

A. H. Tammsaare's Epic Musicality

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Abstract. A. H. Tammsaare was drawn to the musical tonality of prose. Importantly though, he did not wholeheartedly embrace sound patterning as a mode of writing. Rather, he preferred a semantic widening of ordinary language within a comprehensively holistic “spherical music”. In his novels, we can detect a deliberate use of rhythmic motion in sentences. This is evident primarily in the wealth of lexical and syntactic repetitions resulting in a parallelism of patterns. An obvious, although discreet, rhythmic design emerges in the thesis-antithesis-synthesis parataxis the core words of which are the adversative and coordinating conjunctions *aga* (‘but’), and integrative *ometi* (‘yet’, ‘indeed’). The frequency with which these bound conjunctions occur in Tammsaare’s work surpasses that of ordinary speech by about four times, and it is twice as high as the statistical mean for literary texts. One might call this expressive of an epic *but*-mantra, a prose-poetic *but*-meter, or a narrative polysyndeton, and, from a philosophical point of view, a *but*-dialectic. Whenever a reader fails to appreciate Tammsaare’s underlying tone and does not discern the emotional flow of longing scepticism that issues from his dyadic-triadic chains, this pervasive, yet inconspicuously arguing, textual mode may seem unduly pretentious. Indeed, there is nothing to prevent a prose text from featuring a poetic style that is rooted in a poetry-like, paradigmatic parallelism as the poetic principle of formal and semantic equivalence.

Keywords: A. H. Tammsaare; musicality; poetic function; prose poetics; prose rhythm; repetition; polysyndeton; coordinating conjunction; parataxis; linguo-stylistics; word statistics; dialectic method

Introduction¹

As a violin player, A. H. Tammsaare² was deeply influenced by music and understood how to capture and hold an emotional tone of contemplation. His

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² A. H. Tammsaare is the writer’s alias, Anton Hansen was his civil name, while Anton Hansen Tammsaare is a habitual cultural reference.

search for musical attunement in expressions is already observable from his prose lyrics. The instilled rhythm of his wording can also be detected in his more mature prose epic. Musicality manifests itself on the deep level of stylistic unity, which has been described as “a ringing of heaths and forests” or praised as an earth-bound onomatopoeia (see Siirak 1963: 330; Haug 2010: 37; Vaino 2011: 80–94).

Whether as a critic or through his characters, Tammsaare has repeatedly drawn attention to music – to the pervasive vibration of sound. Aside from melodicism, he has given less prominence to the issue of rhythm, but as both a creator and critic, he has clearly emphasised the primacy of “cosmic music” as a “rhythmic, numerical key” (Tammsaare 1979: 62) in existence and expression. Based on this testimony, many interpreters have admired the repetitions that are a hallmark of his novels. Given the most visible rhythmic pattern, i.e., the many juxtaposed sequences of opposition, his personal style could be conditionally generalised as an epic *but*-mantra. Or a prose-poetic *but*-meter, or a narrative polysyndeton, or, depending on the point of view, a philosophical *but*-dialectic. The opposing cliché of Tammsaare as a tedious philosopher probably originates from these broad, composition-level, sound-sentence figures, or discursive parallelism, since such an impression is easily formed in a reluctant or piecemeal reader, who – like his rival colleague Friedebert Tuglas (Tuglas 1959: 611–612) – does not reach a hypnotic catharsis from rolling emotional and thought repetition. Literature is the art of participation: we either want to get involved or we don’t.

Cosmic Music

In 1915, as he approached prose poetry and symbolism in his miniatures, Tammsaare published “Keelest ja luulest” (‘On Language and Poetry’), a longer essay wherein he uses Goethe, Schiller, Lermontov, and the poem “Kerkokell” by Gustav Suits as examples, demanding that poetry merge “the external sound of language and inner spiritual sonority” (Tammsaare 1988a: 225). Such harmony reveals the “soul, a deeply known luminosity, which, upon stopping at the words, only deepens and expands” (Tammsaare 1988a: 226). The writer generously recalls cases where “the meaning of words, their entwined, focused whole-meaning, created unforgettable moments. The sound of words faded from my mind and I gave in to some kind of inner sound of meaning-made spaces, which only music can otherwise do” (Tammsaare 1988a: 224–225). In the essay’s conclusion, the soon-to-be epic author dreams of artistic bliss: “And if I were a poet, I would create some kind of epic-like work, filled with the sunset folds and dawn fire of joyful existence. But without even realizing it, I

would drag a veil of sadness over all this bursting blissfulness [...]” (Tammsaare 1988a: 249). This does not seem like an ordinary statement among a row of other thoughts, but rather like an artistic credo.

