

A CHANCE for ESTONIAN URBAN POETRY? A Glance at Estonian Urban Poetry Between 1860–1940

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Throughout the ages Estonian poetry has been considered rustic, even up to the World War II. Poetry focused on rural images, the farmhouse milieu, people caught in the cycle of work on the farm. Estonian poetry contains a great number of beautiful nature poems – the latter relying on a strong perception of nature, environmental traditions, sense of landscape. The basis of all this is the centuries-long co-existence and communication with nature. Each epoch has its own poet of nature. All the authors of the period of national awakening express their nature-related feelings; Juhan Liiv stands out in the late 19th – early 20th century, Villem Grünthal-Ridala during the *Young Estonia* days, etc. This line can be traced through to the present day.

When did a wider panorama emerge besides/instead of the deep perception of nature; when did poets first take notice of the rapidly developing town and start depicting it? How did the new subject matter and topics shape the way of thinking of our poets who mostly came from the country, and when did the image of a town first appear in Estonian lyrical poetry? What means were used to describe towns? These are the questions that are addressed in this article.

The process of Estonian urbanisation has not been sufficiently examined. Although several fields and disciplines (sociology, psychology, history of economy and art) have dealt with it, only a few conclusions have been drawn. Seen from the point of view of history and cultural history, the relations between village and town were already significant at the end of the awakening period. Carl Robert Jakobson, one of the period's ideologues, believed that the town was nothing but an evil and amoral environment, thus starting off the opposition between village and town. The ideology was directed at peasants – the place for a decent person was in the country where the most important things in life were created. Jakobson expressed his contempt for those who moved to or lived in town with a new word – *vurle* ('layabout', 'dandy') (Hallas 1995: 91). We remember what

Anton Hansen Tammsaare said about peasant boys acquiring education in town: they went to the town to learn the trade of a horse-thief. However, the prose of the 1870s displayed the first glimpses of urban environment and life (Jakob Pärn, Lilli Suburg, Elisabeth Aspe, Maximillian Pödder). From the point of view of national ideology, mention should be made of stories by Johann Volde-mar Jannsen and Lydia Koidula, and of plays by Koidula that take a look at the opposition between the old (the isolating village) and the new (the new cultural mentality) (Kruus 1920: 74–75). The attitude towards village and town became one of the cultural-ideological oppositions of our national movement.

Urbanisation as a social process culminated in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Various writers and literary scholars of the time analysed the process and attempted to draw conclusions. The trend eulogising village and country life still prevailed, both in literature and in cultural ideology. Alongside that, urban description was just emerging, regarded in a negative light or occasionally perceived with slight optimism. In 1920 the young Hans Kruus published the book titled *Town and Village in Estonia*, which besides other topics also analysed the representation of town and village in Estonian literature. This was like a small overview of Estonian literature, focusing on descriptions of milieu and environment. In conclusion, Kruus finds: ‘The ‘human hubbub’ of our towns is weak, the noise rare and ‘ear-splitting’ in only few streets. Just as weak is the urban pathos of our writers, their devotion to town.’ (Kruus 1920: 90.) In the third part of his *History of Estonian Literature* (1929), Villem Ridala writes about the years in question: ‘there was no sign of urbanisation then. Only some movement to the suburbs, settling there, moving into the economic, decent and intellectual atmosphere of a small town. The feeble youth of Estonian urban life explains why the manifestations of our intellectual life are still so immature and vague.’ (Ridala 1929: 7.) Besides such pessimistic opinions, we could refer here to Karin Hallas’s article of 1995, ‘An Estonian and a big city’. This article examines briefly but thoroughly the manifestations in literature in relation to the process of urbanisation (Hallas 1995: 90–114). Hallas relied on several facts and percentages from sociological research, thus being able to claim that Tallinn at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was a big city (with population over 100,000). She made an attempt to analyse Estonian literature (prose) of the time from the point of view of urban topics, presenting a thorough overview of the authors who most vividly described the urban milieu or urban motifs in their work (Eduard

Vilde, Ernst Peterson-Särgava, Mait Metsanurk, Otto Münther etc.). Despite the metropolitanism, the city in their works, in most cases a slum area, remains a grim, oppressing and horrible place, that is depicted in naturalistic tones.

A new, modernist approach to the city is introduced by members of the *Young Estonia* literary group, whose ideal was to create a European urban culture. This was expressed in the works of Gustav Suits, Friedebert Tuglas, Bernhard Linde. Their writings – articles and essays – look at the city with pathos and exaltation.

‘On the whole, the Young Estonians see the town as something positive; it ‘wakes you from inertia’ and creates a new culture, but they naturally saw negative sides as well – a town encourages individualism, at the same time bringing along alienation, solitude, cuts off the roots, completely changes the life style.’ (Hallas 1995: 95) Towns advance the life of a society and deserve attention in Estonian prose. Where, however, is poetry? What positions does our poetry determine, possess and value? In the collection *Place and Location II*, Anneli Mihkelev (2002: 431–454) only wrote about texts on Tartu and Tallinn throughout the ages. The urban theme of Estonian poetry is much wider and comprehensive, and this article makes an attempt to view classical Estonian poetry in corpore.

