10 Theoretically European and/or Upstart?

Decadence in an Estonian key

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In his 1912 essay "Literary Style," Young Estonia's[1] leader, the writer and critic Friedebert Tuglas (1886–1971), offers the following argument:

> Since there are no big cities here, we have come to know the cultural moods of the city and the broader world too theoretically, indirectly, through education, foreign literature, and art. Heretofore we have not been able to participate actively in the creation of Europe's cultural values. Nothing connects us to the history of these treasures. We are but theoretical Europeans.
>
> (Tuglas 1912, 97)

This essay by the young Tuglas, one of his earliest programmatic texts, focuses on periodizing the history of Estonian literary culture based on stylistic criteria. The essay's first half investigates the style of older and newer Estonian folklore, Bible translations and the epic *Kalevipoeg* (Son of Kalev, first version 1853). Its second half deals with the formation of Estonian literature through its different stylistic phases. The above argument comes from the essay's seventh and last sub-chapter and relates to modern Estonian literature from Tuglas's own era, aiming its critique toward his entire generation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Estonian literature was no longer preoccupied with the consequences of an agrarian lifestyle, but rather with the "cultural moods of the city and the broader world." Problematically, Estonian literature privileged representations of European metropolitan modernity over the Estonian experience of urbanization, resulting in abstraction. Since its representations of modernity are borrowed from European literature, Estonian literature is only "theoretically" European.

Though in this essay Tuglas does not explain the background of his argument in detail, he does so elsewhere. Here, I refer to several of his articles and the unconventional short biographical monographs (on A. H. Tammsaare and Mait Metsanurk[2]) published during, immediately before, or soon after the First World War. It is significant that here Tuglas no longer uses the term "theoretical European," but rather the concept of "upstart culture," which he now associates with Estonianness.

However, the content of the new concept remains much the same. Although old, overdeveloped European culture is now replaced by underdeveloped young Estonia, Tuglas repeats the designation of the qualities of "theoretical Europeanness" such as abstract, artificial, or too theoretical, formless, without originality and life energy, and alienated from reality.

What exactly, then, does Tuglas mean by "theoretical Europeanness" and by what intellectual trajectories might this term be related to "upstart culture"? If one accepts that Estonia had never had truly big cities that embodied concentrated experiences of modernity in western European terms,[3] how does Estonian culture, too rapidly transitioning from the rural to the urban Estonian culture, engage with existing metropolitan culture? Knowing that Tuglas's critical evaluations extend to his own fiction and the works of his Estonian contemporaries, one might ask how these judgments fit with Young Estonia's ideology as a whole, summarized in the slogan introduced by poet and Young Estonian ideologue Gustav Suits:[4] "Let us remain Estonians, but let us also become Europeans" (Suits 1905, 17)?

Young Estonia's critique and self-critique, as articulated here by Tuglas, reveals central concerns of "young" nations. Indeed, Tuglas sheds light on ways in which intellectual circles in Nordic countries adopted European metropolitan experiences of modernity. In this chapter, I will focus on Tuglas's ambivalent response to the Estonian contemporary literary situation, both in his critical articles and his novel *Felix Ormusson* (1915). The novel is Tuglas's critical, self-critical and ironical reaction to the typical figure of a decadent young man narcissistically living in a solipsistic universe, a dreamworld detached from common everyday realities.

About the Young Estonians' Understanding of Estonianness

The first and only specific example of "theoretical Europeanness"[5] in Tuglas's essay "Literary Style" is the decadent essay-novella *Ruth*, attributed to J. Randvere (alias Johannes Aavik) and published in 1909, in the third album of Young Estonia. Probably not by accident. It is quite likely that the birth of the term "theoretical European" was driven by reactions to *Ruth*, which scandalized culturally alert but conservatively minded Estonian intellectuals.[6] Indeed, several critics (in particular national conservatives) found *Ruth* artificial and theoretical, not least because of its ostensible French influences,[7] drawing on imaginings of an old over-refined culture and the metropolitan decadent artist as its representative.

