A city awakens

Literary Helsinki at the turn of the twentieth century

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jbid183824 IP: 194.111.73.163 On: Thu, 14 Dec 2017 11:54:20

In 1914, the Finnish poet V. A. Koskenniemi gave an account of the literary imagination on Finland's capital in terms that expressed both earnest disappointment and cautious hopes for the future. Koskenniemi's collection of essays *Runon kaupunkeja* (1914; Imagined Cities) presented Helsinki juxtaposed to urban centers like Bruges, Weimar, and Verona, and maintained that Helsinki compared unfavorably to these well-established cities of the imagination. Koskenniemi wrote in exasperation:

> Tukholmalla on Strindberginsä, Pietarilla Dostojevskinsa, Berlinillä Kretzerinsä, Hampurilla Frensseninsä, Oululla Pakkalansa ja Raumalla Nortamonsa – kuka on Helsingin runoilija? Kuka on Helsingille lunastanut lupakirjan runon kaupunkien yhdyskuntaan? (89)
>
> (Stockholm has Strindberg, St. Petersburg has Dostoevsky, Berlin has Kretzer, Hamburg has Frenssen, Oulu has Pakkala, and Rauma has Nortamo – but who is Helsinki's poet? Who has claimed for Helsinki entrée into the society of imagined cities?)[1]

The answer, in his opinion, was disheartening: "Meillä ei ole … synteettistä runoelmaa Helsingistä, romaania tai eeposta, jossa tämä pohjoinen pääkaupunki eläisi kokonaisuudessaan kaikkine niine ominaisuuksineen, joita luonto, rotu ja kulttuuri ovat sille määränneet" (89) [We do not have … a synthetic poetic work about Helsinki, a novel or an epic in which this northern capital would live in its totality with all those characteristics that nature, race, and culture have bestowed upon her]. In Koskenniemi's view, Helsinki as yet lacked a writer who could capture its particular nature and characteristics and a poetic work that could present this vision.

The idea that Finnish literature generally lacks a rich imaginative conception of the city has been advanced time and again during the twentieth century, most notably in Kai Laitinen's essay "Metsästä kaupunkiin" (1973; From the Forest to the City). It reduced the grand tradition of Finnish prose literature to a gradual descent from the forest to the city. This evolution stressed the "unnatural" character of the city in the Finnish cultural context and the late arrival of a complex urban imagination in literary representations. Although articulating a rather different point of view, a similar perception of the city can be observed in Karkama's study "Kirjallisuus ja nykyaika" (1994; Literature and Modernity), which gives urbanity a historically negligible role within Finnish literary representations of modernity.[2] To what extent was Koskenniemi right in his 1914 denial of Helsinki's entrance into that society of literary cities and thereby painting

1. All translations from Finnish are the author's own.

2. Although Karkama glosses over the importance of the city in his study "Kirjallisuus ja nykyaika" (Literature and Modernity), his later introductory article "Kaupunki kirjallisuudessa" (1998; The City in Literature) is one of the first extensive overviews of the Finnish literary imagination about the city. Karkama's article breaks away from the traditional, deprecating view on the city in Finnish literature, in particular in the way it gives ample attention to the turn of the twentieth century as a fruitful period for these thematics.

doi 10.1075/chlel.xxxi.18ame
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an image of Helsinki that is as old as it is persistent: the image of an eternal Cinderella forever under-aged and waiting to be allowed to the ball?[3]

This essay will analyze the emerging images of the metropolis in Finnish literature at the turn of the twentieth century paying special attention to the relationship of these early images to a larger discursive framework that includes such contemporary urban centers as Paris, St. Petersburg, and Stockholm as well as ancient archetypical metropoles like Babylon or Nineveh. The discussion will also refer to Finland-Swedish literature in order to demonstrate how later Finnish literature adopted elements from its turn-of-the-century discourse about the city.

Belying Koskenniemi's negative assessment, it will be seen that the early twentieth century witnessed Helsinki emerging for the first time as a complex literary image in Finnish literature by combining strong echoes from a wide range of international images of urban life. These early, dense literary portrayals of the city were arguably even richer and more complex than later descriptions in the way that they reflected and commented on the extreme socio-political upheavals of their time. Against that background the focus here will be on the literary texts written during the first decades of the twentieth century. Arvid Järnefelt's kaleidoscopic novel *Veneh'ojalaiset* (1909; The Family Veneh'oja), however, will be treated as a special case; it is one of the very few novels in Finnish written at the turn of the century that could claim the status of the grand urban novel.

