

## The Road to Helsinki

### The Young Provincial and the Confrontation with the City in Juhani Aho's *Helsinki* (1889) and Finnish Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The turn of the twentieth century saw a sharp rise in urban images in Finnish literature. Increasingly, the city – predominantly, the capital Helsinki – was depicted not as the sterile background for literary action, but as an individual entity to which distinct images and experiences were attached. In this essay, I will analyze one, particular experience in literature from the turn of the century: that of arrival in the city. How is the journey to, and arrival in the city, experienced and imagined in Finnish literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century? How can these experiences and images of confrontation with the city be analyzed and contextualized with the help of frameworks offered by genre typology and character typology? I will concentrate on a reading of Juhani Aho's novella, *Helsinki* (1899, "Towards Helsinki"), which will be complemented by a comparison with other turn-of-the-century Finnish prose texts featuring the arrival of a provincial protagonist in the capital.

#### Arrival in the city

The arrival of an outside individual in the city has been seen as one of the most potent topoi used in literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (cf. Keunen 1999: 359). All through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, an impressive cavalcade of European literary characters can be seen travelling from the countryside towards the capital, to be immersed in a strange and often estranging urban environment – from Dickens' Victorian London to Zola's Paris of the second Empire, to the Saint Petersburg of the Russian novel. The spatial movements of literary protagonists have a singular importance in shaping the history of the novel, as Franco Moretti has shown in his study *The Atlas of the European Novel* (1998). In the historical novels of newly emerging nation states, the spatial theatre consisted of the frontiers, whereas in the *Bildungsroman*, the seemingly aimless wanderings of earlier novels of adventure or historical novels have become a journey towards the metropolis (Moretti 1998: 13–73).

It is an evolution which is also present in many Finnish novels at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, which (sometimes literally) trace the road towards Helsinki.

The first and in many respects still the most compelling literary representation of the journey to and the arrival in the capital in Finnish literature is Juhani Aho's *Helsinki*. In the present essay, Aho's novella will be read as a prototypical text, which has set – or captured – the tone for later representations of arrival in Helsinki, not only in the decades immediately following this novella, but in some respects even up to this day. Questions of genre will be particularly important in reading Aho's seminal text, but it will be shown that a broader framework based on character typology may be even more instrumental in analyzing and contextualizing the arrival in the city in this text.

*Helsinki* belongs to a literary genre which, in Finland at least, bears special relevance for the literary confrontation between the individual and the city in the nineteenth century: the student novel. This well-established, although often neglected, genre in Finnish literary history is characterized by the arrival of an outside individual in the metropolis to take up his/her studies, and the subsequent rise (and often fall) of the hero in city circles.<sup>1</sup> Originally, the Northern European student novel, a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, had presented student life in a positive, euphoric light. In the mid-1870s, however, a shift can be seen away from romantic ideals, towards more negative and pessimistic descriptions; a shift which was marked in Sweden by the appearance of Strindberg's seminal short story collection entitled *Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken* (1877, "From Fjärdingen and Svartbäcken") and in Norway by Arne Garborg's novel *Bondestudenten* (1883, "Peasant Students"). In Finland-Swedish literature, a similar shift can be noticed with the publication of Tavastijerna's novel *Barridomsvännen* (1886, "Childhood Friends") (cf. Söderhjelm 1916/1920: 118–120).<sup>2</sup> The gloomy change in the descriptions of student life in the city coincides with the growing influence of French naturalism, with its emphasis on degeneration and its interest in sexuality and prostitution. When the student novel appears in the prose literature written in Finnish near the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, the genre had already undergone this change, and most of the descriptions of student life in the city are consequently infused with a negative vision of the city and its dangerous, degenerating influence.

#### Juhani Aho's *Helsinki*

*Helsinki* tells the story of young Antti Ljungberg, a Swedish-speaking Finn from Kuopio, who travels to Helsinki by steam boat and by train, in order to take up his studies at the Helsinki University. Upon

arrival at the railway station in Helsinki, he is driven to the restaurant Kappeli, from where, at the end of the story, he is taken along, completely intoxicated, to a seedy part of the city. What makes Aho's student novella particularly interesting is the fact that it was originally conceived by the author as a full-scale novel, but was eventually published as a condensed novella (Lyytikäinen 1997: ix). The text at hand, then, presents the reader with the whole plot development of the student novel in miniature form, with covert references and premonitions of things to come.