To justify the above, a few words about *Ruth*. The short essay-novella consists mostly of imaginings, descriptions and evaluations of the perfect

young woman Ruth; her appearance and clothing; her place of residence and environment; her tastes, as well as descriptions of her anatomy and physiology; her psychological and intellectual characteristics; and her sexual preferences. Indeed, there are many lists in this text, which create the impression of the narrator as a typical male decadent collector (Potolsky 2013, 71–75). Of course, he is also narcissistic and self-encapsulated while his metropolitan-style psyche and the object of his projection, the ideal woman, Ruth manifest in this text through numerous direct and indirect quotations from (or references to) thinkers such as Gautier, Baudelaire, Bourget and Nietzsche. Ruth's psychology is masculinized while her body remains feminized. This is also why *Ruth*'s narrator considers it necessary to explain how such a view of a woman's body fits together with decadent understandings of culture as old, highly developed and thus falling apart:

> It seems to me that a woman has the potential to actualize a greater work of art in herself. In her appearance she seems more and more to represent an evolved culture, the product of a more aged and refined humanity.
>
> (Randvere 1980, 10)[8]

Hence, paradoxically the idealized young Ruth comes to symbolize old French culture which has reached the most advanced stage of its development, and hence is refined and feminized (see also Hinrikus 2015).

Right after *Ruth*'s publication, Finnish-Estonian writer and literary critic Aino Kallas, also the only active female member of Young Estonia, recognizes allusions to the French context through the figure of the metropolitan decadent artist. According to her, *Ruth* is the first instance in Estonian literature of "a totally contemporary spirit: the modern human being" (Kallas 1909, 6). In the same breath, Kallas articulates a critical remark: "What is peculiar is this attempt to graft the refined shoot of high culture onto the root of Estonia's fully peasant culture" (Ibid.).

Despite the fact that, almost from the beginning, *Ruth* was discussed as the distillation of Young Estonians' ambitions and ideological aspirations (see Hinrikus 2015), it became a target for the critiques of both conservatives and liberals. Kallas's critical remark calls into question the possibility of combining highly developed European culture with the underdeveloped, predominantly peasant culture of Estonia. Though it may seem at first glance that there is no specific relationship between Tuglas's argument of "theoretical Europeanness" and Kallas's critical observations, closer inquiry shows that both rely on similar assumptions. Tuglas acknowledges that shortcomings in modernizing Estonian literature are contingent upon Estonian intellectuals' (Young Estonians') peasant roots.

However, it would be premature to assume that Young Estonians' understanding of Estonianness was essentialist. Compared to conservative nationalists, who defined Estonianness as something unchangeable and ready-made, by setting Estonianness in opposition to Europeanness and thus regarding *Ruth* as dangerously "other," Young Estonians expected contemporary literature to take into account the changing content of Estonian national identity.[9] Like their Finnish colleagues, they talked a great deal about the decline of the old peasant type and the rise of the new or modern urban type (Molarius 2003, 136–137). Thus, Young Estonians' ideology rested on the opposition old versus new or young. By the negative adjective "old" Young Estonians meant the still-prevalent national-romantic ideology in early twentieth-century Estonian literature and visual art. Young Estonians fought for the breakthrough of the "new," calling for the articulation of what was "modern" and "alive."[10] By the "new," they meant the representations of the impact of urban modernity both in terms of metropolitan experience and the overly rapid transition from agrarian to urban social environments. In Tuglas's words from "Literary style," Young Estonians primarily called for self-expression via "the city, a new rhythm of life and a new psychology" (Tuglas 1912, 99), as *Ruth* undoubtedly had done.[11]

Young Estonians' understanding of Estonian national identity relied on discourses that were circulating in Europe by the end of the nineteenth century. Clearly, their critique draws on *fin de siècle* discussions of nationalism (including Herderian ideas) and social Darwinism as well as various discourses of decay and racism, including theories of degeneration and heredity (cf. Molarius 2003). Above all, it seems that Young Estonians were inspired by Hippolyte Taine, who theorized that works of art are the outcomes of three determinants: milieu, moment and race.[12]

Race is mentioned by Tuglas in the first section of "Literary Style" (1912), where he argues that in a powerful literary form or style[13] one can recognize "the spirit of race and/or nation."[14] In several articles, he then articulates the determinants of this form or style more specifically: first, the environment (Taine's *le milieu*), mediated through such factors as climatic, geographical and/or historical and social conditions (including revolutions, famines, the modernization process); second, atmosphere (Taine's *le moment*), associated with the mentality of a specific period. That environment and atmosphere affect and reshape the spirit or psyche of a race (*la race*) or nation is also a Taineian idea. Similarly to Taine, Tuglas is particularly interested in the historical transformations of race or national identity. On the aesthetic level in Tuglas's terms, this means the decline of old art techniques and the emergence of new ones (Tuglas 1912, 55).