Lyrical-musical nostalgia shaped Tammsaare's soul and ideals. Like the author himself, researchers have already perceived the happy achievement of his stylistic ideals in *Kõrboja peremees* (The Master of Kõrboja, 1922), while observing a rooted and deepening continuation of this in *Truth and Justice*. The plangent main tone in Tammsaare's textual thread has been noted by many of his readers. Karl Mihkla already pointed out the “many repetitions” found in *Kõrboja peremees*, which “create a lyrical mood and sonorous rhythm in the novel” (Mihkla 1938: 94–95). Richard Alekõrs, a contemporary of Tammsaare, also applied the concepts of music, hearing not a single note in the final solutions of Tammsaare's works, but a whole chord (Alekõrs 1940: 161). Erna Siirak also follows the author's musical happiness in her stylistic observations (Tillemann 1940; Siirak 1977). Although, in 1940, this critic still thought that “Tammsaare does not have the repute of a good stylist,” she clearly knew to reference the various formal repetitions in such a way that “rhythm waves have become very influential [...] a dance rhythm carried to the sentence in the literal sense of the word [...] we find quite a delicate play of words and sounds from the rhythm of Tammsaare's sentence” (Tillemann 1940: 320). Most recently, the concept of music of the spheres has been applied by Toomas Haug (2010) and thoroughly by Maarja Vaino (2011).

In Tammsaare's eyes, however, connections between poetry or more widely literature and music were not one-sided. The writer undoubtedly considered the sound image to be important at the creative threshold, but “sonority can hardly serve as the meaning of a word”. What was important to him was not the order of sonorous words and sentences, but the great inner and deep meaning of the words, because of which “sonority increases” (Tammsaare 1988a: 224). He was wisely critical of close comparisons of word and sound art: “But the self-determination of poetry when comparing it with music is that it is not just music. Why should we make music with words when we can do it better with sounds! Only bad musicians could come up with this strange idea. [...] It is impractical to replace language with sounds” (Tammsaare 1988a: 224).

Tammsaare thus tended to deny poetic instrumentation as an end in itself, seeking musicality to expand upon the usual meanings of words, the archetypal or “cosmic” symbolism of the message, and the main emotional tone. In creating harmony, sound art has advantages over word art, which is why it makes sense to strive for uniqueness inherent in the art form instead of trying to replicate music's exterior properties. This kind of modernist-symbolic notion represents a true logocentrism: a more general and deeper idea emanates from each

element of the work like a light in an alabaster vase. The same neo-romantic idea later emerged as a guiding principle in formalism-structuralism.

Characteristically, the critical writer demanded that poets focus on the overall impact of a poem, as well as “the specific focal point required from larger works – plays, short stories, novels, and so on – where all thematic points gather; a unique mood which should not be violated and which would be the work’s unfiltered source of life” (Tammsaare 1988a: 227). It is necessary “to understand the macrocosm from within the microcosm. In a large work, you might get away with not understanding the general mood or concept, but in a poem that is only a few lines long, this would be unacceptable” (Tammsaare 1988a: 227). Instead of external formal tricks, the goal should be “to find a simple, I would like to say, classical language” – “But let’s try to imitate this simplicity without the language losing its sound, rhythm, thickness, flexibility, and imagination – without it becoming vulgar!” (Tammsaare 1988a: 231). According to Tammsaare, it was not necessary to invent a new artificial language, but “to beat the old one, to hone, mould, and stretch it, to deepen, expand upon, and overshadow the meaning of words – this requires hard, patient, and enduring work,” although “every work ultimately requires a certain divine spark of creation” (Tammsaare 1988a: 231). This spark remains “beyond the threshold of consciousness; it is a secret to others and to the creator himself” – to Suits, Tuglas, Vilde, Ridala (Tammsaare 1988a : 232), but the euphoria of the discussion allows us to assume that the secret of creation has probably already been found, a productive method discovered.