Aho's novella offers not just one possible vision of a young student's development vis-à-vis the city: the protagonist Antti is surrounded by a whole range of students, presenting the reader with a number of differing possible futures for a provincial student in the city. Amongst Antti's fellow students, Pekka is Antti's positive double: a diligent and serious student, whose example Antti is unlikely to follow. Kalle and the eternal student Nieminen are Antti's negative doubles, foreshadowing Antti's future course, and his possible turn towards becoming a pleasure-loving, debt-accumulating student (Kalle) and consequently a physically, mentally and financially ruined elder student (Nieminen). This variety of possible students' fates in the city is typical for the student novel, recurring in most if not all student novels at the turn of the century. It was also present in Aho's immediate predecessor, Tavaststjerna's *Barnidomstämmer*, whose title, "childhood friends", already hinted at the dichotomy between the fates of the main character Ben and his unreliable childhood friend, Syberg.

As mentioned above, *Helsinki* was written after the Nordic student novel had made a turn towards negative descriptions of student life, in a literary climate influenced by the negative connotations that were linked to the city in the realist and naturalist literature of the late nineteenth century. The journey towards Helsinki in Aho's novella is consequently seen as a slow descent into a dangerous hotbed of vice and sin. As Antti approaches Helsinki, he gradually falls prey to the three main dangers that infest the late nineteenth century literary city, and that threaten the innocent outsider: wine, debt, and women. The latter danger, in particular, carries special meanings in the genre of the student novel, since it is linked both to the theme of coming-of-age, and to one of the most central themes in the Finnish student novel, that of the problematic relation between lower class women and the student (cf. Molarius 1996). More than anything else, the city embodies an atmosphere of immorality and seductive sexuality. The sensual undercurrents attached to the city in Aho's *Helsinki* can be best illustrated by the following quote, in which young Antti imagines the capital he is hastening towards:

Helsinki began to loom in front of him like a dark red room decorated with velvet sofa's, diffusing an enchanting perfume and with loosely clad creatures roaming about in the secretive semidarkness, moving ever closer towards him, sitting down on his knee, wrapping their arms around his neck while others played piano and sang that light, fiery tune – the same tune that Kalle was humming: "frallallalla, natten ä bra!" [—]

His [Antti's] face had gone white, and when he took his glass, his hand was shaking noticeably. (Aho 1889/1974: 257)<sup>3</sup>

Helsinki, then, is conjured up before Antti like a sensuous brothel, and its enchanting, but numbing force has immediate effect on the protagonist, who has grown pale and whose hand is shaking. Both elements can be considered to be indications of the turn for the worse that Antti's fate is gradually taking. Similar ill-bearing premonitions can be found throughout the novella, multiplying as he draws closer to the city. When stirring his "rum toddy", Antti is satisfied to notice he does it so skilfully that it almost seems he has a *preposition* for it; the italicization is the narrator's, and one of the many ironic asides present in this story (ibid. 248). After a night of heavy drinking on the ship towards Helsinki, the sight of Lake Saimaa and the healthy beauty of nature contrast unfavorably with Antti's hangover and his dirty clothes, and he fears degeneration has already set in (ibid. 264–265). When his hangover has been washed away by him drinking his first schnapps, Antti's cheeks start to glow like someone suffering from consumption (ibid. 266). All these references can be seen as portentous omens. The city clearly has a corrupting and immobilizing effect on the young student protagonist, a characteristic which can also be found in *Barnidomstämmer* and which recurs in most of the turn-of-the-century student novels.

Although much of the above-mentioned images and experiences of the city in Aho's *Helsinki* gain meaning within the larger framework of the student novel, it is a genre which seems to be too rigid to allow for a comprehensive view of the confrontation between the provincial and the city in literature. This is due first of all to the fact that it fails to offer a typology that could bridge the gap between the images of Helsinki and the relevant images of the city in contemporary European literature. Moreover, by concentrating on the experiences of only one group in society, it excludes a significant number of urban images in contemporary Finnish prose. Juhani Aho's Antti Ljungberg and the other students featuring so prominently in the Finnish prose of the late nineteenth century were by far not the only group in society whose move from the provinces to the capital was depicted in literature. At the end of the nineteenth century, Helsinki was one of Europe's fastest-growing capitals, attracting people from all social classes and from all walks of life. For all these people, the

city constituted the nexus of their expectations, the hub of the wheel upon which their fortunes were made or broken.

