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On the Threshold: The Brothel and the Literary Salon as Heterotopias in Finnish Urban Novels

1. Introduction

In this essay I will look at the way in which heterotopias in literature can be analysed as spatial settings for turning points in narrative. My analysis will be guided primarily by the theoretical framework proposed by Foucault under the term 'heterotopias,' by which he meant complex spaces that not only carry their own manifold meanings, but which also have ordering repercussions on the space at large to which they belong (see Foucault). It will be seen that such 'counter-sites' (a term Foucault uses as a synonym for heterotopias) in the literary realm often constitute the surroundings within which a turning point in the plot takes place. In the novels analysed here, the introduction of the character into a counter-site has a variety of effects that can be structured under the heading of the turning point: within the heterotopian setting, the protagonist is brought into contact with other characters central to the plot; there is a density of references back and forth in the narration, and a recognition of sorts is brought about, illuminating not only the nature of the heterotopia itself, but of the society at large of which it is a part. In my analysis of urban novels from the turn of the twentieth century, I focus on the heterotopia of the brothel, while in my analysis of later novels, written in the 1920s and 1930s, I will look at the adaptation of this spatial representation into a new kind of setting: the bohemian after-party set in a literary salon.

The introduction of a literary character into narrated heterotopias typically takes the form of an initiation into the unknown under the guidance of a minor literary character who functions as a mentor or a double. In the course of the event, borders are crossed, liminal spaces traversed, and, regularly, these passages are infused with what amounts to rites of passage. The Finnish novels under scrutiny establish different poetics of introduction into heterotopias depending on the literary paradigm they draw on. In the realist/naturalist paradigm, the brothel scene recounts a mini-narrative of the city's degenerating forces and the necessity for social

and moral action in the face of dysphoria; there is a heterodiegetic narrator who makes sense of the events, which are largely beyond the understanding of the characters themselves. In the early modernist paradigm of the 1920s and 1930s, introduction into heterotopias cannot be outrightly linked to a turning point in a linearly evolving plot.¹ Moreover, the heightened awareness of the protagonist is no longer primarily related to his or her social and spatial surroundings. Rather, in the examples discussed here, the events are internalised as relevant turning points within the personal life-story of a homodiegetic protagonist, or, conversely, they function merely as the starting point for a narrative that otherwise distances itself from linearity and turning points in general.

2. Heterotopia as Turning Point

In his essay "On Other Spaces," Foucault defines heterotopia as "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). Foucault is interested not just in the character of specific sites, but in the kinds of relations that exist amongst sites (see 23). The "Other Spaces" mentioned in the essay are twofold: on the one hand, utopias—non-existent settings that are nevertheless at work in the spatial imagination of a given society—and on the other hand, what Foucault calls 'heterotopias.' Heterotopias are a part of society's spatial framework, potentially performing a healing as well as a punishing function; the asylum, the hospital, institutions for the aged, and army barracks may all be considered heterotopias. They form part of society's spatial power structures, inverting and questioning the normal social order; in Foucault's words, they "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect" (24). Heterotopias exist within society to partake in reflecting and reorganising a certain social order; they are "spaces in which an alternative social ordering is performed," and "in which a new way of ordering emerges that stands in contrast to the taken-for-granted mundane idea of social order that exists within society" (Hetherington 40).

In (cultural) geography and urban studies, the concept of heterotopia has proved to be a particularly productive concept, although it has at

times been used in ways that go far beyond the conceptual boundaries originally set out by Foucault.² In literary studies, heterotopia has not gained the same prominence, although notable exceptions do exist (see for example Ahlbäck; Casarino, *Modernity at Sea*; Mahlamäki). For the study of the urban novel, heterotopias may be of particular relevance. The city, in literature as in everyday experience, is a totality which presents itself in a form that is far from intelligible; in the words of David Harvey, it is "a place of mystery, the site of the unexpected" (229), and theorists of the historical as well as the literary city, from Lewis Mumford to Burton Pike, have stressed its essentially contradictory and opaque character (see Mumford 46–47; Pike xii). As spatial environments that are simultaneously related to all other spatial settings, but "[...] in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect," heterotopias have the particular potential to illuminate and unravel spatial socio-political practices and power relationships in an otherwise extremely complex spatial realm.

