THESES OF DOCTORAL (PhD) DISSERTATION

Tivadar Raitsits

The Characteristics of Literary Tradition and Paradigm Shift in the Finnish Novel of the 1970s

Analysis of the Modalities of Literary Reception through the Novels of A. Ruuth, H. Turunen and A. Tuuri

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1. Topic and Objectives of the Dissertation

At the beginning of the 1980s a new generation of writers, representing a radically new approach towards aesthetics and thematics, appeared in the scenery of Finnish literature. The reasons of such shift of historical and traditional horizons, defined predominantly by literature historians as the "postmodern twist", had intrigued me well before the completion of my thesis; namely I wanted to find answers to such questions as what preliminary causes (in literary history, or social, political or other preliminaries) might have lead to the appearance of the new trend, and also how the generation of the Eighties took over and then transmitted the literary and interpretative traditions. In order to clarify such issues I tried to focus my attention on the novels of the 1970s; more precisely on the phenomena in the literature of said decade that conveyed and transmitted the "old", tradition-based forms of speaking and meanings in literature, and also anticipated the "new" contents that would integrate and also override the elements of tradition. Through the analysis of the novels Kivenpyörittäjän kylä [Village of the Stone Roller, 1976] by Heikki Turunen, Nousukausi [Upswing, 1977] by Alpo Ruuth and Joki virtaa läpi kaupungin [The River Flows Through the City, 1977] by Antti Tuuri, I made efforts in order to explore and describe the main thematic directions that constitute the backbone of Finnish literary tradition, and also the modalities of interpreting literature in the period under survey. While interpreting the novels I wished to point out those elements of the thematic and aesthetic tradition of Finnish prose that were transmitted from generation to generation, and manifested in the literary works of the period in question. The aforementioned literary works, albeit they spoke to the readers of the era in a traditional voice, were also able to formulate the literary anomalies that prepared the ground for, and also caused, the paradigm shift at the beginning of the Eighties. The novel approach to interpretation (of literature in general and specific works of art in particular), shaped by contemporary social, political and traditional-historical influences, indicates the transitional period to be outlined in my dissertation, that can also be interpreted as the threshold of a new era, i.e. a literary dividing line between the Seventies and the Eighties.
2. Structure of the Dissertation

The doctoral dissertation consists of five chapters: the introductory chapter on literary theory (Chapter 1) is followed by the analysis of the thematic trends of Finnish literature – the depiction of rural life, the working class and urban life – together with their presentation, through examples, from the viewpoint of literary tradition (Chapters 2 to 4); the thesis is concluded with the analysis of the phenomena of the paradigm shift (Chapter 5). I also included an introductory part and a summary in the dissertation.

In the first chapter of the doctoral dissertation I made endeavours to construct a basis of literary theory for the receptive modalities of the era in question and the novels selected for further analysis. The goal of my investigation was to put the aforementioned novels in a historical context of traditions, thereby applying a primarily synchronic approach in the history of reception, that allows and facilitates the formulation of certain characteristics regarding the history of effects and influences and the aesthetics of reception, all with reference to the particular trends in the Finnish fiction of the Seventies. In order to achieve my goals I selected the ontologically based and still valid theory of philosophical hermeneutics hallmarked by names such as Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer, that – in accordance with the practical requirements of art interpretation – I complemented with the ideas of Hans Robert Jauss regarding recipient-focused reception aesthetics. In order to map out the interpretative modalities of the era (i.e. in order to allow any interpretation of the thematic and aesthetic traditions from the aspect of literary history), and also in order to be able to identify the phenomena of paradigm shift, we need to become acquainted with the present time of the creators and recipients of written artworks, and also with the literary tradition of the era in question; the latter will allow one to interpret the artwork along the already existing expectations, or in an unconventional manner that deviates from tradition. Given the fact that, during the analysis of the three novels mentioned above, I could and must not ignore the strong social and political orientation of Finnish cultural life in the Seventies, I had to integrate various aspects of social history, sociology of literature and sociology of reading into the originally selected methodology of literary theory at several points. Accordingly, I retained it necessary to examine whether and in which manner the reception
aesthetics of Jauss was compatible with the principal theories of sociology (of literature), among others the scientific findings of Leo Löwenthal, Joan Rockwell or Juhani Niemi. I am of the opinion that the adequateness of the theoretical starting point, selected for the analysis of the literary works of the Seventies, has been proven and evidenced by its practical applicability: with its assistance I could also dedicate attention to the realities of interpretation in the present, in addition to the ontological and historical aspects of literary tradition in my dissertation.