There are a number of advantages to analyzing the representations in literature of this group as a whole, rather than as different, socially defined sub-groups (the student, the working class woman, the civil servant).<sup>4</sup> First, it makes it possible to structure the strikingly similar urban experiences of Finnish literary protagonists who come from the most various social backgrounds; characters as diverse as those found in Eino Leino's *Olli Suurpää*, where the protagonist is a civil servant (*Olli Suurpää*, 1908), or the novel from the same author about a lower class girl, *Jaana Rönty* (1907); Järnefelt's *Veneh'ojalaiset* (1909, "The Family Veneh'oja"), which bears only the faintest traces of a student novel, or Santeri Ivalo's *Heillaassa* (1890, "In Hellas") and Kyösti Wilkuna's *Väikeä tie* (1915, "The Difficult Road"), which are both typical student novels. Second, it makes it possible to draw a number of pivotal Finnish novels into a more international frame of literary interpretation, rather than confining them to a limited Nordic (and German) tradition, provided by the student novel genre.

#### The Young Man from the Provinces

One such larger typology, encompassing all of the diverse above-mentioned characters, can be found in the typology of the "Young Man from the Provinces", which was first introduced by Lionel Trilling in his foreword to the novel *The Princess Casamassima* (1948) by Henry James, and explored in detail by A.K. Chanda (1981).<sup>5</sup> Since the character typology of the Young Man from the Provinces is far from a household term, particularly if applied to the Finnish novel, I will first provide a concise overview of how Chanda defines this typology, before returning for a closer look at *Helsinkiin* to determine to what extent Antti Ljungberg and other provincials moving to the city in Finnish literature at the turn of the century can be seen as Young Men from the Provinces. Not all features of the character typology of the Young Man will at first glance have immediate relevance for our understanding of the literary images and experiences of the city, which are the main concern for the present essay. These features are, however, at least indirectly related to the kind of development that the Young Man from the Provinces undergoes within the city, and hence important in structuring the protagonists' experiences of the city.

In his article "The Young Man from the Provinces", Chanda attempts to define an ideal type of the literary character of the Young Man, drawing from a range of British, American and French novels, mostly from the nineteenth century, but with references to earlier literature (such as picaresque novels) and to twentieth century examples. Novels included by Chanda are Stendhal's *The Red and the*

*Black (Le Rouge et le noir, 1830)*, Balzac's *Lost Illusions (Illusions perdues, 1837-43)*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Summarizing some of the most important features, Chanda's Young Man is a provincial person moving to the city, a "romantic social climber" who rejects his pastoral past and who "possesses innate aristocratic refinement" (Chanda 1981: 339). The Young Man's meteoric rise in society, which is reversely connected to his moral development, is followed by his "irreversible tragic fall" (*ibid.*). Although Chanda consistently speaks about the Young Man from the provinces, female heroes are also included in his typology.<sup>6</sup>

#### Applying the Young Man to the Finnish context

If we want to apply Chanda's typology to the Finnish context, a number of reservations will have to be made. One such reservation is obliquely referred to by Chanda himself, when he comments on the conspicuous absence of Russian novels from his corpus. Chanda claims that the Young Man from the Provinces is largely absent from Russian novels, which is "probably due to the rigid stratification of Russian society which made social climbing from the bottom of the economic heap extraordinarily difficult" (Chanda 1981: 322). This remark is far from uncontroversial, but whether Chanda's statement is correct or not, it is certainly of the utmost importance to consider the socio-political background of a particular country when transposing typologies on the nineteenth century novel directly from French or English examples onto - in our case - Finnish prose. This is especially valid for a typology such as the Young Man from the Provinces, which is intimately connected to the highly context-bound concept of social rise. In Finland before independence, social rise for speakers of Finnish was defined and obstructed by three central factors: Russian oppression, the unceasing, although gradually diminishing, concentration of political and cultural power in the hands of the Finland-Swedish elite, and the historical absence of a large urban Finnish-speaking middle class. These factors would have far-reaching consequences for the social, political and geographical mobility of young Finnish men trying to make their mark on history, and on the representations in literature of their endeavors.<sup>7</sup>

