

*Mediated World and Attention Crisis:
Unhappy Consciousness a Hundred Years Ago*¹

TANEL LEPSOO

Abstract. The atmosphere of the 1920s in many ways resembles that of today. The accelerated technological development and the loss of previously stable points of reference led to the emergence of literary characters who were suffering from an identity crisis and delved into themselves, characters who could not adjust to a dominant value system that fell short of their standards but whose intellectual acumen did not allow them to resort to mere nostalgia for the past. Philippe Chardin, inspired by Hegel, has named them characters with an “unhappy consciousness”. This article focuses on the work of Estonian writer Reed Morn, specifically one of her novellas. It argues that aesthetic experience and spatial distance from the homeland may allow a character with an unhappy consciousness to find a positive solution that could be described as an ecology of attention. Such an approach can also be productive in today’s hypermedia age.

Keywords: representation; mediation; crisis; unhappy consciousness; ecology of attention; Paris

Introduction

It is widely believed that the technological changes of the past few decades have altered our society significantly. Some believe, for the worse. Smartphones, which contain all modern means of alienation, have become the emblem of this change. Indeed, they give the representatives of both the younger and older generations access to Google (with Gmail and Google Maps), TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Netflix, Delfi, Estonian National Broadcasting, Wikipedia, Kindle, camera, calculator, clock and even a calendar. These are not the inventions of this century, but they, too, help to distance people from the immediate and tangible reality and invite them to construct and interpret the world through artificial means.

¹ This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant PRG934 “Imagining Crisis: Discourse, Literature and Image”.

As noted by Bergson, our senses are already deceptive: any clear representation of the matter is artificial. Our hearing has “intervals of silence” (*des intervalles de silence*) as we cannot listen to everything; our tastes of smell and taste have gaps (*vides*) and when we open our eyes we divide the world around us into discrete objects. For Bergson, this results from the understandable human desire to survive in the world, to defend oneself and to find food. Our senses are already directed to distinguishing between the edible and the dangerous, the important and unimportant (Bergson 1965: 135–136). Thus, in one way or another, we relate to the world with the help of different mediating devices, be they our eyes or cameras. The only difference is in the level of artificiality, although here, too, it is debatable whether a photo provides us with an intrinsically less adequate picture of the surrounding reality than a hungry or lascivious gaze.

It is undebatable that we now have significantly more media formats for interpreting the world than the map and the calendar. As development has been fast and accompanied by notable noise, it is understandable that it is associated with danger, especially for the more vulnerable members of society, like children. Some, in contrast, over-estimate the change, seeing in technology revolutionary opportunities for reducing social isolation (through better access to education or services) or for creating an imaginary cosmopolitanism.

Miyase Christensen has criticised the eager proponents of both views for their lack of originality and for making sweeping generalisations without any empirical research. On the basis of Bourdieu’s field theory and surveys, primarily among Stockholm immigrants, she argues that “while the intense mediatisation of our worlds brings with it a de facto openness to and the possibility of connectivity with the other (cosmopolitanism), it also makes it possible to create mediated bubbles of closure, clash, monitoring and exclusivism as extensions of offline reality.” (Christensen 2014: 160) Cultural and social capital and *habitus* will continue to have their influence on different fields even in the hypermedia age. Christensen’s example is a young Turkish man who has created different Facebook profiles to interact in different and mutually incompatible social circles, or a young Turkish woman who uses the Internet to glance at the most recent news and soap operas, which she usually does not care about, before returning to Turkey “to have something to talk about” (Christensen 2014: 165–166). Both examples demonstrate the influence of different social fields on individuals who prefer one cultural community but do not want to sever their ties to another.

Much has been written about the problems of adapting to today’s hypermedia world and the possible solutions. However, the mediated perception

of the world and the attendant crisis in human consciousness did not appear yesterday, but can be seen already at the beginning of modernism in the late 19th century. In the following, this article will focus on a phenomenon that peaked in the early 20th century that has been called *unhappy consciousness* and view it in a space other than its culture of origin.

