



Selecting and Editing of Readers' Letters in the Late 19th-Century Finnish Press

Satu Sorvali

To cite this article: Satu Sorvali (08 Oct 2023): Selecting and Editing of Readers' Letters in the Late 19th-Century Finnish Press, *Media History*, DOI: [10.1080/13688804.2023.2265406](https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2023.2265406)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2023.2265406>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 08 Oct 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

SELECTING AND EDITING OF READERS' LETTERS IN THE LATE 19TH-CENTURY FINNISH PRESS

Satu Sorvali

This article shows that readers' letters were selected and edited in late 19th-century Finnish newspapers for a variety of reasons. The criteria for selection and editing fit the four rules identified by professor of journalism Karin Wahl-Jorgensen for the selection of readers' letters in modern newspapers and it also demonstrates the 1890s newspapers' role as gatekeepers and the continuing professionalization of journalists. The editors considered the selection and editing of readers' letters demanding and frustrating, but they also saw themselves as men of principle, the defenders of the free word. The research sources include the correspondence columns and the editors' writing instructions to the readers in the 1890s press of the Grand Duchy of Finland.

KEYWORDS 19th century; Grand Duchy of Finland; letters to the editor; newspapers; press; reader letters

Introduction

As new modern politics developed in the late 19th century Grand Duchy of Finland, the state was forced to justify its use of power by a broader group of citizens than previously. Civil society was founded as a part of this process and newspapers played a major role as an institute that made modern publicity possible. Newspapers had a significant role in civilizing and educating people but by the 1890s they had also gained a new task, that of shaping public opinion. They offered a central arena for mass politics that took advantage of utilizing emotions. By the end of the century, almost half of the population could read and write, and the number of newspapers had rapidly increased.¹ Newspapers thus became a part of everyday life in every class of society. Citizens could express their thoughts and feelings on social matters in the columns devoted to readers' letters; these columns also partly displayed the ideology of the strongly politicized newspapers. New modern publicity and the upsurge in education encouraged people to have new kinds of individuality where an increasing number of people from different classes and statuses could publicly take a stand on societal issues and in so doing build a world where all classes were connected. Despite this, the debate between citizens was not entirely free but censored by the authorities working for the Russian Empire and moderated and mediated by the newspapers' editors.

This article considers the selection and editing of letters to the editor in the late 19th century Grand Duchy of Finland as a sign of the professionalization of journalism. The publication of readers' letters has a long history both in Finland and internationally.² In the late 19th century, newspapers were produced with considerable help from outside contributors, for example, from readers sending in news, opinion pieces, and notices; however, the editors had a great deal of responsibility for what was published in the paper. The article extends the understanding of the role of late 19th-century newspapers as gatekeepers and the process of the professionalization of journalists as part of the modernizing press. The selection and editing criteria can shed light on the shaping of readers' letters according to journalistic criteria. My questions, therefore, are on what basis were the letters selected and edited and what does this reveal about the newspapers' gatekeeping process and the development of professionalization among journalists?

In the late 19th century Finnish newspapers, the readers' letters expressing opinions were separated into two columns with different functions, letters to the editor and rural letters. The latter was also called local letters in the context of the mid-19th century until the 1870s. Letters published in the letters to the editor column, which in most cases was headlined 'From the public', were written using the conventions and style of opinion writing. The topics varied considerably, but the letters only addressed one subject at a time.³ The rural and local letters, which were usually published in columns headlined 'From the countryside', were often report-like news covering many topics from a specific village or county that was mentioned in the sub-headline of the text.⁴ Only half of the writers mentioned a location in the 1890s letters to the editor.⁵

I am especially interested in the letters to the editor, but the editors and readers of the late 19th century did not explicitly make a difference between letters to the editor and rural letters – they would bundle them together and refer to them as 'readers' letters' or 'sent-in letters'. They did not yet have the name and concept of 'letters to the editor', although the institution and the phenomenon already existed. I do not consider this a significant problem as the same selection and editing rules applied to both.

To date, the selection and editing of late 19th-century letters to the editor has not been systematically studied with large data sets or with the necessary precision, either in Finland or internationally, perhaps because of what Allison Cavanagh, a historian of journalism, has suggested - that the details of the selection and editing of letters to the editor might be lost or there is no information as to what extent it was executed.⁶ Some historians have dealt with the subject briefly, for example, professor emeritus of history Ralph Shaffer in his research on the 1880s *Los Angeles Times*, historian Sarah Pedersen in her studies on two early 20th-century Scottish newspapers, and historian Andrew Hobbs in his work on late 19-century English newspapers.⁷ In addition, folklorist Laura Stark briefly dealt with selecting and editing choices in her research on Finnish local letters in the 1860s.⁸

Professor of journalism, Karin Wahl-Jorgensen has identified four rules used to select letters to the editor in the newspapers of the late 1990s: brevity, relevance, entertainment, and authority. Brevity indicated that the letters should be under 300 words long and relevance that the letters were supposed to address topical, interesting, and relevant matters. Entertaining letters inspired the public to participate in the discussions and they were for example provocative and 'spicy', which I interpret as the emotions expressed in the letter.

According to Wahl-Jorgensen, the rule of authority denoted that the selection was influenced by the social background of the author and it was subtle and harder to detect. Wahl-Jorgensen also included in this category the letters with a poor grammatical or writing style.⁹ I will argue in this article that these modern categories also largely applied to the Finnish press of the 1890s.