The prologue to the development of Estonian urban poetry occurred in the early 18th century, when historical events provided the subject matter for poetry about towns. The most significant example of this is Käsü Hans’s song of woe, ‘Oh, my poor town of Tartu’, in which Tartu laments its history – the burning and destruction of the town during the Northern War. Considering destruction as God’s punishment, Tartu also warns other important towns (Pärnu, Tallinn, Riga) against sinful life so that the same fate should not befall them. The monologue of Tartu thus starts off our history of original urban poetry. Still, a century and a half will pass before a purposefully artistic Estonian literature emerges.

Culture of the national awakening period, the budding original literature and other areas, were fully meant for the rural population. Although the movement was directed in towns, in which various events took place (Tartu, Viljandi), all undertakings and publications were orientated towards peasants. The purpose of poetry that tackled national matters and passionately promoted new ideas, was to ‘awaken’, unite, join. Looking at poetry generally, Estonian lyrical verse of the time created an image of flowering landscapes (Alhoniemi 1969: 86), a happy space, protected from hostile forces (Bachelard 1999: 31). Fatherland and peasants become the main bearers of Estonian poetry. There was no need

whatsoever for the inclusion of urban topics. Even widely used German paragon (Lenau, Uhland, Heine, several second-rate anthologies) failed to incite any interest in urban matters. The hugely popular Biedermeier mentality had, as a rule, nothing to do with Estonian poetry (except Lydia Koidula's *Meadow Flowers* [*Vainulilled*], 1866). As Jakobson said – even talking about town was unhealthy, as it was corrupt and did not strategically fit into the happy space, built with such effort and self-sacrifice. Elise Aun's dual poem 'In Town' I (*Linna*) and 'In the Country' II (*Maal*) might be a good example here, illuminating the thirty-year long concept.

Away from here, no longer / Can I bear the stress! / I cannot stand it any more – /
The mere air here is killing me. (Aun 1890: 11.)

Again I breathe the fresh forest air / Again I tread the sweet flowery path, / Again
songs of joy rise from my chest, / Nature, on your lovely bosom. (Aun 1890: 11.)

Town is a prison, a harasser, a frightening 'creature', and contact with it could result in damage, even death.

An interesting fact is that even Jakobson wrote a poem titled 'Green Town' (*Robeline linn*) that, however, is an allegory of the forest, lauded by the author: 'green forest and trees – / proud town and little houses' (Jakobson 1959: 50). This was his town.

Little is written about the town during the period of awakening, only a few authors spring to mind. First of all, there are some motifs referring to the town in Lydia Koidula's collection of poetry, *The Nightingale of Emajõgi* (*Emajõe ööbik*, 1867). The town has no name. The poem 'On the Shore of Emajõgi' (*Emajõe kaldal*) contains a direct reference to Tartu (as does the entire collection), not only through the river Emajõgi, but by means of the lines, 'Where high pillars rise / From the grave / And spread enlightenment / Upon my Estonia.' (Koidula 1969: 77, trans. Mihkelev 2002: 465–466.) The other poem, 'Thoughts on Toome Hill' (*Mõtted Toom-mäel*) evokes a mythological picture of Estonian history and the achievement of freedom. There are a few odd mentions of a sacred place, and a reference to the town. (The unfinished poem to Tallinn, 'High Towers of Tallinn' – *Tallinnasta kõrged tornid...*, belongs to Koidula's later period.)

Ado Reinvald has given us a few pretty urban pictures. His patriotic songs contain two poems dedicated to towns. In 'To my Town' (*Oma linnale*) he eulogises his (home) town Viljandi: 'Wiljandi, my Estonian town' (Reinvald 1904: 25). (He considered Viljandi his own, familiar town, like Estonia; after all, one's

home is where one's love for Estonia begins, thus also one's love for the town.) Nor are historical references and mythologised usage of language missing here. Describing the rather Germanised Viljandi, the author hopes that, 'For Estonian blood, spirit and mind / Your pain still lives in them!' (Reinvald 1904: 25.) The title of the collection of poetry was inspired by Viljandi – four collections of *The Songbook of Viljandi* (*Viljandi laulik*) were published in the 1870s. The other poem is entitled 'To Lindanisa' (*Lindanisale*) and displays a similar mythological subtext: the myths of Kalev, Linda and the Son of Kalev. It may be assumed, from the enthusiastic eulogy of Estonia, that the author also sees the town as home.

