

CITY and POETRY: Interaction between Material and Verbal Signs

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Speaking about city poetry necessarily raises the question of interaction between material and verbal signs: how the author creates a poem about the city, how the reader(s) interpret(s) the poem, and how the interpretations influence the image of the city. In my opinion, two texts interact with each other in this process: the first is the city as a 'text', and the second is the verbal or written text, the actual text; both of them are created by human language, by the human as an interpreter.

1. The poet as an interpreter of the 'text' of the city

Many theorists have disputed the problem whether the city is a text or not. It is the problem of a message and a meaning: the meaning may also be without the message, and material signs regularly convey only the denotative meanings without the message. As writes Mark Gottdiener:

The wearing of a fur coat, therefore, may 'mean' nothing more than that the individual is cold. Layered on top of this denotative level, however, social behaviors produce connotations that convey a second meaning which represents a more socially inscribed message. Thus, the wearing of a fur coat can connote social status, wealth, and participation in fashion. (Gottdiener 1995: 66.)

Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos represents the opposite idea:

...signification is not only connotative, and even the most trivial producer, when building any kind of house, uses the culturally patterned elements that communicate 'house' – a message immediately understood by an addressee belonging to the same culture. Thus, in the case of contemporary settlements we are neither dealing with a pseudo-addresser nor with a non-addresser, and we do not have a pseudo-text. Instead we have a patchwork text, a message sent by a plurality of both synchronically and diachronically heterogeneous addressers. (Lagopoulos 2000: 49.)

But there is a contradiction in this idea, because the actual addresser is absent

and the purpose of 'house' is not to communicate: it is only a denotative meaning that the building is a house. If an addressee interprets the message by the social context, the house may also become a connotative meaning and a message. Consequently, the message depends on social context and the text of the city and architecture become in this sense a particular type of text which is distinguishable from its material substance. Marrie Klapp has pointed out approximately the same idea: an urban sign is the incorporation of a social message into the physical urban structure; it is a message that may exist in the exterior physical urban structure. The producers of the message 'may be the social groups, historical trends, commercial or political interests, architectural periods, current world events' (Klapp 1979: 945–946) and also writers and poets – all of them belong to the social, human sphere which uses different languages, also the verbal language. And Martin Krampen, referring to different theories, agrees with Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Yuri Lotman and the others who speak about architecture as a particular type of text (Krampen 1979: 169–194).

The urban signs form the text of the city also by Vladimir Toporov. He points out two substrata of the text of the city: the first is formed by concrete literary texts about the city and the second is based on material and spiritual culture, natural and historical material (Toporov 1993: 213). These substrata can be called literary and non-literary substrata (Mihkelev 2002: 434) and these substrata are also reflected in poetry. It means that the urban signs or the natural and material objects are represented by language, which is an essential tool and makes social construction of reality possible. The text of the city is metaphysical and may exist without the material signs: it is a complex of different human interpretations of the material signs, and my hypothesis is that the relation between the text of the city and an author who writes city poems is analogous to the relation between an actual text and a reader. These relations reflect the idea described by Petra Begemann:

A text is not simply 'decoded' by means of fixed word meanings/a 'code' (as early communication models suggest), but furnished with a meaning in an active construction process in which the reader uses information from various sources. This rejection of ontological concepts of meaning is rooted in a general philosophical position: the thesis that reality 'as such' cannot be objectively detected, but is rather the product of human construction. [---] If things and events, however, do not possess 'objective'/'internal' features, but are interpreted by means of strategies devel-

oped in human interaction, the basis of traditional ('objectivist') semantic theories (which correlate features of objects with stable meanings) is destroyed. (Begemann 1994: 2-3.)

