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen,'Intertextual Networks in the Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 5, no. 2 (2004): 255–69.
24 The National Archives of Finland (NA), Cely Mechelin's Collection, Box 3, Vera Hjelt's letter to Cely Mechelin, Helsingfors, 24 Nov. 1901 and Bromarv, 13 Aug. 1899. All Hjelt's letters referred to are from this collection, Box 3.
25 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors 10 Nov. 1901.
26 Ollila, *Aika ja elämä*, 20–1.
27 Hjelt to Mechelin, [Bromarv] Favorita, 16 June 1901.
28 Ollila, *Aika ja elämä*, 20–2; Kai Häggman, *Perheen vuosisata. Perheen ihanne ja sivistyneistön elämäntapa 1800-luvun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1994).
29 ÅAUL, MC, Rancken, släkten, vol 1, Alma Husberg to Minna Forss, Lovisa, 31 Oct. 1875.
30 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors, 17 Nov. 1901.
31 Hanna Elomaa, *Idylliä etsimässä: Identifikaatiot ja itseymmärrys tammisaarelaisessa sivistyneistöperheessä 1880-luvulta 1930-luvulle* (Turku: k&h, 2006), 234–6. See also Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998).
32 ÅAUL, MC, Rancken, släkten, vol 1, Husberg to Forss, Lovisa, 16 Feb. 1880.
33 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors, 9 Dec. 1901.
34 Ibid., [Bromarv] Favorita, 23 Aug. 1901.
35 Ibid., Helsingfors, 26 Oct. 1901.
36 Ibid., 3 Nov. 1901.
37 Ibid., 26 Oct. 1901.
38 This institution still carries her name, as it functions as Celia, a national centre for accessible literature and publishing in Finland of the Ministry of Education and Culture.
39 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors, 24 Nov. 1901.
40 Ibid., 28 Sept. 1904.
41 ÅAUL, MC, Rancken, släkten, vol 1, Husberg to Forss, Viitasaari, 19 July 1875.
42 For example, Palin, *Kuvia menneisyydestä*, 258–9; Ollila, *Aika ja elämä*, 76–7.
43 William Merrill Decker, 'Longing in Long-Distance Letters: Nineteenth Century and Now', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter-Writing*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier, Judie Newman and Matthew Pethers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2016), 171–84 (173).
44 Ollila, *Jalo velvollisuus*, 147.
45 Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi*, 199; ÅAUL, MC, Mimmi Meinander's collection, vol 1, Hisinger to Meinander and Emilia Mallén, undated.
46 Marcus, *Between Women*, 62–6.
47 ÅAUL, MC, Rancken, släkten, vol 1, Husberg to Forss, Viitasaari, 19 July 1875.
48 Kaartinen,'Vera Hjelt', 17–30.
49 Hjelt to Mechelin, Bromarv, 7 Aug. 1899.
50 Ibid., Helsingfors, 10 Nov. 1901.
51 Ibid., Bromarv, 6 July 1900.
52 Ibid.,'Out on the Blue Waves', 13 June 1901.
53 Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi*, 197–8.
54 ÅAUL, MC, Rancken, släkten, vol. 1, Husberg to Forss, Saturday evening, 4 Oct. 1879.
55 ÅAUL, MC, Jenny Nordgren's collection, Wirzenius to Nordgren, Åbo, 9 June 1871.
56 Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 179; Heini Hakosalo, 'Tubipommi ja rautlasi: emotionaalisia esineitä 1900-luvun alkupuolen suomalaisissa tuberkuloosiparantoloissa', *Historiallinen aikakauskirja* 114, no. 2 (2016): 165–76 (167); Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi*, 47.
57 ÅAUL, MC, Mimmi Meinander's collection, vol 1, Hisinger to Meinander, Helsingfors, 9 Dec. 1870.
58 For example, Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi*, 47.
59 Hjelt to Mechelin, Bad Neuenahr, 27 May 1902.
60 Ibid., Bromarv, 1 Aug. 1902. In the next letter, she writes that there has been a terrible accident: the pen fell and broke. She will send it to Stockholm (to Charlotte Busch) the next day to be fixed. Hjelt to Mechelin, Bromarv, 12 Aug. 1902.

61 Eiranen, *Lähisuhteet ja nationalismi*, 47.
62 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors, 26 Oct. 1901.
63 Ibid., 17 Nov. 1901.
64 Elizabeth Edwards,'Photographs as Objects of Memory', in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), 221–36 (222).
65 Hjelt to Mechelin, Helsingfors, 24 Nov. 1901.
66 Ibid.
67 Edwards,'Photographs', 221.
68 Ollila, *Aika ja elämä*, 64–5.
69 Edwards,'Photographs', 222.