



SARIANNA KANKKUNEN

Terrains of Imagination in Contemporary Finnish Literature

Harassing Habitats in Maarit Verronen's Fiction

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Introduction

This study examines Maarit Verronen's literary works and their relationship with space. The spaces and places depicted in Verronen's works range from Antarctic glaciers to the urban islands of the Helsinki archipelago and the narrow confines of a miniature apartment. Among contemporary Finnish authors, Verronen has gained a reputation as an architect of imaginary worlds and a spokesperson for the outsiders of society. Her works are known for their strange, dreamlike environments, and peculiar protagonists who are drawn to desolate places and obsessive pastimes. Verronen's oeuvre provides a rich corpus that is simultaneously distinctive and representative of developments within the field of Finnish literature in the last three decades. These developments involve such phenomena as the ontological instability of postmodernist fiction, the rise of dystopian fiction, the trend of individualization, the reassessment of the grand nationalist narratives, and the interest in environmental issues. Since all these phenomena can be associated with the heightened role of space in contemporary life, I have chosen to approach Verronen's works from the viewpoint of space and place. This study aligns itself with the contemporary approach referred to as spatial literary studies, which is connected to the so-called spatial turn within the humanities.

Verronen's longstanding and prolific career has given her a unique presence in Finland, although the author herself is famously withdrawn. Her impact in the field of Finnish fiction can be described as the early adopter and pioneer of certain genres. Her work paved the way for Finnish science fiction, fantasy, and dystopian fiction, all of which have been areas of rich literary production in the last three decades. Verronen presented these genres to the public; her shortlistings for the Finlandia Prize in 1993 and 1995 were among the first instances when works of fantasy were included in the selection.

Besides particular genres, Verronen's oeuvre can be linked to the pronounced spatiality of contemporary fiction, a feature that has been pointed out by Wolfgang Hallet (2014). As Michel Foucault (1986) envisioned in the 1960s, space and spatiality have been vital for the understanding of late modernity. From environmental concern to dystopian visions, Verronen's works of fiction process and assess dreams and nightmares that contemporary culture assigns to space and spatiality. Verronen's oeuvre thus provides a viewpoint in the vistas of Nordic and northern understanding of space in the early 2000s. This study sheds light on the role of urban nature, for instance, in Verronen's city visions, and analyses her configurations of a dystopic

future and climate change. As the following analyses demonstrate, Verronen's works of fiction foreground the question of spatial agency and probe the ethical and moral implications that arise on phenomena such as homeownership, the erosion of public spaces, homecoming, or the notion of habitat and its application in social rather than ecological discourse.

For those interested in spatial theory, this work offers case studies of the application of spatial concepts. Literary spaces and places were already a focus of scholarly interest well before the spatial turn. The turn, however, has offered literary scholars an abundance of new concepts and a fertile ground of intellectual debate. This study provides analyses of Verronen's literary worlds that combine spatial theory to the knowledge of literary tropes and genre conventions. It is my hope, therefore, that this work showcases how spatial theory can guide literary research and serve as a tool for close reading.

Maarit Verronen: Between Realism and Postmodernism, North and South

Maarit Verronen (b. 1961) was born in Kalajoki, a small town on the west coast of Finland, in the region of Northern Ostrobothnia. She studied astronomy in the northern city of Oulu, worked as a part-time university lecturer, and completed a licentiate, i.e., a predoctoral degree, in 1991, before committing herself fully to authorial work. Her first published works of fiction appeared in small science fiction and fantasy magazines, which, along with the success she had in writing contests, gained her a name among readers of speculative fiction. Early on, her works of fiction transgressed genre boundaries, which contributed to her becoming one of the first authors to make their way from Finnish science fiction fandom¹ to the larger public. Verronen made her literary debut with the short story collection *Älä maksa lautturille* ('Do Not Pay the Ferryman,' 1992), which received the Kalevi Jäntti Prize.

Verronen's work as a pioneer of speculative fiction was one of the grounds on which she was granted the State Prize for Literature in 2018. In 1993 and 1995, her novels were shortlisted for the Finlandia Award, the most prestigious literary award in the country. Despite her success in the field of literary awards, Verronen has been consistent in her withdrawal from publicity, having appeared rarely in public, and even then mostly at minor cultural events, public libraries, and occasional articles about the Helsinki archipelago.

Since her debut, Verronen's works have taken two opposing paths. Her perceptive and unassuming prose, the style she developed in her fandom publications (Verronen 1991; 1986), has increasingly found its subject matter from everyday things and banal settings, which are then, unexpectedly, treated with an element of shock, peculiarity, or absurdity. Works like these include *Kulkureita & Unohtajia* ('Wanderers & Forgetters,' 1996b), *Luotettava ohikulkija* ('A Passer-By You Can Trust,' 2002a), *Keihäslintu* ('Spearbird,' 2004a), and *Saari kaupungissa* ('Island in the City,' 2007). In these works,

1. Finnish science fiction and fantasy fandom is characterized by active publishing, which has helped to educate new writers on the field. Another feature of the field is its high level of collective voluntary work, which culminates in Finncon, the annual convention. For a thorough overview of Finnish science fiction fandom, see Hirsjärvi (2009).

Verronen's long-term interest in the fantastic evolves into a search for the abnormal in the mundane, and human frailty is simultaneously the source of oddity and the target of observation. Alongside these plain narratives, another line of work begins to emerge and develops in the direction of genre fiction. *Pimeästä maasta* ('Out of the Dark Lands,' 1995) is a fantasy novel with an imaginary, although allegorical, geography and culture. In the 2000s, Verronen shifts into dystopian fiction: *Karsintavaihe* ('The Elimination Phase,' 2008) and *Kirkkaan selkeää* ('Bright and Clear,' 2010) present a near future of Finland and Europe, offering bleak visions of an oppressive yet unstable society. Finally, the novel *Hiljaiset joet* ('Silent Rivers,' 2018) is a full-blown apocalypse of a dying Earth.

Although critics have often highlighted the originality of Verronen's fiction (see, e.g., Manninen 2013; Soikkeli 2001), many aspects of her prose can be associated or at least compared with the shifts taking place in Finnish literature in the 1980s and onward. The 1980s were characterized by a newly found interest in short stories, as the decades' debutants, such as Rosa Liksom, Juha Seppälä and Joni Skiftesvik,² experimented with the short format. Verronen, too, started her career as a writer of short stories and has continued this line of work over the years.

Many of the short prosaists of the late 1980s and early 1990s sought the element of shock (see Eskola 1996), be it the linguistic vulgarity, violence, and nonconformity of Rosa Liksom's marginalized subjects in the collection *Yhden yön pysäkki* (1985) or the extreme cynicism in the depiction of capitalist society in Juha Seppälä's *Super Market* (1991) (for Liksom, see Sandbacka 2017; for Seppälä, see Ojajarvi 2006 and Juntunen 2012). Instead of the obtrusive strategies and aesthetics employed by her contemporaries, Verronen's early works draw from her background in science fiction and fantasy, a choice that gives her short stories their signature sense of wonder and strangeness. These aesthetic and thematic emphases might have made Verronen's works more unassuming than those of her contemporaries; however, at the same time, these same qualities drew her farther away from the dominant realist tradition of Finnish literature. The prominent works of short fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, while transgressive in many aspects, were heavily committed to the realist and naturalist undercurrents of the Finnish canon. Liksom's works, for instance, make use of postmodernist strategies such as hyperbolics, the aesthetics of excess, and parody, but these characteristics have often been interpreted in the framework of Finnish realist and naturalist tradition (see, e.g., Kirstinä 2007), and rightly so: as Kasimir Sandbacka (2017, 14–21) suggests in his study, Liksom's narrative art engages with the reassessment of the modern project. Against this background, it is easy to see how certain components of Verronen's prose fiction – elements of fantasy, dreamlike settings, abstract and minimalistic detailing – contributed to the critics', scholars', and readers' sense of Verronen's originality.

2. Rosa Liksom (b. 1958) started her career as a literary *enfant terrible* with outrageous and linguistically experimental short stories. From there on, she has developed into an esteemed writer whose topics range from Finland's cultural relationship with Russia to historical turning points of the twentieth century. Juha Seppälä's (b. 1956) experimental prose, sharp social criticism, and linguistic precision have made him one of the most acclaimed authors of his time. Joni Skiftesvik (b. 1948) is known for his short prose that often thematizes historical topics and seafaring. Skiftesvik has received the Runeberg Award (2015) and the Pro Finlandia medal (2005).

Verronen's position with regard to the realisms of Finnish literature is, however, a complicated matter. Perhaps the greatest disparity between Verronen's oeuvre and realist fiction is the way her works eschew societies and collectives in favor of the subjective experience. In the Finnish context, this preference for subjectivity is significant because, as many scholars have pointed out (see, e.g., Juntunen 2015, 101–2), most of the canonical novels of Finnish literature distinctively revolve around collectives. In this regard, Verronen's narratives may draw comparison to the postmodernist short prose of Liksom, who also depicts marginalized groups, minorities, and social classes. Verronen's characters, however, should not be interpreted in the context of underprivilege and social marginalization – the exclusion of Verronen's outsiders, vagabonds, and wanderers is ontological and existential rather than societal.

While Verronen's characters inhabit a distinct world of abnormality, individuality, and peculiarity, her prose fiction does approach realism in the realms of style and representation. This realistic tendency is discernible at the level of language, which in Verronen's case is simple, unobtrusive and accessible, thus adhering to realist ideals. The lack of linguistic experimentation, a foundational trait of modernist and postmodernist prose, and metafictionality, the cornerstone of postmodernist literature, also suggest an influence from realist traditions. Moreover, Verronen's tendency to favor coherent and closed plots – another factor in the accessibility of her prose fiction – further positions her fiction closer to the realisms than the postmodernisms or modernisms of Finnish literature.

A similar sense of wonder that is present in Verronen's texts can be found in the works of Leena Krohn. Krohn did her breakthrough in the 1980s with *Donna Quijote ja muita kaupunkilaisia* (1983) and *Tainaron* (1985). Krohn's stylized, carefully composed text fragments combine dreamy visions with dystopian fears and philosophical problems. Stylistically, Verronen and Krohn are very different, as Verronen's works of fiction are less fragmentary and more plot-driven than Krohn's, and Krohn's language, although clear and restrained, is more aesthetically oriented than Verronen's plain discourse. There are, however, similarities between the two authors: Verronen and Krohn both work with short prose, draw from speculative genres, and employ the genre of allegory. In her study on Krohn's fiction, Pirjo Lyytikäinen (2013a, 18–47; 2014) highlights the frictional nature of an allegorical text; the strange and peculiar world of an allegorical text is meant to estrange the reader so that the literal interpretation of the narrative makes way for an allegorical reading. Krohn's fragmentary narratives and their open endings follow this basic principle (Lyytikäinen 2013a). Some of Verronen's narratives, especially the novel *Pimeästä maasta*, invite the allegorical interpretation by outlining the storyworld only in broad terms and with the help of toponyms that emphasize the moral nature of places. Unlike Krohn's texts, Verronen's narratives can be read as works of fantasy, which makes their association with the genre of allegory looser.

Another point of comparison is the so-called 'School of Evil' (*pahan koulukunta*), a loosely defined group of authors whose works were associated with moral criticism, the theme of evil, and lack of values.³ Ville Sassi (2012, 15–27) presents an interesting

3. Authors who have been associated with the School of Evil include Annika Idström, Esa Sariola, Eira Stenberg, Juha Seppälä, and – in Sassi's (2012) study – also Matti Yrjänä Joensuu.

analysis of the construction of this so-called school and describes how the cultural and societal changes of the 1980s led critics and literary scholars to interpret the presence of moral themes as a disruption within the tradition of the Finnish novel. Verronen's appearance in the field of literature was read against this literary discussion to the extent that Leena Kirstinä (2000, 212) designated her the forerunner of a 'School of Goodness.' Kirstinä's assessment was based on Verronen's early works, especially the Silberwald stories (1992) and the novel *Yksinäinen vuori* ('The Lonesome Mountain,' 1993), which draw from the genres of adventure novel, romance, and heroic sagas. In hindsight, Kirstinä's judgment might have been hasty, especially if we consider such works as *Keihäslintu*, which takes a painfully sharp-sighted look at the cruelty of human nature and underlines its message with a metaphor of species extinction. Kirstinä's view on the ethical stance of Verronen's prose fiction does, however, gain support from Pertti Lassila's (2007) critique of the novel *Saari kaupungissa*, in which Lassila praises Verronen's 'intellectual optimism.'

As this study proposes, Verronen's works, as postmodern as they may seem, are in many ways committed to the ideals of Enlightenment and the sovereignty of reason and rationality. The latter half of Verronen's career exemplifies how her oeuvre frequently embraces postmodernist themes and techniques while upholding values that are not postmodernist.

From intertextuality to fragmentation, Verronen's works employ multiple postmodernist techniques. *Karsintavaihe*, *Kirkkaan selkeää*, and *Hiljaiset joet* make use of the crossing and mixing of genres; *Luotettava ohikulkija* draws from magical realism and relies on a dreamlike atmosphere; and *Saari kaupungissa* is a fragmented portrait of a woman and her hometown, a narrative that continuously breaks down the linearity of traditional storytelling. The dystopian duology relies on a wealth of intertextual hints at classics of the dystopian genre. Thematically as well, the works touch upon many of the pivotal topics of postmodernist literary fiction: *Luotettava ohikulkija* is a medley of narratives on freedom, yet one that also produces a fine-tuned analysis on the paranoia that inevitably follows when the human subject is presented with the freedom of choice. *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää* foreground the effects of technology and market capitalism upon space, society, and relationships and present these phenomena in a critical manner. *Keihäslintu* consists of short stories that often take place in ambiguous locations and fantastic miniature worlds that draw similarities to historiographic metafiction.

Yet each of the mentioned works subscribe to values that can be related to rationality and reason. In *Karsintavaihe* and *Hiljaiset joet*, these values are articulated through the protagonists' actions and their methodical decision-making and highlighted by the narrator's observationalist tone of voice. *Keihäslintu* – a novel that studies the inhumanity of humans and parallels it with the theme of species extinction – ends with a cathartic scene in which the protagonist is able to distance herself from the cruelty of humankind by expressing her sorrow for an extinct bird. The narrative stages the protagonist's journey – which resembles a scientific enterprise and is set in several scholarly institutions – as a process of not merely mourning but also elevating herself above the murderous instincts that drive the human race. Verronen's narratives hence remain hopeful about scientific inquiry, rational thinking, and the human subject's capability of progress. Whereas the dystopian duology of *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää* both embrace the critique of market capitalism, the author's later

works, such as *Vanhat kuviot* ('The Old Daily Round,' 2012), present a sharp criticism of premodern communities and the peripheries of the late modern world that still resist modernity. These works pertain to a line of criticism that can be traced back to the author's second novel, *Pimeästä maasta*. Among Finnish authors, Verronen is one of the few to consistently portray the structural and ideological problems of premodern and agrarian societies. These issues include patriarchy, class division, superstition, bigotry, and tribalism, to name but a few.

As already stated, Verronen's role in Finland has been that of a forerunner in the fields of fantasy, science fiction, and other genres of speculative fiction. Her influence can be observed in the *reaalifantastikot* group and the notion of Finnish weird (*suomikumma*). The former is a group of writers; the latter is a Finnish version of the Anglo-American genre of new weird, which will be discussed in this chapter (for *suomikumma*, see Samola and Roine 2014). Both work as a genre concept. The features of these two genres are similar: they both underscore elements of fantasy and highlight their genre-crossing function (Raipola 2019; for *suomikumma*, see Samola and Roine 2014; for *reaalifantastikot*, see Ollikainen 2017). These features resonate strongly with the oeuvre of Verronen; her literary career consists of multiple genres, genre-hybrids, and a tendency to embrace both the realist tradition of Finnish canon and speculative genres. The term *reaalifantasia* was coined by Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen (b. 1966) as a genre-crossing effort to employ elements of both speculative fiction, such as fantasy, and realist writing. In addition to Jääskeläinen, the group includes J. Pekka Mäkelä (b. 1962), Anne Leinonen (b. 1973), and Juha-Pekka Koskinen (b. 1968). As Minttu Ollikainen (2017) suggests, a key feature of the works of *reaalifantastikot* is the instability of their storyworlds. This phenomenon can also be found in Verronen's works, especially in the short stories of her early career, such as *Kulkureita & Unohtajia*. In these narratives, people and places disappear or transform overnight, time does not flow as it usually does, and identities are lost or suddenly found.

Verronen's two dystopian novels, which were published in 2008 and 2010, were received well and read widely. By taking up the dystopian genre, Verronen was among many; dystopian fiction, a genre with a short and sparse history in Finland, became a literary phenomenon in the 2010s. According to Isomaa and Lahtinen (2017, 11), dystopian fiction was published in the 1990s and 2000s at a rate of ten to 20 books per decade. A massive leap was taken in the 2010s, with 70 titles published between 2010 and 2017 alone (Isomaa and Lahtinen 2017, 11). The Finnish dystopias of the 2010s include works such as Antti Tuomainen's detective story *Parantaja* (2010), Mikko-Pekka Heikkinen's comic war novel *Terveiset Kutturasta* (2012), Emmi Itäranta's poetic climate fiction novel *Teemestarin kirja* (2012, transl. *Memory of Water*, 2012), and Anu Holopainen's young adult dystopia *Ihon alaiset* (2015). As these examples suggest, dystopian fiction had developed into a versatile literary genre that ranged from comic to tragic and served young adults as well as elderly readers of crime fiction. When compared to other examples of the genre, Verronen's dystopian duology is markedly critical and socially conscious. *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää* focus on societal questions: on the problems of working life, trade union affairs, urban planning, finance capitalism, and the overwhelming sense of precarity that defines the human existence within these parameters.

Stylistic, periodic, and ideological associations aside, Verronen's work can also be situated along spatial coordinates. Born in Kalajoki, having studied in Oulu, and

currently residing in Helsinki, Verronen has practiced the blurring of both genre and regional boundaries. This, however, is not a unique trait; as Sanna Karkulehto (2010, 221) remarks in her article on the northern Finnish authors of the 2000s, most debutant authors of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s had left the north for southern Finland, especially Helsinki. Among these are Anna-Leena Härkönen, Rosa Liksom, Kauko Röyhkä, Hannu Väisänen, Katja Kettu, and Riikka Pulkkinen (Karkulehto 2010, 221). Considering the long and viable tradition of subnational regionalism in northern Finland – one that particularly finds its expression in the literature and literary life of the 1960s and onward (see, e.g., Carlsson et al. 2010a, 7–8; Mäkelä 1999; Niemi 1999, 183; Turunen 1999, 195) – it is relevant to reflect on the ‘northernness,’ or the regional association, of Verronen. The edited collection *Jäiset laakerit: artikkeleita pohjoisista naiskirjailijoista* (‘Frozen Laurels: Articles on Northern Female Authors,’ Tuohimaa, Leppihalme, and Työlähti 1998) incorporates Verronen among the female writers of the Finnish north. A similar conclusion is made in the groundbreaking literary history *Pohjois-Suomen kirjallisuushistoria* (‘The Literary History of Northern Finland,’ Carlsson et al. 2010b). The collection’s section on Maarit Verronen, by Anna Alatalo and Jaana Märsynaho (2010), is short and descriptive, but the collection as a whole offers a multifaceted view on the literature written in northern Finland and thus provides context for Verronen’s works.

A proper examination of Verronen’s regional association requires, naturally, a conceptualization on the region, namely, the Finnish north. The editors of *Pohjois-Suomen kirjallisuushistoria* represent multiple conceptualizations of north and refrain from providing direct coordinates of a region that is arguably just as imagined, cultural, contextual, and personal as it is geographical; they do, however, suggest that the literature of northern Finland either represents northern Finland and/or is written by authors who reside in the northern parts of the country (Carlsson et al. 2010a, 9–10). Geographically, Carlsson et al. (2010a, 10) suggest a demarcation that includes Northern Ostrobothnia and some areas of Central Ostrobothnia. As Verronen was raised and studied in Northern Ostrobothnia and published her first works in Oulu, her inclusion among the northern Finnish authors is understandable. This interpretation gains further support from the fact that the novel *Pimeästä maasta* implicitly represents the Finnish north, although the storyworld consists of allegorical and fantastic elements. Instead of the Finnish north, most of Verronen’s northern settings are situated outside Finland: in the Alps of Central Europe, in the Antarctic, or in the Arctic. As Carlsson et al. (2010a, 12) note, the literature of northern Finland has a tendency to build intertextual associations to previous works of the same northern canon. Among Verronen’s works, only the novel *Pimeästä maasta* carries significant and meaningful allusions to the writings of the canonical northern authors, especially Timo K. Mukka. More numerous are the works that represent the Finnish south: *Saari kaupungissa, Muutama lämmin päivä* (‘A Few Warm Days,’ 2019b), and the many local histories and works of nonfiction, such as *Sulhanen* (2014) and *Varjosaari* (2019c). Instead of emphasizing northernness or regionalist self-determination, Verronen’s prose fiction seems to be critical of these tendencies. *Vanhat kuviot*, a collection of short stories, thematizes regionalism through representations of isolated communities, and associates it with antimodern and patriarchal ideologies. A similar tendency can be discerned in Verronen’s extinction trope, which is examined in more detail in the ‘Living Space and the Troubles of Homecoming in *Pieni elintila*’ section of Chapter 6.

Juha Ridanpää (2006) considers the conceptualization of the Finnish north a phenomenological question, as the essence of the region is, according to him, a deeply personal and relational matter. Along those lines, my suggestion would be to consider Maarit Verronen not a northern or southern Finnish writer but rather a writer whose work has transgressed regional boundaries and deconstructed the existing imaginations of the Finnish north and south. Verronen (2004c; see also 2019a) herself has expressed a strong argument against categorizing her within the regionalist northern or southern groupings.

VERRONEN, NORDIC AND EUROPEAN LITERATURES: FANTASY, DYSTOPIA, AND OTHER POINTS OF CONTACT

Verronen's early publications drew attention due to their foreign and unexpected settings. In his critique of Verronen's debut collection, Antti Majander (1992) approaches Verronen's fiction as a representation of 'Generation Interrail' and spends a good amount of the critique analyzing the foreign settings of the stories. He then concludes that these choices attest to the author's exceptional open-mindedness, which, according to him, sometimes borders on recklessness (Majander 1992). Majander's critique exemplifies the reception of a debutant author whose subject matter and setting deviate from the mainstream of Finnish fiction in the early 1990s. Verronen's authorial image became less Finnish and more European, especially because her debut was followed by works of fiction that continued along the same lines: the second book takes place in Central Europe and is inspired by local myths about the Alps and the numerous short stories are set in either imaginary landscapes or Nordic, Central European or Balkan places. But, besides providing settings and inspiration for her fiction, the Nordic, European, and Anglo-American context is in numerous ways intertwined in Verronen's writing. A closer look at the international literary influences and context of Verronen's works also illustrates the many shifts and trends that shaped the literary market in the 1990s and 2000s.

Fantasy, horror, and science fiction were not genres of mainstream fiction in 1980s and 1990s Finland, nor was it customary that works of fiction drew elements from these genres. In the Nordic context, however, Verronen's genre preferences seem less peculiar.

In the 1980s,⁴ Norwegian literature developed a focus on fantasy and myth. Harald S. Næss (1993, 347) suggests that this can be observed especially in children's literature; but, as he himself notes while writing about Kjartan Fløgstad (b. 1944) and Jan Kjaerstad (b. 1953), postmodern authors of the 1980s that wrote for adults experimented with fantasy and imagination too (Næss 1993, 330–32). In addition to Fløgstad, coined as the magical realist of Norwegian literature, Norwegian writers that can be associated with postmodern interest in fantasy and genre blending include satirist Ragnar Hovland (b. 1952), writer and translator Mari Osmundsen (b. 1951), who writes under a pseudonym, and children's author Tormod Haugen (1945–2008). The shift toward fantasy can be seen as a departure from the aesthetics of the 1970s; as Næss (1993, 307) outlines, Norwegian literature of the 1970s was characterized by the documentarist style and the subject matter of everyday life.

4. Verronen's first novel was published in 1992, but her short stories began to appear in magazines in the 1980s.

Osmundsen's narratives in particular, which from 1980s onward incorporate elements of fantasy, myth, and folk tales, bear a close resemblance to Verronen's prose. Osmundsen's works of fiction, as Raket Christina Granaas (2012) writes, maintain faith in the individual, however weak and insignificant they may seem, and embrace a sense of optimism and hope. Verronen's early works such as *Älä maksa lautturille* and *Yksinäinen vuori* draw, equally, from the folk tales and mythology while containing a message of hope. For both authors, the fantastic is not only an aesthetic device but an ethical stance; the wonders, the miracles and the sudden magical element in the middle of an everyday scene call for the reader's curiosity and accepting and playful attitude.

Although there are similarities between Norwegian and Finnish literatures in the 1970s – realism, emphasis on social and structural issues, and the documentarist style – Finnish literature did not see a turn toward fantasy in the 1980s. Something similar did happen, though, in the works of some female authors. As Liisa Enwald (1999, 211) points out in her article on women's feminist writing in the 1980s, female authors experimented with myth and fantasy and explored them as ways to challenge the narrative form. Verronen, although never associated with the feminist writing of the 1980s and 1990s, explores feminist themes in her novel *Pimeästä maasta*. The novel is an allegorical fantasy that discusses embodied gender and its production in society.

By comparing the fantastic and mythic elements in Verronen's fiction to Norwegian and Finnish contemporaries, one can say that fantastic elements seem to be related to three impulses: the need to react to and rebel against the literary ideals of the 1970s, the breakthrough of postmodernism, and the emancipatory aspirations of the feminist writers.

Another important point of comparison between Verronen's oeuvre and Nordic literatures is the role of crime fiction. Crime fiction is an active field of literary production in all Nordic countries. In Sweden, as Rochelle Wright (1996, 407), points out, crime fiction started to gain appreciation as early as the 1960s, when the previously held ways of understanding literature were being challenged. A turning point, according to Wright (1996, 407), was the publication of Maj Sjöwall's (1935–2020) and Pär Wahlöö's (1926–1975) *Roman om Brotts* series (1965–1975) on superintendent Martin Beck. The series is often seen as a precursor of the Nordic noir genre. Nordic noir itself can be defined in multiple ways, but the classic definition acknowledges the genre's geographical setting in Nordic countries as well as its role as 'a response of the inevitable failure of the optimistic social democracies to fundamentally alleviate human suffering,' as Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir and Gerardine Meaney (2020, 2) encapsulate.

Verronen's works do not involve novels that have been published or marketed as crime fiction or Nordic noir, but in some cases her narratives bear a closer resemblance to these genres. These novels coincide with the high tide of Nordic noir, which started in the mid-2000s (Bradley, Nestingen, and Seppälä 2020, 6). The novel *Osallisuuden tunto* ('The Sense of Complicity,' 2006) not only focuses on a mystery of a missing man and a perfect murder, but also refers directly to the most famous unsolved homicide of Finnish crime history, the Lake Bodom murders. Most importantly, the novel depicts the problems of Finnish reformatory schools, and highlights neglected social groups such as orphans, childless elderly, and drug users. *Osallisuuden tunto* thus discusses the failures of Finnish society, involves social criticism, and conjoins

these two with a crime mystery in a manner that is typical for Nordic noir. By shifting the point of view from the detectives to the perpetrator, Verronen's novel, however, develops into a treatise on guilt. Another example of Nordic noir in Verronen's fiction is the novel *Varjonainen* ('Woman of Shadows,' 2013), which is a thriller-like narrative of an undocumented entry to Finland and the immigrant's sophisticated, although criminal, ways of blending in in Finnish society. Again, the novel employs elements of Nordic noir and thus gains suspense and tools for social criticism, but, by modifying the perspective and avoiding closure, the novel turns from a crime story into a self-reflective look on Finnish society. Verronen's novels are rewritings of the genre: they maintain the core ideas of Nordic noir but underline the metaphysical aspects of these narratives.

Verronen's early involvement in science fiction and postapocalypse – her first published work, a collection of short stories, includes a postapocalyptic narrative – foreshadows her two influential dystopian novels of the late 2000s. *Karsintavaihe* was published in 2008 and its sequel *Kirkkaan selkeää* in 2010. Her novels are part of a global trend. As Basu, Broad, and Hintz (2013, 8) point out, the influx of young adult dystopian fiction was noted for the first time in a 2008 article in the *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, which evaluated the previous year's literary phenomena. Dystopian and postapocalyptic fiction turns into movements that also dominate the literary market well into the 2010s in the Nordic countries. In Sweden, authors such as Johannes Anyuru (b. 1979), Magnus Nordin (b. 1963), Stina Nilsson (b. 1990), Lisa Hågensen (b. 1966), and Anna Jakobsson Lund (b. 1978) publish dystopian and postapocalyptic novels with Nordic perspectives. As with Verronen's dystopias, these Swedish novels employ the dystopian narrative formula but modify it with themes and issues that are current to Nordic societies: the frailty of the welfare state, the viability of an open and democratic society, the challenges that extremist political movements and racism pose for societies previously known for their uniformity, and the role that climate change and nature play for Nordic cultures and self-understanding.

Yet another distinctively Nordic aspect in Verronen's oeuvre is the intense fascination for snow and ice, Arctic, and winter. Some of her narratives both aestheticize and romanticize the north; the best example of these is the novel *Kylmien saarten soturi* ('Warrior of the Cold Isles,' 2001). Others do the opposite: *Pieni elintila* ('The Tiny Living Space,' 2004b) disassembles the myths and hero legends associated with polar expeditions and creates an alternative narrative that relies on internal rather than external expansion. Some of her works depict snow and other winter imagery with a sensitivity and sense of wonder that bears an association to Peter Høeg's novel *Frøken Smillas förnemmelse för sne* (1992; transl. *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, 1993). Snow as a fantastic, otherworldly element that both threatens and protects the human subject appears in the novel *Yksinäinen vuori*, as well as in many collections of short stories, such as *Kulkureita & Unohtajia* and *Löytöretkeilijä ja muita eksyneitä* ('The Explorer and Other Lost People,' 1999).

Looking at the European and Anglo-American context, Verronen's works coincide with the genre of new weird, a concept that appeared in the discourse of speculative genres in the late 1990s and early 2000s. New weird is often understood as a hybrid of fantasy, science fiction, and horror but, as China Miéville (b. 1972), Jeff VanderMeer (b. 1968), and M. John Harrison (b. 1945) – the authors behind the movement – have stressed, it is the progressive spirit borrowed from 1960s

New Wave writing and grotesque and anti-Tolkien aesthetics that distinguishes the genre from other subgenres of speculative fiction (Tranter 2018, 170–72; see also VanderMeer and VanderMeer 2008 and Miéville 2003). Verronen's fiction does not fall unproblematically into the category of new weird: the political agenda in her works is far too implicit and the mythical allusions are too recognizable. As Kirsten Tranter (2018, 172) remarks, works of new weird tend to distance themselves from myths and folklore or use them in an eclectic and humorous manner. Moreover, Verronen's fantastic works do not take place solely in cities, while the urban sprawl has been seen as the key feature of the new weird landscape.

Despite their differences in style, politics and aesthetics, Verronen's works and the genre of new weird are, however, united by the effort to dispel the genre boundaries and the desire to experiment with genre features. There are only a handful of Verronen's works that can be easily classified into one or two literary genres. Most of her works contain elements from multiple genres or modify the key features of known genres. Her debut, *Älä maksa lautturille*, involves elements of horror, fantasy, mythologies, and postapocalypse. Instead of throwing all these elements together, as a work of new weird fiction would do, Verronen's collection separates the different genres into different stories. *Pimeästä maasta* is a fantasy novel, but in the most anti-Tolkien sense; the novel lacks the classical imagery of the genre, and the mood of the novel is not permeated by sense of loss and nostalgia. *Karsintavaihe* is a dynamic dystopia but, instead of depicting a dissident and a rebellion, the novel presents a protagonist whose instincts are geared toward survival and a trajectory that shies away from dramatic solutions. Urban life and its marvels and wonders are examined in the novel *Saari kaupungissa*, which even highlights the theme of hybridity – a key theme of Miéville's city writing according to Tranter (2018, 176) – but does that with minimalistic images and motifs that are subtle, even subdued, a stark contrast from Miéville's bold imagery.

Besides genre-related links – such as those of the dystopian fiction and the new weird – Verronen's literary works have a thematic connection with contemporary fiction that discusses space and spatiality. The most influential examples of this kind of contemporary literature are works of experimental fiction that use space as a structural element, such as George Perec's (1936–1982) *La Vie mode d'emploi* ([1978] 1982). Perec's complex and multilayered novel is a collection of stories that each represent a flat in a Parisian apartment block. Verronen's *Saari kaupungissa* follows structural principles that loosely resemble a spatial pattern and thus bears semblance to Perec's novel. However, Verronen does not work with constraint writing methods like Perec, a member of the Oulipo group, and her writing is less experimental than Perec's. Another canonized example of spatial fiction is Mark Z. Danielewski's (b. 1966) novel *House of Leaves* (2000). The suspense of the novel is created with the trope of a maze; in the novel, the house of the family Navidson contains an impossible maze-like structure that both fascinates and threatens the people that discover it. The maze – or the labyrinth – a postmodern spatial trope, likewise dominates Verronen's novel *Luolavuodet* ('The Cave Years,' 1998), which focuses on a group of speleologists and their passion for an underground network of caves.

Some of the works of spatial fiction employ the element of fantastic and apply it to space specifically (see García 2015). Writers of such works include J. G. Ballard (1930–2009), Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), and Cristina Fernández Cubas (b. 1945).

A similar magical realist spirit can be found in Verronen's short story 'Ahaggarilaiset' ('Ahaggarians,' 1992a), in which the protagonist discovers a tent that contains multiple spaces, and in the novel *Yksinäinen vuori*, which is a story of a mountain and its human-like behaviors and needs.

Above, I have stated that Verronen's oeuvre is in many ways connected to Nordic, European and world literatures, and that her works have often been at the forefront of literary trends. A question remains: why haven't her works been translated? One could assume that the timing has something to do with it. Verronen began her literary career during an economic crisis, the early 1990s depression in Finland. It was hardly a time for a publishing house to venture abroad with a new author; more importantly, it was also a time when the Finnish literary exports did not have a solid infrastructure. It is also possible that a genre-inspired author, whose image was famously withdrawn, did not seem like a sensible investment for foreign agencies and publishing houses. This and other reasonings that revolve around Verronen's commercial potential and the fact that there is a lack of translators from Finnish into other languages are probably the most important explanatory factors. To this day, only a handful of Verronen's short stories have been translated and published in a few anthologies.

As this study is written in English and involves multiple translations of Verronen's works, my hope is to introduce Maarit Verronen and Finnish contemporary fiction to readers who might not be native speakers of Finnish. All the translations in the study are mine.

A QUESTION OF LITERARY SPACE

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the experiences of literary spaces and places in Verronen's oeuvre. The study elaborates on the ideas of the so-called spatial turn and applies spatial theory to the analysis of literary fiction. The guiding principle of the study is Foucault's oft-cited notion of late modernity as 'the epoch of space' (Foucault 1986, 1). The inherent spatiality – or, the inherent interest in spatiality – of present time has been recognized and acknowledged as a foundational element of contemporary literary fiction (Malmio and Kurikka 2020; Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016; Sondrup et al. 2017; Tally 2013; Westphal 2011).

Literary fiction is an area that actively engages in the production of contemporary spatiality. Wolfgang Hallet (2014) presents the category of 'fictions of space,' by which he refers to works of contemporary literary fiction that foreground space and spatial perceptions and practices. According to Hallet (2014), these works of fiction denaturalize space by drawing the reader's attention to the processes of imaginary and cultural construction that surround the spatial experience. Moreover, in 'fictions of space' the spatial elements function not only as a setting – a backdrop for events – but also drive the action and construct the storyworld (Hallet 2014). Kristina Malmio and Kaisa Kurikka (2020), on the other hand, emphasize the notion of in-betweenness for contemporary literary fiction, especially contemporary Nordic literary fiction. According to them, it is the network of local and global connections, the sense of interconnectedness, that contemporary fiction seeks to describe and discuss (Malmio and Kurikka 2020).

This study approaches Verronen's 'fictions of space,' describes and analyses how they emphasize the spatial experience, and traces the themes – among others, interconnectedness – that are depicted and discussed through literary spaces.

My intention is to demonstrate and analyze the complexity of Verronen's literary representations with the help of spatial theory and the concepts of spatial literary studies. This study is the first thorough analysis of Verronen's oeuvre and the first to trace the development of her (spatial) poetics through time. Along with that, this study refines the picture of the spatiality of contemporary Finnish literature.⁵ My perspective on Verronen's works does not, however, limit itself to spatial theory: in order to fully grasp the palimpsest nature of her literary spaces – the islands, mountains, and courtyards – one must consider the literary historical and cultural-historical roots of the spatial tropes that her fiction employs. As Verronen draws from multiple genres of literature, the role of genre and the repertoire they provide for the depiction of spatial experience is yet another point of interest for this study.

The Corpus and an Overview of the Study

This study provides a longitudinal section of Verronen's oeuvre, which is why the selected material spans the author's early works – the breakthrough novel *Pimeästä maasta* (1995) – through to the dystopias of the late 2000s and the Helsinki novel *Saari kaupungissa* (2007). The selected works are the novel *Pimeästä maasta*, two short stories ('Mökki autiolla rannalla' and 'Unohtaja') from the collection *Kulkureita & Unohtajia* (1996), the novel *Luolavuodet* (1998), the dystopian novels *Karsintavaihe* (2008) and *Kirkkaan selkeää* (2010), the novel *Pieni elintila* (2004b), and the novel *Saari kaupungissa*. In sum, the corpus comprises six novels and two short stories, a ratio that roughly reflects Verronen's overall literary production and its slight emphasis on the novel. Whenever relevant, I have also included shorter analyses of and allusions to other works by Verronen; for instance, the section on *Pieni elintila* takes into account *Keihäslintu* (2004a). Works of nonfiction have been excluded from the corpus.

The selection of the corpus has been based on my attempt to form as representative a sample of Verronen's literary production as possible. I have included examples of various genres, such as fantasy (*Pimeästä maasta*), dystopia (*Karsintavaihe*, *Kirkkaan selkeää*), short stories (*Kulkureita & Unohtajia*), and contemporary realism (*Saari kaupungissa*). The selected material involves works that have been considered major works of the author – by this I refer particularly to the novel *Pimeästä maasta* – and works that have been received as examples of high artistic quality, such as *Saari kaupungissa*. The viewpoint of this study has, naturally, guided my interest in the works that demonstrate the variety of Verronen's literary spaces. The corpus incorporates Arctic and Antarctic settings (*Pimeästä maasta*, 'Mökki autiolla rannalla,' *Pieni elintila*), islands (*Pieni elintila*, *Saari kaupungissa*), urban settings and urban nature (*Saari kaupungissa*, *Karsintavaihe*), fantastic landscapes (*Pimeästä maasta*), and settings that take place outside Finland (*Pieni elintila*, *Kirkkaan selkeää*). Lastly, all

5. In the Finnish context, spatial literary studies is a small but growing area of research. For earlier publications on the topic, see Ameal (2013), Isomaa et al. (2013), Laakso, Lahtinen, and Sagulin (2017), and Malmio and Kurikka (2020). Ecocritical studies, such as Ahokas et al. (2018), Lahtinen and Lehtimäki (2008), and Lassila (2011), also discuss the topic of space and place, as does regionalist literary history (see Carlsson et al. 2010b; Sondrup et al. 2017) and postcolonial studies (see Ridanpää 2006).

of Verronen's works foreground space and spatiality in some way; however, in certain narratives, the plot is structured around a spatial activity like traveling or mapping. *Luolavuodet* is an example of the latter and is thus included in the corpus.