Due to these restraining factors typical for the Finnish situation at that time, a number of Chanda's features that are characteristic for the Young Man from the Provinces are absent or appear in a modified form in contemporary Finnish prose. In particular, this is the case for the hero's spectacular rise in society, to the heights of the high nobility.<sup>8</sup> In the Finnish context, the magical stroke of luck, brought about by some powerful benefactor, and a subsequent meteoric rise, were

quite out of the question. Another feature which Chanda deems essential for the Young Man is his "innate refinement, the charm and personal beauty which enable him to adapt himself to, and be adopted by, high society" (Chanda 1981: 328), features which are hard to find in descriptions of the Finnish Young Man from the Provinces. This absence of aristocratic features in the male heroes from the Finnish-speaking classes is most probably due to the problematic image of the common people and the racial prejudice prevalent in Finland at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Juhani Aho's *Helsinkiin* is a telling example of how attitudes cultivated at a particular time towards certain groups in society may find their reflection in literature. It is only logical that protagonist Antti, as a member of the Swedish-speaking bourgeoisie, is described in rather negative terms by Aho, who was a strong advocate of the Finnish cause (cf. Lyytikäinen 1997: x–xi). But in *Helsinkiin*, all students are presented in a more or less ironic light, not only Antti. The Finnish-speaking students in this novella, who are treated with contempt by Antti, are clearly depicted in a more positive light than Antti, but they are nevertheless described as being clumsy and far from being attractive. This categorization will recur in the next few decades and is found in many of the descriptions of commoners moving to the city.

Although the Finnish Young Man from the Provinces lacks innate aristocratic features and generally does not experience a meteoric rise in society, he is not, however, merely a parvenu. According to Chanda, what sets the Young Man from the Provinces apart from the parvenu is a "certain fineness of spirit, a yearning for the rich possibilities of life, which raises him above mediocrity" (Chanda 1981: 329), and being convinced that he "occupies a station far below that [–] to which he belongs by merit" (Chanda 1981: 330). This is certainly true for a number of Finnish provincial people moving to the capital: sensitive heroes eager to embrace the opportunities offered by the city can be seen in characters such as Elijas (Ivalo's *Hellmaassa*), Juuso (Ivalo's *Aikansa lapsipuoli* [1895, "Stepchild of his Time"]), Henrik (Järnefelt's *Veljekset* [1900, "Brothers"]), Markus (Wilkuna's *Vaikea tie* [1915]), and Hilja (Talvio's *Tähtien alla* [1910, "Under the Stars"]).

For the protagonists mentioned above (i.e. Elijas, Juuso, Henrik, Markus and Hilja), sensitivity lies close to sensibility: they are romantic dreamers, to the point almost of becoming sentimental heroes.<sup>10</sup> In a number of Finnish turn-of-the-century prose works, the plight of the men (and women) from the provinces gains almost Don Quixotean dimensions. Juhani Aho's *Helsinkiin* is a case in point: Antti ironically resembles a knightly hero, in whose quest all conventions of late medieval romance are turned upside down.<sup>11</sup> Antti sets out on a dangerous voyage into the world, but the damsel in distress he leaves behind, Alma, does not care in the slightest for him. Antti had

hoped to receive a rose from his beloved Alma as an amulet to protect him from "the seductive charms of the city" (Aho 1889/1974: 219), but when the rose is not forthcoming (nor the engagement he had wished for), Antti's original mission to preserve his purity amidst the dangers of the seductive city attains comical dimensions.<sup>12</sup> From his first failure onwards, *Helsinkiin* can be read as a reversed "novel of ordeal".<sup>13</sup> Antti's virtue, fidelity and valor are continuously tested, and in every test he fails: he does not understand the rules of the card game the others play, he does not master the flirtatious word play with the waitresses on the boat, and when he drinks alcohol, he has to throw up and he passes out. Upon arrival in the city, he almost immediately gives away the money he has received from his mother, and when in the end of the story, he is taken to an address at a street well-known for its brothels, it seems clear what will happen to his purity.