In the framework of the current subject matter, the most interesting section of Reinvald's work is related to the third part of *The Songbook of Viljandi*, published in 1877. It contains a cycle called 'To Towns' (*Linnadele*). Having been to school for only one winter, Reinvald was keen to further his knowledge independently. He writes about great European cities to which he has never been. St. Petersburg, Helsinki, Rome, Amsterdam, Vienna, London, Paris, Berlin, Stockholm, Constantinople – these are cities whose peculiarity, and historical and natural background he turns into poetry. His writings are not travelogues, rather, they are addresses; in terms of their essence and artistic level, these are short and unassuming characterisations. However, European cities are introduced into our literature by means of Reinvald's cycle. The information could have come from *A Small Geography* (1868) and *School Atlas* (1873), by his great paragon Jakobson, or even from Berend Gildenmann's *Countries of the World* (1849). As Reinvald's farmhouse was a place where the villagers came together, to read papers and discuss the affairs of the world, it may be assumed that the numerous articles also offered subject matter for his poetry.

In the last decades of the 19th century and in the early 20th century we see, besides a few individual poems (Juhan Liiv), a great number of references to towns in songbooks designated for the Estonian people. The tradition of songbooks dates back to the 1850s–1860s, when people increasingly took up singing and music (Vinkel 1966: 269–272). It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a songbook and a collection of poetry: the first contains poems, just like the latter, but their manner is different, i.e. they are lighter, simpler, meant to be sung, everyone to his ability, or put to music, without the author's name. Such poems could also just be read. It should be mentioned here that the term 'collection of poetry' was hardly ever used in the 19th century. It emerged only in the

20th century. The period of national awakening introduced authors like Jannsen, Martin Körber, Peeter Süda, etc. Later typical songbooks of their time bear the name of the town where the book was published; the contents did not vary – the focus is on topics significant for the ‘young nation’. A few examples: Jaan Otstavet’s *The First Pärnu Songbook* (*Esimene Pärnu laulik*, 1875), *Toomimäe Nightingale of Tartu* (*Tartu linna Toomi-mäe ööpik*, 1883), *The Nightingale of Tallinn* (*Tallinna ööbik*, 1883), *The First Narva Songbook* (*Esimene Narva laulik*, 1883), *The Songbook of Rakvere* (*Rakvere laulik*, 1894), *Lindanisa-Songbook* (*Lindanisa-Laulik*, 1889), that says, ‘Lindanisa, Estonian town gave birth to / people’s singing spirit’, *The New Tallinn Songbook* (*Uus Tallinna laulik*, 1895), which contains a poem about Tallinn that has clear urban features (promenade, water tower, harbour, steam boats, Russian market, etc.). Here might lie the source of the rivalry with Tartu, because it says in the end, ‘Tallinn is such a pretty town, / Full of wise spirit of the people’. (*Uus Tallinna laulik* 1895: 7.) The last two quotations reveal the opposition between Tallinn and Tartu on an intellectual level, so that the songbooks start off the age-old Tallinna *contra* Tartu affair in Estonian poetry. The intellectual significance of a town can be represented in many ways. Town is another possible environment, created and shaped by the people themselves. One of the themes of the songbooks is that Estonians are the builders of cities, whose aim is to make Estonia beautiful – certainly a positive programme.

A special place in the songbooks’ urban depiction belongs to Gustav Klemmer’s *The Zither of the Sausage Town, or the Songbook of Tapa* (*Vorstilinna kannel ehk Tapa laulik*, 1902). Here, the topic of towns gets a wider treatment. The longer poem ‘Before and Now’ (*Enne ja nüüd*) gives an overview of the development of Tapa. The other poems (‘To Sausage’ – *Vorstile*; ‘Everyday Life in Sausage Town’ – *Vorstilinna elu ja olu*) are focused on Tapa as well, revealing the typical features of the town. The most important of these is trading; a town is a place of selling, buying and cheating. It is therefore with trade (ties between town and country) that our urban poetry themes start: ‘You often buy goods / In a shop in town; / Thinking to yourself: / I got that cheap’. (Klemmer 1902: 38.)

The poetry of the first two decades of the twentieth century, a period when urbanisation was on the increase, does not contain a single urban description. Town and the contemporary world, however, were by no means neglected. Johannes Semper’s article ‘The Lyrical Poet and Our Time’ was published in the fourth album of *Young Estonia* (1912). In it, Semper talks about the time of mak-

ing money: everything is commercial, including creative work. Semper offered comparisons with other European poets, focusing on Verhaeren and the way he tackles towns in his poetry. For Émile Verhaeren, town is a beast, a monster that devours the country (Semper 1912: 158–159). We can find parallels with the Estonian treatment of time: ‘Our time feels estranged to poetry’ (Semper 1912: 150). Town and country relations were also analysed by the press (*Postimees* 1912, *Tallinna Teataja* 1913). Literature for children displayed the first urban motifs (see *Children* by Marta Sillaots). In prose, Anton Hansen Tammsaare wrote his short stories about students and the story *Fly* (*Kärbes*). The literary group *Siuru* was the first to change the traditional tools of nature description – instead of the previously used wild flowers and plants, they introduced cultivated plants (lilacs, bird cherries, tulips, hyacinths, etc.). Such plants grow in gardens, especially urban gardens, although flower gardens were quite common on farms as well. A small garden, a piece of cultivated land around the city house, is of special significance. The green patch of land symbolises the quality of life in the urban environment (Lehari 2000: 40). Marie Under was naturally the one to depict her own garden above the rest of nature. Her garden was very important to her, since she was one of the first poets who was born and brought up in town.

