

ESTONIAN LITERARY SLUM

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Much slum prose was written in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Acknowledged judges of taste did not favour such productions; the notions *slum novel* ~ *slum realism* were often used, still not as terms, but rather to distance the speaker from these works or to show a disparaging attitude, especially in discussions confronting the so-called closer-to-life and closer-to-spiritual trends in literature. Not all works written on the slum theme were conceived as slum realism, but only those which could rather be positioned into the movement of Naturalism. For example, Jüri Parijõgi's *Semendivabrik* ("Cement Factory") has never been classified as slum realism, although several rough episodes of everyday life of a factory village could well account for such a classification. Slum motifs appeared in the poetry of Marie Under, Johannes Schütz and others, as well as in Oskar Luts's short stories (*Andrese elukäik* – "The Course of Andres's Life", 1923) in the first half of the 1920s. But the fame of the initiator of the style was attributed to August Jakobson's debut novel *Vaeste-Patuste alev* ("Poor Sinners' Town") (1927), which became the model work of the trend. This work stood out for its harsh way of depiction, as well as for its bulk – there were two thick volumes. The novel was modelled on Rääma, the workers' slum of the town of Pärnu. Plenty of works were written on the subject of Tartu slums: Oskar Luts's *Õpilane Valter* ("Valter the Apprentice"), *Olga Nukrus*, *Avasilmi* ("With Open Eyes"), *Tagahoovis* ("In the Backyard"), *Väino Lehtmetsa noorpõlv* ("The Youth of Väino Lehtmets"), and a part of his memoirs *Ladina köök* ("Latin Kitchen"); Arthur Roose's *Võhrupes* ("Rat's Nest"); Rudolf Sirge's *Rahu! Leiba! Maad!* ("Peace! Bread! Land!"); Eduard Männik's *Hall maja* ("Grey House"); Leida Kibuvits's *Soomustüdruk* ("An Armoured Girl").

Supilinn, a slum of Tartu, continued to fascinate writers in the 1980–2000s: Valmar Adams's retrospective *Esta astub ellu* ("Esta's Debut"), Lehte Hainsalu's *Kukelokuti* ("Cock's Wattle"), Mehis Heinsaar's *Vanameeste näppaja* ("The

Snatcher of Old Men"), Tiia Kriisa's *Võõras* ("A Stranger"). The authors stylise, (adding zest or a touch of elegy to it), fantasise, visualise or disillusion the place; a film has even been made about Supilinn (1997).

Of the authors living in Tallinn or writing about Tallinn, only short story writer Johannes Ruven was close to Jakobson's school. But in the period between the two world wars, Tallinn did not have a typical slum any more, which could be likened to that of Tartu, i.e. *a chaotically formed area of a town containing workers' dwellings without any conveniences* (specified by Mart Kalm at a conference held at the Art Museum of Estonia, on 21. Oct.1997, on the occasion of an exhibition on the subject of slum in Estonian art). But the typical Tallinn slum – a workers' district, consisting of cheap rental housing; the dwelling areas of the first generation of townspeople; ugly new town districts – can be found as a minor or a background subject in the third volume of Anton Hansen Tammsaare's *Tõde ja õigus* ("Truth and Justice"), and in Karl Ristikivi's novels of the so-called Tallinn Trilogy. Both authors have their own angle, which has nothing in common with Jakobson. The life of Ristikivi's hero resembles, in a sense, at least superficially, those of Luts's young men from the slum, but the sentimentality of Luts has been replaced by humour and slight irony.

Regarding the literary works that describe the Tallinn of later times, a special position is reserved for Paul Kuusberg's depictions of milieu in his debut novel *Müürid* ("The Walls"), in a collection of short stories, *Vabaduse puiestee* ("Vabaduse Boulevard"), and in his other works. Seen from the inside, from the viewpoint of a permanent inhabitant, not an observer of *landscapes* (cf. with Yrjö Sepänmaa's theses below), we are assured that Juhkental, as described by Kuusberg, is a place fit for living despite its poverty. Mihkel Mutt demonstrated in his earlier short stories a perceptual interest and liking towards slums. Fabian liked slums, because only here could he feel the "specific tinge of town life." "A small café, which you discover in your random walks makes a slum beautiful just like an oasis makes a desert beautiful." (Mutt 1979: 810.) The inquiring glance of the writer has later even reached behind the façades of the slum. Quite recently, anxious signals can be found in the media columns written by writers about the emergence of *skid rows* (Tuan 1990: 221–223) in Lasnamäe and older areas of Mustamäe.