The following figure represents the components of meaning construction according to Begemann:

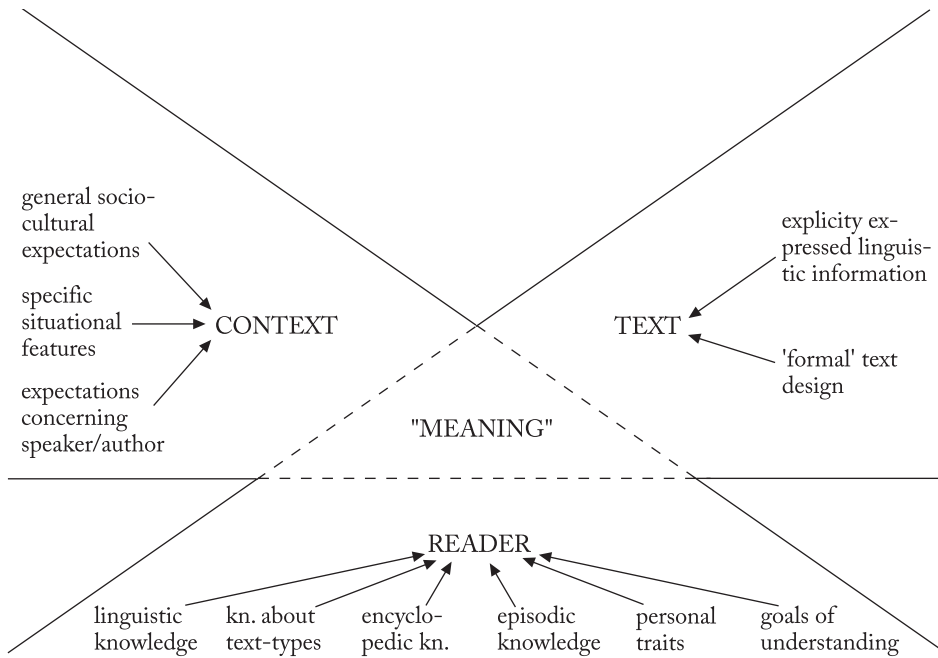


Figure 1] Components of meaning construction (Begemann 1994: 3).

Begemann explicates the figure, ‘...the reader uses not only word meanings ... and syntactic structures..., but also mobilizes various types of non-linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about the world in general (*encyclopedic knowledge*), knowledge about particular events, objects, persons ... (*episodic knowledge*), knowledge about contents and formal characteristics of different text types.’ (Begemann 1994: 3.)

Speaking about relations between the text of the city and an interpreter, the same components of meaning play an important role with some variations:

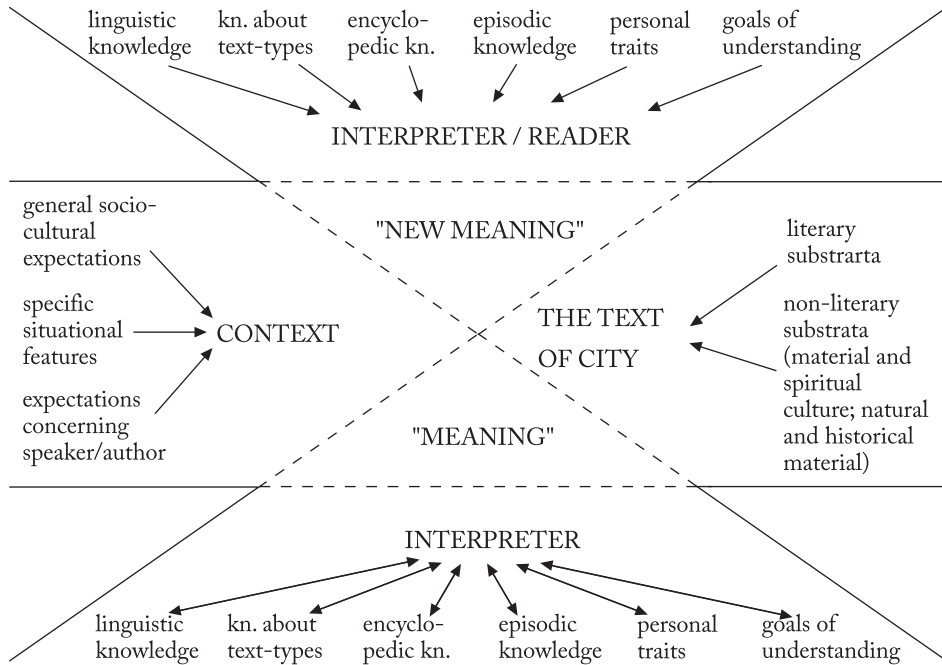


Figure 2] The 'text' of the city and the components of meaning construction.