In the 1920s many writers travelled in Europe. The reflections of various places and (big) cities can be found in the poems of that time. Estonian poetry welcomes poetry about foreign parts, landscapes and urban scenes – a panorama of foreign cities is formed (Kalda 2000: 347). Several poets have cycles like that, e.g. Under, Visnapuu, Barbarus, Semper, Adams. In European literature (and in Russia) a fully-fledged urban poetry had already taken shape by that time. In an essay about Walt Whitman, Semper says: ‘Today, poetry of technology and machines is no surprise to anyone. We often come across it: E. Verhaeren, F.-T. Marinetti, V. Majakovski, J. Romain, G. Duhamel and many others have brought to poetry the smoke of factories and the noise and roar of engines, and made these modern topics acceptable.’ (Semper 1920: 15.) Here, on the contrary, the attention paid to the Estonian urban environment is rare and occasional, connected primarily with social phenomena (slums). A town in its direct meaning is a constant image of only a few poets. However, towns do crop up in the poetry collections of many authors (Gustav Suits, Henrik Visnapuu, August Alle, Marie Under, Mart Raud, etc.).

With some reservations, Johannes Barbarus can be considered the conscious

creator of Estonian urban poetry. In his second collection of poetry, *Man and Sphinx (Inimene ja sfinks)*, published towards the end of the *Siuru* group, in 1919, Barbarus wrote about a (big) city in the cycle 'Fragments of a Big City' (*Suurlinna fragmendid*). It is not clear which city the author has in mind. It could be Kiev, where he studied, or any of the Galician towns he worked in during the World War I. His usage of words and form indicates an expressionist background. It is well known that Barbarus was greatly influenced by various foreign poets (primarily the French/French language modernists). Verhaeren was one of the favourites. Where Verhaeren writes social poetry, he depicts it via cities, first of all regarding the relations between town and country. Barbarus follows suit.

It can be said of both Verhaeren and Barbarus that, 'A city full of the roar of machines, smoke and impatience had been for him [Verhaeren – Õ.K.] a kind of symbol, but now the city has become something else as well – a centre of class struggle, strikes, revolts, industrial crises' (Semper 1929: 15). Barbarus was short of lyrical talent and thus his work is primarily determined by the outside (regarding both the loans and the inner power of perception).

With Barbarus, one should stress the side of poetic expression – his poetic vocabulary relies on the symbolist, expressionist and even naturalistic fund. It was the most peculiar poetic vocabulary, that created a rather shocking (urban) poetry in the Estonia of the 1920s. Barbarus employed unusual comparisons and images, the choice and usage of words is highly uncommon, and this very process made him an active urban poet to whom the city was a direct object of depiction. The city required a specific lexicon, another kind of poeticisation; here the attributes of nature did not function – images taken from nature failed to fit into the new time and space. A new and complex means of expression had to be created. This is precisely what Barbarus did. Using new (modern) means of expression, he showed the novelty of his thinking. He wrote poetry with this new word usage throughout the decade and influenced others as well. His half-naturalistic ways of depiction showed parallels with the late 19th and early 20th century prose, in the depiction of the city as a dirty, filthy environment, in which the author inevitably lives and where he feels good. ('Like to a child, you offer something new to my soul' – Barbarus 1919: 43.) This different field, with its originality and fascination, attracted and invited self-expression in verse.

The collection *Catastrophes (Katastroofid)*, 1920) is another example of the engagement with social and political topics in Barbarus's poetry. The problem of

the poor and the rich made its appearance in Estonian poetry mainly in urban descriptions. Barbarus wrote about cities in the daytime and at night: the first is connected with working class people, the factory proletariat, and the latter with prostitutes, buying and selling human beings. The author's attitude was protesting, militant, active. Many images concealed a wish for a better time and era, created by the 'rebellious hundreds' (the class of the poor). And this struggle went on in city, not in the country: 'the city has raised an iron hand above the countries' (Barbarus 1919: 47), threatened Barbarus already in his previous collection. Towns were harnessed to the ideological bandwagon (Mihkelev 2002: 469). They were eternally corrupt, and this could only be changed by means of social-political rebellion.