Poetics treats rhythm as a phonetic-syntactic repetition, a parallelism of similar language material, i.e., the regularity of sameness and difference. In her doctoral dissertation, Maarja Vaino (2011: 84–87) draws attention to the writer’s alter ego, Anton Petrovich, from the story *Shadows* (1917), who is fascinated by the supernatural reflection of the world’s universal cosmic harmony in which the waves of the whole universe vibrate and resonate, like a violin bow drawn across the edge of a plate filled with dancing grains of sand.

Why then shouldn’t they submit to those sounds when their symphony, their music – the cosmic music resounds, putting the whole expanse of sky and everything to be found in it in a rhythmic, numerical key [...]. Only with music, its subtlety and versatility, its unintended nuances, can one explain the infinite diversity, the unique variety of visible nature [...]. Music resounded through space when our earth was still unborn, and it will resound still for an immeasurable time after man and his dwelling have long since perished from space [...]. (Tammsaare 1979: 62–63)

Vaino claims that, in this passionate speech, Anton Peeter's son, who was actually Tammsaare, outlines "among other things, a pythagorean notion of the harmony of spheres with which some key questions of Tammsaare's work are associated. The cosmic level that occurs on the micro level, evident in the smallest grain of sand, is essential to Tammsaare's worldview" (Vaino 2011: 86). *Musica universalis* is, in the researcher's opinion, connected with the writer's irrational and religious perception. Tammsaare did not have enough comprehension to comprehend the incomprehensible universe, but the more comprehension, the better. The notion of music of the spheres also represents both a rational and an emotional concept.

The writer himself refers to the deep connection between religion and cosmic music in the article "On Faith and its Teachings" (1917) of the same period, in which he declared that the "infinity of nature, the worlds, the universe" teaches us to see faith but "faith can hardly be taught to everyone, because faith is a unique music of the soul and music uses the appropriate senses (Tammsaare 1988b: 164). According to the rather anti-clerical but not quite atheistic writer, it is precisely introspective faith that can discover and unleash in man the mysterious forces beyond the conquering rationalism of the world, if only the intuitive Eastern and mechanical Western mindsets could be combined. In their higher union, he saw a possible redemption, a new messiah, as he wrote in his 1937 essay "Redemption" (Tammsaare 1990: 223–228).

Thus, it can be argued that Tammsaare's main task, as it is said in the language of performing arts, was not the depiction of country, social, or spiritual life alone, be it realistically, impressionistically, or symbolically, or in their symbiosis, but the inner and continuous harmonisation of descriptions, the harmony of the basic tones in the expression of emotion and thought, the symphony of a textual score. He did not want to confine himself only to the essential content, with *mimesis*, but also sought the ideal manner of expression, the great *poiesis*. As a stylist, Tammsaare was by no means alone here: Tuglas (see Undusk 1986: 134, 142–143), Gailit, and Vilde attended to the suggestive, rhythmic impression of their prose.

The future writer's idea of musical perfection was probably already formed in primary school, directly influenced by the Väike-Maarja poets, i.e., Jakob Liiv, Peeter Jakobson, and particularly the schoolmaster Jakob Tamm (Puhvel 1969: 390). Juhan Liiv developed similarly, internalising the ever-growing "sound", the music in the shadow of the world, the "initial harmony". The prestige of the poetic remained high in the literature of the neo-romantic era, even in Vilde's critical realism – for example, the introductory threshing scene from *Mahtra sõda* (Mahtra War, Vilde 1982: 6). "Tropical" elevation (breathtaking epithets, comparisons, hyperbole, metaphor-metonyms...) and figurative

sublimity – beginning, inner, and end repetitions in sentences (anaphora, epiphora, endophora), emotionally accentuated epizeuxes (the successive repetition of words), or polyptotons duplicating word stems (repetitions in different cases or conjugations), spellbinding parallelism and incremental gradation – were not uncommon in the prose genres, occasionally concentrating in clusters. And all this against a predominantly trochaic background of Estonian prose language (see also Lotman, Lotman 2007: 122ff). Today, Nikolai Baturin’s novels have a strong tendency toward rhythmic prose, making Tammsaare’s network of thought rhymes seem much more discreet by comparison – more elusive and hidden, more scattered in the body of the text. Tammsaare’s musical hearing is delicate and unobtrusive.

