

Piret Viires

Postmodernism in
Estonian
Literary Culture

EXTRACT



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Introduction

The aim of the monograph *Postmodernism in Estonian Literary Culture* is to examine how postmodernism has influenced Estonian culture, more precisely its literature. I have tried to map the manifestations of postmodernism in Estonian literature and provide a possible framework to develop this topic further and to analyse postmodernist literary works. The current views also rest on the correlation between a postmodern society and postmodernist literary works.

The objectives of the work are thus as follows:

1. Analyse the occurrence of postmodernism in Estonian literary culture.
2. Analyse the relations between postmodernist literature and a postmodern society, focusing on the case of Estonia in comparison with the common developments in Western postmodern societies.
3. Introduce a possible model for determining postmodernist works.

The hypothesis is that postmodernist works cannot be defined only on the basis of the features within the text, but that we should also consider the depiction of the postmodern world and the existence of a postmodern society when the work was written.

Postmodernism in Estonian Literary Culture relates to previous research carried out in Estonia which examines the relations between postmodernism and Estonian literature.

At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, a number of articles were published about postmodernism; the first was probably Hasso Krull's "Hando Runnel and Postmodernism" in the literary magazine *Vikerkaar* (see Krull 1988). Most texts about postmodernism indeed appeared in that magazine. For example, Hasso Krull's lecture series introducing poststructuralism (Krull 1992–1993) was published, as well as translations of the texts of the relevant theoreticians. Today, texts of several postmodernist theoreticians have been published as books.

In the late 1990s, academic research took a keener interest in postmodernism, especially Epp Annus's articles; Tiit Hennoste, Hasso Krull, Märt Väljataga, Rein Veidemann, Sirje Olesk and others also analysed postmodernism. Postmodernist discourse is included in *Eesti kirjanduslugu* (History of Estonian Literature, 2001), where several Estonian literary works of the late 20th century are called postmodernist.

In 2005, Janek Kraavi published in Estonian the comprehensive summary *Postmodernismi teooria ja postmodernistlik kultuur* (Theory of Postmodernism and Postmodernist Culture), introducing the main principles of postmodernism (see Kraavi 2005); in 2008 Piret Viires's monograph *Eesti kirjandus ja postmodernism* (Estonian Literature and Postmodernism) appeared (Viires 2008).

The current book, *Postmodernism in Estonian Literary Culture*, examines how postmodernism reached and was established in Estonian literature. It presents and analyses various samples of Estonian postmodernist literary texts, following the manifestations of postmodernism from the 1950s until the beginning of the 21st century.

In addition, the book suggests a practical model which makes it possible to determine whether literary texts are postmodernist. This model should of course be seen as one possible model of analysis. The model is universal enough to be used in the analysis of postmodernist texts in other national literatures. The approach suggested in the monograph is thus not restricted only to Estonian literature.

The book can be regarded as one possibility for examining postmodernism, and an attempt to establish a framework from which it is possible to move on. As the term postmodernism is quite extensive, blurred and unstable, the heterogeneity of material leads to a heterogeneity in methods. The topic of postmodernism cannot be defined once and for all, and the current treatment is only one of many possible interpretations.

So, the book offers a brief overview of postmodernism in general and of the relations between Estonian literature and postmodernism. In a wider sense, an attempt has been made to see postmodernism from every conceivable angle: from its first manifestations to the alleged end of postmodernism.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine the terms of postmodernism and postmodernity, and the relations between modernism and postmodernism. Chapter 3 tackles the history of the term postmodernism. Chapter 4 deals with the postmodern society, and Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the connections between postmodernism and technology and postmodernist culture. Chapter 7 is dedicated to differentiating the features of postmodernist literature.

The second half of the book focuses on the relations between Estonian literature and postmodernism. Chapter 8 describes in more detail the general cultural background at the time when postmodernism arrived in Estonian literature: we first consider the arrival of the ideas of postmodernism/postmodernity in Estonian culture, and then the usage of the term postmodernism in the context of the history of Estonian literature.

Chapter 9 presents an analysis of text samples, beginning with the possible general features of postmodernism. Then follows an overview of the early manifestations of postmodernism in Estonian literature between the 1950s and the

1980s, postmodernism in the 1990s during the radical changes in literature, and finally postmodernism in 21st century Estonian literature. The end of the chapter offers conclusions about postmodernism in Estonian literature.

The book concludes with an analysis of the current situation at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Chapter 10 discusses the possible end of postmodernism and the postmodern era. Chapter 11 briefly introduces various new theoretical trends after postmodernism, which have emerged in recent years. Chapter 12 tries to analyse the general picture of the current era and suggests defining it as a transitional era.

It should be kept in mind that Estonian literature is a small literature, as there are only about one million speakers of Estonian. However, although it is a small literature, its research enables us to find models suitable for analysing other cultures as well. On the one hand, the suggested practical model for determining postmodernism is universal. On the other hand, insight into how the term postmodernism arrived in Estonian culture and theoretical thinking resembles the experience of other East-European post-socialist countries, where the early 1990s witnessed radical social changes, which brought about also changes in cultural theory and in cultural practices. For instance, the comprehensive analysis of postmodernism in Lithuanian literature “Transitions of Lithuanian Postmodernism” (Kvietkauskas 2011) was published quite recently and several parallels can be seen between the processes in Estonia and Lithuania.

Although the analysis in this book focuses on Estonian literature, the background of the research is much wider than just one national literature. It is hoped that anyone interested in postmodernism, contemporary culture, comparative literature, or East-European, Finno-Ugric or Estonian literature will find something interesting here.