In Barbarus's next collection of poetry, *Relations (Vahekorrad, 1922)*, the attention focuses on man. The treatment of man was connected with the city (see the cycle 'Man of Paper' – *Paberist inimene*). That man lives in city, and the urban environment is depicted accordingly. New attributes emerge: streets, cafés¹, towers, walls, chimney smoke, rattle of carriages, etc. The topic of working class and revolutionary struggle gains ground. Since revolutions only take place in cities, a certain tense atmosphere appears in urban poetry, bringing frustration and a sense of suffocation ('Between High Walls' – *Kõrgete myyride vahel*; 'Scenes of a Street' – *Uulitsa stseenid*; the saying 'stone wall at canals filled with people'). The relations between man and town became more specific, (Estonian) people and towns start to grow together, like the peasants and country before them.

Johannes Barbarus continues his observation of man through experiments of form in the mid-1920s: *Geometrical Man (Geomeetiline inimene, 1924)*, *Multiplied Man (Multiplitseerit inimene, 1927)*. Quite original was his usage of city names to depict people ('man – like ethereal New York skyscraper, / woman – chimerical like Notre-Dame in Paris' – Barbarus 1924: 25). There is a lot of the city in these collections, the poet creates the necessary urban (technical) vocabulary (machines, trains, aeroplanes), and tries to evoke a new spatial environment (see the cycle 'Man and Space' – *Inimene ruumin*, and the poem 'Urge into Space' – *Tung ruumi*). The new space is first of all the opening world. (Big) cities as a means of discovering the world are important signs in the world perception

¹ Barbarus was one of the first to use the word *kobvik* ('café'). Before, *café* and *kobvimaja* ('coffee-house') were used. According to Toomas Haug (conversation on February 17, 2003), *kobvik* could have been coined by Henrik Visnapuu (Gailit/Tuglas 1996, 7th letter from 1918).

of the Estonian people. This is a euphoric and megalomaniac attitude, incited by the establishment of the independent state, a sense of solitude and equality with other peoples and countries: to be one among many in the big world. Estonia seemed to enter Europe (pro: world) for the second time, this time not only culturally, but also politically. The world of the 1920s was open to the new Estonian state, and it was to this that our poetry aspired. Barbarus travelled quite extensively. In his work Paris clearly stands out (e.g. the cycle 'Paris'). Paris and other new cities seen on his travels are depicted as more peaceful, friendly, and pensive than towns in Estonia.

The motif of 'the world is open' gave the title to the next collection (*Maailm on lahti*, 1930). Here the author interferes in 20th century life, displaying a global grasp, and embracing the whole world (trains, stations, buses, aeroplanes and other contemporary technological achievements). 'Compositional development of the poetry collection proceeds from a small town to the open world. Other chapters are components of this development.' (Visnapuu 1930: 469.) Poetry is constantly on the move, man rushes from city to city: London, Moscow, Leningrad, Venice, Paris. Electricity and telephone are the connecting links: 'The howl of the wires, / electricity...' (Barbarus 1930: 14). Describing the relations between man and city that bring about a change of mentality, Barbarus again makes use of images from nature, especially poeticising small towns (e.g., 'Cycle of a Small Town' – *Pisilinna tsükl*). Poems about small towns and nature are entitled 'Morning' 1–2 (*Hommik*), 'Weekday' (*Argipäev*), 'Evening' 1–2 (*Õhtu*), 'Night' 1–2 (*Öö*) etc. Barbarus carries on reconciling images of nature and towns, which was left off in the 1930s. An original nature verse emerges where the old opposition between country/nature and town is clearly felt. The poet is more open and stands closer to nature (e.g., the cycle 'Anno Domini 1928').

The collection *E.R-c* (*E.V.-r*, 1932) depicts town and nature at the same time. The poem 'Bird's-eye View of E.R-c' (*E.V.-r linnulennult*) shows Estonian landscapes, nature and towns: Pärnu, Viljandi, Narva, Rakvere, Tartu, Jõgeva, Tallinn, etc. Just like Mihkel Veske in the 19th century, so Barbarus looks at his country from high above and describes what he sees. This is a vertical, structural urban view or mapping (Barthes 1997: 3–17). 'Film-Verse (Negative of the Capital)' (*Filmvärss (Päälinna negatiiv)*) is fragmentary, but nevertheless offers a description of many places in the capital city, including the old town. The author is in the role of a tourist who roams around, observing and enjoying the sur-

rounding sights. Here we have a horizontal or linear urban view (Barthes 1997: 3–17). The poet keeps coming back to people, sympathising with the poor and the suffering. This perception of towns was expressed in the lines: ‘Selfless bard! / Your place is here – amongst the pavement stones, / you better not stare up into the sky!’ (Barbarus 1932: 64.) At the same time the poet remembers his origins: ‘And I stand barefooted / my toes rooted in earth’ (Barbarus 1932: 85). A similar opposition is symptomatic of Barbarus’s perception and way of thinking – he is caught between country and town, not knowing who he is. How much of him has been influenced by the town and how much by the country and nature? Has he lost his home? Later, in the second half of the 1930s, Barbarus admits: ‘I might be the first amongst you, / who’s abandoned the field and plough. / I’ve dropped out of those, / who have reaped what they’ve sown.’ (Barbarus 1937: 61.)