Unfortunately, there has preserved hardly any original letters to editors in Finnish archives. There are clear indications that more letters were sent to the newspapers than they could publish¹⁰ so the number of letters must have been great. Perhaps the editors did not think the letters were important at the time and of course, a considerable problem was the lack of archival space. This seems to have been an international issue as Shaffer and Pedersen report the same situation with the newspapers they studied.¹¹

Fortunately, there are other sources that can be examined. Some of the newspapers published correspondence columns through which the editors could give feedback, answer questions and give advice to the readers that had sent their texts to the newspapers. The column was given the subtitle caption of either 'Correspondence' or 'Letter-box'.¹² The notes and answers to the public were usually quite short, just a few lines, sometimes just one word, and neutral in tone, but they provide important information about the selection of the readers' letters. Usually, the editors would tell the authors why their texts were not being published or what they needed to do to get them published. These correspondence columns were also published, for example, in some 19th-century British and Swedish newspapers.¹³

The 19th-century Finnish newspapers are digitized, and they can be searched and browsed in the National Library of Finland's Digital Service. I used columns' headings as the search words and limited the search to 1895, the same year I have researched earlier with my studies of letters to the editor. Because of optical character recognition errors,¹⁴ I also made searches with wrongly spelled words such as 'Breilåda' or 'Breflåda'. I obtained over 400 results with all these searches and then went through them individually and found 358 suitable columns. I included in my research only the notes that dealt with the rejection reasons of readers' letters and got as result 197 correspondence columns.

In 1895, there were 65 newspapers in the bilingual Grand Duchy of Finland, and 59 of them published, at least occasionally, readers' letters. Of these newspapers, 37 were in Finnish and 22 in Swedish.¹⁵ Correspondence columns were published in at least 42 newspapers in 1895. This means that over 70% of the newspapers publishing readers' letters communicated with their readers via this column.

Since it is not possible to compare the published letters with the originals, the quality of editing must be examined in other ways, for example by looking at the instructions that the editors gave to their readers. For that purpose, I gathered several Finnish and Swedish-speaking newspaper articles from the 1890s that provided information about the selection and editing processes. I used various search words and phrases and different operators such as proximity search and Boolean operators.¹⁶

I will first describe the background process when making publishing and editing decisions and the most common reasons for rejection. I will then discuss the rejection reasons and editing in more detail from the perspective of the four selection rules of Wahl-Jorgensen (Picture 1).

emphasized that the readers possess different skills as writers: 'A great deal of the newspaper's public are probably grateful to the editor when he throws all the inferior products of geniuses to the paper bin despite of the cry raised by those pen-pushers themselves about the supposed autocracy, tyranny, oppression and so on of the newspaper editor.' He called for the editors' skills, diligence, and attention to detail to gain support from every thinking and impartial citizen in the newspaper's public.²¹

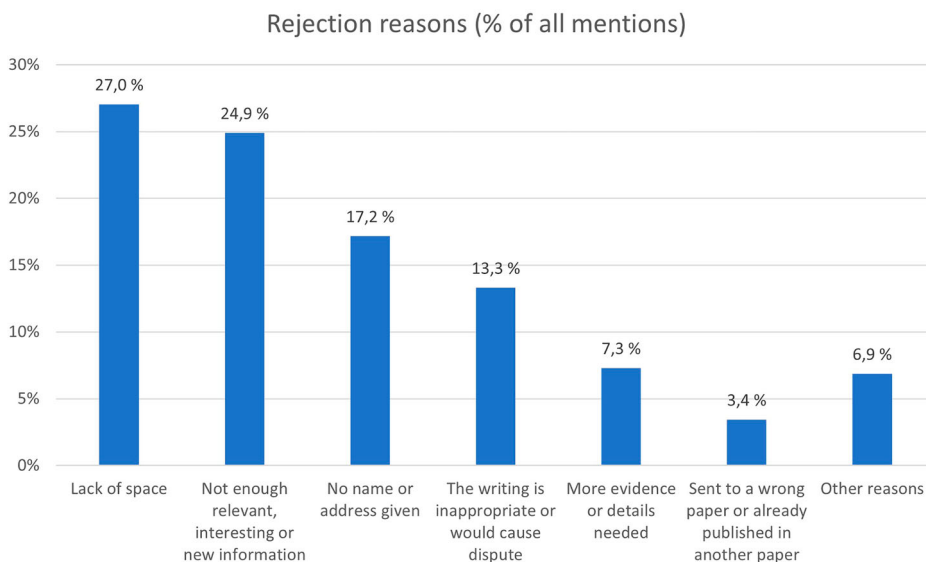
The decision to reject a letter was often difficult as the editors feared the writers would not understand the decision and would stop their subscription to the paper. Therefore, they sometimes humbly apologized in advance for their decisions.²² The editor of the national newspaper *Uusi Suometar*, pointed out that many editors did not want to print everything that was sent to them but in the current poor financial situation they were forced to publish too many letters they disliked to please the public's demands.²³

Sometimes the editors were forced to publish letters according to the law, as newspapers were obliged to publish a correction or response from a reader who felt offended by something published earlier in the same newspaper.²⁴ Readers often invoked this 'printing law' when sending an angry response to letters in the editor's column.²⁵ Some editors complained that the work of the journalist was heavy and difficult, and readers seemed to be constantly dissatisfied with the content of the newspaper. However, they acknowledged that the newspaper and the public benefited from each other.²⁶

