

*Poetry in the Vanguard of Nation-Building and Cultural Ecology*¹

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To all probability, literary culture, including its primary creativity (first of all, the phenomenon we call “World Literature”) as well as literary scholarship (whose core function is to explicate primary literary-creative activity) has been in most societies and especially in smaller nation(alitie)s relying on their ethnic-natural languages, among the main vehicles of keeping alert and infusing moral values in ideologies and economic-political processes. In fact, poetry has had an immense role and influence in the emergence of individual nations, their culture and languages. It is not anything that has remained forever in the past, as an “obsolete relic”. There are numerous smaller nationalities in today’s world desperately craving for their freedom to use their native languages and passionately calling for their existential liberty to develop as individual nations.

For that reason, it is hardly sufficient to speak about ecology as applied to exclusively natural and social sciences and the biosphere. Understanding cultural ecology as exclusive interrelations between the environment and the humans can lead to simplifications and confusions. In my opinion, much more attention should be paid to the autonomy of cultural ecology and its specific capacity and function to produce and inspire spiritual-psychological (ethical, moral) values.

The nucleus of literary culture, as creativity, could hardly work beyond its dynamic interior alliance with philosophy and aesthetics. It is the promotor and generator of moral-spiritual values in their intrinsic complexity and change. It is the “invisible magic” of literary creativity. In the rise and formation of individual independent nations since the times of romanticism, poetry in many parts assumed the role of philosophy and ethics. It was so in Estonia, a tiny Baltic nation, whose first important thinkers and cultural personalities along the 19th century were all poets: Kristian Jaak Peterson, glorifying diversity of

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nature and natural languages, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the author of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1861, written in twenty cantos in Finno-Ugric traditional metric), the great patriotic poetess Lydia Koidula, singing to the dream of freedom of her native Estonian people as well as of all minor nationalities humiliated and enslaved by foreign occupants and imperialism.

Still at the start of the 20th century, before Estonia for the first time in all history could establish its independent state (1918), Juhan Liiv in his lyrical-philosophic poetry called for a morality based on the wholeness of nature – respect for nature’s diversity and freedom of existential choices for small(er) nationalities.

In our present technocratic and highly robotized societies, poetry may seem to be a useless fancy; yet in the world filled to the brim with computers, poetry, paradoxically, has not at all lost its attraction and charm. On the contrary, the need for poetry in the late postmodern age seems to be an ascending trend.

Just as the resilience of life is in a direct dependence on biodiversity, culture’s resilience depends on cultural diversity. Despite a lot of sophisticated talk about “otherness” in postmodern discourses, a radically important territory in cultural ecology has been left predominantly in obscurity, nearly undiscovered, more often than not excluded from the world university curriculums.

By that “radically important territory” I mean the literary culture of the world’s immense “periphery” – smaller, small and minority nation(alitie)s whose societies and communities operate predominantly in their own ethnical-national languages. The sad fact is that the world humanities’ academia has no financial means to support genuine comparative literary studies beyond the “centers” (the cultures relying on the traditionally widest-spread international Western languages – English, in the first place, but also French, German and Spanish). Though some languages may comprise tens or even hundreds of millions of speakers, they still seem to be fated to be “peripheries”, as outside their own main geophysical territory the knowledge of their language and culture is scarce, if not absent altogether.

To create new and better prospects for the spread of a truly dialogical spirit in our world, humanities’ creative vanguard – poets, writers, translators, literary and cultural philosophers and critics both from “centers” and “peripheries” – should unite their (often) “sleeping” potential, to meet in alliance the ever growing need for a re-conceptualized and re-vitalized cultural ecology, in defense of life’s boundless individualities and diversity.