The space of action

– In depicting slumscape *resp.* slum environment, an often-used technique is getting into it from outside, the "coming in of a camera" from a panoramic view from afar to the details of an interior. The description can be cartographically exact, e.g. Jakobson's novel begins with a historical and sociological survey of the emergence, structure, inhabitants, their living standards, etc., of a *rural town*. The location of Männik's *gray house* can be ascertained, although the description is somewhat misleading (coordinates supplied by the novel refer to Raatuse Street in Tartu, across the river). Researchers (Mägi, Kulpa 1966) have ascertained that Luts merged together facts from different locations. Adams's novel gives full addresses (*Mister Müller's institution* – a brothel – is located on Oa Street 16; Jaan Lepik, who has been repatriated from Russia, moves to his father's house on Herne Street). But *genius loci* can be evoked as well while avoiding recognisable accents, as the Tallinn authors do.

– Regarding the names of different districts of a town, we know that people have often named them so wittily that the authors need not make efforts to make names up, because the real names sometimes even add to their inspiration. For instance, the Ristikivi's naughty *Lambapea tänav* ('Sheepshead Street') can well be derived on the analogy of *Hundiþea* ('Wolfshead'¹) and *Toomþea* ('Domeshead') hills. And think about *Kassisaba* ('Cat's Tail'), *Kelmiküla* ('Rogues' Village'), *Torupilli* ('Bagpipes'), and *Tondi* ('Ghost')! But the latter has actually not been named after Estonian ghosts, but after a 17th-century town official named Dunte. There are several names of town districts in Tartu that end with *-linn* ('town'), the number of new combinations is even larger than that of old place names, and some toponyms ending with *-mõis* ('manor'). In Tallinn we can find a number of toponyms ending with *-küla* ('village'), and only a few of these town districts had existed in the times when the *Liber Censu Daniae* was written; the rest have been erected in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Tallinn's megalomania, or rather, the heights mania, has found expression in the abundance of toponyms ending with *-mägi* ('mountain'). Aleksander Kivi concluded his research on the subject with the fact that "thus we have found 61 places in Tallinn which are called 'mountains'" (Kivi 1964: 411).

¹ A hill with such a name was located between Tööstuse Street and the sea (Kivi 1964: 409).

The street scene

– Fences and gates: ugly, hanging down, cracking and rattling. They can appear almost as natural forces, and, if you wish, as symbols of social forces:

"The wind was whistling and whining, weathercocks were creaking, shutters were rattling and signboards were clattering. Pieces of tarpaper were flying in the air here and there ..., falling on the stones with a deafening clatter and crashing into walls or fences. [---] Indrek walked in the middle of a muddy street, fearing that otherwise something might fall onto his head." (Tammsaare 1931: 321.) Judging by the strong winds and the fact that the "Dvigatel" factory was somewhere nearby, Indrek's flat could have been somewhere near Ülemiste, in the recently built Sikupilli slum of the beginning of the century.

– Signs and notices: ugly, painstakingly made, with clumsy language, touchingly helpless, but still so characteristic that the authors love to "cite" them. "Indrek halted at a yard gate. A notice stating that "A decent man or woman can get a nice cheap room" had been put on the gatepost where paint was dull and crumbling. [---] Flat number 7 was on the first floor, a clumsy boot had been painted on its door. That meant a shoemaker – always hammering and pounding." (Tammsaare 1931: 6–7.) The subject of informing was introduced very soon, and we know that this *always hammering and pounding* shoemaker Lohk proved to be an informer. Informing on people occupies a central part in Tammsaare's conception of revolution and slums, and it has been written deep into the III volume of *Truth and Justice*.