The figure expresses the change of meaning and also the representation of material urban signs. The mechanism begins when an interpreter (writer or poet) 'reads' the text of the city, and interprets the text or the substrata of the text. The urban signs or the natural and material objects (referents) are always mediated in poetry about the city: it means that the *significans* (objects), the *significatum* (meaning) and the *signum* (sign, word) are (complex) objects depending on the interpreter (Petöfi, Sözer 1988: 443). The interpreter is the central phenomenon in this case: the interpreter is not only a reader but also an author or a poet who interprets the urban signs in the physical urban space or in the earlier texts about the city to create a new poem. And then the poet may become a producer of the social message: s/he creates a new world with language.

S/he uses both linguistic knowledge, containing the literary substrata of the text of the city, and non-linguistic knowledge, containing the non-literary substrata of the text of the city: material and spiritual culture, natural and historical material. But as a creator, s/he also creates a new meaning using his/her own personal vision, and then will create a new text, which is an actual text, a poem. At the same time, 'A material object gives an impulse for the creation of a text,

for expressing one's subjective experience. Therefore it is possible to create extremely different texts about one and the same object, and to apply them to serve different ideologies.' (Mihkelev 2002: 433.)

In the Figure 2, the dashed line represents the interaction and continuous movement between different components of the meaning construction. Not only the meaning changes, but also the context and finally the text of the city: the new text again belongs to the literary substrata of the text of the city and adds a new meaning or nuances of the meaning to the text. For example, Aleksandr Pushkin used the myth about the Bronze Horseman and brought it into literature (Toporov 1993: 209–210), but he also brought along his own interpretation of the myth, and through the myth, the new interpretation of material urban signs (first, the monument to the Bronze Horseman, and second, the whole city as the capital of Russia) to the text of St. Petersburg, as well. Nikolay Gogol's stories about St. Petersburg added new variations to the theme of St. Petersburg as the capital of Russia. Fyodor Dostoyevsky developed the same theme from his own point of view, as has been done by many writers after him (Toporov 1993: 210).

The double-ended arrows between the interpreter and the components of the meaning construction represent their interaction: an author who creates a new text and a new meaning that necessarily influence the components of the meaning construction. S/he may change linguistic knowledge and the concepts of text-types in culture (e.g., as did Johannes Barbarus in Estonian literature), as well as other components. It is the principal difference between the interpreter as an author and the interpreter as a customary reader: the latter interprets the text more to himself and the interpretation does not carry to the text of the city; s/he does not change the general linguistic knowledge and the concepts of text-types, etc. The changing and influencing are the privileges of the author; the customary reader must consider the intentions of the author.

2. The cities and texts

2.1. Riga and Čaks

History knows cities that have been established with a firm goal and symbolic meaning: St. Petersburg is one of them, but there is an older and a very important city in the history of the Baltic States – Riga, the present-day capital of Latvia.

From its founding in 1201, Riga has been the largest and most important urban center of the eastern Baltic littoral. Initially, the city was meant to be the principal center for the Christianization of the Baltic area, but benefiting from its location on the Daugava River (q.v.) and the Gulf of Riga, it quickly emerged during the thirteenth century as a significant commercial center, especially for entrepôt trade between western Europe and the Russian states east of the Baltic area. Joining the Hanseatic League in 1282 enhanced the city's economic wealth and importance during the late medieval centuries. (Plakans 1997: 132.)

Although Riga was not founded on an empty place (there were two Livonian settlements at that location), the medieval city was built with political goals in mind and its denotative meaning is the centre of the German expansion to the Baltic area. But the expansions need ideologies, which cover their real goals, plans and denotative meanings: thus the social messages and connotations are born.

The chronicler Henricus begins to create a new meaning for Riga as soon as he begins to write his *Henrici Chronicon Livoniae*. He explains the name Riga with the help of a play-on-words: the name Riga sounds quite similar to the Latin word *rigare*, meaning 'to water' and metaphorically, 'to christen'. Henricus writes that maybe Riga's name originates from the lake with the same name, or maybe the name means that Riga is watered from under and from above. From under, because the ground is moist and from above, because all sins of the sinful are remitted in Riga – the watering from above is the Kingdom of Heaven, the new religion and christening. The surrounding nations are christened with the new religion, which springs from Riga (Henricus 1982: 34–35). This is the main idea of *Henrici Chronicon Livoniae*, and it concludes with verses expressing the same:

Sic, sic Riga semper rigat gentes!
Sic maris in medio nunc rigat Osiliam
Per lavacrum purgans vitium, dans regna polorum
Altius irriguum donat et inferius.