Before discussing the literary images proper, some observations about their historical context are required. Although Helsinki has often been recognized as a young city, it is, strictly speaking, centuries old. Founded by the Swedish King Gustav Vasa in 1550 on a site showing traces of earlier medieval occupation, it had a violent history including forced relocation, ravaging plague, total destruction, and foreign occupation. During the nineteenth century, the transfer of political allegiance brought radical changes: after Finland had become part of the Russian Empire as a semi-autonomous duchy (1809), Helsinki became the capital in 1812, and in 1828, the university was also transferred from the old capital Turku (Åbo) to Helsinki. The city grew explosively making it one of the fastest-growing European capitals at the turn of the twentieth century. The population spiraled from a mere 4,000 souls at the beginning of the nineteenth century to almost 30,000 in 1870, 93,000 in 1905, and more than 150,000 in 1920 (see Palmgren 22, 38). Considering that Finland was still one of the most rural countries in Europe, the accelerating growth of its capital entailed a particularly bewildering experience for the growing numbers of people moving to Helsinki.

3. Maila Talvio explicitly draws the comparison between Helsinki and Cinderella, in a short essay "Pieni puhe meidän Helsingille" (1936; A Small Talk to Our Helsinki), which is clearly in dialogue with Koskenniemi's *Runon kaupunkeja* (Imagined Cities). The text yet again laments Helsinki's short (cultural) history. At the turn of the twentieth century, in a period when European cities were more and more described in terms of aging, death, and decay, the Finnish capital was conceived by both Finnish and Finland-Swedish authors as young and immature. More generally, it was – and still is – compared to an innocent girl, newly born from the Baltic Sea – a conceptualization that was embodied by the statue of Havis Amanda erected in 1908 near the Helsinki harbor.

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The student novel

In the first texts about their new capital, Finnish authors looked to the west for models of urban imagination – to Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Paris – but also to the east towards the expanding empire of which they were a part and especially to St. Petersburg, that imposing metropolis so close nearby. Nordic influences on the urban imagination during this period can be most clearly discerned in a literary genre that is particularly relevant for the embryonic literary images of Helsinki, i.e. the student novel. The Finnish student novel was firmly set in a frame defined by northern European examples, most notably by Strindberg's collection of short stories *Från Fjärdingen och Svartbäcken* (1877; From Fjärdingen and Svartbäcken) and Arne Garborg's *Bondestudentar* (1883; Peasant Students).[4] The most remarkable example of the student novel in Finland-Swedish literature was K. A. Tavaststjerna's novel *Barndomsvänner* (1886; Childhood Friends), in which young Ben Thomén moves from the countryside to Helsinki, degenerates, and ends up eventually disillusioned in a God-forsaken place far removed from the capital that made and broke him.

In literature in Finnish, the topos of the student in the city appears in novels and novellas such as Juhani Aho's *Helsinkiin* (1889; Towards Helsinki), Santeri Ivalo's *Hellaassa* (1890; In Hellas), Arvid Järnefelt's *Isänmaa* (1893; Fatherland), and Maila Talvio's *Kultainen lyyra* (1916; The Golden Lyre). These prose texts depict Helsinki primarily as a place of arrival, a city where an outsider is confronted with a disturbing and paralyzing environment. The dysphoric image of the city in this genre can be related to the discourse about the city in late nineteenth-century French and Nordic realism and naturalism, which presents the city as a seedbed of sin and as a degenerative environment. The gloomy images in turn-of-the-century Finnish student novels are, however, much older than the naturalist or realist city; they are rooted in an age-old discourse about the city as a hotbed of vice and sin as exemplified by the biblical cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Babylon. The potent imagery of these ancient examples was not lost on Finnish authors at the turn of the century: large and prosperous cities reminded Koskenniemi inevitably of the ruins of Carthage and Nineveh (see Koskenniemi *Runon* 45–47); and in his letters to L. Onerva, Eino Leino explicitly refers to Helsinki as a Sodom and Gomorrah (*Kirjeet* 145, 148). Maila Talvio, for her part, identifies Helsinki with Nineveh in her novel *Niniven lapset* (1915; Children of Nineveh) and with Sodom in her historical novel *Linnoituksen iloiset rouvat* (1941; The Merry Wives of the Fortress).[5]

But this dystopian discourse is never wholly without complex countercurrents. The very ambivalence of the city is the "inability of strong negative and positive impulses towards a totemic object to resolve themselves," which constitutes the essence of the mystery of the city (Pike xii). It is a manifold complexity that at the turn of the twentieth century becomes ever more apparent in the literature set in Helsinki. During this period, Helsinki is presented as a space

4. For a study on the Nordic student novel, see Ahlund: *Den skandinaviska universitetsromanen 1877–1890*. For more on the student novel in Finland, see Söderhjelm: *Kotimaisia kulttuurikuvia*; Molarius: "Nuoren Apollon syöksykierre"; Ameel: "The Road to Helsinki."

5. The same title was incidentally also used by Leino as the title for a poem (1917) but without reference to Helsinki.

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in which atavistic urges and instincts awaken, as in Onerva's *Nousukkaita* (1911; Parvenus), or in which lower class women are brutally awakened to an urban reality that oppresses and marginalizes them, as in Leino's *Jaana Rönty* (1907; Jaana Rönty). It is a space that presents nerve-wracking experience and causes degeneration, death, madness, or eventual expulsion from the capital among those who move in, as is the case in Ivalo's *Aikansa lapsipuoli* (1895; A Stepchild of His Time). But it is also a city of awakening in a positive sense: a space where representatives of the masses awaken as individuals, where beginning students awaken to the possibilities of learning, and where outsiders can dream of social ascendency and a bright future, such as, for example, in Kyösti Wilkuna's *Vaikea tie* (1915; The Difficult Road). The city, then, is presented in many turn-of-the-century novels not only as a threat to the moral integrity of the protagonists, to the family, and to bourgeois values, but also as a space for opportunity.