In keeping with Taine and widespread organicist definitions of culture, Tuglas differentiates between specific cultural periods, the development of which is associated with birth, blooming and aging. The "positive"

style is full of "life energy"[15] and refers to the maturity phase of the cultural period which gives rise to the spirit of race or nation. However, stylistic features such as incoherence and artificiality indicate either the end or beginning of a period. In such a situation, the characteristics of race or nation do not reveal themselves too clearly. Such conditions are clearly transitional in nature. In his study, "La Philosophie de l'art" (Lectures on Art, 1865–1869), Taine talks about such intermediate periods during which changes are activated in the "primitive granite," by which he means race, and a metaphor for those instincts and intuitions that create the foundation of nationality. Such conditions are caused either by interracial mixtures or changes in physical milieu (Taine 1875, 216). According to Taine, in this intermediate period, which signifies both over-maturity and immaturity, "the types of the preceding and following period are intermingled" (Taine 1875, 284). Namely, besides the so-called era-type and the universal type, Taine talks about a period type,[16] who belongs to a new race, and is

> the child of the lower classes, equipped with abundant natural talent and ambition, who finds himself at the top of society for the first time, and who thus expresses the restlessness of his soul and heart in an outburst. His sentiments and ideals are those of an entire generation; therefore a whole generation needs to pass before representatives of this type disappear.
>
> (Taine 1875, 213)

Returning to Tuglas's concept of "theoretical Europeanness," one could argue that on the one hand, and in Taine's terms, this concept becomes coded negatively, to the point of articulating an accusation. Tuglas thinks that the style of his contemporaries' works of art is immature due to insufficient reliance on local milieu and atmosphere. Dependence on representations of metropolitan modernity makes style (or the lack of it) too abstract, artificial and theoretical. Hence, Tuglas does not find enough the spirit of his race and/or nation embodied in the literary works of his own generation. However, the argument of "theoretical Europeanness" is not just an expostulation, but rather a recognition of an inevitable situation. On the other hand, Tuglas acknowledges that the path chosen by Young Estonians (i.e., their desire to become European or civilized) is "unavoidable and therefore the right path. Yet understanding this truth does not diminish its tragic nature" (Tuglas 1912, 97).

What does Tuglas mean by "tragic" nature? Tragedy lies in the coexistence of two mutually contradictory attitudes. Tuglas's generation shows its readiness for accelerated development in order to catch up with Europe. As Tuglas argues on their behalf, "Heretofore we have not been able to participate actively in the creation of European cultural values" (see opening citation above). Obviously, this claim harbors

a feeling of "backwardness" so typical of Nordic countries (Gemzøe 2010, 852), with an admixture of feelings of inferiority. The inevitable consequence of over-eagerness to civilize is what Kallas terms in the introduction from her influential article collection, "Young Estonia. Portraits and Trajectories" (1918) the "scars of an extraordinary cultural acceleration" (Kallas 1921a, 42).[17] As Tuglas explains in 1921, "recently we have been living too fast; we have had to skip over a number of stages of development; we have only had some years and decades at our disposal, while naturally-developing nations have had centuries" (Tuglas 2009, 383).

Both Kallas and Tuglas rely on the notion of culture as a biological organism the development of which has to accord with natural laws. In line with biological and social-Darwinist ideas, they both believe that overly quick social advancement inevitably leads to symptoms of decline and/or decadence: passivity, pessimism, skepticism, cultural fatigue, self-analysis, egoism, infertility, enormous spiritual hunger, feelings of inauthenticity and inferiority. One might think that these are typical features of the figure of the metropolitan decadent. However, here these symptoms refer to the so-called upstart (parvenu) as a representative of upstart culture. Namely, there was much talk about this figure upstart (which more or less relates to Taine's terms period type or transitional type) in Estonian and Finnish cultures at the beginning of the twentieth century (Kunnas 1980; Molarius 1998, 2003; Rojola 2009; Hinrikus 2011a). The term signifies the first generation of urban intellectuals and/or university students. The upstart (usually masculinized, though there were also female exemplars)[18] has no predecessors; he is the first to adopt an urban lifestyle, its rhythm, psyche and behavioral patterns. In consequence, he is somehow ungrounded and disoriented, unable to fully sever his peasant mentality and roots[19] and thus as the type he or she is immature and without a clear form. He does not properly belong anywhere except to a transitional generation. As emerges from Taine's citation above, it was believed that at least one generation would be required for the emergence and solidification of typological characteristics (Molarius 1998, 102).