The Rhythm of “But”

In his monograph on Tammsaare’s earlier life and work, Heino Puhvel characterised the writer’s style: repetition is one of the stylistic tools that Tammsaare uses quite incessantly, especially repetition of richly nuanced verbs (Puhvel 1966: 352–353). Undoubtedly, such an observation can be applied generally about the repetition of any word type, be it changing or unchanging. Melody and rhythm can be measured in many ways, acoustically or linguistically. The music of text is coded into an organised use of language: prosody, lexicon and syntax, formal and semantic parallelism – the repetition of equivalents and the alternation of contrasts. Into anything that can vibrate harmoniously and suggestively.

When stepping away from abstract “cosmic sound” to concrete sentence rhythm, one can see that the systematic and organised use of the coordinating conjunction *aga – but –* is clearly highlighted in Tammsaare’s text. On closer inspection, it soon becomes clear how the abundant *but*-connections in the text form a visibly rhyming or formally communicative fabric, which at one point begins to have an explicit rather than implicit effect. The massive occurrence of *but*-granules (and their close analogues) seems not to be a coincidence but a poetically determined pattern of thought and expression: a dialectical *but*-rhythm. They are wavy – sometimes even circular (Merilai 2012: 383; Undusk 2013: 315) – chains of sentences and counterarguments. To conduct the flow of the arguments, contrasting conjunctive vocabulary and sentence patterns are needed. Of course, it is not just a question of a single conjunctive fragment, but of a more general dialogue, a consistent exchange of views, and, from time to time, an attempt to integrate them from a slightly higher perspective into a model of textual creation, whose more characteristic manner of expression is still mainly centred around excessive use of *but*. The word *but* acts as a representative word for this type of discourse, so why not as a symbol? But

an argumentative exchange of words uses other appropriate, often emotional vocabulary to achieve the negation of the previous utterances or the negation of the negations: *then, however, still, nevertheless, nor, yet, or, now, before, as yet, just, at last, whether, what, surely, probably, for all that*, the opposing *ki-/gi*-affixes.

Daniel Palgi (1938) and Erna Siirak (see Tillemann 1940) referenced the interesting phenomenon of *but*-logic in their time, until finally, during Tammsaare's centennial (1977–1979), the philosophical physicist and playwright Madis Kõiv in his somewhat obscure essays (2005a, 2005c) elevated this tiny particle to a Saul Kripkean “rigid designator”. However, *aga – but –* was still partially overshadowed by the meaning-rich *ometi – yet –*, which he preferred more for some reason, calling it Tammsaare's “primordial truth” and the “fixed point” that holds him and leads him back to himself, reconciling the contrasts while not nullifying them (Kõiv 2005b). *Yet* means nothing more than *but indeed*, meaning that it is already a semantic composite and no longer primitive. Although the triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, or plus, minus, and plus/minus, is an inevitable and fruitful Tammsaare-ish model, it is not worth considering it as a completely Hegelian or even Marxist overcoming of negations or a prior abandonment of a merciless spiral of progress. As a peasant who remained close to nature and contemptuous of nihilistic city slickers, Tammsaare was anything but a believer in progress, which meant there was little hope of his becoming passionate about dialectic materialism, although, in retrospect, this was quite an obvious threat that Soviet criticism could have exploited, but which luckily went undiscovered.

Having vaccinated ourselves against Hegelian synthesis while undoubtedly acknowledging the dialectic, we can move closer to the “+, – and +/-” cycles. In an analysis from long ago, which Tammsaare saw with his own eyes, Daniel Palgi drew attention to the methodological puzzle of Tammsaare not being easy to define in an authoritative way. However, Palgi was correct in interpreting this positively: Tammsaare's views are contradictory, and, in many ways, problematic – the most obvious feature of his mind is an inclination for dialectics, logical investigation, and conclusion. According to Palgi, Tammsaare is a sceptic, a relativist, a sophist, whose discussions are intense but inconclusive since his basic truths are not permanent cornerstones (Palgi 1938: 23–24). Erna Tillemann (Siirak), who was well acquainted with Tammsaare's language style, also came to notice this lexicon of logic, i.e., the formal connectives, and made the following observation: the writer's sentences are not analytically independent but connected to the whole organism through “somehow softening particles” – *and, but, like, around, thus...* (Tillemann 1940: 322–324). Let us now recall cultural semiotics and structural poetics, the main postulates of which are that, in a poetically inspired text, even the purely formal units of

language can carry semantic meaning, becoming meaningful and self-referential (Lotman 1990). Later, Siirak summarises her experience of Tammsaare's musical style in the following sections, which are worth review:

The internal rhythm of Tammsaare's way of description, unique and immediately recognizable, would result from a three-step thesis-antithesis-synthesis, with obvious emphasis on the first two levels and weaker on the last. The details of the description, the branches of the narrative, the suspected truths of *pro* and *contra* unraveled in monologue-dialogue and intensive thought are often summarized in characteristic epilogue-remarks and sentences.