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The city walker

Eclipsing the importance of Stockholm or St. Petersburg, one city served as an enormously important background for literary Helsinki at the turn of the twentieth century, the omnipresent capital of the nineteenth century, Paris.[6] Koskenniemi had mentioned German (Kretzer, Frenssen), Russian (Dostoevsky), and Swedish (Strindberg) writers as models for a future poet of Helsinki, but in his own urban travel poem *Kevätilta Quartier Latinissä* (1912; A Spring Evening in the Latin Quarter), he expressed a preference for Baudelaire as his model and Paris as the setting (see Pääjärvi 2006).[7] Koskenniemi's *Kevätilta Quartier Latinissä* exemplifies the attitude of Finnish authors towards that most Parisian urban pastime, *flânerie*. When the *flâneur* makes his appearance in Finnish texts at the time, the spatial environment is typically Paris rather than Helsinki, which was considered too small and dull to invite *flânerie*. Instances of *flânerie*-inspired movements through urban space, however, can be found in Finnish prose in, among others, Juhani Aho's *Yksin* (1890; Alone), Maila Talvio's *Tähtien alla* (1910; Under the Stars), and Mika Waltari's *Suuri illusioni* (1928; The Great Illusion) among others. In all three cases, the Baudelairean surrender to the crowd and to the frenetic pace of urban movement is set in Paris although the setting of these novels is at least partly Helsinki. Influenced by Hjalmar Söderberg and other Swedish authors' literary imagination, the idle city walker took firmer root in Finland-Swedish literature. The so-called *dagdrivare* (idler) generation built a

6. The importance of Paris for literary images of Helsinki spans much of the twentieth century. For late nineteenth-century writers such as Juhani Aho, as well as for Mika Waltari (in the 1920s to 1950s), or for Markus Nummi or Tommi Kontio (in the 1990s), Paris presents irrevocably a city always present within Helsinki but always lost in it. Imagined, remembered, or dreamed, Paris is the place of last rejuvenation in Aho's *Yksin* (1890; Alone), of lost youthful possibilities in Waltari's short story "Pariisilaissolmio" (1953; Parisian Tie), or both a lost utopia and a palimpsestic space through which Helsinki becomes readable anew in Markus Nummi's *Kadonnut Pariisi* (1995; Paris Lost).

7. In his first collections of poems (1906), Koskenniemi had used urban and industrial imagery, but the city in those poems is hardly recognizable as Helsinki – or, conversely, as Oulu, where Koskenniemi was born.

rich imagery of literary Helsinki in which the lonely *flâneur* assumes a central place (Ciaravolo; Pedersen).[8]

The *flâneur* may have been largely absent from the literary imagination of Helsinki, but walking still played a significant role. It was not, however, the Baudelairean, wandering stroll in search of the faint heartbeat of the city that gained prominence, but rather a highly programmed bourgeois ritual that consisted for the most part of parading up and down Helsinki's central promenade, the Esplanade, at the appropriate time.[9] In most prose works written between the 1880s and the 1920s, the Esplanade is portrayed as a central space in imagined Helsinki, the nexus of the city where all expectations, fears, and possibilities converge. It presented a complex array of fleeting and opaque layers of meaning. This was especially true of gender relations since the Esplanade was both the main promenade for male exhibitionism and the central precinct for prostitution (Häkkinen 1995). This double image of the Esplanade – an area characterized by leisure, but also by gender expectations and the male gaze – synecdochically functions as a portrayal of the whole of the Finnish capital at the turn of the twentieth century. It is a discourse consistent with the literary imagination of other contemporary literary capitals: Zola's Paris, Söderberg's Stockholm, or Hamsun's Kristiania. These cities, apart from all the other varied images with which they were associated, were experienced by male characters who in striving to reap the cultural and erotic fruits the city had to offer, were brought face to face with a power grid of gendered social expectations.