Unlike the upstart, the peasant in Tuglas's critical works does represent a type with definite characteristics. As he argues,

> [d]espite his one-sidedness and underdeveloped intellectual life, there are reflected in our villager phenomena that have been pushed to the limit and crystallized into a type. His language—the tool of his intellectual life and the expression of his thoughts has been shaped into a general framework, congruent with the external circumstances of his life, his dwelling, clothing, way of life and manners.
>
> (Tuglas 1935a, 135)

Thus in contrast to the peasant, the upstart remains formless, without tradition and style, unable to create anything new and original, but merely copies as in Kallas's description of the Estonian upstart culture:

> All of the obstacles and the privations which usually accompany too rapid a rise in cultural status can be felt in Estonia. This kind of first-generation society is free of all direct ties to tradition, both the good and the bad kind; nothing holds it down. As it grows, it cannot revert to a pre-existing cultural crystallization of long duration; it completely lacks the support which would be provided by an enduring cultural substrate.
>
> (Kallas 1921a, 16)

Thus, like Tuglas, Kallas also perceives abrupt social advancement as latent regress, that is, as decadence (see Hinrikus 2011a).

Given this background, Tuglas understandably agrees with Young Estonian artist and writer Alexander Tassa's observation: if culture is to develop, it is impossible to avoid representations of metropolitan modernity. As Tassa argues, "The artist represents the cultural type of the metropolis" because "only urban crowds and the labyrinth of streets will aid in the development of a 'flexible brain'" (Tassa 1912, 236). Similarly, Tuglas asserts that though the new, more conscious energy of life demands new forms of literature, there is not yet enough material to permit the expression of refined feelings and thoughts about Estonian urban life (Tuglas 1912, 97). What Tuglas and his colleagues assume is that the first generation of Estonian intellectuals still have too much "peasant blood" in their veins (Tuglas 1935b, 155). This view suggests the influence of *fin de siècle* racist discussions[20] according to which peasants were considered to be a separate, inferior type or race (Molarius 1998, 2003).

Tuglas elaborates on the unavoidable predicament of "theoretical Europeanness" based on the need to reform his native language:

> In order to achieve typicality and acquire style, language as a psychological phenomenon requires that the nation who speaks it begin by formulating that unified type. But we, together with our own dialects, provincial tendencies, even our anthropological differentiation are people still lacking in common cultural traditions.
>
> (Tuglas 1912, 99)

In Tuglas's view, *Ruth* (as well as many other examples of Estonian literature) does not express this formless and styleless cultural situation clearly enough. If the heart of the literary text is the metropolitan experience of modernity, the problems of the first generation of Estonian

city-dwellers or upstarts remain sidelined. However, there is at least one of Tuglas's own works, which seems to fulfill his Taineian demands—a novel with a core decadent protagonist in the Estonian countryside *Felix Ormusson* (1915), which constitutes a kind of synthesis[21] in which the local and metropolitan experiences of modernity are interwoven.

Metropolitan and Upstart Dimensions in *Felix Ormusson*

Tuglas's novel *Felix Ormusson* signifies both a rhetorical response to *Ruth* and an elaboration thereof.[22] Similarly to *Ruth*, the first-person narrator in Tuglas's text is a male decadent artist and/or aesthete named Felix Ormusson, whose nervous fever is explicitly related to his former metropolitan Parisian life and café culture. Further, since male narrators of both *Ruth* and *Felix Ormusson* live in their self-centered imaginary worlds with the desire to subjugate the outside world to their own interests and fantasies, both texts relate to the myths of Narcissus and Pygmalion ubiquitous in contexts of European modernity. Moreover, both texts rely on the generic conventions of the diary, and their form is highly fragmented.

However, unlike *Ruth*, Tuglas's novel is much more closely anchored to the contemporary Estonian socio-cultural context. With nods toward several other works by contemporary Estonian intellectuals, Tuglas illustrates, comments and develops ideas highlighted in his critique (Kallas 1921b, 167; Liiv 1988, 326). Besides, *Felix Ormusson* is in many respects a highly autobiographical novel (Kallas 1921b, 167–168). The process of its completion took place during Tuglas's exile consequent to his participation in the 1905 Russian Revolution. Henceforth, he could only visit his homeland under the false names. Tuglas lived as a refugee in several parts of Europe, spending many winters in Paris, summer and autumn months often in the Helsinki area and the Åland Islands,[23] places which almost became his second home.

Tuglas's novel is framed by a prologue—a three-page "Letter to Felix Ormusson in Paris" initialed F.T.; the rest of the text consists of the twenty-five-year-old[24] Ormusson's diary, composed of 88 fragments of various lengths. The prologue's complexity is primarily due to its narrative strategies, and its abundance of intertexts. The initials F.T. may allude to the author of *Felix Ormusson*, Friedebert Tuglas. However, the novel's frame and the entirety of the diary continually undermine such direct connections between the author, the reader and the text. Namely, both the figures of the author in the prologue and the narrator Ormusson are unreliable: as is typical of literary modernism, the novel plays with the reader, destabilizing the comfortable positions of the author-narrator and the character-narrator as controllers of the text.

