

*Mapping the symbolic capital of a nation: Riga in fin-de-siècle Latvian novels*¹

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Abstract. This article concentrates on the representation of Riga in six *fin-de-siècle* Latvian novels written by Augusts Deglavs, Jānis Poruks, and Andrejs Upits. The relations between the country and the city were changing significantly at the time due to growing social mobility in the Baltic littoral. However, in this paper we also argue that to a considerable extent the descriptions of Riga preserve principles previously employed by Latvian writers who tend to focus on minute descriptions instead of mapping a broader territory. The representation of living conditions in Riga thus fluctuates between true-to-life episodes and the recycling of certain stereotypes that determine the overall perception. More specific elements enter into literary texts in two ways. First, as psychological close-ups become more nuanced, they suggest closer links between fictional characters and carefully depicted milieus. Secondly, in our last example we discover an ideologically conscious effort of Latvian identity construction as the author, Deglavs, promotes the necessity of mapping Riga as the symbolic national capital, thus summarising and transforming ideas already implicit in earlier representations of the city.

Keywords: Latvian literature, Riga, literary representations, literary geography, national ideology

Introduction: Main Ideas and Theoretical Framework

The aim of this paper is to trace the representation of Riga in selected *fin-de-siècle* Latvian novels. Our research was prompted by the question whether Riga, a modern metropolis by the late nineteenth century, has been adequately documented in fiction revealing the whole scale of transformations taking place there

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that includes migration as well as rapid industrial development. We have also been looking for the underlying reasons for specific aspects of representation encountered in the novels. In the introduction we first provide the historical background of prevailing conditions and touch on issues important to the inhabitants of Riga at the turn of twentieth century. We then proceed with an outline of the theoretical framework employed in this research. The paper is further subdivided into three main parts. In the first we discuss the parallel biographies of the three authors whose texts have been dealt with in more detail, Augusts Deglavs, Jānis Poruks, and Andrejs Upīts. The second part scrutinises three novels written and published in the 1890s. In the third part we focus on three texts that appeared in the 1910s. In the conclusion we summarise the main points outlined in the paper.

Fin-de-siècle Riga was a rapidly developing city both in terms of its industrial development and the increasing number of inhabitants. One of the major boosts for the expansion of the city was provided by the construction of the first railroad in the Baltic littoral which, in 1862, connected Riga to the major line running between St. Petersburg and Warsaw. Secondly, in the 1890s the Russian government embarked on an ambitious programme of industrial development. In this context, the Estonian historian Andres Kasekamp provides the following comparative insight: “Improved transportation and economic development stimulated urbanization. Riga’s population multiplied exponentially, growing fivefold in less than 50 years: from 102,000 in 1867 to 282,000 by 1897 and 507,000 by 1913. The other major Baltic cities remained in Riga’s shadow: in 1897 Vilnius had 155,000 inhabitants and Reval had just 60,000. Since most of the new residents of Riga were peasants from the countryside, the ethnic composition of the city also changed swiftly: from 43 per cent German, 25 per cent Russian, 24 per cent Latvian and 5 per cent Jewish in 1867 to 42 per cent Latvian, 26 per cent German, 17 per cent Russian and 7 per cent Jewish in 1897.” (Kasekamp 2018: 80) However, these changes do not indicate similar shifts in social hierarchies. Throughout this period society was still dominated by the Baltic German upper class and representatives of the Russian administration. The political system in imperial Russia restricted possibilities for socially lower classes to achieve political representation in local municipalities. This meant a stalemate of political dynamics that did not match expectations with regard to the social rights of Latvians moving into Riga from the countryside. Therefore, the political aims of the national circles preserved many features already characteristic of the movement of New Latvians in the mid-nineteenth century. (Mintaurs 2022: 73) A major turning point in the assertion of national aspirations was provided by the creation of the Riga Latvian Society in 1868. Even if its principal spokesmen already belonged to established bourgeois

circles, their roots, as revealed in the careful analysis made by Kristine Volfarte, were in the countryside. (Volfarte 2009: 272)