With regard to the fact that the relevance of the applied method of analysis, as manifested in scientific life, can also justify the reasonableness of its application, I retained that it was necessary to review the history and current stance of Finnish research in the field of reception aesthetics and sociology of literature. While providing an overview of Finnish scientific life in connection with the subject matter of my dissertation, I have taken into consideration - among others - the works of Katarina Eskola, Jeja-Pekka Roos, Kimmo Jokinen, and also Yrjö Varpio and Juhani Niemi.

In the second chapter of the doctoral dissertation I have analysed the particulars of Finnish rural epics and its contemporary reception. In order to interpret, on the basis of traditions, the literary works of the Seventies with agrarian topics, I had the define the concept of "identity" influenced and shaped by Lutheran social ethics and the ideal of national spirit by Snellman in relation to the idealised countryside milieu; with regard to the fact that, from the second half of the 19th century, such concept fundamentally determined Finnish prose that described the countryside and rural population.

Such rural prose quite often encountered situations of social crisis that the authors then endeavoured to interpret in their works (such as the so-called maaltapako, a wave of escape from the countryside at the end of the 19th century); in the series of turning points that radically transformed rural society – and also the respective rural prose – we may consider as the most important the period known as suuri muutto, a period of social transformation in the Sixties, that also involved mass migration. In connection with the causes and consequences of such profound social transformation I wished to expound the reaction of traditional Finnish rural prose to the events, that is the traditional-historic characteristics of agrarian epic, a trend within rural prose.

In addition to providing an outline of historical facts and events, in the second chapter of my dissertation I placed a high priority on describing the factors that had an influence on the
contemporary reception of agrarian epics. The questions regarding the presumed and effective circle of recipients of the literary works, and the questions regarding the "adequate" interpretation of the agrarian novels, i.e. an interpretation that takes into consideration both the elements of tradition and the actualities of the era, were answered on the basis of sociological surveys (sociology of literature) and conclusions of reception aesthetics. In this regard I primarily relied on the analyses by Jeja-Pekka Roos and Matti Kortteinen, and the observations of Matti Mäkelä. The dilemmas regarding the recipients and the interpretation of the novels partially correlate with the issue of occasional intentionality of agrarian epics, with regard to the circumstance that agrarian epics, being the heir of the educating and enlightening role of the aesthetic principle by Hegel and Snellman, continued to display aspects that were in conformity with the historical-positivist paradigm. In connection with the ambivalent perception of agrarian epics, at the end of the chapter that describes the importance of such trend from the viewpoint of the history of traditions, I also addressed the issue whether the statements of contemporary critics were justified or less.

The second chapter of the dissertation ends with the review of the novel Village of the Stone Roller (Kivenpyörittäjän kylä) by Heikki Turunen. Regarding the interpretation modalities of the scenery, the characters and the events of the novel, I made efforts in order to call the readers' attention to the historical-traditional elements described in the first half of the chapter, and their actualised, updated interpretation in the novel. The diverging viewpoints manifested in how the novel was welcomed by contemporaries, i.e. the statements regarding how difficult it was to take in the novel, or the observations made by the critics, contribute to an ever more layered interpretation of Turunen's novel in question, also from the viewpoint of the history of traditions.