In the Finnish turn-of-the-century novels I will analyse, introduction into the heterotopian space of the brothel means symbolically as well as literally becoming acquainted with the city's vices.³ From that moment on, there is no turning back for the protagonist to a state of innocence or ignorance. This does not mean that the turning point brought about within a heterotopian setting takes place only within the linear structure of a protagonist's development. Heterotopian settings are composed of a number of various features that all enforce a sense of secrecy and disorientation, leading up to a recognition that sheds light, not only on the protagonist's development, but also on the environment in which they live. The heterotopias I explore in the Finnish novels at hand bear relevance to a whole number of elements: they reflect upon the real city of Helsinki, as well as upon other cities, real and literary; they have their guiding and often disrupting influence upon the literary characters that are brought across their threshold, and they can be seen to function as nodes within the narration, providing a density of characters and of references back and forth in the narration. The events which unfold within the heterotopias are, moreover, closely related to genre- and period-related conventions, and to the ethical questions pre-occupying a given age.

1 In the case of Finnish literature of the 1920s and 1930s, it would be going too far to speak of fully-fledged modernist novels; high modernist prose written in Finnish would not appear until the 1950s (see Riiikonen).

2 See, for example, the plethora of applications in Dehenne and De Cauter.

3 In much Finnish prose literature at the turn of the twentieth century, Helsinki is equated with a biblical seedbed of vice, and in one of the most prototypical urban novels in Finnish literature, Juhani Aho's *Helsinkiin (Towards Helsinki, 1889)* the protagonist actually imagines Helsinki in the form of a brothel (see Ameel "Road to Helsinki?").

3. The Brothel as Heterotopia

In the first generation of Finnish urban novels, one heterotopia stands out: that of the brothel. In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault draws particular attention to brothels, denoting them as an "extreme type of heterotopia" (27). The brothel is, indeed, a heterotopia par excellence: it is set partly outside of the traditional set of moral values which upholds the social structure of society, a place in which social interaction is regulated according to a particular set of rules and habits. Entrance into a brothel, moreover, is generally restricted, a feature which Foucault saw as one of the typical characteristics of heterotopia. At the same time, the brothel might also be said to be an 'institution' within society, mirroring and questioning sexual morals, ideas of family, femininity and masculinity.

It is, of course, far from a coincidence that a particular literary genre or period presents a certain environment as particularly pivotal. Casarino has drawn attention to the way in which the foregrounding of the heterotopia of the ship in turn-of-the-century modernist literature coincided with a period particularly concerned with the reconceptualisation of paradigms of gender and sexuality. In Casarino's view, the ship, "while its place in culture was being fatally put into question, became among the aptest stages for the dramatization of paradigm shifts in conceptions of sexuality" (Casarino, *Sublimes* 201). In the case of the heterotopia of the brothel, the link with social and sexual paradigm shifts is even more obviously present. In the late nineteenth century, literary representations of the brothel were informed by the vivid and complex discussions on prostitution that occupied sociologists from New York to Paris; the brothel became, in literary and other representations, "a metaphor for the whole new regime of nineteenth-urbanism" (Wilson, "Flâneur" 105).⁴ It should not come as a surprise, then, that brothel scenes can be found in realist and naturalist (urban) literature, although the theme was taken up equally by novelists of high modernism: pivotal brothel scenes can be found in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) as well as in Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).

Within the spatial setting of the brothel, various forces are at work: the male gaze of the newly initiated visitor, the ethical questions of a particular society, and the sign of the female body, inscribed with meaning by the male gaze, but also giving meaning to the initiation rite of the male visitor. In the representations of modernism, the relation between the male gaze and the female body acquired particular relevance, as Griselda

Pollock has shown in her analyses of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paintings and literature. When considering these renditions it is important to ask "[...] why the territory of modernism so often is a way of dealing with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women—why the nude, the brothel, the bar?" (Pollock 247). Literary and other representations of a newly appearing urbanity and modernity tried to understand the city and to react in an appropriate way to the ethical questions it posed; these endeavours often became juxtaposed with the semiotic construction of the feminine body, under the guidance of the male gaze. It may be useful at this point to stress that the Finnish novels I analyse here were all written by men. Moreover, they almost exclusively feature male protagonists, and in the few cases in which we find a female protagonist introduced into heterotopian settings, focalisation generally passes to a male bystander. Literary characters and the modes of focalisation are by no means innocent onlookers in the processes that assigned particular roles to men and women in the heterotopian space, but act, rather, as accomplices.

