

**Irene Virtala**

## **Matti Kurikka**

**Emigrant writer and feminist**

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## Matti Kurikka – Emigrant writer and feminist

Matti Kurikka (1863-1915) was a pioneer in emigration and the promotion of women's issues. Kurikka was only nine when his long path as an emigrant began with a move to Helsinki from Tuutari in Ingria; during adulthood his path took him to three continents (Europe, Australia and North America).

A personal background in emigration, the Geigerstam dispute, and the ambience of Minna Canth's tendentious plays and the literary salon left their marks on Kurikka's choice of topic for his plays. The defence of a relative sexual ethic which began in his play *Aili* in 1887 continued in the Finnish-Canadian magazine *Aika* (Time) 1901-1904, and later on in the Finnish magazine *Elämä* (Life) 1905-1908 and the Finnish-American *New Yorkin Uutiset* (News from New York) 1912-1915. The question of relative sexual ethics which had earlier been given a markedly social treatment was later intertwined with a deeper tradition of religion and philosophy.

Anticlericalism, which has often been perceived as part of Kurikka's literary manifesto, meant for him a comprehensive theological project of pulling the construction down. None of the partial truths presented by the established schools prevented him from his unconditional search for truth. Kurikka is critical especially of the significant decisions made throughout history at synod meetings to which the origins of the patriarchal bias which has resulted in the oppression of women can be traced. The Nicene Council in the 5th century which declared man as the sole reflection of God simultaneously legalised the dependence of women on men. Women were left outside the world of legal rights. Along with demands for the abolition of private ownership, Kurikka also acknowledged the importance of the liberation of women from the feelings of inferiority and guilt laid upon them by the views of the church.

At the turn of the century, churching was still a widely used practice in the Nordic countries. This tradition sounds strange these days and can only be understood by looking at it historically. The custom was based on Mosaic law on the impurity of a woman who has given birth, and involved a certain compulsory period of quarantine that followed giving birth and ended when the church took the women back into its protection, i.e. she had to pay the priest an offering. If the woman who gave birth was unmarried, she was subjected to much shame and reprimand. Great numbers of new-born children have been killed as a result of this ideology. Kurikka was a fierce opponent of clerical power and these kinds of forms of earning money. By spreading information Kurikka believed it would be possible to conquer the prejudice connected with motherhood.

Kurikka aimed to find knowledge from the pre-Christian era, from holy texts other than the Bible, from Indian mythologies and the *Kalevala*, and also from ancient matriarchal societies. He aimed to prove that women had the right to a religious and philosophical position alongside men.

An ancient Indian transcript, *Viides evankeliumi* (The Fifth Gospel), which Kurikka translated into Finnish in 1906, provided plenty of evidence for the equal religious and philosophical position of women; he also cited this work in his articles in *Elämä*. The ancient heroes of the *Kalevala* were each other's equals. Fourier, Saint-Simon, More, Owen, and the Oneida community carried out a manifesto that aimed at equality. Dauthenday's

Uusi rakkaus. Kirja kypsyeille hengille 1902. (New Love. A book for Mature Spirits, German original Das Neue Weib und Ihre Liebe 1901, Finnish translation 1902), which had belonged to Kurikka's original book collection, partly represented the model of the new woman of the turn of the century. Within this model the women seeks new ways of life while waiting for her manly partner's psychological growth out of his polygamic drive. According to the principles of theosophy, it can be proved self-evidently that the sexes are equal in the eyes of the deity. Finns, Väinös's sons as well as his daughters, were in Kurikka's dreams representatives of high spirituality, as Madame Blavatsky had also pointed out in her review of Kalevala in Lucifer 13/1888. Emigrants were the spiritual aristocracy of their people.

The theoretical developments advancing the position of women since Kurikka's times have been far-reaching. Many of Kurikka's daring thoughts are taken for granted nowadays; others resemble the manifesto of today feminist theologians. Kurikka's intellectual cultural contribution is full and fascinating, especially from the perspective of women's history.

**More information on Matti Kurikka and Sointula:**

<http://www.island.net/~sointula/>

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/vol2/no25/sointula.html>

[http://www.nordicway.com/places\\_sointulla.htm](http://www.nordicway.com/places_sointulla.htm)