Although some of the characteristics of the Finnish turn-of-the-century Young Man from the Provinces do not correspond with the features set out by Chanda, a substantial number of the main characteristics of Chanda's Young Man are indeed present in Finnish turn-of-the-century prose. The first of these is the aspiring nature of the Young Man, and his/her rejection of his/her provincial, often impoverished roots. Certainly, many Finnish protagonists feel a sense of responsibility for their provincial background, or at least consider returning there once they have finished their studies or earned enough money (including, amongst others, Antti in *Helsinkiin*, and the protagonists in both Leino's *Juana Röivity* and Järnefelt's *Brothers*). But in their confronting the city, these characters turn their back on their provincial origin, and they do their best in their clothing, speech and bearing, to conform to the urban norm. This attitude is far from trivial, since by betraying their provincial background, they often become more vulnerable to the dangers in the city. An interesting feature of the Young Man from the Provinces which, according to Chanda, is linked to the rejection of the protagonists' provincial background, is his or her fantasies about substitute patrician parents. In the case of Antti Ljungberg, whose Finland-Swedish background gives him free access to urban circles, this feature is – not surprisingly – absent. But it is a feature which is present for a number of Finnish Young Men and Women from the provinces, such as Olli (Leino's *Olli Suurpää*), Hannes (Järnefelt's *Veneli'öjalaiset*) and Leeni (Hilda Tähli's *Leeni* [1907]).<sup>14</sup>

Another feature which is considered typical by Chanda and which occurs frequently in Finnish turn of the century novels, is the fact that the Young Man is a social achiever who rises and who, in most cases, also falls; and that in his rise, he is accompanied by a *Doppelgänger*. We have already seen how in *Helsinkiin*, Antti is surrounded by a whole range of student doubles, and in Finnish turn-of-the-century novels featuring provincials in the city, doubles abound. Examples of

such doubles can be found in a number of other contemporary novels featuring arrival in the capital, such as Järnefelt's *Veneh öjalaiset* (Hannes and Hinkki) and *Nuoruutteni muistelmia* (Hilja and Sanna; 1919, "Memories from my Youth"), and Ivalo's *Aikansa lapsipuoli* (Juuso and Heikki). Just as the Young Man from the Provinces has a male double to put his rise and fall in perspective, the choice in life (between ambition and family) of the Young Man is embodied in two types of women: the upper class/city girl, and the lower class/provincial woman (Chanda 1981: 354–355). In the case of *Helsinkiin*, this is covertly present in the juxtaposition between the pure, but unattainable Alma, who stays behind in Kuopio, and the rather more attainable girls at the ship buffet.<sup>15</sup>

#### Mobility and the degenerating city

Possibly the most important feature of the Young Man from the Provinces, in particular when relating this literary character to the experience of the city, is the Young Man's association with speed and mobility. Chanda claims that "swift vehicles are [–] associated symbolically with the Young Man. They are symbolic of his energy and drive, his meteoric rise, and of the distant wealth, power, and privilege he aspires to and comes eventually to possess, however fleetingly." (Chanda 1981: 325–326) Chanda's analysis on this point needs to be expanded: in a number of turn-of-the-century Finnish novels, modes of transport and images of mobility acquire much more than mere symbolical status, they are central to the development of the provincial protagonists in the city – a development which, in essence, is a journey both socially and geographically.

An analysis of images of mobility may reveal not only resemblances, but striking differences between various novels featuring a provincial protagonist moving to the city. In the case of the immediate predecessor to Aho's *Helsinkiin*, Tavaststjerna's *Barnämsvännen*, the railroad and the developing railroad network are closely connected to the character development of the novel's protagonist Ben Thomén, who ends up as a broken man in a small provincial railway station. But even though this thematic connection between the railroad and the evolution of the main character appears in a similar way in quite many late nineteenth century Finnish prose texts (e.g. Aho's *Helsinkiin*, Järnefelt's *Veneh öjalaiset*), it is exactly his modes of mobility which set Ben Thomén far apart from contemporary Finnish-speaking Young Men or Women from the Provinces.<sup>16</sup> Ben's self-evident travels abroad, and the proud way in which he asserts his staggering mobility by arriving at a summer villa in his very own sailing boat, puts him in a league apart from his Finnish-speaking contemporary heroes. For Ben, who belongs to the Swedish-speaking elite, access to

the highest circles of the capital is not so much something that can be won, but something that can and eventually will be lost.