If prostitution "was the great fear of the age" (Wilson, "Flâneur" 92), Finland and its literature were no exception.⁵ In Finnish literature, too, "[w]oman was understood as a sign, as an allegory of the 'modern'—depicting both the fears and hopes of modernity" (Lappalainen, "Seduced Girls" 155). The topos of prostitution carries a special meaning in the period under discussion. Finland went through a period of profound transformation during the nineteenth century, during which time the intellectual climate was structured within a national-romantic framework. Within this frame of thought, the student, rising from the people, was seen as an Apollo-like figure, and the elevation of the people could be brought about with the help of an idealised bond between the (upper-class) student and the common girl, consecrated in marriage. The moral fall of a poor girl, initiated through seduction by a man from the higher classes, and the heterotopian space in which this fall is performed, symbolise not only the perverting dangers of the modern, urbanising world, but also the failure of the idealised marriage that should have healed the nation (see Lappalainen, "Uhatu"; Molarius). Coinciding with a growing crisis of Fennomann ideals and ideas, the corruptive seduction of a young woman from the lower classes by an upper-class male is thematised widely in turn-of-the-century Finnish literature (see Lappalainen, "Perhe"). Brothel scenes are present—or hinted at—in Juhani Aho's novellas, *Halt sinkein* (*Towards Helsinki*, 1889) and *Yksin* (*Alone*, 1890), Eino Leino's

4 On seduction narratives and interest in the figure of the prostitute in fiction in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American fiction, see Renner.

5 For an excellent study of prostitution in Helsinki in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Häkkinen.

novel, *Jaana Röiny* (Jaana Röiny, 1907), and Arvid Järnefelt's *The Family Vein* (*Veneh'öjalaiset*, 1909), amongst others.

4. Key Features of Introduction Into Heterotopian Space

What are the key features that constitute the introduction into the brothel? My analysis will be based on two novels, Eino Leino's *Jaana Röiny* and Arvid Järnefelt's *Veneh'öjalaiset* (Occasionally, I shall take into account other contemporary novels). Leino's *Jaana Röiny* is the story of a young country girl who moves to the city in hope of a better life, but who—uprooted and trapped halfway between different social classes and the dichotomy of city and country—eventually degenerates. Similarly to *Jaana Röiny*, Järnefelt's novel *Veneh'öjalaiset* deals with the upward and downward social mobility of people moving from the countryside to the city, and with the social and political turmoil of early twentieth-century Helsinki, but with a male protagonist as the main focaliser (see Ameal, “City Awakens”). The theme of introduction into a strange environment links turn-of-the-century brothel scenes to a larger literary category which is typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels, especially the ones dealing with social mobility: that of the introduction of the young protagonist into an unfamiliar space with its own moral and cultural codes (see Alter 32).

The first key feature of introduction into heterotopian space is related to the brothel's character as a space that is inaccessible to the general public. As mentioned above, it is typical for heterotopias that entrance into them is restricted: according to Foucault, heterotopias “presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable”; they are “not freely accessible like a public place” (24). In both novels, the protagonist is unable to move into this pivotal space on his or her own. He or she is guided there by someone else who has superior knowledge about the unwritten rules of the surrounding environment. The image of the urban environment as profoundly enigmatic draws heavily on the age-old image of the city as labyrinth. But the danger hiding in this labyrinth took on a feminine guise: as Elizabeth Wilson has pointed out, “[a]t the heart of the urban labyrinth lurked not the Minotaur, a bull-like male monster, but the female Sphinx, the ‘strangling one,’ who was so called because she strangled all those who could not answer her riddle: female sexuality, womanhood out of control, lost nature, loss of identity” (Wilson, *Sphinx* 7).

The second feature is that the brothel constitutes a disorienting environment to the protagonist, consisting of various elements that at first

defy interpretation. These elements include strange sounds, clothes and habits, which the protagonist finds difficult to read, although to the actual reader they may present revealing clues. The importance of the reader in substituting part of the suspense inherent in this specific feature of the turning point is in tune with the observation made by Sicks and Nünning in the introduction to this volume that “[t]urning points serve to produce suspense, leading storylines to a climax, or they interfere with reception so that readers reconstruct subplots”. The events unfolding within the brothel only make sense within these novels insofar as the reader is aware that the scene of the events is, indeed, a brothel, and that the protagonist is at first unaware of the nature of his surroundings.

Among the enigmatic elements experienced by the protagonist, it is usually sounds that first indicate—to the reader at least—that the space is not as innocent as it had appeared to be. The protagonist perceives these sounds as strange and enigmatic. The stress on the faculty of hearing in these scenes strengthens the focaliser's sense of passivity and insecurity. Yi-Fu Tuan, in his groundbreaking work on environmental perception, states how the “effect of evanescence and fragility in [...] description of place [...] is achieved by dwelling on the sounds. Compared with seeing, hearing is unfocused and passive” (Tuan 51). Jaana Röiny, thinking she has been accepted into a household as a maid, wakes up in the middle of the night because of strange sounds which announce to the perceptive reader the real nature of her surroundings and, consequently, what kind of degenerating turning point is in the offing: “[f]rom the rooms around her, she heard drunk singing and a piano playing” (Leino 209).⁶ Similarly, the novel *Rakastunut rampa* (*A Cripple in Love*, 1922) describes the sensation of young Nelma, unwittingly introduced into the brothel of her acquaintance Mimmi Rumsfeldt: “[f]rom the room next door, she heard happy voices and clattering sounds” (Lehtonen 123). In *Veneh'öjalaiset* again, the protagonist Hannes gradually starts to realise what is happening when “in the bigger room [next door] the noise of drunks can be heard” (Järnefelt, *Veneh'öjalaiset* 84).