The analysis chapters of this study are thematically organized, but the works are discussed in order of publication, with the exception that the two dystopian novels are treated before the homecoming narratives. The analysis starts from the fantastic realms of Verronen's early career, proceeds to consider wilderness and wild spaces, turns then to visions of dystopian future, and concludes with the narratives of homecoming and homesteading. A progression from fantastic to domestic may sound like a dreary journey, but, as the last analysis chapter demonstrates, Verronen's spatial dynamics only intensify as the narratives draw closer to home. That said, the emplotment of this study does present an interpretation of the author's oeuvre: Verronen's early works create landscapes of wonder and narratives of wanderers. The later the work, the more likely it revolves around themes of attachment, belonging, agency and inhabitancy.

The 'Space and Literature' chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study by examining the foundation of the spatial turn and the various approaches of spatial literary studies. The chapter also explores the intersections and disparities between spatial literary studies and ecocriticism. The final part of the chapter focuses on the key concepts of the study and provides a categorization of them.

The 'Spatial Imagination' chapter begins the analytical part of this study by drawing attention to the imaginary and fantastic landscapes of Verronen's early works. The first subchapter examines the intertwining of space and plot with the help of semiotic concepts developed by Ūrij Lotman. The semiotic viewpoint allows us to see how strongly the spatial plane of the text dictates the novel *Pimeästä maasta*, and how it also functions as a rhetorical device that guides the reader's interpretation of the novel, underlining the mythical and archaic elements of the text. The second subchapter delves into the complex relationships that Verronen's protagonists have with their surroundings. The selected material of the subchapter, the novel *Luolavuodet*, is a multilayered narrative that weaves together spatial and temporal elements as the protagonist explores the underground environment of a cave system. With concepts such as monomania, the section aims to shed light on the emotional and psychological meanings attached to spatial experience. Moreover, the subchapter demonstrates how Verronen's novel revisions the cave trope and develops it in an emancipatory direction.

The 'Wild Spaces' chapter addresses the spaces of wilderness in Verronen's fiction. The section begins with a look at the wilderness tropes of the Finnish canon and considers how Verronen's works deviate from the tradition. The first subchapter presents a reading of the short story 'Mökki autiolla rannalla' ('Cottage on a Desolate Shore,' 1996c), which is a mysterious encounter between a wanderer who has traveled through vast distances in the snow and a desolate couple living in an empty harbor. The short story combines the depiction of wilderness with the state of being alienated, mixing traditional wilderness imagery with postindustrial images. The subchapter also considers the directionality of Verronen's wilderness narratives, as it seems to be the opposite of traditional Western wilderness narratives. The latter part of the subchapter applies Michel de Certeau's notion of the practices of everyday life and suggests that many of Verronen's short stories and novels depict characters whose spatial practices are in discordance with their actual surroundings. The subchapter focuses on two recurring patterns of behavior, self-isolation and infiltration, and

interprets them as manifestations of wilderness. The analyzed text is the short story 'Unohtaja' ('The Forgetter,' 1996e), a narrative that exemplifies how Verronen's prose fiction places special emphasis on how the characters observe and make use of the space around them.

The 'Dystopian Spaces' chapter examines Verronen's two works of dystopian fiction, the novel *Karsintavaihe* and its independent sequel *Kirkkaan selkeää*. The chapter sets out to investigate how the utopian hopes that are associated with city development turn to nightmares in *Karsintavaihe*, and how the repressive mood of the dystopian novel is evoked through the depiction of the reorganization of space. A special emphasis is placed on the specific spatial tropes that the novel utilizes to present its critique on the order-making impulse of modernity. Chaotic and in a constant state of transformation, the novel's cityscapes reflect the characters' precarious condition. The subchapter observes how the centripetal forces of the novel challenge the dissidence plot formula of the classical dystopia. These spatial arrangements, however, recede in the sequel, which introduces a more detached relationship between the characters and their spatial surroundings. My analysis of *Kirkkaan selkeää* examines how the tropes of detachment – aimless drifting, airborne travel, the panoramic perspective – emerge from the novel's spatial plane but speak of a larger shift between the mood and the genre of the duology. Returning to the question of how literary spaces evoke the dystopian, the subchapter explores the theme of agoraphobia within the novel and considers its environmentalist, science fictional, and historical backgrounds.

The 'Homecomings and Homesteadings' chapter investigates how Verronen's imaginative narratives finally turn toward home. With the help of Edward S. Casey's ([1993] 2009, 290–96) distinction between homecoming and homesteading – of which the latter refers to establishing a new home – the chapter addresses the complex dynamics that revolve around homes in the author's works. In *Pieni elintila*, these tendencies draw from the ancient Greek theme of *nostos*, the homecoming of the war hero, and thus introduce elements of tragedy to the novel's conception of homecoming. The novel involves one of the most intricate conceptual spaces of Verronen's oeuvre: the notion of living space (*elintila*), a concept that can be associated with the biological habitat – or the infamous geopolitical notion of *Lebensraum*. In the analysis, I present a reading of these conflicting meanings and assess whether the novel leans toward the expansionist or the introverted ways of understanding space. The second subchapter focuses on the novel *Saari kaupungissa*, a minimalist, episodic story of homesteading in an alien city. The subchapter examines the interplay of the two spatial poles, the island and the city. The analysis demonstrates how the novel juxtaposes the mediated, socially unpredictable contemporary city and the pioneer spirit of earlier generations – the great narrative of homesteading in Finnish literature. In the context of homesteading, the chapter analyzes how the shorelines and the islands of the city are depicted as an area of in-betweenness, an alternative to the idea of being rooted.

Finally, the conclusion of the book recapitulates the findings and the key arguments of each analysis.

Space and Literature

The spatial turn, a movement within the social sciences and humanities, has drawn scholars' attention to the role of space. Often depicted as a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, spatial studies – an umbrella term for the research executed in the wake of the spatial turn – can be seen as a conjoined effort of human geography, sociology, history, philosophy, urban studies, phenomenology, architecture, cultural studies, literary studies, and many other related fields. Viewing space as socially constructed and inherently relational, the spatial turn emphasizes the imagined, culturally shared and representational aspects of space. These are the realms where literature operates.

In the field of literary studies, the spatial turn has established space and place as analytical categories. The examination of literary spaces is nothing new to the scholars of literature: from the notion of setting to that of the *milieu*, spaces of literature have been observed in relation to the temporal elements and the plot of the narrative. Rather than the introduction of a new methodology, the spatial turn in literary studies can be understood as a refocus of attention, a reevaluation of preexisting methodology, and as a new set of questions that guide our approach to the literature we read today.

In this chapter, I first present the theoretical framework of the study and position the notions of spatial turn, spatial studies, and spatial literary studies in relation to each other. I then consider the approaches of spatial literary studies, by which I mean the various ways to perform a literary analysis that foregrounds space. After this, I consider the differences and junctions of spatial literary studies and ecocriticism, two fields that share similar interests but are rarely brought together. As many of Verronen's works of fiction involve representations of spaces of nature, ecocritical perspectives are a useful addition to the analytical toolbox of this study. At the end of this chapter, I introduce the key concepts of this study and the conceptual hierarchy they constitute.

Framework: Spatial Turn and Spatial Literary Studies

The spatial turn refers to a heightened interest in spatial matters and the establishing of space as a category of analysis within multiple fields of humanities, especially cultural studies and literary studies. The definitions and the timelines of the spatial turn vary, but most experts on the field agree that the turn was set in motion in the

late 1960s and 1970s, and systematically formulated in the late 1980s (see, e.g., Casey [1993] 2009; Gomel 2014; Hallet and Neumann 2009; Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016; Tally 2013).

The notion of the spatial turn was first introduced by geographer Edward Soja ([1989] 2011, 16, 39) in his *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. In the work, Soja presents a critique on ‘historicism as an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory that actively submerges and peripheralizes the geographical or spatial imagination’ (Soja [1989] 2011, 15). In *Postmodern Geographies*, he anticipates a crisis for Marxist historical materialism, a crisis that he then inflicts in his later work *Thirdspace* (1996). In it, Soja takes up the task of rewiring the principles of the dialectics, suggesting a ‘critical thirding’ of dialectical thinking – namely, the assertion of space within the historical materialist school of thought.

In addition to rebalancing the Marxists’ historical perspective, the spatial turn can be seen as a departure from the Western ideals of development and progress, both of which are temporal concepts, and the turn itself can be related to the postmodernist reevaluation of the legacy of the Enlightenment. The shift from modernity to postmodernity was foreseen by Michel Foucault, who in 1967 claimed: ‘The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space’ (Foucault 1986, 1). According to Foucault (1986), the key experiences of the epoch of space are simultaneity and juxtaposition. Instead of temporal progressions and trajectories, the individual experience of the moment is that of a network, and the virtue of interconnectedness is replacing the idea of development (Foucault 1986). The shift from temporal to spatial is thus not only a conceptual and theoretical shift but a larger change in the processes of meaning-making and self-determination of individuals and societies (Foucault 1986).

The most prominent adherent of the new orientation toward space was the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who brought together critical social theory and the notion of space. Space is socially produced, Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) famously claimed, and he drew attention to the social processes that generate space, as well as the role of representations. Lefebvre’s formulation highlighted the lived, contested, continuously changing and symbolically transmitted aspects of space: as Doris Bachmann-Medick (2016, 216) crystallizes it, the relationality of space. These new conceptual openings invited the scholars of culture and literature to take part in the reassessment of the role of spatiality. On the one hand, the study of space needed the viewpoint of the humanities in order to successfully chart the subjective, partial, emotional and imaginative aspects of space. On the other hand, the humanities themselves discovered space as an analytical category and started to explore the possibilities it opened up. The result was a heightened way of understanding space as, in the words of Pirjo Lyytikäinen and Kirsi Saarikangas (2013, ix), ‘experiential,’ ‘multidimensional,’ and ‘dynamic.’

After the spatial turn’s wider recognition and its movement into the scholarly mainstream, different alignments within the turn have generated their own emphases. Eric Prieto (2011, 15–18) distinguishes three partially overlapping movements within the spatial turn: the phenomenological, the poststructuralist, and the activist. The phenomenological approach, based on the philosophy of Gaston Bachelard ([1964] 2014) and Martin Heidegger ([1954] 1975), studies subjective spatial experience

and perception. This tradition has been successfully taken up by Anglo-American philosophers such as Edward S. Casey. More recently, as Prieto (2011, 16) points out, the phenomenological approach has gained new insights from cognitive studies and neuroscience, especially in the work of Francisco Varela (1993). The poststructuralist focus eschews the subjective and foregrounds the analysis of social processes, the workings of power and representations, in the tradition of Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja (Prieto 2011, 16–17). Finally, the activist branch, for Prieto (2011, 15–18), consists of Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and environmental interpretations of spatial matters.

Various intellectual and geographical traditions have also had their different interpretations of the spatial turn. Bachmann-Medick (2016, 224–25) suggests that the spatial turn in the Anglo-American tradition clusters around the problematics of globalization and (global) spatial politics, while the German version highlights localities and regionalism. In a similar vein, Sigrid Weigel (2009, 191) announces that the Anglo-American take on the spatial turn employs its concepts mainly as tools for discourse-historical criticism and its need to develop new vocabulary for cultural identities moving between and beyond nation-states. She presents the notion of displacement as an example of a concept that has been appropriated from the spatial turn and used as a substitute for previous notions such as diaspora and exile (Weigel 2009, 189–94). The German spatial turn, which is often referred to as the topographical turn (*topologische Wende*) in the German context, is simultaneously more theoretical in the sense that it strives to theorize topography and semiotic readings, and more concrete, as it practices mapping and looks for identifiable geographical locations and their histories (Weigel 2009, 189–94).

Spatial studies is the umbrella term for the various fields of research that have gained momentum from the spatial turn and the development of computerized spatial data management. These fields include areas in the humanities, such as cultural studies, cultural anthropology, architecture, and urban planning, but also various data-driven approaches within geography and engineering and the many applications of Big Data. Because of the term's overlapping use in the humanities and data-driven fields, I have opted for a narrower categorization and placed this study in the field of *spatial literary studies*. This term refers to the movement within literary scholarship in the wake of the spatial turn and is aligned with one of the central book series in the field, *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies*, edited by Robert Tally. The term allows me to recognize the impact of the spatial turn yet draw a distinction between the spatial turn itself and the outcome of the turn (spatial literary studies). By opting for this term, I also follow Sheila Hones's (2018; cf. Tally 2020) view on separating spatially oriented literary criticism from human geography that focuses on literary texts, i.e., literary geography. Finally, the notion of *spatial theory* refers to the theoretical work done during and after the spatial turn.

There are multiple ways of inserting the spatial viewpoint into the practice of literary analysis. In order to facilitate future discussions on methods, I have outlined the following different approaches within spatial literary studies. Far from being comprehensive, the outline gives an idea of the scope and variety of the methods and ways of reading available for the practicing of spatial literary studies.

Spatial literary studies might find its expression in the form of:

Spatial vocabulary and metaphorization

By this I refer to spatially oriented readings of fiction that employ such concepts and metaphorizations as mapping, boundary, border, center and periphery, and margin. By directing the perception, presentation, and representation of literary works, the use of spatial vocabulary can, at its best, establish a way of understanding space as a perspective and a central category of critical analysis. The challenge, and the danger, lies within the conceptual groundwork: without clear and carefully established definitions and appropriate application, the use of spatial vocabulary may generate diffuse readings and conceptual confusion. The concept of mapping, for instance, has been watered down by its incessant use, as Bachmann-Medick (2016, 226) observes; Marie-Laure Ryan has presented similar criticisms regarding the notion of space and the spatial turn altogether (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, chap. 2). Despite such criticism, the rendering of spatial studies into a discourse can be regarded as one of the dominant approaches within the field of spatial literary studies.

A spatial thematic focus

By selecting and foregrounding spatial themes within a literary work, space can be approached as a subject and a theme of literature. A thematic focus involves, among other things, exploring representations of spaces, depictions of spatial meaning-making, and the narrative devices, genre formulas, poetics, and language that evoke the spaces and places of a given work of fiction. Such thematic interest in spatial matters existed in the field of literary studies before the onset of the spatial turn. A classic in the field is Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), which observes the historical development of the rural–urban division in the English literature. Williams (1973) examines how the juxtaposition of the two has played an important role in cultural reflection on modernity.

An emancipatory reading related to spaces

This refers to an intentional reading of a literary work that strives for a reassessment and/or deconstruction of the work or its context, often carried out within a framework of Marxist, postcolonial, or feminist paradigms but with a clear emphasis on spatial matters. As a product of postmodernity, the spatial turn has multiple alliances and overlaps with the other contemporaneous political lines of thought that pursue the emancipation of marginalized groups or focus on the analysis of power relations. In other words, as Bachmann-Medick (2016, 218) announces, 'the spatial turn has been politically charged from the start.' These types of reading have a solid ground in the canonized thinkers of the spatial turn: in the historical materialist and Marxist thinking of Lefebvre, Fredric Jameson, and David Harvey; Foucault's focus on power, later continued in the work of Michel de Certeau; the feminist approaches to geography, especially by Massey; and the fertile ground laid by the postcolonial thinkers Soja and Edward Said. For instance, this line of research is carried out by comparatists with regard to the situatedness of literatures and the concept of world literature (Deckard et al. 2016), or, as Bachmann-Medick (2016, 230) suggests, the study of migrant and transcultural literatures and their relation to interstitial spaces.

Cartographical and topographical experimentation

By this I refer to the approaches in which literary analysis and literary research draws methods, analytical tools, and means of representation from the fields of cartography, topography, and geography. In his *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (1999), Franco Moretti employs maps as a means of literary analysis, presenting them as ‘not as metaphors, and less of ornaments of discourse, but as analytical tools: that dissect the text in an unusual way, bringing to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden’ (Moretti 1999, 3). According to Moretti, mapping as a method of literary analysis allows us to discover ‘the place-bound nature of literary forms’ (Moretti 1999, 5), by which he means the specific extratextual geographies of each genre and form, as well as the internal logic of a given narrative. Recently, a systemic presentation of literary cartography has been published in the edited collection *Literature and Cartography: Theories, Histories, Genres* by Anders Engberg-Pedersen (2017). Literary scholars’ interest in mapping has also come under criticism: Tania Rossetto (2013) adamantly points out that literary cartography has been unable to recognize a paradigm shift within cartography, and that it has therefore neglected the new approaches offered by so-called postrepresentational or emergent cartography, fields that Rossetto (2019) presents and synthesizes in her recent book *Object-Oriented Cartography: Maps as Things*. Another manifestation of this kind of experimentation is the empirical studies that explore the reader’s perception of literary spaces. Marie-Laure Ryan (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, chap. 4) studies the mental maps of actual readers, asking how the spatial imagination of a reader develops during the reading process.

Formal(ist) reading: a focus on textual space

A formal reading in relation to space focuses on the space of a page, the arrangement and patterning of words, graphics, and other types of figurations that can be created within a published literary work, a manuscript, or, to an increasing degree, a digital format. Often these issues are referred to as ‘textual place/space.’ Sally Bushell’s (2010) reading of the textual places and spaces of Wordsworth’s ‘Michael’ and its manuscript, for example, opens up a wholly new line of interpretation of the poem. Beyond textual matters, this approach can be detected within the new formalist readings, particularly those that make ‘a continuum with new historicism’ (Levinson 2007, 559) as opposed to those that rather seek to reestablish art and history as separate categories (on new formalism, see Levine 2015 and Levinson 2007).

Worldmaking

Within literary studies, the spatial turn manifests itself as and participates in the reevaluation and reconfiguration of previously existing fields of study. An exemplary case might be the focus on worldmaking in narratology. Based on philosopher Nelson Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) and its discussion of how imaginary worlds are crafted out of existing ones through various modifications such as ordering and deformation, narratology in the 1990s and 2000s saw a realignment toward the worldmaking functions of narratives instead of the previously dominating focus on the plot (Herman 2009; Nünning 2010; Ryan 1991). This is not to suggest that worldmaking as a theoretical and methodological concept is a product of the spatial turn but, given the concurrence of the two developments, we might assume that some cross-fertilization has taken place. By focusing on narrative worlds and their

functions, the proponents of the worldmaking approach pave the way for readings that pay attention to the nontemporal elements of narrative.

These six approaches can further be categorized into three groups:

Linguistic-thematic	Spatial vocabulary and metaphorization A spatial thematic focus
Poststructural-experimental	An emancipatory reading related to spaces Cartographical and topographical experimentation
Formalist-narratological	Formal(ist) reading: a focus on textual space Worldmaking

As the categorization demonstrates, the six different approaches share varying degrees of common background. For scholars of literary studies, the linguistic-thematic and the formalist-narratological approaches may carry greatest methodological familiarity, while the poststructuralist-experimental approaches rely heavily on critical theory and cultural studies – regarding the poststructuralist part – and cartography and geography – regarding the experimental part.

It must be stressed that these approaches overlap and supplement each other, resulting in new variations and emphases. A thematic focus, for instance, often results in, and even requires, the use of spatial analytical vocabulary. The use of certain spatial analytical concepts, on the other hand, directs attention toward the thematization of space within the narrative. This means that a clear outline between different approaches may be difficult to assert. Moreover, the approaches mentioned above present only a few possible realizations of spatial literary studies.⁶ This study makes use of spatial vocabulary and metaphors while maintaining a thematic focus. In addition to that, the analyses presented occasionally show facets of an emancipatory reading.

Spatial Literary Studies, Ecocriticism, and the Concept of Wilderness

The previous sections have outlined the field of spatial studies and spatial literary studies, and the various approaches of the latter. A further question is the relation between spatial literary studies and ecocriticism. For the study at hand, the significance of this relation stems from the corpus of Verronen's works, and, as the emerging body of scholarly literature on the topic (Battista and Tally 2016; Buell 2005) seems to suggest, the overlap of the fields is currently under discussion.

Spatial studies have traditionally privileged the urban spheres of space, while nature and wilderness have remained less theorized and studied. The prevalence of the urban condition is grounded in the work of philosopher Lefebvre, the key figure of the spatial turn. As Neil Smith (2003) points out, despite the foundations laid

6. For a different perspective on the conceptualization of spatial literary studies, see the cultural narratological model developed by Alexander Matschi. His model focuses on the narratology of movement and is constructed as a trialectical design, as it accounts for the spatial, the temporal and the agentive aspects of movement in literature (Matschi 2015, 38–102).

by Émile Durkheim and George Simmel, urban research remained descriptive and 'dramatically undertheorized' well into the 1960s. Lefebvre, originally specialized in rural communities, was working against this prepossessed backdrop while developing the theses of 'The Right to the City' (1996), *The Urban Revolution* ([1970] 2003), and, finally, *The Production of Space* ([1974] 1991). His goal was to develop a theoretical body for the study of urbanity, a framework that would complement the descriptive and pragmatic tradition of the field. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre presents his view on nature as follows:

Theoretically, nature is shrinking, but the signs of nature and the natural are multiplying, replacing and supplanting real 'nature.' These signs are mass-produced and sold. A tree, a flower, a branch, a scent, or a word can become signs of absence: of an illusory and fictive presence. [. . .] Parks and open spaces, the last word in good intentions and bad urban representation, are simply a poor substitute for nature, the degraded simulacrum of the open space characteristic of encounters, game, parks, gardens, and public squares. This space, which has been neutralized by a degrading form of democratization, has as its symbol the square. The urbanist passively obeys the pressures of number and least cost; the functionality he thinks he has created is reduced to an absence of 'real' functions, to a function of passive observation. (Lefebvre [1970] 2003, 27)

In 'The Right to the City,' Lefebvre connects the rise of the notion 'the right to nature' with the emerging concept of leisure; according to him, this leads to the commodification of nature and its transformation into 'the ghetto of leisure pursuits' (Lefebvre 1996, 158). For Lefebvre (1996, 158–59), the right to nature is nothing but a pseudo-right, which must be complemented, possibly even replaced, with the right to the city:⁷ a claim for a more inclusive set of urban practices and a way of understanding city as something that is created by the members of the community rather than inhabited by them. This view anticipates his later notion of the social production of space.

Lefebvre's work, especially *The Production of Space*, shifted the focus of sociologists and Marxist scholars to the urban condition. Marxists, as Neil Smith (2003, x) states, had been reluctant to create a theoretical body of work specifically devoted to the urban, partly because postwar communist governments, although they pressed for accelerated urbanization, regarded urban structures as being rooted in the prevalent capitalist modes of production. On the side of Marxist cultural theory, this situation was transformed by Lefebvre's writing, and eminent thinkers such as Harvey and Soja have followed the road marked by him. Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996) is markedly urban and so is Harvey's line of work, especially *Social Justice and the City* ([1973] 2009), which is indebted to Lefebvre's 'the right to the city' – although, later, Harvey does venture into the field of environmental justice in his book *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1997).

Like the Marxist theories mentioned above, phenomenological discussions on spatial experience lean toward the urban, rural, and domestic realms of space at the

7. Lefebvre's use of the notion 'right' has been criticized; see the essay 'Henri Lefebvre's Writings on Cities and The Right to the City,' published in the Situationist International magazine *NotBored!* (NotBored! 2006).

expense of wild spaces. This is because the phenomenological study of space has its roots in texts like Heidegger's 'Building Dwelling Thinking' ([1954] 1975), which, as the title suggests, is a study of dwelling as a human practice, and Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* ([1964] 2014), a eulogy, in both meanings of the word, for the intimate, enclosed spaces of home: drawers, corners, attics, etc.

Among the phenomenologists, it is Casey's work that stands out in its recognition of the wilderness and noncultivated natural environments. The leading thought in Casey's treatment of spatial matters is the restoration of the concept of place, which, according to him, has largely been neglected in the Western intellectual tradition. Whereas early continental phenomenologists concentrated their treatment on dwelling places, Casey's reflection takes 'wildscapes' into account as an equally integral part of the human spatial – in Casey's case, 'placial' – experience. In *Getting Back into Place* ([1993] 2009), Casey introduces the concept of implacement in order to shed light on the relationship between the experiencing body and the place. As Prieto (2011, 18) has suggested, Casey's emphasis on bodily experiences anticipated the embodied cognition theory, which spilled out into humanist fields as the new materialist turn. Casey's interest in the embodied aspects of human perception is a point often taken up when his work is discussed (see, e.g., Cruz-Pierre and Landes 2013) but, as I would like to suggest, the presence of wilderness or wild places in his reflection is a trait that should be equally acknowledged. To make this argument, one needs to pay attention to how Casey develops his lines of thought in *Getting Back into Place*: The discussion starts from the lived body and its dimensions, then proceeds to built places in the spirit of Bachelard and Heidegger – but culminates in the 'Wild Places' chapter. In this chapter, Casey presents his most elaborate tool for phenomenological analysis, a scheme for the 'moments of Nature,' as he calls it. The scheme consists of seven individual traits, such as 'ground,' 'sensuous surface,' or the 'surrounding array,' which together make up a conceptual framework for the analysis of bodily perceptions in a wilderness setting. The structure of Casey's discussion suggests that wild places play a pivotal role in his understanding of place–human relationships. This stance is confirmed toward the end of the chapter: 'Wild things are not positioned in space as in a neutral medium; they are not confined to the simple locations that form the absolute presupposition of modern physical science,' Casey ([1993] 2009, 226) writes. Thus, in Casey's critique of the dominion of space and time over place, wilderness is presented as the area least corrupted by this conceptual bias.

The various approaches within spatial studies have had multiple reasons to favor urban settings over wild places. A further reason can be found beyond spatial studies: the presence of ecocriticism and environmentalist thought in general. Wilderness, as a foundational concept of first-wave environmentalism (see, e.g., Muir and Gleason 1911; Thoreau [1864] 2004), seems to fall naturally under the domain of ecocriticism. This association is enforced by a certain caution that exists around the concept of wilderness even within ecocritical thought as contemporary ecocritics seek to distance themselves from the first-wave readings of the European Romantics, the American frontier narratives, and other forms of realistic nature writing (see, e.g., Garrard 2004). A culmination point of this debate was reached in the mid-1990s when William Cronon (1996) published his influential essay 'The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.'

If the scholars of spatial studies have been reluctant to deal with wilderness and the wildness of places, ecocritics have been similarly reluctant to discuss place. The landmark of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), discusses place in its eighth chapter, making a case for the late introduction of the concept. '[G]rounding in place patently does not guarantee ecocentrism, place being by definition perceived or felt space, space humanized, rather than the material world taken on its own terms,' Buell (1995, 253) writes. Throughout the chapter, Buell expresses skepticism toward not only the ecocentric potential of place-bound perspectives but also literary fiction's capacity to present space and spatial experience. For him, place is a 'utopian project,' and attachment to place is something feeble and fleeting, often acknowledged in fiction only in passing (Buell 1995, 254–56). Still, he concludes that fiction can amplify and strengthen the sense of place (Buell 1995, 261–67). However, ten years in the field and the presence of the spatial turn alter his views: in 2005, Buell returns to the question of place within ecocriticism. This time, the fluidity and abstractness of the concept presents itself as a strength instead of a weakness: 'Place is an indispensable concept for environmental humanists not so much because they have precisely defined and stabilized it as because they have not; not because of what the concept lays to rest as because of what it opens up' (Buell 2005, 61), he writes. He presents multiple starting points for the discussion of place within environmental criticism, including the problematics and ethics of place-attachment and place as a postcolonial concept. A special emphasis is placed on the notion of bioregion;⁸ according to Buell, it is one of the most important inputs that environmental thought has developed in relation to place and space (Buell 2005, 83–89).

In recent years, steps have been taken toward cooperation between spatial studies and ecocriticism. One of them is Robert Tally's and Christina Battista's edited collection *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism* (2016),⁹ which looks at overlaps and common

8. The concept of bioregion, which refers to a naturally defined but also culturally significant area, appeared in the environmentalist discussion in the 1970s (Berg, Glotfelty, and Quesnel 2015). Bioregionalist thought stresses the importance of local communities and seeks to highlight and enhance a place-based approach in both politics and ethics. For Buell, the promise of bioregionalism lies in its capability to bring together urban and environmentalist perspectives: 'For ecocriticism to recognize "the city" as something other than non-place is itself a great and necessary advance' (Buell 2005, 88), he writes, referring to urban bioregionalism. Moreover, Buell (2005, 88–9) sees, perhaps surprisingly, bioregionalism as a perspective that focuses on the vulnerabilities and changes of a given region, a point of view that gives rise to a distinctly global sensitivity. This is partly due to the bioregionalism's antinationalist overtone – bioregions do not follow state borders – but can also be traced back to bioregionalist literature which often considers bioregions in the context of larger, even planet-wide developments. For Buell, it seems, bioregionalism thus represents a less self-sustained and a more connected form of regionalism.
9. As the title of the book suggests, the focus of the volume is on geocritical studies, not spatial studies. Geocriticism, as coined by Bernard Westphal (2011), can be defined as a branch within the spatial literary studies. But, since Battista and Tally use geocriticism interchangeably with spatial studies and name several key figures of the spatial turn as the predecessors of geocriticism, I have taken the liberty of citing them while discussing spatial studies in general.

interests of the two fields.¹⁰ In the introduction, the editors claim that the difficulty of combining the two fields lies at least partly in their different approaches toward activism. Spatial studies, according to them, is bound by ‘the ostensible, if misleading, neutrality of space or spatiality. [. . .] That is, one could not necessarily be an advocate for space or spatiality’ (Tally and Battista 2016, 1), whereas, according to them, ecocriticism is more directly associated with the environmentalist ethos. However, as the editors state, this is hardly more than a hasty judgment, since the key theorists of the spatial turn ‘have been themselves deeply engaged political thinkers, often coming from oppositional political traditions’ (Tally and Battista 2016, 2). Considering the weighty input of the Marxist tradition within spatial studies, the last part of the claim seems unexpected and not entirely accurate. However, the overall picture Battista and Tally paint helps us to understand another reason for the absence of wilderness within the spatial thought: wilderness has been associated with forms of political engagement other than urban space

Key Concepts

The spatial turn and spatial literary studies offer a wealth of concepts for the analysis of literary texts. The following section describes the conceptual hierarchy of this study and provides a more detailed definition of the two main concepts – space and place – that are used throughout this study. The five other conceptualizations, which are boundary, mapping, wilderness, dystopia, and home – with its subconcepts of homecoming and homesteading – are presented in the analysis chapters.

I have chosen these concepts because together they reflect the spatial specificities of Maarit Verronen’s prose fiction. The combination of the concepts provides a functional framework for the analysis, even if the concepts themselves differ in their backgrounds and genealogies. The premise of this study is, therefore, text-based rather than theory-based; as this study is an attempt to analyze Verronen’s literary oeuvre and poetics – in other words, to create an overall picture of the author’s work and its development through time – it has been necessary to draw from different schools of thought in spatial studies. Text-based as they are, the premises of this study have, nevertheless, been impacted by theory: as the ‘Corpus and an Overview of the Study’ chapter has already stated, the theoretical framework has guided the selection of the literary works analyzed in this study.

The key concepts of this study fall into the following categories:

Proto-tropes	space, place
Spatial tropes	boundary, wilderness, home
Generic conventions	dystopia
Reception of space	mapping

10. In the field of literary and cultural studies in Finland, one could point out the research group Spatial Studies and Environmental Humanities, led by Johannes Riquet at the University of Tampere.

Space and place belong to a higher level in this conceptual hierarchy. During and since the spatial turn, both have been widely theorized on and are thus more conceptually ingrained in spatial theory than the other concepts in the framework. Yet the notion of place in particular functions as an analytical tool in the 'Homecomings and Homesteadings' chapter, which suggests a similarity to spatial tropes, the second category of the table. I therefore refer to space and place as proto-tropes in order to underline their foundational role in this study and their use as spatial tropes.

The second category, spatial tropes, refers to the culturally constructed and shared figures of spatial meaning-making which may appear in literary works but also in other areas of culture. In comparison to space and place, these concepts are more specific and have a more recognizable genealogy. Boundary, wilderness, and home are tropes with a fundamental role in the history and development of Western literature and have been under scholarly scrutiny since well before the spatial turn. This study nevertheless demonstrates that the spatial point of view adds to the existing lines of research and provides useful perspectives for the understanding of contemporary literature. Moreover, for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that, in the case of literary fiction, spatial tropes are cross-generic; that is, they may occur in different genres and contexts. When compared to each other, the three concepts seem to reflect the nature of Verronen's authorial work: wilderness and home illustrate how her narratives veer between the strange and the familiar, and boundary highlights the role that transgression plays in her stories.

The third category, generic conventions, refers to the genre-specific spatial features of literary fiction. The use of this category draws from the premise that literary genres have distinctive sets of spatial tropes and practices. A work of fiction can hence gain meaning by applying, modifying, or rejecting these generic conventions. A mere focus on the detection and grouping of these tropes and practices is not, however, sufficient for the analysis of a literary work; as far as I see it, each genre has a specific approach to spatial meaning-making and its depiction. In this study, the most important generic conventions belong to the genre of dystopian fiction, as this is a genre that Verronen has actively developed in the Finnish context. Dystopia is a genre with a significant spatial emphasis; it therefore lends itself to the inquiry of spatial literary studies. While Verronen's oeuvre does cover other genres, her novels are typically characterized by genre-blurring, which renders these genre categories less useful in relation to her other works.

Finally, the fourth category depicts a subject's reception of space rather than a spatial figure or a genre-related set of spatial figures. The concept of mapping relates to the mental and cognitive processing of one's surroundings. Mapping is thus a concept that directs attention to the subject and their relationship to the space rather than the space itself. In other instances of spatial literary studies, mapping can also refer to the reader's reception of narrative space (see, e.g., Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016). However, the focus in this study lies on characterial mapping, which refers to the mental and cognitive spatial processing of characters, as well as the narrative's depiction thereof. The foregrounding of these kinds of characterial spatial reception processes is a common trait in contemporary works of fiction, as Wolfgang Hallet (2014) suggests.

As concepts such as dystopia and home demonstrate, literary studies has a spatial vocabulary and genealogy of its own. It is my conviction that these concepts and their

literary backgrounds are equally enriching for the adherents of spatial theory as the concepts of spatial theory are for the practitioners of spatial literary studies.

SPACE AND PLACE

In this study, the concept of space refers to large and unspecified areas and landscapes that are typically associated with character movement. By this, I rely on the classic definition of space and place, which is founded on the tension between the closed and the open, the immobile and the mobile, the specified and the unspecified. One of the most influential classifications, coined by human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), assigns 'place' the connotations of stability and security, making 'space' the abstract and open counterpart. As Tuan remarks, '[w]hat begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value' (Tuan 1977, 6). This tradition has been followed in the various fields of humanities and social sciences that have been affected by the spatial turn, especially in human geography and fields inspired by phenomenology.

The classification has also been reworked and contested. These redefinitions include various hierarchies, as in Casey's ([1993] 2009) thinking, in which, contrary to Tuan's, it is place instead of space that is the primary component in our spatial experience; reversed oppositions, as in Doreen Massey's (1994) notion on place, in which the particularity of a given place is the product of its connections with the outside realm, making place the open and connected pole of the conceptual duo; and challenges thrown against the binarism of the space–place pairing, as in Homi Bhabha's (1995) work on the concept of 'third space,' and in Soja's (1996) *Thirdspace*, which introduced the even bolder 'trialectics' of the real, the imagined, and the real-and-imagined space.

The juxtaposition of space and place can be comprehended in relation to various traditions of spatial theory. The phenomenological approach, with its emphasis on individual experience and intimacy, is inclined to focus on place, whereas the poststructuralists, such as Foucault, and the scholars of postmodernity, highlight the importance of space (see, e.g., Prieto 2011, 15–18). One recent development in the field, however, is the comeback of place, which will be addressed below.

In the wake of the spatial turn, place has been seen as an obsolete concept that lacks the critical potential needed to study the global condition (see, e.g., Gomel 2014; Jameson 1991). After a decade of social constructionist theories on place in the 1980s, and the growing focus on globalization and its assumed effects, such as the proliferation of so-called non-places (Augé 1995) and a return to essentialist notions of place as an antidote to the expanding globalist agenda, a revival of interest – and optimism – regarding the concept of place came about in the late 1990s.

In his intellectual history of the concept of place in Western thinking, Casey (2013, 336) proposes that place should be understood as an event of reflection. This formulation is part of Casey's ([1993] 2009; 2013) ongoing reappraisal of the relationship between space and place. With the metaphor of reflection, the notion of place produces 'an inclusiveness that does not exclude anything but reaches out to everything' (Casey 2013, 336). It is, in other words, a means of detachment from the essentialist, parochialist, and nationalist connotations that have been assigned to the concept of place in the aftermath of the spatial turn. Moreover, it is a strong argument for Casey's critical stance toward the modern idea of places that are absorbed into

space. According to Casey (2013, 340), it is place that assimilates space, which makes space merely the substrate and constituent of place. But by no means is place something isolated or self-sufficient; as the metaphor suggests, place gathers and happens; its essence is the act of bringing-together (Casey 2013, 340).

Massey's influential essay 'A Global Sense of Place' (1994) heavily criticizes both the romanticized notions of place and scholarly neglect of the concept, and outlines an alternative approach. According to Massey, the specificity of a place does not spring from 'some long internalized history' but from the unique constellation of relations and connections that the place shares with other instances (Massey 1994, 154). In the original formulation of her statement, Massey emphasizes the social constructivist foundation of the approach; relations and connections thus refer to social networks. Later, Massey's (2005) focus shifts to include relations between and with nonhuman counterparts as well. Nevertheless, the core of her message remains the same: place is 'a constellation of processes rather than a thing' (Massey 2005, 141). This formulation is remarkable in that it simultaneously opens up place for the wider context and globalized reality and consolidates the specificity of place. Massey herself calls her approach 'a global sense of local' (Massey 1994, 156).

In this study, place is understood as the known, specific, familiar, and definite location that can be contrasted with space, which is more open and indefinite. I have chosen to follow this traditional and classic division for the sake of clarity, and because it aligns well with how these concepts are used in the works of Verronen. The revival of place is, however, addressed in the latter part of this study, especially in the 'Homecomings and Homesteadings' chapter. The chapter examines an array of conflicting notions of place: those that rely on expansionist yet simultaneously exclusive and discriminatory ideas, such as the concept of living space, and those that challenge and rewrite these notions. The specificity of place, the key component of Massey's outlook, receives a particularly interesting interpretation in the last work discussed in this study, *Saari kaupungissa*.