1. Character with an Unhappy Consciousness

A good example can be found in the work of Estonian writer Reed Morn² (pen-name of Frieda Drewerk, 1898–1978), specifically her 1936 novella “Kauguse vang” (‘The Prisoner of Distance’). Despite the temporal distance (or perhaps because of it) the text makes it possible to analyse the clash of cultures in the imagination of the characters in the context of intense mental exhaustion. The protagonist of the novella lives in Paris, away from his homeland to which he cannot return, and is destined to be in the force field of his own and alien culture. Characterised by the overall pessimism and sense of abandonment that is present in today’s atmosphere as well, the character, who resembles the author in his mind-set, finds a solution that the author, who found it difficult to adjust to life in her home country, was probably seeking herself. Despite the pessimistic title, the novella is optimistic and the solution could also work in today’s world, where different identities, media spaces, and cultural contexts are even more fused than at the beginning of the previous century.

In his opinions and attitudes, the protagonist of the novella resembles the characters of Morn’s other texts that also have autobiographical traces. The present article will therefore analyse her most famous novel, her debut *Andekas parasiit* (‘The Talented Parasite’) that won the second prize in the novel competition of the *Loodus* publishing house in 1927.³ The novel is the story of the education and development of an independent girl named Ellu. After her childhood and school years in Tallinn, being interested in philosophy and theology, she starts her studies at the University of Tartu. However, her early incompatibility with her companions and with the educational system leads to her sexual and intellectual incompatibility with young men who seemed to

² The work of Drewerk is not widely known, but has been studied by Estonian literary scholars like Endel Nirk (1979) and above all Rutt Hinrikus, who has published a thorough analysis of Morn in the literary journal *Keel ja Kirjandus* in 1998, republished in her collection *Kahe vahel* (2016: 55–93). For clarity purposes, the name Reed Morn is constantly used, even when referred to the flesh-and-blood person.

³ The novel has been reprinted in 2008 in Tallinn by Eesti Raamat publishing house.

her “too confident in their gender privileges” (TP: 154)⁴, as well as with the world that had been designed by and for men and the value judgements of the time. We are dealing with an explicitly feminist novel, as was recognised by the reviewer in the *Üliõpilasleht* in the year of publication: “The novel shows the tragedy of the woman of our time who does not flirt, use makeup and date, who lives more for her brains and less for her dancing feet.” (Ehrmann 1927: 192–193) However, the protagonist’s intellectual disappointment cannot fully be explained from the gender perspective. Perhaps because he focused solely on the representation of the female character, the reviewer from *Üliõpilasleht* refers to the lack of credibility, saying that the character’s lack of willpower and impracticality remain incomprehensible for the reader. Yet there is nothing incomprehensible about Ellu’s thoughts or behaviour. Morn’s character can be recognised as one of the most typical protagonists of the European novel of the early 20th century, whom Philippe Chardin, proceeding from Hegel, has described as the character with an “unhappy consciousness” (*conscience malheureuse*).

The French title of Chardin’s monograph, *Le roman de la conscience malheureuse* (first published in 1982, revised edition in 1998), refers to both a novel about an unhappy consciousness (i.e. a character with an unhappy consciousness) and a novel created by an unhappy consciousness (i.e. an author with an unhappy consciousness). The most important element of such novels, as suggested by the notion of consciousness, is that the author and the protagonist are reflexive and self-aware. This is why Chardin has set temporal limits to his corpus,⁵ excluding the earlier naturalist novel with its more limited analyses of consciousness as well as the later existentialist and absurdist novels with their more extreme alienation.

In most of the novels that illustrate this concept we can see a strong link between the author’s personal life and what is being represented. In most cases the author is sympathetic to the protagonist, with the exception of Louis Aragon, who is sharply critical of his unhappy characters. Intellectual activity is the dominant feature of the novels and the characters. It is this intense intellectual activity that leads to the internal split of the subject, the observation of oneself and the surrounding world and disappointment in the surroundings

⁴ From here on abbreviated as TP (= Morn 1927) for *Andekas parasiit* (‘The Talented Parasite’) and PD (= Morn 1936) for “Kauguse vang” (‘The Prisoner of Distance’). Neither of the texts has been translated into English and the translations here are by Raili Marling.