According to Wahl-Jorgensen, the increased discussions in letters to the editor about the ethics of journalism from the second half of the 19th century until the early 20th century indicate the developing professionalization process of journalists.²⁷ This was also seen in the Finnish newspapers as some of the readers would comment bitterly on the choices made as regards the editing, selecting, and commenting on the readers' letters.²⁸ These remarks surely made the journalists reflect on their practices and develop them. However, these kinds of statements were not published very often. It is plausible that the letter writers, for example, because of a feeling of shame, kept the rejection to themselves but it is also possible the newspapers did not publish statements like these. In addition, the letter writers had the opportunity to offer their letters to another newspaper if it was rejected in one. Sometimes this was used as a weapon in the fierce competition between Finnish newspapers in the 1890s. For example, the editor of a regional newspaper *Haminan Sanomat* made fun of the rival paper *Wiipurin* and stated that they published all the readers' letters *Haminan Sanomat* had rejected, implying they had extremely lower standards and quality checks.²⁹

There were 233 mentions of rejections in the 197 correspondence columns. Most concerned one specifically identified letter, but rejections for lack of space and anonymity were relayed to several letters and were not identified separately (Figure 1).

Lack of space was the most mentioned rejection reason with 63 mentions, but to be precise, delays in the publication were normal and usually, the publication of a letter was only postponed. The journalists agreed in their general meeting in 1898 that the newspapers would publish only one response per reader per subject and this was justified by the lack of space.³⁰ I have no information on how well this was followed, but in 1895 the newspapers would sometimes publish 3–4 responses per reader on one subject.³¹ There is no indication there was a limit on the number of letters per person, and every reader, theoretically, could try to get as many letters published as they wished.³²

**FIGURE 1.**

The most common reasons for rejection (mentioned in the correspondence column).

The third most common reason for rejection with 40 mentions was that the authors had not provided their names and address to the editor which had to be done although the letter could be published anonymously or with a pseudonym.³³ The law stipulated that newspapers had to know the names of the authors of every newspaper article.³⁴ Lawsuits involving the press and insults of honor were common throughout the late 19th century and were often brought against both the author and the editor.³⁵ The editors gave assurances that names would be kept secret if required and only supplied to the authorities in legal cases.³⁶ The Finnish press was not an exception, as the author's name was also demanded by American and British newspapers.³⁷

I did not include the lack of space and the demand to provide names and addresses in the selection categories of Wahl-Jorgensen because there was usually no need to consider these aspects. Either there was space for another letter or there was not, and the name and address were provided or not – which led the letter to being rejected.

The second most common reason for rejection was mentioned 58 times: the lack of relevant or interesting information. The fourth most mentioned rejection reason with 31 cases was that the editors considered the letter inappropriate, too sarcastic, or harsh, or because the editors did not want to support disputes in their newspapers. The editors demanded more evidence or details to support the claims in 16 cases which makes it the fifth most common rejection reason. The sixth most common reason was that the letter was sent to the wrong newspaper from the perspective of the editors. In the following, I will go through these reasons for rejection and the editing criteria in detail from the perspective of Wahl-Jorgensen's four categories of selection: brevity, relevance, entertainment, and authority.

Selection and Editing Criteria

Brevity

Some letters were immediately rejected because of their length and some letters were shortened by leaving parts out of the text or by summarizing the text. For example, the national newspaper *Uusi Suometar* stated in 1893 that they often had to shorten the letters because of the lack of space.³⁸ The regional newspaper *Uusi Savo* gave some advice: 'Be brief. Save the readers' and your own time. Your basic rule should be facts, no platitudes, and no idle musings.'³⁹

The readers understood that a long piece of writing that did not summarize the key message would not be published.⁴⁰ The newspapers did not give any specific limits like a maximum number of words, so what was considered 'too long' likely varied from one issue to another and was ultimately left to think for the readers themselves. Some papers published quite long letters, sometimes divided between two different issues.⁴¹

Relevance and Entertainment

The relevance and entertainment aspects of the letters were intertwined as will be shown next.

In some notes, the editors said that the particular issue had already been covered sufficiently in the newspaper and that everything had already been said. Sometimes, the editors said that a better report on the same matter would be given later or that the writing was too trivial to raise interest among other readers. The editorial secretary of *Wiipurin Sanomat* reminded: 'Remember that you are writing for the whole audience, not just for yourself or some of your neighbors'.⁴²

Sometimes the subject was considered no longer topical. The editors advised writing about a topical issue immediately and posting it as soon as possible.⁴³ When the writer was in the lucky situation of living in the same city as the newspaper's office, he or she could just walk into the office and hand the letter to the editors personally. However, in a country like the Grand Duchy of Finland in the late 19 century, most of the people lived outside the cities and were forced to trust the local post office. For farmers and farm workers, it was also hard to find a time and place for writing⁴⁴ and it may have taken many days, even weeks, to get the letter posted.

Sometimes the discussion in the letters to the editor became heated and the editors thought it was time to close the discussion. Around a third of the letters to the editor in the mid-1890s expressed anger-like emotions.⁴⁵ Newspapers had a mixed attitude towards disputes and controversies, on the one hand, they saw that society progressed by debating and arguing, but on the other hand, the long-lasting 'wars of words' disgusted and bored the readers and gave them bad impressions.⁴⁶ Sometimes the editors' hands were tied because the law allowed the readers' to defend themselves with angry responses and the newspapers were forced to publish such letters.