The third typical feature of introduction into the brothel consists of elements of make-believe with which the protagonist is confronted. In all three examples mentioned above the protagonist is not, at first, led into the main room, but into a kind of antechamber. Within this space, the protagonist is confronted with a subtle play of deception and masquerade, which centers on the resemblances to normality and to the traditional bourgeois home. The women in the brothel scenes seem almost invariably to be occupied in some act of transformation, often in front of mirrors:

⁶ All quotations from Finnish novels are translated by myself unless otherwise stated.

combing their hair, changing clothes, putting on make-up, and the like. In the case of Jaana Rönty, the transformation is almost total: when she wakes up in the strange house, her clothes are gone and replaced by more fitting attire, and she is told by the lady of the house that a name other than her own would be more suitable (see Leino 199). In *Venohjälaiset*, the element of dressing up is taken to unprecedented heights when one of the girls get ready to see the clients; she takes off her normal clothes and puts on a night gown (at least, this is how Hannes interprets the attire), as if to imitate an atmosphere of nightly and homely intimacy. It is at this point that full recognition starts to dawn on Hannes (see Jännefelt, *Venohjälaiset* 85–86).

The element of masquerade is closely linked to the idea of the home: the brothel can be seen as a travesty of a utopian image of the bourgeois home, strangely inverted and put into question. In Jännefelt's novel, *Venohjälaiset*, Hannes believes he has arrived at the home of his friend's fiancée and that the other girls moving about are her sisters. As already mentioned above, Jaana thinks she has entered into the service of a family as a housemaid. An extreme reversal of a perceived home transformed into a brothel is described in Waltari's disturbing *Kuhkakuuti* (*Golden Locks*, 1961 [1946]). The cellar room which young Maire, 14 years of age, has rented from an elderly couple turns out to be used as an improvised brothel by her landlords, where she is forced into prostitution.⁷ Foucault noted how heterotopias are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25). This is exactly the reason why the brothel is capable of reminding an uninitiated observer of a bourgeois home, while at the same time being a radical travesty of the home.

A fourth feature is that the pivotal space presents a density both at the level of the characters and in the references to events earlier and later in the narration. The brothel brings together various characters whose life stories will meet again in the course of the story, but who otherwise belong to essentially different worlds. In *Venohjälaiset*, the brothel scene finds the protagonists Hannes and Hinkki for the last time together as childhood friends, in combination with their teacher, the police and the young prostitute Magda, whom Hannes will meet much later in dramatic circumstances. In *Jaana Rönty*, Jaana meets the enigmatic baron Mantfelt for the first time in the brothel; throughout the novel, their roads will cross at crucial stages (see Rojola 229–35). The events at the brothel go beyond a mere gathering of characters converging upon the same spot: in

the brothel scene, earlier hints at a moral downfall are fulfilled or consummated, and the narration also contains elements that look forward to things to come.

The fifth and final feature is that of recognition. It is often, in effect, in recognition that we can situate the turning point. I do not intend recognition here in the strictly Aristotelian term, as *agnorosis*, which, together with *peripeteia* ('reversal') constitutes the turning point in the tragic plot. What happens in heterotopias, however, bears resemblance to that which Aristotle defined as *agnorosis*, be it in less drastic terms. Recognition, "as the word itself implies, is a change from ignorance to knowledge" (qtd. in Cave 27); a character and/or the audience suddenly realise the true nature of things. It is the moment in which earlier observations and enigmatic elements suddenly take on meaning (see Lyytikäinen in this volume). The moment in itself does not have to be very eventful; as Sicks and Nünning observe, "[...] the very moment that marks the turning point does not constitute a particularly eventful incident itself, but has usually been preceded by one or several important events" (see introduction).