⁵ Italo Svevo, Maxim Gorky, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Martin Du Gard, Hermann Broch, Joseph Roth, Louis Aragon.

and in oneself. On the one hand, the religious background of the subject affects this disappointment, but so does straying from religion. Faith provides no consolation to the characters. On the contrary, they come to recognise the irreversible turn of the world towards secularism and a simultaneous realisation that the church has nothing to offer to them. Separation from religion, first and foremost its institutionalised forms, is caused by the fact that the characters are all “intellectual animals”, that is, writers, artists or teachers who value their vocation above all else. They are also sufficiently well off to find time for intellectual pursuits and recoil from any possible social and collective endeavours. They are far from an acute desire to change their lives, social or political struggle, and artistic engagement. They have high self-esteem and great expectations (ethical and aesthetic) of themselves and the society. This leads to increasing dissatisfaction, which in turn leads to verbal excess and possible insanity or suicidal thoughts, although the latter are rarely realised (Chardin 1998: 31–43).

In the context of Estonian literature, this definition is quite well suited for describing A. H. Tammsaare’s *Tõde ja õigus* (‘Truth and Justice’) and placing it in the context of European literature.⁶ However, it is also a good match with Morn’s life and work. There are some important differences. First, Chardin’s corpus only contains novels by male writers that focus on male characters. Second, the novels are bulky *romans-fleuves* and, third, the characters are often aristocrats (or members of the high society that closely interacts with nobility). Morn’s novel is short, Ellu is a woman, and she is from an impoverished background. Yet poverty does not prevent her from living a life of leisure, spending her summers in the countryside where she watches the robust peasants and their physical labour with a mixture of fear and excitement, and acquiring an education and developing tastes that exceed those of Tartu intellectuals as well as the pseudo-knowledge of the society stars derided by Proust.

Morn was not only a woman, but also an intellectual and a writer. The protagonist’s incompatibility with the surrounding world is not just the incompatibility of women with men’s world, but was characteristic of the intellectual atmosphere of the early 20th century. This article argues that being a woman magnifies what is manifest in the male characters studied by Chardin. The male characters with an unhappy consciousness tend to contemplate suicide, but Morn’s character actually ends her life at the age of twenty-two. Although Morn was not drawn to writing one single comprehensive and

⁶ See Chardin 2015.

substantive novel, similar thematic repetitions and literary devices can be found in her second, more fictional novel, *Kastreerit elu* ('Castrated Life'), in which the protagonist is a man. Her 1956 *Tee ja tõde* ('Road and Truth') is too distant from the period discussed in the present article, although the protagonist's life parallels that of Ellu. Despite these differences, however, Morn, because of her academic culture, worldview, mode of writing and the main problems of her characters, can be added to Chardin's illustrious corpus.

2. Clash of Cultures

We can be certain that the 1936 novella "The Prisoner of Distance" is not isolated from the Morn's oeuvre but closely tied to it both thematically and stylistically. In this article, it will be viewed in a close comparison with *The Talented Parasite*. Hinrikus (2016: 72) has pointed out that "close observation plays an important role in the birth of her works. Her skill of fabulation was weak, it was observation that activated her inspiration." For example, there is a description of a night-time train ride from Tallinn to Tartu in *The Talented Parasite* that is indeed in accordance with the timetable of the time (up to almost 8 hours) and the play "Wedding March" viewed in the Estonia Theatre (the "uniquely mature sexual world" that left an indelible impression to young Ellu, although she does not remember the name of the author⁷) probably also affected the author.

The protagonist of "The Prisoner of Distance" is a man, with the somewhat odd name of Pardo, but recognisably Estonian in origin, although this is not mentioned in the text. In the first lines of the novella he wakes up in bed in an attic apartment in Paris and his thoughts quickly move to suicide. Despite financial difficulties, he lives a life of leisure and spends his days wandering in the city. Morn, who was in Paris in 1932–33 on a scholarship of the French Scientific Institute and the support of Gustav Suits, quite recognisably describes her personal impressions: incessant cold in her room, bare-kneed schoolboys in the Latin Quarter, eating hot chestnuts, cafés and the music played there⁸, and the Notre Dame cathedral. It is interesting that the eyes of this observant character, who walks from Passy to the Île de la Cité on the banks of the Seine, never stop on the Eiffel tower. This shows that the author is not aiming at an objective picture of Paris, but that through Pardo's eyes, she

⁷ Henry Bataille's *La marche nuptiale* (1905), staged in the Estonia theatre in 1916.