The national identity construction employed the imagery of Latvians that was based on the traditional ways of life in rural communities. This feature was shared by other societies in the Baltic littoral. As pointed out by the Estonian researchers Linda Kaljundi and Eneken Laanes, and the Finnish scholar Ilona Pikkanen in their comparative analysis, “The Finnish and Estonian national movements chose the peasantry as the core of the new nation”. (Kaljundi et al. 2015: 17) Andrievs Niedra, one of the most important *fin-de-siècle* Latvian authors, in the early twentieth century complained about the insufficient attention that had been paid to the successfully developing cities, especially Riga, in literature. (Niedra 1931: 169) In his own literary output, however, Niedra still followed traditional models focusing on the rural community. Paradoxically enough, this trend was at least to some extent already established by earlier Baltic German historiography as well as German literary efforts. Ulrike Plath indicates that in the early nineteenth century the mental landscape of the Baltic provinces as experienced by travellers was created by predominantly focusing on sea journeys or land routes that allowed for an appreciation of the vast agrarian resources. (Plath 2011: 242–252) This partially orientalisng perspective was largely accepted by the ideologues of nineteenth-century Estonian and Latvian romantic nationalism, and in the process of identity construction they fully relied on dominating stereotypes. The activities of the Riga Latvian Society in collecting intangible cultural heritage as well as artefacts from the life of the peasant community culminated as late as 1896 in the First Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition, held in Riga on the occasion of the Tenth All-Russian Archaeological Congress. (Stinkule 2016) The tradition of peasants being considered the core of the nation remained strong in subsequent decades, and was still relevant enough in early twenty-first century Latvian society, according to the sociological investigation of literature carried out by Aija Priedīte. (Priedīte 2012) In her research, Priedīte focuses on twelve novels from different periods of Latvian literary history in order to demonstrate in what ways peasant identity is preserved as an important topic. Based on these opinions, our preliminary assumption is that the representation of Riga in *fin-de-siècle* novels only partially lives up to the role the city had acquired in Latvian economic and social life of the last decades of the nineteenth century.

In order to make a more detailed investigation, in this paper we supplement traditional methods of literary analysis with approaches initiated by literary geography brought into the spotlight by recent developments in digital humanities. In doing this, we also rely on our own previous research. Our two earlier publications (Daija, Kalnačs 2019a; Daija, Kalnačs 2019b), based on the

corpus of texts printed between 1900 and 1914, dealt with the geographical imagination in early twentieth-century Latvian novels including the substantial enlargement of different locations referred to in literary texts. More specifically, we paid attention to the representation of places considered exotic as well as to the depiction of the neighbouring territories of present-day Estonia and Lithuania. Our preliminary conclusions indicated the non-substantiality of differences in geographical imagery encountered in elite literature and popular fiction. (Kalnačs and Daija 2019a: 77–82)

In this paper we include several new aspects. First, we have enlarged the corpus of *fin-de-siècle* novels by adding texts written and published in the 1890s, and thus broadened the temporal spectrum of investigation. At the same time, we decided to focus only on selected texts written by three of the most important authors of the period whose novels had been widely appreciated by literary critics and readers alike, and therefore can be considered representative for the period under discussion. Secondly, one of the principal aspects of this paper is an evaluation of writers with different political inclinations, from liberal to leftist, with the latter being more interested in the representation of the milieu of urban workers. Thirdly, we single out representations of Riga as the largest city in the Baltic littoral and relate these literary interpretations to the wider context of *fin-de-siècle* literary trends.

Recent research in the fields of literary geography and literary cartography has developed and discussed important European trends from various angles. It is important to notice specific features in the representation of the Baltic area. Thus, for example, Barbara Piatti points out that literary cartography generally works well for the nineteenth-century realist novel. (Piatti 2016: 89) However, we notice that Latvian realist fiction mainly focuses on details of everyday life without specifying particular locations, thereby making attempts to arrive at wide-ranging results by means of literary cartography relatively difficult. As demonstrated by our case studies, there is not much difference between realist and modernist novels as we also encounter a mutual overlap of various literary trends.

In his investigation titled the *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*, Franco Moretti points to nineteenth-century novels as important tools of national identity construction. (Moretti 1998) In the Latvian corpus we encounter other priorities. Although national issues remain constantly present in society, the texts under discussion predominantly focus on social inequality. This might be considered an innovative feature in literature that moves beyond national ideas. As our case studies also demonstrate, there is no radical difference between liberal and leftist authors, as all the texts feature largely similar patterns of social stratification in the city.

Parallel biographies: Augusts Deglavs, Jānis Poruks, and Andrejs Upīts

Before turning to literary texts, it is important to provide a brief parallel description of the authors' biographies relevant to our purposes. Each of their personal stories at this time can be subdivided into three phases. The first relates to their childhood; in the next step, there are attempts to establish themselves in society; and, finally, all three writers reach literary maturity while also becoming part of the *fin-de-siècle* intellectual community. It is interesting to note that there are significant differences in the second phase while the first and third periods display much similarity.