If the text was considered to be too private to be published in a national or regional newspaper, it could be abridged.⁴⁷ Either the journalists thought that the issue was of no interest to a wide readership, or it was 'too private'. Spreading too intimate information in

public could lead to unnecessary and unwanted legal cases. For example, a regional newspaper *Louhi* from north Finland made it clear to their readers that it was not worth writing too detailed, personal information because that text would be removed from the publication.⁴⁸ There is also evidence that letters were shortened in Scotland because of personal attacks on another person.⁴⁹ Likewise, in the *Los Angeles Times*, it was usual that the readers were offended personally by the letters to the editor and demanded their response in the same column. Sometimes the editors would choose sides in the argument, which also occurred in the Finnish press.⁵⁰

Wiipurin Sanomat explained to their readers that they could not publish letters that contained nothing but witty and biting remarks about another reader, and nothing about the subject itself: '[...] if we were to publish all such often childish polemical writings, they would take up a large part of the space of our paper and would bore all those other readers who could not even follow and comprehend the detailed meaning and purpose of the matter. [...]' They advised readers not to make personal attacks and stick strictly to the subject.⁵¹ Likewise, the northern-Finnish regional newspaper *Louhi* explained to its readers that the newspaper was not a place for private disputes but for general matters.⁵² A regional newspaper *Uusi Savo* advised the writers to stay impartial and not to make accusations motivated by anger or envy.⁵³

Additionally, inappropriateness could be manifested by a writing that was too cryptic and vague to understand. I presume in cases like these the writers wanted to hide their identity in a small community and avoid possible lawsuits, but this caused problems with the publication.

The demand for more evidence and details was most likely mentioned for fear of legal repercussions. The editors would also advise the readers to be sure about the facts and always be prepared for lawsuits if the text dealt with grievances.

Sometimes the texts were rejected because they were sent to the wrong newspaper. Many newspapers thought it was natural that a response to a newspaper article or a response to another letter to the editor was published only in the same newspaper it concerned. This was also a matter that was agreed upon in the general meeting of journalists in 1898.⁵⁴

Authority

The Finnish society of the 19th century was gradually turning from a society of estates into a class society. Most people did not belong to the estates, or to the upper class. The social changes caused a class confrontation that escalated into a civil war in the 1910s, but which was already partly visible in the readers' letters of the 1890s. Most of the published letters to the editor came from middle-class men and about 4% were identified as coming from the working-classes. Only about 2% of the letters were identified as written by women.⁵⁵ This is in line with other studies from the British press⁵⁶, but it can be assumed that there were probably more women and people with a working-class background as writers because many would not reveal their backgrounds at all. Over 70% of the letters to the editor were published anonymously or with a pseudonym.⁵⁷

It is possible to examine the editing through duplicates, i.e. opinion pieces that were published at the same time in two or more newspapers. Sarah Pedersen was able to compare two Scottish newspapers of the same period and noticed the newspapers

sometimes published the same readers' letters in both newspapers and this revealed the editing. She discovered the editors usually edited anonymous letters more than letters from known writers, which in many cases remained untouched.⁵⁸ I have a collection of about 1350 opinion pieces from the letters to the editor column of ten Finnish newspapers from 1895 and these include only seven letters published at about the same time in two different newspapers. Four of them were published with the authors' names and three with pseudonyms. I examined these duplicates next to each other to distinguish any differences between them and found that they were almost identical, with only minor spelling and formatting differences in periods, commas, spacing, and hyphenation. I did not detect any deletion of text. All the same, I would like to point out a source problem with the duplicates: the author had to copy the letters by hand and in that process, the author might have left some word out or misspelled another, corrected, or restructured the text and we do not have any information about this. This means all the differences between the duplicates might not strictly indicate that editing was done by the press.

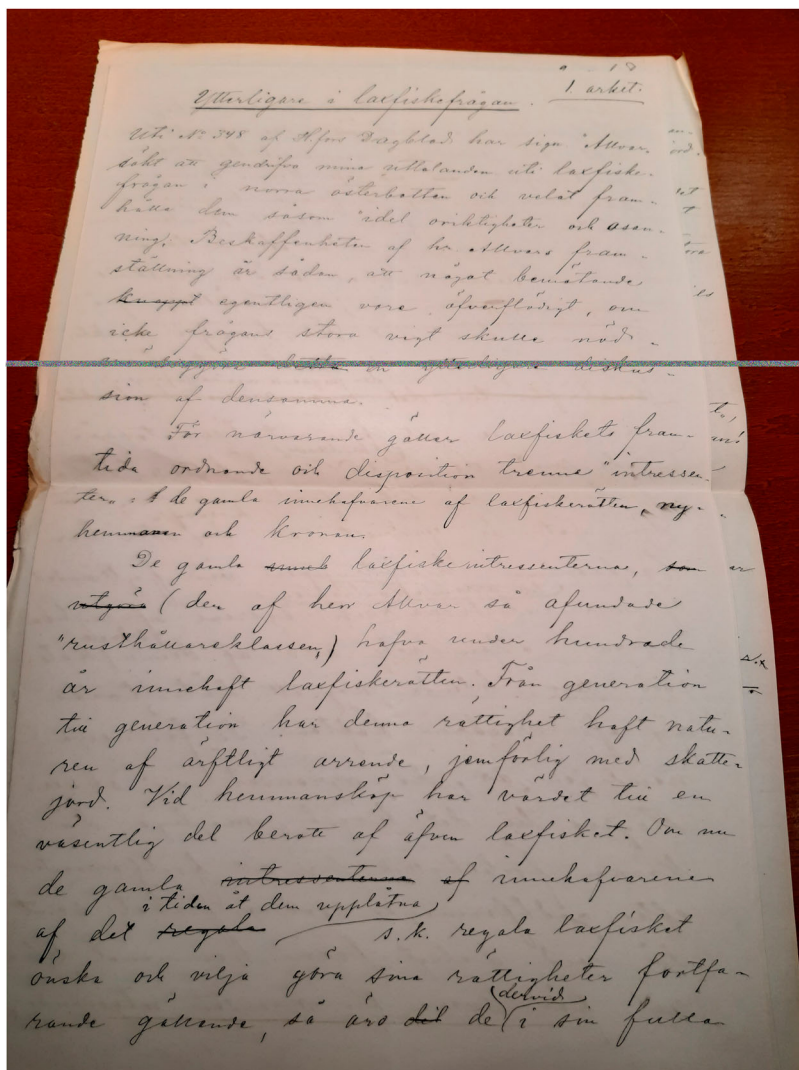
I have not found any evidence that letters from the lower classes were rejected more than those from the upper classes. Of course, sometimes it was hard to tell from which class the letter came if the writing style or grammatical mistakes did not reveal it. Some newspapers explicitly declared they were objective and would publish letters from both the working and the upper class.⁵⁹