In his diary, Ormusson enacts the conflicts and antinomies of a confrontation with modernity, mostly using a conspicuous language and style that alludes to decadence but also to impressionism (he describes landscapes and his perceptions as if describing paintings). As the diary indicates, he has recently returned from Paris to spend the summer holidays at his friend (the pediatrician and prototypical bourgeois) Johannes's farm in rural South Estonia. In this rustic resort, Ormusson mainly interacts (often via fantasies, eroticized desires and dreams) with members of Johannes's family: his wife Helene, their son Juhan and Helene's sister Marion. In addition, Ormusson's diary briefly mentions local farm folk—Old Aadam, a landless peasant farmhand working in return for lodging in the sauna, his wife Eeva, their daughter Miili, the servant Konrad and the widowed housekeeper, Mai.

As already mentioned concerning the prologue, the reader's attention is drawn not to events, but to Ormusson's perceptions and imaginings. Not much happens in this text. Ormusson first falls in love with Helene, then with Marion, but the two sisters are attracted to Ormusson in reverse order. When Marion becomes Ormusson's muse, Helene begins to hate him, and Marion's hostility also gradually increases. To get out of this situation, Ormusson lies to the sisters that he has just received a letter from a certain mysterious "lady from Paris" and makes a hasty escape. In the ironic ending, Ormusson, still in his dreamworld, is riding on a wooden horse (an allusion to Don Quixote), clearly showing that, despite his efforts to present himself as a decadent artist, others have seen right through him and he falls into disgrace. As Laitinen claims, Tuglas's contemporary Kafka could have ended his works with a similar humiliatingly comic scene (Laitinen 1988, 191). Indeed, irony is visible at every level of the novel. Unlike some examples of core decadence such as Huysmans's *À Rebours* that approach naturalism,[25] *Felix Ormusson* seems to approach literary modernism.

According to Ormusson, the main reason for his stay at his friend's country house is to reflect on impressions and sentiments that have arisen as a result of his sojourn in Paris. He confesses the need to rid himself of different decadent symptoms, which seem to coincide with the states and symptoms described by Paul Bourget in his influential "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine." Surely, considering his background, Ormusson's neurosis can be regarded as that of a modern (e.g., Baudelairean-Bourgetian) city-dweller. Due to this accumulation of metropolitan experiences, Ormusson's head (like Ruth's) is stuffed with miscellaneous facts, literary examples and images from well-known naturalists, decadents and symbolists. Because he perceives things and persons around him through various intertextual filters, he is not able to make direct contact with the real world. He walks around in his friend's country house like a *flâneur* in "the forest of symbols." He associates himself, Johannes, Helene and Marion with different

mythological and symbolic figures (such as the beautiful Helena, John the Baptist, Salome, Don Juan, Don Quixote, Medusa, Pygmalion, Galatea, Hermaphroditus) or with types of women from the paintings of famous artists (L. Cranach, Botticelli, etc.). He also perceives natural landscapes through famous impressionist and symbolist paintings. In sum, Ormusson's symptoms of metropolitan decadence, signs of the refinement and over-ripeness of European culture, make him incapable of holistic, coherent perceptions of himself and the life that surrounds him. In this novel, decadence manifests itself as the fragmentation or disintegration of (life's) wholeness.[26]

However, not all aspects of fragmentation and disintegration relate to Ormusson's recent sojourn in Paris. As Ormusson is an unreliable narrator, he is also insufficiently aware of his constructions of himself (Laitinen 1988, 191). The reader can see that his controversial comments in the diary often display his illusions about himself as well as others: the reactions to his behavior by minor characters and by F.T. in the prologue show this. The text also indicates that Ormusson is dependent, both psychologically and behaviorally, on his peasant roots. Indeed, Ormusson is only too familiar with the activities, tools and tasks connected with rural life. He recognizes the practices of chopping firewood with an axe and beating laundry at the lakeshore with a wooden club; he knows exactly what conditions of growth are necessary for different kinds of grain in different types of soil. He is familiar with the signs of nature, and he recognizes various kinds of animals, birds, insects and plants. His diary depicts smells (such as the distinctive smell of drying hay or a carpet smelling of horse's sweat), colors and textures typical of the rural landscape. This places him in an in-between state with respect to urbanization. His abrupt dislocation from an agrarian village society to the city in order to become "civilized" in Paris has only reached a halfway point.