In the brothel scenes discussed above, all elements of alienation, disorientation and masquerade ultimately lead to an understanding of the true nature of the brothel, and hence, to a deeper understanding of the workings of society and the role of the protagonist within it. The various features of introduction into the brothel listed above illustrate how the brothel scene constitutes a pivotal setting. In the case of Jännefelt's *Venohjälaiset*, sudden recognition takes place within the protagonist's consciousness, as it dawns upon him that he is, indeed, in a brothel. This recognition and the following Herculean fit of rage constitute a clear turning point in the protagonist's evolution. They will instill Hannes with a hatred of prostitution, the roots of which can be found in his traumatic past as an illegitimate child. In the case of Jaana Rönty, recognition does not dawn on the protagonist herself, but is present through a change in focaliser. During the brothel scene, focalisation shifts to a male outsider, baron Mantfelt, who recognises the danger the girl is in, and who 'saves' her. This shift in focalisation sets in motion a process that will structure the narration throughout the novel: the tragic events befalling Jaana will be voiced and given perspective from the viewpoint of baron Mantfelt, who meets Jaana at all the crucial moments of her life. The brothel scene in this novel, then, is profoundly pivotal in the way it brings together a variety of central characters and thematics within one and the same heterotopian space, structuring the tense dichotomy on which much of the novel rests: that between the fate of the common people, and of the morally passive but ideologically dominant perspective of the intelligentsia (see Rojola 229–35).

⁷ The novella was perceived to be so shocking that Waltari's publisher waited for some 15 years to publish it (Rajala 741–42).

5. Early Modernist Urban Novels and the Adaptation of the Brothel Theme

To what extent can we find elements of earlier brothel scenes in literature from the 1920s and 1930s, and how has this topos evolved in literature of this period? In order to get to grips with this question, something needs to be said on the overall changes Finnish society underwent during the first decades of the twentieth century, which saw the country move from beneath the czarist yoke onto the international scene as an independent nation. Three important changes concerning Finnish society will have repercussions on how the brothel lost ground to other representations of pivotal space in literature. Firstly, Finnish night life changed radically as a result of the Prohibition, inaugurated in 1919 and abolished in 1932. A substantial amount of bars and restaurants were closed, and liquor runners and illegal distilleries—rather than prostitution—held the public's imagination and kept the Helsinki police department busy.⁸ A second change is that which took place within the framework of the Fennoman national project, which loomed large in the background of the nineteenth-century image of prostitution. Already in the late nineteenth century, belief in the possible bond between *intelligentsia* and commoners had come under considerable strain, and the events of the early twentieth century (the 1905 Great Strike, in particular) put further strain on such national-romantic images.⁹ In 1918, suspicion between different layers of society erupted in a short but bloody civil war, and the idealist Fennoman project became largely irrelevant. Within this frame of reference, the image of the common girl, seduced by a man from the upper classes, lost much of its force as a wake-up call for Fennoman-inspired idealists, and became instead located in the more general sphere of loose morals and the dangers of modern, urban society.

A third change which needs to be stressed is the appearance of the image of a 'new woman' and the vivid discussion of new kinds of relationships between modern men and women in the 1920s.¹⁰ Increasingly, (middle-class) women went to university and had the chance to become financially independent; the image of the chain-smoking young woman with strong opinions, love for tango and/or jazz, and rather loose morals became common throughout 1920s Europe, and replaced much of the forcefulness of the earlier image of the prostitute. The search for a new,

modern woman, and a new kind of (sexual) relationship between modern men and women was extensively mediated and thematised in a number of 1920s and 1930s Helsinki novels, notably those written by Waltari, as well as in Unto Kari's *Sodoma* (1929), Arvi Kirvima's *Espännimäki* (1930), Iris Uurto's *Ruumin ikeävä* (1931) and Elsa Soini's *Unni* (1930).¹¹

Similar to earlier realist and naturalist literature, the literature of the 1920s and 1930s inscribed much of its anxiety and fascination into the sign of the female body, which in a number of Finnish interbellum urban novels represents a world of exotic modernity, while at the same time retaining a threatening mysteriousness. Since the 'new' woman appeared in literature as a relatively independent and adventurous companion to modern man, the brothel became largely unfit as a central heterotopian space in 1920s and 1930s novels. Instead, a new pivotal and heterotopian setting appeared in which both sexes could meet. This new setting retained strong links to the earlier image of the brothel: it was the *Nachtspiel* or the (Bohemian) after-party, where men and women freely mingled in an atmosphere of exoticism, drenched in the fumes of illegal alcohol. One such setting in particular became the symbol of the roaring 1920s in Prohibition-Helsinki: the bohemian gathering modeled on the actual salon of Minna Craucher.¹²

6. The Salon of Mrs. Craucher

The notorious salon of Mrs. Craucher, set in the modern Tröölö district in Helsinki, appears in a number of 1920s and 1930s novels. It is most famously described in the opening scene of Mikka Waltari's cult novel *Suuri illusio* (*The Great Illusion*, 1928), but also in such novels as Martti Merenmaa's *Nonsenset* (*High Tide*, 1926), Unto Kari's *Sodoma* (1929), and Joel Lehtonen's *Henkeä karkuun* (*Battle of the Spirits*, 1966). References to the salon can also be found in Riku Sarkola's *Tanssipaisten jälkeä* (*After the Dance*, 1931) (see Paavola, 2008: 80–82). As an environment which was part public, part private, the salon bears striking similarities to the image of the brothel (and, indeed, to other heterotopian pivotal settings in literature, such as the masked ball). It was a place where people from different walks of life could mingle in a setting which resembled a home without really being one. The fact that alcohol was provided in con-

8 See e.g. Määttä 39–40; Peltonen.

9 For this change in the image of the common people, see Sarjans, "Routavuoder"; Haapala et al.; Lappalainen, "Pehmeä" 70–73.