Reading the letters to the editor in the late 19th century, it would be easy to conclude that the readers were well-educated and sophisticated because the language and grammar were usually impeccable. Some of the earlier researchers have come to this conclusion,⁶⁰ although the harsh truth is that the editors used a lot of time to correct letters to make them publishable. At least in the Grand Duchy of Finland, a large group of readers was not good at grammar, especially self-taught individuals from the lower classes. The editors constantly complained about how they had to correct all the spelling mistakes and put the dots and commas in the right places. In a sarcastic article published in 1898 in *Wiipurin Sanomat*, the editorial secretary complained they had received rural letters where every word was spelled incorrectly and there was not a single valid sentence in the whole text.⁶¹ Some unaccustomed writers also used vague terms such as 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow' and the editors had to remind them to use exact dates instead.⁶²

In the *Los Angeles Times* of the 1880s, the editor would in very exceptional circumstances publish a letter with poor grammar, supposedly without any editing, in order to humiliate the writer.⁶³ I have not witnessed this in the 1890s Finnish newspapers although the editors would sometimes maliciously make fun of the spelling mistakes made by the readers without naming anyone.

When the handwriting filled the whole paper on both sides and there was no space left for the editor's corrections, the editors were forced to rewrite the whole text by themselves. This was considered time-consuming and nerve-wracking. The editors asked the readers to write only on one side of the paper, leaving space between the lines and about a third of the paper empty for corrections.⁶⁴ Andrew Hobbs has found evidence that the nineteenth-century editors of British newspapers also struggled with this problem, although some declined to correct the letters.⁶⁵ (Picture 2).

Although the range of topics in the readers' letters was very wide, most of them dealt with topical domestic issues of the late 19th century, such as building railways,



PICTURE 2.

Some apparently unpublished letters to the editor from the mid-1880s sent to the Swedish-speaking national newspaper Helsingfors Dagblad have been preserved. There are no editorial notes on these letters or any other indication of why they were never published or why they were archived. Chydeniuska släktarkivet SLSA 642.

improving the status of the Finnish language, and religious affairs. No letters were published that dealt with foreign affairs or matters relating to the Russian emperor.⁶⁶ This may be because of the strict censorship conducted by the authorities in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Printing bans, imposed because the censors had detected texts that were not allowed to be printed, became widespread in the Finnish press in the 1890s. In such cases, either the part was removed, or a complaint could be lodged with the authorities; however, as an easier and quicker solution, newspapers usually chose to remove

the text. The censors intervened in texts dealing with the Russians and the Emperor, but also occasionally in matters relating to the reform of the postal service, customs, and monetary institutions. Punishments for violations included warnings, the dismissal of journalists, and the termination of newspapers.⁶⁷ It is plausible that some of the letters were rejected because they dealt with these unspoken restrictions, although I have not seen any evidence of this except for one note from the editors of the regional newspaper *Aftonposten* in which the reader was told they could not publish the letter as the censor would remove it.⁶⁸

Laura Stark noticed that the 1860s newspapers sometimes declined to publish those letters that did not support the newspapers' ideology and Andrew Hobbs has made the same observation regarding English newspapers in the 1860s.⁶⁹ This seems to be different compared to the policy of the 1890s Finnish press in general; in addition, I have also not seen any evidence of editors changing the text's meaning because of the opinions it represented. It is plausible that at least one author would have later complained, for example in a competitor's newspaper, if his or her text had been published in a modified form. Nevertheless, although the newspapers were happy to present themselves as defenders of free speech in the liberal spirit of John Stuart Mill and as supporters of pluralism in the press, they would also annotate the readers' letters with bitter comments and 'reading instructions'.⁷⁰ This phase can be seen as a turning point between the partial press and the modern press pursuing objectivity.

Conclusion: Modern Editorial Gatekeeping as a Sign of the Professionalization

This article shows that newspapers in the late 19th century selected and edited readers' letters in a more varied and thoughtful way than previous research has suggested. The article has added to our knowledge of the criteria used to select and edit letters and has broadened our understanding of the professionalization process of late 19th-century journalists.

The selection rules of Wahl-Jorgensen also applied to Finnish newspapers in the late 19th century. The requirement for brevity is reflected in the constant emphasis on the lack of space in the correspondence columns and in the direct instructions to readers. Relevance is seen in the demand for interesting, new and comprehensive information. The rule for entertainment can be seen in these demands and in the requirement to avoid disputes, although the newspapers did occasionally publish angry and polemic letters; these were also seen as entertainment by some readers. The entertainment value was also enhanced by ensuring the writing was not cryptic or detail-oriented but relevant to a large readership and not just a small local community. The editors did not want to bore the readers.