⁸ Henri Garat's hit from the time, "En parlant un peu de Paris", is even quoted, as it talks about the longing for Paris that characterises a person from the provinces.

provides her retrospective view of her emotions associated with the city. This stands in contrast to the opening of Aragon's *Voyageurs de l'impériale*, which begins with a description of the tower and not a very flattering one ("Quelle horreur!"). Morn either ignores modernity or quietly blends it into her aesthetic background: cars drive "gracefully" in the asphalt, creating the image of a quiet street (PD: 495), and a three-storey department store is "cinematically unreal" (PD: 502).

In other words, Pardo is a character from a different world: the Paris that he lives in is not an imitation with precise details, despite the author's realistic mode of writing, but its reality is expressed through experience. Because Morn does not vary her technique, it is possible to see the many parallels between Pardo and Ellu that are outlined at the very beginning of the novella: before he has risen from the bed, we get to know about his lack of willpower, his sense of the meaninglessness of life, and a view from outside suggesting that he is alienated from his own body.

Estonia is also present in Paris – it is not directly referred to, but the country and its inhabitants can be easily recognised in the constantly repeated word "homeland". On his way, Pardo meets a girl with "sturdy legs" who "at the time seemed to Pardo the true embodiment of his homeland with her strong bones and the heaviness of her gait and movements. Regardless of whether she puts her foot on the ground or her pen to the paper, – what is left behind is something heavy." (PD: 503) The young woman creates no sympathy in the character ("the spiritual world that shines from under the brows that have been shaved too narrow for the wide face is trite, he says to himself.") (ibid.). However, for some reason, he follows her, to help the girl choose gifts to take with her to her homeland, emphatically recommending an inflatable exotic crocodile although the girl would have preferred a more familiar duck. On his way home Pardo meets another woman, a girl who is selling herself on the street. He has the desire to talk to her, but he gives up on the idea for ethical reasons, unwilling to create false expectations in the woman, in the professional sense, that he had no intention of satisfying.

Pardo, like Ellu, is asexual: he is not uninterested in women (like Ellu is only theoretically interested in men), but he is hindered by the pragmatism and intellectual deficiency of the opposite sex. This is increased by his incessant observation and analysis of others, as well as himself. Ellu cannot immerse herself in the moment, lose herself, or remain serious in intimate moments. Thus, in one scene she falls against Pärtel Kraiss' "well-developed and air-filled chest" and allows him to kiss her, until "she felt enveloped in heat", but she is reminded of her confirmation, when she could not remain serious while eating

the host; she bursts laughing again, thus destroying the most sexual experience of her life (TP: 258). Pardo, in contrast, envisions the “mouth with a halo of pain” of a woman from his homeland when he sees the “destructive fire” of the prostitute’s eyes (PD: 506). In addition to seeing him from afar, we also see his spatial distance from a possible object of desire (that is projected in a sterile fashion anyway).

Why does Pardo not kill himself? Two answers to this question are suggested at the beginning of the novella, but this question also provides background tension to the silent course of the text. First, in his contemplation, Pardo reaches the religious conclusion that it is inappropriate for a human to destroy what has been created by God. Pardo and the author’s relationship with religion is important. For characters with an unhappy consciousness, religion is not connected to some specific denomination, the rituals of some church, but rather to a quintessence of personal thoughts and sensations, in which beauty plays an important role but is also overshadowed by a sense of having been abandoned by God. Thus, when Pardo first has suicidal thoughts, he is quite ironic about the Coué method of autosuggestion, popular at the time, but he still attends an ecumenical meeting of spiritual sharing where “joy is to be always shared but pain kept to oneself because joy strives for openness, pain for depths.” (PD: 505) Examining Notre Dame, he is consumed by devotion that is quickly transferred to the realm of aesthetics. Abandoning suicide is thus a positive aesthetic programme, not a moral one; it is not fear of sin and punishment, but the philosophical conclusion that a person cannot be killed, because he or she is capable of creating beauty. The second reason is derived from the title of the novella: Paris with its beauty and its openness has received and accepted Pardo (although the text contains references to French bureaucracy, this is not attributed to Paris). The (physical or mental) closeness of homeland is “boring”, but its “distance has invited Pardo back to life” as the end of the novella states. Pardo’s existence is thus paradoxical: he cannot sever his ties with his homeland, as that would result in his too full immersion in Parisian culture and society, but he also cannot return to his homeland as he would face the same world as Ellu. Finding links with and reminiscences of his homeland helps him to see Paris through fresh eyes, but this link can only exist through distance. The analytical view from outside, which is a problem in intimate circumstances, also allows him to experience his surroundings aesthetically and emotionally. The title “The Prisoner of Distance” thus does not refer to the character’s sad fate in exile but the opposite: imprisonment in distance is the condition necessary for life.