They often begin with particles such as "so," "such," "therefore," "about" and so on. [...] They synthesize decisively less often because Tammsaare naturally leaves things open-ended without offering ready-made truths. Even with seemingly definite claims, he leaves one in doubt. [...] In following Tammsaare's way of description, we are led to his style, the unity of all the components of the system. Contrary to popular belief [...] Tammsaare has an exceptionally strong sense of style, of both substance and form and their balance [...] At the very least, he could have assumed the mantle of good stylist together with Tuglas. (Siirak 1963: 331)

One can agree with Siirak that "in Tammsaare's pattern of thought, language applied for artistic purposes rises to another level, where words with their meanings appear in novel structural relations" (Siirak 1977: 66). Here, then, we will look more closely at the use of *but*-particles as a unified structural pattern, a rhythmic model of repetition. Inspired by Madis Kõiv (see Kõiv 2005a), who drew attention to the role of *but* and *yet* in the matchmaking scene of Varamäe's daughter, Liis, in Chapter 36 of Part 1 of *Truth and Justice* (Tammsaare 1981: 406), we will analyse the famous scene in the final pages of Part 1 Chapter 39, which describes the young and old Andres having a sombre conversation while rattling down Vargamäe before the son's recruitment (Tammsaare 1981: 491–493). From a couple pages of this scene, or 527 words, there are: 8 *aga*, 3 *ju*, 3 *ega*, 2 *siiski*, 1 *ometi*. The share of the two conjunctions *but* – *aga* – and *yet* – *ometi* – is 1.71%. The rest is implied without the word *but*, yet remains consistent, though a mild dispute is pervasive in the authorial and character discourse. The structure of the statement-objection-concession or the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model will be indicated as follows: an initial statement will be marked with [+], its counter-statement [-], or vice versa, depending on their sequence, a conceding *yet*-statement as [+/-] or [-/+]. A new step will be denoted with the > sign and adjacent-level discourse with double brackets [[+/-]]; the spacing of opposing vocabulary is by me.

As they rode down from Vargamäe, young Andres said,

“You’ll have to hire some help again, father.” [+]

“You know, I d o n ’ t think I will,” old Andres replied. [-]

“B u t Ants is still so young and not strong enough.” [+]

“We a l w a y s managed the work at Vargamäe with boys,” said the father.

[-]

“B u t Vargamäe was different back then, and you were a different man, too,” said the son. [+]

Old Andres sat for a while in silence, his back bent.

“I want to see if I can get by w i t h o u t hired help until you get back.” [-]

“I f I come back at all,” commented the boy. [+]

His father looked frightened.

“What are you saying?” he managed to mutter after a pause. “Who have I been working and sweating for all these years? D o n ’ t you have any love at all for Vargamäe?” [-]

“Father, e v e n you d o n ’ t really love Vargamäe. It’s just that you d o n ’ t want your work handed over to strangers, that’s all,” said the boy. [+]

“On a day like this, h o w c a n you say such things?” Andres was pained.

[-]

“D i d n ’ t you say just this summer that you’d go back to your father’s farm if only you could. You’d put your jacket on and walk away from Vargamäe singing. D i d n ’ t you say that?” [+]

Hearing his own words from the mouth of his oldest son [[+]], old Andres knew they were true, b u t he couldn’t understand why his son threw them back at him so hurtfully [[-]]. On the day of his departure, the boy s h o u l d ’ v e h a d some pity for his father [[+]] – b u t sons never pity their fathers [[-]].

Old Andres stayed quiet for a long time before he answered.