Spatial Imagination

This chapter explores the strange and fantastic worlds and the peculiar, often obsessive protagonists that inhabit the worlds of Verronen's early works. These novels bring together fantasy, horror, modern allegory, and science fiction, but they also imagine unconventional arrangements and atypical characters that cannot be associated with their respective genres. As I am about to demonstrate in this chapter, much of this sense of wonder and originality can be traced back to the way these novels make use of space and place. The first subject of my analysis is a work of fiction that weaves together narrative space and events; the second involves a spatial setting that functions as a point of convergence for the multiple storylines and themes of the narrative. Together these two works exemplify how literary space is more than a mere backdrop for the narrative; space is the key to deciphering these strange stories.

The novel *Pimeästä maasta* is an allegorical fantasy of a world that is populated by earthen people, in other words people who are made of mud and soil instead of bone and flesh. With its combination of fantastic landscapes and allegorical clarity, the novel is a highly original contribution to the thematization of gender roles and gender relations, themes that are often associated with Finnish literature of the 1990s.¹¹ Most importantly, the narrative operates with pronounced spatializations, as the plot is built on binary oppositions that are manifested through the spaces and places of the novel. These are examined in the first subchapter. The second subchapter turns to consider the entanglement of the protagonist and the literary space, a relationship that is often underlined in Verronen's narratives. The novel *Luolavuodet* revolves around a mystery surrounding a network of caves and a self-proclaimed speleologist whose life's work is the discovery and mapping of the caves. The novel oscillates between a scientific pursuit and a developing obsession, while it simultaneously unravels temporal layers that seem to be hidden within the underground spaces.

Before setting foot in the Dark Lands or the network of caves, I offer a theoretical look at the key concepts of this chapter. The following two sections thus introduce the notions of boundary and mapping.

11. According to Liisa Enwald (1999), the period's intense focus on gender issues sprang at least partially from the newly established dialogue between academic feminist theory and the literary field.

BOUNDARY

Border and boundary are concepts that have gained intense scholarly focus within the spatial studies. As Didier Fassin (2011, 214) summarizes, the notion of border descends from the works of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber and has been traditionally linked with political entities and processes of exclusion and inclusion. The boundary, on the other hand, refers to social and symbolical construction of identities and differences (Fassin 2011, 214; 2019, 27–28). Following the words of Lamont and Molnár (2002) the concept of boundaries has been at the center of influential research agendas in anthropology, history, political science, social psychology, and sociology. This article surveys some of these developments while describing the value added provided by the concept, particularly concerning the study of relational processes. It discusses literatures on (a, border tends to be a territorial concept, whereas boundary is a cultural and a symbolical one. This study follows the conceptualizations depicted above,¹² with one distinction, which is the use of boundary as a semiotic concept according to the model of Ürij Lotman.

Lotman, a founding member of the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, started modeling his theory on literary space in his 1968 article ‘Artistic Space in Gogol’s Prose’ (1990). A more comprehensive, and abstract, discussion followed in *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (1971/1977). His interest in space lies in the special role that visual perception plays in human comprehension; for Lotman, ‘visible spatial objects serve as the denotata of verbal signs’ (Lotman 1977, 217). In his view (1977, 218), the binary oppositions in their spatialized form, ‘the language of spatial relations,’ is one of the most fundamental ways of comprehending reality. This language of spatial relations consists of opposites like high–low, open–closed, or accessible–inaccessible (Lotman 1977, 218). Because of this inherent visibility and spatiality of our comprehension and verbal systems, spatial modeling is also possible for concepts that are not spatial in nature. In art, this spatial modeling plays a vital role, which Lotman highlights with the concept of spatial language. The internal organization of a given text is based on binary semantic oppositions, and, as Lotman states, in the text these oppositions ‘almost always receive spatial realization’ (Lotman 1977, 237). As Katharina Hansen Löve (1994, 34) states, the analysis of semantic oppositions is a common tool for other semiotics of the Tartu–Moscow school, but it was Lotman who applied it to the discussion of literary space. Lotman’s early theory on literary space thus established the idea that the spatial turn in humanities and social sciences presented 20 or 30 years later: the recognition of the role of spatiality in abstract human thinking and cultural concepts.

The following subchapter, ‘Crossing the Boundary in *Pimeästä maasta* (“Out of the Dark Lands”),’ makes use of Lotman’s definition of boundary. Lotman’s theory links the examination of literary space with the internal organization of textual elements, particularly plot. According to Lotman (1977, 238), an event, the basic episode of the plot, is a crossing of the boundary of the text’s spatial structure. The boundary is the separating feature, the dividing line, between binary semantic oppositions (Lotman 1990, 201). For Lotman, the boundary between the oppositions has to be

12. Although the distinction between the two concepts is largely followed in spatial studies and cultural studies, it is necessary to acknowledge that the separation of the two concepts has been under growing criticism. This is also pointed out by Fassin (2019, 28–32).

'impenetrable,' and a boundary-crossing, or an event, is thus always a violation of a prohibition from penetrating the boundary (Lotman 1977, 230, 236). The concept of event is thus determined by the spatial organization of the text (Lotman 1977, 238).

MAPPING

Within spatial studies and spatial literary studies, mapping is more often understood as a mental process that is carried out by an individual in their everyday life rather than an actual cartographical act that produces a physical (or a digital) map.¹³ This emphasis is grounded in Kevin Lynch's seminal study *The Image of the City* (1960), in which Lynch studies how people orientate themselves in cities and which features of urban environment are significant for the human perception and interpretation of space. In this chapter, mapping is an intellectual and practical activity that an individual practices in order to make sense of their surroundings. Mapping is thus one of the ways in which a character may engage with their surroundings, but as a form of engagement it is characterized by a notable cognitive emphasis.

One of the most influential applications of mapping is Fredric Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping. With this concept, Jameson (1991, 89–92) attempts to bring together the viewpoints of Lynch – especially his understanding of alienation as the individual's incapability to relate their position to the city – and Louis Althusser's philosophy of ideology and interpellation. Cognitive mapping, then, is an individual's attempt to locate and relate themselves within the global (economic) world system (Jameson 1991, 92). The notion of cognitive mapping is famously ambiguous and, as Tally (2013, 67–69) points out, Jameson developed and refined the concept throughout his career. It did, however, pave the way for the study of the global condition, as Marie-Laure Ryan (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 108) suggests. In the context of Verronen's works, cognitive mapping is used as an analytical tool in the instances where Verronen's prose depicts the relation between the local and the global.

Verronen's literary works present characters who perform actual cartographical activities, too; as this study demonstrates, these cartographical attempts often overlap with processes of cognitive mapping. Both are explored in the 'Space as *Idée Fixe* in *Luolavuodet* ("The Cave Years")' subchapter.

Crossing the Boundary in Pimeästä maasta ('Out of the Dark Lands')

Published in 1995, *Pimeästä maasta* is Verronen's second novel and fourth work of fiction. Shortlisted for the Finlandia Prize, the most prestigious literary award in Finland, it introduced Verronen to wider audiences. The novel is a postmodern *Bildungsroman*, a novel of formation, with fantastic and allegorical elements. The story centers on the life and development of the protagonist, Ulthyrāja Tharabereghist,¹⁴ whose flight from the suppressive community forms the storyline of the novel.

13. In spatial literary studies, the concept of mapping has been cultivated by Robert Tally (2013) in particular. He views mapping as a tool for addressing problems of representation. Moreover, Tally (2013, 4) sees a connection between storytelling and mapmaking, which, as he claims, makes the concept even more important for literary scholars.

14. The names of the characters are not Finnish.

The original Finnish title, *Pimeästä maasta*, has an interesting morphosyntactical element, the locative case elative, which manifests itself as the suffix *-sta/-stä* and means 'out of'. Locative cases in Finnish are a rough equivalent of prepositions of location in Indo-European languages. In addition to its basic meaning (out of somewhere/away from somewhere), the elative of Finnish language also expresses background and origin. The title is thus ambivalent: resulting from the many uses of the elative case in Finnish language, it can be read as a statement of background or origin ('from the Dark Lands'), as a statement of directional physical movement from somewhere ('out of the Dark Lands'), as a statement of composition (be made 'of dark land'), or as a statement of the content of speech or thought (an account 'of the Dark Lands').

The title of the novel can also be seen as an allusion to Verronen's essay 'Pois Pohjoisesta' ('Away from the North,' 2004c), which is a short depiction of her reasons for leaving the north of Finland and migrating to Helsinki, the capital city. The title of the essay, in turn, can be seen as a reference to Jamma Tuominen's popular 1983 schlager 'Pois Pohjoiseen,' which translates 'off to the North.' Verronen's essay thus inverts the direction of the schlager and presents itself as a counternarrative for the schlager's antiurban and nostalgic yearning for the north of Finland. Both the titles – 'Pois Pohjoisesta' and *Pimeästä maasta* – share the same locative case, although the essay title carries a clearer directional meaning, since the adverb 'pois' means 'away.' The essay is one of the few texts in which Verronen explicitly recounts her artistic views on literature and some aspects of her personal history. The similarity of the two titles implies that the novel can be interpreted as an autobiographical work of fiction; see footnote 23.

The novel begins when the protagonist is taken for their first fitting-in:

Ulthyrāja felt the touch of the cold metal, and their breath stopped short. They were surrounded by the Mold, trapped in a cavity where it was unavoidable. Rough hands pushed them deeper so that every part of their body was pressed tightly against the walls. They felt a hint of pressure and started to guess what was about to happen. The hands withdrew, the hinges creaked, and more metal was pressed against their skin. They were trapped inside a big mold, and several appendages sought their way to the orifices of their body. They were forced to open their mouth for something large and rusty, which scraped their teeth; something penetrated their ears and their nose, and even their eyes felt the pressure.¹⁵ (PM, 8)

The protagonist is only ten days old when they experience the metal embrace of the Mold for the first time. Ready to crush, cripple, and cut its victims into pieces, the Mold is not only the model for an ideal body but also the moral standard that

15. Ulthyrāja tunsi kylmän metallin kosketuksen, ja hänen hengityksensä salpautui. Muotti ympäröi hänet; hän oli onkalossa, jossa siltä ei voinut välttyä. Kovat kädet työnsivät häntä syvemmälle, niin että kehon jokainen osa painui tiiviisti seinämiä vasten. Hän tunsi aavistuksen puristuksesta ja alkoi arvata, mitä oli tulossa. Kädet väistyivät, saranat kirskahtivat, ja lisää metallia painui kiinni ihoon. Hän oli ansassa suuren muotin sisällä, ja lukuisat ulokkeet etsiytyivät hänen kehonsa aukkoihin. Hänen oli pakko avata suunsa jollekin suurelle ja ruosteenmakuiselle, jota vasten hampaat raapiutuivat vihlovasti; hänen korviinsa työntyivät jotain, samoin nenään, ja jopa silmät tuntuivat olevan puristuksissa.

controls the community into which the protagonist is born. As the protagonist will quickly notice, everyday life in the Dark Lands resembles fitting oneself into the Mold. The communal culture of the settlement is permeated by restrictions, demands, and unspoken rules, and the only possible option for an individual is to yield and comply. Just as the iron Mold defines the bodily limits of the protagonist's existence, the cosmological tradition of the village elders incarcerates the protagonist in their home village. The protagonist fears the edge of the Earth, which awaits those who wander off to the tundra.

Ulthyrāja is the newest member of a small village settlement living in the Dark Lands and, like all the others, as an adult they are expected to assume the role of either a caretaker or a hunter. Their life, like everyone else's, is paced by regular fitting-ins: painful ceremonies in which the members of the community fit themselves into the Mold, an object of worship. The opening scene of the novel introduces this practice as well as the dormant rebellious spirit of the protagonist. The practices of molding and fitting-in are possible because the characters, though human-like, are made not of flesh but of mud and soil. In the storyworld, the main task of every person is to take care of the form and the proportions of their body, and to strive toward an ideal body shape. Although physicality plays a significant role in the story, the sex and gender of the protagonist are never revealed in the novel. Since the procreation of the characters differs greatly from human sexual reproduction, it remains unclear whether the characters have a sexual distinction at all. The differing roles assigned to caretakers and hunters do nevertheless suggest that some sort of socialization into specific roles and division of labor does occur. This narrative decision is enabled by the fact that Finnish is a grammatically genderless language that lacks a gendered pronominal system. Because of this built-in genderlessness of the Finnish language, the Finnish reader may indeed fail to notice that the genders of the protagonist and other characters remain a mystery. For the purposes of my analysis, I have made the decision to use the gender-neutral personal pronoun 'they' for the protagonist and other characters of the novel. I would, however, like to highlight that the purpose of the novel is not to underline the gender aspect but rather to evade it.

On reaching adulthood, Ulthyrāja chooses to leave the settlement of the Dark Lands. After several months of travel through the icy tundra, they finally reach the seashore and settle down in a large village, the Village of the Fishers (PM, 75). The protagonist, now called Tharaist, spends years studying and practicing the craft of fishing, and slowly fitting themselves into the fishermen's molds. After constant troubles with the fitting-ins and an ensuing personal crisis, they meet a shipwrecked sailor and embark on a new journey that takes them to the City of Light (PM, 193).

The City, rich in diversity, is different than any other community the protagonist, now called Thara, has ever encountered. Encouraged by the tolerance of their surroundings, the protagonist gives up the fitting-ins and reworking their body and its forms, and starts processing their past experiences through artistic work. The protagonist also faces their past in a concrete way, by carrying out long hikes in the tundra and entering settlements much like their childhood home (PM, 210–13, 237–44). One of them is burned down and destroyed, a fate that also seems to await the City of Light. By the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the City and its surroundings are on the brink of an ecological disaster (PM, 245–54, 265). The residents start fitting out ships for a voyage, but Thara is not among them (PM, 266–67). The protagonist

chooses not to cross the ocean but turns instead to the tundra, the same environment they first fled to from their childhood home.

Even though the text presents the reader with a variety of fantastic elements – the physical makeup of the characters' bodies, the practices of molding and fitting-in, the strange communities, locations, cultures, and religious doctrines – the trajectory discussed above suggests another possible interpretation that connects the narrative universe with our own by means of allegory. In this line of reading, the settlement in the Dark Lands represents a premodern, preagrarian community of hunter-gatherers. The Village of the Fishers is governed and controlled by trade guilds and offers its inhabitants modest urban comforts; thus, it resembles a medieval city-state with a growing burgher presence. The City of Light, the last resort of the protagonist's travels, presents a modern, fully urbanized society with a great measure of diversity and individual freedom. Verronen's allegory operates here by mixing and contrasting the spatial and the temporal: the protagonist's travels in space are also travels in different sociohistorical periods of time.

Next, Verronen's novel will be observed with the help of Ūrij Lotman's (1977) notion of boundary as a spatial realization of the text's semantic oppositions. In Lotman's (1977) model, the reading of a text begins by identifying the semantic oppositions that are at play in the narrative. After this, the events of the plot can be approached as acts of boundary-crossing, the boundary being the separating element between the semantic fields (Lotman 1977). Lotman's theory has its limitations, as Marie-Laure Ryan notes:

When spatial concretization takes place, the concept of boundary crossing can be applied quite literally; but when it does not, the idea of crossing becomes a metaphor so thin that one might just as well replace it with a 'change of state' or 'switch of value of a semantic feature.' (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 57)

In other words, the analysis of semantic oppositions and the spatial boundaries separating them requires a literary text in which the spatializations are concrete and noticeable: a literary text very much like Verronen's *Pimeästä maasta*. As the following analysis states, with the help of spatial semiotics and Lotman's conceptualization of boundary-crossings, the novel's strange geographies and fantastic landscapes reveal their inner logic.

DEFINING THE BOUNDARY: SPATIALIZING OPPOSITIONS

In *Pimeästä maasta*, the most compelling binary opposition is the juxtaposition of darkness and light. In the narrative, this binary opposition is spatialized as geographically differentiated locations. The protagonist's childhood home, Dark Lands, obviously represents the semantic field associated with darkness. This is particularly well illustrated in the following scene, in which the protagonist experiences bright daylight for the first time in their life:

The Hunter had always said that in the wintertime the tundra was brighter than the settlement. Ulthyrāja noticed that The Hunter had been right. The difference was not considerable, and there were moments of sudden darkness in the plains, as well; but it never got nearly as dark as in the settlement. Ulthyrāja forgot about the dog sled, forgot

about the purpose of the trip, forgot about anything else, as they grasped and marvelled at the amount of light.¹⁶ (PM, 22)

As the scene shows, the darkness is directly associated with the settlement, while the surrounding tundra is brighter even during winter. The title of the novel – 'Out of the Dark Lands' – highlights the semantic field of the darkness and implies that an opposite to that exists, as to get 'out of' somewhere requires an alternative position to get 'into.' The title, however, is notably vague concerning this alternative position and does not offer any clues on its nature or name. This reflects the narrative's overall structure, in which the protagonist leaves the Dark Lands and finds an alternative in multiple locations: first in the tundra, then in the Village of the Fishers, and finally in the City of Light. One can say that the opposite semantic field of the Dark Lands – the semantic field of light – thus receives multiple spatializations, but, as the toponyms suggest, it is the City of Light that most clearly offers an alternative to the Dark Lands. In the narrative world, these two spatializations are also geographically differentiated: the Dark Lands are positioned to the north, and the City of Light to the south.

The two semantic fields receive other attributes as well: darkness is associated with closure and inaccessibility and light with openness and accessibility. The Dark Lands are related to the enclosed, the inaccessible, the continuous (or the magical and the traditional), and the isolated; the City of Light, on the other hand, represents the open, the accessible, the discrete (as for the residents; the individual), and the connected. Many of these binarisms are played out with corporeal themes. The enclosed and restrictive nature of the Dark Lands is represented with the help of the fitting-ins and other means of manipulating the physical body.¹⁷ These practices cease as the protagonist arrives at the City of Light.

The juxtaposition of the north and the south in the novel is compelling. When contrasted with other works of Finnish fiction, the novel's image of the north deviates from its contemporaries. The Finnish north appears often in dystopian fiction, especially in the subgenre of climate fiction. Finnish climate fiction often imagines Arctic areas as future abodes of life, as Saija Isomaa and Toni Lahtinen present (2017, 11) in their article. Verronen's dystopian works, such as *Kirkkaan selkeää*, adhere to this regional genre trait. A much earlier short story, 'Valaat ja albatrossit' ('The Whales and the Albatrosses,' 1992c), can be seen as a variation of the theme, as in the story it is the Antarctic that serves as a safe space for human and animal life in the middle of apocalyptic events. The north, in these narratives, is a north of light, if light is associated with future, hope, and life. But, as the above analysis of *Pimeästä maasta*

16. Metsästäjä oli aina sanonut, että tundralla on talvella valoisampaa kuin kylässä, ja Ulthyräjä huomasi, että hän oli ollut oikeassa. Ero ei ollut suuri, ja joskus tasangollakin pimeni äkillisesti melko paljon, mutta ei koskaan niin pimeäksi kuin kylässä. Ulthyräjä unohti toiset valjakot, matkan tarkoituksen ja kaiken muun, kun hän henkeä haukkoen ihmetteli valon määrää.

17. Playing with bodily proportions has always been a strategy applied by authors to highlight the spatiality of human existence (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 46). The strategy often appears in fictions that foreground the exploration of fantastic landscapes and alien worlds. In *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift [1726] 2008), the protagonist first visits the Kingdom of Lilliput, where he meets the miniature people of the island, and in the second book he has to survive among the giants of Brobdingnag. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll [1865] 1970), the protagonist grows and shrinks in order to explore the strange world she has dived into.

demonstrates, Verronen's breakthrough novel presents a geographics of hope that is vastly different: instead of harboring prospects and providing safety, the north of *Pimeästä maasta* is backward and restrictive and suffers from regressive development. The ending of the novel, however, brings the story closer to the geographies of Finnish dystopian novels, as the protagonist learns about the apocalyptic fate hanging over the City of Light. The south and its civilization are secretly vulnerable, although rich and socially progressive.

Verronen's fictional geography resembles that in Finland's national epic, *Kalevala* ([1849]/1999), in which the main conflict arises between the tribes of Pohjola ('The Northern') and Kalevala ('The Land of Kaleva'), where the heroes live. Pohjola is depicted as a cold, frosty land, the source of illnesses and frost, ruled by the mighty shaman-sorceress Louhi – a setting very much like the cold, illness-ridden Dark Lands, which is dominated by magical thinking. Today, the general consensus in *Kalevala* research is that, although the mythic Pohjola often appears in Baltic Finnic mythology, the juxtaposition between the two locations and especially the two tribes inhabiting them was invented by Elias Lönnrot, who compiled and composed the epic from oral folk poetry (see e.g., Anttonen 1999, 69–79; Kaukonen 1979). This kind of opposition is not recognizable in the original oral tradition. Nevertheless, after the publication of *Kalevala*, the evaluative juxtaposition between the north and the south has greatly influenced the spatial semiosis of the Finnish nation.

In Verronen's novel, there are a few other details that can be interpreted as allusions to *Kalevala*. The most important of them is the story of the Mold, which is the centerpiece of the community in the Dark Lands. While living in the Village of the Fishers, the protagonist finds out that the origin of the Mold is in the seaside Village (PM, 124–25). The metal of the Mold came from the fishermen, since the residents of the Dark Lands were not able to get any other suitable material from their native place. In *Kalevala*, the mistress of Pohjola asks the men of Kalevala to build her a magical object, the Sampo, since she lacks the necessary skills herself. In both cases, the north is in need of a holy object and the south has the resources for its construction; the south, then, provides these resources to the north.

In addition to the geographically spatialized opposition between the Dark Lands and the City of Light, the novel operates with several other binarisms. One of these presents itself in the social realm of the narrative world. In the settlement of the Dark Lands, an individual has a preordained role either as a caretaker or as a hunter – a role that the protagonist struggles to fulfill, since they are first intended to be molded as a hunter, and after several unsuccessful attempts are ordained otherwise (PM, 19–25). The two groups live in the same village but reside, work, eat, and socialize separately. A similar kind of arrangement appears in the second part of the novel, which is set in the Village of the Fishers. Even during the first day of their apprenticeship in the House of the Fishers, the protagonist is warned about the deformed ways of the whalers (PM, 90). The two trade guilds detest each other:

The huts of the whalers were built on the northern side of the village, close to the sea but far enough away from the other huts that the choice of location seemed meaningful. The closest fishermen-neighbors had deliberately left stinking piles of death-soil in their backyards; Tharaist imagined that those who had to walk pass the piles on a daily basis

must become deformed. The whalers who opened their doors to the rescue team didn't show any signs of deformity, though, or if they did, not in a pronounced way.¹⁸ (PM, 97)

In the scene above, the protagonist takes part in a rescue mission looking for two lost newborns. Soon it turns out that the rivalry between the fishermen and the whalers has escalated into a bloody tragedy: the children of the two groups have attacked each other. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of the two fisherman young (PM, 99). A clear spatialization occurs, since the two opposing groups are represented as living in different neighborhoods, on opposite sides of the village. Interestingly, their clash takes the form of a loss of spatial orientation: before the true course of the events has been detected, both parties believe that their descendants are lost in the mountains. The protagonist, again, is the one who ventures between and beyond the opposing groups, or semantic fields: Tharaist is a fisherman, looking for the children of the whalers.

Although the narrative is built on different binaries, the geographically spatialized binary opposition between darkness and light maintains itself as the primary element of the plot and functions as a frame of reference for all the other binary oppositions, such as the social binary opposition between the two competing trade guilds in the Village. This is further supported by the fact that the main events of the plot are boundary-crossings between two semantic fields of darkness and light. The protagonist escapes from their childhood settlement to the tundra; from tundra they enter the Village of Fishers; and, finally, they leave the Village and settle in the City of Light. As already stated, the semantic field of light has multiple spatializations in the novel, whereas the darkness is more clearly associated with Dark Lands throughout the narrative. One can, however, interpret this the other way around; the semantic field of darkness can be associated with the Village, too – in contrast to the City of Light, the Village is an abode of darkness. Although the spatializations of these semantic fields vary, the overall arrangement between binary oppositions and their juxtaposition remains the same.

The most prominent departure from this pattern of geographically represented binarisms is the total number of different settled locations, which is three – the settlement of the Dark Lands, the Village, the City. This suggests that the narrative, as much as it is built on the binaries, seeks alternatives to the binary perspective, and thus anticipates the ending of the novel, which positions the protagonist in the area between the two binaries. The novel itself is divided into three numbered sections according to the main setting of the section (Dark Lands; the Village of the Fishers; the City of Light); this structural solution is yet another element that underlines the novel's departure from the binary system.

The binaries and their spatializations have also a compelling stylistic effect on the narrative. The roots of the binary oppositions emphasized by Lotman lie in structural anthropology, where this binary logic is seen as essential to myths, or the primeval

18. Valaanpyytäjien majat oli rakennettu kylän pohjoislaidalle, lähelle merta, mutta paljonpuhuvan erilleen toisista majoista. Lähimmät kalastajanaapurit olivat ilmeisen tarkoituksellisesti jättäneet takapihoilleen haisevia kuolemanmaakasoja, ja Tharaist arveli, että niiden ohi päivittäin useita kertoja kulkevan täytyi saada vaurioita muotoihinsa. Etsijöille oven avanneista pyytäjistä sitä ei kuitenkaan huomannut, ainakaan kovin selvästi.

form of meaning-making. Structural anthropology treats binary oppositions as a fundamental part of human thinking and as a necessity that often take the form of cultural constants (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1967). In their most simplified form, binarisms can be reduced to the categories of 'positive' and 'negative,' which sometimes also take the form of 'sacred' and 'profane' (Löve 1994, 34–35). The spatialized binary oppositions of the novel communicate that the spaces of the narrative are not meant to be realistic representations but that they serve a metaphorical and mythical purpose instead. They are thus a rhetorical device that connects the author's prose fiction with fairy tales, myths, and other premodern genres of narration. This is a feature that sheds light on the whole oeuvre of Verronen: Verronen's fiction is commonly characterized as vaguely fantastic, marvelous, or weird. At the same time, it seems difficult to place her fiction clearly into a single specific genre, such as fantasy or science fiction. I suggest that the quality of Verronen's fiction, often described as 'fantastic,' 'archaic,' or 'mythical,' is the result of the use of binary logics, and especially their concrete spatialization.

Pimeästä maasta is a travelogue and an adventure novel, but only on the outside. Upon closer inspection, the novel is an allegory of personal development: a novel of formation. The alternation of the 'positive' and the 'negative,' the protagonist's movement between these spatialized opposites, and especially their final positioning in the liminal in-between-area represent an individual's growth and development from magical and religious thinking to a rational, exploratory, and more relative worldview. The journey of the protagonist is the life-journey of an individual, and their subjectivity and agency develop through the travels presented in the novel. This subjectivity is also highlighted in the place-names of the novel: Dark Lands and the City of Light do not resemble common toponyms or follow the same linguistic rules as the names of the characters in the novel. Instead, they appear as subjective, evaluative statements made by the protagonist.

CROSSING THE BOUNDARY: SPACE AND PLOT

When the character movements in the novel are closely examined, an interesting arrangement appears: the boundary-crossing of the protagonist is always preceded by another crossing from the opposite direction. This pattern is most obvious when an intruder arriving in the Dark Lands inspires the protagonist to escape from their community. The peddler Razka Ziraj arrives in the settlement out of the blue and upsets the whole community (PM, 47–59):

A flock of prying villagers gathered quickly to wonder. Every one of them would have, in the stranger's place, hunched over and withdrawn. In addition to that, a properly formed adult would have never asked anything from the adolescents, unless they already knew the answer. Nevertheless, someone went for the Council, and another rushed to see the sledge dogs of the stranger, because they thought they had been stolen from the village. Everyone else tried to recall if a hunter had gone missing lately and whether the stranger resembled the missing person even slightly.¹⁹ (PM, 47)

19. Paikalle kerääntyi nopeasti uteliaiden joukko, jolla oli paljon ihmettelemistä. Jokainen kyläläinen olisi muukalaisen asemassa ymmärtänyt vetäytyä köyryyn. Sitä paitsi kukaan hyvämuotoinen täysikasvuinen ei koskaan kysynyt opettelevaisilta mitään, ellei jo itse tiennyt vastausta. Joku lähti kuitenkin hakemaan Neuvoston johtajaa, ja toinen kiiruhti tarkastamaan tulijan vetokoiria,

The scene above highlights how the peddler shakes the foundation of the settlers' belief system. The stranger's forms and even the way they stand are not common nor acceptable; the same applies to the stranger's behavior. Most importantly, the settlers immediately conclude that the stranger must be a lost member of their community, because, according to their cosmology, no other settlements or villages exist. The boundary that the peddler has crossed is thus ontological and epistemological in nature. The violation of this boundary does not go unpunished. The episode turns into a tragedy when the peddler, tortured by the metal embrace of the Mold and the other torments that the settlers impose upon them, ends their life (PM, 52–53). For the protagonist, the epistemological order has permanently been shattered: Ulthyrāja starts to question the authority of the settlement elders, as well as the fear-inducing cosmology of the community. Finally, the protagonist is no longer able to contain their curiosity and ends up leaving the settlement with the intention of looking for the peddler's origin (PM, 63–64).

In the Village of the Fishers, a similar boundary-crossing precedes the protagonist's own boundary-crossing: on a stormy night, the inhabitants of the seaside village witness an accident at sea, as a small vessel is crushed against the rocks of the cape (PM, 175–80). The fishers are uninterested in helping the crew and a ship they fail to recognize and thus consider alien and imperfectly formed; flotsam from the wreck, nevertheless, is received with great enthusiasm. The scene is a recurrence of the boundary-crossing of the peddler, but, as the reactions depicted above demonstrate, in this community the transgression of the spatial and epistemological boundary is less strictly sanctioned than in the Dark Lands. The protagonist is, nevertheless, the only one who is willing to help the shipwrecked. With Tharaist's help, the sailors are able to repair their ship, and, while helping them, the protagonist learns of their home harbor, the City of Light (PM, 180). The episode is a version of the castaway narrative, a genre that plays a central role in the works of Verronen. The classic robinsonade is a product of the Age of Enlightenment and is thus expressive of the ideals of rationality, individual prowess, and empiricism; these are the virtues that are implicitly present in the shipwreck episode of *Pimeästä maasta* as well. The protagonist's lack of prejudice, dexterity, and desire for knowledge are rewarded as the ship takes Tharaist aboard (PM, 184–85). The world around the village turns out to be a lot larger than what the fishermen have known. As in this scene, also in the scene of the peddler's arrival to the Dark Lands both the protagonist and the reader experience the broadening of cosmology simultaneously. As Ryan (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 113) notes, the pace and timing of the disclosure of spatial information is a powerful narrative device. In the novel, spatial knowledge and descriptions in the narrative are given to the reader piece by piece, step by step, when the travels of the protagonist progress. This serves to bring the reader closer to the protagonist; a shared horizon of knowledge works as an affective device and results in identification.

As I have demonstrated above, in Verronen's novel, the breaking out is preceded by a break-in: the movements of the characters resemble a symmetrical position-taking and balance each other. Despite their symmetry, these boundary-crossings do have

koska arveli niitä kylästä varastetuiksi. Kaikki muut yrittivät muistella, olisiko joku viime aikoina kadonnut metsästäjä jäänyt löytymättä ja muistuttaisiko muukalainen häntä edes vähän.

a difference: the break-ins are presented as random or accidental, like the shipwreck or the wanderings of the peddler, while the break-outs are intentional.

The pattern is more complicated, though. A significant feature of the protagonist's boundary-crossings is that they are not one-directional. The protagonist, after moving to the Village of the Fishers and the City, repeatedly returns to the tundra and settlements of the Dark Lands. Instead of a simple departure from the oppressive community of the Dark Lands, Ulthyrāja's itinerary is depicted as a back-and-forth movement between the Dark Lands and the City of Light:

They had found a delicate balance for their existence; they had estimated the bearings of that balance and begun to pulsate irregularly around it.

Their solution was to travel to the tundra and return to spend time in the City of Light. If they spent too much time away in the wilderness or in the City, the balance wavered. Once a certain time had passed, the one who had stayed still was unable to move; and once a certain distance had been travelled, the one who had left for the tundra was unable to return.²⁰ (PM, 259)

In the example above, mental balance is spatialized as an area, and the protagonist's existence in it is described as a pulsating movement. This abstract metaphor turns into concrete action in the next sentence, where the narrator describes the protagonist's pendulum-like movement between the Dark Lands and the City.

As the story progresses and the protagonist evolves from a village-dweller into an urban resident, the pattern of their movement between the tundra and the domicile develops. When living in the Village, the protagonist enters only the tundra, not the settlements that can be found all over it. But, when residing in the City, they start visiting the settlements that resemble their childhood home (PM, 208–13, 237–44). The farther the protagonist resides from the home of their childhood, the closer they draw it during their trips to the tundra. It appears as if the physical distance between their past and their present turns into freedom of movement: the farther the protagonist resides from their childhood home, the more eager – and capable – they are to cross the boundary between the tundra and the settlements. This is yet another way that the protagonist's personal development is spatialized in the narrative.

The analysis of the novel's boundary-crossings suggests that the boundaries are areas of transaction and intensive transformation. The boundary-crossings of the protagonist are always preceded by another crossing coming from the opposite direction. Thus, the narrative presents the character movements that result in boundary-crossings as a dialogue: the protagonist's crossings can be interpreted as reactions or responses to external stimuli. The character movements can be categorized as either external or internal in terms of direction of movement. Moreover,

20. Hän oli löytänyt herkän tasapainon olemiselleen: määrittänyt suunnilleen, millä alueella tasapaino sijaitti ja alkanut värähdellä epätasaisesti sen ympäristössä.

Hänen mahdollisuutensa oli siinä, että hän teki matkoja tundralle ja palasi sieltä aina takaisin ja vietti jonkin aikaa Valon kaupungissa. Jos hän oli liian kauan poissa tai liian kauan kaupungissa, tasapaino järkkyy. Oli jokin raja-aika, jonka kuluttua paikalleen jäänyt ei päässyt enää liikkumaan ja rajaetäisyys, jonka kuljettuaan tundran vaeltaja ei enää kyennyt palaamaan takaisin.

as the different places can be interpreted as allegorical representations of historical periods – premodern, medieval, late modern – the dialogic character movements, too, call for an allegorical reading. The alternating boundary-crossings can be understood as representations of a dialogue between the inner and the outer, or the intrinsic and the extrinsic. Rather than staging an independent, isolated selfhood, *Pimeästä maasta* illustrates how even the dissident character rests upon external influence.

Furthermore, the crossings that the protagonist accomplishes suggest that the nature of boundary-crossings is not one-dimensional, one-directional, or once-and-for-all. Instead of the boundaries, the focus of the novel lies in the actual act of crossing. This is also the postmodern component of the narrative: even though the spatializations of the novel suggest simple binarisms that carry qualities of mythical or primeval thinking, the plot structure unwinds these binarisms through repeated border violations and by placing the protagonist in the liminal boundary area again and again.

A similar spatial strategy is also employed in other works by Verronen. In the novel *Saari kaupungissa*, the protagonist is torn between a seaside city and the archipelago in front of it. Although the city is her new place of residence, she is equally drawn to the small offshore islets and islands that, despite their barrenness, possess a strange allure for her. The islands serve as metaphors for the protagonist's individuality, whereas the city stands for the community. The conflict between the opposite poles is finally resolved as the protagonist appropriates the waterfront of the city and learns how to travel by sea. The waterfront of the city thus functions like the tundra in *Pimeästä maasta*: it is a liminal space that allows the protagonist to negotiate between two oppositions, an area of freedom, movement and personal development, and an intermediary zone between the two extremes. In both narratives, the liminal area is marked by wilderness and the presence of the elements and requires considerable practical prowess of the protagonist.

The emphasis on acting and movement when discussing Verronen's *Pimeästä maasta* can be understood in the light of Lotman's theory. The modeling that Lotman builds between the plot events and literary space functions with the ethos of Verronen's fiction, in which autonomic movement and the ability to act in space play a pivotal role. In *Culture and Explosion* (2009), Lotman elaborates his notion of the semiosphere and its function. The semiosphere, which is the context for the communication and creation of information, is characterized by its separateness, namely, its boundaries. The whole purpose and function of the semiosphere is nevertheless dependent on boundary-crossings, and these crossings always take the form of translation (Andrews 2003, 42–43). The boundary functions as a translation filter, allowing the transfer of information.

In *Pimeästä maasta*, the transitions of the protagonist from one binary opposition to another are highlighted by the change in the protagonist's name: events that can also be understood as acts of translation. At the beginning of the narrative, the protagonist is presented as Ulthyrāja Tharabereghist; in fact, their name is the very first word of the novel (PM, 7). After leaving the Dark Lands, they settle in the Village of the Fishers and join the guild of the fishermen. The first change of name is depicted in a dramatic scene (PM, 87): the protagonist is about to enter the Fishermen's House for the first time when the doorkeeper asks for their name, and they state it as Ultja Tharaist. The renaming takes place in a liminal setting both at the story level – because the

protagonist stands in the doorway – and at the narrative and textual level – because their name-utterance is the last line of the chapter. The second change of name happens when the protagonist, now presented by the narrator as Ula Thara, spends a night on the ship's deck and waits to see the City of Light, their new homeplace. Again, a liminal setting appears: the protagonist is on a ship, 'watching the hardly visible silhouette of the coast' (PM, 193), between the land and the water, traveling.

The last renaming scene of the novel takes place in the last chapter, in which the protagonist refuses to enter the ships leaving the City of Light and imagines their own death:

They are not afraid of their own decomposition. They hope that it will take place on some bright winter day when they are alone in the tundra. The river flowing through the barren land shall take them. It shall flow through them and past them, mold them and be molded by them while they travel together to the sea. And then the wind will blow through the heaths and recite their new names until it fades away:

'ua tha... ua tha... tha... tha... hhh...'²¹ (PM, 269)

In this imagined scene, just like the body of the protagonist, even their name breaks down into pieces and fades, uniting with the environment. The whole of the narrative comes full circle: The novel which started with the name of Ulthyraja Tharabereghist now ends with a line hinting at the ultimate disappearance of any name. This strengthens the theme of cyclical formation and de-formation, the core of the novel.

At the level of the plot and the thematics, the renaming episodes serve multiple functions. As stated earlier, they highlight transitional events of the novel. But they also add an element of discontinuity and irregularity: the changing of the protagonist's name keeps the reader alert by making it more difficult to identify the protagonist. More importantly, renaming the protagonist disturbs the idea of permanent identity and presents the self as something that is to be constructed and reworked. The new names thus serve the purpose of depicting the personal development of the protagonist – especially since the changes or translations are enacted by the protagonist themselves. This solution highlights the agency of the protagonist in relation to the boundary-crossings.