As Wahl-Jorgensen commented, authority was harder to detect. I did not discover any evidence of excluding more letters from the lower classes, but it may still be the case that they were rejected more often not because of their political viewpoints but from other difficulties. It should be borne in mind that journalists were constantly short of time. It is easy to imagine a situation where an editor's desk was full of letters from readers, and where it was easier to throw a letter with many spelling mistakes into the

paper bin instead of spending the next few hours transcribing it. I also did not detect any indication that letters were rejected because of the ideology or agenda they represented. Of course, most of the letters were sent to like-minded newspapers in the first place and those which were not, the newspapers would publish with their comments attached to them.

I would still like to add the fifth selection rule in the case of the newspapers I researched: the legal and censorship aspect that forced the newspapers to print a letter they did not like or forced them to omit it because of the possibility of a legal case or censorship. There were also other rules for selection, anonymity, and lack of space but these can be seen as technical 'either/or' cases where the journalists did not need to use their discretion.

All of this means stricter editorial gatekeeping, as a modern phenomenon was already in action in some of the 1890s Finnish newspapers. It is likely that the Finnish press was not an exception, but utilized the same processes used by other newspapers in other countries. This article suggests that executing a careful and systematic study on this subject in the late 19th-century newspapers of other countries would be valuable. The selection of letters contributed to the quality of the newspaper and to maintaining readers' trust. The editors seem to have wanted to maintain high standards for their publications and this is a sign of the professionalization of the newspapers. The readers' letters that were published were molded by modern journalistic processes, they were mediated through quality control that demanded certain criteria, skills, discretion, time, and good nerves.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland.

Notes

1. In the 1900 census 39% of the population over 15 years old were literate. Official Statistics of Finland VI:37, 1905.
2. Sorvali, "Pyydän nöyrimmästi sijaa seuraavalle", 327–330; Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists and the Public*, 29–39.
3. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?"; Sorvali, "Pyydän nöyrimmästi sijaa seuraavalle", 330–331.
4. Kokko, "From Local to Translocal Experience", 182, 185–186, 190; Nygård, "Poliittisten vastakohtaisuuksien jyrkentyminen sanomalehdistössä", 133; Sorvali "Pyydän nöyrimmästi sijaa seuraavalle", 325, 330.
5. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?".
6. Cavanagh, "Ladies of the Times", 270.

7. Hobbs "Readers' letters to Victorian"; Pedersen, "Within their sphere?"; Shaffer, *Letters from the People*.
8. Stark, *The Limits of Patriarchy*, 52–55.
9. Wahl-Jorgensen, "Understanding the Conditions", 73–78.
10. See for example "Arvoisille kirjeenvaihtajilleen", *Uusi Suometar* 31 December 1893; "Tidningsmannamötet", *Hufvudstadsbladet* 28 May 1898.
11. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 13; Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 13.
12. In Finnish *Kirjevaihtoa*, *Kirjeenvaihtoa* or *Kirjelaatikko*, in Swedish *Breflåda*.
13. Hobbs, "Readers' letters to Victorian", 133–134; For Swedish papers, see for example "Breflåda", *Dagens Nyheter* 29 September 1897; "Breflåda", *Göteborgs Aftonblad* 28 March 1894; "Breflåda", *Malmötidningen* 8 September 1897.
14. OCR-technology and the errors see Jarlbrink and Snickars, "Cultural Heritage as Digital".
15. Sorvali "Pyydän nöyryimmästi sijaa seuraavalle", 331.
16. I used phrases such as "do not publish", "do not print" and search words meaning "paper bin" – the unpublishable letters were thrown in a paper bin.
17. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 13–14.
18. Hobbs, "Readers' letters to Victorian", 133; Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 17; Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 13, 80–82.
19. Leino-Kaukiainen, "Kasvava sanomalehdistö sensuurin kahleissa", 572.
20. *Ibid.*
21. "Yhtä viisas kuin vanhakin", *Louhi* 8 April 1891.
22. "Arvoisille kirjeenvaihtajilleen", *Uusi Suometar* 31 December 1893. See also "Paperikorien puolustukseksi", *Salmetar* 2 December 1899.
23. "Sanomalehdistön suhde yleisöön", *Uusi Suometar* 23 August 1894.
24. Imperial Majesty's Gracious Decree 1868; Imperial Majesty's Gracious Decree 1892.
25. "Painolain 12 § 10 kohta", *Karjalatar* 9 April 1889; "Painolain nojalla", *Uusi Savo* 9 February 1892; "Painolain nojalla", *Oulun Ilmoituslehti* 9 December 1892.
26. Laurila, "Hajanaisia muistelmia", 155; "Maaseutu-kirje. Ohjeita kirjevaihtajille", *Wiipurin Sanomat* 8 August 1893.
27. Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists and the Public*, 39.
28. "Yleisöltä", *Satakunta* 9 December 1893; "Ääniä Korpiselältä", *Karjalatar* 10 January 1895; "Kruununmetsien lisäämis-kysymyksen johdosta vähän vastausta Uuden Suomettaren toimitukselle", *Uusi Suometar* 5 February 1895.
29. "Puhdepakinoita", *Haminan Sanomat* 27 February 1897.
30. "Tidningsmannamötet", *Hufvudstadsbladet* 28 May 1898.
31. See for example the discussion thread: "Moses bar Jakob", *Nya Pressen* 18 October 1895; "Till pastor Abr. Amirchanjanz", *Nya Pressen* 23 October 1895; "Pastor Moses bar Jakob", *Nya Pressen* 25 October 1895; "Pastor Abr. Amirchanjanz contra Moses bar Jakob", *Nya Pressen* 26 October 1895; "Pastor Abr. Amirchanjanz icke contra bar Jakob utan contra dennes patroner", *Nya Pressen* 29 October 1895; "Pastorerna Abr. Amirchanjanz & Moses bar Jakob", *Nya Pressen* 31 October 1895; "Pastor Moses bar Jakobs patroner", *Nya Pressen* 2 November 1895; "Slutord till hr Abr. Amirchanjanz", *Nya Pressen* 5 November 1895; "Mitt slutord", *Nya Pressen* 17 November 1895.
32. Shaffer made the same observation in the *Los Angeles Times*. Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 21.