“What i f I were to go back to my father’s farm? Vargamäe is your father’s farm, so you should come back here.” [-]

“That’s the way it is,” answered the son. [-] “D i d your father love the place his children were born?” [+]

“W e a l l loved it—father, mother, and children.” [-]

“B u t you d o n ’ t love the place where your children were born, and n e i t h e r did mother, because of all the marshes and bogs. You told me that,” the boy explained. [+]

“Yes, your sainted mother,” said old Andres [+]. “B u t the marshes can be drained, and the forest would come back. That’s what should happen.” [-]

“W h y s h o u l d we bury ourselves in the marshes, when it’s easier to earn your daily bread elsewhere?” asked the boy [+], and when his father gave no answer, he added, “U n l e s s it’s for love, of course...” [-]

“Work and sweat, t h e n love will come,” said the father. [-]

“You’ve worked and sweated, and so did mother or she wouldn’t have died so young. B u t love never came and there’s none at Vargamäe to this day.” [+]

They were sad words, so sad that old Andres d i d n ' t understand how his son could say them. As he drove down the hill from Vargamäe, old Andres stooped over and seemed even older, so his son felt very s o r r y when he glanced at him. [[->+]]

“B u t who really knows,” young Andres said. “Man proposes b u t God disposes.” [->+; +/-]

“Yes, you c a n ' t go against God,” his father a g r e e d [+], imagining God as a bottomless vat where all the world's worries and sorrows were poured. B u t it never filled up. [-] The vat was a great masterwork, containing all sorrows and grievances, and old Andres marveled at the thought of it as he sat next to his son in the wagon, driving down to the government office. [+/-]

(Tammsaare 2014: 636–638).

Characteristically, the passage arrives at the motive for reconciling contradictions on a more symbolic level, i.e., the plus and minus integrative *yet*, the *yet indeed* (which is more obvious in the original Estonian than in the English translation). From here, we can move on to larger generalisations: the stylistic and methodological definition of Tammsaare as a psychological-symbolist realist.

The Calculation of “But”

As an unchanging word, *aga – but* – is one of few conjunctions in the Estonian language, whose “only syntactic function is to bind clauses of a sentence without affecting the form of the latter” (EKK 2007: 197). The conjunction *but* does not subordinate; it coordinates sentences and has a unifying meaning of opposition (EKK 2007: 198). In addition to its main function as a connecting separator, it also has restrictive, clarifying, explanatory, repetitive, and emotional emphasising functions; it may also act as an introductory at the beginning of a sentence (EKSS 2009: 43). As an adverb of emphasis, *but* signifies a contrasting-opposing uniqueness or expresses wonder, surprise, reproach, menace in relation to something different (EKSS 2009: 43). Etymologically, *but (aga)* is associated with the old illative form of the word ‘time’ (*aeg: aega*), which may have also had a possessive suffix (EES 2012: 43). Although the trace of time has been removed from the connector, it is still possible to imagine the original perception that *a (e) ga* (into time, within time, at the same time) creates an independent and parallel time space belonging to its sphere of influence, distinguishing it from the time space of the content in the previous statement. The difference already carries an opposition in itself: setting a new fact beside the old ‘gives time’, i.e., creates a separate existence next to the other. Two rival clouds of meaning are created instead of one, each with its own right to life or, in other words, time. The word *ometi (yet as yet indeed)* also has an

etymologically interesting existential origin as it relates to the same-stemmed words *olema* (to be) and *oma* (own) (EES 2012: 337). This refers to being on one's own (hypothetical *omati* – standing alone, by itself), in opposition to independent circumstance. Therefore, *yet* may have been a prefix to giving existence and time to something, embracing the development of oneself or acquiring selfhood, being on one's own or self-existence, being in one's own way, the emphatic validation and confirmation of it.

For the 10,000 most common words/lemmas in the *Dictionary of Frequency of Estonian Literary Language* (2002), which operates on a large corpus of about one million words, the frequency of occurrence is 5,276 times: 1,817 times in the press and 3,459 times in literature. The press is predominantly a reporting medium, while, in addition to descriptions, literature tends toward conversation, debate, and explanation, which assumes more frequent use of *aga*. According to the corpus, we get a 0.53% frequency of occurrence for *aga*, 0.05% for *ometi*: a total of 0.58%. Both *aga* and *ometi* together comprise 0.77% of the words in fiction and 0.38% of words in the press. Given the large amount of fiction, we must assume that the database is showing somewhat elevated data for *aga/ometi*. Newspapers/letters still represent a more typical everyday language, as shown by the newer vocabulary corpus etTenTen13, although certainly with some reservations.³ The etTenTen13 database, which also contains the University of Tartu's original consolidated corpus, is more than five hundred times larger with 563,220,548 text words.⁴ In this database, the frequency of the word *aga* is 0.38%, *ometi/ometigi* 0.02%, *aga/ometi* together 0.39%. This is a general linguistic background, which also contains some literary texts. Applying this method to the use of *aga/ometi* in 10 selected chapters of Tammsaare's *Truth and Justice* and 10 other works (see the table in Merilai 2015: 309), we see a significant increase, which in only two cases is less than 1%, and up to 1.8%. Thus, the frequency of occurrence often increases approximately four times in comparison to the general language background, which is twice as high as the general level of fiction. It all points to a clearly inspired choice of words. The seven prose writers compared do not appear to have