10 On the image of the new woman in Finnish literature of the 1920s and 1930s, see e.g. Tapioharju 40–58; Hapuli et al.

11 Like the prostitute before her, the 'new woman' foregrounded in Finnish media and literature had its counterparts in international literature and imagery. The French *gaitonne*, and the flapper figure in jazz, were all expressions of the 'new woman' appearing in the 1920s.

12 Originally of poor descent, the actual Mrs. Craucher, born Maria Lindell, was one of the most contentious Finnish public figures of the late 1920s and early 1930s (see Selén).

siderable quantities gave it a clearly illegal character, and the atmosphere, as described in the various literary accounts, was drenched in exoticism and a suggestive eroticism. In Lehtonen's novel, *Henkeän taitelin*, the salon of Miina Craucher is literally called a "private brothel" (Lehtonen 203). In my analysis of the salon as a pivotal and heterotopian setting, I will look primarily at the long description in Miika Waltari's debut novel, *Suuri illusioini*, making reference to other relevant novels. Waltari's debut novel is not only the most well-known literary work to describe the famous salon, but was also the cult novel of the (late) 1920s, a work of literature that was considered to give a particularly accurate image of the rhythm of the age (see Sarajas, *Suomen* 459).¹³

To what extent do we find the features found in the earlier heterotopian brothel setting in scenes describing entry into the salon of Mrs. Craucher? Firstly, the salon, like the brothel, is a space inaccessible to the general public. Entrance into the salon is restricted, and the protagonist of *Suuri illusioini*, Mr. Hart, needs a guide to acquire entry into the salon: the journalist, Korte. The profession of the protagonist's guide is no mere coincidence: the journalist—like the detective—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a figure thoroughly familiar with the secrets of the labyrinthine city.¹⁴ In Lehtonen's *Henkeän taitelin*, too, the protagonist is led to the salon by a journalist.¹⁵

Secondly, there is something secretive and disorienting about entrance into this new environment, and, just as with characters introduced into the brothel in literature at the turn of the twentieth century, Mr. Hart is at first at a loss as to how to interpret the signs he finds displayed around him. The disorientation is described through a variety of senses, smell in particular.

The unsettling nature of the surroundings is linked to a third feature, also found in earlier brothel scenes: there is a strong element of make-believe attached to the complex elements Mr. Hart sees and hears upon entering the salon. At the after-party, nothing is what it seems, and the actions of those in attendance can best be described as fitting for a masquerade. All characters present seem to be acting out a role, pretending, amongst other things, to have abnormal tastes (see Waltari, *Suuri illusioini*

9), to be angry (see *ibid.* 10), to be lazy (see *ibid.* 11), showing off their depravity (see *ibid.* 12). The idea that everything is but one big illusion in which people act out their role recurs time and again. The title of the novel is, of course, "The Great Illusion" and the theme of life as one big illusion appears in other novels of the same age. It is hardly a coincidence that amongst the new professions of literary characters during these decades, we find not only the journalist and the architect, but also the stage director (for example in Kivi's *Espionni*). In the salon scene of *Suuri illusioini*, the image of acting and playing out different roles is explicitly linked to the loose morals the characters pretend to have. If the brothel can be seen as a masquerade of the bourgeois home, concealing corruption behind plush sofas and silk nightgowns, in Waltari's *Suuri illusioini*, the roles are reversed: during a relatively innocent gathering of bohemians, poets and journalists, the characters pretend to be depraved and to take part in a scene of debauchery. As a heterotopian scene, the salon shows the visitors a perceived image of a new modernity, urbanity and sexuality.¹⁶

The after-party, in a space half-public, half-private, creates a fascinating illusion that exposes both the sexual and moral preoccupations of the 1920s, as well as a general interest in the exotic and the modern. This was nothing particularly new: in Toivo Tarvas' 1916 novel *Eri kassilla* (*On Different Levels*), a central after-party scene takes place in a young woman's 'box' (small apartment) in Helsinki's fancy Töölö district. Strong elements of make-believe are implicitly and explicitly present; the room is furnished with Asian and Turkish objects, and young Marra tells the man she loves that she can arrange the room into "the hanging gardens of Semiramis" (Tarvas 106), if only he should wish it. During the 1920s and early 1930s, however, similar scenes become much more common.¹⁷