All three writers spent their childhoods in the countryside, although in different parts of Latvia, Deglavs in Kurzeme (Courland), Poruks and Upīts in Vidzeme (Livland). Second-generation Latvian intellectuals growing up in towns were still almost non-existent in the 1860s and 1870s. Most writers had completed their education in parish schools. Contrary to those who had started their careers earlier, in the 1870s and early 1880s, and generally remained in the local environment, authors of the next generation more often tried their luck in Riga, moving there to look for work as either teachers or journalists. Those who had some professional interest in the visual arts or music aspired to be even more mobile. Thus, by the late 1880s, after being born into peasant families, a number of young Latvians had entered art academies and conservatoires in the imperial centre, this providing the basis for their professional careers. Most writers, however, found it more difficult to establish themselves due to the lack of higher education, meaning they encountered significant hardships.

In the second phase of their activity, important differences can be discovered in the lives of Augusts Deglavs, Jānis Poruks, and Andrejs Upīts. Deglavs (1862–1922), who was the oldest of the three, came to Riga in 1887 with the aspiration of becoming either a writer, or an actor at the Latvian theatre. However, until 1891 he had to secure his living by working in industry, predominantly as a sawmill employee. His later descriptions of the workers' milieu in Riga are hence to a considerable extent based on first-hand experience acquired during these years. (Grāpis 2013: 116) Subsequently, Deglavs started to work in the press in the early 1890s.

Jānis Poruks' (1871–1911) encounter with the city took a different trajectory. As one of the first Latvians to become acquainted with Baltic German upper circles in the early 1890s, he worked as a private tutor in Riga and was successful enough to get support from a well-to-do patron, which allowed him to study at the Dresden Conservatoire. (Jēgere-Freimane 1922) There he studied music for some semesters in 1893 and 1894 and attended lectures in literature. Upon

returning to Riga, even though his previous activities had not produced any specific results apart from the publication of a German-language essay on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, he was met with general recognition and became one of the most highly valued contributors to the important literary magazine *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts* (Home Guest's Monthly) and other periodicals printed by publisher Arnold Plates and edited by Pēteris Zālīte.

Andrejs Upīts (1877–1970) left his father's farmstead in 1897 after completing preparations for the teacher's exam, which he successfully passed as an extern permitting him to teach at parish schools. After working at Mangāļi parish school on the outskirts of Riga between 1897 and 1901, he acquired the additional rights of a private tutor and was able to improve his social position, although still mainly engaged by education establishments predominantly attended by working-class children. In 1908, after being employed as a teacher for eleven years, Upīts returned to his native region and settled down as a professional writer. He managed to sustain himself and his family through prolific literary activity. (Vāvere 2001: 244)

These trajectories already indicate that there were important similarities in the third phase that show the established literary careers of the three authors. The principal difference was the fact that Deglavs and Poruks worked in the press while Upīts opted for the position of an independent author, which he was able to keep until the breakout of the Great War. Here, however, it is reasonable to take into account a somewhat different situation in two subsequent decades. Contrary to the 1890s, the Latvian literary field had already expanded substantially by the 1900s, and Upīts profited from readers' interest and better financial revenues.²

It is also important to sketch how the literary interests of each author developed during the initial stage of their literary activity. Deglavs's first major publication, *Vecais pilskungs* (The Old Lord of the Castle, 1891), follows the established pattern of representing relations between Latvian peasants and a German landlord. (Daija 2017: 130–137) The conflict dealt with in this novel and the satirical take on Baltic Germans reflect Deglavs's close links to the Riga Latvian Society at the time. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Society in 1893, Deglavs published an overview of its activities. Subsequently, Deglavs political affiliations moved to centre-left, as reflected in his literary interests, which moved toward closer inspection of his own earlier experience in the urban workers' milieu. This provided the background for most of his novels written and published in the 1890s.

² His subsequent literary career was long and controversial, continuing almost until Upīts's death in Soviet Latvia in 1970 at the age of 93.

Poruks established himself among liberal circles almost immediately after his return from Dresden in the mid-1890s, and was considered one of the principal innovators of Latvian literature and a forerunner of early twentieth-century modernist trends. This determined his position as an elite author in the literary field.

Upīts began his career at the turn of the century with short stories mainly based on examples from Russian literature, thus indicating a conscious turning away from the traditional preference of German models. He then continued along a similar path as he became interested in French realist and naturalist literature. In his early attempts Upīts mainly focused on his own experience both in the country and the city, which included various periods of employment as a teacher. The real start of Upīts's career came after 1908 when he became a professional writer.