The importance of the symbols of mobility and speed cannot be overlooked when analyzing Aho's *Helsinkiin*. In much of his work, Aho expressed his interest in depicting journeys and in using vehicles of mobility, such as trains and trams, as multilayered literary motifs (e.g. in *Rautatie* [1884, "The Railroad"]; *Yksin* [1890, "Alone"]). During most of *Helsinkiin*, the protagonist is on the move, and much of his sensations of mobility can be linked to his expectations of life in the city, to his hopes for a future social and academic success, and to his implicit, subsequent fall. The rhythm of the journey towards Helsinki, which started off at a rather leisurely pace on the boat from Kuopio, seems to gradually move towards an almost sexual climax when Antti and his fellow students board the train at Lappeenranta. Sensuous adventures seem to be promised by every whistle of the locomotive:

And this promise [of future adventures] could already be felt in every passionate whistle of the locomotive, and in the raging motion of the train and in all those stations rapidly moving away behind them – in all those things which meant that the journey became shorter every moment and that their destination, Helsinki, was coming closer and closer. Helsinki! towards which they were racing with the speed of an ever accelerating stream, and which awaited them like a still pond, boiling with bubbles, ever more greedily swallowing up the waters. (Aho 1889/1974: 268)

The acceleration felt by Antti as he approaches Helsinki is reflected in the narration by ever denser sentences, which seem to be running almost out of breath ("in every passionate [–] and in the raging motion [–] and in all those stations [–] in all those things"), and come to a climax with the triumphal mention of Helsinki. The capital is the nexus of Antti's mobility, the goal, "boiling with bubbles", of the mighty stream which transports the masses of people. The metaphor of the city as a vibrant center, while the countryside consists of still and forgotten waters, is explicitly spelled out in *Helsinkiin* when the narrator describes the provincial town of Savonlinna and some of its inhabitants, students of old, who had stepped outside of the "flow of people streaming towards the big world" and were left to stay in a small and silent bay beside the stream (Aho 1889/1974: 250).

Although the journey towards the city is experienced as exciting and encouraging by the protagonist, potentially foreshadowing the social rise he hopes for, the images of speed and mobility are also connected to the protagonist's future fall – to his alienation and degeneration. The typical provincial protagonist in Finnish prose at the turn of the century has as little control over his or her fate in the rapidly

modernizing society as over his or her movement through the world: Antti's feeling is not that of independent movement, but of *being taken* somewhere. In bouts and fits, he grows more and more paralyzed during the journey until, upon arrival at the Helsinki railway station, his sense of frightened expectation culminates in complete immobility when the train comes to a standstill in Helsinki (Aho 1889/1974: 271). Antti becomes completely dependent on others for movement: he is swept away by the stream of passengers, after which he is dragged along by Kalle and consequently forcefully taken along to the Kappeli restaurant (ibid. 271–273). In a long paragraph, the dazzling spectacle of Helsinki's most famous restaurant is described. It is as if Antti has arrived, at last, in the brothel of his earlier imagination, or in the "still pond" of the earlier simile, although the effect is very different and much more disconcerting:

In a daze, as if swept down a foaming waterfall, Antti found himself seated for a moment on a soft sofa in a green room with a many-splendoured cut-glass chandelier, paintings on the walls and a huge mirror. It was as if he'd fallen into a quietly hissing pool, but not a restful one, a frothing whirlpool that a moment later would hurl him down another waterfall, still lower, with no end in sight. He felt he was being whirled round and round, with the blood going to his head and flushing all sense of direction from his eyes. For a moment Antti had no idea where he had come from and where he was going. (Aho 1889/2003: 77)<sup>17</sup>