The three latest collections of poetry of the late 1930s reveal some distancing from towns and artificial environments. *Focus (Tulipunkt, 1934)* still contains plenty of urban references, e.g. ‘Rocca-al-mare. (View of Tallinn)’ (*Rocca-al-mare. (Vaade Tallinnale)*), with its subtle political line, motifs of power and leadership. The focus is on a sense of liberation, produced by depicting the working masses. The last collections *Fish on Dry Land (Kalad kuival, 1937)* and *Crossing the Threshold (Üle läve, 1939)* display rather less urban verse. Barbarus is milder, talks more about land and earth (‘Poem of Earth’ – *Mullapoeem*), and mostly uses words and images of nature. The poet leaves town and arrives in the country, writing various nature poems besides those about the power and the mind.

Johannes Barbarus’s profession should also be mentioned, as it is relevant to his poetry. He was a doctor, i.e. nature and the natural are familiar to him, and thus he never neglected to describe nature. Secondly, he glorified and eulogised man, never accepting the way life was arranged – the poor and the oppressed as contrary to the rich oppressors. Thirdly, he practised in the small town of Pärnu that became his home and reality. His experience there shaped his urban picture, which is seldom romantic or refined, rather, it is full of contrasts. Only his travels gave him some positive sensations; on the whole his *city* is presented in a negative or ambivalent key.

Besides Barbarus’s man-centred, open-to-the-world urban depiction, mention should be made of Karl Ehrmann (Eerme), who relates to the town quite differently. Another example could be Valmar Adams, whose pretentious intellectual urban poetry appeared in 1924. Ehrmann’s three collections of poetry,

all published in the second half of the 1920s – *The Milky Way* (*Linnutee*, 1926), *Word, Century, Town and Gun* (*Sõna, sajand, linn ja püss*, 1927) and *Streets* (*Tänavad*, 1929) – are lyrical urban poetry that is based on plentiful key words. The first collection, *The Milky Way*, was the first book bearing a picture of a town on its cover, produced by Eduard Ole. ‘In his book, ‘The Milky Way’, Karl Ehrmann does everything Estonian poetry has so far been doing. He is seeking a human being in a deserted street on an autumn evening.’ (Visnapuu 1927: 73.) Despite some mediocrity and obvious traces of other poets’ influence, Ehrmann’s poetry offers an adequate picture of a developing and successful Estonian town. To create a special and unique urban atmosphere the author makes use of numerous urban attributes: this is primarily a cultural and contemporary picture of a town, associated first of all with stressing the importance of our café culture. Ehrmann’s work abounds in poetical pictures of the café environment and mentality – this is the world of café singers and dancers, and the significant relationships formed there, smoke-filled air, waiters and waitresses, beer drinkers, and also the brightly lit cabaret where the orchestra is banging away and couples swing on the dance floor. The café milieu requires fashionable clothing and hairdo (women had short hair – see the poem ‘Eton Crop’ – *Poisipea*), make-up and new dances (foxtrot, charleston). A café can be erotic, sometimes amoral – that was how the bohemian life of the time was depicted (see ‘In a Deserted Café’ – *Tühjunud kobvikus*; ‘Late rendez-vous’ – *Hiline rendez-vous*, etc.).

Another aspect of café life and urban life in general was the focusing on the woman. A woman in an urban environment, as opposed to the café, is seen as a pure young soul in all her beauty and childishness/innocence. Interior and exterior beauty are being compared here, with the poet apparently seeking a new pure urban woman. The depiction of Estonian woman thus undergoes a change – she is quite different in the country.

Ehrmann’s beloved cities are Tallinn (‘Dispirited Tallinn’ – *Tusane Tallinn*; ‘Coming from Winds of Misery’ – *Tulen tuultest tuskade*), Tartu (‘Nocturnal Town in Autumn’ – *Õine sügislinn*; ‘Hometown’ – *Sünnilinn*) and Võru (‘Nocturnal’ – *Õine*; ‘In the Town of the Bard’ – *Lauluisa linnas*; ‘Small Town in the Evening’ – *Väikelinn õhtul*). His overall favourite is Tallinn with its sea, Toompea Hill and old streets. His affection for the capital city is evident in the poetic fact that he calls Tallinn his mother and father (poem ‘Biographical’ – *Biograafiline*, etc.). ‘The street empty, windy / good and kind mother’ (1929: 7), ‘The city

– my father and mother...’ (1929: 8). Ehrmann is an urban boy (born in Tartu) through and through, engaged to the city streets, or the city is his fiancée. Occasionally he sees the city/streets via nature: descriptions of a sunny city (scenes of the city waking up), autumn storm in a sleeping town, snow storms in deserted streets. Alongside early morning sun the poet talks about the dim streets of the evening when people hurry home (‘It is: 6 o’clock’ – *Kell on: 6*), and soon when night falls the streets will be deserted and desolate (‘Streets in the Evening’ – *Õhtused tänavad*; ‘Nocturnal Streets’ – *Öised tänavad*; ‘Street Verses’ – *Tänavavärsid*). A certain elegiac moment can be detected in the author’s emotional diapason. On the basis of the features mentioned, Ehrmann could be called the introducer or creator of Estonian urban romantic poetry. ‘The city still asleep in the sun / peacefully like a maiden-virgin / between white soft pillows. / The city still in morning sleep, / yet dreams of the day ahead.’ (1926: 62.) Cities inevitably have the panorama of lights, illuminated windows, glowing advertisements – a sense of the sublime.