In the following, we focus on six novels, in which the authors chose Riga as the main location for the action to unfold, and examine the literary strategies these novels adopt. Each text has its own approach in terms of mapping its field of interest. "By determining the elements of a story or a map, by choosing which elements will be prominent and which can remain in the background, and by arranging the elements in a way best suited to the intended effects that writer or cartographer wishes the work to have upon the reader, the author is also determining what *kind* of narrative or a map this will be." (Tally 2013, 54. Emphasis in the original.) In our case studies we discover an approach that generally follows the principles of internal mappability described by Robert Stockhammer as follows: "*Internal mappability* applies to cases in which all of the descriptions of geographic features rendered by a fictional text are consistent with each other and with the rules of Euclidian geometry, such that the world created by this text can be unequivocally depicted on a map." (Stockhammer 2017, 74. Emphasis in the original.) However, our point in this paper is that, even if there was an increasing number of texts that included Riga, the authors did not try to specify locations such that it would allow a detailed mapping of particular places and establish spatial relations between them. In general, previous principles of literary representation did not undergo significant transformation. Like depictions of the countryside, which were dominated by small scale documentation of peasant farmsteads and their living rooms, and did not specifically indicate the represented area, a largely similar approach was employed as writers turned to the representation of Riga. In addition, there is no major difference between the three authors discussed in this paper, nor between the two different time periods we touch upon, the 1890s and the 1910s. The most specific case is provided by Deglavs's novel *Patrioti* (The Patriots, 1912), which he judged to be the first part of a trilogy that should epitomise

turn-of-the-century Riga. Here, in contrast to the otherwise dominant approach of representing contemporary reality, Deglavs tried his hand at a retrospective representation of the Latvians who had gradually establish themselves in the city in the nineteenth century. For this purpose, he intended to provide a much more detailed description of specific localities and portrayed numerous people and events.

The 1890s: newcomers to the city and their experience in different milieus

In this section we turn to representations of Riga in three novels of the 1890s: *Zeltenīte* (Zeltenite, 1896) by Augusts Deglavs, and *Pērļu zvejnieks* (The Pearl fisherman, 1895) and *Rīga* (Riga, 1899) by Jānis Poruks. The first two texts are characteristic stories of a newcomer to the city, even though they draw on different sets of experience. The third novel stands somewhat apart as its principal protagonist was born in Riga and comes from a different and socially much more established background.

Deglavs's *Zeltenīte* can be considered the paradigmatic novel of the 1890s, depicting the workers' milieu. As its main protagonist it features a seamstress, Anna Zeltēnīte, who tries to establish herself in the city, with the narrative following the disappointments and hardships caused by her high, and unfulfilled, expectations and difficult living conditions. The author pays close attention to the immediate surroundings in which she lives, something that provides a key to the understanding of plot development.

Riga experienced its most rapid population increase in the period between 1867 and 1881. It is interesting to note that by 1881 more than 60 percent of the people in Riga were newcomers. (Mieriņa 1978: 21) The swift increase in the population was initially not matched by sufficient living space for the newly arrived workers. The historian Jānis Bērziņš indicates that there were several types of lodging, including small private houses, rented apartments or rooms, and some kind of dwelling proposed by employers, most often barracks. By the end of the nineteenth century the latter had diminished and most workers lived in rented rooms. (Bērziņš 1997: 156) At the same time, problems persisted as many did not consider building rental houses for workers prestigious. The renting for better apartments remained relatively high and led to overpopulation of more modest places, with several people living together in small flats. A common practice for a family who rented an apartment was to rent some living space to a subtenant. This led to situations in which some people had a solid apartment of their own, while alongside them their neighbours' flats were overcrowded. Such a situation also kicks off the conflict

in Deglavs's novel. The relatively prosperous seamstress Zeltēnīte falls in love with the handsome factory worker Saša Pumpurs, who lives next door. After they get married, however, it turns out that the only reason he proposed was the hope that Zeltēnīte had sufficient financial means to allow him to start his own business. When these expectations are not fulfilled, the marriage is immediately dissolved, and, after some further plot complications, the utterly devastated Zeltēnīte falls ill and dies.