'Thus does Riga always water the nations.
Thus did she now water Oesel in the middle of the sea.
By washing she purges sin and grants the kingdom of the skies.
She furnishes both the higher and the lower irrigation.'
(Henricus 1982/1961: 245.)

Henricus interprets the text of Riga and creates a new meaning, using mainly linguistic knowledge. The new meaning of the place was an idea, which de-

terminated the image of the city, and the goals and meanings of architectural objects, e.g. Riga Cathedral (1211), etc., for many centuries. The establishment of Riga as a medieval city is a deletion of the preceding historical tradition – the Henricus's voice is a voice of conquerors and strangers. Maybe this fact causes the opposition between Riga and the rest of Latvia, or between Riga as a city and the countryside represented by the later poetry even at the end of the 20th century: Riga is like a space in itself (Viitol 1999: 580) as, e.g. represented and interpreted by Monta Kroma in her poems written in 1983 (Godiņš, Skujenieks 1997: 70–71). In this sense Riga is comparable with St. Petersburg, which was also an antithesis of Russia (Lotman 1999: 344) and 'own' and 'strange' in Y. Lotman's sense are intertwined both in St. Petersburg and Riga (*ibid.*). And further, St. Petersburg is St. Peter's city (Lotman 1999: 308–309), and it is interesting that Latvian poet Uldis Bērziņš also connects St. Peter with Riga in his *St. Peter's Ballads* (1968). The Christian myth about St. Peter and his denial of Christ is transformed into Riga and connected with its history in the 20th century (Bērziņš 1998: 20–21). The city evokes its history and uses it to generate new texts: then the past and present times exist synchronically in the text of the city (Lotman 1999: 333). But like other substrata of the text of the city, history, too, needs an interpreter.

The text of the city is always heterogeneous, because very different interpreters interpret the urban signs and the text of the city is always changing. Aleksandrs Čaks¹ was 'the first unapologetic celebrant of Latvia's urban experience, in contrast with most other Latvian poets who stressed ruralism and general human emotions. Riga (q.v.), the capital city, was particularly the object of Čaks's poetic attention.' (Plakans 1997: 40.) Margita Gūtmane writes, 'The work of Aleksandrs Čaks marked the beginning of modern poetry in Latvia. [---] Čaks made his debut during the first decade of the independent Latvian state, when cultural life did not flourish in any particular way. Instead it seemed conventional and stagnant.' (Gūtmane 2001: 190.)

¹ Aleksandrs Čaks (Aleksandrs Čadarainis, 1901–1950) was born in Riga in a tailor's family. Having finished school, he studied medicine in Moscow. During the Russian Civil War, he was drafted into the army as a medical orderly. In these years, he met among others Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. After the war, he continued his medical studies, but did not finish them because of a lack of money. He passed his teacher's examination and worked for several years as a schoolteacher near the town of Cēsis. Eventually, he moved back to Riga to be a writer, editor and publisher (Gūtmane 2001: 190–192).

Čaks created a new world, a new picture of Riga in his poems written in the 1930s; his poetry, as a literary substratum of Riga, forms the basis for many other texts. The above-mentioned authors also allude to the motives of Čaks's poetry. The city is not a strange place for him; on the contrary, he emphasises that his poetic ego and Riga completely belong together in life and also in death:

*Your breath catches on my tongue and breaks
And half of it is mine, for me to be.
I'm yours from foot up to the nape.
Indeed.*

*You'll be with me for all eternity:
I'm in the glowing space above you.
[---]*

*Time will drape my corpse with odours from the streets
And on my lips will place a moistened leaf.
(Čaks 2001: 31–32, trans. by Baņuta Rubess.)*