The theme of prostitution and the question of gendered public space were also instrumental in creating – and/or exposing – an ever more clearly emerging geographical divide between different districts in Helsinki: Punavuori/Rödberg (and later Söörnäinen) were typical examples of base and indecent surroundings; areas such as the Esplanade, Bulevardi, and the Old Church Park were more ambiguous areas potentially as dangerous as they were uplifting. This geographical divide became ever more clearly defined by class differences equally difficult to bridge in both literature and historical reality. In his text on literary Helsinki quoted earlier, Koskenniemi had already noticed that a future poet of Helsinki would have to write about *two* cities within the city. Envisioning a possible future novel about the class struggle in the Finnish capital, he writes: "Saammeko sosiaalisen romaanin, kuvauksen niistä kahdesta kaupungista, jotka Pitkänsillan välityksellä ovat toistensa yhteydessä, kertomuksen pääoman ja työn taisteluista?" (*Runon* 94) [Will we get a social novel, a description of those two cities that are connected to each other by way of Pitkäsilta, a story of the battles between capital and labor?] As will be seen, Arvid Järnefelt's novel *Veneh'ojalaiset* (1909; The Family Veneh'oja) constitutes exactly such a narrative that moves through all the layers of urban society. But as the social and political turmoil at the turn of the twentieth century erupted, the formulation of an all-encompassing literary view of both socially divided cities within Helsinki became increasingly challenging,

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8. The Finland-Swedish *dagdrivare* or idler cannot be equated outright with his close relative the Baudelairean *flâneur* (as happens in Laitinen, *Suomen* 301–02 or in Molarius, "Suomenruotsalaisen"). The *dagdrivare* saw the idleness of his life as an unpleasant pastime and acted out as a lack of anything better rather than as an accomplishment worth pursuing (see Pettersen, Ciaravolo 172–73).

9. For more on the appearance (and absence) of the *flâneur* in Finnish turn-of-the-century literature, see Ameel: "Walking the Streets of Helsinki."

and the tragic events of Finland's 1918 civil war made such an endeavor virtually impossible for decades to come.

Most of the characteristics that constituted the literary image of Helsinki at the turn of the twentieth century remained part of the ongoing discourse about imagined Helsinki throughout the twentieth century and into the present millennium: a city of leisure inviting dreamy wandering; a city divided along the fault lines of gender, class, and language; a city as a disorienting and paralyzing seedbed of vice. Beginning in 1899, however, a number of dramatic events successively shook the foundations of Finnish society, radicalizing the existing images of the imagined city and infusing the discourse about literary Helsinki with a whole new range of symbols and associations.

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Helsinki in the mist

The beginning point of these climactic events was the February Manifesto issued in 1899 by Nikolai II, Czar of the Russian Empire. The aim of the manifesto was to draw Finland more firmly within the administration of the Russian Empire. It marked the beginning of the "Frost Years," years of harsh oppression coordinated by Finland's Governor-General Bobrikov. The February Manifesto and the oppression it embodied sent a shock wave throughout Finnish society, which was immediately perceived in the literary imagination of Helsinki. The first, and in many ways programmatic reaction was Eino Leino's poem "Helsinki sumussa" (Helsinki in the Mist), which was published in the newspaper *Päivälehti* on February 17, 1899, only two days after the February Manifesto had been issued. It was the first time Leino chose Helsinki as a literary setting (Larmola 21). During the following decades, Leino – one of the most prolific and influential Finnish authors of his time – wrote dozens of novels, short stories, and poems set in Helsinki presenting a manifold image of the Finnish capital that are still relevant today for their perspectives on (ideological) history and the embryonic modernism they represent.

In Leino's poem, the monumental heart of Helsinki centered upon the Senate Square is gradually covered by a menacing mist. One after the other, the majestic buildings retreat out of sight until only the University and the Bank of Finland remain standing – and the statue of Alexander II, who was seen as a czar with a particularly benign attitude toward his Finnish subjects. Suddenly sounds are heard in the mist: marching Russian soldiers appear and the last buildings and the revered ruler too are covered by the fog, leaving the citizens without hope of salvation. The literary imagery in the poem functions first of all as a political allegory, and this characteristic was indeed the prime function of the poem. Due to strictly enforced censorship, the media had no other option than to resort to allegorical stories and historical reminiscences if they were to criticize the Russian authorities (see Leino-Kaukiainen 238–39). The buildings (the House of the Estates, the House of Nobility) covered by fog were allegories for the legal and political institutions directly affected by the Manifesto as were the institutions standing firm in the onslaught (the University, the National Bank). The statue of Alexander II (the good Czar) functioned as a double allegory in the poem since it referred to an earlier and more benign rule, but also to the statue itself, which in turn consisted of a number of allegories (the figures of law and peace among others).

Figure 25. Panorama of Helsinki, seen from the top of the St. Nicholas' Church (currently the Helsinki Cathedral). Photographer: Signe Brander, 1909/Helsinki City Museum

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The literary city in Leino's poem is more than the scene of a mere political allegory, however: it also presents a dialogue with a major topos within the international imagination of the city. The image of fog invading a city has been used to manifold effects in urban literature, e.g. the fog shrouding Bruges in George Rodenbach's *Bruges la morte* (1892; The Dead [City of] Bruges) symbolized in part the melancholy of the protagonist, while in one of the most famous foggy openings in literature, Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53), the mist perturbing London could be interpreted as obscuring the capital's legal institutions (Keunen 282). In a context closer to Finland, Leino's poem features a number of images appearing in Pushkin's famous "Медный всадник" (1833; "The Bronze Horseman") in which the equestrian statue of Peter the Great hunts a desperate and disorientated hero through the misty streets of the Russian capital.[10] "Helsinki sumussa" presents a number of symbols familiar from Pushkin's poem (mist covers the city as a symbol of (political) unrest, and the urban population wanders in doubt and fear) and turns its attention to the statue of the Russian czar at the heart of the city in the Senate Square. The meaning of the statue is reversed, however: Alexander II is seen not as a cruel oppressor or a lord of doom, like the czar in Pushkin's poem, but as a potential savior. The ominous sounds in the mist belong not to a deceased, haunting ruler, but to Russian soldiers marching through the city.