³ The corpus etTenTen13, which contains information on Estonian-language websites, was compiled by Lexical Computing Ltd. in 2013. The corpus was laminated, marked, and unified by OÜ Filosoft. The database is available at www.keeleeveeb.ee and through the Sketch Engine program (<https://the.sketchengine.co.uk/auth/corpora/>).

⁴ According to this corpus, in terms of frequency, the word *aga* belongs to the first dozen Estonian language words, after the words *ja, on ei, et, ta, oli, kui, ka, oma, see – aga* – before the words *ma, ning, vői, kuid ja, on ei, et, ta, oli, kui, ka, oma, see*. This is largely the case when combining different forms of words: *olema, ja, tema, see, mina, ei, et, kui, mis, saama, oma – aga –; sina, ise, siis, ning, kes, nii, vői, kōik, kuid*.

prominent *but*-based, dyadic-triadic argument chains. Their ratios, which also tend to significantly exceed the common language background (0.54%–1.2%), are clearly lower than Tammsaare's, the highest being Jaan Kross and Karl Ristikivi.

Language statistics of *Truth and Justice* has been attempted previously and more thoroughly. In 1978, during Tammsaare's centennial, Kalju Enniko and Astrid Villup stated that the application of precise methods in the study of the language of fiction proves that there is nothing stylistically neutral in a work of word art; each language unit is functional in relation to the whole (Enniko, Villup 1978: 28). They observed the stylistic statistical occurrence of word types in authorial speech in the first volume of *Truth and Justice*, separated from more specific character speeches, and compared it to indicators of authorial speech of other fiction prose. It turned out that Tammsaare uses 1.6% fewer nouns than the other fiction prose writers (30.1% versus 31.7%), whereas he uses around 3.3% fewer common nouns and about 1.7% more proper nouns. He uses close to 1% more verbs (23.6% versus 22.5%) and also slightly more adverbs than usual (16.5% versus 15.8%). Aside from the concretisation of proper nouns, however, the biggest discrepancies became apparent in the case of adjectives and conjunctions: Tammsaare was found to have about 2% fewer of the former (4.1% versus 6.0%) and about 2% more of the latter (10.3% versus 8.2%) (Enniko, Villup 1978: 30). The researchers conclude: "Conjunctions and pronouns are most often repeated in the authorial speech of the novel: the former is repeated an average of 35.5 times in the text of one 10,000-word sub-dictionary, the latter 28.2 times. The frequent repetition of words of these two parts of speech reveals a general pattern, due, on the one hand, to the limited number of different conjunctions and pronouns, and, on the other hand, to their high functional load in several language styles" (Enniko, Villup 1978: 31–32). Thus, the statistical contribution of the epic *but*-polysyndeton – if one may coin such an *ad hoc* term – is higher than usual: twice as high compared to fiction and even four times as high when compared to ordinary language.

However, Enniko and Villup do not declare conjunctiveness as stylistically marked, neither do they raise this part of speech in the ranking of Tammsaare's stylistic characteristics. According to them, materiality, substantiality, pronominality, verbality, and adverbality belong here (Enniko, Villup 1978: 38). Probably, because of the purely formal reputation of the parts of speech, they did not assume "thematic" or "key words" (Enniko, Villup 1978: 33 – quotes from the authors), undervaluing the possible poetic and expressive function. Although, on closer inspection, an impression of epic polysyndeton does tend to emerge. An X-ray of this was only captured by the analytical philosopher

Kõiv, whose manuscripts, though completed at the same time, remained in the drawer for a while.

Yet, after an extensive analysis, Enniko and Villup come to a clear conclusion: "The frequencies of the individual conjunctions are most evenly distributed between the sub-dictionaries of the work". There are 10 high-frequency conjunctions in the authorial speech of *Truth and Justice* [...]: 1. *ja* (2,034); 2. *et* (875); 3. *kui* (866); 4. *aga* (479); 5. *nagu* (466); 6. *sest* (440); 7. *või* (205); 8. *ega* (131); 9. *ning* (130); 10. *nii* (105, only as a component of a compound word)." It is acknowledged that coordination is more characteristic of the sentence than subordination in the authorial speech of the work (Enniko, Villup 1978: 38).