Čaks interprets mainly the non-literary substrata of the text of Riga in his poetry. Nature is a very important factor, creating feelings and representing Riga as a living organism with its natural smells (different flowers and plants in the streets and potted flowers: last year's heather, linden trees, tea-roses, etc., also the old tires and burnt rubber, garbage, etc.), sounds (endless alarm, panting dog, whispers, rustles, etc.) and ageing, 'Ah, my Riga, my old and grizzled Riga' (Čaks 2001: 54). The poetic ego and Riga belong together like a human being and nature:

*Come the day my body starts to slowly rot,
And roots of linden trees suck my juices...
(Čaks 2001: 32, trans. by Baņuta Rubess.)*

At the same time, nature and human culture are both opposite and twisted: the nature of the city is not the same as the nature in the countryside, although dogs, birds, rats, centipedes and other animals live in the city and different plants grow there. The nature of the city is always related to human activities and it may also be polluted by waste:

*No trace of nature
but a piece of orange peel
dropped on the pavement
and, in the litter bin, some radish leaves.
(Čaks 2001: 33, trans. by Baņuta Rubess.)*

Čaks has the viewpoint of an urbanite: he is not a stranger – he lives in Riga. He knows the city; he loves its suburbs, coachmen, inner city, walls, buildings, stairs and also the people. For example, his verses in the poem ‘Hemmed in by Walls’ are realistic and also slightly socially critical – it is the natural urban environment:

*Hemmed in by walls, I live within
the inner city.*

*My garden –
a bunch of last year’s heather in a vase
and on a footstool in my room,
a flower-pot.*

*There are no rivers bigger here
than gutters
nor larger lakes than puddles
where basement children,
lured by sunshine, splash about.*

(Čaks 2001: 33, trans. by Rūta Spīrsa.)

By interpreting the material and natural substrata of Riga Čaks created two new meanings for the text of Riga. First, he represented the city as a normal environment for human beings and this idea was innovative in the Latvian literature of the time. Second, he emphasised the animation of nature in the city and also the animation of the city itself – in this sense he connected Latvian folklore and city poetry and created a new meaning (maybe it is opposite to Henricus’s meaning) of Riga both for the Latvian public and foreigners.

2.2. Paris and Barbarus

Innovative Estonian poet Johannes Barbarus² interpreted urban signs differently from Aleksandrs Čaks. He mostly represented foreign cities, not Estonian

² Johannes Barbarus (Johannes Vares, 1890–1946) was born in an Estonian village. Having finished Pärnu Gymnasium he studied medicine at the University of Kiev (1910–1914). He was a military physician in WWI, mainly in Galicia. When the Estonian War of Independence began in 1918, he was a military physician in the Estonian army. After the war, he worked as a doctor in Pärnu. He was influenced by French literature – the *Clarté* group and poets Apollinaire, Cendrars, Divoire, Beaudouin and others. In 1940, when the Soviet occupation began in Estonia, he became the Prime Minister of the Estonian puppet government. He committed suicide in 1946.

towns in his poetry of the 1920s. Tallinn as the capital of Estonia appears in his poetry only later. His poetry was both experimenting and imitating, enthusiastic for European and American metropolises and French literature.

While interpreting the texts of foreign cities, Barbarus had the viewpoint of a foreigner, the city and his poetic ego did not belong together completely, he was only a visitor. The titles of his poems, such as 'Again in the Metropolis' (*Jälle suurlinnas*, 1919), 'The Panorama from Notre Dame' (*Panoraam Notre-Dame'ilt*, 1924) sound as they would be described by a tourist. His favourite city was Paris, a city of a very rich and heterogeneous text – both the literary and non-literary substrata are inexhaustible: Victor Hugo's Paris is not the same as, for example, Charles Baudelaire's Paris; Marcel Proust's Paris is not the same as Erich Maria Remarque's or Ernest Hemingway's Paris, etc. Paris was the centre of modernism after WWI; many European and American writers and artists stayed there and were, naturally, inspired by the text of Paris.

Johannes Barbarus was in Paris in 1923 and 1930. Certain signs have certain meanings for tourists, and Barbarus indeed used the well-known material signs of Paris: Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, Sacré Cœur de Montmartre and some others, but in addition to the material signs he was inspired by the literary substrata as well. He interpreted and translated the material signs to the language of modernism, namely, to the language or versification of cubism and constructivism, imitating French poets Apollinaire, Cendrars, Divoire and others. But such poetry also has a fixed meaning – the city as a sign means the metropolis, this is a living and swarming environment, which cultivates the new urban, technical and modern world: at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Paris was the biggest international business, science and cultural centre. Paris changed and poetry about the city changed as well.