In the quotation above, the move towards the city is described as a river gathering force, flowing downwards; a symbol for the debasing turn Antti's life has taken when moving to the city. Helsinki appears as a series of violent rapids and waterfalls, hurling Antti lower and lower, "with no end in sight". This disorientation is taken to a point where Antti is not only incapable of reading his environment, but actually unable to remember "where he had come from and where he was going". The identification of the road towards the city as a forceful downward stream, while the countryside is depicted as still waters, can also be found in other contemporary depictions of provincials moving to the capital. In the opening pages of *Hellaassa* by Ivalo, for example, the protagonist is surrounded by the still waters of an inland swamp, pondering the dangers of throwing oneself thoughtlessly into the stream of the capital (Ivalo 1890: 1–2). Halfway through the same novel, the second part of the story, now set in Helsinki, is introduced by a long metaphor of downpouring snowy water, stream- ing unrelentingly down the eaves into the "black, deep, dark sewers", portraying the degenerating and paralyzing effect the city has had on the idealistic protagonist (ibid. 54). As in the case of *Helsinkiin*, the city

is at the center of the protagonist's social and geographical mobility, symbolized by raging waters, but its centrifugal power has a disorientating and degenerating effect.

### Conclusion

As elsewhere in (late) nineteenth century European literature, the confrontation between an outside individual and the city constitutes an important theme in turn-of-the-century Finnish literature. It is a thematics that can be detected from prose titles such as Aho's *Helsinkiin* ("Towards Helsinki"), Wilkuna's *Vaikea tie* ("The Difficult Road") or Matti Kurjensaari's *Tie Helsinkiin* (1935, "The Road to Helsinki"); by 1911, already five literary works (mostly short stories) by four different authors had appeared bearing the title *towards Helsinki* (cf. Liuttu 1963: 107). Genre typology can be a helpful tool in identifying the relevant features of this confrontation between the provincial individual and the capital, and the genre of the student novel is particularly instructive in contextualizing the negative images and the dangers lurking in the city. The character typology of the Young Man from the Provinces lends a further dimension to the analysis of images and experiences of the city, by including experiences of the arrival in the capital from all social classes, and by linking a number of central Finnish literary works to an international frame of literary interpretation.

The Finnish provincial protagonist arriving in the big city differs substantially from his international contemporary; he generally does not experience a meteoric rise in society, and he lacks the innate refinement of the international Young Man from Chanda's definition. But the Finnish Young Man also shares many characteristics with the international Young Man: the rejection of provincial roots, the way his choices in life are represented by male and female doubles, and the importance of images of mobility in his voyage towards (and within) the capital. Whereas the genre of the student novel has lost much of its relevance after its heydays during the turn of the century, the image of the Young Man from the Provinces has, in modified and often ironized forms, enjoyed an unceasing relevance in the depictions of arrival in the city.

### Notes

- 1 For an early study of the Finnish student novel, see Söderhjelm (1916/1920); for an exhaustive overview of the student novel in Finland, see Molarius (1993, 1996). Claes Ahlund has provided

a detailed study of the Scandinavian student novel (excluding, however, Finnish literature) in his dissertation *Den skandinaviske universitetsromanen 1877–1890* (1990).

2 The shift in the Finnish student novel has been seen as reflecting a change in what is referred to as Fennoman ideas (in particular romantic ideals about the nation and its people); when these entered into a crisis, the student became increasingly a subject of satire and irony (cf. Lappalainen 1999: 51–53).

3 Only parts of Aho's novella have been published in English, in a translation by Herbert Lomas (Aho 1889/2003). All translations are by myself, unless otherwise mentioned. The Swedish words of the song Kalle is singing in the quotation can be roughly translated as follows: "lalala, the night is fine!"

4 The last years have seen a growing academic interest in the generation of in-between people depicted in Finland at the turn of the nineteenth century. See e.g. Haapala, Löytty, Melkas & Tikka (eds.) 2008, and in particular, Melkas (ed.) 2009; a collection of essays analyzing this phenomenon, and entitled *Läpikulkumiesiä*, which is literally translated as "in-between people".

5 In this text, I use the capitalized words Young Man and Young Man from the Provinces as referring to the character typology proposed here.