For Hegel, the unhappy consciousness is above all characterised by the knowledge of total loss: “it has lost both the worth it attached to its immediate personality and the worth attached to its personality as mediated, as thought.” (1977: 455) Paul Ricœur, contrasting nostalgia and mourning, sees traces of mourning in Hegel’s concept of unhappy consciousness. Differently from nostalgia, where the beautiful and desired past has been buried under the banality of the present that is hopelessly inaccessible and long gone, mourning allows us to understand the rupture and accept the ugly reality. Ricœur (2013: 36) argues that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* does not just finish off nostalgia but replaces it with mourning. We can see a nostalgic character in *The Talented Parasite* in one of Ellu’s acquaintances, a “classicist” who is also an asexual individual unable to feel any desire for women, since as historical malformation has supposedly led them to become thick and their necks masculine. Together “with their necks, women have lost a great deal of their charm”; he is also shocked by “the bones of the big toe that he can see through the shoes that make the foot so ugly and square” (TP: 174–175). Ellu, in contrast, who approaches the classicist’s despair with a certain irony, does not desire the lost past, but gradually becomes aware that she can no longer feel the immediate or interpret the mediated. Hence her suicide.

Traditionally, what is stressed in the case of nihilist and cynical characters influenced by Romanticism (like Lermontov’s Pechorin, whom Morn’s Ellu quotes eagerly) is their incompatibility with time. Ellu’s and Pardo’s fundamental difference lies not only in their gender, but in their positioning in different spaces. There are few instances of spatial conflict in the case of characters with an unhappy consciousness as described by Chardin, like Proust’s narrator or Aragon’s Mercadier, who are from a culture at the centre of which they are positioned. Incompatibility with time is simultaneously expressed in the incompatibility with the surrounding space. The triggering mechanism in the case of “The Prisoner of Distance” is the fact that Pardo is in exile in a different cultural space.

3. Ethnoscapes and Mediascapes: Hemingway vs Morn

At this juncture, it is necessary to explicate the notion of cultural space used here. Lionel Ruffel⁹, proceeding from the work of Arjun Appadurai and

⁹ See his chapter „Synchronisation, polychronie, ethnoscape et globalisation“ (Ruffel 2016: 67–78)

Benedict Anderson, distinguishes between two definitions of space in relation to national culture. The *ethnoscape* brings together different Others: tourists, migrants, diaspora. Between the two world wars a large ethnoscape in Paris was formed by the American expatriates whom Ernest Hemingway describes in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*, published in 1926, a year before *A Talented Parasite* and in his memoir *A Moveable Feast* (published posthumously in 1964, in a revised edition in 2009). It is productive to linger on this community as, in Hemingway's description, it stands in stark contrast with Pardo's depictions.

Differently from Pardo, who is active during the day, the Americans are above all interested in nightlife; Pardo does not drink, while the Americans drink with abandon; Pardo walks long distances, the Americans drive cars for short distances (from the Latin Quarter to Montparnasse and back). Pardo loves Paris without a doubt, while some of Hemingway's characters certainly do not. Similar traits of the post-war American expatriate community can be found in other works and it can be argued in general that while Pardo prefers to avoid his compatriots, the Americans move in each other's company, and the only French people they are interested in are women of loose morals, although they, too, become boring at times. For example, one character in John Dos Passos' novel *Three Soldiers* exclaims: "God, it will do me good to see a nice sweet wholesome American girl" (see Prost 2018: 197). It can be said that although Pardo and the Americans described here are in the same city almost at the same time, they exist in two different and independent worlds.