10. A first Finnish translation of Pushkin's poem was not published until well after Leino's death. Leino could, of course, have read the poem translated in another language. Eino Leino's older brother and literary mentor Kasimir knew and highly appreciated Pushkin's poetry (see Lönnbohm).

In “Helsinki sumussa,” a number of potent images represent the capital. As the political center of the country, Helsinki becomes a metaphor for the whole nation, and an affliction at the heart of the city functions as a symbol of the nation’s social and political sickness. The layout and architecture of Helsinki’s center – like that of St. Petersburg or Haussman’s Paris – were an expression of the political powers that reigned and the broad, straight lines of Engel’s neo-classical gridiron – built on the orders of the Russian czar – can be seen as representing the political schemes, ambitions, and power of the empire (Kervanto-Nevanlinna 21–22). But in Leino’s poem, the cityscape is more than just a representation of the powers that brought it into being; it becomes as well the expression of the mood of the city’s inhabitants in presenting a troubled face when they feel perturbed.

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The Great Strike and the Viapori Rebellion

Just as Nikolai II’s February Manifesto was the beginning of a dramatically heightened tension within urban public space and of an infusion of new images of the city in literature, the subsequent pivotal moment in Helsinki’s history was the assassination of Finland’s Russian governor-general. The political murder carried out on the staircase of the Finnish Senate at the site of the symbolically charged setting of Leino’s poem violently hurled Helsinki into the orbit of a grand European tradition of urban prose literature. For by a stroke of strange coincidence, the day on which these shots were fired happened to be the day Joyce chose for the setting of *Ulysses*: June 16, 1904. The events in Helsinki are actually referred to in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). In Finnish literature, overt references to Bobrikov’s murder were few and far between in the years that followed probably partly due to Russian censorship.[11] But the importance of this day as a turning point in Helsinki’s history and for the (literary) discourse about the city may well be illustrated by the fact that Kjell Westö puts the opening scene of his monumental Helsinki novel *Där vi en gång gått* (2006; Where We Once Walked) on the day of the first anniversary of Bobrikov’s murder.

The murder at the Senate was, however shocking and symbolic, nothing more than a beginning. The tension of the Frost Years running up to this murder culminated in events that were to pass during the following years. In 1905, the Russian Empire, Finland included, was struck by a revolution and a general strike. The Great Strike and its effects would change the Finnish and Russian power structures irreversibly (Palmgren; Kujala). In Finnish literature and media, it gave rise to a wave of pamphlets, articles, short stories, poems, and novels (Haapala, et al). In Helsinki, a violent aftershock of this political and social earthquake was felt in 1906, when the Russian garrison at Helsinki’s fortress islands of Viapori (present day Suomenlinna) revolted and tried to force the city to take sides in the rebellion (Jussila 112–47).

11. The Russian authorities did not encourage celebrations of the murder of their prime representative in Finland; a famous anecdote has Jean Sibelius dragged to the police station for celebrating Bobrikov’s death at Kappeli, the legendary restaurant on the Helsinki Esplanade. A comprehensive study of the history of censorship in Finland is not available; for more on Russian censorship in Finland at the turn of the twentieth century, see Leino-Kaukiainen, *Sensuuri ja sanomalehdistö Suomessa vuosina 1891–1905*.

In the descriptions of the city in Finnish literature, these events leave a long-lasting mark and coincide with the emergence of a new discourse about the city. The paradigm shift did not remain unnoticed by contemporaries; it was referred to in a long article signed R.Sdt. that appeared in 1912 in the periodical *Dagens Tidning*. The article, entitled "Helsingfors i skönlitteraturen" (Helsinki in Literature), is part of a collection of essays commemorating the centenary anniversary of Helsinki as the capital of Finland. Behind the unimposing initials, one of the most influential Finland-Swedish writers-to-be is hiding, Runar Schildt. In a number of ways, Schildt's overview of the literary discourse about the Finnish capital mirrors the disappointment Koskenniemi displays in his 1914 essay: he sees Helsinki as too small and too young to generate a rich literary imagination and as lacking the complex historical layers of, say, Hjalmar Söderberg's Stockholm. Although Schildt compares the city to a clumsy teenager and to a parvenu, his contribution is nevertheless very different from Koskenniemi's. Schildt's essay betrays the heightened interest in everything urban that would be symptomatic of the new generation of Finland-Swedish authors: the prosaists who made their debut in the beginning of the twentieth century with a series of urban novels and who would be grouped under the name *dagdrivare*. Although they were later seen as apolitical (Palmgren 38–39), Schildt claims that the first genuine literary images of Helsinki present in the novel that heralded the *dagdrivare* generation – Gustav Alm's novel *Höstdagar* (1907; Autumn Days) – could not have arisen out of circumstances other than those of oppression and the Great Strike. Runar Schildt argues in summary that the Finland-Swedish generation responsible for the breakthrough of urban images is the generation marked first and foremost by the Frost Years and the Great Strike ("Helsingfors").