The importance of the novel lies in its careful descriptions of living conditions in a courtyard where most of the main characters are quite close to each other. Deglavs demonstrates that there are virtually no private rooms available for most people, and so they divide their time between working hours in the factory and spells of free time when they are in constant interaction with each other. Only some steps separate Zeltēnīte's apartment from the rooms where Saša Pumpurs's greedy and sloppy sister lives with her family. It is through their daily contact that she is able to convince Zeltēnīte that Saša is fond of her, even though this is not the case. Frequent occasions when people come together are festivities, such as the wedding of another couple from the same area at the beginning of the novel. Thus the all-important events of the novel occur in the compressed space of a single courtyard. In addition, to underline the social context and largely similar conditions in various workers' milieus in late nineteenth-century Riga, the author consciously avoids specifically locating these events. The cultural historian Kristīne Volfarte says that among the most characteristic of Riga's suburbs, where the majority of Latvian-speaking workers lived, there were areas either to the west (Pārdaugava) or north (Katrīndambis, Andrejsala, Sarkandaugava) of the city centre, with somewhat later development of the area to the east around so-called Alexander's gate (Aleksandra vārti). (Volfarte 2004: 45) Deglavs, who had lived and worked in both western and northern parts of the city, seems not to make any substantial difference between them, but rather attempts to mark the principal contrast between the periphery and the centre. Again, this is not done in terms of specifying the geography of the city but of concentrating on the interior details. Thus, in contrast to the workers' courtyard with its constant noise, crowded rooms, small kitchens, there is a crucial episode in the novel, when Zeltēnīte has finished working on a new dress. She goes to an upper-class apartment where, at being told to sit in the anteroom and wait for the hostess, she admires through the open doors spacious rooms with paintings and decorated mirrors with gilded frames as well as a beautiful salon with elegant tables and sofas. (Deglavs 2006: 128) In the context of the novel, however, this remains an isolated scene as the focus of the author is on the social inequality and unsatisfactory conditions of working-class newcomers to the city.

Jānis Poruks in his novels sketches a different picture, as he generally delves into the milieu of well-to-do and intellectual circles. The first of his texts under discussion, *Pērļu zvejnieks*, clearly displays this difference as the social background of the neophyte in the city, the largely autobiographical character of Ansis Vairogs, is similar to that of most characters in Deglavs's novel. The son of a parish clerk, Ansis initially lives without substantial funds, and goes to the city largely driven by his idealistic aspiration to fulfil his calling in life, "rooted in the human understanding of romantics such as Richard Wagner, Novalis, and others". (Rožkalne 2009: 241) This move is made possible by the generous support of his benefactor Tālheims, which allows Ansis first to spend some time in Riga and then to make a further move as he continues his studies at the Dresden Conservatoire. This directly coincides with the experience Poruks himself had in the early 1890s (the novel was written almost immediately after his return to Riga).

The subsequent phases in Vairogs's character development are closely linked to different places represented in the narrative. First, the spatially closed rural area with its traditional co-ordinates marked by the church, the school, the cemetery and the country inn. (Berelis 1999: 28) In the next steps Poruks's narrative creates new possibilities. As the protagonist comes to Riga, the topography of the city is characterised through reference to its more impressive architecture compared to rural houses. The author also briefly refers to some important cultural markers such as the main avenue, Alexander Street (*Aleksandra iela*), leading toward the Riga City Theatre (*Stadttheater*). This German-language theatre, which performs both opera and drama, especially fascinates the main character as he enters the spacious rooms of the magnificent building together with a crowd of other interested people. During a performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, he becomes fully immersed in music and closely follows the experiences of the opera's protagonists. Apart from these detailed descriptions, however, Poruks does not attempt to take a closer look at other locations in Riga, which are predominantly emblematic, and simply mentions some well-known places, such as Wehrmannsche Garden (*Vērmanes dārzs*) in the city centre. The fascination of the city thus remains on a general level.

It is interesting to note that, in comparison to the rather limited representation of Riga, Poruks becomes much more detailed when it comes to Ansis' next move, which is to settle in Dresden. Here the important sights of the city, such as the Semperoper, the music academy, the famous terraces along the river Elba (*Brühlsche Terrasse*), and different lodgings where the protagonist lives and meets his friends, are described in more detail. In addition, recreation areas surrounding Dresden are also portrayed. This can be considered a significant landmark in Latvian literature as here Poruks for the first time provides a

detailed description of a large city. Significantly, in *Pērļu zvejnieks*, the author demonstrates that urban space creates possibilities compared to life in the countryside.