Like Barbarus, Ehrmann also writes about the urban working class and the opposition of the rich and the poor. Ehrmann, however, is not directly political; rather, these topics form a part of the extensive economic field that a city has. ‘The city roars, the earth trembles,’ writes the author (Ehrmann 1929: 21). What matters here are the banks, money, stock exchange, bills. A contemporary city consists of telephone lines, radio, aerials, searchlights, cars, trains, trams, but also of museums, the parliament, theatre, circuses, cinemas. All this diversity culminates in the madhouse, certainly no exception in Ehrmann’s poetry (maybe an impact of Valery Bryusov’s *Madman*?). A big city is opposed to a small one with its simplicity and balance: rambling wind in deserted streets, a sleepy constable, signboards on the houses, an advertisement for a grocer’s shop, a cobbler, pub and church. Many places feel drowsy, desolate. Some small towns resemble slums, revealing the drabness of the place. A woman’s role and various types of women are described here too. One mourns her beloved, the other enjoys life of luxury, the third is giving birth, the fourth walks the streets. Women are observed in town and life in general.

There is another, more ambivalent part of Karl Ehrmann’s urban poetry. It can be seen in the cycle ‘Century’ (*Sajand*), in which the poet seeks someone living in the society of the time who is not corrupt. Like Barbarus, Ehrmann wishes to create a new person with new qualities: ‘Will Man become Man? / Or

will the world perish?’ (1927: 19.) Several poems tell of the fragile existence of the world’s towns, and that of the whole planet. Ehrmann compares contemporary life with dancing. Through that, towns become signs bearing destruction (guns, tanks and cannons): London, New York, Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Tallinn.

In summary, on the basis of the examined material, various conclusions and generalisations in Estonian urban poetry, through the second half of the 19th century until the 1940s, can be distinguished. Firstly, it is immediately clear that urban poetry is not popular, being represented by only a few authors with a few poems. A turn and culmination in the treatment of urban topics was brought about in the 1920s, through the work of Barbarus and Ehrmann. In the 1930s the depiction of towns in poetry diminished once again, although quite a number of examples can be found in the work of Valmar Adams, Jaan Kärner, Erni Hiir, Juhan Sütiste, and August Sang. The range of topics remains the same. Why did poetry, usually so sensitive to social changes, take such an indifferent and mild view of urbanisation process? The reasons could be various.

- (1) A deep, genetic sense of nature among Estonians that made it difficult to go along with the times. Being connected with the earth and nature strongly prevails in our classical poetry – it is rustic poetry, strongly supported by tradition. There is a fixed system of nature imagery in Estonian poetry, which develops into metaphor-abounding poetry. For almost a century, attributes of nature with changing semantics are used in poeticising phenomena (light, star, wind, earth, fire, etc.). There are no attributes for urban nature (parks, green areas, avenues, gardens). The city seldom rises to the level of a metaphor: description, enumeration, and comparison prevail.
- (2) The Estonian town was agrarian for a long time, with the ties between country and town persisting. Town-dwellers first dig up a patch of land for vegetables near the house, and only then comes the flowerbed. Animals are kept as well. Such a way of life was typical of the suburbs, and it is slums that crop up most frequently in our scarce urban poetry.
- (3) The Estonian town is essentially anonymous – there are very few specific towns (except in travel poetry). It is not often that a town can be identified through hints in the poetry, and the author’s biography. Comparing the roles of our two most significant towns, Tartu and Tallinn, in poetry, Tallinn

comes out the winner. This is quite understandable as Tallinn with its thriving economy bore a greater resemblance to a city than Tartu did. Poetry usually depicted an unspecified small town; often, especially in the 1930s, nature imagery is added at the same time, and this is expanded in turn by the emerging verses about summer holidays.