Although Schildt sees a new Finland-Swedish literature of Helsinki emerging in the shadow of the years of oppression, he also notes that contemporary authors writing in Finnish might actually be better situated to paint the complex social reality of the city and mentions Eino Leino and L. Onerva, in particular, as Finnish authors who have taken steps towards describing the first generations of Finnish-speakers in contemporary Helsinki. While the events of the early twentieth century motivated Finland-Swedish authors to concentrate on resigned, blasé, and decadent urban *Einzelgänger*, in Finnish a number of highly complex and relatively underrated novels appeared depicting the far-reaching causes and effects of these years of oppression. Notable among these representations are Eino Leino's so-called *Routavuosiromaanit* (Frost Year Novels), which present a cross section of Finnish society during these years. Other authors, too, have used these tense years as material for writing Helsinki novels such as Kyösti Wilkuna in *Vaikea tie* and Mika Waltari in *Sielu ja liekki* (1934; The Soul and the Flame). The way the city is experienced in these novels depicting the Frost Years is one of dysphoric feelings, rootlessness, and unrest brought about by an atmosphere of political fear, insecurity, and looming paranoia.

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A kaleidoscopic city novel

The richest kaleidoscopic literary account of these tumultuous years written by one of the most privileged witnesses is Arvid Järnefelt's novel *Veneh'ojalaiset*.[12] It deals primarily with the events of 1904–06, the years of the Russian oppression, the murder of Bobrikov, the Great Strike, and the Viapori Rebellion. Described by L. Onerva as "nousukaspolven pimeä eepos" (390) [the dark epic of a parvenu generation], it is a multifarious analysis of the social and historical events at the outset of the twentieth century, but also a kaleidoscopic presentation of an emerging metropolis. As a historical document, the novel is particularly interesting since the main character, Hannes, is closely modeled on a prominent historical figure with whom Järnefelt was well acquainted, Captain Johan Kock.[13] What makes this novel most relevant for the literary imagination of the city is the way it combines radically different layers of urban meaning. There are at least four clearly distinctive levels from which the problem of the city is approached: an epic/mythological level; a realist/naturalist level; a revolutionary/apocalyptic level; and finally a level that may well be called euphoric (as opposed to the other three with dysphoric undertones). The imagined city is not only given a historical depth by situating Helsinki at the summit of a family history spanning numerous generations. It is also presented through different focalizations (male and female, middle class and lower class) and in relation to other imagined cities, St. Petersburg in particular. *Veneh'ojalaiset* thus presents for the first time in Finnish literature a highly complex construction of the imagined city of Helsinki – a construction, which, moreover, takes into consideration a much broader geographical portion of the city than had earlier been the case by expanding its purview into the suburbs and the islands across the Helsinki harbor.

All the different levels of the novel bring their own meaning to bear on the image of the city. The opening scenes set in a mythical past first seem to suggest that the novel will deal with the countryside and with the question of land possession. The family – or rather, the tribe – of the Veneh'oja, that lives in a semi-paradisiacal state in the wilderness of southern Finland, is dispersed by the devil, who poses as, among other figures, a land surveyor. The partitioning of the land – possibly referring to the land enclosure started in 1757 when Finland was still part of the Swedish kingdom – is similar to the Fall of Man and the expulsion from Paradise (see

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12. Arvid Järnefelt was one of the most colorful and most prolific Finnish writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Descending from a family belonging to the nobility, his father was a high-ranking officer in the Czarist army, who became a Finnish senator, while his mother, Elisabeth, kept one of the most influential literary salons of Finland. His brother-in-law was the composer Jean Sibelius, and his brothers Armas and Eero belonged to the artistic elite of his time. The most well-known Tolstoyan in Finland, he at one point renounced his position at the law court to become a farmer.

13. Captain Kock acted as the leader of the Red Guard during the Great Strike and the Viapori Rebellion. The accuracy with which Järnefelt described the events of 1905–06 can be gleaned from the fact that in a long open letter to Järnefelt posthumously published in 1916, Kock accused the author of publishing confidential information and of presenting events in a way which was so convincing and so recognizable, that it made it nigh to impossible for the general audience to see it as a work of fiction; Kock consequently accused Järnefelt of libel (see Kock).