If the renaming episodes are, on the other hand, interpreted as acts of translation rather than mere name changes, as I am suggesting here, the analysis takes a new turn. Name translation is a complex issue; in common understanding, names are considered untranslatable.²² The question of untranslatability receives a heightened role in Lotman's thinking as well. Lotman famously states: 'the translation of the untranslatable may in turn become the carrier of information of the highest value'

21. Omaa hajoamistaan hän ei pelkää. Hän toivoo, että se tapahtuu jonain valoisana talvipäivänä, kun hän on yksin tundralla. Karun maan läpi soljuva joki saa ottaa hänet. Se saa virrata hänen lävitseen ja ohitseensa, muovata häntä hitaasti ja muovautua hänestä, samalla kun he vaeltavat yhdessä kohti merta. Ja silloin tuuli kulkee kanervissa ja lausuu hänen uusia nimiään kunnes vaimenee pois:

'ua tha... ua tha... tha... tha... hhh...'

22. In translation studies, the issue of translating or adapting personal names has been widely discussed. For an overview, see Sanaty Pour (2009) and Särkkä (2007). For translating personal names in works of literary fiction, see Cummings (2005), Manini (1996), and Sato (2016).

(Lotman 2009, 6). The protagonist of the novel solves the problem by modifying their given name, stripping down excess components as their travels proceed. The practice suggests that, while their personal development and empowerment progress, the core of their selfhood unfolds. The remaining bits of the protagonist's given name gain a symbolical meaning of the self, and this self is at the same time translatable – since they do change their name in every new location – and untranslatable – because, in fact, these new names are not new but versions of the original one.

At the end of the novel, the City of Light faces an ecological crisis, and the residents start planning an escape. The protagonist refuses to join the other refugees, who aim to leave the city with their fleet. Ula Thara declines the invitations again and again and extends their travels to the tundra with the intention of never returning (PM, 266–69). The resolution of the novel is particularly interesting because it chooses a spatial strategy opposite to the preceding narrative. The final act of the protagonist, whose story has been one of travel and discovery, is to not cross a boundary, to not venture, to refuse the exploration of a new continent.

The building of the ships is an allusion to the science fiction trope of leaving the Earth on generation ships, which are starships that travel for the lifetime of multiple human generations. This linkage is established at the end of the novel, where the narrator describes how the ships are built to support fish and vegetable farming and water purification, and how carefully the sailors are selected (PM, 266–67). Naturally, this interpretative line requires some knowledge of Verronen's background as a writer who started out in science fiction magazines. The concealed association between the ships of the city and the trope of the generation ships means that the spatial referent of the narrative space changes: at the end of the novel, the City of Light no longer represents a modern, urban society, as it did when first introduced to the protagonist and the reader, but the whole of a planet, suffering an ecological disaster. The setting, which earlier represented a certain sociohistorical period, comes to represent the distant future. The ending of the novel thus gains an apocalyptic tone.

The novel utilizes spatializations of binary semantic oppositions to depict the formation of thinking and the personal development of an individual. Simultaneously, the boundaries between these oppositions are repeatedly crossed, and at the end of the narrative the protagonist settles down in the in-between area. The ending of the novel unwinds the binarisms and the constitutions established throughout the narrative. At the same time, as the boundaries between the oppositions are challenged and crossed, control over the protagonist's physical body and its forms is diminished. A novel of formation²³ is, so to speak, also a novel of unformation in the sense that

23. The locations of the novel can be seen as autobiographical allusions to the author's life. Verronen spent her childhood in Kalajoki, which is a small village in the Northern Ostrobothnia region of the Bothnian Bay area. Kalajoki and its surroundings are the heartlands of Laestadianism, a Lutheran revivalist movement known for its conservative views, especially the prohibition of all forms of contraception. The strong sexual anxieties of the Dark Lands can be interpreted as a critique of Laestadian sexual morals. This Laestadian/Christian reading is also activated by the biblical allusion carried by the fantastic physicality of the characters: the analogy between human flesh and the soil of the Earth is an allusion to the creation scene of the Old Testament, where God forms the first man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7).

Verronen studied and worked in Oulu, northern Finland's biggest city. Historically, Oulu was the center of the tar trade and the so-called 'tar tycoons,' the wealthy bourgeoisie that

it challenges the value of socialization, upbringing, and education and represents the individual's development as an attempt to dispose of forced external influence. The two-directionality of the narrative's boundary-crossings does suggest that a dialogic relationship between the external and the internal realms is necessary and even beneficial, yet the majority of the narrative stages different forms of suppression. The process of shedding these demands is represented through the protagonist's release from the practices of body-morphing – a theme that culminates in the last scene, which imagines the death and decomposition of the protagonist, a unification with nature and thus a final liberation from the demands of civilization – and the shortening of their name.

Space as Idée Fixe in Luolavuodet ('The Cave Years')

Luolavuodet, Verronen's third novel, continues to employ space for the purposes of allegory in a manner that resembles her previous work *Pimeästä maasta*. The novel develops a theme introduced in the author's first novel, *Yksinäinen vuori*: the intimacy of a close relationship between a character and a place that could be defined as a form of symbiosis. *Luolavuodet* can be seen as the pinnacle of Verronen's allegorical fantasy, while the novel simultaneously approaches a more realist subject matter and distances itself from the elaborate fantasy worlds of the two earlier novels.

The story of *Luolavuodet* revolves around the discovery and exploration of a network of caves set in the Finnish countryside. The events are set in motion by the protagonist, Vjeshta, an amateur speleologist, who is determined to keep a group of caving enthusiasts active. Years of traveling abroad in search of caves wear out the spirits of the group. The crisis sparks the protagonist to make every effort to discover a domestic cave for them to explore. She succeeds in finding a promising network of caves and, in order to make their explorations as easy as possible, buys a cottage from the village near the caves. After relocating to an alien village and abandoning her career as a mathematician, the protagonist has created ideal working conditions for the group of speleologists and is finally able to focus on cave explorations (LV, 8). These explorations, nevertheless, turn out to be more complicated than the group has anticipated. The uncharted, unexplored, and seemingly isolated network of caves proves to be intertwined with the lives of the locals and the speleologists in many ways. The protagonist first discovers a connection between the caves and the settler history of the area, which means that her findings challenge the prevailing understanding of the prehistory of the area (LV, 30, 38–40). During the hours and the days spent in the underground galleries and cave halls, she finds the traumas of her family history

controlled the tar trade at the end of the nineteenth century and onwards. Since the 1980s, Oulu has invested significant resources into training the workforce and commercializing innovations in telecommunications and electronics, hoping to establish a reputation as a northern hub for technology. The practical, organized, and craft-driven life of the Village of the Fishers may depict the trading and engineering spirit of Oulu.

In the 1990s, Verronen fully engaged in writing and moved to Helsinki, which can be associated with the City of Light. The most important feature of the City of Light, the appraisal of artistic work, may thus be interpreted as an autobiographical reference to the role Helsinki has held in Verronen's career.

starting to unravel and surface. A daughter of a multicultural family, raised in a Finnish–Albanian context, she has balanced between two cultures and an experience of shame that has haunted her immigrant father. These experiences are further strengthened by the marginalized position of her Finnish mother, who comes from a small revivalist sect, a religious and a social minority within her own country. As the protagonist battles with her repressed memories and the anger tied to them, a conflict arises between the speleologists and the local people. Historically, the caves have played an important role in the area, serving as a source of bat guano, an ingredient for fertilizers and gunpowder. In the novel's present, however, guano harvesting has ceased and given way to horse racing, which makes the betting industry the main source of livelihood in the area. The work of the speleologist and the interests of the local economy collide with each other as the protagonist discovers that the horse track is located on top of the largest cave hall (LV, 97). She warns the local community about the possible collapse of the horse track, but the message is not received well. The protagonist's caving efforts culminate in the discovery of the remains of a young girl, a Paleolithic inhabitant of the caves (LV, 126), while the conflict between the speleologists and the locals is resolved as the horse track collapses (LV, 135). Finally, the protagonist attains a better understanding of her family history, which seems to be connected to the area as well; while studying the remnants of her Paleolithic subjects, she is able to reconcile with her own history of trauma and migration.

The main plot line of the novel is supplemented with a two-part frame story. The first part, which begins the whole novel, describes a claustrophobic, frightful experience of a dark space with sounds of dripping water and a looming threat of unspecified creatures that might come alive (LV, 5). The second part takes place at the end of the novel (LV, 140). In this second scene, the speaker's fear of the darkness, dripping water, and the creatures has made way for a more determined stance: the speaker is now convinced of the fact that she is the catalyst for things happening around her, and that there is nothing to be afraid of. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is left to wonder whose focalization it is that initiates these frightful imaginings; but at the end of the novel, it is suggested that the focalization can be connected to the Paleolithic girl the protagonist has discovered and named Dimra. It seems that the speaker of the frame narrative is either Dimra or the protagonist, who identifies herself with the girl.

The following subchapter explores how the caves of the novel develop from an *idée fixe*, an object of obsession, into a sprawling mapping project. As the analysis shows, the novel challenges the traditional functions of the cave trope and develops it in an emancipatory direction. These new directions are also reflected in the novel's structure, especially in the relationship between the narrative and the frame narrative, both of which are studied in the latter part of the subchapter.

REVISIONING THE CAVE TROPE

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist has a short conversation with one of her speleologist friends:

- There was once a thinker, you know, who said that if you're not willing to find out what is and what has been within a ten-kilometer radius of your home, you're essentially an

uncivilized person, I say aloud. The thought springs to my mind suddenly – the way ideas always occur to me in the cave – and it seems important enough to be passed on.

– Did he mean for those ten kilometers to be measured underground too?²⁴ (LV, 22)

The short excerpt can be read as a depiction of a misunderstanding, or of friendly wisecracking – the friend seems either to take the protagonist’s anecdote too literally or to understand the protagonist’s underlying train of thought perfectly. The result is a humorous little scene that, while entertaining the reader, also reverses their perspective by introducing an often-neglected spatial dimension, that of the underground.

The beginning of the novel focuses on discussions and negotiations on the meaning of cave as a space and an environment. The narrative offers multiple perspectives, which range from scientific to psychological. The conversation above suggests an intertwining of nature and culture, as the civilized state is linked with the knowledge of (natural) surroundings. The scientific viewpoint is introduced in the fifth chapter (LV, 16–19), which involves the first-person narrator’s account on the formation of the cave network. It is a relatively long depiction of the natural history of calcareous rock and the physics of cave formation. Besides the natural historical viewpoint, caves are also linked with cultural and psychological meanings and their popularized representations. At the beginning of the novel, the novel’s first-person narrator comments on and rejects a few of the possible associations linked with the cave trope:

– I’m not fond of caves because they are dark and resemble tombs, but because one can see all kinds of beauty in them, when one takes some light in there, I correct Vera when she tries to foist her pseudo-psychological thoughts about death wishes and yearning for a return to the womb on me. She has got these ideas from women’s magazines and keeps repeating them like a parrot, without fully comprehending them. – I’m not going over there so that I could curl up motionless, but to walk and climb. And I do not stop thinking. On the contrary, I think more clearly and intensively in a cave than on the ground. I do not want to escape normal life or stay underground. But I do want to visit caves and come back wiser than I left.²⁵ (LV, 12)

The passage alludes to the cave’s role as a classic literary trope rich in cultural connotations. The early German Romantics cherished a fascination with speleology;

24. – Tiedätkö, eräs ajattelija on sanonut, että jokainen, joka ei halua tietää, mitä on ja on ollut kymmenen kilometrin säteellä hänen kodistaan, on perimmältään sivistymätön ihminen, sanon ääneen. Ajatus tulee mieleen yhtäkkiä – sillä tavalla kuin asioita aina tulee luolassa mieleen – ja se tuntuu riittävän tärkeältä eteenpäin kerrottavaksi.

– Tarkoittiko hän sen kymmenen kilometriä mitattavaksi myös maan pinnan alapuolelle?

25. – En minä siksi luolista pidä että ne ovat pimeitä ja hautamaisia, vaan siksi että niissä voi nähdä kaikkea kaunista, kun niihin vie valoa, korjaan, kun Vera tyrkyttää minulle naistenlehden hömppäpsyko-osastosta löytämiään ajatuksia kuoleman- ja kohdunkaipuusta; ajatuksia, joita hän ei itse lainkaan tunnu ymmärtävän vaan toistaa niitä kuin papukaija. – En minä mene luolaan käpertymään liikkumattomaksi vaan kävelemään ja kiipeilemään. Ja ajattelemista en lopeta, päinvastoin. Ajattelen luolassa usein selkeämmän ja intensiivisemmin kuin maan pinnalla. En halua paeta tavallista elämää enkä jäädä maan alle. Haluan käydä luolissa ja tulla sieltä takaisin viisaampana kuin olin mennessäni.

as Theodore Ziolkowski (1990, 23–33) points out, for the Romantics the descent into the cave symbolized an attempt to study the soul and its hidden layers. The symbolic connection between the unconscious and the cave was later reestablished in psychoanalytic theory. In this passage, the protagonist acknowledges these cultural connotations yet emphatically expresses her desire for movement and progress instead of regression, a state often connected with caves and other underground spaces. The cave is represented as an environment that encourages active, exploratory, and intellectual attitudes ('I do not stop thinking'), as well as an object of aesthetic appreciation ('one can see all kinds of beauty in them'). The passage thus anticipates that the central setting of the narrative, the network of caves, might promote epistemological discovery. Furthermore, it also implies that the traditional and popularized notion of the cave trope is under reassessment in the narrative.

The caves and their meaning are, however, primarily characterized by the protagonist's obsessive fixation in all caving-related activities. This obsession is introduced early, in the second chapter of the novel (LV, 6–8), which describes the protagonist's discovery of the caves and the drastic changes she is willing to execute to enable the caving expeditions. The theme of the obsession is developed in the third chapter (LV, 9–11), which depicts the protagonist's move to her new home in the village: The driver of her removal van expresses his bafflement over the quantity of the protagonist's possessions. As the protagonist starts to observe her belongings, she comes to the conclusion that it is not their quantity but also their quality that stands out. The observations she makes underline the importance of caving in her life:

Nearly everything that I own relates to the caves, somehow. The radio and the CD player are small and lightweight, so that they can be easily carried if I intend to stay underground for a few days. For the surface of the earth, one has to have a computer, a printer, and a modem to process the data concerning the caves, and to keep in touch with fellow amateur speleologists. On top of that, there are ropes, a helmet, a first-aid kit and such.

Even my clothes seem to be somehow related to caving. Those few pieces that are not suitable for underground expeditions or terrain visits are acceptable for attending lectures that are relevant to speleology.²⁶ (LV, 9)

The excerpt portrays a character whose professional and social life revolves around one single obsession, speleology. Moreover, the protagonist herself seems to be fully aware of her fixation. Later in the novel, the protagonist's preoccupation with the caves is highlighted by the first-person narrator's remarks on how much she spends time underground: 'Afterwards, I can't say whether I've made my discovery easily or if it has been difficult. Eighty hours of work per week for a little more than a month – is

26. Melkein kaikki mitä minulla on, liittyy luoliin. Radio ja cd-soitin ovat pieniä ja kevyitä, niin että ne voi ottaa mukaan, jos aikoo viipyä maan alla useita vuorokausia. Maan pinnalla tarvitaan tietokonetta, kirjoitinta ja modeemia luolia koskevan aineiston käsittelyyn ja yhteydenpitoon luolaharrastajaystävien kanssa. On tietysti myös köysiä, kypärä, ensiapulaukku ja paljon muuta.

Vaatteenikin näyttävät tarkoitetun johonkin mitä tehdään luolien yhteydessä. Ne harvat vaatekappaleet, jotka eivät sovi käytettäväksi maan alla tai maastossa, ovat kelvollisia speleologiaa läheltä sivuaville luennoille.

it a lot or just a little?’²⁷ (LV, 44–45) In addition to dedicating most of her time to the caving expeditions, the protagonist, as she occasionally ventures to the nearby village, is constantly reminded of the presence of the caves: while visiting the local museum, she looks for clues on the settler history of the area (LV, 27–30); while sleeping, her dreams are filled with caving nightmares (LV, 68–70); and, while at the horse races, she dismisses the excitement and the drama of the race but is fascinated by the story behind the horse track’s logo, which is an adaptation of a Paleolithic carving (LV, 23–26).

The protagonist’s preoccupation with the caves can be related to the cultural-historical concept of monomania. The term originates from an early nineteenth-century diagnostic category introduced by French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, who depicted it as a pathological fixation on a specific idea or an object ‘in an otherwise sound mind’ (Goldstein [1989] 2001, 155–56), as Jan Goldstein states in her history of the notion. Although originally a diagnostic concept, monomania rose into fashion in the nineteenth century and developed into a cultural and literary phenomenon, as described by Marina van Zuylen (2005), who approaches monomania as a strategy of presenting an unstable mind with an escape from a chaotic and irrelevant existence toward something in which ‘the world falls into place because it seems guided by a divine plan, a firm and meaningful teleology’ (van Zuylen 2005, 5). In a literary work, monomania, a reductive method, is a means to depict those who are unable or unwilling to choose and are burdened by the complexities of life.

The protagonist of *Luolavuodet* is but one of many monomaniacs in Verronen’s works. In *Pieni elintila*, the protagonist, Natalia, has been fixated on the history of polar exploration from a young age. The last story of *Keihäslintu* depicts a woman who suddenly feels an urge to trace the last remnants and preserved eggs of an extinct bird species, the great auk. The short story ‘Kivenhalaaja’ (1996a) presents a strange attachment between a person and a large rock, and, in *Keihäslintu*, an untitled short story (KL, 114–19) focuses on a character whose life’s work is to measure and count the stone fences of Ireland’s countryside. Read against the concept of monomania, the confusing behaviors and enigmatic fixations of Verronen’s protagonists appear as indicators of an existential crisis. According to van Zuylen, monomanias are ‘direct responses to the daunting demands of freedom, to the anguishes of a selfhood told it can and should be its own master’ (van Zuylen 2005, 9). As random as they are, the fixations depicted in Verronen’s works can be understood as the characters’ self-made organizing principles in a world that lacks them.

Besides an organizing principle, monomaniac behavior can be a strategy for empowerment. According to van Zuylen, one of the lures of monomania lies in its ability to grant the subject a sense of agency:

Whether perceived as pathological, perverse, or poorly disguised maneuvers to counteract *horror vacui* and depression, these idiosyncratic obsessions are powerful weapons that enable individuals to resist the tyranny of the everyday, the dictatorial nature of materiality. The *idée fixe* is an infinite source of comfort; not only does it provide unshakable

27. Jälkeenpäin en osaa sanoa, olenko tehnyt löytöni helposti vai onko se ollut vaikeaa. Kahdeksankymmentä tuntia työtä viikossa runsaan kuukauden ajan: onko se paljon vai vähän?

boundaries, but it lures the subject into a sense of agency. In contrast, in the confusion of everyday life, with its chance encounters and unanticipated challenges, formlessness prevails, rupturing our hold over things. (van Zuylen 2005, 6)

Restrictive and strenuous as it is, monomania offers experiences of accomplishment and competence. This aspect of the phenomenon, too, is present in the excerpt that depicts the protagonist's removal van load: the protagonist's attention is drawn to the different activities that her caving-related belongings allow her to accomplish.

In *Luolavuodet*, the protagonist's monomaniac interest in the underground realm can be interpreted as a rejection of everything that can be found on the surface. The protagonist indeed abandons her career and seeks distance between her and the family life, or her and economic competition. It is a turn inward – and backward. Instead of pursuing comforts of life, the protagonist immerses herself in the prehistory – both natural and cultural – of the region. She is fascinated by the physical markers of cave formation and uses her skills in caving as a means to reconstruct the history of the cave settlers. The protagonist's fixation on the caving is thus an expression of the character's urge to come to terms with the past, be it her personal trauma or the collective history, and highlights the temporal dimension of human existence. Her compulsion to go underground can be viewed as an attempt to uncover the repressed, the unconscious, and the forgotten.

Alongside the temporal interpretation of the caving fixation, another point of view emerges. Although the caves function as a means to practice introspection and self-reflection, studying them leads the protagonist to familiarize herself with the village and its inhabitants and economy. Instead of being cut off from the world, the caves seem to be in direct contact with everything in the area: its history, its religious sects, its economic life, its politics. In the narrative, these connections are foregrounded in a manner that reflects Doreen Massey's formulation of the specificity of place. According to Massey (1994, 155–56), a place draws its distinctivity and specificity from its unique constellation of interrelations. Massey's notion challenges the traditional discourse on places, which often views them as isolated entities; a place, according to her, functions through its connections and relations, very much like the expanding and sprawling cave network of *Luolavuodet*. Moreover, the protagonist's preoccupation with caving takes the form of mapmaking, which in itself is a spatial enterprise that circumvents the temporal. The form of the caves, a network, further underscores the role of spatiality and substitutes depth and verticality, the classical elements of the cave trope, for horizontality.

The spatial and the sprawling nature of the caves is highlighted by the protagonist's self-appointed task of constructing a map of the network of underground galleries. This enterprise plays a significant role in the narrative. In the excerpt below, the first-person narrator describes her stance toward mapmaking:

Mapping gives me pleasure. Explicit, finished maps of caves are beautiful. They are always incomplete – but that's an advantage, not a shortage. There's always a corridor extending beyond the edge of the map, on its way to a place that's not visible. A place of which I know

nothing about. There's always more to find out; there's always more pleasure in finding and investigating.²⁸ (LV, 53)

In the excerpt, mapping is presented both as an intellectual-epistemological and an aesthetic enterprise. The pleasure the narrator describes derives equally from the intellectual curiosity – the act of discovery, the joy of learning – and from the aesthetic appreciation of a seemingly finished map, the representation of the knowledge acquired. Most importantly, mapping is depicted as a sprawling endeavor and a process of expansion, yet another means of underlining the horizontality of the caves.

The protagonist's mapping attempts can be examined in the light of Fredric Jameson's (1991, 51) notion of cognitive mapping. For Jameson, cognitive mapping is an attempt by the subject to orientate themselves in the landscape constituted by multinational finance capitalism and other phenomena of the postmodern era: an experience of the deviation of the postmodern spatial subject and the quest to overcome it (Jameson 1991, 51–54). In the decades since the initial launch of the concept, Jameson has developed and modified the notion of cognitive mapping. As Robert Tally (2013, 67–68) notes, sometimes the concept refers to the attempts of a single subject to orientate themselves in alien surroundings; but on other occasions the starting point of the mapping process is not a physical space but a larger socioeconomic context, namely the globalized late-capitalist world system. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, chap. 4), cognitive mapping is to be understood as a methodological orientation toward studying phenomena as parts of a global network instead of isolated instances. In the context of this study, cognitive mapping is understood as a means of orientation and meaning-making, a process that takes place at the local level but expands to cover a larger, even global, terrain.

Read from this point of view, the protagonist's attempt to map the network of caves is a means of relating the local and the personal with the global and the general; it is an attempt to connect separate contingent things and general ideas, a process of retelling and reorganizing. In this vein, the protagonist's interest in the prehistoric migrations can be associated with her own family history of national and international migration. The cave develops into an intersection of all these separate storylines: At first, the protagonist discovers that the caves can be connected to the prehistoric settlement of the region. She visits a local museum and realizes that there must be a connection between the red iron ochre and the Paleolithic human remnants that are kept in the museum: 'Which one of you did it, I ask, absorbed in my thoughts while I'm standing next to the vitrine that holds the skeletons. Which one of you made the sculptures and dropped the red iron ochre into the pit?'²⁹ (LV, 40). Later, she observes a horse carving that is decorated with an abstract ornament and ponders why a preglacial inhabitant of Finland would carve a horse, since horses were not found in the north of Europe at that time. She realizes that the horse carving could be a memento of the previous home of

28. Kartoittaminen tuottaa minulle nautintoa. Selkeät, valmiit luolakartat ovat kauniita. Ne ovat aina epätäydellisiä – mutta se on etu, ei puute. Aina jokin käytävä jatkuu kartan reunan yli jonnekin, jota ei enää kuvassa näy ja josta en tiedä mitään varmaa. On siis vielä lisää selvitettävää; vielä lisää nautintoa siitä, että jotakin löytyy ja selviää.

29. Kuka se teistä oli, kysyn ajatuksissani luurankovitriinin äärellä. Kuka teki veistokset ja pudotti punamullan kuiluun?

the tribe – and that the abstract ornament that decorates the carving is a lunar calendar that represents the days traveled from the land of the horses to the site of the caves (LV 25–30, 74). The network of caves and the Paleolithic remnants are thus a record not just of the region's history but of its connections to far-away places as well.

The protagonist's ability to read the landscape of the region and the caves leads her to discover unspoken truths about more recent history as well. She observes the limestone soil and combines it with the town records, which reveal the history of the region's own religious sect:

Well over a hundred years ago, a large river near the village dried up. Things like that are bound to happen from time to time in limestone regions. In the village, the loss of the river gave rise to a frenzied religious movement that expected a global drought and its disastrous consequences. The movement incited the people of the region until the onslaught of the Second World War.³⁰ (LV, 58)

More importantly, the sect and its presence in the region are connected to the protagonist's own family history. She is gradually able to deduce that her mother is one of the children of the group, and that the oppressive childhood of the protagonist can be traced back to the mother's trauma among the sect: 'Confusing, shameful: a darkness of ignorance, ignorance confusing itself for knowledge or at least trying to pass itself off as such'³¹ (LV, 96), as the protagonist describes her childhood family. 'The darkness of ignorance' is comparable to the darkness of the underground caves; and the protagonist's background as a descendant of a religious minority and a victim of ignorance and emotional trauma develop into a vignette of discrimination, inequality, and religious fundamentalism within Finnish society. As if these connections weren't enough, the protagonist is able to connect her paternal family line to the region as well. While reading the archives and researching the history of the local horse track, she discovers that her immigrant father was involved in a failed mining project (LV, 62–63). The village newspaper expressed some reserves concerning the project: 'The man is slick and smells too good – but he does like a good horse race. Along with him come two young helpers who were originally foreigners, too'³² (LV, 62). The group has been drawn to the region because of its limestone soil, which is suitable not only for cave formation but for mining as well.

Read through the realist paradigm, the intersecting storylines and their connections with the caves might seem like an ill-advised plot development. *Luolavuodet* is, however, an allegory and obeys different ordering principles. The caves and their everlasting presence in the region and in the histories of the locals and the protagonist compose a compelling study on the intertwining of space and time. The caves are simultaneously keepers of history and witnesses to the repression of that

30. Runsaat sata vuotta sitten kylän alueella ehtyi suuri joki – niin kuin kalkkikivialueella aina joskus käy. Siitä sai alkunsa pikaiseen maailmanlaajuiseen kuivuuskatastrofiin uskovien hurmosliike, joka villitsi seudun väkeä toisen maailmansodan kynnykselle saakka.

31. Hämmentävää ja häpeällistä: pimeää tietämättömyyttä, joka luuli olevansa tietoa tai ainakin yritti sellaisesta käydä.

32. Mies on lipevänoloinen ja liian hyvänhajuinen – mutta sentään innokas raveissakävijä. Hän tuo mukanaan kaksi nuorta apumiestä – ulkomaalaisia nämäkin, alun alkujaan.

history. The network of caves unravels migrations of Paleolithic people, the foreign ancestry of the contemporary residents, the division of the twentieth-century village community between the members of the sect and those outside it and the ensuing discrimination against the sectarians, and how the protagonist's paternal migrant community drew her father into questionable and illegal mining enterprises. The history of the caves is thus a history of exclusion and divisions but also a history of connections and migrations. By mapping the caves, the protagonist deconstructs and reconstructs the origin stories of the locals and her family. The map of the caves turns into a study on belonging and displacement and the ways in which these emotions are masked and repressed.

The juxtaposition of the individual and the late-capitalist world system in the Jamesonian sense can be detected in the novel's depiction of the horse track, a plot development that takes place mainly in the second half of the novel. As already stated, the novel depicts tensions in the small town between those willing to explore and conserve the prehistoric cultural inheritance and those who serve the interests of business and commerce. The latter are described from the protagonist's point view as follows:

The surroundings are ugly: a dusty and treeless plateau, the bottom of an ancient lake, with large areas that have been tarmacked as a parking lot. The people are ugly. The horses are ugly, even the least beaten ones. They look grotesquely unnatural and forced with their harnesses, blinkers and ear plugs.³³ (LV, 24)

In the excerpt, the protagonist reads and interprets the geological history of the horse track. More importantly, the description of the harnessed, blinded, and deafened horses anticipates the role that the horse racing enthusiasts will play as the antagonist figures of the narrative. Much like the racehorses that have a limited scope of sensory perception, the horse racing people are unable to receive information on their surroundings. They reject the new information produced by the speleologists, as it poses a threat to their livelihood. This arrangement is echoed in the narrative's spatial plane as well: The caves, which function as symbols for history, identity, and origin stories, are literally covered by the horse track; equally, the protagonist's quest to de- and reconstruct the history of the area is dismissed and nearly buried by the proponents of the horse racing and betting industry. The presence of the market economy thus hinders the individual's agency and ability to orientate themselves in a manner that approaches Jameson's understanding of the deviation of the postmodern subject. The novel's dramatic end, however, seems to verify triumph of the individual and history over the all-encompassing and delusive sphere of economy.

The novel's depiction of the issue is, nevertheless, more ambiguous than the preceding account suggests. A hint of irony can be detected in how the narrative presents the protagonist's processing of the map of the cave network: the protagonist uses the map for her board game design and, later, divides the map into several

33. Ympäristö on ruma: pölyinen, puuton laakio, muinaisen järven pohja, josta suuria osia on asfaltoitu pysäköintialueeksi. Ihmiset ovat rumia. Ja jopa kaikkein vähiten lyödyt hevoset näyttävät irvokkaan luonnottomilta ja pakotetuilta valjaineen, silmälappuineen ja korvatulpineen.

postcards in order to sell them and make a living (LV, 99). The result of the laborious and intellectually demanding mapping project is cut into pieces, distributed for sale, and turned into merchandise. The mechanics of the market economy seem to be inescapable, even for the protagonist who engages in the project of cognitive mapping.

Despite the ambiguities and caveats depicted above, the novel's rendering of the cave as a spatial trope and the related mapping project are both subversive in nature. The cave, which is the Romantic and psychoanalytical symbol for the origin, assumes in the novel a distinctly postmodern form of a network, transforming from a womb-like, centripetal, and self-contained container into a vast space that allows for movement and exploration. The protagonist's mapping project and its connection to global migrations further highlight the connected and transformative nature of the cave network. The mapping project can be interpreted as an attempt to rationalize the unrational, the unconscious, and the emotional, but, similarly, it can be seen as an approach that rewrites the rules of the cave trope. It is an emancipatory take on the traditionally gendered spatial trope.

As the previous analysis has shown, the novel conjoins two different approaches in its representation of the cave network: the restrictive strategy of monomania and the sprawling attempt of cognitive mapping. The narrative, in other words, presents the caves as an object of and a setting for two very different mental processes: obsession, a method of reduction, and cognitive mapping, a method of comparison. Although very different, these two methods share the same objective, which is ordering, organization, or meaning-making, in general. As the narrative progresses, the obsessive-restrictive method gives way to the comparative-sprawling strategy. The protagonist's often solitary caving expeditions are replaced by her joining in archaeological excavations (LV, 71); instead of dedicating her time to the underground environment, she is drawn to communal and social matters, such as the issue with the horse race track (LV, 98–101), and, instead of approaching the cave network as her private refuge, she experiences a tumult of positive emotions while learning that the caves will be announced as a World Heritage site by UNESCO: 'I am moved by that beautiful word. I couldn't care less about the official definitions; for me, *world heritage* refers to all the things of beauty that humankind has created during its history'³⁴ (LV, 136; italics in the original). The caves' selection to the list of World Heritage sites can be seen as a final seal to the victory of the cultural and the historical over the economy.

TOWARD SPATIAL AGENCY

One of the key themes of the novel, the quest for agency – both spatial and other-than-spatial – is established in the narrative in multiple ways: by rejecting the psychoanalytical understanding of the cave, by depicting a process of mapping, and by modifying the traditional, centripetal idea of the cave in the direction of an expanding network. The treatment of the theme receives its culmination in the relationship between the narrative and the frame narrative. As already stated, the focalization of the frame narrative is enigmatic at the beginning of the novel but, as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that the observations of the frame narrative belong to the human remnants discovered by the protagonist at the end of the novel.

34. Liikutun tuosta kauniista sanasta. Vähät virallisista määritelmistä; minulle *maailmanperintöä* on kaikki kaunis mitä ihmiskunta on historiansa aikana tehnyt.

The first part of the two-part frame narrative revolves around a frightening spatial experience:

The darkness around her is absolute. But the water is even more frightening.

She does not know which would be worse: that out of somewhere, an all-consuming flash flood would come, a flash flood, of which the dripping would be only a warning – or that the dripping would cease, and it would be utterly silent.

In the beginning, she anticipates and fears the moment when the creatures in the darkness – she has seen glimpses of them in the dim light – come to life. But time passes and nothing happens. Water just keeps dripping, and the echoes of each drop are a thousand times stronger in her head.³⁵ (LV, 5; italics in the original)

The emphasis is on sensory perception: the lack of eyesight is constituted in the first sentence of the description. Instead of eyesight, hearing establishes itself as the main means of sensing and perceiving. The focalizer recognizes darkness and the presence of dripping water, along with a third element, a visual memory of ‘creatures,’ which she recalls seeing earlier. This vision is introduced as a trigger for the focalizer’s fearful anticipation. She is alarmed by the possibility that the creatures might come to life, which, in turn, suggests that they are pictures, figures, or other (yet) lifeless objects. Both visual and auditory perceptions of the surroundings lead to appalling imaginings. The focalizer fears a sudden awakening of the creatures, or a change in the pattern of dripping, which could be a sign of either a flood or a cessation of dripping, followed by a complete silence. These fabrications constitute most of the passage. In addition to senses and perception, the passage thus introduces imagination as a world-sensing and world-building entity.

At the end of the chapter, the focalizer acknowledges her fears concerning the awakening of the creatures. She has seen glimpses of them and fears that they might come to life, but time passes and ‘nothing happens.’ At this point, the reader is prone to question the reliability of the focalizer: the awakening of a lifeless creature goes against real-life natural laws, and, since this scenario is not materialized in the passage (‘nothing happens’), the same principle seems to apply to the fictional world as well.³⁶ The focalizer of the passage seems to possess limited knowledge concerning the world around her, being unable to tell the difference between living and lifeless objects, or is misled to do so by her frightful emotional state. Her error is semiotic in nature: she misinterprets the signs she has seen and confuses the sign of a creature for the creature itself. In other words, she cannot tell the sign, or representamen, from its object referent.

35. *Pimeys hänen ympärillään on täydellinen, mutta vielä sitäkin pelottavampaa on vesi.*

Hän ei tiedä, kumpi olisi pahempaa: sekö, että jostakin syöksyisi kaiken nielevä hyöky, josta nyt harvakeen tipahtelevat pisarat olisivat vain varoitus – vai se, että tippuminen lakkaisi, ja tulisi täydellisen hiljaista.

Aluksi hän odottaa ja pelkää myös sitä hetkeä, jolloin pimeyden keskellä heräävät eloon kaikki ne olennot, joista hän on himmeässä valossa nähnyt vilahduksia. Mutta aika kuluu, eikä mitään tapahdu. Vettä vain tippuu edelleen, ja jokainen pisara kaikuu tuhatkertaisena hänen päässään.

36. According to ‘the principle of minimal departure,’ coined by Marie-Laure Ryan (1991), a reader assumes the fictional world to be as close as possible to the actual world. A difference between these worlds can appear only if the text directly imposes it (Ryan 1991).

The fears described by the narrator are either life-threatening (flood) or isolating (silence), both linked with loss of subjectivity and the frailty of human agency. The third possible threat, the fear of the creatures coming to life, is based on a failure to distinguish the inanimate object from an animate object, or alternatively, on an articulation of a supernatural worldview. Together they form a perceiving and imagining consciousness that is operating at the very fundamental level: worried about their physical safety and loss of sensory perception and fumbling for the line between living and lifeless entities. The focalizer of the passage desperately tries to interpret their surroundings, a process whose urgency is highlighted by the anticipated threats. This sort of spatial imagination could be described as primitive or fundamental, depending on the connotation desired. The first chapter of the novel serves the reader terror, confusion, and claustrophobia. The root cause of these strong negative affects is not only the setting of the scene but, most importantly, the unorganized and primitive or fundamental way in which the focalizer's spatial imagination works. In other words, the focalizer's reading of the space is incomplete and distorted, and this creates the oppressive, nightmarish tone of the chapter.

The first part of the frame narrative functions as a means to introduce the underground realm to the reader; but, besides that, the chapter also foregrounds the importance of space and spatial meaning-making specifically. The latter, as discussed by Wolfgang Hallet, can be understood as a process in which the interpretation and construction of the perceived spatial reality are 'one and the same' (Hallet 2014, 42). According to Hallet, many works of contemporary fiction 'imitate or stage the cognitive processes and narrate the individuals' acts of consciousness that are connected to the semiotizations of space' (Hallet 2014, 52). This is a very accurate characterization of the frame narrative of *Luolavuodet*, too. By initiating the novel with this kind of a depiction that stages not only the perception but also the interpretation of the space, and by foregrounding the interpretative problems which guide the reader to question the reliability of the narrator or experience a sense of ambiguity regarding the representation of the 'creatures' and the 'flash flood' – a sense of ambiguity depicted in Todorov's ([1970] 1975) definition of the fantastic – the frame narrative of *Luolavuodet* presents a powerful alternative perspective to the rational and investigative viewpoint of the protagonist. Instead of the scientific method and the practices of speleology and cartography, the frame narrative emphasizes the importance of subjective perception and interpretation in the formation of (spatial) conception.

After the first part of the frame narrative, the narrative proper begins. The protagonist, Vjeshta, recounts the reasons for her change of career. She leaves mathematics for speleology because, in her words, she 'can't see the beauty of mathematics like good mathematicians do'³⁷ (LV, 6):

Somehow, I've known all the time that there is no place for me in that world. As if I'm lacking a sense which is vital there. The only wise thing that remains to be done is to leave – to leave for an environment where the missing sense has no use.³⁸ (LV, 6)

37. [E]n kykene näkemään matematiikkaa kauniina niin kuin hyvät matemaatikot kykenevät.

38. Jotenkin olen tiennyt koko ajan, ettei minulle ole paikkaa tuossa maailmassa. Aivan kuin minulta puuttuisi jokin aisti, joka on siellä elintärkeä. Ainoa viisas teko on lähteä – lähteä sellaiseen ympäristöön, jossa puuttuvalle aistille ei ole käyttöä.