– Shutters: mostly painted green, sometimes with heart-shaped openings. But they do not mark isolation or surly privacy, they are not aimed at safety, but primarily, they are aesthetical details, showing the care and love the master has for his house. When Jakob Kadarik, who has survived a disaster, eventually (according to Ristikivi's productive scheme of composition) returns to his grandfather's slum house, the green shutters are still there, and they express this minimal feeling for home that all Ristikivi's characters are missing when away.

– Street corners seem to be even slightly magical places in the timelessness of a slum: things can look different there, a gust of wind may hit one there. A corner shop is like a club, where people talk about and comment on daily news.

– Brothel – either a legal or illegal brothel is as compulsory enterprise as a colonial shop or shoemaker's workshop, it is very rarely missing (in Tallinn). The author's text usually refers to it by euphemisms (*grey house*, *Mister Müller's institution*, *the refuge for lethargic people*).

– Odours: the difference between Tartu and Tallinn is rather noticeable. Even the contemporary works describe many specific odours in Tartu – to mention only the symphony of stinks in Maimu Berg's novel *Ära* ("Away"). In Tallinn the smells are mentioned in a more generalised way (for instance, Tammsaare speaks about *the air that is heavy with slum odours*, and some definite stinky smell might be present at the psychological level as an image. The delicate hero of Ristikivi's *Rohtaed* ("The Garden") sometimes experiences *something like a fear* of getting home, because the *smell of fried fat* strikes his nostrils there. The Tartu brewery manifests its existence with smells (naturally so!), "Dvigatel" and other factories in Tallinn, as well as those in Pärnu, let out shrill whistles. Can we find something objective and characteristic to geographical location here? Tartu as a threshold town, located on a flat river valley, and Tallinn and Pärnu by the sea, open to sea winds. Could we regard Tartu as a threshold town in its metaphorical sense? Cf. Edgar Kant (who has coined the term *threshold town*): "The threshold between the poor and the rich has been marked with a special clarity in town" (Kant 1926: 113). Can we say that the class hierarchy is much more pronounced in Tartu, and the enclosure within the confines of one's class, and within the geographical borders of the corresponding town district are much stricter than in Tallinn? The aura of the Tähtvere district as the *district of university professors* even persisted during the Stalin era. It has often been quite justly said that Tallinn worships Mammon, but it seems that partly due just to this fact, we can find less spiritual arrogance and less marked class boundaries there.

Since the **types of slum dwellers** are so various and colourful, much has been written about them, and we can only give a short list here. A shoemaker and washerwoman are universal to all slums. All kinds of *-smiths*, shopkeepers, dressmakers and charwomen are as characteristic and as much depicted. Luts's short stories add a horse-dealer, butcher, waiter, hairdresser, railway official, caretaker, mechanic, tailor and a palmist to this list. Many of them are also pimping and/or selling illegal liquor. Another large group informs of degraded

people: scores of drunks, blackmailers, swindlers and prostitutes. Among other people there can be found some eccentrics and home-made philosophers. Slum women are much more laborious than their men are. *In the Backyard* and *A Quiet Corner* have an international cast. The main hero does not fit well among the inhabitants of the slum; he is more ethical and talented, he feels alien among them, he suffers and wants to get out of it, he is harassed by his neighbours, etc.

Activities

– Timeless idleness. The free-lance glasscutters of the Tartu slum are naturally much idler than workers, whose life is dominated by clock hands and factory whistles.

"Katariina Lüüne woke from her afternoon nap just when her small wall clock with a painted face struck five in the corner.

Usually, this was the time when the sleepy workers' houses became active again. Bony women, their jacket sleeves rolled up to their elbows, became busy [---] and were incessantly afraid of being late in preparing food for their men, who came home from work. Half-rotten well handles were creaking, and the chimneys that belched smoke only twice a day started to emit bluish black columns of smoke that cleared away sadly, boringly and phlegmatically into the deep blue of summer sky. The smell was the same every day: bitter onions and burnt fat." (Jakobson 1927: 9.)