Molarius, "Johdanto").[14] After having been driven from their lands and experiencing a series of adventures, a branch of the Veneh'oja slowly descends towards Helsinki. The events of this "absolute past" – the time of "fathers and founders of families" – normally destined for the epic genre (Bakhtin 13–14) are essential for understanding the complex literary image of the city in Järnefelt's novel. The city is the birthplace of all evil, the seat of government, rationalization, and the money-based economy, which disturbs the idyllic village community of the Veneh'oja. The anger of the Veneh'oja is consequently directed at the idea of the city, and one of them concludes a pact with the devil to set fire to what is described as "kaikista isoin kylä" (23) [the greatest village of all].[15] The question of land ownership looms large in the background of Järnefelt's novel, and it is no mere smoke screen that Järnefelt originally claimed that *Veneh'ojalaiset* was going to be a book about the land question (Kock).[16] In many ways, the question of land reform was actually also an urban concern since the landlessness of the poor created the conditions for the growth of the city and for the social and moral degeneration of its inhabitants.

The epic conditions at the beginning of the novel thus serve as a contrast to the later dysphoric images, which gain depth once the story is brought into the contemporary timeframe: the last decades of the nineteenth century when the two protagonists Hannes and Hinkki – both descendants of the Veneh'oja – grow up in Helsinki. It is a context whose depiction draws heavily on images taken from realist and naturalist discourse in which the city is seen as a diseased center alien to nature (Lehan 70). It negatively affects the rural hinterland and is portrayed as both cause and effect of profound social evil. This dysphoric image of the city (and society at large) is instinctively felt by Hannes, the main protagonist. Not until he becomes acquainted with Russian revolutionaries at a later stage in the story are his uneasy feelings about the city's moral and social problems molded into words. The revolutionary Natalja Federova explains to him how the city is not only the most explicit environment for loose morals, but also their ultimate cause: "Prostitutsioni on kaupungin tuottama tauti" (Järnefelt *Veneh'ojalaiset* 162–63) [Prostitution is a disease produced by the city]. Shocked by his realization of the vicious nature of the city, Hannes readies himself to devote his life to the politics of radical change.

As the momentous upheavals resulting from the Great Strike and the Viapori Rebellion drew nearer, the literary city attained another quality: Helsinki in *Veneh'ojalaiset* is a city swerving towards revolution and impending apocalypse. This state of affairs changed the nature of the imagined city considerably. In much of the turn-of-the-century discourse about on Helsinki, the city was depicted as a degenerative space that exerted its negative influence on a paralyzed and alienated subject. Within the revolutionary framework of Järnefelt's novel, however, the

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14. For contrasting comments on the themes of the expulsion from paradise and exodus in Järnefelt's novel, see Isomaa 313. There remain, nevertheless, a number of possible intertextual references to exodus in the text, although the intertextual relation is ambiguous to say the least.

15. Note how in these early stages, the Veneh'oja did not even possess a word for "city," but had to denote it with the term "isoin kylä" (Järnefelt *Veneh* 23) [biggest village].

16. Järnefelt was particularly preoccupied with the land reform question, writing on the subject the novel *Maaemon lapsia* (1905; Children of Mother Earth) and the pamphlet *Maa kuuluu kaikille; Matkoiltani Laukon lakkomailla* (1907; The Land Belongs to Everyone; From My Journeys to the Strike-Torn Region of Laukko), among others. The unresolved question of land reform would eventually be one of the issues that triggered the Finnish civil war.

city becomes a space in which an individual can grow to an unparalleled extent and can gain the power to destroy or remodel the cityscape.

This revolutionary conceptual framework is closely connected to the construction of the novel as Järnefelt's "tale of two cities." *Veneh'ojalaiset* tells the tale of a socially divided city: it moves through the city of the well-to-do, represented by Hannes's acquaintances with the nobility, but also descends into the city of poor laborers, socialist agitators, working-class gang members, and underground characters. But *Veneh'ojalaiset* is a novel of two cities in another way too: it is a text about both St. Petersburg and Helsinki and about the myths pertaining to both of them.[17] The link with St. Petersburg infuses the imagination of Helsinki with a modified form of the apocalyptic discourse that was strongly present in literature on the Russian capital (Pesonen *Andrei Belyin*; "Vajoaako"). When Hannes goes to St. Petersburg to study at the military academy, he gradually becomes acquainted with Russian revolutionaries who plan to flood the city by opening the sluice gates of the Neva, an apocalyptic image from the mythology about St. Petersburg and already strongly present in Pushkin's poem "Медный всадник" (The Bronze Horseman). Gradually, the revolutionaries conceive of another plan in which Hannes's knowledge of Helsinki as well as his expertise on fortifications figures prominently. Their plan is to use Helsinki and its island fortress Viapori as the hub on which to turn the fate of the Russian Empire. Under the threat of the fortress's artillery, the Finnish capital will capitulate, offering the revolutionary government a safe haven in which to await the outcome of events in Russia proper. If the first revolutionary strategy involves the mythical images of the destruction of St. Petersburg by flooding, the second envisions the possible annihilation of Helsinki by fire – a vision that has its roots in the Finnish capital's violent history: the total destruction by fire in 1713 during the Russo-Swedish war and the threat of foreign fire in 1855 during the Crimean.