In his attempt at a linguo-stylistic approach to Part I of *Truth and Justice*, Joel Sang (1978: 85) also confirmed the high recurrent index and coherence of the text. The exact results represent objective relations, making it possible to formulate the regularities of expression and thought, the significance of which goes beyond specific analysis of the work.

Conclusion: The Method Triangle

At the unveiling of the statue of A. H. Tammsaare in Albu parish in 1936, Gustav Suits admitted that Tammsaare, who did not attend the event, had a creative method that made him a "village realist, an urban impressionist, a neo-romanticist, a symbolist. He is at once all of these things; he does not allow himself to be forced into the formula of any specific keyword" (Suits 1999: 371). Indeed, if Tammsaare has been primarily defined as a psychological realist, then a rather hazy definition would be even more fitting – a *psychological-symbolist realist*. After all, the epic-writer's style of writing is aptly characterised by a tripartite relationship in which the unifying, generalising peak of symbolism tends to rise above the contrasting axis of realism and impressionism, i.e., the external description of the circumstances and their internal reflection.

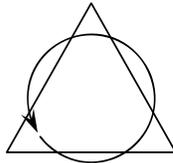
His creative body of work also supports this geometry, wherein the original realistic village depictions were replaced by the lyrical soul-shaking and timelessness of student stories. All three registers were already droning together in the biblical and superhuman-influenced, psychological-aphoristic (the European-deductive) *Judith* (*Juudit*) as well as in (the European-inductive – originating from our own juniper-bush-speaking god) *Kõrboja peremees*. Therefore, the fulcrum slips and Tammsaare's stylistic euphoria is no longer easily maintained: the point of view moves from description to mood and beyond to symbolism, then back again to description, rolling ever onwards. The more precise meaning of the message always remains a little obscure and

open-ended, the sharp angles are cut away, evoking new thoughts and feelings. However, one could argue that the late Tammsaare had already begun to shake this achieved balance by emphasising the allegorical-symbolic in *Kuningal on külm* or the magical-mystical origin in *Põrgupõhja uus vanapagan* at the expense of psychological realism, thus spilling over into the field of magic realism (which, to be honest, could be called mystical realism instead).

This idea is illustrated by the drawing below (Merilai 2011: 533; Merilai 2012: 382).

Tammsaare's method triangle

(allegorical) symbolism



(village) realism

(psychological) impressionism

Finally – with a generalising conditionality – we can also project a Tammsaare-like, methodical, triple relationship onto *but*-tirades in triads. Or, on the contrary, derive a more general dialectic method from the custom of emphasising *but*: moving the focus from realism to symbolism to psychological impressionism. This means a manner of thinking in which the objectification of circumstances results in a distancing modality (subjective ‘internal circumstances’) as a reaction to *but*. The contrasting counterpart tends to be followed from time to time by an uplifting *yet indeed* concession, which reconciles contradictions and alienates starting positions. The meaning of the dimensions, which overrides and exceeds assumptions, is not wholly perceptible to mortals with a restricted field of vision, instilling unspeakable longing and blurry mystery. Tammsaare was zealous to write: each *but* that accompanies a sound or utterance leads to the next turn, circling back around to a changed starting point. Creatively and psychologically, it was undoubtedly an inspiring and unfailing goldmine of productivity. This made Tammsaare a deeply euphoric author, which did not in any way exclude some misanthropy or a sarcastic dislike of progress, but, on the contrary, rather demanded it as a dialogical contrast (Merilai 2012: 383).

So, input-intense repetitive structures, which mark a clear preference for parataxis and vocabulary in the *but*-function, play a strong role in the formation of rhythmic semantics, i.e., the Tammsaare-ish ‘inner-ringing’ fluidity, by

which many of his readers – including the writer himself – are still fascinated. This should be accompanied by co-creative empathy from readers, as otherwise the main tone falls into burdensome rhetoric. Both empathetic and more critical reading styles have spread, but it is not right if only the latter is proficient. Thus, the prose epic sometimes reveals a poetic style based on paradigmatic parallelism, sequences of equivalence. Let them who have the ears for it, hear it.

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