Like the heterotopian brothel setting in earlier literature, the salon brings together characters that will be joined together for the rest of the narrative: at Mrs. Spindel's party, Mr. Hart meets the two other characters with whom he will form the dramatic triangle that lies at the core of the novel, the femme fatale Caritas and the poet Hellas. Moreover, the scene contains a density of references to events in the past and the future. Tellingly, the smell in the staircase leading up to the salon leads the protagon-

13 Miika Waltari himself frequented the salon at Friesenkanu (see Rajala 130–35).

14 For the journalist and the detective in Finnish-Swedish images of Helsinki, see Pedersen 187–92. The link between the journalist and the urban imagination is also visible in the biographies of a number of prominent authors on the city: Dickens, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky were all at some point active as journalists (see Plice 92).

15 There is, of course, another reason why journalists would act as go-betweens for Madame Craucher: the actual Mrs. Craucher had strong links with the Finnish print media, and many journalists frequented the salon (see Selén 96).

16 Part of this image consisted of the exoticism hinted at in the salon. Miina Craucher's home had a legendary "Turkish room" furnished with pillows and water pipes (see Selén 87–88). Description of the Turkish room is missing in Waltari's novel, but present in other novels, e.g. Merimma's *Nokkeneri* (1926).

17 In Elsa Soini's novel, *Uini* (*Dream*, 1930), for example, a party at the female protagonist's small two-room apartment, again situated in Töölö, is referred to as opening up the palace of the Dalai Lama (see Soini 16).

nist to reminiscence about his strange feelings of excitement as a child on the day of his father's funeral, while shortly afterwards references are made to the shaky mental state of the same protagonist and the poet Hellas, who has a dramatic mental breakdown towards the end of the novel.

Many of the features typical of brothel scenes in Finnish literature around the turn of the twentieth century, then, recur in modified form in salon scenes in 1920s and 1930s literature. To what extent, however, do these various features of introduction into the salon lead to a recognition, and hence to a turning point in the narration? Essential in this respect is the degree to which the elements of make-believe in the heterotopian setting gradually dawn on the protagonist. Contrary to turn-of-the-century protagonists, however, characters entering the bohemian salon are no mere outside spectators of the various elements of the masquerade occurring in these heterotopian surroundings. They play an active part in the illusion, and the elements of make-believe are internalised and fictionalised by them.

In Mika Waltari's *Suuri illusioini*, Mr. Hart is not only guided into the salon by a journalist, but he, too, is a journalist and well-initiated in modern and urban circles. During much of *Suuri illusioini*, the protagonists themselves overtly read their surroundings in fictionalising terms, and thus create the masquerading elements, rather than being dumbfounded by them. In an aside in *Suuri illusioini*, for example, Mr. Hellas asks the people present at Mrs. Spindel's salon to look at their surroundings with new eyes: he claims that they are, in fact, in a mental hospital, where the journalist, Mr. Korre, is the doctor (see Waltari, *Suuri illusioini* 36–37). It is a revealing scene in the way it imposes new meanings upon the surrounding settings—the mental hospital, of course, is also a deeply heterotopian setting, and ironically, there is much truth to the word play of Hellas, which looks forward to the later disintegration of both his own fragile mental health and that of the protagonist Hart towards the end of the novel.

The recognition which was so essential an element in the earlier brothel scene is now absent, and the same can be said of most other contemporary novels featuring *Nachspiel* scenes. In novels such as Joel Lehtonen's *Hankien taitelin*, Unto Kari's *Sadonna* and Marti Merenmaas' *Nousuwei*, the protagonists are conspicuously aware of the illusory atmosphere they encounter in the bohemian salon, and either they are actively involved in upholding the elements of make-believe, or else they take the stance of a cynical observer. This thematic change runs parallel to the changing role of the narrator: in a number of the novels mentioned, the focalisation has shifted from an outer narrator firmly in charge of the events to a vision strongly filtered through the awareness of the protagonist. The homodiegetic narrator of *Suuri illusioini* is a case in point, and