The inability to perceive one's spatial surroundings and interpret these stimuli correctly connects the two focalizers of the novel, the protagonist and the observer of the frame narrative. The protagonist's lack of a certain sense resembles the observer's description of the darkness that negates her eyesight. The protagonist, unable to perceive the beauty of mathematics – which means unable to attach meaning to the field she works in – turns to speleology and the dark, lightless underground environment wherein different senses are used. The beginning of the novel thus juxtaposes these two characters and hints that their roles might be complementary: the protagonist is prepared to function in the environment that is incomprehensible to the observer, and the observer, on the other hand, is already situated where the protagonist wishes to descend. From the first two chapters of the novel, the reader can already assume a distance between the two characters and anticipate the undoing of this distance. As the protagonist later discovers the remnants of a Paleolithic girl from a cave hall (LV, 126), the reader is keen to suspect that the girl, Dimra, might be the observer of the frame narrative.

The relation between the protagonist and Dimra can be further understood through the mythical and literary trope of the labyrinth. The creatures that frighten Dimra – the pictures whose coming to life she anticipates – can be seen as an allusion to the myth of the monster that lives in the middle of a labyrinth. Perhaps the most prominent version of the myth is the Minotaur of Crete. Half man and half bull, the Minotaur is the bestial offspring of queen Pasiphaë and a bull, a result of the god Poseidon's revenge against the queen's husband, King Minos. In order to contain the beast, the king orders Daedalus to build an elaborate labyrinth and detain the monster in its center, where it receives regular human sacrifices. In her seminal study of the ancient tropes of the novel, Margaret Ann Doody (1997, 337–58) links the beast of the labyrinth with the fear of female sexuality.³⁹ The rapprochement of Dimra and the protagonist can thus be understood as an understated representation of an integrated sexuality and female emancipation, an interpretation aligned with the novel's rewriting of the gendered cave trope.

The second-last chapter of the novel returns to Dimra's underground experience. As already stated, Dimra's focalizations function as a frame story that initiates and concludes the novel. The structure of the novel resembles a circle that distances itself away from and draws closer again to the center, Dimra. A change can be detected between the Dimra of the first part of the frame narrative and the Dimra of the second part:

*She no longer waits, nor fears anything unnamed or unknown. The creatures are still in place, but they are mere images on the cave wall. Time goes on, but throughout there is something happening that wouldn't take place without her.*⁴⁰ (LV, 140; italics in the original)

39. A connection between the female sexuality and the trope of the labyrinth can be found in Finnish and Scandinavian history as well, as the stone-lined labyrinths known as *jatulintarha* have been connected with fertility rites. *Jatulintarha* are most prevalent on the west coast of Finland, where they go under the name of *jungfrudans* ('maiden's dance' in Swedish) in local (Finland Swedish) folklore.

40. *Hän ei enää odota eikä pelkää mitään nimetöntä tai tuntematonta. Olennot ovat yhä paikoillaan, mutta ne ovat vain kuvia luolan seinässä. Aika kuluu edelleen, mutta koko ajan tapahtuu jotakin jota ei tapahtuisi ilman häntä.*

The confusion between the sign and its object is settled: the focalizer is able to recognize the figures of the creatures as pictures that bear an iconic relationship to reality. More importantly, as the last sentence expresses, Dimra's role has changed. At the beginning of the novel, the focalizer focuses on perceiving her surroundings, and anticipating changes and possible threats. In the final passage focalized by her, she turns from an observer into a subject. The focalizer acknowledges herself as the catalyst of change; she has gained her own form of (spatial) agency.

The frame narrative, as already stated, offers an alternative perspective to the protagonist and her worldview that relies on rationality and science; but, as the analysis above suggests, at the end of the novel the frame narrative complies with the narrative's views rather than challenges them. The changes that have taken place in the protagonist as a result of her mapping project are also reflected in Dimra's focalization. Dimra, in other words, mirrors the protagonist and her development. Both characters, the protagonist and Dimra, develop their sense of autonomy and inclusion. The result of the interaction depicted in the novel is a subject who is not only capable of practicing her spatial subjectivity but also capable of making meaning of her spatial surroundings.

Both novels present spatial arrangements that acquire allegorical meanings. In *Pimeästä maasta*, spaces and places of the novel are fused together with temporal elements, as separate locations represent different sociohistorical periods and, eventually, the intellectual development – the formation – of the protagonist. In the novel, the boundary-crossings of the protagonist are preceded by crossings coming from the opposite direction, a pattern that I have interpreted as a dialogue between the inner and the outer, or the self and the other. *Luolavuodet* challenges the classical cave trope and revises it with the help of two other spatial tropes: the labyrinth and the network. The altered and revised version of the cave represents allegorically the histories, the social connections, and the international and regional migrations that are hidden beneath the monolithic origin stories of communities or individuals. In the novel, the sprawling network of caves is the focal point that summons these diverging narratives together and allows for their examination.

In the case of *Luolavuodet*, a closer look on space and especially the depicted methods of approaching space – the protagonist's monomaniac obsession, her attempt to map the caves – has showcased that the quest for spatial meaning-making is inextricably tied with the quest for spatial agency. *Luolavuodet* employs the act of mapping as a metaphor that illustrates the individual's need to merge local with global, or individual with general. Moreover, the novel's structure that involves a frame narrative and the narrative proper foregrounds the processes of spatial perception, spatial imagination, and spatial meaning-making. The frame narrative challenges the protagonist's rationalist and cognitive stance but, as the novel draws to its end, these two opposite strategies become united.

Wild Spaces

Scenes of wild spaces play a pivotal role in Verronen's oeuvre. Scattered throughout her works, these spaces take the form of a desert, tundra, sea, heath, or mountain. Along with the vast expanses and untamed landscapes comes a threat of mortal danger: in these narratives, wilderness tests the human subject with extreme heat, severe frost, long distances, difficult terrain, and steep slopes that can easily lead the wanderer astray. Wilderness, in Verronen's works, does not equate with flora and fauna: depictions of animal species are scarce, and the focus of the wilderness scenes is on the spatial aspects of the surroundings and on the movements and actions they afford for the human protagonist. Therefore, it is justifiable to say that Verronen's wilderness is not nature; it is a place of nature. Nor does it function only as an abstract idea: when it is present, its presence is felt. Wilderness, in these narratives, is spatial. This is something that connects Verronen's contemporary work with the Finnish literary tradition, and the example set by the first novel published in Finnish, Aleksis Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* ([1870] 1984) (transl. *Seven brothers*, 2005). In his study on nature in Finnish literature, Pertti Lassila (2011, 126–27) proclaims that Kivi's nature description is characterized by its spatiality.⁴¹ Nature and wilderness in Kivi's writing are realms through which the human characters move and operate; in contemporary terms, they are the interfaces of action, systems that simultaneously enclose and enable the characters. This tradition continues in Verronen's prose.

It is, however, essential to point out that Verronen's wilderness representations deviate from the Finnish canon in several ways. To begin with, wilderness in Finnish literature occurs as a source of livelihood: the forest, for instance, is often viewed as a hunting ground. This is the case in Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* as well. In Verronen's works, wilderness, as essential as it is, presents itself as a realm of adventure and self-discovery. Similarly, the relationships that Verronen's protagonists have with wild spaces deviate from the naturalized symbiosis of land and people that populates Finnish wilderness depictions. The protagonists in Verronen's stories are closely connected to the wildscapes⁴² (see Casey [1993] 2009, 201–2) they encounter, yet the

41. On the spatiality of *Seitsemän veljestä*, see also Nummi (2007).

42. 'Wildscape' is a notion that Casey ([1993] 2009) coins as a parallel concept for landscape. The defining qualities of a wildscape are, according to him, limitlessness, formlessness, and its capability to evoke a sense of displacement and desolation. Casey draws a distinction between

nature of these connections is often mysterious, ambivalent, symbolical, or threatening. The wanderers who journey through the wilderness often move in a dreamlike space. Verronen's wildscapes have specific features and concrete characteristics, yet they escape temporal and geographical coordinates or fuse them together in a haunting way. Likewise, the motivation of the characters and their direct relation to the landscape is left unexplained or is explained in a way that raises questions more than it provides answers. In Verronen's works, the symbiotic coexistence between people and wilderness that is an elemental part of the Finnish literary tradition retreats, and is replaced with complicated liminal, allegorical, and hybrid bearings that call for careful reading.

The following chapter examines the strange encounters and enigmatic relationships that Verronen's narratives develop between the characters and wild spaces. The analysis, which makes use of both ecocritical and spatial concepts, is carried out with a particular emphasis on the conjoining of the two approaches. As already stated in the theory chapter of this work, spatial studies have traditionally focused on urban and rural issues and areas of spatial experience that are directly linked with social interaction. Despite this, spatial studies can and should be used to analyze wilderness. To think about wilderness from the viewpoint of spatial theory would mean to think about it as a process and as something that is produced and maintained by social acts. It would also mean a focus on the ways of engagement that wilderness fosters or does not foster.

The first subchapter sets out to compare Verronen's wilderness tropes with those of the Finnish literary canon and considers thus the spatial and geographical referents of Verronen's wilderness imagery. The specific qualities of Verronen's wildscapes are analyzed in relation to the ecocritics' concern over the need for a more global perspective. After this, the subchapter provides a reading of the short story 'Mökki autiolla rannalla.' The story conjoins the problematizing of the notion of wilderness with a powerful, although strange and confusing, representation of alienation, and thus makes visible how the notion of wilderness is inevitably imbued with our understanding of modernization and the social realm. These issues are also written within the directionality we associate with wilderness, meaning our tendency to approach wilderness as something that 'we edge toward,' as Edward S. Casey ([1993] 2009, 186) claims. The second subchapter takes the use of spatial theory for the purposes of analyzing wilderness a step further and applies Michel de Certeau's notion of the practices of everyday life to understand the patterns of self-isolation and infiltration that often appear in Verronen's narratives. The subchapter suggests that the self-isolation and infiltration of Verronen's narratives can be viewed as spatial practices that are dislocated from their culturally and socially acceptable surroundings (spaces of wilderness) and appear, instead, in social environments. This line of interpretation is put to use with regard to the short story 'Unohtaja' and discussed with the help of the conceptual pair eccentricity/ex-centricity.

a landscape approached through the notion of beauty, as 'an object of aesthetic pleasure' ([1993] 2009, 201), and a landscape understood as sublime, in other words a landscape that escapes and challenges human perception and cognition. The latter possesses an inherent wildness, and is thus a wildscape rather than a landscape (Casey [1993] 2009, 201–2).

Before analyzing the two works of fiction, it is necessary to review the notion of wilderness as it is understood in this chapter. Wilderness, in this case, is closely connected to movement and the dynamics of presence and absence.

WILDERNESS

In the context of this chapter, wilderness must be approached in relation to the trope of travel. Movement and mobility have always been essential elements in the Western imagination of wilderness. As Greg Garrard (2004, 59–62) demonstrates, Western wilderness narratives owe their pattern of escape and return to the older pastoral tradition, which has been enhanced by the Judeo-Christian notions of wilderness as a setting for exile. Wilderness, then, is connected with narratives of travel and journey (Casey [1993] 2009, 188; Garrard 2004, 60–61). This might reflect the origins of the wilderness concept: for the proponents of wilderness, the birth of the notion marks the shift from Paleolithic hunter-gathering livelihoods to Neolithic agricultures. According to these viewpoints, the need to distinguish between the realm of culture and the realm of wilderness could only emerge after permanent settlement had replaced the nomadic lifestyle of hunter-gatherers. (Casey [1993] 2009, 188; Garrard 2004, 60–61)

The journey plot formula establishes notions of presence and absence as part of the wilderness imagination. Within this formula, wilderness is something to be sought after: half destination, half mirage. Moreover, the dislocation embedded in the travel narrative raises ethical considerations. Who has access to the wilderness? Is wilderness the same for colonialists and for indigenous populations? Whose presence determines the wilderness: the visitor's or the inhabitant's? These problematics have been studied in postcolonial ecocritical studies (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011). The overlapping of the two fields, postcolonialism and ecocriticism, has shown that, when it comes to wilderness discourse, the central ethical questions do not consider solely human–nature relations but also human–human relations. This is where the tools of spatial studies and the notion of social production of space are of use.

The journey plot formula of wilderness depictions is closely related to larger questions of engagement and agency. In his *Ecocriticism* (2004), Garrard highlights this aspect while analyzing the problematics of the wilderness discourse:

A further problem is apparent: the ideal wilderness space is wholly pure by virtue of its independence from humans, but the ideal wilderness narrative posits a human subject whose most authentic existence is located precisely there. This model not only misrepresents the wild, but also exonerates us from taking a responsible approach to our everyday lives: our working and domestic lives are effectively irredeemable alongside this ideal, so the activities we carry out there escape scrutiny (see Cronon 1996:81). Wilderness, then, is ideological in the sense that it erases the social and political history that gives rise to it, extending into reactionary politics as well as Thoreau's occasional misanthropy. (Garrard 2004, 71)

Garrard's (2004, 71–72) concern over wilderness representations considers the alienation and externalization that often take place in these narratives. Wilderness is presented simultaneously as the authentic realm of human existence and as something that can only exist and sustain itself when cut off from culture. The result is

a discourse that mystifies wilderness and distances it from everyday life. Engagement with such wild places is reserved for specific instances, which rarely coincide with our contemporary daily lives in a modern, urbanized society. More importantly, the focus on authenticity distorts the discussion and steers it toward essentialism, which effectively limits our considerations of ethics and morality. If wilderness is produced as a site of authenticity, does that not mean that engaging with it self-evidently results in higher morals and just decision-making? This is what Garrard refers to as 'the poetics of authenticity.' Garrard's solution to the problem is to shift the discourse from 'the poetics of authenticity' to 'the poetics of responsibility'; according to him, it is what we do, not what we are, that should be discussed in relation to wilderness. Garrard's suggestion therefore highlights the actions of individuals and societies, and refrains from the discourse that conjoins nature or wilderness with the notions of authenticity, originality, nativity, or primitivity. (Garrard 2004, 71–72)

Journeying into the Wilderness in 'Mökki autiolla rannalla' ('Cottage on a Desolate Shore')

Verronen's works of fiction have often been approached from the point of view that highlights their discrepancy from the contemporary and canonical works of Finnish literature (see, e.g., Majander 1992). In this subchapter, I provide an overview of the most common tropes of wilderness that appear in the author's oeuvre and juxtapose them with the wilderness tropes of Finnish literature. As the following analysis shows, Verronen's literary works adapt and modify the classical tropes of Finnish wilderness depiction and sometimes discard them altogether. After the general overview, I focus on a single short story that exemplifies how Verronen's works problematize not only the tropes but also the idea of wilderness.

Throughout the relatively young history of written Finnish, depictions of wild nature have been utilized for various purposes. The centrality of natural landscapes for the Finnish nationalist and patriotic sentiment can be traced back to the country's division between the Swedish-speaking minority and the Finnish-speaking common folk, as Pirjo Lyytikäinen (2013b, 163) presents in her study. She continues:

Downplaying the role of language (central to German Herderian nationalism, which influenced them) and exalting national landscapes were strategies used to connect the Swedish-speaking intellectuals with the homeland, where the working people spoke only Finnish. (Lyytikäinen 2013b, 163)

According to Lyytikäinen (2013b), the propagation and the selection of national landscapes functioned as an intermediary strategy, which explains its success and ongoing (yet changing) presence in the Finnish culture.

Lassila (2011) relates the wilderness tradition of Finnish literature to cultural and religious movements. In his study on the development of the human–nature relationship (*luontosuhde*) in Finnish literature, Lassila (2011, 8) traces the roots of the notion to three factors: first, the human–nature relationship of Finnish literature is strongly influenced by Romanticism. This is due to the infancy of Finnish literature; the first canonized works were written as recently as in the nineteenth-century

Romantic period⁴³ (Lassila 2011, 8). Second, Finnish literary depictions of nature echo the Evangelical Lutheran tradition that holds nature, and especially the forest, to be a spiritual sanctuary (Lassila 2011, 8). Third, Finnish self-identity has been built on the notion of a specifically communicative human–nature relationship (Lassila 2011, 15–17). This idea allegedly relies on the shamanistic-animistic pagan belief system of Finnic peoples that has been preserved and mediated by oral folklore: ritual poetry, which presents itself as a dialogue between the human and the surrounding nature, and lyrical oral poetry, where the forest plays the part of an empathetic listener (Lassila 2011, 17–20). The influence of the oral tradition was, naturally, enhanced by the late development of the literary tradition. A critical reader would suggest that these associations of the third case have, no doubt, been utilized for nationalistic and Romantic nationalist purposes; Lassila himself sees the contrary. According to him, the close bond between the common folk and nature has functioned as an antidote for the politicized and ideological notions of nature. In this vein, nature and its cultural representations have functioned as a refuge for the ordinary and the daily, as well as for the lower strata of society (Lassila 2011, 230).⁴⁴

Throughout literary history, certain tropes of nature have recurred in the Finnish wilderness narratives. In Finland, the forest is a cultural cornerstone, a national symbol, and a spiritual *Heimat*⁴⁵ – in other words, a spatial trope that cannot be overemphasized. In the light of national statistics, the presence of the forest in Finnish culture and society is self-explanatory: approximately 75 percent of the area of Finland is covered by forest, and in 2017 products of the forest industry made up 20 percent of Finnish exports (Lier et al. 2018). Culturally, the image of the Finnish forest is a combination of the animistic worldview of pagan folklore, the pioneer spirit related to slash-and-burn farming and other means of agriculture (see, e.g., Kirstinä 2007, 79–80), and the sublime landscapes propagated in the National Romantic style of the nineteenth century.

In literature and arts, the trope of the forest is often accompanied by another, that of the forest lake (*erämaajärvi*). In the arts, the scenery of the forest lake has been represented by Akseli Gallén-Kallela's (1865–1931) painting *Erämaajärvi* (1892). Gallén-Kallela, a prominent figure among the artists of the so-called Golden Age of Finnish Art (1880–1910), began his career with realist portrayals of peasant folk, but took his art in Romantic and symbolist directions especially with his beloved paintings on *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. *Erämaajärvi* presents a scenery of pines, young spruces, and silvery deadwood that turn the forest into an impenetrable jungle. The

43. The strong association between Romanticism and Finnish literature's human–nature relationship is also reflected in the following analyses of Verronen's wilderness narratives.

44. As Riikka Rossi (2020, 17–19) shows in her study, the association between the common folk and wilderness can also be interpreted as a consequence of the primitivist movement of early twentieth-century Finland.

45. I use the concept here to depict the Romantic nationalist (by which I refer to the political thought, as opposed to the National Romantic style of the Nordic countries in the second half of the nineteenth century) incorporation of home, nation, and state into a joint spatial construct. It is important to acknowledge, however, that during the National Socialist regime of Germany the concept was appropriated and weaponized for the purposes of Nazi propaganda. For the discussion of spatial language and the *Heimat* concept in the Nazi era, see, e.g., Szejnmann and Umbach (2016).

forest lake and its bold blue color cast a contrast to the age-old yet regenerating forest. The scene, with rowanberries red as drops of blood, is simultaneously serene and dramatic, even threatening. In literature, the trope of the forest lake plays an iconic part in Veikko Huovinen's (1927–2009) *Havukka-ahon ajattelija* ([1952] 2005). Huovinen, a forester by occupation, set his works in the deep forests of Kainuu in eastern Finland. *Havukka-ahon ajattelija* depicts the character of Konsta Pylkkänen, his intimate relationship with nature, and his down-to-earth philosophical attitude in the shores of the forest lake Lentua. Pylkkänen's character is often considered a prime example of the figure of an isolated thinker in the woods, often coined the 'backwoods philosopher,' a trope that highlights the virtues of isolation and simple life.

Apart from the forest, Finnish culture places special emphasis on the trope of the bogland, an environment that has established its place especially in folklore and literature.⁴⁶ In one of the most memorable scenes of *Kalevala*, the demi-god hero Väinämöinen sings his young opponent Joukahainen into a bog. The liminal site of exclusion and defeat of the folklore tradition was reworked in Väinö Linna's⁴⁷ extremely influential family saga trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* ('Under the North Star,' 1959). The opening line of the trilogy refers to the role of the bogland as a symbol of the pioneer farming and settlement of Finland: 'In the beginning there were the swamp, the hoe – and Jussi' (Linna [1959] 2001, chap. 1). Linna's trilogy illustrates how the mythical bogland of Finnish folklore gradually develops into an in-between zone, a site where wilderness and the agrarian sphere clash and where the agrarian and civilized take over the wild and uncultivated. Today, the economic and agrarian meanings of the bogland have given way to recreational uses, and, as Kirsi Laurén (2011, 115–16; see also 2006) concludes in her study of Finnish bogland narratives, the meaning of the trope has shifted from agrarian work to aesthetic, environmental, sensory, and even corporeal pleasure.

When read against the canon, it is striking how much Verronen deviates from the wilderness tropes of the Finnish literary tradition. The most prominent difference is the absence of the forest in her oeuvre. Just like the forest, the bogland is virtually nonexistent in Verronen's literary environments. The third interesting, but less significant, deviation is the waterscapes depicted in Verronen's works; instead of the lake scenery of inland Finland, an archetypal National Romantic setting, Verronen's

46. The significance of the bogland trope can be seen in how the concept has been attached to the name of the nation and country. Early theories on the origin of the Finnish name for Finland, *Suomi*, suggested an association between the name and Finnish word for bogland, *suo*. *Suomi* would then signify the land of bogland. The theory has been rejected in the linguistic context but still persists as a common belief. The etymology of the name *Suomi* remains unclear; credible theories have interpreted the name as a Proto-Baltic loan, or, more recently, as a Proto-Indo-European loan (*Suomalainen Paikannimikirja* 2019, 430).

47. Väinö Linna (1920–1992) is considered one of the most influential authors of the twentieth century in Finland. His novel *Tuntematon sotilas* (1954) depicts the Continuation War against Soviet Union and became an instant bestseller despite being heavily criticized by the literary critics. Today, it has gained a canonized status as the war novel of the century and an analysis of the Finnish identity. Linna's trilogy *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (1959–1963) is a sociohistorical look at the development of Finnish society from a class society to a modern democracy. The trilogy, too, has had a long-lasting effect on literary and national self-understanding of its readership.

works are situated in the coastal areas of Finland, within landscapes that have typically (but not exclusively) been associated with the cultural imagination of Finland Swedish minority⁴⁸ rather than the nationalist project of Finnish-speaking Finland (Ameel 2018; Kirstinä 2007, 28; Lyytikäinen 2013b, 163). What does this breaking away from the traditional Finnish wilderness imagery indicate? For one thing, it is a withdrawal from the nationalist discussion. The use of Central European and polar settings is a move away from the ideological fusion of (forest) wilderness and Finnishness and the questions of nation-building. By refusing these prototypical settings, Verronen's prose fiction distances itself from the canonized tradition. Instead, her works employ wild settings such as the polar regions, the desert,⁴⁹ the tundra, the sea island, and the mountain.

Alongside the canonized wilderness tropes of the forest and the bogland, a third trope can be found in the Lapland literature. As Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2010) presents, Lapland and its vast areas of wilderness made their way to Finnish literature as late as in the 1920s and 1930s, which saw a considerable rise in the hunting literature and nature writing. In these works of fiction and nonfiction, the fells and tundras of northern Lapland present themselves in the trope of *tunturi*. The notion of *tunturi* captures both the geological and the biological traits of the Finnish Lapland, as it refers to the small Lapland hills and mountains and to their dominant biome, which is Alpine tundra. The development of the literary *tunturi* trope can be found in the well-known works of Samuli Paulaharju (1875–1944), Yrjö Kokko (1903–1977), and Pentti Haanpää (1905–1955),⁵⁰ but also in the large body of lesser-known nature writers,

48. It should be pointed out that, instead of representing wilderness, the archipelago landscapes of the Finland Swedish cultural imagination often draw from the pastoral mode and the idyll.

49. The desert appears in Verronen's early short stories, where it often functions as a site of illusion and escape. In 'Ahaggarilaiset,' the protagonist visits a farmer's market and discovers a tent of mysterious desert people who offer services from storytelling to dreaming. The tent, although small in size, transforms into a labyrinth of fabric, and the protagonist is transported into a peculiar world by the oral storytelling of the tent-owners. In 'Erämaat' ('Deserts,' 1994), a weary programmer receives a floppy disk with a program named 'desierto.bas,' which grants her an entry to primeval desert landscape. 'Nomadit' (1996d) follows the journey of the protagonist, who enters a desert in search for a long-gone nomad tribe. Against all odds, the tribe is found, and the protagonist is taken aback by the emaciated state of the starving yet gentle nomads.

The first two instances of the desert trope highlight the heterotopic qualities of the setting, as in both narratives the desert is represented as a counter-site that exists hidden beneath the actual world. As the desert presents an alternative to the hegemonic order of the narratives, it can be interpreted as a symbol of the protagonist's dissidence. In 'Nomadit,' the setting turns into an allegory of detrimental adaptation and isolation: after visiting the tribe, the protagonist recognizes a need to turn to other people more often than before. The desert is depicted as an area that constantly expands and gains new ground; at the end of the narrative, the protagonist leaves the desert but is left to anticipate whether they already live in the desert, perhaps without noticing it themselves. In 'Nomadit,' the desert setting thus symbolizes a social and emotional state rather than a geographical space.

50. Samuli Paulaharju, an ethnographer and writer, collected folklore in northern Finland. His most well-known work is *Tunturien yöpuolta* (1934), a collection of horror folk stories. Yrjö Kokko, a veterinarian and a writer, became a leader of the early bird conservation movement in Finland. He also wrote extensively of hunting and fishing in northern Finland. Writer Pentti Haanpää is known for his short prose. Haanpää, whose works depicted the Finnish north and

such as Arvi Järventaus (1883–1939) and Veikko Haakana (1923–2018).⁵¹ The central element of the trope is the often violent clash between human and wilderness, Lehtola (2010, 128, 131) suggests; in many ways, the *tunturi* of the Finnish literature resembles the role that is assigned to the forest or the mountain in Central European literature. It is an ambivalent space, simultaneously sacred and cursed, and often tests the faith and competence of the human protagonist.

Verronen's works cannot be approached as direct descendants of the Lapland literature of the 1920s and 1930s, yet some similarities can be found. The notion *tunturi* never appears in her works of fiction, and most of the northern settings are situated outside Finland, in the Arctic or Antarctic regions, or within imaginary worlds. The polar regions, for instance, are introduced as early as the first short story of Verronen's first publication, the collection *Älä maksa lautturille*. From there on, they reappear in the novels *Pieni elintila* and *Kylmien saarten soturi*. Mountain settings, on the other hand, dominate the earliest works of the author. The latter half of the collection *Älä maksa lautturille* is a compilation of stories that build up the legend of the Silberspitze mountain and the people who are drawn to its influence. The Silberspitze mythology is revisited in the novel *Yksinäinen vuori*, which begins as a portrait of young Peter Urd, native to the Silberwald valley next to the mountain. As the story progresses, Urd develops into an optimistic and widely admired sports hero of downhill racing, while simultaneously his uncanny connection to the mountain valley and its geological transformations seems to grant him powers that extend the human realm. The depiction of the personified and anthropomorphized mountain is woven together with the extreme physical ordeals and prowess of the human protagonist, a mixture that results in a curious rhapsody of extreme mountain environments. The testing of the human protagonist and the clash between the environment and the human subject are elements that draw inspiration from early twentieth-century Lapland literature but, as *Yksinäinen vuori* illustrates, Verronen modifies these classic elements and ties them together with postmodern features such as blending of the genre boundaries.

Many of the wild landscapes depicted in Verronen's narratives share similar qualities. Verronen's fiction places the characters in environments where the subject is salient and highly visible, such as tundra or mountains. Instead of the sheltering forests of the Finnish canon, Verronen's narratives take place in open areas such as the tundra, as in *Pimeästä maasta*, and ice plains, as in *Pieni elintila* or the short story 'Jäätynyt' (K&U, 69–75). In lieu of enclosed inland lakes, Verronen's characters sail the sea, inhabit seaside cities, and are drawn to sea islands. The openness and vastness of these spaces grant the protagonists vision but also make them visible. The tundras, ice plains, and frozen sea ice are thus settings that allow for intellectual, sensory, and perceptual inquiry; they are not wildscapes that absorb the subject, nor do they

often expressed socially critical views, was a highly contested figure in his lifetime but received posthumous praise for his writing.

51. Arvi Järventaus, a priest and a writer, was a prolific depicter of northern Finland. His works focused on the lower classes of countryside but he also wrote about his hometown, Oulu. Veikko Haakana wrote novels and short stories for young readers. His adventurous stories often take place in the wilderness of northern Finland.

offer the experience of being embedded in themselves. Rather, they underline the separation between the subject and space.⁵²

Another quality of these wild spaces is their association with cold temperatures. The mountains in the Silberspitze stories are covered with snow, the tundra of *Pimeästä maasta* is distinctively circumpolar, and the barren islands in *Kylmien saarten soturi* are set both in the Antarctic and Arctic, or at least northern, waters.⁵³ In *Pieni elintila*, the protagonist's preoccupation with the history of Antarctic exploration infuses the narrative with references to extreme temperatures and hostile climate. The sensory qualities of these landscapes are often downplayed in Verronen's prose, as the minimalistic style of narration avoids description and focuses on the actions of the protagonist and the events of the plot. This emphasizes the symbolic function of the cold. The symbolic connotations of coldness have been examined by Fredric Jameson in his *Archaeologies of Future* (2005), in which Jameson analyzes the literary representation of an extremely cold environment in Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Jameson contextualizes his discussion with a short look at the use of extreme heat as a symbol for the dissolution of the self and loss of autonomy, a literary trope that he connects to the European colonialist imagination. Bearing this in mind, Jameson interprets that the wintery landscape of Le Guin's novel functions:

not so much as a rude environment, inhospitable to human life, as rather a symbolic affirmation of the autonomy of the organism, and a fantasy realization of some virtually total disengagement of the body from its environment or eco-system. (Jameson 2005, 269)

A similar interpretation can be drawn from Verronen's wild spaces. One cannot help but notice the retelling of the story of an autonomous, physically able, masculine, and European human subject that is presented through the sports hero protagonist of the Silberspitze stories, the historical explorers of the Antarctic, and the mercenary protagonist of *Kylmien saarten soturi*. In the earlier novels of the author, the affirmation of this kind of subjectivity seems to be rather unproblematic, but, as my analysis of the novel *Pieni elintila* (see the 'Homecomings and Homesteadings' chapter) demonstrates, the issue is viewed increasingly critically in Verronen's more recent works.

All in all, while discarding some of the Finnish nationalist tropes of wilderness, Verronen's earlier works tend to draw from the adventure novel, a genre that often overlaps with the imperial romance.⁵⁴ In Verronen's hands, the genre that typically presented exoticized non-European locations to the European readership is modified to introduce Central European, Alpine and circumpolar environments to the Finnish reader. In some cases, the wilderness tropes that Verronen employs can be regarded as Finnish but culturally and politically marginalized within the Finnish literary tradition. This applies especially to the tundra of *Pimeästä maasta*.

52. For a more in-depth reading of the features of Verronen's Antarctic landscape, see the phenomenological analysis of *Pieni elintila* in Kankkunen (2014, 55–60).

53. The only exception to this rule is the trope of the desert, although Verronen's narratives associate it with dryness rather than extreme heat, as can be seen in 'Nomadit' for instance.

54. On the problematics of defining the genre of imperial romance, see, e.g., Jones (2004), and Andrea White's seminal study *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition* (1993).

In addition to the politics of spatial imagination depicted above, certain qualities of Verronen's wildscapes can be interpreted in the light of the risk discourse of late modernity. The barrenness and chill of the polar landscape, the heights and the avalanches of the mountains, and the barren emptiness of the desert are but a few examples of the presence of mortal danger in Verronen's works. This is best exemplified in the earlier works, such as *Älä maksa lautturille* and *Yksinäinen vuori*, which largely revolve around mountaineering. The subject in these environments is thus not only highly visible but also exposed and vulnerable, which adds a layer of dramatic suspense to the stories. Mountaineering can be understood to carry a symbolic function for late modern liberalism similar to what (Antarctic) exploration did for imperialism: as Jonathan Simon (2002) presents in his article on extreme sports and risk-taking, mountain climbing has come to play a special role in the cultural imagination of what he calls advanced liberalism. According to him, risk-taking in mountain climbing can be linked to the larger politico-ideological shift that encourages individuals to assume more risk in order to foster responsibility, autonomy, and possible rewards that are linked to risk exposure (Simon 2002, 177–82). Verronen's mountaineering fictions – part II of the short story collection *Älä maksa lautturille* and the novel *Yksinäinen vuori* – represent the new and heightened role of individualism in contemporary society.⁵⁵ Verronen's spatial imagination on wilderness operates, in other words, not only with the symbolic connotations linked with specific environments and their qualities, but also with certain physical activities and their cultural-historical bearings.

Based on these three traits – the openness of these wildscapes and the subject's saliency within them, the symbolic function of the cold temperatures, and the intertwining of the notions of risk and mortal danger – I suggest that Verronen's wilderness tropes mark a shift in culture, a transition from the communal and the national toward the increasingly individualistic. That this shift is expressed through the spatial plane of the works is an earmark of Verronen's poetics, an example of how the narrative space can develop and communicate complex meanings.

Moreover, Verronen's use of distinctively non-Finnish tropes of wilderness can be viewed in the light of another, perhaps more contemporary, tendency. With their unspecified locations and settings that cross regional, national, and sometimes even continental boundaries, Verronen's wilderness depictions resonate with the current discussion that aims to bring together the ecocritical and globalist (sometimes referred to as cosmopolitan) schools of thought. The proponents of this view, such as Ursula Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), criticize traditional ecocriticism for its localist emphasis, a tendency she calls 'ecolocalism.' According to Heise (2008, 6–9), ecocritics have too long neglected the need to establish a truly global 'sense of the planet,' a task that would be necessary for ecocritical thought to remain

55. The mountain is, of course, an iconic example of the Romantic imagery of individualism, and mountaineering's close association with individualism can be detected already in the works of British Romanticists (see, e.g., Bainbridge 2020, 177). Even before the Romantic period, the mountain was a trope with a transgressive potential: in *Strange Truths in Undiscovered Lands*, Nahoko Miyamoto Alvey (2016, 82–108) explores how the Romantics' mountain geographies are related to the theological notions of mountains as environments that were both cursed and sacred. Romanticism and postmodernism both share a fascination with mountaineering, which prompts a consideration of the similarities and shared tendencies between the two artistic and intellectual movements; see, e.g., Larrissy (2010).

relevant. From Heise's perspective, the unresolved tension between these two poles – the localist and the globalist – has had a detrimental effect on ecocritical studies and environmentalism in general. This, of course, is linked with the larger debate concerning the representation of the Anthropocene, in other words the problematics of aesthetic representation of large-scale environmental change. In contrast to this localist bias, which Heise designates as ecolocalism, Verronen's wilderness narratives could be labeled as representatives of economadism. In their depiction of wildscapes that clearly differentiate themselves from the canonized tropes of wilderness of Finnish literature, Verronen's works not only challenge but also broaden the range of wilderness depiction in the field of Finnish literature. The rejection of the nationalist images, the tendency to draw influences from adventure novels and imperialist romances, and the prevalence of European, non-Nordic wilderness settings are signals of an emerging and global 'sense of the planet.'

To better demonstrate the complexities of Verronen's wilderness narratives, I turn to the analysis of a single short story. In the story, wilderness serves not only as a setting but as a concept that is deeply problematic or even controversial. The story employs several tropes that are typical of Verronen's poetics of wild spaces: the wintery northern environment, a large open space, mortal danger, and a protagonist whose view of the landscape is that of a stranger.

Verronen's collection of short stories, *Kulkureita & Unohtajia*, presents the reader with an array of characters who are indecisive about where they are, or who they are. Verronen's narratives are filled with outsiders, tramps, vagabonds, and characters who choose other forms of voluntary displacement. In the collection at hand, these characters populate the wilderness settings by sailing the (Ant)arctic seas, inhabiting deserts, and traveling to mountains and desolate islands. The last story of the collection, 'Mökki autiolla rannalla,' starts with an unpromising scene: the protagonist has spent six days on a snowy hike, sleeping outside, in a seemingly irrational attempt to reach the shore of a nameless northern sea. The protagonist is running out of food: all the wanderer has left is a pinch of salt and sugar, and a sip of water. Nevertheless, the wanderer is determined to keep on moving:

At the beginning of the journey, the wanderer had convinced himself that there was the option of turning back. Mere self-deception, for the wanderer had never turned back after setting their eyes on a specific place. Along the road, there always came that moment, that special point, whence continuing the journey would be just as burdensome as turning back. At that point, one knew: it was just a matter of going on.⁵⁶ (K&U, 132)

The beginning of the story contrasts the physical challenges of the journey with the protagonist's motivation. The latter remains a mystery throughout the story; it seems that the protagonist has been on the move for quite a while, for no reason other than curiosity. The wanderer has, as the passage above mentions, set their eyes on a specific

56. Alkumatkasta hän oli uskotellut itselleen, että voisi koska tahansa kääntyä takaisin. Se oli ollut itsepetosta, sillä hän ei ollut koskaan kääntynyt takaisin enää sen jälkeen, kun jokin paikka oli alkanut askarruttaa häntä. Jossain vaiheessa matkaa tuli aina se helpottava piste, jossa määränpäähän saakka jatkaminen ja lähtöpisteeseen palaaminen olivat suunnilleen yhtä vaikeita ja rasittavia. Silloin tiesi aina, että voisi yhtä hyvin jatkaa eteenpäin.

place; after that, the options of turning back or quitting the journey are no longer available.

The midpoint of the journey marks the victory of faith over doubt and spirit over flesh, since, from that point on, continuing the journey is not only a matter of willpower but reason as well. The scene can be related to one of Zeno's paradoxes, known as the dichotomy paradox, which is included in Aristotle's *Physics* (for Aristotle's discussion of the paradox, see Sachs 1995, Book V). According to the dichotomy paradox, if a person wants to reach a certain goal, they first have to reach the midpoint between the starting point and the goal. Before that, the person has to travel a quarter of the way; and before that one-eighth, and so on, *ad infinitum*. The paradox thus questions the possibility of movement per se: since the distance that has not been traveled yet can be divided into half, and the half of that into half, and so forth, there will be no point when the person has reached the goal. Simultaneously, the first distance to be traveled can always be divided into half; therefore, there is no first distance to be traveled – the journey cannot even start. Verronen's story modifies the paradox: in this case, dividing the distance of the travel into half is the very reasoning for continuing the journey. The narrator also presents a paradox of their own: the protagonist has been pondering the possibility of a return, although that option, the protagonist knows, does not really exist for them. The traveler of the dichotomy paradox is not able to start their journey or reach their goal, whereas the wanderer of Verronen's story is not able to cease their journey. Thus, the impossibility of movement that the ancient paradox suggests is in Verronen's story inverted into the impossibility of immobility.

After several days of painful hiking, the wanderer finally reaches the seashore:

The temperature kept dropping, and the blue light of the midday succumbed into black darkness. Simultaneously, the wind grew stronger, the terrain started to ascend, and the trees of the forest became increasingly sparse. Soon the wanderer-in-the-frost found themself climbing a steep slope through the low pine trees and birches.