– Gardens and gardening: this was an essential activity, but at the same time, the most enviable privilege of the slum. A part of the Jakobson's *rural town* is inhabited by the unique class of factory workers-cottagers, who grow gardens. We should think that not only the slum called *Supilinn* ('Soup Town') and the names of its streets, but also the self-pride of inhabitants have stemmed from these gardens.

– Informing and spying: these are the special subjects of Tammsaare, forcefully introduced at the scenes depicting Mr. Maurus's school. It is really rampant in the third volume of *Truth and Justice*, degenerating human relations and determining people's fates. Describing this phenomenon, Tammsaare casts away his peace of an epic thinker and becomes sarcastic, no matter whether he deals with the irresponsible reflex curiosity of listening behind the doors and around the corners, or with political cruelty.

– Plodding and toiling: the collective hero of Ristikivi's trilogy – *diligent and laborious lower classes of the town* – do not spy upon each other, but they follow the life of their fellow citizen with a *severe interest*, since one cannot let anybody get better than oneself is. They have ambitions, and not very many problems. Timeless idleness is unheard of in Lambapea Street. The first generation townspeople have a positive attitude, they set accomplishable goals and plod and toil incessantly.

A ghastly place

Something bad, soiled, ugly and sinister is permanently going on in the slum. At the same time, all this is somehow habitual, monotonous and expected. Many deaths numb the soul. Death is not a feared visitor, but a local presence. Nothing can daunt or shock the inhabitants of the slum, blows of fate and passing away are only dully acknowledged. In this way, both life and death are in a way timeless in the slum. But dullness and numbness are ghastly by themselves. People can notice them in some place of ghastly reputation, but also sense them suddenly, as a revelation, in any long-familiar and characterless place.

– Locksmith Piir is dying, nobody knows whether from drinking or of some illness, and he suggests that Valter, his apprentice, ward and caretaker, sold his body to the university clinic.

"Valter could not bear such confused talk; he went to the doorstep, where he had stood so often. A child gazed at the old man and the old man asked: "Why are you looking at me? Am I awful?" – "Yes, you are, but I am not afraid of you." – "But I will eat you!" – "Mother, mother!" cried the child, stumbled and fell down, stood up and fled into the sidestreet. A chimney sweep was crouching on a chimney, scolding a cat.

These ghastly stories penetrated into Valter's backbone, he backed into the workshop and further into the other room to see what the master was doing.

The master was not doing anything anymore. His pale hands were limply hanging over the edge of his bed." (Luts 1952: 353.)

An old man and a child, a chimney sweep and a cat – nothing but staffage in a landscape – how can these scenes "objectively" be found to be ghastly? They do not know that at the same time another human being ceases to exist, this moment is as ordinary for them as any other moment. But Valter and everything he is able to perceive at this moment have been buried in a cloud of ghastliness.

Environmental aesthete Yrjö Sepänmaa guides us to notice differences between man's relations with landscape and his relations with the environment.

1. "The environment meets us, enters us, becomes us. We do not only entwine the environment, the environment entwines us – nor is the relationship then between us and the environment, rather we are in the environment, penetrated and possessed by it."

2. "The environment cannot be the same as a landscape. A certain degree of distance to a landscape is needed – if it is to be a landscape. We are face to face with the landscape, staring it in the eye. [---] A model of an encounter of this kind – instead of union – can be found in the theatre. Mentally and in our feelings we participate in the events on stage, but physically we are behind the invisible fourth wall of the stage." (Sepänmaa 2000: 15.)

Valter is not in the theatre, he is standing on a doorstep in a slum. Having been *penetrated* with the disconsolateness of his own being and that of his master, he *faces* two simultaneous scenes from slum life and perceives them as *ghastly* scenes. In such prose as we are talking about, the author ~ narrator ~ first-person hero or the third-person hero is always *inside* and *outside* at the same time.

– In Männik's *grey house* there are four deaths within a few autumn months – two deaths because of illness and two at the hands of the police.