- (4) The Estonian town is very realistic. We have no dream cities or a beloved, nostalgic city of memories, such as St. Petersburg is for the Russians (Toporov 1993: 203), or a provincial town is to Valery Bryusov. Nor have we any paradisiac or extreme towns as described by the philosopher and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (Tuan 1999/2000: 21). Ehrmann and Hiir display romantic undertones. For them, urban romance has its own place and field of perception.
- (5) Analysing towns from the aspect of the development of our poetry, we see that the beginning of our original literature – the national awakening – created a very strong perception and tradition of poetry, and its influence continued for decades. The impact of that poetry on further development was in fact so strong that it produced epigonism during the last decades of the 19th century. The paragon was so dominating that poetry deemed it necessary only to flow in the bed of imitation; nothing new was necessary or indeed possible.
- (6) The 1890s introduced a new method into prose – a realism/naturalism that was not beneficial to poetry. The latter did not adapt to the new way of depiction, finding it essentially unacceptable to change the means of expression (Haava, Sööt, Tamm). A strong sense of tradition is perceived here too.
- (7) The younger generation who entered literature in the early 20th century considered it important to tackle the changing society and go along with it. However, this happened in essays, short stories, journalism, but not in poetry (Suits, Grünthal-Ridala). Gustav Suits did alter the poetic material and means of expression, but even he failed to achieve true urban perception. He did not think urban topics were quite suitable.
- (8) Estonian urban poetry was born in the 1920s. The perception of life and literary paragons of Johannes Barbarus introduced a new paradigm into Estonian poetry. Contacts with foreign countries and local reality brings us true-to-life urban depictions. European cities inspire poems about Estonian towns. The process was influenced by searching and experiments, in which one part was devoted to attempts to describe the new reality – the city. The first years of our independence witnessed such economic growth and urbanisation that

the urban environment could no longer be ignored. Urban topics were found, one way or another, and it can be claimed that the city appeared in Estonian poetry as a foreign loan.

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Eesti linnaluule võimalus? Pilk eesti linnaluulele aastail 1860–1940

Kokkuvõte

Eesti luulet on peetud läbi aegade rustikaalseks, isegi kuni Teise maailmasõjani. Luule keskmes on maakujutelm, talumiljöö, inimene oma talutööde ja tegemiste ringis. Lüürika baseerub tugevasti loodustunnetusel, keskkonnatraditsioonidel, maastikutajumisel. Millal ilmub loodustunnetuse kõrvale/aselele avaram

panoraam; millal hakkab luuletaja märkama ka kiiresti arenevat linna ja seda kujutama? Kuidas uus ainek ja temaatika kujundavad meie põhiliselt maalt tulnud poeetide mõtlemisviisi ja millal ilmub linnakujund eesti lüürikasse; millised on atribuudid, mille kaudu linna iseloomustatakse? Need on küsimused, millele keskendub käesolev artikkel.

Eesti linnaluule kujunemises peab kõigepealt erandina ära märkima 17. sajandist pärit Käsü Hansu nutulaulu “Oh! ma waene Tardo Liin”, kus isikustatud Tartu linn kurdab oma ajaloolist saatust – põletamisi ja hävitamist Põhjasõja päevil. Tartu linna monoloogiga algab meie linnaluule ajalugu, kuigi möödub veel poolteist sajandit, kuni tekib algupärane eesti kirjandus.

Ärkamisajal tulevad mõningatesse luuletustesse linna ajaloo jaoks tähtsad atribuudid – pühad ja mütolgiseeritud paigad (Toomemägi, Emajõgi), mis annavad viite vastavale linnale. Selle kõrval luuletatakse juba konkreetse linna ülendamiseks (Viljandi, Lindanisa). Üldine joon on linna ja linnaelu taunimine (Carl Robert Jakobson, Elise Aun) nii ideoloogiliselt kui moraali seisukohalt.

19. sajandi lõpul ja 20. sajandi alguses kohtame linna ja ka linnalüürikat eesti rahvale mõeldud laulikutes. Laulikute traditsioon kujuneb rahva seas väga populaarseks. Täheldatavad on kaks tendentsi: esiteks, nimetada laulik väljaandmise koha järgi (Viljandi, Tapa, Tallinn, Narva vms.) või siis luuletada antud linnast, tema ajaloost ja väärtusest (*Vorstlinna kannel ehk Tapa laulik*).

Vastupidiselt nooreestlaste kirjutistele ja seisukohtadele puuduvad nende luules linnaga seonduvad motiivid ja kujundid. “Siuru” aeg muudab siiski loodusatribuutikat – endiste loodusest võetud lillede ja taimede asemele tulevad kultiveeritud taimed (sirel, reseeda, toomingas jt.); tähtsaks muutub *aed* ja aia-kujund.

1920. aastad toovad eesti lüürikasse kaks linnakeskse kirjutamislaadiga autorit. Johannes Barbarus töötab välja atribuutide süsteemi, mille põhjal võib linna iseloomustada. Mitmete poeetiliste reisikirjade ja suurlinnapiltide kõrval kujuneb eesti oma (ehkki õrnalt adutav) linnakujutus. Selle loomisel on tähtis koht Karl Ehrmannil, kelle kolm kogu 1920. aastate teisest poolest on inspireeritud linnast ja linnaelust. Linnakujutuse arengule aitavad kaasa 1930. aastate suvitusvärvid, kus distantseerutakse varasemast talupoeglikust vaatevinklist.