The third chapter of the doctoral dissertation includes my findings regarding Finnish working-class epics. In a manner similar to the presentation of rural epics, I made endeavours to illustrate the significance of worker-themed literature by positioning it in the history of literature and traditions. Social consciousness, ethics and democracy, that contributed to the development and thematic strengthening of working-class epics, have always been fundamentally determining elements of Finnish public thinking, and the same values have determined the horizon for the interpretation of working-class literary traditions. Although, in the event of working-class literary works, it may be reasonable to presume that promoting the goals of political parties and dogmatically intensifying class conflict were intentional, the
writers following this trend - with the exception of certain extraordinary periods and extremisms - predominantly analysed the relationship between the individual and society in their works. In a manner similar to rural prose, the tradition of working-class literature was received in various manners during history. From the Sixties the social and political surroundings provided a welcoming background for such literary works, consequently Finnish working-class literature could return in the focus of attention in the 1960s and the 1970s. In addition to the new leftist movements that appeared in the period in question, we may attribute the renewed expansion of working-class epics to the effects of the great social transformation that also resulted in the renewal of how the countryside was depicted in literary works. In my dissertation I describe in details the possible connection points between politics, ideology and the (working-class) literature of the era, because my goal is to prove the truthfulness of the statement according to which traditional Finnish working-class literature, given its existentialist and social attitude, never addressed any issues of ideology in a direct manner.

The manner the opuses of working-class epics were received in the 1960s and the 1970s was in close connection with the society-shaping effects of the phenomenon of *suuri muutto*, as mentioned above. With the appearance of the new urban middle class the readers of traditional working-class prose have undergone a significant change. The reception modalities of the Seventies working-class literature are well reflected by the contemporary sociological surveys regarding reading habits; with their assistance we are able to formulate statements concerning the popularity of working-class literature and the possibility of its tradition-based interpretation, and we also may draw fundamental conclusions regarding the literary preferences of the average Finnish reader. I made attempts to sketch up the horizon of expectations of the receivers of Finnish working-class literature on the basis of the findings of the contemporary sociological surveys regarding reading habits, and principally based on the findings of Juhani Niemi, Kai Laitinen, Katarina Eskola and Pertti Vakkari.

I illustrated the elements of the tradition of working-class literature, as described in the third chapter of the dissertation, with examples taken from the novel *Upswing* (*Nousukausi*) by Alpo Ruuth. Also regarding Ruuth's novel I pointed out the thematic peculiarities conveying the tradition of working-class epics, with the assistance of the analysis of the interpretative modalities of the scenery, the characters and the events of the novel. In addition to taking into consideration the social and political realities of its age, *Upswing* basically represents and proves the existentialistic sensitivity of the literary works with a working-class thematic.
Accordingly, the analysis aims at revealing that the elements of tradition survive in the transmission of working-class (leftist) values to a certain extent, but mostly in the complexity of the characters of the novel: the characters of *Upswing* are very far from the idealised heroes of the left-wing workers' movement, they appear as uncertain personalities, quite often as marginalised little figures, in the course of the events depicted in the novel.

In the following chapter of my dissertation I describe the third thematic branch of Finnish literature, urban literary tradition. Although the urban thematics, that became independent at the end of the 19th century, did not play a significant role (compared to the traditions of rural epics and working-class literature) in the development of the literary tradition that reinforced the self-identity of the Finnish people, it became a trend of determining importance in literary history, principally due to its role of formulating existentialistic issues. Finnish urban literary tradition obtained an interpretation within the framework of the conflict between country and town; consequently, from the beginning, the depiction of towns was expected to be received with much less enthusiasm than the depiction of the countryside that became a topos of national identity. Due to the outstandingly modernistic orientation of Finnish literature, urban epics gained real importance in the 1940s and in the 1950s; then the great social transformation continued to increase its significance in literary history from the Sixties. In my dissertation I explained the decreasing importance of urban epics with social reasons: in the 1970s (following the transformation of society) the urban milieu was presented as the natural habitat of the individual in the literary works of the era; therefore the way of existence in the city, that previously was depicted in an ambiguous manner – i.e. the traditionalistic approach of urban life – has become a general experience as interpreted by Finnish readers.

The establishment of the role of urban thematics in the history of traditions is closely related to the establishment of the interpretative framework of the thematic tradition. As far as rural and working-class literary traditions (presented as independent thematic branches in my dissertation) are concerned, no interpretative issues have been raised, with regard to the fact that the aforementioned trends were present in the Finnish literary tradition as real thematic units positioned within the history of traditions, that also had well-described and specific contents. Given the circumstance that, with regard to its ontological questioning, we can define the depiction of towns as a thematic trend with a very broad interpretative horizon, therefore – having taken into consideration the contemporary findings and statements as well
– it seemed justified to occasionally amend the expression used in the dissertation, i.e. "urban" thematics, into "urban-existentialist".