Nevertheless, in this novel Riga remains an intermediate location that is perceived in its relation to and difference from rural areas. The principal sights of Riga mentioned in Deglav's *Zeltenīte* and Poruks's *Pērļu zvejnieks* are emblematic and reappear in several period texts, thus being more indicative of the social importance of particular spaces than of their specific features. Comparative analysis of *Zeltenīte* and *Pērļu zvejnieks* also shows that the varieties of experience in the city depend on specific circumstances in which the protagonists find themselves; hence the authors provide relational and contextual representations of reality. (Stefanescu 2013: 38) Coming to the city is a dominant pattern often employed in contemporary literature. (Talivee, Finch 2015) This model was further developed in Latvian novels of the 1910s. In Poruks's *Pērļu zvejnieks* the vivid descriptions of Dresden indicate a somewhat broader spectrum of experience elaborated in the representation of Riga in his own subsequent novel published in 1899.

In *Riga*, Poruks indeed has a slightly different take on the city. First, the change is indicated by having a Baltic German with inherited wealth as the main protagonist; second, for the first time in Latvian literature the author pays close attention to the intoxicating atmosphere of the city. It has to be remembered that in his literary aspirations Poruks appropriates a wide spectrum of literary traditions. (Vecgrāvis 1998) In this particular case, he goes beyond the tradition of classical, and especially romantic, literature and moves toward modernist representations in which, according to the apt formula of Malcolm Bradbury, "the city has become metaphor rather than place". (Bradbury 1991: 97) The push and pull of the city is experienced not only by newcomers but also by people fully immersed in everyday realities that are mirrored by the more detailed portrayal of specific locations.

The main protagonist, Roberts Landens, has inherited his father's industrial business and remains the principal owner of several factories. Instead of continuing with his father's practical engagement, however, Landens has entrusted his uncle with most of the practical tasks and spends his time as a kind of *flâneur* who deliberately and at random immerses himself in various sorts of bohemian activity. (Kalnačs 2022: 124–125) The author indicates the hardly compatible spheres of interest represented by the artists whose company Landens is looking for, and the merchant circles of Riga. The best attempt to bring these different worlds together comes with a large gathering after Landens's wedding to his cousin Alma, although this event does not synchronise the different world views. The author focuses on the various

activities and locations in which Landens finds himself and which Poruks documents quite carefully. The starting narrative point of the novel is Landens's rich mansion close to the city centre (the indicated location is in the area around Strēlnieku dārzs and Ganību dambis, slightly east of the centre) and its beautifully arranged garden. (Poruks 1929: 96; 100–101) This location allows the author to name in passing some important and sociable places in the city centre, which Landens attends, including restaurants, concert halls, and theatres. Even if Poruks does not specifically name each of these places, he creates an atmosphere of living in a large city that is constantly on the move. In his mansion Landens feels relatively detached from his surroundings and can choose whether or not to join large gatherings. The main focus of Poruks's novel is, however, the growing disillusionment of the main character. While seemingly having every opportunity to enjoy his social status and wealth, to which he also aspires when meeting well-known actresses as well as frivolous singers, his relationship with the city is ambivalent. On the one hand, Landens appreciates the various activities that Riga offers, while, on the other, he has to accept the opinion of one of the visiting actresses that the city is too peripheral for a deeper understanding of art. (Poruks 1929: 164) It is in this direction that his dissatisfaction increases, and he comes to the realisation that the possibilities he has do not provide sufficient personal satisfaction. Becoming tired of the different but constantly recycled activities available to him, Landens undergoes a process of disillusionment. Poruks's innovative literary effort links modernity and the city, and, paradoxically enough, this modernist experience precedes the geographically more specific mapping of Riga developed in novels written in the 1910s.

The 1910s: social and gender inequality and the changing role of the city

In this part we focus on two novels by Andrejs Upīts, *Sieviete* (The Woman, 1910) and *Zīda tīklā* (In the Silk Net, 1912), as well as the panoramic novel *Patrioti* (The Patriots, 1912) by Augusts Deglavs, envisaged as the first part of a trilogy about Riga.

In his political preferences, Upīts followed the trajectory earlier indicated by Deglavs, gradually acquiring more leftist views. Initially Upīts was linked to the activities of the Riga Latvian Society and participated in the activities of several commissions. Soon, however, he changed his position and became one of the most outspoken defenders of Marxist ideas. These are also partially displayed in his novels, which largely are in the tradition of the naturalist novel established by Deglavs's *Zeltenīte*. Upīts also relies on his personal experience,

especially in *Zīda tīklā*, while *Sieviete* focuses on a female character in a manner that reminds one of the characteristic *fin-de-siècle* literary trend of demonising women. Generally, Upīts's early novels portray conflict as more radical from the social as well as gender point of view. At the same time, there are links to the modernist aspects of Poruks's representation.