This conundrum can be solved with the help of the notion of a *mediascape*, a space that is characterised by jointly consumed media. Although we habitually equate media with mass media channels (newspapers, radio, television), the notion of a mediascape is more capacious and includes all that reaches us in a mediated form and that organises or dislocates our (cultural) identity. Thus we can also view Paris as a cultural medium and view scenes in which Pardo wonders about the city as modes of media consumption. For example, Pardo is intrigued by a "dark-skinned Hindu", whom he meets in Paris and whose colourful garments catch his eye and with whom he shares the right to be in Paris; he listens to street musicians; he enjoys the quiet darkness of the Notre Dame, where customs "weave a poetic veil over the facts of daily life" (PD: 500). He also exchanges opinions with a Canadian pastor and a local Orthodox priest, and he admires the Venus of Milo and the Mona Lisa. It is quite surprising how Morn's description of Paris is similar to the perceptions and descriptions of the young people who visited Paris in the mid-1990s, after the opening of borders. Determining to what extent we are dealing with the recreation of stereotypes of Paris is not a question this article seeks to answer.

However, we can speak about a certain similarity in the mechanisms of reception that are not directly linked to national belonging. But then again, the desire to avoid one's compatriots may also be a national trait.

Distinguishing between the concepts of *ethnoscape* and *mediascape* allows us to provide a more precise description of two modes of being in Paris. Hemingway's and Dos Passos' characters are not the Lost Generation only because of the traumas of war but because they exist in the same national and media space when they read American newspapers, listen to American music and despair that they cannot find what they are looking for in Paris. In other words, they are consumed by nostalgia. Pardo does not rule out communication with compatriots, but has created an *alternative media space* that allows him to come to terms with the world that he cannot stand: in other words, he copes with mourning. Ellu also constantly dreams of escape: as a child to faraway exotic lands and later to a convent. To an extent she is consoled by the intellectual atmosphere at the University of Tartu and in her studies, but she does not manage to isolate herself from her surroundings. Pardo, however, perceives Paris to be a place that has accepted him.

Conclusion

In today's hypermedia world, we are facing a different situation. Ruffel (2016: 69) stresses three characteristics of collective identity: simultaneousness of the nation, synchronisation of transnational forms (with the help of ethnoscares) and the polychrony of globalisation, as a result of which all these forms exist simultaneously. To put in more plainly: depending on the media that we consume and how we do so, we may feel at home abroad and exiled at home, and *at the same time* share a collective national identity.

In the context of such polychrony and in view of the fact that we are the targets of different media channels, it is pertinent to talk about a crisis of attention. Consumer society places great pressure on our mechanisms of reception, which explains the worry about the younger generation's ability to focus, to delve into complex problems and to express itself in more than 140 characters. In the spirit of ecocriticism, Yves Citton (2014) has proposed the idea of *ecology of attention* as a parallel to our awareness that we need to separate our recyclable rubbish and reduce the number of single-use items. Today's media is captivating, but not to the extent that people should be deprived of the ability to shake themselves free, to create the so-called vacuoles of silence that allow us to pay attention to ourselves. According to Citton, attention is

something not just directed to others, but also something that we provide (ourselves) (cf. Ruffel 2016: 71–78).

The world of the 1920s was not burdened by our media hypertrophy, but the period, like today, of fast social and technological changes. Electricity, cinematography, the telephone, and aeroplanes were, in those years, no longer curiosities seen at world fairs, but devices that had entered everyday life, forcing people to adapt to or to resist them. The upper middle classes who enriched themselves quickly and easily on the financial markets increased social inequality, although the lexicon of solidarity derived from the Enlightenment was still used in public rhetoric. The traumas of the war that just ended were still in the air, deepening xenophobia and fear. This list could be extended to other phenomena that deepened the *mal à l'aise* of the intellectuals of the time in the same way as they do today. This article demonstrates how two very similar trajectories, which both stem from an incompatibility with the surrounding environment and the inability to delve into nostalgia, reach very different conclusions: the female protagonist, unable to cope with mourning, commits suicide, while the male protagonist finds solace in foreign lands through connection with the alien and through an aesthetic perception of the world.