The wanderer made it to the hilltop – and there, right in front of them, was a white and grey expanse of ice, lit by the stars.

Down on the shoreline the wanderer saw traces of other times, when the place was filled with the bustle of cargo ships, cranes and harbor workers. Once the icebreakers had kept the fairway to the harbor open all year round. Now everything was dead and frozen, and the solid sea ice extended as far as the eye could see.

There was only one snow-covered cottage with a narrow column of smoke hanging above it.⁵⁷ (K&U, 133)

57. Lämpötila laski laskemistaan, ja keskipäivän sininen kaamosvalo antoi tilaa mustalle pimeydelle. Samalla tuuli voimistui, ja maasto alkoi kohota ja metsä harventua. Pian kylmässävaeltaja huomasi kahlaavansa jyrkässä rinteessä matalien mäntyjen ja koivupensaiden lomassa.

Hän saavutti kukkulan laen – ja hänen edessään levittäytyi valkoisenharmaa tähtien valaisema jäälakeus.

Alhaalla rannassa näkyi jäänteitä siitä, kuinka siellä oli joskus hyörinyt suuri joukko rahialuksia, nostureita ja satamatyöläisiä. Joskus jäänmurtajat varmaankin olivat pitäneet satamaan johtavan väylän auki ympäri vuoden. Nyt kaikki oli kuollutta ja jähmettynyttä, ja meren jää ulottui silmänkantamattomiin.

Vain yhdestä lumen lähes kokonaan peittämästä mökistä kohosi hento savupatsas.

At first sight, the scene evokes, in an antithetical way, the Romantic motif of a solitary subject elevated before an awe-inspiring sublime landscape. In the Finnish context, it resonates with the patriotic landscape depictions of Johan Ludvig Runeberg's *Vänrikki Stoolin tarinat* ([1848] 1910) (transl. *The Tales of Ensign Stål*, 1938) and Zachris Topelius's *Maamme kirja* ('The Book of Our Land' [1875] 1982), both of which established the hilltop view over a summery inland lake as the symbol of the Fennoman movement. In Verronen's adaptation, the National Romantic scene has been modified in several ways. Verronen's wanderer gazes at the sea, not the inland lakes, and the season is winter instead of the high summer of the canonical landscape depictions. Instead of the open waters of inland lakes, the wanderer faces a vast plain of sea ice. Unlike in the traditional Romantic imagery of the sublime, the emotional intensity of the scene stems from the wistful depiction of the harbor ruins – the longing that the viewer experiences is directed toward the relics of the past human settlement instead of the natural beauty or pristine wilderness. Accordingly, the sense of isolation comes not only from the frozen, immobile landscape but is explicitly connected to the remnants of the once-busy northern harbor. Moreover, the moment of gazing on the landscape from a hilltop is simultaneously a view over the sea, toward foreign lands, and over the harbor, which is the link to the outer world. In this scene, the protagonist literally turns their back on the landscapes of the National Romantic movement. Their gaze is directed toward the horizon, the harbor, away from the forest from which they came. Sea ice, a liminal space between land and water, often appears in Verronen's works as a connective element that establishes new pathways between locations.⁵⁸

After the panoramic scene, the snow-covered cottage with a fire in its fireplace catches the protagonist's attention. The protagonist approaches the cottage; the inhabitants turn out to be an elderly couple. The traveler is invited in and treated with hospitality, although the three do not share a common language. Days go by and the protagonist settles in.

As already stated, the panoramic scene activates but also challenges elements that are often present in the narratives of wild spaces. The narrative becomes even more ambivalent, as the narrator presents the inhabitants of the cottage and depicts their way of living:

Neither of the inhabitants of the cottage spoke any language that the wanderer-in-the-frost was able to speak. It was a surprise. One couldn't escape the thought that the man and the

58. Scenes that take place on sea ice appear relatively often in Verronen's works. The novel *Saari kaupungissa* opens with an episode (SK, 7) that depicts how the city dwellers enjoy the frozen sea in front of their city. In the episode, the sea ice is a liminal, shared space that brings the townspeople together. The narrator gives an account on a newspaper article that presents the sea ice as a conflict-free zone: 'There were no problems, no arguments, no demands' (SK, 7). The beginning is especially striking because the novel itself highlights small-scale social conflicts, moments of awkwardness and other forms of social friction that belong to the experience of the urban way of life. In the short story 'Jäätynyt' ('The Frozen One,' *Kulkureita & Unohtajia*, 69–75), sea ice opens a passage to a small islet that the protagonist last visited in early childhood. The opening of the pathway brings back a suppressed memory of the protagonist, connecting her with the past she has been trying to escape.

woman had been abandoned on the shore because of some linguistic misunderstanding.⁵⁹ (K&U, 133)

The elderly couple were kind towards the wanderer: they provided them with a proper amount of food and an opportunity to get clean and use their warm clothing. They wouldn't allow the wanderer to take on the chores of the cottage, but when the wanderer nevertheless did, they took it as if the wanderer were a child with a curious nature, playing and practicing new skills. [. . .]

The summer was short and changed nothing. The sea ice melted away for two months, and some days were relatively warm. Not a single ship approached the former harbor. [. . .]

The summer hardly brought a change to the lives of the elderly couple. Fishing and berry picking didn't belong to their repertoire, the canned foods were enough for their nourishment. The berries that the wanderer-in-the-frost picked were left almost untouched by them.⁶⁰ (K&U, 134–35)

The depiction of the couple seems neutral and focused on the elderly, but it directs the reader's attention in a manner that is far from objective. As the remark on the berry-picking detail demonstrates, the couple's actions and attitudes are constantly contrasted with those of the wanderer. The wanderer picks berries; the cottage couple does not. As the scene progresses, the depiction of the couple gains more nuance: the elderly are passive in not only berry-picking but other activities as well. They live from a giant storehouse stocked with canned food, fuel, and gas. They do not go berry-picking or fishing; they possess no means to communicate with the outside world; they do not elicit help from the wanderer; they are not interested in teaching the visitor their language. The narrator describes their everyday life as being filled with iterative, reproductive work: little is consumed, but even less is produced. Resignation and a lack of initiative characterize the atmosphere of the little cottage.

The narrator's portrayal of the couple culminates in a scene that concerns their ability to communicate – or, rather, the lack thereof. The protagonist asks the man for the word for the vast sea ice, and the man grabs a handful of snow, uttering the word for snow (K&U, 134). For a dweller of a northern region, not possessing the vocabulary to express the differences between ice and snow and subtypes of the two is peculiar and can even be dangerous. In other words, it seems that even the linguistic skills of the elderly have deteriorated. Even more importantly, the scene activates a well-known frame of reference that concerns language and the Arctic. With this scene,

59. Kumpikaan mökin asukkaista ei puhunut yhtäkään niistä kielistä, joita kylmässävaeltaja edes jonkin verran osasi, ja se oli melko yllättävää. Ei voinut välttyä ajatukselta, että mies ja nainen olivat unohtuneet autiolle rannalle jonkin kielellisen väärinkäsityksen takia.

60. Vanhukset olivat hänelle ystävällisiä ja antoivat pyytämättä riittävästi ruokaa ja mahdollisuuden peseytyä ja käyttää heidän lämpimiä vaatteitaan. Mökin askareisiin vanhukset estelivät vierasta osallistumasta, ja silloin kun kylmässävaeltaja sai tahtonsa läpi ja pääsi jotain tekemään, siihen suhtauduttiin kuin hän olisi ollut utelias, leikkisä ja uutta kokeileva lapsi. [. . .]

Kesä oli lyhyt eikä se muuttanut mitään. Meren jää suli kahdeksi kuukaudeksi, ja joinakin päivinä oli melko lämmintä, mutta yksikään laiva ei lähestynyt entistä satamaa. [. . .]

Vanhan pariskunnan elämään kesä toi vain harvoja uusia askareita. Kalastus ja marjojen poiminta eivät kuuluneet niihin; säilykkeet riittivät heille ruoaksi. Kylmässävaeltajan poimimiin marjoihin he tuskin koskivat.

the narrative invites the reader to consider the hypothesis of linguistic relativity and its stereotypical representations of northernness and Arctic cultures: in *The Handbook of American Indian Languages* (Boas 1911), anthropologist Franz Boas claims that, in relation to English, the Inuit languages possess a significant number of words for snow.⁶¹ In Verronen's story, the reference to the snow debate functions as an element of irony: it is another feature that distances the cottage couple from their environment, since it labels them as nonindigenous. The scene hints that, like the canned foods that the couple consume, their cultural knowledge is imported from elsewhere. Wilderness, in this case the Arctic, is linked with the rhetoric of authenticity, but in an ambivalent manner.

The ambivalence of the couple is yet another example of how Verronen's works often invert or rework genre formulas and narrative clichés. The short story presents a dichotomy between everyday life within civilization and authentic existence within the wilderness. The nomadic lifestyle of the wanderer is contrasted with the immobile, settled life of the elderly couple. The postindustrial landscape, the presence of the couple within the wilderness, and the curious way that they have rooted in yet remained detached from their surroundings are all elements that draw their power from the reversal of the reader's expectations. The wilderness is not what it first seems to be, and the interaction between the characters and the wild space follows rules that are difficult to interpret.

Depending on the context, the cottage couple can be interpreted as a symbol for various phenomena. Clearly, their role is antagonistic to that of the wanderer's; be it a critique of a bourgeois lifestyle or the narrow-mindedness of a stationary way of life, the couple represent the opposite of the wandering protagonist. But this is not the only possible frame of reference. A couple crouching next to a northern shore directs thoughts to the national self-image of Finland as an isolated, northern country with a strong dependence on maritime connections. This line of interpretation is strengthened by the language motif: the couple, unable to communicate in the languages known to the wanderer and left on the shore 'because of some linguistic misunderstanding,' as the protagonist is tempted to think, echoes the isolated position of Finnish in the middle of Scandinavian (North Germanic) and Slavic languages. Is this a caricature of collapsed nationalistic ideals and the political ideologies that have emphasized self-sufficiency and isolationism?

An alternative reading of the story would link it with a more universal disappointment at the ideals of development, economic growth, and systems of production. The couple's isolationism is not only from the community but from their direct surroundings and sources of livelihood, a discourse usually employed by the critics of modernization. The narrator pays specific attention to how the couple are distanced from their environment: their vocabulary concerning the material world

61. The anecdote took on a life of its own and was later referred to by Boas's student Edward Sapir, who with Benjamin Whorf was a proponent of the well-known hypothesis of linguistic relativity (also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), i.e., the notion that language and its structures determine or at least affect the subject's worldview. Boas's original claim has been widely criticized, sometimes even referred to as 'the great eskimo language hoax' (see Pullum 1991). But, as Krupnik and Müller-Wille (2010) demonstrate, these criticisms have often been based on misinterpretations of Boas's original idea.

is limited and, as the summer comes, they fail to engage in any kind of activity to make use of the gifts of nature but live off the storehouse filled with canned food. The story defies clear-cut interpretation but encourages speculation on the part of the reader, especially as far as the couple's alienated state is concerned. Seen in the light of Karl Marx's concept of alienation, the couple's lack of initiative can be linked to their estrangement from the means of production. According to Marx (2016, 67–83), the capitalist mode of production causes the workers to become alienated both from the process of production and the end result of the process, the product. As workers become instrumental for the production processes, they lose their control over work, which for Marx is the essential, vital element of human condition, and necessary for the sense of fulfillment (Sayers 2011, 14–31). The cottage couple is quite literally estranged from the process of production, because any production, from their point of view, does not take place. Relying on the stored goods, the old people are consumers in the purest sense. Instead of engaging in labor, the couple lives off the products of earlier times; instead of eating fresh food from the surroundings, their nutrition consists of preserved foods picked and packaged somewhere else. The deteriorated language skills of the couple are linked to their detachment from the material surroundings but also reflect their lack of social interaction in the desolate state in which they live. For both Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Marx, work is something that enables the worker to relate 'not only to the object of work and hence to the natural world, but also – and through it – to other human beings,' as Sayers (2011, 15) points out in his treatment of the two philosophers' notion of work.

In literary tradition, the social issues inflicted by modernization and the ideals of development have been discussed through the myth of Baucis and Philemon. This fable from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1998, 8.611–8.724) received a reinterpretation in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* ([1832] 1981). Ovid's original fable belongs to the tradition of *theoxenia*, a depiction of hospitality toward a guest who is revealed to be a god in disguise. According to the fable, the old couple were the only people in their town to offer food and shelter to the gods Jupiter and Mercury, who traveled the area in the shape of mortal men. In Goethe's *Faust* ([1832] 1981), however, the old couple are presented as the innocent victims of the protagonist's devilish construction plans. In the play, Faust becomes obsessed with the couple's plot of land; he wishes to build an observation tower, an ambition that resembles the biblical Tower of Babel. Faust, the devilish developer, turns to Mephisto's help to expel the couple out of the lot they inhabit, and, as a result, Mephisto kills them, an act that Faust strongly condemns afterwards. In his classic diagnostics of modernity's experience, Marshall Berman (1982, 66–68) reads Goethe's Baucis and Philemon as embodiments of modernity's tendency to displace and disregard large groups of people.⁶² Verronen's dreamlike and riddling version of the myth presents the cottage couple as a symbol of the critique of development. The short story, however, transplants the motif from Goethe's Arcadian scenery into a northern setting. The postindustrial, abandoned, nearly apocalyptic harbor of the short story can thus be associated with the trope of the modern

62. The Baucis and Philemon motif does, as Lieven Ameel (2014, 93–96) points out in his study, appear repeatedly in the Finnish literature of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. As he concludes, the motif presents the 'dissonant rhythms between the development of literary characters and their urban surroundings' (Ameel 2014, 94).

wasteland, a notion that Berman (1982, 68) employs to describe the developer's way of viewing areas that lack or resist the touch of modernity. In Verronen's short story, the deserted harbor seems to present the wasteland's fate without the developer-figure's intervention. Instead of the dissonance between the surroundings and the characters, the story pictures a harmony of sorts: although degenerate and passive, the couple's way of life is in equilibrium with the environment.

In Verronen's short story, the couple are simultaneously settled and adrift: settled because their existence is rooted on the desolate shore, and adrift because this rootedness has resulted in a lack of engagement and a reduced ability to act. As the cargo ships have left the northern harbor and the cranes ceased their nodding, the vigor and the optimism of the doctrine of growth has escaped the lonely subjects.⁶³ All that is left is a storehouse of canned dreams and a sense of helplessness in relation to the surrounding world.

The alienated condition of the couple is an example of the overall ethos of Verronen's works, where value is often attached to or represented by adaptability, the ability to function in different environments, and various skills from woodcraft to street smarts. In *Pieni elintila*, for example, the protagonist, a camper herself, observes the hardships of an upper-class woman who vacations for the first time off the tourist trails on a small island, far from the hotel chains and prepackaged attractions. The satirical depictions of the trouble and confusion the woman creates with her snobbery and helplessness evoke the genre of comedy, but it does not take long until the story turns into a full-blown tragedy that closes with a matricide, a motif of classic Greek tragedy. In Verronen's fiction, the characters' spatial sensibility is proof of their moral character, and, as *Pieni elintila* demonstrates, the lack of it correlates with other ethical failures. Elsewhere in this study I have contextualized this trait with the theory of evolution, Darwinist notions of natural selection, and Herbert Spencer's 'survival of the fittest.' It is true that Verronen's works exhibit a certain admiration toward the social Darwinist understanding of society and social relations. However, the analysis of the cottage couple and their relation to the processes of production complements this picture by showing that, alongside the social Darwinist undercurrents, these narratives develop an ethical stance that underlines the importance of participation, everyday life, and labor much in the sense that these themes appear in Marx, Henri Lefebvre, and even de Certeau ([1980] 1984).

A central feature of the narrative is, however, that the cottage couple is represented from a single point of view, that of the protagonist. The evaluative tone linked to them is mediated with the help of focalization:

The elderly didn't refuse, when the wanderer asked if they would allow their visitor to take some of their canned foods. It was as if the couple didn't fully understand what the wanderer was doing and why they were packing.⁶⁴ (K&U, 135)

63. This arrangement resembles the shipwreck depicted in *Robinson Crusoe*: just like Crusoe, the couple is stranded with bountiful supplies but without any human contact.

64. Vanhukset eivät vastustelleet, kun hän kysyi, saisiko ottaa mukaansa heidän säilykkeitään. Oli aivan kuin nämä eivät olisi täysin käsittäneet, mitä hän oli tekemässä ja miksi pakkasi tavaraa mukaansa.

The focalization of the latter sentence is clearly linked to the protagonist, the wanderer. It is the protagonist's assessment of the couple's poor understanding, and the protagonist's speculation about the reasons for their generosity. According to the protagonist, the couple lack understanding, just as they lack language, practical skills, curiosity, and variation. A similar dynamic emerges when the protagonist first enters the cottage, as the wanderer is surprised by the fact that the elderly couple do not speak any common languages, which makes the wanderer speculate, in a humorous manner, that the couple have been left behind because of their lack of language skills. However, in this scene it is the wanderer who is isolated and left behind – she is the one who is unable to communicate. The scene shows how the protagonist projects their own situation on the couple, and how self-centered and biased their observations are. The wanderer's perspective and focalization are, however, the only ones presented in the narrative. It is the wanderer's gaze that follows the elderly when they work and when they rest; the gaze of an outsider, the gaze of the younger generation, the gaze of the one who is drawn to the horizon. But, still, it is the couple that inhabit this corner of the world, it is their home the wanderer uses for shelter, it is their food storage that saves the protagonist from starvation. The contrast that the narrative establishes between the couple and the wanderer is not just a contrast between the settled and the nomad lifestyle but a contrast between the visitor and the inhabitants, the tourist and the locals – and the starving one and the rescuers. The narrative subtly suggests that the protagonist might not be trustworthy. Perhaps the couple's resignation is not just resignation but resistance: resistance to movement, resistance to the environment, resistance to the idea of wilderness. Perhaps the pity and the criticism that the protagonist expresses do not stem from the juxtaposition of two lifestyles but from a different approach toward the production of wilderness.

The short story is, after all, a story of a wanderer looking for the utmost wilderness, the sea, and their surprise when the shore is already inhabited and civilized. The narrative employs classic Western notions of wilderness – wilderness as a National Romantic construct, wilderness as a setting for a travel narrative – discards them and replaces them with postindustrial images. The cottage couple inhabits a wilderness, but it is a different wilderness than the one the protagonist is looking for. Stories like 'Mökki autiolla rannalla' engage with the discourse on the dichotomy of being versus doing or, as Garrard (2004, 71–72) coins it, the poetics of authenticity and the poetics of responsibility. According to Garrard (2004, 71–72), Western wilderness representations tend to highlight the former, which raises the issue of essentialism and often hinders ethical discussion. By presenting and juxtaposing two alternative ways of inhabiting wilderness, Verronen's story questions the essentialism that is often explicitly or implicitly attached to the protagonists of wilderness narratives. The cottage couple certainly does not meet the expectations that are inscribed to the poetics of authenticity and its call for an essentialist idea of man; they are not natural or primal, nor do they strive for this kind of state of being.

When the second winter comes, the protagonist leaves the cottage and returns to their nomadic lifestyle. But the wanderer has had a change of heart:

The wanderer-in-the-frost had always been on the lookout for places that would resemble themselves, at least partly. Never had they been able to specify what they were after, for they didn't know themselves. The wanderer had recognized themselves in many places, and for a long

period of time, that had sufficed for them. But these places had always been occupied by someone, so there was no room for them.

Now, the wanderer thought, now they could find – or make – a place for themselves where they would be the only one. [. . .]

It would be necessary, however, to make sure that the wanderer would always encounter something new, something that would allow them to recognize themselves. For that purpose, they could resort to other people. The thought was new to the wanderer-in-the-frost, but they didn't turn it down. If the close encounter with the two dwellers-in-the-frost sparked insights like this, what could one expect from different people, if one could only give them a chance?⁶⁵ (K&U, 135)

The encounter between the wanderer and the cottage couple results in an epiphany on the wanderer's side. It is the wanderer, not the old couple, who has been affected by the encounter: as the excerpt above demonstrates, after living with the couple, the wanderer starts to consider the possibility of inhabiting a fixed location. The authenticity-seeking and the Romantic conception of wilderness implicit in the wanderer's character thus submits to a change. The wanderer's development is not only a result of the clash of wilderness ideologies but also a testament to the place's ability to transform a human subject. As Doreen Massey suggests, place does 'change us – not through some visceral belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it) but through the *practicing* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us' (Massey 2005, 154). The wanderer's change of heart is brought upon them through their practicing of cottage life in the desolate shore and the relations with the couple.

With this story, the collection of short stories that consists of narratives of wanderings and vagabonds ends on a different note, one that hints at the possibility of settling down. This is the formula that recurs in all of Verronen's narratives of wilderness and wandering: In *Kylmien saarten soturi*, recovery from a war trauma that has manifested itself as an odyssey from one cold island to another leads the protagonist to settle down in a harbor city. In *Pieni elintila*, the complex web of travel narratives culminates in a series of homecomings and homesteadings; even the matricide at the end of the novel is a homecoming in a sense, as it involves the return of the killer, the victim's son. The same pattern appears in most of the stories in *Kulkureita & Unohtajia*. As the story of the northern shore has shown us, the conflicts and their resolutions in these stories are told in a way that sets wilderness as the starting point. Looking at the character development in these works, one can say

65. Kylmässävaeltaja oli aina etsinyt paikkoja, jotka olisivat edes joiltakin osin hänen kaltaisiaan. Ei hän ollut osannut tarkasti sanoa, mitä toivoi löytävänsä, koska ei ollut tiennyt millainen oli. Hän oli tunnistanut itsensä monista paikoista, ja pitkän aikaa se oli riittänyt hänelle. Noissa paikoissa oli kuitenkin aina jo ollut muita, niin ettei hänelle ollut jäänyt paljon tilaa.

Nyt hän ajatteli, että voisi yrittää etsiä – tai raivata – itselleen paikan, jossa hän olisi ensimmäinen olento. [. . .]

Pitäisi kuitenkin huolehtia myös siitä, että eteen tulisi aina jotain uutta, josta voisi itseään tunnistaa. Siinä tarkoituksessa voisi turvautua ihmisiin. Se oli kylmässävaeltajalle uusi ja outo ajatus, mutta hän ei torjunut sitä. Jos jo kahden paikoilleen jähmettyneen kylmässäasujan tiivis kohtaaminen tuotti tuollaisia oivalluksia, mitä voisivatkaan sysätä liikkeelle aivan toisenlaiset ihmiset, kun heille antaisi tilaisuuden.

that the move from wilderness toward civilization is connected to the protagonist's psychological development from detachment toward attachment. In *Kylmien saarten soturi*, the protagonist's gradual return to civilian life is enabled by the affection he develops for a small island community. In *Pieni elintila*, the protagonist's journey in the Isles of Scilly allows her to process her childhood traumas, and the return from the islands marks her ability to reconnect with the past. In the case of 'Mökki autiolla rannalla,' the encounter between the cottage couple and the wanderer in the frost induces the protagonist to consider whether the social realm could offer them similar experiences as those they had been seeking from their constant wandering within the wilderness. As the narrator acknowledges, the protagonist 'had always been on the lookout for places that would resemble themselves' (K&U, 135); in other words, their mobility has been a search for selfhood and recognition. Instead of wilderness and changing settings, the protagonist is now willing to turn to other people – civilization – in their attempt at self-reflection.

In Western wilderness narratives, the orientation is typically from the cultural, built environment into the wilderness. In *Getting Back into Place* ([1993] 2009), Casey underlines the problematics of this formula:

Is the natural world really something we *edge toward*? Is this world to be conceived as nothing but a border or perimeter? The very idea of edging *out* from built places into the wild world beyond presumes the primacy of a humanocentric starting point: the hearth, the home, the house, the city. We have just seen that these centers cannot hold; capacious as they are, they cannot contain the diversities and vicissitudes of the place-world. [. . .] [W]e must question the anthropocentric (or more exactly, the domocentric) belief that the most significant motion is from built places into the natural world, as though this latter were some secondary realm, a mere outpost of human experience to be entered belatedly and on tenterhooks. (Casey [1993] 2009, 186; italics in the original)

Casey questions the directionality we associate with wilderness, or nature. In essence, it is the same problem Garrard (2004, 71) raises in discussing the ethics of wilderness narratives: is it ethical to represent pristine wilderness as something cut off from the human realm? Casey's critique concerns not only the presence/absence dichotomy of the representations of wilderness but points out how common it is for the human thought to equate wilderness with border and periphery. This border is, according to Casey, the 'towardness,' the place to be approached and ultimately reached, from the center. Casey's take on directionality is especially useful for the purposes of literary analysis, since it not only raises the question of point of view but problematizes the formula of the travel narrative, which is embedded in the Western notion of wilderness. This specific viewpoint and formula reaffirm the idea of wilderness as something that is approached, as Casey puts it, 'belatedly and on tenterhooks.'

Casey's observation of the directionality of Western wilderness formula can further be contextualized with the current reassessment of the pastoral tradition in ecocritical thought. Although pastoral, as a mode and a genre, focuses on rural environments and the countryside rather than wilderness, it has shaped the Western notion of nature in a way that inevitably affects our common understanding of wilderness as well. At the heart of the genre and/or mode lies the pattern of retreat and return, an arrangement that Terry Gifford asserts as 'the essential pastoral momentum' (Gifford 2011, 18). As

ecocritic Lawrence Buell coins, ‘pastoral has become almost synonymous with the idea of (re)turn to a less urbanized, more “natural” state of existence’ (Buell 1995, 31). Elements of the pastoral retreat to the nature can thus be detected in narratives of wilderness as well; in fact, as Gifford (2011, 18) points out, in American naturalist writing (and its ecocritical readings), the pastoral retreat is an escape into wilderness.⁶⁶ Apart from pastoral and antipastoral tendencies, Gifford (2011) detects signs of so-called ‘postpastoralism’ in contemporary writing.⁶⁷ According to him, the concept refers to a mode of writing that is aware of the pastoral tradition and connects with it but simultaneously suggests ‘a collapse of the human/nature divide while being aware of the problematics involved’ (Gifford 2011, 26). Rather than rejecting the tradition altogether, these versions of the pastoral incorporate an element of reflexivity while still maintaining many of the mode’s classic tropes and other features.

The trajectories of Verronen’s wilderness narratives differ from the typically culture-centric Western formula, including the pastoral. In Verronen’s narratives, it is wilderness that comes first, and the point of view is from the wild toward the cultivated. To such a degree, Verronen’s work participates in rewriting the wilderness in a similar vein that many authors working on postpastoral literature do. Although little studied (see, e.g., Aura 2018), postpastoral seems to be an emerging mode in Finnish contemporary literature; elements of the mode can be detected in novels such as *Korpisoturi* (2016) by Laura Gustafsson, *Karhunkivi* (2016) by Vesa Haapala, *Halla Helle* (2021) by Niillas Holmberg, and *Pienen hauen pyydystys* (2019) by Juhani Karila, as well as in the works of Anni Kytömäki and the dystopian novels of Johanna Sinisalo, to name but a few of a growing group.

The Eccentric as the Ex-Centric: Practicing Wilderness in ‘Unohtaja’ (‘The Forgetter’)

Not all of Verronen’s wilderness narratives are stories of difficult terrain and life-threatening, extreme environments. As this subchapter aims to present, it is often the everyday space, the mundane space of a workplace, school, or street, that suddenly summons the untamed and unexpected – wild – behavior of the characters. These narratives often involve a protagonist who is unable to adjust to civilized society after years spent in the wilderness, such as in *Kylmien saarten soturi*, or they center on a wanderer whose contact with human communities is only fleeting, or a hermit who chooses voluntary isolation in the midst of people. This recurring theme in Verronen’s oeuvre has been recognized by critics (Lehto 2012; Majander 1996; Soikkeli 2001) but it has been approached mainly from the viewpoint of social exclusion

66. The most influential interpretation of American pastoralism is Leo Marx’s 1964 work *Machine in the Garden* ([1964] 2000), in which Marx examines the presence of technology in American pastoral literature. For him, the conflicting ideas of pastoral idyll and technological development signal a contradiction between the rapidly industrializing twentieth-century American society and its self-image that drew from the imagery of a lush and virgin landscape, the idea of ‘the New World.’

67. Although Gifford himself has been wary of postpastoralism’s association with environmentalist thought, the notion has gained popularity among scholars of contemporary environmentalist writing (see, e.g., Lilley 2020).

or marginalization. Instead, I would like to propose a discussion that is spatially informed and thus draws from the spatial tropes of Verronen's fiction. Following de Certeau's ([1980] 1984) influential conceptualization in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, I refer to such behavior as practices. Practices, according to de Certeau ([1980] 1984 chaps. 2, 3), are individuals' ways of utilizing, modifying, and appropriating various aspects of everyday life that are dictated by institutions, authorities, and the producers of culture. A practice, in other words, is a concept that highlights the individual's role as an active agent. In the context of spatial matters, a practice refers to the multiple ways in which an individual can make use of a given space or alter the rules assigned to it (Certeau [1980] 1984, 96). As a concept of spatial studies, a practice thus directs the attention on the creative use of space and the transgressive potential hidden in everyday routines. Furthermore, de Certeau's practice is a tool that can be used to analyze the power dynamics of space and everyday life. In my reading, the practice of self-isolation in Verronen's characters is directly linked with the notion of wilderness: wilderness that in these narratives presents itself as a set of practices that has engraved itself in the lives of the characters, and as an asymmetry of power that can be grasped with the concepts of center and periphery.

This subchapter provides an analysis of a short story that illustrates the problematics mentioned above. The story, set in an urban environment, depicts a protagonist whose behavior conceals and dissociates them from their social surroundings. The following discussion examines the contradiction between practices and the spatial environment from which they emerge. After distinguishing these practices, it remains to be examined how they are connected with the notion of eccentricity – or, as Linda Hutcheon ([1988] 2004, 57–73) translates the term, ex-centricity.

A story of self-isolation and infiltration, 'Unohtaja,' is published in the collection *Kulkureita & Unohtajia*. The narrative depicts a mysterious case of amnesia; the anonymous protagonist finds themselves in a university building without any recollection of their name, their identity, or the events preceding their loss of memory. The story opens with a scene depicting the sudden awakening of the protagonist:

The forgetter was about to jump up and state clear and loud:

'Excuse me, I've made a mistake. I shouldn't have come here.'

There was a millisecond of hesitation, and during that moment the forgetter realized that they were in a lecture hall and that such announcements were not to be made in a setting like that.

A flood of sensations took over the forgetter's mind as if a switch had been flicked. The forgetter saw the lecture hall and the people sitting there, heard the speech of the lecturer, the rustle of papers, the coughs, the whispers, the humming of the ac machine and the clicking of a briefcase locket. Their seat was comfortably padded, but its cover was made of sweat-inducing fake leather. The space lacked any scent or flavor.

After the surge came a cold, empty moment:

'Alright, this is the reality. But who am I?!'⁶⁸ (K&U, 31)

68. Unohtaja oli vähällä nousta seisomaan ja sanoa selkeästi ja kuuluvasti:
'Anteeksi, olen erehtynyt. Minun ei olisi pitänyt tulla tänne.'

The narrator begins with the protagonist's intention to jump up and make a statement. These intentions are, however, restrained when the protagonist locates herself, identifies the social norms related to the setting, and conforms to them. After that, the narrator enumerates the sensations the protagonist suddenly experiences. All the senses are addressed, although the description is based mostly on visual and auditory input. The description of the sensations proceeds from external perceptions – visual perception and the various sounds produced by the people – to the sensations that come closer to the lived body – the tactile sensations, smells, and finally, tastes. When the surroundings have been put in their place – when the scene of action has been filled with objects and sensations – the protagonist experiences, paradoxically, an 'empty moment': the place is settled but their identity is not. Who are they?

As the short story progresses, the initial shock of the protagonist wears off, while their identity remains a mystery. The plotline moves along the protagonist's quest to blend in within the academic institution and the small town they have been thrown into. The protagonist has no recollection of their past or identity but manages to camouflage herself and explore the surroundings without causing suspicion. Toward the end of the story, the narrator acknowledges that the protagonist has somehow entered the state of amnesia voluntarily and on purpose. When the memory loss eventually ends and the memories do come back, the protagonist congratulates herself⁶⁹ on the solid 25 hours she has managed to spend without any recollection of her identity. 'Someday she'd forget herself for good'⁷⁰ (K&U, 37), the narrator concludes, suggesting that a permanent loss of memory is the protagonist's goal. The mechanics of the memory loss remain inexplicable, as do the protagonist's motives.

The mystery at the heart of the short story, the protagonist's need to do away with her identity, can be examined in relation to the notion of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) as it is presented in Martin Heidegger's existentialism (Heidegger 1996, 127–28). In Heidegger's thinking, the concept of thrownness functions, among other things, as a way to depict the joint effect of all the qualifiers, attributes, and external and internal conditions that prepossess the human existence: the human condition, Heidegger insists, is the experience of being designated with attributes. The world quantifies us, contextualizes us, and inescapably exists already as we acquire consciousness. The metaphor of thrownness, the idea of being thrown into a world of attributes, highlights the randomness of these designations and the initial helplessness of the human subject (King 2001, 171). Read against Heidegger's concept of thrownness, the protagonist's voluntary amnesia, a note of magical realism implanted within the

Sen sekunnin murto-osan aikana, jonka hän epäroi, hän ehti tajuta, että oli täpötäydessä luentosalissa ja että sellaisessa ei ollut tapana kiinnittää huomiota itseensä tuollaisilla ilmoituksilla.

Aistimusten tulva syöksähti unohtajan tajuntaan yhtäkkiä aivan kuin se olisi käännetty päälle katkaisimesta. Hän näki salin ja siellä istuvat ihmiset, kuuli luennoitsijan puheen, paperien rapinan, yskähdykset, kuiskaukset, ilmastointilaitteen huminan ja salkun lukon napsahduksen. Hänen istuimensa oli sopivasti pehmustettu, mutta päällykseltään hiostavaa keinoahkaa. Hajuja tai makuja ei tuossa tilassa ollut.

Hyökyä seurasi tyhjä, kylmä hetki.

'Hyvä on, tämä on todellisuus. Mutta kuka minä sitten olen?!

69. At this point, the gender of the protagonist has been recognized by the narrator.

70. Jonain päivänä hän unohtaisi itsensä lopullisesti.

otherwise realist narrative, is a method of delaying the submission to the attributes and the preconditions life reserves to the human being. The short story is thus a depiction of a resistance toward the *Geworfenheit* of human condition.

The amnesia theme can further be considered in the light of the concept of trauma. In his essay 'Aetiology of Hysteria,' Sigmund Freud (1953, 213) suggests that it is the partial and distorted return of a given event that makes up the trauma; the pathological processes of a traumatized mind are thus evoked not by the traumatic event itself but by the recollection (and the suppression) of it. It is thus clear why, as Silke Arnold-de Simine writes, trauma narratives are 'characterized by gaps, silences and fragmentations, symptoms of "disremembering" which testify to the trauma' (Arnold-de Simine 2018, 141). In 'Unohtaja,' the protagonist's amnesia, voluntary as it is, can be interpreted as a pathological psychological process that results from suffering. The inability – and, perhaps more importantly, the unwillingness – to retrieve and remember one's identity reflects a psyche that is caught in the limbo of defense mechanisms. That the protagonist's amnesia, – reluctance to retrieve or to claim as one's own – encompasses all aspects of her personal identity, not only a single event or series of events, adds complexity to the short story.

That complexity might gain meaning from the literary context of the time. Literary scholarship has pointed out the prominence of identity problematics in the Finnish prose fiction of the 1980s and 1990s (see, e.g., Kirstinä and Turunen 2013). Verronen's story, published in 1996, joins the choir. The erasure of the protagonist's personal attributes and her determined quest for a state of impersonality can be seen as critical gestures toward the attention these topics received in the Finnish literature of the time. Simultaneously, the story participates in the very same discussion: by staging a protagonist who is desperately fleeing her identity, the story affirms the presence and significance of such a concept and challenges the reader's attitude toward it. Thus, the strange mood of the story is partly evoked by a reversal of the reader's expectations regarding the literary context of the work. Instead of something that should be constantly worked and reworked, Verronen's short story presents identity as something that should be fled from.

The focal point of the story lies, nevertheless, not in the amnesia itself but in the practical measures the protagonist takes to cope with her situation. In the state of amnesia, the protagonist's main concern is not the retrieval of her identity but the need to avoid all forms of attention and suspicion from the community around her. After waking up in the auditorium, the protagonist launches a full-blown infiltration procedure: she starts collecting stolen food, learns the routines of the school, and spends the next night hiding in the basement. She familiarizes herself with the surroundings of the institution, studies a map of the city, and develops a strategy to remain fed, warm, and, above all, unnoticed. The protagonist is not plagued by panic or concern because of her condition; instead, her mind is mostly occupied by the urge to avoid attention. Instead of seeking help and advice, she remains isolated, as if the university and the small town around her were a desert, a forest, or some other desolate location. A discordance like the one depicted at the beginning of this subchapter – between the practices and the setting in which they emerge – appears in the story. In other words, the survivalist ethos needed in the middle of extreme environments is brought into an urban setting.