The novel *Sieviete* is divided into three parts, the first two initially being printed as separate stories, which explains the considerable difference between them. In the first part, we encounter four men living in a private pension. During one afternoon they embark on the exploration of various locations in the city. They start by attending a charity concert, followed by a social party, while later they visit a brothel. Upīts identifies all four men as middle or lower middle-class; among them there is a public official, a teacher, and a student. Attention is paid to the substantial difference between their social status, on the one hand, and daily habits that display the shallow interests and futile existence of which they are also partially aware, on the other. The first part of the novel ends with the suicide of one of these men because he is disappointed in his life, a loss of illusion reminds one of the main protagonist in Poruks's *Rīga*. Further plot developments focus more specifically on Elza Pūpola, whose brother is one of the inhabitants of the pension. Upon her arrival from the countryside, she is immediately indentured in the activities of her brother's companions and becomes a victim of their brutality. Thus, to a considerable extent Upīts builds on the storyline introduced in Deglavs's *Zeltenīte*, which revolves around the hardships faced by a humiliated woman. Upīts's perspective is merciless and at the same time also in tune with *fin-de-siècle* perceptions of the danger women present to society. On the one hand, Elza Pūpola is humiliated by men, while, on the other, she also attempts to take her revenge even if this is ultimately unsuccessful as she tragically falls in love with one of her former tormentors. The main events, similarly to Deglavs's *Zeltenīte*, are largely linked to one location, a private boarding house in Riga. Other places important for the plot, such as the society where the charity concert takes place, are indicated only loosely. The scale of the city points to this being Riga, but its representation is vague.

A slightly different approach was taken by Upīts in his novel *Zīda tīklā*, which more specifically locates some of the places represented in the text. As these locations are relatively distinct from one another, a larger panorama of Riga and its suburbs emerges. The plot of the novel is based on the experience of a young teacher who also aspires to become a poet, and in his representation of the main character, Jānis Robežnieks, the author partially traces his own experience as well as describing milieus important for his career development. The fascination with and fear of women is a topical issue. Social motifs and the

potential workers' movement, which also involves Jānis's brother, Mārtiņš, are also discussed.

Jānis Robežnieks's personal relationships undergo several stages that, more importantly for our purposes here, are also linked to four specific locations. First, the modest circumstances at the Mangaļi parish school that come close to the author's initial experience there are described. (Upīts 1923: 29) The connection to the city centre from this location is secured by a small boat that brings people to and fro, indicating at one and the same time closeness to and distance from Riga. When Jānis finally is able to leave this place behind him, his way leads from Riga harbour directly to the heart of the city where he is appointed private tutor by a rich family. In summer, this family moves out of the city and goes to nearby Jūrmala, a resort on the shore of the Baltic Sea and a popular escape of the well-to-do circles. Upīts portrays this second period of Jānis's career in significant detail, as he shows how lively social life in Jūrmala is. It includes, among other activities, visits to the famous concert hall in Edinburgh (Dzintari). Upīts links his description of this kind of leisure to the social status of characters, and delves into complicated feelings of the protagonist who recognises that he is a short-term visitor to the upper circles of society. His doubts are soon confirmed as Jānis is fired and finds himself at a factory school in Pārdaugava on the western edge of Riga. In this third stage of his career as a teacher he experiences radically different conditions, fluctuating between the simple living habits of his brother and other conscious workers who dwell in small rooms, and more pretentious people from the same environment who try to mimic the upper classes, especially in some of their leisure activities. In the fourth and final part of Jānis's spiritual and physical journey he finds himself back in the countryside where he alternates between different social strata, the peasant household of his father, the house of a rich neighbour and the elder of the parish, and, finally, the manor of the local landlord whom he also visits on a regular basis.

In terms of mapping territory, Upīts's novels demonstrate the great attraction of Riga, around which the hopes of the protagonist constantly circle, while at the same time he is distanced from it, spending his time in four different locations – the parish school on the eastern outskirts of the city, the summer lodgings of his employers in Jūrmala, the western suburb of Pārdaugava, and finally the countryside. Once again, Riga and especially its central parts are in the distance as an unfulfilled dream for the newcomer to the city.

The question is whether the aim of the author has been to depict particular places or, rather, are we encountering an attempt to construct the socially divided space of the luxurious city centre, on one hand, and its modest suburbs, on the other; we can only speculate whether “‘real-world’ debate [is relevant]

for the understanding of *literary* place and space". (Bushell 2016: 126. Emphasis in the original.)