33. The readers were asked to write down their names in the letter, not on a separate piece of paper that would get lost. "Maaseutu-kirje. Ohjeita kirjevaihtajille", *Wiipurin Sanomat* 8 August 1893; "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899.
34. Imperial Majesty's Gracious Decree 1868.
35. "Helsingistä. Kunnianloukkajutut", *Uusi Suometar* 11 January 1890; "Kysyn 'kunniani perään'", *Tampereen Sanomat* 28 March 1890; "Kirje Helsingistä", *Inkeri* 16 November 1890; "Käräjänkäynnistä yleensä ja painojutuista erittäin", *Suomalainen* 3 August 1891; "Äran och processlystnaden", *Nya Pressen* 24 January 1892; "Kirje Helsingistä", *Keski-Suomi* 18 February 1892; "Helsingistä. Huomioita Karjalasta II", *Uusi Suometar* 19 October 1895; "Sanomalehdistön vitsauksia", *Haminan Sanomat* 13 May 1899.
36. See for example "Kirjevaihtoa", *Wiipuri* 30 January 1895.
37. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 13; Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 17, 22.
38. "Arvoisille kirjeenvaihtajilleen", *Uusi Suometar* 31 December 1893.
39. "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899.
40. See for example "Lopputili hra 'Erään' kanssa", *Karjalatar* 2 May 1895.
41. See for example "Vastaus kysymykseen: 'Viljatulliako?'"', *Wiipuri* 16 July 1895; *Wiipuri* 18 July 1895.
42. "Maaseutu-kirje. Ohjeita kirjevaihtajille". *Wiipurin Sanomat* 8 August 1893.
43. "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899.
44. Stark, "Sanomalehtien maaseutukirjeet", 168–169.
45. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?".
46. Sorvali, "Kynäsotien aikakausi", 32–37.
47. See for example "Yleisöltä", *Louhi* 10 April 1895.
48. "Yleisöltä", *Louhi* 10 April 1895.
49. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 80.
50. Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 20–21.
51. "Kirjeenvaihtoa", *Wiipurin Sanomat* 15 February 1890.
52. "Kirjevaihtoa", *Louhi* 12 July 1895.
53. "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899.
54. "Tidningsmannamötet", *Hufvudstadsbladet* 28 May 1898.
55. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?"; Sorvali, "Äkäiset akat ja kiivaat herrat", 12.
56. Hobbs, "Readers' letters to Victorian", 139; Pedersen, "Speaking as Citizens", 25.
57. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?".
58. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 80.
59. "Kirjevaihtoa", *Wiipuri* 9 July 1895.
60. See for example Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 13.
61. "Maaseutu-kirje. Ohjeita kirjevaihtajille", *Wiipurin Sanomat* 8 August 1893.
62. "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899.
63. Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 13–14.
64. "Maaseutu-kirje. Ohjeita kirjevaihtajille", *Wiipurin Sanomat* 8 August 1893; "Sanomalehtiin kirjoittajain säännöt", *Uusi Savo* 23 August 1899. See also Reunanen, "Hämeen Sanomat. 1879–1929", 7.
65. Hobbs, "Readers' letters to Victorian", 132–133.
66. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?".
67. Leino-Kaukiainen, "Kasvava sanomalehdistö sensuurin kahleissa", 554–555.
68. "Breflåda", *Aftonposten* 24 October 1895.

69. Hobbs, "Readers' letters to Victorian", 133; Stark, *The Limits of Patriarchy*, 52–54.
70. Sorvali, "Onko syytä suuttua?"; Sorvali, "Kynäsotien aikakausi", 28–29. The editors also commented on the readers' letters subjectively in the postscripts or the introduction of the letter in the US and Scotland. Pedersen, "Within their sphere?", 14, 132; Shaffer, *Letters from the People*, 11, 19, 21.