In the following excerpts, the narrator follows the protagonist's efforts to secure herself food and shelter:

She took a roll of toilet paper and a couple of empty paper bags from the toilet stall. One had to start collecting all kinds of supplies that one could rely on to survive. It was necessary to gather food when one was not hungry, as it would be extremely dangerous to go hungry and desperate, panic, and look for sustenance. In such conditions one was bound to do something silly. And the same was true in relation to all other necessities without which life would quickly become uncomfortable.⁷¹ (K&U, 33–34)

One just needed to plan one's life carefully, always a little ahead. There should be plenty of room for flexibility and changes. One had to remember, for instance, that all warm public spaces were closed towards the night, and that every decent citizen was expected to withdraw into a place that they had paid for. In those moments, one could hang back, remain in a suitable place behind the locked doors and hide from the cleaners and the janitors; maybe even use the shower, sauna, or kitchen.⁷² (K&U, 35)

As these examples demonstrate, surviving, for the protagonist, is a matter of careful planning, strategic actions, and the ability to remain unnoticed. The narrator describes how the protagonist's view of her surroundings starts to fixate on the resources they might provide, and how acts of gathering and collecting dominate her day. As the second excerpt illustrates, the difference between the protagonist and the people around her manifests itself as access to spaces and places, or as ownership, established through monetary transactions. The gathering of resources is also contrasted with ownership:

Behind the building, there was a path which led to the forest that bore ripe berries and mushrooms. On the opposite side of the little forest, she found a suburb of detached houses, with gardens full of the autumn harvest. It offered plenty of opportunities, but at a risk. One had to know the area well to be able to find what one was looking for. [. . .] A stranger observing the environment attracts attention in a quiet suburb, and if word spread, the residents would become cautious.⁷³ (K&U, 35)

71. Hän otti kopista vessapaperirullan ja pari tyhjää paperipussia. Oli ryhdyttävä hankkimaan kaikkea sellaista, minkä varassa olisi mahdollista selvitä. Oli kerättävä ruokaa silloin kun ei ollut nälkä, koska kaikkein vaarallisinta olisi, jos joutuisi nälkäisenä ja epätoivoisena paniikissa etsimään itselleen ravintoa. Silloin tekisi varmasti jotain typerää. Ja sama koski kaikkea muutakin, minkä puuttuessa elämä kävisi epämukavaksi.
72. Tarvitsi vain suunnitella elämänsä huolellisesti aina vähän matkaa eteenpäin. Joustoille ja muutoksille olisi jätettävä runsaasti tilaa. Pitäisi ottaa huomioon esimerkiksi se, että illalla kaikki yhteiset suojatut tilat sulkeutuivat ja jokaisen kelvollisen kansalaisen odotettiin vetäytyvän paikkaan, jossa olemisesta hän maksoi. Silloin voisi jättäytyä sopivaan paikkaan lukkojen taakse piileskelemään siivoojilta ja talonmiehiltä; ehkä jopa käyttämään suihkua, saunaa tai keittiötä.
73. Rakennuksen takaa lähti polku metsään, jossa marjat olivat kypsyneet ja josta löytyi myös sienia. Metsikön vastakkaiselta laidalta alkoi omakotitalolähiö, jonka vihannespuutarhat pursuivat syksyn satoa. Se tarjosi paljon mahdollisuuksia, mutta oli silti hankala alue. Paikat täytyi tuntea perusteellisesti ennen kuin saattoi tietää, mistä löytäisi tarvitsemansa. [. . .] Ympäristöään tarkkaileva outo kulkija herätti rauhallisessa lähiössä aina jonkun huomion, ja jos sana levisi, ihmiset kävivät varovaisiksi.

While observing the surroundings of the university building, the protagonist stumbles upon a nearby forest. The passage draws a comparison between the forest and the protagonist's intention to pick berries and mushrooms and the suburb of the homeowners and vegetable gardeners. In other words, a distinction is drawn between the gathering economy and permanent settlement, or the wilderness and the cultivated land. To this end, the voluntary amnesia of the protagonist is not only a rejection of one's identity but of the cultured, settled – human – condition. Contrary to the Rousseau-led Romantics and American transcendentalist nature writers and philosophers such as Henry David Thoreau, Verronen's solution does not require a change of location, a radical change of lifestyle, or even a retreat to nature; instead, a change of spatial practices suffices. The loss of memory erases the protagonist's customary practices, allowing her to establish new ways of approaching the spatial and the social environment – and it is this rewiring of the spatial habits that eases the protagonist's sense of alienation. The very same topic is presented in Verronen's works of nonfiction, especially in *Pieni kumikanoottikirja* ('The Little Book of Rubber Canoeing' 2011). *Kumikanoottikirja* is an essayist depiction of the author's excursions in the river system of the Finnish metropolitan area, a book that fuses travel narrative and outdoor literature with a microhistory of the urban area. The book curiously merges genres that traditionally represent exoticized locations (travel literature) and remote areas of wilderness (outdoor literature) – but, instead, the narrative takes place in the water systems of Greater Helsinki, a liminal area between city and nature, metropolis and country. By relocating the genres of travel narrative and outdoor literature within the urban and the semiurban, the book transplants the customary spatial practices of these narrative genres into an unexpected environment. The result is the exoticizing of the familiar and the wilding of the domesticated.⁷⁴

The themes of infiltration and blending in are extremely common in Verronen's fiction. Her characters are often placed in situations where they need to infiltrate enclosed spaces and communities. This scenario receives its fullest realization in the novel *Varjonainen*, in which the protagonist, a Soviet citizen of Finnish ancestry, arrives in Finland illegally and without proper documentation. The novel documents her attempt to acquire a lawful identity in the eyes of the Finnish welfare state, which slowly takes darker and darker shades as the protagonist commits one fraud after another and, finally, a murder. The suspense of the story lies between the acts of violence and the cold, observational tone of the narration that hides the protagonist's mental states from the reader. Many of Verronen's works have similar patterns to *Varjonainen*: the short story 'Mökkiläiset' ('Cottage People,' 2009) opens as an idyllic depiction of a cottage weekend on a desolate islet, but soon the holidaymakers learn that a secret squatter has settled down on the island next to them. The squatter visits the couple and confesses that he has been living in the area's cottages over the whole winter: moving from cottage to cottage, eating canned foods, sometimes even toothpaste, he has managed to support himself in the middle of the wintery archipelago and the hibernating cottage community. In the novel *Kylmien saarten soturi* the protagonist is an ex-soldier who settles down in a small shore village community to investigate rumors of enemy presence on a nearby island. The villagers suspect that the enemy might be behind the strange events on the island: disappearing

74. For a more in-depth analysis of *Pieni kumikanoottikirja*, see Kankkunen (2019).

sheep, mysterious lights, noises, and constant shipwrecks. The soldier, with his extensive military training and wartime experience, is only able to discover the secret of the island after being properly accepted as a member of the community; then, the villagers let him know about the massive scheme of illicit trade that has been going on with the enemy state during and after the war. The rumors of enemy activity and supernatural events have been a deliberate smokescreen for the trade. 'Heinäkuun viidennen päivän hölmö' ('July Fool's Day,' 1999) is a story of a determined Western businessman who emigrates to a developing country in anticipation of an economic boom. The boom comes, as does a mental breakdown when the protagonist is forced to acknowledge that, despite all his efforts, his cultural integration with the surrounding society has its limits. The realization comes in the form of a linguistic misunderstanding when the protagonist is unable to understand a fellow passenger's dialectal description of the contents of his luggage. The phrase the man uses remains unknown to the protagonist, but by observing other passengers he is able to deduce that the man is carrying something dangerous. By hopping off the bus, the protagonist saves his life before the fireworks inside the luggage go off; but, nevertheless, the shock of not being able to comprehend the man's dialect is too much for the protagonist, and he returns to his land of origin. 'Viikonloppuseminaari' ('The Weekend Seminar,' 2002b) presents a woman whose hobby is to attend seminars that have nothing to do with her actual field of work. Toward the end of the story, it becomes evident that the woman, although an outsider, is fascinated by the processes of group formation that take place in these events; she enjoys observing them and participating in them, and that is all she wants from the seminars.

The practices employed by the protagonist of 'Unohtaja' thus comprise gathering, seeking shelter, infiltration, and blending in, of which the first two are the most self-evidently connected to wilderness. Gathering of resources and seeking shelter are the basic activities that constitute much of any day spent in wilderness; they are also practices that highlight the subject's dependence on its environment as a source of nourishment and refuge. While practicing activities that underline the subject's dependency on their environment, the protagonist simultaneously dissociates herself from the social body; the dependency on other people and the society as whole is thus projected on the environment. This is underscored by the protagonist's attempt to survive in an urban setting without resorting to human contact. The other two practices – infiltration and blending in – can be interpreted as alterations of the two basic activities. Infiltration and blending in are acts of seeking shelter, although in their case the shelter is socially rather than materially constructed. Although the practices of infiltration and blending in aim at establishing favorable interaction between the subject and the group, they are only seemingly social; as acts of hiding and deceit, they could rather be interpreted asocial in nature.

The protagonist's tendency to avoid social contact and the society's institutions is acknowledged early on at the beginning of the short story. After waking up in the lecture hall, the protagonist of 'Unohtaja' leaves the hall with other people and starts to make sense of her surroundings. One of the first things the protagonist discovers is the health station, but, as the scene above concludes, the protagonist quickly refuses the help of health care professionals.

Forgetter saw a sign with the text 'health station' and an arrow pointing to the right; but they immediately shut out the thought of going and asking for help. They would be too helpless, completely at other people's mercy; they didn't have money, nor ID; they had nothing.⁷⁵ (K&U, 32)

For the protagonist, lack of identity becomes an obstacle to approaching institutional help; it seems that, by denying their identity, the protagonist also denies their involvement in, if not membership of, society.⁷⁶

The dynamics of Verronen's stories of isolation and infiltration owe much to the genre of robinsonade, also known as a castaway narrative. The regular appearance⁷⁷ of the eighteenth-century genre indicates the importance of Enlightenment ideas to Verronen's literary works. Although her narrative worlds often test the limits of knowledge, draw influences from mythologies, and employ various fantastic elements, they still maintain a belief in rationality, empiricism, and intellectual liberty and tolerance. The scientific method, for example, is presented as a successful way to approach the natural world. This is evident in the 'Keihäslintu' (KL, 141–75) story cycle, which documents the protagonist's evolving obsession with an extinct bird species. The short story at hand, 'Unohtaja,' introduces the reader to an amnesiac who is, despite her condition, able to function in a perfectly orderly and rational manner. Numerous narratives in Verronen's works explore the dynamics of isolated and narrow-minded communities, often dominated by religious, patriarchal authorities and conservative ideologies that strongly oppose change. The biting tone of these narratives and the repeated theme of extinction – a metaphor for the unviability of closed communities – highlight the works' message of the necessity of change, open debate, and openness in general as a guiding principle of a functional human community. This is the governing idea of the collections *Keihäslintu* and *Vanhat kuviot*.

Verronen's use of the castaway narrative formula is related to the postwar reassessment of the robinsonade genre and its Enlightenment ideals (Ameel and Kankkunen 2017, 365–66). As Theo D'haen (1995, 196) writes in relation to John Coetzee's *Foe* ([1986] 1987), postmodern authors have been more than willing to rewrite the colonialist, masculinist, and progressivist narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*.

75. Unohtaja näki kyltin, jossa luki 'terveysasema' ja nuoli osoitti oikeaan suuntaan, mutta hän torjui heti ajatuksen mennä pyytämään apua sieltä. Hän olisi ollut liian avuton, kokonaan toisten armoilla, ilman rahaa ja papereita; ilman mitään.
76. The protagonist's solution resembles the hand-in-hand dynamics of discipline and individualization in the sense that Foucault describes them; according to him, it was the needs of the new disciplinary systems of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that helped to solidify the idea of an independent individual in Western thought (Foucault [1975] 1980). The Nordic welfare state model, represented in the story by the health station, thus comes under subtle but noticeable critique, as the protagonist shuns rather than reaches out for the welfare services.
77. Features of the robinsonade genre can be found in the following collections and novels: *Löytöretkeilijä ja muita eksyneitä* ('Eloonjäänyt,' 69–73; 'Löytöretkeilijä,' 94–100), *Kylmien saarten soturi, Keihäslintu* (27–34, 79–85, 98–105), *Luotettava ohikulkija* ('Linnoitus,' 62–5, 'Haaksirikko,' 85–8, 'Pienet saaret,' 94–6, 'Laivojen hautausmaa,' 97–105), *Saari kaupungissa* (27–9, 31; 'Selviytyminen,' 123–46), and *Kirkkaan selkeää* (161–8).

The general disappointment toward the idea of progress colors William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* ([1954] 1959), while the collapse of the colonialist ideology and the mechanics of othering are discussed in Michel Tournier's *Vendredi* ([1967] 2000), which famously gives voice to the native of the Crusoe story, Friday. Despite their defense of the rationalist, scientific, and liberal worldview – the values put forward by the robinsonade genre – Verronen's works also challenge the genre formula. In the story of the forgetter, the symbolic shipwreck has been replaced with the loss of memory: Daniel Defoe's Crusoe is lost when he loses contact with the community, whereas Verronen's forgetter goes astray in the midst of people. The modification speaks for the differences between the collective and the individualist idea of man. The novels *Kirkkaan selkeää* and *Saari kaupungissa* both include an island scene but, unlike Crusoe's challenging yet ennobling island, these islands are settings for illusion and deceit, tangled in the webs of power, designed to be centers of media spectacle. Verronen's use of the genre formula is not so much interconnected with postcolonialist and gendered interpretations and rewritings of the robinsonade but rather focuses on the power relations and the friction between the individual and the community.

Like Crusoe, the protagonist of Verronen's short story makes plans, studies maps, and starts collecting food stocks in an attempt to colonize the lot she has been thrown into, in complete ignorance – or denial – of the coexistence of other people. In Defoe's novel, Crusoe falls into shock after discovering a footprint on the beach; until then, he has held the belief that he is completely alone on the island (Defoe [1719] 1868, 156–69). The footprint, a symbol for human presence, turns into a haunting image that refuses to leave Crusoe alone. The amnesia in Verronen's short story is a reversed form of haunting: as the story presents, the protagonist is able to escape the thing – her identity – that haunts her. The escape is, nevertheless, only temporary.

A stronger connection between the genre of robinsonade and the short story is established toward the end of the narrative. The protagonist has successfully remained under the radar and has been able to feed herself and to remain warm and sheltered. She concludes:

If one were to devote all of one's time to survival, it would be possible to learn everything well in advance.

In that case one wouldn't be forced to take stupid risks: to stash goods in the bag in front of a surveillance camera or a store detective. Managing the practicalities wouldn't be overwhelming. If one could accept a handful of limitations, it should be possible to take over the whole city. And afterwards, some other places as well.⁷⁸ (K&U, 36)

In this excerpt, the urge to survive and remain unnoticed develops into a desire to 'take over' certain locations: first the city and then, perhaps, 'other places as well.' The short and seemingly innocent paragraph exposes the expansionist undertones of Verronen's infiltration motif. Perhaps the most harmless example of such expansionist spatial practice takes place in the novel *Pieni elintila*, in which the protagonist's exceptionally

78. Jos kaiken aikansa omistaisi selviytymiselle, ehtisi aina oppia ajoissa. Ei tarvitsisi ottaa typeriä riskejä, ei olla varomaton, ei sulloa tavaraa kassiinsa juuri valvontakameran tai myymäläetsivän edessä. Käytännön asiat eivät olisi ylivoimaisia. Jos hyväksyisi muutamia rajoitukset, olisi täysin mahdollista ottaa vähitellen haltuun koko kaupunki. Ja sitten muitakin paikkoja.

small apartment starts to gain new dimensions, as she discovers a hidden attic and a miniature garden in front of the window. In the novel, the transformation of the living quarters illustrates the protagonist's developing self-knowledge and her struggle for independence and free self-expression. The expansion of her living space comes, however, at a price to others: while working through her troubled family history, the protagonist familiarizes herself with another character, who shares her experiences of childhood trauma. In the course of their acquaintance, she is informed of a crime – an act of revenge – that the other person plans. The protagonist chooses not to interfere with the plan and follows its execution in a manner that can be interpreted as a form of vicarious revenge. The novel suggests that the quest for freedom and independence, however just, is bound up with violence.

As the preceding analysis has shown, 'Unohtaja' presents a protagonist whose actions are, even in the context of the story, difficult to understand. Why does the protagonist hide instead of seeking help? How can she maintain a rational stance while realizing that she has no recollection of her past? Toward the end of the story, these peculiarities are, however, overshadowed by a much larger element of mystery: the amnesia depicted in the story is never explained by any rational or natural cause. In contrast, the narrator makes clear that the protagonist has caused her own memory loss, that the incident in question is only one among many, and that the protagonist is already looking forward to her next bout of amnesia. Since it is highly unlikely that a person would be capable of inflicting memory loss on themselves on a regular basis, the amnesia must be a fantastic element in the vein of Tzvetan Todorov's ([1970] 1975, 24–40) trope of the fantastic: the reader is tasked with determining whether the bouts of amnesia have a rational explanation or whether the protagonist has supernatural abilities.

In 'Unohtaja,' the choice of setting carries symbolic meanings. The protagonist's awakening takes place in a university lecture room, which, of course, gestures toward the role of higher education in character formation and intellectual development. At the same time, the university community is also the area of the protagonist's infiltration attempts, which makes it an ambivalent setting. The cost of awakening of consciousness is a sense of isolation, and an instinctive need to hide it. That the awakening takes place during a lecture is significant, since a lecture setting is a very special type of social occasion. In social psychology, such social groups are known as random groups. A random group is a group of people brought together by external circumstances. The incidental nature of the occasion creates a group dynamic wherein lack of commitment is the norm, and the group members are allowed a high level of autonomy (Jauhiainen and Eskola 1994, 57). As a result of the group's looseness and lack of regulation, the members of the group resort to generally accepted rules of behavior; in other words, within the random group occasion, customs, etiquette, and other culturally shared norms of behavior play an important role (Jauhiainen and Eskola 1994, 57). This is also the case in Verronen's short story, where the protagonist immediately orientates herself in relation to the general norms of behavior ('the forgetter realized that they were in a lecture hall and that such announcements were not to be made in a setting like that'). Moreover, the proliferation of random groups is symptomatic of modernization, modernity, and postmodernity, as the forces linked to them, such as urbanization and secularization, loosen traditional communities and

create opportunities for strangers to meet and large crowds to develop (Jauhiainen and Eskola 1994, 55).

As the short story unfolds as the protagonist's developing awareness of her surroundings, the geographical setting of the narrative also gains importance. The location of the town and the school is never explicitly revealed, yet the short story has a marker of geographical peripherality. The narrator observes that in front of the school's main door, the protagonist sees a large, ball-shaped granite sculpture (K&U, 32). This locates the story in Oulu, northern Finland, since the granite ball can be recognized as Matti Peltokangas's work *Yhtyvät säteet* ('Coalescing Rays'), which is located at the main entrance of the University of Oulu. The sculpture, first displayed in 1992, consists of a red-granite ball with a splined surface, and a nearby water pool. Setting the narrative in Oulu, the story makes use of ambivalent notions of peripherality. As literary historian Yrjö Varpio (2005, 33) claims, peripherality in the Finnish context is associated with the eastern and northern regions of the country. Oulu, the largest city of northern Finland, occupies an interesting position between the periphery and the center: the city is simultaneously the regional capital of the Finnish north, but too far south to belong to Finnish Lapland, which is the northernmost north of Finland and the stereotypical wilderness setting of Finnish nature writing. Simultaneously, from the viewpoint of the southern cities and most densely populated regions, Oulu is considered provincial, if not peripheral. The city is, in other words, a semiperiphery: the core of the periphery and the periphery of the core (Wallerstein 1976, 462–63). The short story is one of the few examples of localized northernness in Verronen's writing, a detail that highlights the importance of the setting. Most often, northern settings appear without any recognizable landmarks or other regional characteristics that would locate them within a specific country, region, culture, or even timeframe. One could say, however, that the semiperipherality of Oulu provides the short story's setting with a sense of ambivalence that is distinctive of Verronen's northernness.

Ultimately, along with geographical peripherality, Verronen's works, including 'Unohtaja,' explore the notion of eccentricity, or ex-centricity, as D'haen (1995) puts it. This concept is based on Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* ([1988] 2004, 57–73), where she raises the issue of postmodernist fiction's tendency to decenter formerly privileged centers. According to Hutcheon ([1988] 2004, 58), postmodernist thought challenges the impulses of centralization and totalization, which were instrumental to the preceding, universalist-humanist worldview. She further suggests that postmodernist fiction entails a departure from modernist discourse, and coins this shift as a 'moving from the language of alienation (otherness) to that of decentering (difference)' (Hutcheon [1988] 2004, 62). In order to foreground these tendencies of postmodernity and postmodernist fiction, she refers to the notion of ex-centricity, namely breaking away from the center. But, as she quickly reminds the reader, the ex-centric is still identified 'with the center it desires but is denied' (Hutcheon [1988] 2004, 60). The notion of ex-centricity and its treatment in postmodern thought resonates with Massey's (2005, 60, 107) view of space as the dimension of multiplicity. According to Massey, space unfolds as the continuous production of heterogeneity – and not only the heterogeneity of things but also events, as she claims: 'What if space is the sphere not of a discrete multiplicity of inert *things*, even one which is thoroughly interrelated? What if, instead, it presents us with a heterogeneity of practices and *processes*?' (Massey 2005, 107, emphasis in the original).

The eccentricity/ex-centricity in Verronen's case refers to the positions that the characters assume in relation to their communities and the (spatial) strategies they apply. In 'Unohtaja,' the protagonist flees not only from her personal history and daily life but also from the all-encompassing welfare state, as her shying away from the health station reveals. By eluding her personal history and her identity and the spaces that are related to them, and by extending this avoidance to other people as well, the protagonist constructs a micro-wilderness of her own. Wilderness, in this case, manifests itself as a move away from the organized social body and as eccentricity of behavior, both of which are covered by the notion of ex-centricity. The ending of the short story illustrates this. In the following excerpt, the protagonist has entered the market square and sits among the crowd, while she comes to realize that her memories have returned:

They [the other people on the square] all knew their names and place – and so did the forgetter. She remembered it all. There was no dramatic flow of memories, no sudden awakening. The memories had just silently come back, and everything was in order. She had spent the night in a strange basement and done a little bit of stealing, something she didn't do when she remembered her name, address, and the like.⁷⁹ (K&U, 36)

After being the free agent, the unruly and the nondescript, the protagonist, regaining her identity, is now 'in order,' as the narrator concludes. The memories have fallen into place and so has the protagonist; she is, again, orderly, tamed, and heads back to her apartment right away.

While Verronen's narratives challenge the classical directionality associated with Western wilderness tropes, her stories also develop ways of narrating wilderness as an integral part of the human and social experience. Verronen's wildscapes inevitably invite the reader to consider how wilderness is not only discovered or experienced but also practiced, and how much of it is actually built on the absence of other human subjects, while also rewriting the classic wilderness narratives such as the genre of robinsonade. In addition to that, wilderness, in Verronen's narratives, may manifest itself in the form of human behavior, or take place in an urban setting.

79. He kaikki tiesivät nimensä ja paikkansa – ja niin tiesi unohtajakin. Hän muisti taas kaiken. Ei tullut mitään dramaattista muistikuvien tulvaa, ei yhtäkkistä heräämistä. Muistot vain olivat hiljaa palanneet takaisin, ja kaikki oli järjestyksessä. Hän oli tosin viettänyt yön vieraassa kellarissa ja varastellut hieman, mitä kumpaakaan hän ei tehnyt silloin kun tiesi nimensä, osoitteensa ja kaiken muunkin.

Dystopian Spaces

This chapter concerns two of Verronen's novels, *Karsintavaihe* and its independent sequel *Kirkkaan selkeää*. Set in the near future, the two novels present nightmarish visions of strictly controlled cities, empty wastelands, and a world that is constantly on the brink of the next devastating disaster, manmade or not. I approach literary dystopia as a genre that holds a specific relationship with space, a relationship that can be characterized by an oscillation between urban and antiurban sentiment and a heightened valorization and categorization of space into good and bad for allegorical purposes. Along those lines, my purpose is to shed light on the way these two novels employ space as a vehicle for oppressive and unwanted development.

Dystopian literature can be divided into classic dystopia, sometimes referred to as totalitarian dystopia or canonical dystopia, and its successor critical dystopia. Definitions of these two subgenres vary, but most theoreticians agree that the level of complexity – or ambiguity – increases as classic dystopia is gradually superseded by critical dystopia. In classic dystopia, the antagonistic functions fall upon a single ideology or institution, most often an authoritarian state, as Tom Moylan (2000) notes, and/or its totalitarian ideology, as pointed out by Gregory Claeys (2010). The genre, whose canonical works appeared in the first half of the twentieth century, has been seen as a reactionary response to modernity and especially its scientific and technological developments (see, e.g., Vieira 2010, 17–18). In addition to the aforementioned, Claeys (2017, 30) highlights modernity's obsession with group pathology, which he sees as a distorted form of collectivism, and suggests that it concerns most of the classic dystopias. The notion of critical dystopia, on the other hand, originates from Lyman Tower Sargent's (1994) concept of critical utopia and his suggestion of examining the possibility of a parallel genre, that of the critical dystopia. Further developed by Raffaella Baccolini (2000) and Moylan (2000; see also Baccolini and Moylan 2003a), among many others, the term has been attached to works of dystopian fiction published in the late 1980s and onward. Critical dystopia is different from its predecessor in that it either critiques forces other than the state apparatus, such as the late-capitalist market economy, as Moylan (2000, chap. 6) notes, or distances itself from the dystopian tradition by retaining elements of utopian hope. The latter argument has gained support from multiple scholars working on the issue. With their open endings, genre hybridity and resistance toward antiutopian sentiment as well as the diminished agency of the subjugated subjects, critical dystopias develop

the dystopian genre toward openness, both formally and politically (Baccolini 2000, 13–18; Moylan 2000, 183–202). The following analyses observe some of the differences between the two subgenres, as they affect the novels' view on space and place.

I begin my observation with the first novel of the duology, *Karsintavaihe*. Closer to the classical dystopia, *Karsintavaihe* focuses on the experiences of a single dissident and follows her survival and modest rebellion in a chaotic urban landscape. The novel ends with a pastoral retreat to the countryside. *Kirkkaan selkeää*, on the other hand, is structured loosely around the journey plot formula, which is not typical among the classical dystopias but indicates a resemblance to utopian, apocalyptic and postapocalyptic narratives. With its hybridization of different genres, *Kirkkaan selkeää* falls on the side of critical dystopia. As the previous depiction of the narratives suggests, the two novels function as points of reference to each other. In this chapter, I examine how *Karsintavaihe* stages the imbalance of power and the dissident protagonist's struggle by juxtaposing private and public spaces. In *Kirkkaan selkeää*, on the other hand, the contradiction is thwarted by societal and cultural developments that could be coined as agoraphobia, as I suggest.

Before looking closer at Verronen's two dystopias, I present a short look at the spatial aspects of dystopian fiction.

DYSTOPIA

In his influential definition of the genre, Sargent (1994, 9) defines dystopia as a description of a nonexistent society that is normally located in time and space and narrated with the authorial intention of convincing the contemporaneous reader of the depicted society's inferiority to the reader's own. A less nuanced, yet often cited and commonsensical, is Eric S. Rabkin's ([1976] 2015, 140) definition: a literary dystopia can be defined as a work that depicts a future bad society.

In this chapter, dystopian fiction is approached as a genre with specific spatial emphases. These include: a fixation on the city, the allegorism of space, and the tendency to express moral valuation through spaces.

The first of these, the heightened role of the city, stems from the history of Western urban thought: both literary scholars and urban historians have pointed out the close association between urban planning and literary utopia, the precursor of the dystopian genre (see, e.g., Ameel 2016; Fishman 1982). Lewis Mumford (1965, 271–79) traces the connection between the city and utopian thought to Greek tradition, suggesting an earlier origin for the alliance between the two; he points out the religious underpinnings of ancient city structures and claims that the first cities were brought into realization to present cosmic order. Judeo-Christian thought saw the city as an allegory for God's promise, as in the coming Jerusalem, or as an allegory for the community of believers, as in St. Augustine's (b. 354) *The City of God*. Later, the two upsurges of literary utopias, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the period between 1850 and 1950, were both transitional periods characterized by change and a heightened interest in urban matters (Ameel 2016). The latter period, as Lieven Ameel (2016) presents, also saw the development of urban planning as a discipline, a concurrence that has led many thinkers to derive urban planning from utopian thought (see, e.g., Harvey 2000; Hall 2014). Yet the association between utopia and city has always been ambiguous and contested: Peter Hall (2014, 79) brings into relief the idea that many movements of urban planning, such as the garden city movement

or the postwar suburbia of Anglo-Saxon countries, derived their utopian sentiment from antiurban ideas. In this chapter, Verronen's dystopian novels are read in relation to the urban and antiurban ideas they employ.

The setting of a dystopian narrative assumes allegorical functions, as the spaces and the places depicted in the novel represent society as a whole (see Frye 1965). The living quarters of the protagonist, the public spaces, the workplaces, and other locations function as cues for the societal, political, and, increasingly often, ecological makeup of the future world. Literary dystopias rely on the effect of cognitive estrangement (see Suvin 2016, 15–28), as the world depicted in them is simultaneously familiar and strange; this invites the reader to draw comparisons between the lived reality and the novel's world. The setting of a literary dystopia is thus a site of comparison and tension, a request to identify certain features and to trace their development from lived reality into the world of fiction. A temporal aspect is involved in this process of comparison, since, as a literary genre, dystopia involves an orientation toward future. In his history of the genre, Claeys suggests that modern dystopias are 'intimately interwoven with discourses on "crisis"' (Claeys 2017, 14). With the notion of crisis, Claeys refers to the understanding of modern society as a society that is anxious and concerned about the future. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1999) has famously coined the idea of modern society as the 'risk society,' which, according to him, refers to the heightened need to monitor and control future developments and crises.

Dystopian fiction allows us to focus on the ethical and moral valorization of fictional spaces. Utopian fiction derives its name from the ancient Greek expression for a no-place, *ou-tópos*, as it was used by Thomas More in his 1516 work *Utopia*. Even at this stage, More pointed out the similarity of the terms *ou-topia* (no-place) and *eu-topia* (good place). Dystopia, on the other hand, is a concept originally coined by John Stuart Mill as an antithesis for utopia. The prefix 'dys' stands for 'bad': Mill's wording thus indicates a change in the meaning, a tendency to approach utopia as an *eu-topia* instead of *ou-topia*, a no-place. As Sargent proposes, '[a]ll fiction describes a no place; utopian⁸⁰ fiction in general describes good or bad no places' (Sargent 1994, 5). By reading dystopian fiction, we thus inevitably face the concepts of good and bad, often simultaneously and in an ambiguous relationship. The ambiguity of literary dystopia can be traced to the genre's close association with satire (see, e.g., Claeys 2010; Rabkin [1976] 2015, 140–47). This further adds to the difficulty of differentiating utopia from dystopia, a feature that has been pointed out by most scholars of the genres (see e.g., Gottlieb 2001, 26; Kumar 1987; Rabkin [1976] 2015). In this chapter, this ambiguity will be addressed in relation to Verronen's two dystopic novels, both of which include utopian elements and utopian counter-sites within the dystopian narrative world.

Finally, the examination of dystopian genre complements our understanding of the power thematic of Verronen's spatial arrangements. Literary dystopia can be defined by its structure of narrative and counternarrative, as Baccolini and Moylan (2003b, 5) suggest. Works of dystopian fiction open up *in medias res*, which is a strategy that creates narrative immersivity and delays the reader's sense of cognitive estrangement. The beginning of a dystopian novel, in other words, makes use of narrative strategies

80. Lyman Tower Sargent refers to both utopian and dystopian fiction with the umbrella term 'utopian fiction.'

that center on the construction of a hegemonic order, which Baccolini and Moylan (2003b, 5) call 'the narrative.' The order established at the beginning of the narrative is, however, challenged as the protagonist's loyalty to the hegemony wavers and develops into alienation and, finally, a counternarrative of resistance (Baccolini and Moylan 2003b, 5). As Baccolini and Moylan (2003b, 5) further point out, the juxtaposition of narrative and counternarrative often takes the form of a linguistic and discursive conflict; in most works of dystopian fiction, the protagonist initiates the revolt with a linguistic act that challenges the hegemony's discursive power. While observing dystopian novels, one must therefore pay close attention to the manifestations of order and chaos and the discursive battle between the two.

Experiencing Dystopian Spaces in Karsintavaihe ('The Elimination Phase')

Karsintavaihe takes place in the near future, in an unspecified Finnish city where the life of the inhabitants consists of struggles for employment and a decent dwelling place. Although imaginary and euchronic, the world of the novel carries intentional allusions to contemporary trends, which are presented in an extrapolated manner. These include precarious working conditions, competition among the workforce, the omnipresence of economic rationalizing and profit-seeking, the segregation of society, the annihilation of public spaces, and the proliferation of surveillance technologies. The city, the setting of the novel, is in the middle of a massive reorganization of both social and physical realities. This includes measures such as forced transfers of populations, classification of the remaining citizens into separate caste-like classes, and a continuous cycle of building and demolition in order to yield maximum profits for international investors. Everything is on the move, people and landscapes. Especially people: a large part of the novel focuses on looking for missing people.

Karsintavaihe follows the life of Lumi,⁸¹ a middle-aged worker who, at the beginning of the novel, lives in a mixed boarding house meant for common workers in precarious positions. The housing units are the main means of accommodation for the inhabitants of the city; moreover, they reflect the class separation, as the quality of assigned accommodation depends on the citizen's class, which derives from their status in the workplace and their level of education. Despite her low status as a worker of the D class, Lumi is lucky: she is employed as a cleaner of demolition and construction sites. Such work is still prevalent, as property development is one of the booming markets in the city. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist discovers that there is a new cure for her genetic condition. While attending the treatment, she is also suddenly left to take care of a child of her housemate, as the mother of the child goes missing. In addition to the toddler, Lumi finds herself spending more and more time with an elderly man, Kalevi, who is shunned and discriminated against in the ageist society. The couple is soon welded together, as the protagonist is separated from her boarding house community. Despite their separation, Lumi keeps looking for the mother of the toddler, and discovers the truth behind the constant mergers and replacements of the boarding house units: they are a means of forced population transfer, Europe's solution for streamlining welfare costs and controlling its citizens.

81. Lumi is a female first name in Finnish but also a noun that signifies snow.

As the atmosphere in the city becomes increasingly tense, the protagonist and her unconventional family find shelter first in a caravan park of homeless people, and then as in-house janitors of a luxury condominium. After violent events – which include the return of the toddler’s mother and the child’s parting from the protagonist’s little family – the couple find their way out of the city and into the vast, deserted countryside. There they find sanctuary within an abandoned holiday village, stepping both physically and mentally outside work life and the urban nightmare.

THE CITY AND THE HOME: REORGANIZING SPACE

The beginning of *Karsintavaihe* introduces the reader to a world in a state of flux. The story opens *in medias res*, as the protagonist acknowledges that she has just found out that there is a new treatment for her progressive lethal disease. Instead of a coming death, the protagonist is offered hope for recovery. She sets on the streets of the city to recover a test kit from a nearby pharmacy (KV, 5–8). As the first-person narrator recounts her experience of shock in the face of her unexpected prospects, the protagonist encounters a street view with multiple construction sites, heavy traffic, and few forgotten spots of wasteland that persist in the middle of busy property development. The ailing, aching body of the protagonist is juxtaposed with the rapidly developing cityscape; as the protagonist learns of the new gene therapy developed for her metabolic disorder, she simultaneously observes the transformation of her neighborhood. The narrator acknowledges how the city is rendered unfamiliar by the building projects, rules for traffic are not what the protagonist remembers them to be, and work assignments take place in a new location every day. The first chapter draws to its end with the protagonist’s statement: ‘The rules might change, but it was usually worth trusting that they wouldn’t change at this very minute. Normally, a little warning came first’ (KV, 11).⁸² The protagonist’s proclamation proposes that the environment is regulated but the regulations produce uncertainty instead of assurance. The protagonist’s focus on the changes in her direct environment and the attention she must dedicate to her surroundings suggest that she is constantly on the lookout for possible danger. Her encounters with the urban fabric set the tone for the narrative to come.

In the first chapter of the novel, city development, a notion that has traditionally held high promise for urban residents, seems to generate chaos instead of order and security. Urban planning, which is often associated with ideals of progress and hope, has been linked with utopian thinking since the Greek city-states and Judeo-Christian allegorical depictions of the city as the community of believers (see, e.g., Kolson 2001; Mumford [1961] 1989). The negative connotations of the construction and development of cities are, however, equally present in the tradition of city literature (Ameel 2013, 37–39). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the image of the city is associated with Jerusalem, the City of God, but also with Babylon and its lesser companions, such as Sodom and Gomorrah, nests of evil and sin, as Burton Pike (1981, 6–8) notes in his seminal study. Moreover, in the Western literary tradition, the act of building a city is often associated with the effort of constructing the Tower of Babel (Ameel 2013, 37–39).

82. Säännöt saattoivat muuttua, mutta yleensä kannatti luottaa siihen, että eivät juuri nyt. Tavallisesti tuli ensin jokin pieni varoitus.

The weight that *Karsintavaihe*'s opening chapter gives to the transformation of the city landscape activates both associations, the utopian and the sinful, described above. This is demonstrated in the passage below:

The greyness of it all was highlighted by the new, fortress-like blocks that had appeared next to the boarding house and all the way to the gas station. As far as I had heard, the new flats were popular and pleasant, and each block of flats had a large green inner courtyard, fancy balconies, and all kinds of luxurious features. But, from the outside, one could see only the walls and the rhythmic patterns of shades of grey. The walls were made of windows, of half-opaque glass, so that from the outside one couldn't see into the apartments, but from the inside a view of the outside was available.⁸³ (KV, 7–8)

In this excerpt, the building of the apartment blocks is simultaneously a signal of a utopian impulse of order-making and perfecting the urban fabric, and a dystopic and evil enterprise that renders the city colorless and opaque to the passer-by. The passage introduces perhaps the most important feature of utopian and dystopian literature: the impact of the viewpoint. Utopias and dystopias are twofold in nature, as someone's utopia is often someone else's dystopia. Here, in the excerpt, this duality arises between the homeowner and the passer-by, or the private and the public space. A house that provides comfort to some might at the same time cast a shadow and obstruct the view and the passage of others. In the passage above, the scales are tilted toward the dystopic, as the protagonist's viewpoint is that of the outsider, and as the topic of surveillance, a typical subject of totalitarian dystopias, appears. The glass walls only allow the gaze in one direction, making the resident of the home the overseer of street life; thus, the spatial setting introduces the unequal distribution of power to the narrative. Moreover, the new apartment buildings are equated with fortresses, another hint of the imbalance of power.

The new luxury condominiums depicted in the first chapter also anticipate the novel's focus on constructing and dismantling homes of different kinds. While new apartments are constantly being built, the protagonist's own living quarters shift throughout the narrative. As the narrative begins, she lives in a boarding house, but she is forced to move into a less personalized locker dormitory, from there to her partner's camper van, and, after that, onto the construction site of a new condominium. Toward the end of the narrative, the protagonist and her partner finally abandon the city for the countryside, but only after several attempts to stay in the urban area. The plot formula of both classic and critical dystopia involves the protagonist's revolt, which often takes the form of leaving an enclosed spatial setting. Typically, this means that the protagonists venture to new grounds, explore derelict urban areas, or gravitate toward nature and wilderness. In the case of *Karsintavaihe*, the protagonist's primary motivators, the seeking of home and acts of homemaking, deviate from the plot

83. Harmautta korostivat uudet linnoitusmaiset korttelit, joita oli noussut asuntolan lähelle, ja jotka jatkuivat koko matkan huoltoasemalle saakka. Kuulemma uudet asunnot olivat suosittuja ja viihtyisiä, ja jokaisen korttelin keskellä oli suuri vihreä piha, upeita parvekkeita ja kaikkea mahdollista luksusta. Mutta ulospäin näkyi vain seinää, jossa harmaan eri sävyt toistuivat rytmikkäinä kuvioina. Ikkunaseiniä, puoliläpäisevää lasia, niin että asuntoihin ei nähnyt sisään, mutta niistä näki ulos.

formula. This deviation is a factor that adds to the ambivalence of the novel and the protagonist. As the expected direction of movement is centrifugal, i.e., away from the center of power and toward a peripheral setting, the protagonist's prolonged struggle to establish a home within her city of residence speaks to her unformulaic character.