This "going halfway" is also evidenced by Ormusson's ambivalent feelings—a mixture of shame, contempt, disgust and admiration—all concerning the people with whom he interacts, country life in general and the type of the "country bumpkin" (*maamats*). Ormusson's hostile emotions are especially strong at the beginning of his stay at his friend's country house. Scornfully describing the "little world" of rural folk in which everything repeats itself and where fantasy life is non-existent, Ormusson admonishes himself to keep his distance from "the country bumpkin and his God" (Tuglas 1988, 14).[27] However, the longer he spends time with them, the more he begins to feel that these local people are the most authentic and alive—the farmhand Aadam who lives in a sauna and tills a small garden plot in return for his work, and Aadam's wife and daughter, all remind Ormusson of good, patriarchal (i.e., agrarian) times (Tuglas 1988, 42). For Ormusson, Aadam is "in a sense, a kind of ideal: extremely silly and extremely viable" (62)[28] and Aadam's

daughter Miili seems "so perfect and stylish" (38).[29] Of course, both of these judgments contain a measure of irony, but they also allude to Ormusson's own vague and immature psyche. The reader is again reminded of the opposition in Tuglas's criticism between the typical peasant and the formless upstart.

Similar ambivalent and ironic feelings apply to Ormusson's relationship with Johannes, a successful upstart and/or bourgeois. The longer Ormusson lives in his friend's summer house, the more he seems to accept him, finding that Johannes "is first of all something real, truly existing, for whom the visible world in its turn really exists" (108).[30] Yet in his diary entries which underscore Johannes's ordinary and mediocre qualities, Ormusson undercuts this positive statement, rephrasing it in terms of irony, disdain and caricatures. With the scornful comment that Johannes is "a man who knows what he wants, and wants what he knows, although he does not know or want too much" (108),[31] Ormusson contradicts his previous admiration. In sum, however, Johannes is described as an unstylish, formless, transitional figure:

> Everything is average, lacking in tradition, nicely rounded—man, his love and socialism! How little that is characteristic and typical! The face has no point whatsoever, although it might have been refined and thoughtful. A mixture of all styles, as in his closing statement and his worldview.
>
> (56)[32]

These examples can be placed in the context of Tuglas's upstart arguments in his literary-critical articles, but we should not forget that Ormusson is an unreliable narrator. Ormusson's conflicting emotions allude to his reluctance to acknowledge his local, utterly provincial origins, though he wants to represent himself as a metropolitan *flâneur* and artist in opposition to his upstart friend Johannes. Needless to say, the oppositions Ormusson sets up demonstrate how strongly dependent he is on the extremes they designate, onto which he projects both his own transitional, inauthentic characteristics[33] and his contradictory desires for wholeness, typicality and style. Indeed, Ormusson himself is an incomplete, formless and transitional figure, "a mixture of all styles," congruent with the figure of the author of the prologue, F.T, who addresses his protagonist as follows:

> Allow yourself to say: the virtues of your type are not clear enough. Despite all your efforts, the ridiculousness that I have regarded as your most heartfelt attribute is as yet insufficiently self-conscious. Your philosophy of life has not yet been crystallized, and it has not given your life the style and rhythm that you need.
>
> (Tuglas 1988, 10)[34]

This viewpoint coincides with Ormusson's self-description, namely that he is nothing but "chaos, thirsty for style" (96).[35] Once again, we can see parallels with passages (or quotations without quotation marks) from Tuglas's articles, where he interprets an immature and therefore transitional period of Estonian culture, its artifacts and inhabitants. As a representative both of the decadent and the upstart, Ormusson is—in opposition to the representations of premodern agrarian life—inauthentic and fragmentary.

Hence, in addition to the large number of intertextual references, *Felix Ormusson* is closely intertwined with discussions of the upstart in Estonia and Finland,[36] undergirded by the opposition of premodern agrarian society versus modern urban environment. We should also note that in Tuglas's works, "urban surroundings" refer either to the immature, half-urbanized Estonian culture and society or to highly mature European metropolitan conditions. Though both of these settings were perceived by their contemporaries as transitional and prone to decadence, they were met by various responses. If representations of metropolitan decadence symbolize highly refined style and, ultimately, maturity (the utmost limit of development, from where there is nowhere to go, and from where one can only decline), first-generation urban upstart culture at the beginning of the process of nation-state building, exhibits signs of prematurity and lack of coherence.