"... Dead? ... What does it mean? Probably it meant this grave in the dirty clay that he had been digging for almost the whole day, so that his whole body was still aching. And his thoughts went back to that grave. The singing became lower and lower. He recalled vividly how he had thrown dirt out of the grave and cursed. Then he had measured the length and width of the grave and continued again, now and then stopping and sitting for a moment on the heap of clay and guzzling some vodka. Mikael remembered digging so clearly, just as if he was still looking into that empty, dark throat with a puddle of muddy water at its bottom. The leafless tree branches had been murmuring in the wind just as they were doing now, crosses on the graves had been creaking and glass in the doors of the boxes that contained wreaths had been rattling." (Männik 1930: 128–129.)

Mikael is the security guard of the brothel, his inner monologue is given in a clumsy speech. But even this sequence of memories is full of overwhelming existential bleakness.

Supilinn

– Adams's novel *Esta's Debut* (1986) presents a scene where a professional washer of dead bodies, an aggressive and talkative person, who speaks Tartu

dialect, orders Esta to help her. This expressive, harsh scene is unique in the work of Adams the mannerist.²

– The homeliness of the shacks of Supilinn in Hainsalu's *Cock's Wattle* (1999) is deceptive, unarming and decadent.

– Something awful also happens in Heinsaar's stories about Supilinn, which the critics have classified as magical realism.

– The term *poetic realism* should be appropriate for Kriisa's *A Stranger*. The episode where Moonika goes to Supilinn to find Leelo and learns that Leelo is dead shows the slum as a ghastly place with its everyday reality and the speech and gestures of its inhabitants, just as in Luts's works.

"The windows of the opposite house opened, but nobody was seen behind them. Children were playing in a sandbox between the woodsheds. The woman swung her fist towards Moonika and followed the man.

Nobody came to the open windows. The street was also empty. [---] A piece of veneer had been nailed onto the corner of the house, bearing a notice in Russian letters, 'Herne.' [---]

A path turned between the woodsheds and outhouses, she had ventured into the next yard. The yard was peculiarly empty, a few clothespins had been left on an empty stretched clothesline. The path went straight to the door of the opposite house, it seems that one had to pass through the house to get to the street. The windows were dirty, the door of the house was open. Moonika turned around the corner of the house and was suddenly in the street. There was a pear-shaped sign, 'Oa 7,' on the wall of the opposite house. It was a long two-storey red brick building. Beside the door there was a worn wooden bench where somebody had carved their initials. A motorbike with a sidecar rattled past." (Kriisa 2001: 95–99.)

The description fits everyday realism well, but the overall effect is scary.

People who do not live in Tartu might ask, why such continuous interest in Supilinn? Yi-Fu Tuan points out, based on research done in Boston's West End, that artists and intellectuals especially have a sharp awareness of special qualities of their districts and they defend these areas against intruders, doing it not as the owners of the property, but for some aesthetical and sentimental reasons. Since their worldview is broader than that of others, they are able to see their district

² This chapter, "Mother's death," was, according to the author, "written in the 1940s, in the atmosphere of Stalinism, when I was repeatedly discharged from my work" (V. Adams's letter to M. Kalda of Dec. 5, 1984), during the period from October 1946 up to June 1947.

as an entity and to value its special features (Tuan 1990: 214). One does not need to be a city sociologist to see that the same applies to Supilinn or, for instance, to the Nõmme district in Tallinn.

What could, then, be the specific features of such a district that inspires people's creative work and evokes chivalrous feelings in them? The district of Supilinn is said to have been started to be formed in the mid-18th century. If we look up the grid of its streets either on modern town plans or on any older plan, such as between pages 104 and 105 in the book by Edgar Kant, cited above, we can see that it is of quadrangular shape, with the exception of the small winding Lepiku sidestreet. There is no evidence of *chaotic formation*.