Even Charles Baudelaire, standing on the threshold of modernism, felt these changes and his poetry has had its influence on the modern poetry of the 20th century. In Baudelaire's poetry we can find the literary substrata from the earlier texts of Paris and his interpretations of these substrata, and these interpretations contain also thoughts about the future – therefore, Baudelaire is the best fulcrum when speaking about the text of Paris.

In his poem *Paysage* from the cycle *Tableaux Parisiens* (1857) Baudelaire writes that he wants to see Paris as a workshop that is full of life, with chimneys, church towers and ship masts:

*Les deux mains au menton, du haut de ma mansarde,
Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde;
Les tuyaux, les clochers, ces mâts de la cité,
Et les grands ciels qui font rêver d'éternité.*
(Baudelaire 2000: 238.)

Baudelaire stood between the old and new, between the classical and modern and, for example, also between Victor Hugo and the cubists or constructivists. In the poem *Le cygne*, dedicated to Victor Hugo, from the above-mentioned cycle, he writes that the old Paris is lost: *La vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel)* (Baudelaire 2000: 248). And in the second part of the same poem he seems to connect the ideas of constructivism and symbolism:

*Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie,
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.*
[---]

*À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve
Jamais, jamais! à ceux qui s'abreuvent de pleurs
Et tettent la Douleur comme une bonne louve!
Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs!*
(Baudelaire 2000: 250–252.)

The two last verses are an allusion to the Roman legend of the she-wolf, Romulus and Remus, carrying the meaning of the changeable and eternal city (Baudelaire 2000: 502). Baudelaire was really a prophet – Barbarus and his contemporaries indeed sang about the buildings, masts and towers.

Experimental quality is a characterising feature of modernism. It means revolutions mainly in versification and representation, thereby, in form, but both the material and literary substrata remain; only their meanings may change. The meanings are carried by new forms: the poet interprets the material substrata by the ideology of his time – the ideology of technical progress, well-known all over Europe and America.

Barbarus's poem 'The Panorama from Notre Dame' represents a panoramic view of Paris. The poet uses geometrical figures to describe the buildings: perpendicular, rhombs, quadrangles, parallelograms, curves, cones and pyramids. The squares are like circles and the streets are like straight lines, zigzags, parallel

lines or like the pulsating veins of the city – Barbarus's Paris is animated like Čaks's Riga although it is much more technical. At the end of the poem, the author sighs, '...what a joy – to draw with words' (...*milline õnn on – sõnadega joonistada* – Barbarus 1924a: 92). It means that Barbarus's poem is really an experiment, born from pleasure and the message to the public is primarily the innovative play: if not for the names of places and buildings in this text, it could as well be New York, Madrid, Moscow or some other metropolis of the time – all of them may be modern and technical, being at the same time the centres of art with romantic streets, legends and different ideologies. Secondly, Barbarus demonstrates his enthusiasm for the panorama of Paris – his poetic ego admires the city as a visitor, who mediates impressions about the city.

The verses in Estonian are for the Estonian public and consequently, in Barbarus's poems we can find the same meaning of Paris that is conceived by any Estonian who is in Paris as a foreigner. His poems express his enthusiasm for the city, but there is no connection, as it had been between Čaks and Riga, or between Baudelaire and Paris. Barbarus has written that the goal of his city poetry was innovation, and first of all, he wanted to modernise the provincial and rural Estonian poetry (Barbarus 1924b: 3–5). (Compare with the similar situation in Latvian literature in the 1930s.)

The poem 'Paris 2. A Verse with Contrasts' (*Pariis 2. Vārss kontrastidega*) is one of Barbarus's best constructive experiments. He separates two lines of pictures: the left hand poem represents a small Estonian town in a province, and the right hand one represents Paris as a metropolis.