Synthesis of the Metropolitan and Upstart Experiences of Modernity in Nordic Decadence

In sum, one can argue that the figures of the (European) decadent-dilettante and the (Estonian-Finnish) upstart somewhat overlap, encompassing various trajectories of rise and fall, thereby ambivalently articulating the consequences of urbanization. Because both of these figures signify transitional states, with the decadent aligned with over-ripeness and the upstart with immaturity—on a meta-level they begin to function synergistically as signifiers of decadence (the field of meaning of which includes notions such as non-coherence, decomposition, fragmentation, cf. Gagnier 2010). The metropolitan artist Ormusson longs for whole, authentic, real life; his upstart nature searches for style and form as something coherent and unifying. As a result, he perceives himself as inauthentic, formless, uncreative and chaotic in both of his roles. By comparison, Ormusson's friend Johannes remains merely an upstart—a representative of the abrupt urbanization in Estonian society. Meanwhile, Ormusson functions as an in-between figure and a symbol of two partially overlapping contexts: modernizing, metropolitan *fin de siècle* Europe and rapidly (still modestly and belatedly) urbanizing Nordic countries such as Estonia.

We have seen that ways of perceiving and talking about decadence were activated in Nordic countries such as Estonia and Finland by

similar encounters with the paradigmatic intertexts of decadence. Yet, this discourse eventually became mixed with many other streams of ideas: racism, nationalism, theories of degeneration and heredity, Taineian ideas and social Darwinism. Nordic modernists wrote their ambivalent adaptations of Western- and Central European practices of decadence, which were charged with metropolitan experiences of modernity. As I have pointed out, Tuglas criticized the emerging modern, Young Estonian literature and culture via two partially overlapping concepts—"theoretical Europeanness" and "upstart culture," most of all echoing Taine's theory of the triple influences (milieu, moment and race/nation) and his understanding of the notion of type. If "theoretical Europeanness" refers to Estonian cultural media's dependence on representations of metropolitan modernity as overripe (as was the case with *Ruth*), "upstart culture" is primarily associated with the understanding of early twentieth century Estonian literature as something immature and as yet formless.

Meanwhile, Tuglas does not use these concepts only in a negative sense. From his perspective, the symptoms of "theoretical Europeanness" and/or upstart culture are inevitable given modernizing Estonian society. Just as *fin de siècle* Western Europe was perceived as transitional, early twentieth-century Nordic culture was also perceived as transitional, and by consequence too theoretical, artificial and immature. Nordic intellectuals also perceived themselves as belonging to the transitional generation of upstarts. Under the influence of racial and biologically determinist ideas, they believed that their blood still contained features of the less developed and more robust peasant race. Thus, borrowing a refined, metropolitan artist type seemed to be inevitable.

Two latent understandings of culture subtend examples of Estonian and Finnish decadence with its different combinations of rise and fall, upstart and decay. Oppositions such as young and old, immature and over-mature, underdeveloped and overdeveloped, unstylish and highly stylish, all collapse into the experience of non-coherence. As a result, decadence can signify either fragmentation or decomposition, or both. As I have shown, these combinations are vividly highlighted in Tuglas's novel *Felix Ormusson*, which in accordance with the ideology of Young Estonia, represents the paradoxical ideal of becoming European while remaining Estonian, offering a kind of synthesis of the experiences of modernity in Estonia and Europe.

Notes

1 Young Estonia was the most important social-cultural movement in early twentieth-century Estonia, the first to apply modern aesthetics in literature, art and music. The core group of the Young Estonians (born in the 1880s) worked and communicated mainly on the Tartu-Helsinki axis (G. Suits, J. Aavik and V. Grünthal studied in Finland; F. Tuglas and G. Suits lived

there for many years. Aino Kallas was born and grew up in Finland) and were most active during the years 1905–1915 publishing different types of texts.

2 Tammsaare is one of the most canonical of Estonian writers who was not a member of Young Estonia, but shared their aesthetic views. Metsanurk was Tammsaare's contemporary Estonian writer.

3 For Estonians, the closest "big cities" were Riga and Helsinki.

4 Gustav Suits became Professor of Estonian Literature at Tartu University in 1921.

5 Otherwise, and in relation to theoretical Europeanness, Tuglas refers to Estonian writers by name.

6 I am referring to the older generation of literary critics, whose Christian morality was tightly interwoven with national-romantic aesthetics.

7 Aavik was a Francophile, the first to introduce Baudelaire as well as the term decadence to Estonia in 1905.

8 "Naisterahvas näib mulle suuremat kunstitööd eneses realiseerida võivat. Välimuse poolest on ta ühe enam edenenud kulturi, ühe enam vananenud ja rafineeritud inimesesoo produkt."