The categories of real and literary space presumably almost match each other in Deglavs's novel *Patrioti*, at least on the conceptual level. Here the author paints a retrospective picture of the Latvians who enter Riga in the 1860s and 1870s. They gradually position themselves on a par with the previously dominant Baltic German population. The milieus to an extent are similar to other texts discussed in this paper (rich bourgeois apartments, houses in Jūrmala, etc.) although their descriptions are much more elaborate. The main purpose is not to link the milieu to the action, but rather to create a panorama of social life that is achieved by showing people in various locations. Here we can speak of a continuation of the invention of a tradition now taking on a major literary form, the novel, in an attempt of identity construction that reminds one of the ideas articulated in Moretti's *Atlas*.

In the formulation of Irina Novikova, Riga in the novel becomes a constructed and paradigmatic contemporary location: "The important question for Deglavs was how to represent a small nation through its inclusion in modern urban space, historically alienated from its collective consciousness. The novel focuses on multiculturalism as the central condition for this ambiguous, multi-differential production of identity and language. Deglavs tried to capture the melting space and time of the city, representing characters from a rich ethnic, social, and cultural spectrum – German traders and Latvian intellectual leaders, artisans and Russian workers, emancipated women and students. The novel documents the process of forming a collective national identity and a modern sensibility of belonging in an urban ethnosocial geography." (Novikova 2004: 42) In this construction process, the author pays attention to numerous public buildings and their architecture as well as describing a variety of interiors including personal apartments, offices, and pubs. (Audere 1999: 56–57; 66–67) The overall impression is that these descriptions become a dominant feature in the novel, with the primary aim of creating a panorama of the city with less relevance to the characters' experience. The author makes use of minute description as a tool for providing the ideological meaning of the city rather than being interested in revealing particularities of different locations and their capacity to contribute to the understanding of psychological nuances or narrative complications. Even if we, for example, trace several places through which the main protagonist, Pēteris Krauklītis, gradually finds himself in the city, different episodes serve introductory purposes in a conscious attempt to transform real places into literary ones, this being done in a somewhat overemphasised manner. This is perhaps one of the underlying reasons why Deglavs's large project eventually remained unfinished. In the opinion of literary

scholar Ausma Cimdiņa, the author also attempts to reveal the constantly changing dynamics of the city, which might be another explanation for the intended third part of Deglavs's remaining incomplete. (Cimdiņa 2013: 31) Despite their potential shortcomings, however, the texts discussed in this paper come close to a representation of the social dynamics typical of a developing city that displays characteristic features of modernity.

Conclusion: the paradoxes of representation through the prism of literary geography

Our aim in this paper was to follow the representation of Riga in *fin-de-siècle* Latvian novels and to find specific features of these texts from the perspective of literary history. We have come to the conclusion that previously established patterns of rural representation strongly influence the depiction of urban space. The attempts to introduce Riga to Latvian readers focus on various minor details that demonstrate characteristic close-ups of particular locations but do not create a more elaborate portrayal of the developing city. This approach is similar to previously known literary representations of the countryside with their focus on everyday situations in relatively recognisable milieus. In their depictions of peasant families, Latvian authors had focused on particular characters and their relations, preserving a lot of similarities in the living conditions many of them represent. A similar approach is employed when the authors turn their attention to the depiction of the city. In terms of geographic imagery, the principal juxtaposition is that of the centre and periphery. The modest living conditions of urban workers are described in detail, for example, in Deglavs's novel *Zeltenīte*, while well-known places in the city centre are mentioned only in passing without more specific attention. A very similar trend is observable in Poruks's novels, written in the 1890s, although here the author is more interested in depicting upper-class milieus. Importantly enough, in literary texts conceived in the first decade of the twentieth century, this representational trend does not undergo significant change. In particular, scrutinising Upīts's novels, where social criticism becomes considerably more explicit in terms of literary geography, we similarly encounter a generalised juxtaposition of the centre and the periphery. In his turn, Deglavs takes a different ideological perspective with his retrospective focus on Latvians who gradually establish themselves in Riga in the 1860s and 1870s, yet he describes their journey in similar terms of moving from periphery to centre. Despite descriptions of particular locations becoming more vivid, the representation of specific places still serves primarily ideological purposes and refers to the social distinction between different characters. Our enquiry thus brings us to the conclusion that

the principles of representation of the city in *fin-de-siècle* Latvian novels largely builds on earlier representations of the countryside. The focus on minor details as well as on stereotypical generalisations significantly limits the possibilities of applying the tools of literary geography and literary cartography to the analysis of these texts.

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