In the dissertation I demonstrated the interpretation of the elements of urban tradition in the Seventies with a literary example. In the novel titled *The River Flows Through the City* (Joki virtaa läpi kaupungin) by Antti Tuuri, I aimed at describing the interpretative modalities that proved that thematic tradition can be renewed. While updating the thematic and aesthetic tradition of depicting a city, Tuuri pointed out the relativistic set of values that essentially characterised the society and ideals towards the end of the 1970s. Quite in a paradox manner, the topographically exact and realistic urban context in the novel of Tuuri appeared as the background for aimless people struggling with existential issues and their empty human relationships.

My dissertation concludes with the description of the phenomena of the paradigm shift manifested through the thematic trends of the Seventies. In the fifth chapter, based on the definition of paradigm by Thomas S. Kuhn, I summarised the characteristics of the thematic paradigms that were present in the Finnish prose of the Seventies, and I also pointed out the anomalies (that may also be interpreted as breaking points) represented by certain elements of the novels described in the previous chapters of the dissertation. As far as the three novels analysed in my dissertation are concerned, the change of interpretative perspective is evident: the typical and popular topics of the previous decades – the depiction of the countryside, the world of the working classes and the urban-existentialist thematic – are presented from a new, unusual viewpoint in the novels of Turunen, Ruuth and Tuuri. The aforementioned novels, therefore, have anticipated and, in effect, have implemented the shifting of horizons in literature. The thematic paradigm shift of the 1970s fits into the line of horizon shifts that resulted in a renewal of aesthetics and vision; however, as far as its motives are concerned, it differs from the previous similar shifts in literary history. In my dissertation I made efforts in order to evidence and prove that the social psychological motives, that inspired changes, constituted a basis for the paradigm shift in the 1970s only in an indirect manner, with regard to the fact that it was not the social crisis itself (i.e. the profound changes in the traditional rural lifestyle, the identity of the working classes and the urban lifestyle) that generated the anomalies that lead to the paradigm shift in literature, but the changes in the manner of thinking about such crises.
The horizon shift manifested itself in the field of canonised paradigms with roots into literary tradition, i.e. it had a significant influence on the thematic trends that had strong links to Finnish literary realism and depicted the lifestyle and ideals of the rural population and the working classes, and also gave space to the urban-existentialist viewpoints. The literary works within such thematic trends relativised the system of literary ideals in such manner that, in the meantime, they did not reject the traditional voice of Finnish literature, i.e. they applied the tools and processes of realism (and partially modernism as well). We therefore can attribute a significant role to the novels of the era in the paradigm shift; on the other hand we have to point out that the "total" paradigm shift, that affected forms, aesthetics and thematics in Finnish literature, effectively occurred only from the beginnings of the 1980s.

Having provided a theoretical definition of "paradigm shift", I made efforts in order to point out the interpretative anomalies in the elements of the novels of Turunen, Ruuth and Tuuri that I selected for analysis. Although the aforementioned writers followed the thematic paradigms of Finnish literature when selecting a subject – i.e. the events depicted in their novels focused on the lives associated with the countryside, the working classes or urban existence, and the authors depicted, without exception, average people that the recipients could identify with, without any –, they were not satisfied by the conventional reformulating of the elements of tradition. They transgressed the framework provided by tradition-based interpretation in such manner that, in respect of the thematic direction, they seized the social and existential phenomena as being relative compared to the outdated canonised interpretations.

At the end of the doctoral dissertation I make efforts at evidencing the presence of the thematic horizon shift, as described in the last chapter, with examples taken from the novels. I am of the opinion that, by identifying the anomalies in the interpretation of traditions, I have successfully proven the hypothesis of the dissertation to be true, i.e. that the novels of Turunen, Ruuth and Tuuri prepared the ground for the postmodern shift in Finnish literature by attributing new meanings to the elements of tradition, contemporaneously crossing the borders of such traditions.

The works of Finnish literary history do not interpret the phenomena of the aforementioned paradigm shift in the historical context of thematic traditions. The aim of my dissertation is also to hopefully contribute to the research into the aforementioned turning point of literary history, as described in my dissertation, by proposing new aspects of analysis.
Research Publications in the Topic of the Dissertation