9 At this time, the beginning of the twentieth century, there was yet no nation-state in Estonia. Therefore, nation was understandable above all in terms of culture (cf. Herder's idea of the *Kulturnation*).

10 The term "alive" associates with the so-called life philosophers (Bergson, Simmel and Nietzsche). It also connects with W. Ostwald's theory of energetics, which was common in Estonia (see Undusk 2009, 556–558) and Finland (see Molarius 2003).

11 About Young Estonia, their nationalism and its reception (including essentialist viewpoints) at the beginning of the twenty-first century (see Peiker 2017, 249–270).

12 Taine presents this "theory of the three influences" in its first and most concentrated form in the book *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 1863. Taine's ideas found their way to Estonia and Finland mainly through Georg Brandes. (Andresen 1983; Molarius 1998, 100.)

13 Style is one of Tuglas's most important terms and associates with Oscar Wilde. In "Literary style" Tuglas explicitly cites Wilde's famous saying "truth is a matter of style" (see Undusk 2009, 602–605).

14 In the first publication of this article, Tuglas uses the term race, but in later versions, nation. The word race (in Estonian *rass*) functioned at the beginning of the twentieth century in a similar way to the Finnish word race (*rotu*) that is, in a broad semantic field. The Estonian word nation (*rahvus*), like the Finnish one (*kansakunta*), refers to the peasantry or villager.

15 About the terms "life" and "energy," see note 10.

16 About these terms (see Kunnas 1980, 88–95; cf. Hinrikus 2011a, 83–86).

17 About this collection (see Hinrikus 2011a).

18 Especially Finnish literary scholars have written on female upstarts. Grönstrand et al. (2009; Parente-Čapkova 2014, 33–34, 56–57).

19 Similarly, the etymology of the term "upstart" (both in Estonian, *tõusik*, and Finnish, *nousukas*, rise or start up) carries the meaning of potentially abrupt or jarring transition from an agrarian to a modern urban society.

20 By racism, I am not referring to Taineian understanding of race as a kind of core for nationality, which changed quite slowly. Here, I mean the (later) modernist tendency to differentiate races and/or nationalities according to hierarchy.

21 Besides the concept of style, one of Tuglas's key concepts is synthesis. Tuglas's ideal was spiritual naturalism (see Undusk 2009, 656–661). About spiritual naturalism in Finnish literature, see R. Rossi's article in this volume.
22 Soon after its publication, many critics started to see substantive connections between *Felix Ormusson* and *Ruth*. For example, Luiga ([1917] 2017, 301) called this novel *Ruths*' "brother."
23 See Undusk (2006).
24 Tuglas is twenty-nine-year old when this novel comes out. "Felix" was one of his main pseudonyms for a long time.
25 It is narrated from an outside perspective.
26 This term "life" associates most of all with Nietzschean understandings of it (see Hinrikus 2011b).
27 "Kuid eemale matsist ning tema jumalast!"
28 "on omast kohast mingi tüübi ideaal: äärmiselt rumal ja äärmiselt elurikas."
29 "on nii täiuslik ja stiilne."
30 "ta on kõigepealt midagi reaalset, tõeliselt olemasolevat, kellele nähtav maailm omakorda on tõesti olemas."
31 "see on igatahes mees, kes teab, mida tahab, ja tahab, mida teab, kuigi ta palju ei tea ega taha."
32 Kõik keskmine, kõik traditsioonikehv, kõik parasjagu ümmargune: inimene, ta armastus ning sotsialism! Kui vähe iseloomulikku ja tüüpilist! Ei ühtki punkti näos, mis oleks peen ja läbimõeldud. Segamini kõik stiilid, nagu riietuses ning maailmavaateski."
33 According to Rojola, the feeling of inauthenticity is the most characteristic feature of the upstart (Cf. Rojola 2009).
34 "Luba enesele öelda: Su tüübivoorused pole küllalt selged. Su naeruväärsus, mida olen Su kõige südamlikumaks omaduseks pidanud, pole kõigest pingutusest hoolimata teadlikuks saanud, enesest. Su elufilosoofiat kristalüseerinud ja Su elule tarvilikku stiili ning rütmi andnud."
35 "tiili janunev kaos."
36 Finnish-Estonian Aino Kallas also associates Felix Ormusson, in Taineian terms, with the figure of upstart; Kallas 1921b, 170–174 (see Hinrikus 2011a).

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