Let us refer to Kant once again. The fire of 1775 destroyed two thirds of Tartu. Reconstruction got into full swing in the first quarter of the 19th century, when the university main building and a number of other important university buildings were completed. (Kant was not very enthusiastic about them – to him, they represented the "cold academic virtuosity of form" in accordance with the domineering Classicist style of the time.) It was the era of geometric town-building. The rectangular grid cuts into the primeval river valley; instead of taking the streets up the slope at an angle, as was the case with older, naturally formed streets, the new ones were designed to cross the river valley. A number of streets run right up the slope, e.g. Mäe and Lubja streets across the river, where the sidewalks are the flights of steps and driveways are entirely missing, or Piiri, Meloni and Marja streets in Supilinn, which end against a high slope (Kant 1926: 187–188). We can conclude that although the façades of the houses of Supilinn are naughtily zigzagged and funny³, the grid of the streets that ignores the natural relief of the area has forced the houses into straight lines and has, thus, created an interesting dissonance with the local bohemian *genius loci* of the slum.

³ "The farther towards Supilinn we go, the more we see that the greyness of the houses is hidden by the greenery of their gardens. The houses in Oa, Herne, Kartuli, Marja, Meloni [---] streets mostly have only one storey; they are individual, one may stand straighter, another may lean this or that way, one may be narrow, another much bulkier. [---] there is such an arbitrary freedom of a builder, which had once glued a small doll's house on the neighbour's firewall or built a false plastered wall on the roof of a one-storey brick house to make it look taller. [---] some may stand out like a fang, another grows older, having never been completed – but they all look like the real masters of Supilinn." (Adams 1986: 5.)

Vaestepatuste ("Poor Sinners")

The debut novel of August Jakobson (1927) proved to be a sensation for the jury of the novel-writing competition, as well as for the general public. *Vaeste-Patuste alev* ("Poor Sinners' Town") became a popular quotation for a time. This place name with such a poetic aura had actually already been introduced into literature by Marie Under some years earlier. One of her earliest poems on the slum motif titled *Vaeste patuste tänav* ("In the Poor Sinners' Street"), was written on April 18, 1923 in Tallinn, and it was published in the May volume of the literary magazine *Looming*. Most probably this magazine was read by the future debutant, who was ill in bed and devoured books in his father's house in the Rääma workers' slum at that time.

– The toponym *Vaestepatuste* has really existed in Tallinn. This street, or rather a connecting road (*Armesündergasse*, *Грешная улица ~ Грешный переулок*), was used to take the condemned from Toompea to Võllamägi (Gallows Hill) as late as at the turn of the 19th century. A part of this road, stretching from Tõnismäe to Pärnu Road, was named Hariduse Street on Dec. 16, 1936, when the building of the houses for the Tallinn French Lycée and the Institute of Domestic Economics, founded by the Estonian Women's Union, was started (Kivi 1972: 32, 119). Hariduse Street was fully developed in the second half of the 1930s, so the whole street is the best representative of the functionalist style in Tallinn (Kalm 2001: 25).

Vaestepatuste Street crossed Pärnu Road and continued up to Liivalaia Street⁴, to Võllamägi, and we can read from Aleksander Kivi's research:

"The gallows of the city of Tallinn was situated near the crossing of V. Kingissepa [=Liivalaia] and Vana-Veerenni Streets, on the hill behind the present-day Tallinn Polytechnic School [Pärnu Road 57] and its students' hostel. It had – like a gallows of a big city should – been built of limestone. On the oval platform three stone columns had been erected, which had been connected by three wooden beams, each of which had space for two condemned. One beam had been placed from a column to the middle of the opposite beam: this had been the place for the main thief (*Erzdieb*). We know that mostly thieves were hanged in the Middle Ages. Thus, the whole gallows could accom-

⁴ A zigzagging connecting path or pedestrian path passing the *Kosmos* cinema was called *the previous Vaeste-Patuste Street* even in the city scheme that was recently published in the *Postimees* newspaper from Sept. 27, 2001 in connection with the reconstruction of Rävälä Boulevard.

modate seven thieves. In German there was a joking word for seven things or persons – *galgenvoll*, a 'gallowsful.' The gallows was demolished in 1876. The story goes that the last one to be hanged at the Tallinn gallows had been a goat, who had killed a butcher's apprentice who had badly teased it." (Kivi 1964: 407.)