This article has viewed media in a very broad sense thus far. However, one of its forms, the aesthetic media experience, is something that provides the best opportunity to withdraw into those vacuoles of silence that are necessary for achieving stability. This experience may be provided by theatre, cinema, even TV series and computer games, but above all by literature, which makes it possible to create a necessary aesthetic screen similar to the one that Pardo experiences while walking in Paris, although the novella is too short to know what happens to the character the next day. We do not know whether Pardo manages to remain in his vacuole. However, if we think about happy resolutions, we can certainly see one in Proust's narrator. Literature and, above all, the act of writing, allow us to move from contemplation to active interaction, to avoid clinging to the past and to bring the past into the present. Pardo as a writer might be liberated from the prison of distance in the same way as Ester, Ellu's alter ego with a less tragic fate in Reed Morn's 1956 novel *Road and Truth*, finds equilibrium by starting to write fairy tales.

In interpreting and shaping literature (and art more broadly) in today's society, one needs to be attentive to two important aspects. First, literature as a medium participates in the global polychronic landscape as a result of which we can see it not just through linguistic and geographical taxonomies, but

also through its manifestations in different ethnoscapes. Literature in exile, postcolonial and diasporic literatures tend to be studied in close dialogue with their countries of origin, but it would also be intriguing to investigate their ties with each other.¹⁰

Second, literature may also act as a *mediascape* and, through that, as people's personal refuge. Schools should support individual reading practices alongside collective and compulsory reading assignments. The success of *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter series has shown that books can also become *viral*. Making reading compulsory and banning smartphones drives adolescents away from literature and creates a craving for social media. Instead of looking for correct answers to textual analyses teachers should guide young people to lose themselves in books. Binge watching shows not only the triumph of the marketing strategies of telecommunication companies, but also people's need to isolate themselves from the world. The brain would probably relax if it were at times allowed to indulge in binge reading.

Tanel Lepsoo

tanel.lepsoo@ut.ee

Tartu Ülikool

Maaailma keelte ja kultuuride kolledž

Lossi 3

51003 Tartu

EESTI / ESTONIA

References

- Bergson, H. 1965 [1939]. *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*. Paris: PUF.
- Chardin, Ph. 1998. *Le roman de la conscience malheureuse : Svevo, Gorki, Proust, Mann, Musil, Martin du Gard, Broch, Roth, Aragon*. Genève: Droz.
- Chardin, Ph. 2015. Un beau roman d'éducation estonien: *Vérité et Justice* d'Anton Tammsaare. – *Revue de littérature comparée*, 354, 205–217. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rlc.354.0205>
- Christensen, M. 2014. Technology, Place and Mediatized Cosmopolitanism. – A. Hepp, F. Krotz, eds., *Mediatized Worlds. Culture and Society in a Media Age*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 159–173. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137300355_10
- Citton, Y. 2014. *Pour une écologie de l'attention*. Paris: Seuil.

¹⁰ For example, a project initiated at the University of Umeå tries to map the tourist's view of 19th c. Italy regardless of national peculiarities, by trying to bring together as many linguistic and cultural spaces as possible.

- Ehrmann, K. 1927. Naise romaan naisest. – *Üliõpilasleht*, 11, 03.12, 192–194.
- Hegel, F. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press.
- Hinrikus, R. 1998. Reed Morni tee ja tõde. – *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 8–9, 521–534, 622–634.
- Hinrikus, R. 2016. Reed Morni tee ja tõde. – *Kahe vahel. Artikleid kirjandusest ja elulugudest*. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi teaduskirjastus, 55–93.
- Morn, R. 1927. *Andekas parasiit*. Tartu: Loodus.
- Morn, R. 1936. Kauguse vang. – *Looming*, 5, 493–506.
- Nirk, E. 1979. Psühholoogilise romaani tulekul. Pilk poolsajandi taha. – *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 7, 391–402.
- Prost, J. 2018. La représentation d'un Paris transatlantique dans les romans de la génération perdue: the *Sun Also Rises* (Hemingway) et *Three Soldiers* (Dos Passos). – *Revue de littérature comparée*, 366, 191–203. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rlc.366.0191>
- Ricœur, P. 2013. Vers la Grèce antique. De la nostalgie au deuil. – *Esprit*, 11, 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.3917/espri.1311.0022>
- Ruffel, L. 2016. *Brouhaha. Les mondes du contemporain*. Lagrasse: Verdier.