But if amidst all violence, upheaval, and defeat, total destruction is avoided, it is because *Veneh'ojalaiset* again introduces a completely new theme into the Finnish-language imagination of Helsinki, i.e. the love for one's home city. The revolution is crushed and Hannes is forced into exile, but all this occurs because the protagonist lacks the ruthlessness to give the order to shell the city at that crucial moment. Pivotal is the scene in which Hannes looks down on the city and on the fortress lying below him knowing that he has the power, at last, to guide the fate of both. The scene reminds one of the ending of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* (1835; Old Goriot), in which Rastignac looks down at Paris from Père Lachaise and issues his challenge to the city. In Järnefelt's *Veneh'ojalaiset*, the idea of conquering the city pervades the story from the first effort of the forefather Heikki to set fire to the "biggest village" and culminates in Hannes, who devotes years of his life to studying the art of besieging. When Hannes refrains from giving the fateful order, his decision is rooted in a complex web of thoughts and ideals that can be linked to the debate within the novel between the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and the humble Tolstoyan ideal human (Isomaa). But one of the most important reasons for Hannes's decision – or indecisiveness – is his feeling of love for his home city.

17. Järnefelt was intimately acquainted with St. Petersburg and Russian literature; he was born in St. Petersburg, and his mother belonged to Russian (Baltic German) nobility; moreover, Järnefelt was not only an avid reader of Russian literature, but also a translator into Finnish of Tolstoy.

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Conclusion

Most of the first Finnish novels and short stories featuring Helsinki deal with an arrival to the city. One might say that in *Veneh'ojalaiset*, the protagonist has at last come home to the city. Born in Helsinki, initiated on a number of occasions into the mysteries of the city, and schooled in the art of overcoming city fortresses, Hannes experiences, especially upon his return home from St. Petersburg, the most acute feelings of genuine homecoming and belonging. This new theme, the feeling of euphoric love for and belonging to the city as a force vital in guiding the fates of literary characters, was introduced into Finnish literature in *Veneh'ojalaiset* for the first time with such broad scope.

In Järnefelt's kaleidoscopic novel, various images and new features of the literary city combined and continued to exert an influence on the discourse about the imagined city in Finnish literature throughout the twentieth century. The dysphoric image of the city and the vision of the urban environment as paralyzing and degenerative that can be found in much of the late nineteenth-century literature about the city continues in many respects to the present day. Helsinki novels that draw on images from this frame of reference are, among many others, Unto Karri's *Sodoma* (1929; Sodom), Matti Kurjensaari's *Tie Helsinkiin* (1937; The Road to Helsinki), and Helvi Hämäläinen's *Katuojan vettä* (1935; Water in the Gutter). In the second half of the twentieth century, this theme persists but within a radically changing setting: the city center is gradually replaced by the concrete jungle of suburbs and housing projects. Rosa Liksom's collection of short stories *Yhden yön pysäkki* (1985; One-night Stands) may serve as a compelling example of a gloomy picture of life in a nowhere city that could be Helsinki as well as Moscow.

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Within this predominantly negative representation of the city, the euphoric sense of belonging to one's urban surroundings has not been much more than an intermittently appearing undercurrent. Interesting early instances of strong feelings of belonging can be found in Toivo Tarvas's curious collections of Helsinki short stories *Häviävää Helsinkiä* (1917; Disappearing Helsinki) and *Helsinkiläisiä* (1919; People of Helsinki). The most well-known examples, however, are probably Mika Waltari's Helsinki novels, among others *Suuri illusioni* (1928; The Great Illusion), *Surun ja ilon kaupunki* (1936; City of Sorrow and Joy), and the historical, semi-autobiographical trilogy *Isästä poikaan* (1942; From Father to Son), which have retained a considerable popularity. Some of the most lasting eulogies of the city, however, can be found in poetry rather than in prose: from their very different perspectives, poets such as Pentti Saarikoski, for example in the collection *Kuljen missä kuljen* (1965; I Walk Where I Walk) or Arvo Turtiainen in *Minä paljasjalkainen* (1962; Me, Barefoot) have sung the praise of Helsinki.

The novel *Veneh'ojalaiset* not only anticipates the coming diversification of thematic perspectives on Helsinki, but also the arrival of the generic variety that would become apparent in the 1920s and '30s. Järnefelt's novel shows characteristics of various genres – the epic and novel, the historical novel, the student novel, the revolutionary novel, and of both the "portrait novel" and the "synoptic urban novel" – in Gelfant's taxonomy of the urban novel (11). During the decades following Finnish independence in 1917, the city was described from a variety of perspectives that were hitherto unseen in Finnish literature: children's literature (Kersti Bergroth), detective literature (Villo Hellanen, Mika Waltari), literary sketches (Kersti Bergroth, Yrjö Kivimies), essays (Olavi Paavolainen), and historical novels (both Mika Waltari and Maila