From the same source we can learn that there was also a wooden gallows in Tallinn, which was situated on the plot of the contemporary Tallinn Coeducational Gymnasium, Pärnu Road 71. What is now Hariduse Street provided a connection between Toompea and both gallows, so the Ministry of Education probably acted wisely when it abandoned this ghastly place and the Lycée could have made a mistake in returning to the site.

– Returning to Under, we can say that *Vaeste patuste tänaval* (Under 1923: 82) is not material for an anthology and it does not have the tragic and mystical subject one might expect from its title. There is a mute scene: *a young butcher, red as a bull* gazes at a passing ethereal *maiden*, who gets frightened under such a carnal gaze and flees into *a low yard*. It seems right, since even in the 1930s this nondescript street without houses was lined with the backyards of houses that stood in Tõnismäe and Roosikrantsi Streets. The last verse, where the disappointed young man continues his everyday work *among flying pieces of bones and marrow* is especially harshly visual and relates to the above-mentioned folk story about the butcher and the goat. It was quite possible that Under had heard the story, since she had spent her youth nearby in Tuvi Street in Tõnismäe (Kokla 1953), and another local folk story later became a source material for some of her ballads. Although we cannot establish a direct connection, both cases have a similar feature – the tragic is brought down to earth – into gallows humour in the story about the gallows, and into bloody, but still harmless work in the poem. Thus poetry has robbed the place of its ghastliness.

– There is an area of sandy hills called Kolgata (Golgotha) near Jakobson's depressingly inhuman and indecent Vaeste-Patuste town. The description of this place contains reminiscences of timeless landscapes of the Holy Land – Jakobson used the symbols from the Bible in several of his works – revealing that the author had the ability of existential perception.

"A long time ago people tried to mine for sand in this area, but it was officially prohibited after a few cartloads, since the amount of bones that were dug out of the sand pit was enormous." Bones of animals and people were all mixed

up in the sand. They are in great detail and sensually described with the pen of a classic of naturalism. Legends were born, but at the same time everybody knew that even recently, people had been taken to Kolgata to be shot early in the morning. In the autumn of 1905, Katariina Lüüne had come here to mourn her brother. People avoided this place. The road that had crossed Kolgata had been abandoned and it grew over with bushes, because people got used to detouring. Only children and berry-pickers came here, "because the former loved the flour-like soft sand of Kolgata, and the latter the lush forest berries that grew here [sic!]." (Jakobson 1927: 54–55.)

For comparison, a passage from Valev Uibopuu. On the border of his friendly small town there are two graves of soldiers of the Red Army, and the hero has a personal reason to avoid this place. "A long time ago a tin wreath had been fixed to the trunk of a pine-tree, but during the years it grew deep into the tree. Its brown rough bark arched over the metal hoop and it was still holding the hoop in its place, although the hoop only held some rusty pieces of tin that had once been the leaves of the wreath, painted green." (Uibopuu 1991: 29.)

– For a brief summary: the slum prose based on Tartu and Pärnu areas is full of existential ghastliness. In case of the protoplaces of Tartu, the thought and senses of a medium-like hero generate the dimension of ghastliness into some arbitrary area of space. Jakobson's Kolgata is large-scale and its ghastliness is objective. Uibopuu's ghastly place (Valga) is a miniature, and a painful ecological detail emphasises its effect.

Tallinn

– There are no locations in *Truth and Justice* that are ghastly in the above-mentioned sense. Indrek, who walks the windy streets (in Ülemiste?), feels quite safe there. Tammsaare is a master creator of atmospheres, and he does it by using the sense of hearing. "... lonely steps on stone sidewalk echoed far in the silence of the streets, and the iron nails in the worn heels created a loud whining sound when they met the limestone pavement, which sounded in his ears like loll, loll, loll ['fool']! Indrek liked this sound. It trembled like the string of a zither in tender warmth. He did not go straight home, but walked aimlessly about." (Tammsaare 1931: 14.)