such a change towards inner development is in tune with the international development of the urban novel, which gradually moved from an all-encompassing, totalising vision by an outward narrator, towards an interiorised understanding processed within the consciousness of a character.¹⁸ Related to this internalisation is the gradual turn away from linear plots punctuated by turning points, which becomes visible in a number of urban novels in 1920s and 1930s Finnish literature. In novels within the realist and naturalist paradigm, turning points (such as the seduction of a female protagonist) formed an essential part of the plot structure; this is less and less the case, however, for a number of 1920s and 1930s novels inspired by a search for modernity, in which turning points become conspicuously absent. Waltari's *Suuri illusioini* may serve again as the point of reference. The novel presents itself as a bric-a-brac of fairly disparate scenes that function as windows into urban life: a game of soccer, a tango dance, the railway station, an outing to a German ship in the harbour to get cocaine, a night at the movies. The same can be said of Joel Lehtonen's novel, *Hankien taitelin*, which is completely stripped of a linear plot and composed of various sketches of society. However, even such a novel as this requires a beginning and an ending, and it is telling that in the case of *Hankien taitelin* both narrative landmarks are placed in heterotopian contexts. In other words, even profoundly non-linear narratives that eschew the very notion of a turning point in the plot, do need some pivotal elements upon which to hinge the framework of the plot. In *Suuri illusioini*, this is exactly the task which the after-party scene performs, since it is set at the very opening of the novel.

If the bohemian salon cannot in strict terms be seen as the setting for a radical turn in the narration, this is not to say that it is without its importance in the narration. The central symbolic function of Mrs. Spindel's salon in a variety of 1920s and early 1930s Finnish urban novels had already been noticed—and criticised—by a contemporary critic, Olavi Paavolainen, himself a prolific writer who was well acquainted with the actual Minna Craucher. In his 160-page vitriolic literary pamphlet, *Suursiinons* (*Cleaning out the House*, 1932), Olavi Paavolainen condemns the new Finnish literary generation for equating "modernity" with the figure of "Mrs. Spindel," writing that "a party in such a grand apartment, excitingly dimmed by eroticism and politics, by cigarette smoke and whiskey fumes, composes the indispensable clou in most of our 'modern' novels" (Paavolainen, *Suursiinons* 81).¹⁹ The *Nachspiel* at Minna Craucher's salon is

¹⁸ For more on these two different strands in the context of the English urban novel, see Keating.

¹⁹ Olavi Paavolainen himself was one of the most prominent writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Arguably the most explicit embodiments of the 1920s interest in the (literary) city, and

seen as “indispensable” to a new generation of novelists, but not, in Paavolainen’s view, as a setting for a turning point, rather as what he calls a “clou.” Paavolainen uses the French term, but the intended meaning comes close to the way the *OED* defines the term: “That which holds the attention; the chief attraction, point of greatest interest, or central idea.” The heterotopian salon does not constitute a reversal of fortunes for the protagonist; rather, it presents the ‘central idea’ of the novel in question. It offers a compact image of urbanity and modernity, and the most compelling quest in the new generation of Finnish authors taking the stage in the 1920s, was indeed to be “in Search of Modern Times,” to quote Paavolainen’s essay collection of the same title (*Nykyaikaa etsimässä*, 1929).

7. Conclusion

In Finnish urban novels belonging to various literary paradigms, heterotopian spaces assume the role of pivotal spatial settings in the narrative. At the turn of the twentieth century, in the realist/naturalist paradigm, the brothel can be seen as a central setting, both representing and contesting a number of questions in Finnish and international discourse of that age: the woman question, the moral and social threats inherent to urbanisation, prostitution, and, in Finland, the Fennoman movement. In early modernist prose works of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the brothel had to make way for another pivotal space: that of the after-party set in a bohemian salon. Counter-sites in the novels analysed here typically display five central features. These features are the heterotopias’ inaccessibility to the general public, its disorienting character, the strong element of masquerade, the bringing together of a density of literary characters and references back and forth in the narration, and, finally, a recognition related to all earlier elements. It is this recognition, either in the protagonist or in the intended readership, which constitutes a turning point of sorts. In Järnefelt’s 1909 novel, *Venehöljäläiset*, the brothel is the setting in which awareness gradually dawns upon the protagonist, leading to radical change; in Leino’s 1907 novel, *Jaana Rönkä*, recognition is shifted to an outsider perspective, and indicated by a change of focalisation. In Finnish inter-war urban literature, pivotal heterotopian spaces can still be found, but within a changing framework of meaning. Rather than being the setting for radical change, heterotopian space has become a symbol for the whole age, infatuated with modernity, exoticism and urbanity. Although the literary

salon or the after party, epitomised by Mrs. Spindel’s bohemian salon, functions in a very different way to the brothel, both brothel and salon can be seen as revelatory and pivotal literary spaces, spatial mini-narratives that give a particular perspective on the questions central to their age. As a heterotopian mirror of society, they bring the protagonist face to face with a reverse image of the social and moral conventions of their society, within a space that holds the key to understanding the complex nature of the world of which they are a part.

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modernity are his collection of poems, *Välialue* (written together with Mikka Waltari, *The Main Road*, 1928) and his influential essay collection, *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* (*In Search of Modern Times*, 1929). See Häpuli, Rirkonen.

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