Barbarus contrasts two lives: a static, dull and stable life without prospects in the province, and a dynamic, sparkling, busy and ambitious life in the metropolis. At the end of the vision of Paris his poetic ego cries, 'Go on! Go on!' (*Edasi, edasi!* – Barbarus 1924a: 99). The author represents many faces of Paris, or the Paris that consists of several Parises, and therefore he represents the inner contrasts of the city. It is the city of nightlife, pleasures, desires, and at the same time it is the city of business, jobs and bustle in offices, banks, shops and factories. Barbarus uses the same substrata as, for example, Baudelaire in his poem *Le Crépuscule du matin*:

*La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes,
Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes.
[---]*

Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.
Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,
Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide;
 [---]
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux;
Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,
Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices
Poussaient leur dernier rôle en hoquets inégaux.
Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte,
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux,
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.

(Baudelaire 2000: 300.)

Baudelaire's text is mainly melancholic and obsessing, only the last strophe sounds optimistically like a small allusion to the future, to the beginning of the 20th century. According to my hypothesis, in his poem Barbarus interprets both the material and literary substrata of Paris: essentially, mainly Baudelaire's texts, and through Baudelaire, also the earlier texts; formally, he interprets his contemporary French poets. But the constructive form demands optimistic and enthusiastic content, and Barbarus translates the literary substrata, melancholically existing in Baudelaire's text, into the optimistic and constructive language (like Baudelaire's last verse) to represent the feelings of the contemporary time.

And secondly, Barbarus's poem is a critical message to the Estonian public – maybe it is a warning against provincialism.

Conclusion

The text of the cities depends on its interpreters. It is a changeable heterogeneous system that generates new meanings through its interpreters, although its material substrata may stay invariable: the synchronic and diachronic intersect in the texts of the city and in the texts about city. The changeable factor is mainly the verbal material, the oral or written texts, especially when the text of the city is as rich in different texts as that of Paris. But the new meanings may originate both in the material and verbal substrata, as demonstrated by different meanings of the text of Riga. And finally, all the meanings of the texts of the cities are more

or less social messages, because the city is a social environment, connecting different ideologies, nations and viewpoints.

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Linn ja luule: materiaalsete ja verbaalsete märkide vastasmõju

Kokkuvõte

Artikkel analüüsib linnast kirjutatud luulega seonduvat materiaalsete ja verbaalsete märkide vastasmõju: kuidas autor loob vastava teksti ja kuidas erinevad tõlgendused mõjutavad linna imago. Niisugusest vastasmõjust võtavad osa kaks keele abil loodud teksti: esiteks linn kui “tekst” ja teiseks verbaalne või kirjutatud tekst. Linnatekst on metafüüsiline ning võib eksisteerida materiaalsetest märkidest lahus: see on kompleks materiaalsete märkide tõlgendusi, mis on loodud ja eksisteerivad keele abil. Linnast kirjutav autor interpreteerib linnateksti nagu lugeja tõlgendab tavaliselt kirjutatud teksti, näiteks luuletust. Lugeja kasutab teksti mõistmiseks ja tähenduste loomiseks erinevaid informatsiooniallikaid, mitte ainult verbaalset materjali, vaid ka keelevälisest reaalsusest. Seega on uue teksti loomisel keskne interpreteerija roll, kelleks pole mitte ainult lugeja, vaid ka autor, kes uue teksti loomiseks interpreteerib materiaalseid linnamärke, luues keele abil uut sotsiaalset sõnumit, uut maailma.

Artikli teine osa analüüsib erinevate autorite tekste linnadest. Läti luuletaja Aleksandrs Čaks oli esimene, kes lõi 1930. aastatel kirjandusvälist materiaalsset

substraati kasutades uue, senisele vastanduva pildi Riiast: Čaksi luules on linn normaalne elukeskkond, mille loodus nagu linn isegi on isikustatud – selles võib näha läti varasema luule ja folkloori mõjusid. Hiljem on Čaksi loodud tekstid saanud kirjanduslikuks substraadiks paljudele uutele tekstidele.

1920. aastate eesti luulesse tõi uuenduslikkust Johannes Barbarus, interpreteerides oma luules välismaa linnade tekste. Artiklis vaadeldakse lähemalt Pariisi teksti kajastumist Barbaruse ja Charles Baudelaire'i luules.