Danger can appear everywhere and it strikes people unexpectedly. Indrek is hit with a breaking fence in a stormy night. Mr. Bõstrõi is killed by a stray bullet. On the 16th of October, Indrek's neighbour, factory worker Passelmann, is killed and Kristi gets wounded. The massacre in the New Market has very suggestively been depicted through Indrek's senses and motor reactions; the same could have happened in the psyche of all people who had been present there. An unexpected blow hits Kristi in her own home. But Kristi's tragedy cannot be seen as an existential problem of one person. Tammsaare saw the tragedy of the year of 1905 in the social context of Estonia.

– Ristikivi's *Õige mehe koda* ("The Abode of a Just Man") begins and ends in a slum house, the owner of which is a respectable carpenter. The subject of death is therefore treated in the key of black humour: "Master Kadarik mostly worked for common people, and it is known that they need very many coffins" (Ristikivi 1940: 6). The son of the master and a young maidservant even make love and talk about their wedding among the coffins. Coffins are, indeed, needed in other volumes of the Tallinn trilogy. But the sadness, although it may be deep, does not last too long, as the first generation townspeople are busy establishing themselves. Jakob Kadarik's brief encounters with ghosts are almost farcical and are mostly related with the old town, thus being not relevant to our subject of slums.

– Tammsaare's and Ristikivi's perception of Tallinn is related to the conception voiced by Werner Bergengruen – their contemporary author, who did not live in Tallinn – which is explicated in his collection of stories *Der Tod von Reval. Kuriose Geschichten aus einer alten Stadt* (the 1st edition in 1939).⁵ Actually, this does not concern only Tallinn, but is a wider and more general conception of city and death.

In Tallinn, Bergengruen was inspired by burial grounds, and related stories and persons, beginning with Toompea: "And thus the beginnings of this city are based on a grave" (Bergengruen 1998: 8). It is obvious that his knowledge about Tallinn is too brief. He knows Vaimu Street ('Ghost Street') and Kadriorg, the

⁵ A selection of his stories was published in Estonian in *Loomingu Raamatukogu* in 1966, and the whole collection by Varrak in 1998. Werner Bergengruen (1892–1964) was born in Riga, where he lived until 1904, later he lived in Berlin, München, Zürich, Rome and Baden-Baden. His father was a physician, *Dr. Med.*, he himself was a philologist and journalist. He was a soldier in WW I, in *Baltische Landeswehr* in 1919, after 1924 he was a writer (Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon 1970).

climax of one of his stories, which aims to fool its readers, takes place somewhere *In the slum near Tartu Road*, and that of another, somewhere on the sea ice. He might have seen the interior of St. Nicholas Church. The painting that depicts *danse macabre* has been made into the sign of Tallinn's mentality, and the motto of the book comes from *Revaler Totentanz*. Facts given in the story about the exhibit in St. Nicholas Church that attracted visitors until 1897 – the mummy of Duke de Croy, Peter the Great's Field Marshal, coincide with Kyra Robert's short article (Robert 1985).⁶

The most used scene of action is the Kopli graveyard. A young disconsolate widow builds a Biedermeier-style small house on the grave of her husband and spends many cosy evenings there. A fanatical Dr. Barg bequeaths money for the opening of a shelter for the living dead. It becomes a small idyllic lively brothel, until one autumn night a dreary shadow knocks on the door and says that he is the living dead. The author's credo is: "Each death has its own laugh. We are not disrespectful, when we laugh together with it; it wants to get familiar with us, and we shouldn't remain strangers to it." And about Tallinn: this is not a saturnine city, and no city has closer relations with death than all others have. Only "one has to come from a Nordic country and be used to long winter nights and short drinking feasts [sic!] to be able to live so near to death and not even notice it" (Bergengruen 1998: 9–10).

Let us leave aside the question, which conception, whether that of Tartu, Pärnu or Tallinn, has left the deepest (most serious, most frivolous, or most courageous, etc.) traces in the Estonian literary slum.

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⁶ A small mistake has been made concerning the name of *Rosen's Chapel*, which has become *Rose Chapel* – cf. e.g. "Der Sarg wurde aus der Rosenkapelle in die gegenüberliegende Kapelle der Familie Clodt von Jürgensburg geschafft" (Bergengruen 1965: 62).

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