Bibliography

Contemporary Literature

- Imperial Majesty's Gracious Decree on printing matters in Finland. "12 §, 10, 12. The Decree Collection of the Grand Duchy of Finland from the Year 1867." In *Keisarillisen Majesteetin Armollinen Asetus painotoimen-asioista Suomenmaassa. Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaan Asetus-Kokous vuodelta 1867*. Helsinki: Keisarillisen Senaatin kirjapaino, 1868.
- Imperial Majesty's Gracious Decree including amendments and additions in the gracious decree of 31st of May 1867 on printing matters in Finland. 12 §, 11. The Decree collection of the Grand Duchy of Finland from the year 1891. Keisarillisen Majesteetin Armollinen Asetus sisältävä muutoksia ja lisäyksiä armolliseen asetukseen 31 p:ltä Toukokuuta 1867 painotoimen-asioista Suomenmaassa. 12 §, 11. 1892. Suomen Suuriruhtinaanmaan Asetus-Kokoelma vuodelta 1891. Helsinki: Keisarillisen Senaatin kirjapaino.
- Laurila, Jaakko "Hajanaisia muistelmia kolmekymmenen vuoden takaa." [A scattered memoir from thirty years ago.] In *Päivälehdien muisto 1889–1929. [The Memory of Päivälehti 1889–1929]*. Helsinki, 1929.
- Official Statistics of Finland. VI. Population statistics. 37. Overview of the population of Finland on 31st of December 1900 and information on previous general censuses in the country. SVT VI:37. Keisarillisen senaatin kirjapaino, Helsinki 1905.
- Reunanen, Kaarlo. "Hämeen Sanomat. 1879–1929. Katsauksia ja piirteitä kuluneilta vuosikymmeniltä." [Hämeen Sanomat. 1879–1929. Reviews and features from the past decades.] In *Hämeen Sanomat 1879–1929*.

Research Literature

- Cavanagh, Allison. "Ladies of the Times." *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 2 (2018): 268–283. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2016.1179125.
- Hobbs, Andrew. "Readers' Letters to Victorian Local Newspapers as Journalistic Genre." In *Letters to the Editor. Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Allison Cavanagh, and John Steel, 129–146. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.
- Jarlbrink, Johan, and Pelle Snickars. "Cultural Heritage as Digital Noise: Nineteenth Century Newspapers in the Digital Archive." *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 6 (2017): 1228–1243. doi:10.1108/JD-09-2016-0106.
- Kokko, Heikki. "From Local to Translocal Experience." *Media History* 28, no. 2 (2022): 181–198. doi:10.1080/13688804.2021.1961575.
- Leino-Kaukiainen, Pirkko. "Kasvava sanomalehdistö sensuurin kahleissa 1890–1905." [The Growing Press in the Chains of Censorship 1890–1905.] In *Suomen lehdistön historia 1. Sanomalehdistön vaiheet vuoteen 1905 [The History of the Finnish Press 1. The History*

- of the Newspapers Until 1905], edited by Lars Landgren, Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen, and Päiviö Tommila, 421–632. Kuopio: Kustannuskiila, 1988.
- Nygård, Toivo. "Poliittisten vastakohtaisuuksien jyrkentyminen sanomalehdistössä." [A Rise in Political Controversy in the Press.]. In *Suomen lehdistön historia 2. Sanomalehdistö suurlakosta talvisotaan [The History of the Finnish Press 2. The History of the Newspapers from the Great Strike Until the Winter war]*, edited by Toivo Nygård, and Raimo Salokangas. Kuopio: Kustannuskiila, 1987.
- Pedersen, Sarah. "Speaking as Citizens: Women's Political Correspondence to Scottish Newspapers 1918–1928." In *Letters to the Editor. Comparative and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Allison Cavanagh, and John Steel, 25–47. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.
- Pedersen, Sarah. "Within their Sphere? Women's Correspondence to Aberdeen Daily Newspapers, 1900–1918". Ph.D. diss., The Robert Gordon University, 2004.
- Shaffer, Ralph. *Letters from the People. Los Angeles Times 1881–89*. 1999. Reformatted, The Endangered History Project, 2020.
- Sorvali, Satu. "Kynäsotien aikakausi – 1890-luvun suomalaislehdistön valta ja vastuu riitakirjoitusilmiössä." [The Age of the Pen Wars. The Power and Responsibility of the 1890s Finnish Press in the Phenomenon of Polemic Writings and Arguing.]. *Media & viestintä* 46, no. 1 (2023): 23–43.
- Sorvali, Satu. "Äkäiset akat ja kiivaat herrat – sukupuoli ja luokka ärtymistä määrittävinä tekijöinä 1800-luvun lopun lehtikirjoituksissa." [Grumpy Hags and Fierce Gentlemen – Gender and Class as Determinants of Irritation in Late 19th Century Newspaper Articles.]. *Ennen ja Nyt* 22, no. 3 (2022): 2–25.
- Sorvali, Satu. "Pyydän nöyrimmästi sijaa seuraavalle" – Yleisönosaston synty, vakiintuminen ja merkitys autonomian ajan Suomen lehdistössä." ["I Humbly ask for a Place for the Next" - The Birth, Establishment and Significance of the Letters to the Editor in the Press of the Grand Duchy of Finland.]. *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 118, no. 3 (2020): 324–339.
- Sorvali, Satu. "Onko syytä suuttua? Ärtymyksen ilmaisu 1890-luvun yleisönosastoissa." [Is There a Reason to be Angry? The Expression of Irritation in the Letters to the Editor of the 1890s.]. *Ennen ja Nyt* 19, no. 2, (2019).
- Stark, Laura. *The Limits of Patriarchy. How Female Networks of Pilfering and Gossip Sparked the First Debates on Rural Gender Rights in the 19th-Century Finnish-Language Press*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2016.
- Stark, Laura. "Sanomalehtien maaseutukirjeet." [The rural letters in the newspapers.] In *Kynällä kyntäjät. Kansan kirjallistuminen 1800-luvun Suomessa* [Pencil ploughers. The literacy of the people in 19th century Finland], edited by Lea Laitinen and Kati Mikkola, 145–177. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2013.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin. *Journalists and the Public: Newsroom Culture, Letters to the Editor, and Democracy*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin. "Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: Four Rules for Selecting Letters to the Editor." *Journalism Studies* 3, no. 1 (2002): 69–81.