6 Chanda does not make any major distinctions between the male and the female hero from the provinces. Due to the limited scope of the present essay, I will focus on the similarities between the Young Men and Women from the Provinces in Finnish literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, rather than on their differences, which are, however, very substantial. The Finnish Young Men and Women share much of the same traits: their provincial background, their move to the city, their particular sensitivity, their upward social drive and their eventual fall from grace. But their starting point in society – and hence the course of their development – is generally very different: in Finnish turn-of-the-century literature featuring provincials in the city, there are virtually no male protagonists with a proletarian background, and there are conversely very few female protagonists with a (upper) middle class background. Many of the exceptions (i.e., women from [upper] middle class backgrounds), are to be found in the works of one (female) writer: Maila Talvio (e.g. Talvio: *Kultainen lyry* [1916, "The Golden Lyre"]).

7 For women, the case is more complex. On the one hand, Finnish women were restricted in their social rise by the same three factors restricting the rise of Finnish men, and they were, moreover, obstructed by gender-related social, judicial and moral codes quite similar to those applied in much of contemporary Western Europe. On the other hand, compared to the rest of Europe, Finnish women were granted relatively early entry to the University, and general suffrage was instated in Finland as early as 1906.

8 Another feature which is largely absent is the importance of

national myths of (personal) success in the trajectory of the Young Man from the Provinces. This may be due to the fact that in Finland, a politically subjected, largely agrarian country, without Rockefeller or Napoleons, national myths of success were still in the making at the turn of the twentieth century.

9 The idea that Finns belonged to a race that was physically and mentally inferior to the Germanic Swedish speakers living along the coastlines of Finland, was widespread at the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Molarius 1998).

10 Chanda stresses the fact that the Young Man from the Provinces is a romantic social dreamer, but in his typology, an over-sensitive and passive character would probably disqualify these Finnish heroes as Young Men from the Provinces, since Chanda considers the Young Man typically a vigorous rather than a passive or pondering character.

11 Note that Trilling had situated the roots of the Young Man from the Provinces in folklore and in medieval romance (Chanda 1981: 321).

12 *Helsinkiin* is not the only text by Aho which carries undertones of medieval romance; Nummi has analyzed one of the short prose extracts by Aho, "Kosteikko" (1890), as a story which can be read from the perspective of the mythical search for the Grail (Nummi 2002: 119–121).

13 In Bakhtin's words, the novel of ordeal is "constructed as a series of tests of the main heroes, tests of their fidelity, valor, bravery, virtue, nobility, sanctity, and so on" (Bakhtin 1986/2004: 12).

14 Unlike their English or French counterparts (e.g. in Dickens *Great Expectations*), the supposed patrician background of these Finnish protagonists constitutes a rather negative factor in the protagonist's development, attaining nightmare-like qualities in *Olli Suurpää*, traumatizing the protagonist in *Veneh'ojalaiset*, and predestining the main character for degeneration in *Leeni*.

15 Many other turn-of-the-century Finnish novels share this trait. See e.g. Järnefelt's *Isäntämaa* (Liisa and Fanny [1893, "The Fatherland"]), and *Veneh'ojalaiset* (Kerttu and the daughters of the colonel), Leino's *Jaana Rönity* (Heikki and the secret policeman), and Ivalo's *Hellaassa* (Anni and Sylvia).

16 The inclusion of Järnefelt's *Veneh'ojalaiset* amongst the Young Man from the Provinces -novels may seem unwarranted, since the protagonist, Hannes, is born and raised in Helsinki. However, *Veneh'ojalaiset* belongs in many respects to a group of novels that state the main object of their focus, the protagonist and his/her development, in their very title (e.g. Eino Leino's *Olli Suurpää*, *Jaana Rönity*, *Thomas Vitiikka* [1906]; Tähli's *Leeni*, Järnefelt's *Veijokset*; Kasimir Leino's *Ennaltan Elli* [1884], Onerva's *Mirra* [1908], etc.). The real protagonist in *Veneh'ojalaiset* is not Hannes, but the family of the Veneh'oja, whose conflicting desires for ancestral lands and success in the capital are documented. As a true Young Man, the family of the Veneh'oja also has a double in the Tyrvääntäinen fam-

17 The translation is by Herbert Lomas. Lomas prefers the translation of the novella's title as *To Helsinki*, while I prefer the translation as *Towards Helsinki*.

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