In the classic dystopias, the trope of house stands for premodern society and the protagonist's nostalgia for it. An outdated, abandoned, or even partly dilapidated house often appears as a secret refuge of the protagonist: it offers privacy and stands as a relic of the time and social order that existed before totalitarian rule. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell [1949] 2000), Mr. Charrington's shop, and the rented room above it, serves as a setting for the protagonist's illegal love affair. Symbolically, though, the setting is more than a refuge: the protagonist's fascination for the place stems partly from his admiration for the old-world memorabilia and décor of the room; in other words, nostalgia. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* ([1920] 2006), the propaganda machinery of the One State presents the Ancient House as a relic of the chaotic past, portraying it as a manifestation of everything that was corrupt in the pretotalitarian world order. Ironically, as the protagonist's revolt progresses, the Ancient House turns into a nest of dissidents. And in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* ([1952] 2009) the protagonist buys himself a preserved farm, the Gottwald estate, in an attempt to escape modernity and its distinctive division of labor, the root cause of the oppressive corporate culture he so deeply detests. In *Karsintavaihe*, the protagonist, after leaving the boarding house, moves into the camper van of her companion Kalevi. Unlike most of the vehicles in the novel, the camper van runs on gasoline and is thus a dated, deviant sight on the road. Just like the houses of the classic dystopias, the camper van illustrates how the protagonists of dystopian narratives are often fascinated by historical artifacts and outdated housing solutions. The protagonists carry the mark of anachronism, and this mark is simultaneously a mark of their dissidence.

The importance of the homeplace is not limited to its symbolism as a relic of the pretotalitarian (and, often, premodern) era. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *We*, in *Karsintavaihe* the domestic and the romantic represent the realms least corrupted by unfavorable social developments as they are the areas of life where intimacy and individualism flourish. In *Karsintavaihe*, Lumi's affection toward her elderly companion can be seen as an analogy for her interest in anachronistic solutions in housing and urban planning. The dissident protagonist conducts a rebellion in her private life by means of an unconventional blended family.

While the narrative develops a strong confrontation between the public and the private, or the home and the city, there exists a setting that conjoins the two. That is the boarding house, the protagonist's long-term dwelling place, and the setting that launches the protagonist on her journey toward recovery from her illness and higher knowledge of the society around her. The first two chapters of the novel, in addition to presenting the protagonist and her current situation, introduce all her fellow residents; the beginning of *Karsintavaihe* focuses almost as much on the minor characters, the housemates, as on the protagonist. While the point of view of the narrative is tightly fixed on the protagonist, encounters with the housemates function as catalysts for plot development. But, like the city around her, the protagonist's boarding house unit is about to change; housemates start to move out, and soon the protagonist herself must move (KV, 88). Although the community scatters and the residents move to

separate locations, the focus on the group of people continues throughout the novel. The scattering of the community functions as a device to probe and demonstrate all the different trajectories taking place in the novel's world, as the protagonist keeps in touch with her previous housemates. By the end of the novel, the narrative has exposed all their fates. In this regard, the novel unravels as a network of stories whose central node is the protagonist, Lumi.

The boarding house of the novel represents the reformed social reality that is the key focus of the dystopian genre. In *Karsintavaihe*, the boarding house maintains elements of the domestic, as it is a place of privacy and rest, an environment that allows for a sense of communality and affection. Simultaneously, it is also a community that is regulated by external forces. The housemates share nothing in common except their status as workers: they all belong to the C and D categories, and if their status changes they are forced to move to another boarding house. As the boarding houses are allocated based on the resident's status as a worker and their employment contracts, they highlight the role of working life. In the novel's world, the labor market has subjugated the private realm, and family ties have been replaced by labor relations, as the organization of households is based on employment rather than relationships. In classic dystopias, modifications of the domestic realm often appear in the form of diminishing privacy. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the flats are relentlessly monitored by the party-controlled telescreens, devices that oversee the inhabitants and churn out propaganda broadcasts. In *We*, the subjects of the One State live in glass houses that can be easily observed by the state apparatus. The Ancient House, a traditional house with solid, opaque walls and small glass windows, draws the citizens' attention with its outdated design. Verronen's contemporary dystopia replaces state authority with the market economy and subjugates the characters through precarious working and living conditions rather than constant surveillance. The boarding house community is constantly under threat of breaking apart, as any member of the household may lose their status as a worker and face eviction from their home. Instead of the consistency of surveillance, the characters of *Karsintavaihe* are oppressed by the instability of their society – the changing market situation – which is illustrated by their volatile living conditions.

The volatility of *Karsintavaihe*'s world is conveyed through a central plot device of the novel, which is the search for missing people. Among Lumi's housemates, the mother of the toddler, Noora, and her friend Piia go missing after being employed by a new company. While looking for the two women, the protagonist discovers that they are not the only ones who have disappeared from the city. People have been going missing during recruitment events and parties but also during the demolition and rebuilding frenzy that Lumi is able to observe closely, thanks to her job as a cleaner of construction sites. With the help of some others, she starts to uncover a larger scheme of missing persons:

An open orange boarding house, for example, was located in the northwestern part of the city eighteen months ago, on Arolankatu. When the people of the missing site started to ask question about a man who had lived in the boarding house and vanished, they had, for starters, heard that the house had moved to the neighboring city, on Vaapukkatie. Alongside the move, the boarding house had been turned into an open red, since so many

of the previously orange residents had been demoted because of petty crimes. Those of the residents who had remained orange moved elsewhere, and some of the reds had caused enough trouble to be transferred to a closed red boarding house. It was therefore debatable whether the boarding house of Vaapukkatie was the same as the boarding house of Arolankatu. Moreover, the boarding house had soon been transferred away from Vaapukkatie and merged with another one that had been relocated. The hybrid boarding house had the status of closed red, but its location was unclear. One couldn't find it at the three previous addresses suggested. And what about the resident, the missing one, whose existence had started to look questionable? It was impossible to say at which point he'd gone missing.⁸⁴ (KV, 197–98)

The excerpt above demonstrates how the boarding houses are operated like companies: they merge and establish complicated chains of ownership that add to the obscurity of their location. At the end of the excerpt, the search team is able to verify the status of the boarding house ('closed red'), but its geographical location remains a mystery. The boarding houses allocate people according to the coordinates that the labor market needs for efficient employment – the color codes of red/yellow/white/green/black stand for the residents' civic merit and reliability – but, as the passage highlights, when applied to other needs, these very same coordinates serve as a means to lose and misplace people (Kankkunen 2017, 61). While the residents of the boarding houses can be easily and efficiently organized and classified according to their status and rank, their actual location in relation to places and people is lost. The novel's market-based organization of the social world is thus revealed to be antisocial in nature.

The relocation of the boarding houses and the larger scheme of population transfer link the novel with Malthusian visions of population growth, a popular theme within the dystopian genre. As Greg Garrard (2004, 93–100) notes, overpopulation became one of the visions of environmental apocalypse in the 1960s. Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1969) conflated alarmist rhetoric – and an allusion to the atomic bomb, a dread that provoked the environmentalist debate of the postwar era – with hyperbolic predictions of near-future famines and controversial suggestions for preventative measures, such as denying all food aid to countries in the most dire circumstances. Ehrlich was not the first neo-Malthusian thinker of the postwar

84. Esimerkiksi eräs avoin oranssi asuntola oli vielä puolitoista vuotta sitten sijainnut kaupungin luoteisosassa Arolankadulla. Kun kadonneiden sivuston väki oli ryhtynyt selvittämään, mitä oli tapahtunut eräälle asuntolassa majailleelle miehelle, josta ei sittemmin ollut kuultu mitään, he olivat ensinnäkin saaneet tietää, että asuntola oli muuttanut naapurikaupunkiin Vaapukkatiele. Muuton yhteydessä se oli muuttunut avoimeksi punaiseksi asuntolaksi, koska niin monet entisistä oransseista asukkaista olivat kokeneet statuksenalennuksen pikkurikosten takia. Oransseina pysyneet asukkaat olivat muuttaneet muualle, ja osa punaisista oli rötötellyt niin pahasti, että heidät oli siirretty suljettuun punaiseen asuntolaan. Oli siis kyseenalaista, millä tavalla Vaapukkatien asuntola oli sama kuin Arolankadun asuntola. Sitä paitsi, asuntola oli pian siirretty pois myös Vaapukkatieltä ja yhdistetty erääseen toiseen asuntolaan, joka sekin oli yhdistämisen yhteydessä muuttanut entisestä sijaintipaikastaan. Näin syntynyt yhdistelmäasuntola oli suljettu punainen, mutta sen sijoituspaikka oli epäselvä. Sitä ei enää ollut missään niistä kolmesta osoitteesta, joita oli ehdotettu. Ja missä kohdin yksittäinen asukas – jonka olemassaolo nyt oli kyseenalainen – oli kadonnut, sitä oli täysin mahdoton sanoa.

environmentalist movement, but his book became a bestseller that popularized the demographic concern in the twentieth century. As usual, the topic had emerged in science fiction before becoming a public issue: Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* ([1966] 2008), adapted on screen in 1973 under the title *Soylent Green*, presents visions of overcrowded cities that drown in the masses of human flesh.⁸⁵ The crowded urban space has become a classic trope of dystopian literature, even though current apocalyptic visions stem not from demographic but climate-related topics.

Against this background, it is intriguing to consider the novel's take on the demographic question. As the narrator remarks, '[t]here were too many people in the wrong places'⁸⁶ (KV, 199). The forced displacement of people, a coercion that targets the relation between a person and a place, is the response of the novel's authorities to the Malthusian nightmare. In an important scene in the novel (KV, 198–99), the disappearance of the lower-status boarding houses is revealed to be a cost-cutting measure: it is cheaper to outsource the care of the disadvantaged than to take care of them within wealthy Western societies. In the world of *Karsintavaihe*, overpopulation is determined in relation to costs and productivity rather than in Malthus's and Ehrlich's terms of exceeding the planetary resources. In other words, the novel depicts a world system that functions according to neoclassical economics, whereas the older demographic apocalypses rely on classical economics. The difference between the two schools of thought lies, among other things, in their recognition of the limits to growth: classical economics has traditionally ruled in the demographic, environmental, and social limitations of production and its growth (Saeed 2008), whereas the neoclassical school and its growth theory emphasize the role of technological development, which, according to the model, drives not only the growth of production but also the growth of productivity (Solow 1956). Because of its focus on the growth of productivity, the neoclassical school puts less significance on the available resources. The neoclassical school has often been criticized for its failure to take into account the ecological conditions that inevitably limit the resources needed for production (Daly 2007). One of the most outspoken critics, Tony Lawson (2013), crystallizes this critique into a discordance between the closed mathematical models employed by the neoclassical economy and the open system – the social reality – that they aim to depict. *Karsintavaihe*'s depiction of the forced displacement as a cost-cutting measure is, in a sense, a satirical representation of Lawson's critique.

The spatial experience portrayed by the novel is thus one of volatility, instability, and change. Compared to the classic dystopias, *Karsintavaihe* presents a radically different view of mobility and borders. The world of the novel is in a state of constant migration. Young, affordable workforce flows from Asian countries to Europe, and European seniors are shipped in the opposite direction. Noora, the mother of the toddler, explains the recruitment policy of her new employer: since the business model of the wellness company relies on exoticism, the company sends white people into Black communities and vice versa (KV, 42).

The worldmaking of classic dystopias relies heavily on the horizontal axes and practices of exclusion and othering: in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, all three global

85. For an analysis of Harrison's novel and the overpopulation topic within dystopian literature, see Ireland (2013).

86. Maailmassa oli liikaa väkeä väärissä paikoissa.

superpowers maintain their legitimacy by constructing hostilities between themselves; totalitarian regimes redeem their existence with the help of interminable war and nationalistic propaganda. The mechanics of exclusion–inclusion are, of course, expanded to concern internal threats, mainly dissidents, and the citizens are encouraged to internalize these mechanics, a process that is the topic of the novel. In *We*, a boundary is drawn between the rational, modern One State and the surrounding wilderness, which is closed behind the Green Wall; between culture and nature, order and chaos. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ([1932] 1982), the exclusion and othering are directed toward the Savage Reservoirs, the peripheral territories outside the center, the World State, and the islands, including Iceland, that serve as dissident colonies.

The mechanics of inclusion and exclusion, which form the basis for the drama of classic dystopias, can be interpreted in the context of orientational metaphors. The notion of orientational metaphor, introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson ([1980] 2008, 14–21), refers to a metaphor that assigns a spatial orientation to a given concept. Based on the previous reading on the mechanics of inclusion and exclusion, I would propose that the orientational metaphors that dominate the classic dystopia are based on the in/out dyad. In *Karsintavaihe*, on the other hand, the separation of the inside and the outside, the center and the periphery, is more ambivalent, sometimes even irrelevant: the constantly ongoing migration between the poles and the characters' changing status and nationality highlight the ostensibility of horizontal distinctions.

Instead, the most significant plot events, the drama of *Karsintavaihe*, take place on the vertical axis. This means that the trajectories of the characters are metaphorically represented with the up/down dyad rather than the conceptual pairs of periphery/center or inside/outside. The up/down dyad comes up often, especially in relation to the topic of competition; the characters of Verronen's dystopia are forced to compete against each other in a never-ending battle for status, money, and power. People climb up but they also crash. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist sums up the spirit of the society:

Little by little, it began to seem that many were confused by people like me: people who were not rising or sinking, or even worried, people who didn't take great risks to obtain a single-family house in a distant suburb and who did not, therefore, run the risk of falling into a miserable tightly-controlled boarding house.⁸⁷ (KV, 21–22)

In the excerpt above, the up/down dyad is presented as a tool that is used to negotiate social relations. The protagonist positions herself outside this social game. The importance the novel places on the drama of the vertical axis differs from the model set by the classical dystopias. Moving on from the prole class to the Outer Party, let alone the Inner Party, is not a concern for the residents of Orwell's Oceania. Verronen's contemporary dystopia thus seems to differentiate itself from classic dystopias by

87. Vähitellen oli alkanut näyttää siltä, että monia hämmensivät kaltaiseni ihmiset, jotka eivät olleet nousemassa tai vajoamassa tai edes huolissaan; jotka eivät ottaneet suuria riskejä saadakseen omakotitalon kaukaisesta lähiöstä, ja joilla ei siten ollut niskassaan myöskään uhkaa pudota surkeaan kovan kontrollin asuntolaan.

choosing another dyad of orientational metaphors, that of the up/down. It might prove fruitful to study a larger set of contemporary dystopias to see if this is a consistent shift within the genre.

In *Karsintavaihe*, shifting borders and changing city landscapes, along with the disappearance of boarding houses and other familial coordinates, combine to create a sense of profound confusion. The sense of disorientation and spatial turbulence connects the novel with postmodernity and postmodern spatiality, which, according to Fredric Jameson (1991, 44), presents itself through orientational problems. With his reading of the architecture of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Jameson lays out the *modus operandi* of postmodern space: '[T]his latest mutation of space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world' (Jameson 1991, 44). Another observer of the postmodern condition, David Harvey (1989), addresses the same phenomenon with the notion of fragmentation. Followed by side phenomena such as eclecticism and chaos, fragmentation characterizes postmodern architecture and urban planning (Harvey 1989, 98). The great importance both Jameson and Harvey place on the sense of disorientation has, however, been criticized: the foundation of this critique was laid in the feminist readings of the flaneur figure, especially in Elizabeth Wilson's *The Sphinx in the City* (1991), in which Wilson highlights the gendered nature of the modernist urban experience. According to her, the sense of confusion and shock often assigned to modernist urban affectivity and aesthetics is a trope of male writers, whereas the female modernists depict a radically different view of urban life, one of freedom, energy, and vitality (Wilson 1991, 85–87). Following Wilson's argument, Doreen Massey (1992, 74) draws a parallel between the vertigo of postmodern theorists with that of male modernists, suggesting that the sense of confusion might stem from gendered male anxiety rather than the contemporary epoch itself.

Bearing this in mind, we may consider Verronen's *Karsintavaihe* and the combined effect of the novel's spatial confusion and the theme of home. The dissolution of homescapes and the disintegration of communities is contrasted with the protagonist's constant attempts to construct shelters and homey places. *Karsintavaihe* offers a fresh take on the postmodernist sense of disorientation and the earlier modernist urban vertigo. The novel introduces the vertigo and the disorientation to the sphere of home; but at the same time the narrative also presents a protagonist whose response to this is not to abandon home altogether but to persevere with her efforts at homemaking.

Next, I will take a closer look at how a specific city motif depicts the narrative's skepticism toward history and temporal trajectories, another development that reflects the dissolution of home in *Karsintavaihe*.

THE INNOVATION CITY: REINVENTED SPACE

The topics of urban planning and construction are elevated to a more conceptual level as the narrative progresses. This is done with the help of another urban setting, as the city of the protagonist has a twin, a utopian alternative. The protagonist never visits the second city but listens to stories and rumors about it. The source of these stories is Eljas, one of the protagonist's friends from the boarding house community. Eljas has

passed an entrance examination for a new project and has left the boarding house and the city in order to relocate to the new place. Half community and half workplace, the project is called ‘innovation city’ (*innovaatiokaupunki*): a closed city for high-status specialists. In a phone conversation, Eljas⁸⁸ tries to explain the idea of the innovation city to Lumi:

The new city was something more than a collection of jobs, and more than the old cities, which had all kinds of jobs. A new kind of place was forming around innovative people who had created things from new ways of thinking: jobs, apartments, lifestyle, everything. What was new? Everything.⁸⁹ (KV, 147)

Eljas sets out to explain the nature of the city in relation to the jobs it brings together. In the second sentence of the English excerpt (third in the Finnish original), the logic of the address falls apart and turns into circular reasoning: the city is new since it is filled with people who carry new ideas and create new things. The idea of novelty produces a loop of repetition; a discordance appears between the semantic and the stylistic and formalistic level of the excerpt. Pushing further, the speaker tries to pin down the novelty of the city but fails to locate it and ends up concluding that it can be found everywhere. Novelty, in this case, functions as a will-o'-the-wisp that lures the speaker astray. The short passage is narrated in the form of free indirect discourse, which further adds to the effect of confusion. The reader is unable to distinguish whether the question at the end of the passage is presented by the first-person narrator Lumi or whether it is a rhetorical question, part of Eljas's rambling monologue. In addition to deliberate confusion, the narrative technique of free indirect discourse creates a sense of critical distance, as Eljas's explanation is narrated rather than presented through direct speech.

The topic of the address is novelty but the stylistic device used is repetition. The poignant irony of the passage stems from the discordance between the topic and the device. Eljas's attempt to explain the innovation city circles around two notions: jobs – the city as a consortium of jobs – and novelty – a new kind of thinking, new kinds of jobs, everything. The innovation city is presented as a physical realization of the job market and as a source of endless novelty, which, apparently, signifies progress and improvement. The promised improvement is, however, presented in an ironic light, as the stylistic device only underscores Eljas's inability to pinpoint any proof of the bettered condition.

In the grand scheme of things, the scene can be associated with a larger philosophical question about the value of novelty and that of repetition. The topic and the device of the passage reflect a schism between premodern and modern systems of

88. The name Eljas is a Finnish variant of the Bible's Elijah (Greek/Latin: Elias). Elijah, perhaps the most prominent prophet figure of the Biblical tradition, was ascended to heaven on a chariot of fire. The name of the novel's character can be read as a reference to prophesizing. It may also equate the character's entry to the innovation city with the heavenly ascension of the prophet.

89. Uusi kaupunki oli jotakin enemmän kuin kokoelma työpaikkoja. Ja se oli enemmän kuin vanhat kaupungit, joissa oli jos jonkinlaisia työpaikkoja. Nyt oli syntymässä uudenlainen paikka siltä pohjalta, että sinne tuli uudella tavalla ajattelevia ihmisiä, jotka olivat luoneet uuteen ajatteluun pohjautuvia työpaikkoja, asuntoja, elämäntapaa, kaikkea.

Mikä oli uutta? Kaikki.

value. The appreciation of novelty and innovation is a distinctive feature of modernity (see, e.g., Eco 1990), while within older aesthetic traditions the ability to repeat and skillfully imitate were equated with high aesthetic-artistic value. Postmodernity, on the other hand, has redefined the notions of repetition and creation: based on accounts such as Gilles Deleuze's ontology of difference (Deleuze [1968] 2004), repetition appears as a foundational concept of postmodern thought. In her work on postmodern poetics, Linda Hutcheon ([1988] 2004, 26) has highlighted the role of repetition with critical distance as the core of the parodic practice that, according to her, plays an important role in postmodern cultural production. With this, Hutcheon opposes Jameson's (1991, 16) thesis of pastiche as the dominant postmodern mode. In her *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon lays out a more detailed critique of the prevailing understanding of postmodernist parody. According to her, postmodernist parody is generally seen as a 'value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms' – a notion that resembles Jameson's understanding of pastiche. Instead, Hutcheon foregrounds the critical distance embedded in the parodic practice and presents parody as a 'value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history [. . .] of representations' (Hutcheon [1988] 2004, 90). Hutcheon's view of repetition as a practice of critical distance can be used to shed light on the innovation city episode. The scene acquires a parodic undertone, as it satirically imitates the contemporary discourse of innovation and directs the protagonist's as well as the reader's attention to its hollowness.

The concept of innovation and its discursive use are central to the whole episode. In his study on innovation, Benoît Godin (2015) traces the history of the concept, particularly its connotational shift from positive to negative and vice versa, over the centuries. Innovation, a notion already employed by the ancient Greek philosophers, was brought into Western public discourse by the Reformation. In the religious context, innovation was, according to Godin (2015, 6, 10), a secular term for heresy, a pejorative expression used by those who opposed the changes that the innovators were seeking to bring. This pejorative connotation was further strengthened by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their republican and revolutionary uprisings. Only in the twentieth century did the semantic connotation of innovation become positive. Innovation as a concept was linked with liberal ideology – innovation as a synonym for initiative – and, later, progress (Godin 2015, 6). In this latter phase, innovation appeared to describe the process of technological and/or material progress, a phenomenon greater than mere scientific invention and research. As Godin formulates, '[i]nnovation stresses application versus mere scientific discovery. In this sense, technological innovation is a counter-concept to science – and more particularly to basic research – as a dominant cultural value of the twentieth century' (Godin 2015, 12–13).

The two key meanings of the concept, its earlier association with heresy and its contemporary significance as technological development with an emphasis on applicability, are both present in Eljas's address. The first cluster of meanings, which connects innovation and heretic thought, is reflected in how Eljas's address is framed as an attempt to conform to certain social rules. Before the address, the narrator describes the protagonist's reactions to talking to Eljas:

He babbled away in his enthusiasm, churned out clichés, and sounded how I imagined Samu and Mikki [other residents of the boarding house] had sounded in their late teens when they had got carried away with how the world seemed to be functioning and how they themselves should operate within it. The difference was that one could spot the old Eljas here and there, in a sentence or a half – but then came the new one and corrected the thought errors made by the old.⁹⁰ (KV, 146)

The narrator, by means of the protagonist's focalization, presents the speaker as a hybrid between the old and new Eljas, and the latter controls and subjugates the former. In contemporary discourse, as well as in *Karsintavaihe*, the poles have shifted from the premodern understanding of innovators as heretics: those siding with innovation represent the utopian order, while the opponents of innovation are considered negatively. Knowledge of the concept's background in religious and political discourses as a pejorative expression helps to understand how deeply the contemporary understanding of innovation is embedded with power relations and social control. The shift to modernity altered the connotation of innovation from negative to positive, but the concept itself remains a means to practice communal control over the individual subject.

By introducing the concept of innovation, the discussion is steered away from critical inspection of the 'innovated' phenomenon, the object, and toward the subject's attitude to it. As a discursive practice, the innovation jargon is a means to divide subjects into proponents and opponents, us and them: it is a practice that is meant to hinder the ideals of rational and critical debate and to focus the discussion on inclusion within and exclusion from the social group.

Dystopian literature as a genre has a long tradition of criticizing such discursive practices. In Eljas's address, repetition of the word 'new' creates an association with the genre's most well-known example, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and its infamous 'newspeak.' As it is presented in Orwell's work, newspeak is a means of control: a language that is deprived of its critical potential with a constantly shrinking vocabulary and the use of abbreviations and contractions. The innovations in newspeak are government-dictated changes that function as linguistic censorship: instead of merely controlling public discussion, the totalitarian rule extends its control over language itself. Something similar seems to happen with the 'new' of Eljas's address: the adjective functions like a linguistic and semantic dead end that thwarts any attempt at clear and individual thinking.

The second cluster of meanings links the concept of innovation with economic growth, material progress, and market applications. In Verronen's dystopia, the concept of innovation appears as a marker of the instrumentalization that permeates the society of the novel. Values, if there are any, are seen only as means to an end, and progress, if it appears, means economic profit; the novelty that Eljas so keenly accentuates is an empty epithet. In Eljas's address, the repetition of the word 'job'

90. Hän pulputti innoissaan, suolsi kliseitä ja kuulosti samalta kuin saatoin kuvitella Samun ja Mikin kuulostaneen myöhäisinä teinivuosinaan, kun he olivat innostuneet siitä miten maailma näytti toimivan ja miten heidän itsensä kannattaisi siinä toimia. Sillä erotuksella, että vanhaa Eljasta kuului aina välillä lauseen tai puolikkaan verran – ennen kuin uusi keskeytti ja korjasi ajatteluvirheen.

suggests that the innovation city has strong ties to the economic realm. The innovation outputs that Eljas mentions in his address are apartments and lifestyles. In the novel, the former is the main area of commercial activity, as the story largely revolves around construction processes and housing operations. The latter alludes to the consumer culture depicted in the novel, and to marketing as a means of promoting different lifestyles to increase consumer demand. This resonates with the contemporary understanding of the concept of innovation: according to Godin (2015, 251–54), the future-oriented and science-based notion of innovation was reinvented in the managerial classes and corporate R&D departments of the twentieth century. This engineer-driven reform shifted the meaning of the concept toward commercialization and market application (Godin 2015, 253–55). Just as importantly, the twentieth-century understanding of innovation accentuated its collective and collaborative nature: more and more often, innovation is viewed from the systemic perspective rather than from an individualistic point of view (Godin 2015, 253–54).

In Eljas's address, the lack of individual perspective – lack of clarity, lack of vision and, most importantly, lack of answers – is an indicator of the collective and systemic nature of the twentieth-century innovation discourse. In his address, Eljas makes several attempts at defining and describing the novelty of the city but fails repeatedly. This is to be read as a critique of innovation jargon: although a product of a highly individualistic culture, the innovation discourse does not tolerate individual or original thinking. As the narrator-protagonist remarks, Eljas's speech is a compilation of borrowed catchphrases and sales talk; rather than depicting the innovation city, it repeats the discourse surrounding the place.

A similar difficulty of definition and orientation appears in Eljas's attempt to evaluate his status as a worker:

– I can tell you only that this job of mine, it's only a white status gig, as you probably knew already if you've heard about the nomination. Later, there'll be a chance for promotion – well, that's what they say, at least. It's a good job, the best I could get, but on a more general level, only mediocre, of course. Although this is a wrong way to see it, this is, in fact, a fucking amazing opportunity.⁹¹ (KV, 146)

Within a single sentence, the rating of the job wavers between 'good,' 'the best I could get,' and 'only mediocre.' Just like the novelty of the city, the status of Eljas's job – and, even more importantly, his own evaluation of that value – seems to be shifting and unstable. In the case of the job, the difficulty of definition stems from the multiple perspectives Eljas adopts: for him, the job might be the best he could get, while for others it is barely mediocre. As in the city passage where the innovation city is compared with older cities, in the job address the use of comparison is a confusing, not a helpful, element.

91. – [S]en verran voin sanoa, että nämä minun hommat ovat ainakin aluksi vain valkoisen statuksen hommia, vaikka sen ehkä tiesit muutenkin, jos olet kuullut nimityksestä. Myöhemmin on mahdollisuus ylennyksiin – no, niin ainakin sanotaan. Tämä on hyvä homma, paras mitä saatoin saada, mutta vähän yleisemmillä kriteereillä ihan vain keskitasoa. Vaikka tämä on tietysti väärä tapa asennoitua, koska itse asiassa tämä on aika helvetin uskomaton mahdollisuus.

The complicated relation to novelty reflects the novel's focus on the problematics of temporality, a theme that is already present on the first page. The novel begins with a dramatic line: 'I had just found out that I wasn't about to die after all'⁹² (KV, 5). The protagonist, Lumi, has been raised with an awareness of a hereditary illness that will most likely bring her to an early death. At the beginning of the story, she has just received information of a gene therapy for her condition. She soon realizes that with her accumulated savings – money that she has been putting away for her future terminal care – she is able to afford the treatment and will thus avoid the early death she has been preparing for. Instead of prearranging her end-of-life care, she can now start planning for her future. As the first line of the story hints, this newly acquired information requires some readjustment on the protagonist's side. Up to the present, she has practiced the art of contending herself with whatever has befallen her: by avoiding permanent relationships, career prospects, and other forms of ambition, she has managed to live a decent life in the here and now (KV, 6). With a foreseeable future, this will not do. When the horizon extends, the novel suggests, a burden is placed on an individual: the burden of forethought and planning, the burden of dreaming and dreading – the burden of living a life instead of merely staying alive.

The beginning of the novel problematizes the protagonist's relationship with the future; the rest of the story, however, expresses similar reservations about history. The story of the novel is sprinkled with hints that highlight skepticism toward history and the meaningfulness of temporal trajectories, including family history. For the protagonist, the meaning of legacy is reduced to a genetic illness. Apart from the ill-fated genetic condition, the childhood family is absent from her current life stage. In fact, all the nuclear families of the novel are represented in an unfavorable manner: the protagonist's family is dead and her remaining brother both physically and mentally distant, and all the family relationships of Lumi's housemates are either hostile or nonexistent. The only actual unit of a child and a parent, Lumi's friend and her toddler, are separated at the beginning of the novel and remain that way until the end. One could assume that the central storyline, uniting the mother with the child, would reestablish the family unit but, as the discovery and the return of the missing mother are presented in an anticlimactic, ironic manner, the overall impression is of cynicism and disillusionment (KV, 306–12). The protagonist herself establishes a heterodox family unit with an elderly man: instead of continuing the family line, childless and with a man that could be her grandfather, she seems to be reversing it. A similar critique of the nuclear family can be found in the follow-up novel *Kirkkaan selkeää*, where the protagonist's family ties are reduced to an inherited debt.⁹³

The analysis above is supported by the recurring theme of skepticism toward family, procreation, and lineage in Verronen's prose. It is already thematized in the early novel *Pimeästä maasta*, in which the closed family unit is associated with primitive states of society, repression, and the notion of darkness. The novel is an

92. Olin juuri saanut tietää, että en kuolisikaan.

93. In her study on the rise of familialistic ideology in Finnish society, Riitta Jallinoja (2006) acknowledges that, within the Finnish media discourse, a turn from individualism toward familialism took place in the first half of the 2000s. *Karsintavaihe* was published in 2008 and *Kirkkaan selkeää* in 2010; their antifamilialistic message can thus be seen as a reaction to the shift in public discourse.

allegorical representation of the development of modern society. Within this allegory, the protagonist's childhood family is related to the tribal, premodern social order, as well as with a superstitious, repressive belief system and gerontocratic rule. The central plot twist of the novel is the protagonist's breaking away from this family community toward the rational, enlightened urban community. The episodic novel *Saari kaupungissa* presents a parody of the traditional Finnish family saga (Lassila 2007). Unlike the genre of the family saga, Verronen's novel refuses to carve a meaningful whole out of the multiple generations that follow each other. The truncated, extremely minimalistic episodes that chronicle the lineage of the protagonist are irrelevant, even coincidental; instead of affirming the explanatory power of history, they seem to refute it. In both examples above, the skepticism toward family is echoed in the characters' relationship with places as well. In *Pimeästä maasta*, the protagonist's traumatic family background finds its expression in the way the protagonist rejects her native place. In *Saari kaupungissa* and its parody of the family saga, the setting of the historical episodes varies from episode to another, and the protagonist's connection to the locations of her forefathers remains indefinable. Either negated or lost, the homeplaces of the two narratives reflect the protagonists' problematic family relations; the experience of space, in other words, is influenced by the rejection of the temporal, historical, and lineage-related aspects of life.

The third example of Verronen's discussion of the meaning of family, the novel *Varjonainen*, follows the journey of an immigrant looking for her family roots in Finland. The dramatic intensity of the novel emanates from the desperate, often illegal, actions the protagonist takes, and the risks that are linked to these actions: entering the country illegally and assuming someone else's identity, the protagonist is willing to violate the law and sacrifice the people around her to achieve her aims. But at the end of the story, after meeting her grandfather, establishing a false identity, and gaining mastery of the Finnish system and society, the protagonist abruptly decides to leave the country and return to the collapsing Soviet Union, a place she never considered home. In its reversal of the reader's expectations as to plot and character development, the protagonist's return comes as more of a shock than her lies and crimes. It soon becomes clear that the protagonist's journey to her roots has changed nothing. In Verronen's retelling of the roots trip,⁹⁴ personal development does not take place, and the connection with motherland, family, and legacy proves to be insignificant. The narrative thus underscores how the protagonist's inability to commit herself to a certain place is a sign of her immaturity, past trauma, or perhaps some other obstacle that hinders her capability to grow.⁹⁵

94. On the genre of the roots trip, see Antz (2012).

95. Postmodernity in general has been described as a larger cultural departure from historicism. This interpretation was invoked by Foucault with his 1966–1967 focus on the concept of heterotopia, which led him to claim that the great fixation of the nineteenth century, history, was about to diminish and give way to the epoch of space (Foucault 1986, 22). It was Jameson, with his *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), who established the problematics of historicism as one of the foundational features of postmodernity. If historicism has withered, orientation toward the future has replaced it. In the Finnish context, literary scholars have suggested that the emphasis on the future has been the explanatory factor for the growing presence and popularity of genre fiction, especially science fiction (Lahtinen 2013, 96) and dystopia (Isomaa and Lahtinen 2017, 10). In these interpretations,

How are we to interpret the criticism the novel directs against domesticity and family life? Are the antifamilial and antihistoricist attitudes of the narrative merely signs of skepticism, that is, elements that foreground the dystopian tone? In the case of *Karsintavaihe*, I would suggest that they are also markers of a hidden utopian impulse. In his *Dystopia. A Natural History*, Claeys (2017) explores the connections between millenarian and utopian/dystopian thinking. Millenarianism, in a nutshell, contains two components: it is a belief in an immense societal change, held by a community, a group, or a movement. It is a shared horizon of expectation that directs the thoughts and actions of its proponents. Millenarianism is commonly associated with Christian and other religious contexts, but, as Claeys (2017, 55) suggests, it began its journey into secularization during the French Revolution and became an elemental component of Nazism, Stalinism, Maoism, and other totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, as well as multiple nonviolent and pacifist ideologies. Millenarianism often entails an urge for the purification of the community (Claeys 2017, 54). The latter impulse, of course, appears frequently within dystopian thought as well. At the heart of millenarian thought lies the trope of rupture: a heightened sense of a break, a revolution, a dividing line that is drawing closer (Claeys 2017, 253). As Claeys describes, '[t]he mental atmosphere of the millenarian-revolutionary moment is one of concentrated frenzy and haste which parallels the anxiety felt during catastrophes. Time is now intensified. Rather than meandering aimlessly through life we now have an acute sense of direction' (Claeys 2017, 253).

Instead of solely gesturing toward antifamilial attitudes and cynicism per se, the problematic relationship that *Karsintavaihe*'s characters have with family and history suggests a rupture, a millenarian breakage with the past and the locations related to the past, and thus an intensification of the now. This line of thought is underlined on the paratextual level, with the novel's title, *Karsintavaihe* – 'The Elimination Phase' – radically guiding the interpretation of the novel, as it simultaneously gives a sinister tone to the narrative and alludes to the millenarian idea of a bettered, purged, pruned future society. It also modifies the classic dystopian narrative formula (see, e.g., Moylan 2000, xiii), in which the story starts *in medias res* and the plot mostly evades the question of how the current state of affairs came to be. Dystopian narratives, in general, do not depict the devolution of a real-world situation into a dystopian condition; the discontinuity between the real world and the dystopian narrative world is a central element of suspense from which the genre draws its power. *Karsintavaihe*, on the other hand, positions itself as a depiction of the dystopian development, not as the result of it. That said, the narrator of the novel makes several remarks that underline the fact that the dystopian devolution has been happening for quite a while before the story opens. The picture the novel paints is still partial, one without a beginning or ending.

FROM THE CARAVAN PARK TO THE AUTOMATIC COURTYARD

The dramatic plotline of *Karsintavaihe* revolves around two very different settings: a caravan park, which is an impromptu ghetto for homeless people, and a new condominium building with its courtyard. As the following analysis demonstrates,

the fertile imagination of the dystopian genre is a functional outlet for the processing of the preoccupation with risk, a general tendency shared by most modern societies.

these two sites not only dramatize the events of the narrative but also encapsulate the novel's societal criticism, which mostly targets the unwanted effects of modernity.

Toward the end of the novel, the caring and altruistic actions of the protagonist – taking care of the toddler and elderly Kalevi, searching for the missing people – are contrasted with her work as an informant for a security contractor. Her spying assignments focus around one of her boarding house housemates, an activist aspiring to build an autonomous zone within a caravan park. The caravan park is also Lumi's dwelling place after the boarding house community has broken up and the residents have scattered all around the city and, as in the case of the missing women, into unknown locations. Her companion Kalevi parks his old camper van in the area, which makes it a part-time home for Lumi as well (KV, 143–44). Although unofficial and poorly planned, the caravan park is booming as housing costs keep rising and boarding houses are merged and closed. The growing community is also of interest to a group of civil rights activists. Among them is Lumi's boarding house housemate Vilma, one of the antagonist figures of the novel. The activists smuggle gas masks, weapons, and other equipment into the caravan park; as Vilma declares to Lumi, the purpose is to fortify the area and set up an autonomous zone, a free city within the city proper (KV, 174–75). The depiction of the caravan park is yet another instance of a utopian pocket embedded in the dystopian narrative world. The protagonist, although sympathetic to the activist's desire to defend civil rights, strongly opposes the idea of turning the caravan park into a war zone, as the area is home to thousands of civilians, mostly children and old people. In order to defeat the budding rebellion in the caravan park, the security corporation assigns Lumi to the ancillary staff of a secret operation (KV, 181).

The unspecified task the protagonist is assigned to turns out to be a cleaning shift at a car depot, an unfinished automated courtyard that has been taken over by the security contractors. The security corporation's cars that roll in and out are filthy with vomit and blood, and it does not take long before Lumi realizes that the cars are coming from the caravan park (KV, 183–84). The depiction of the operation is elliptic, as is the first-person narrator's knowledge of the ongoing situation, but the narrator's account of the horrified reactions of Lumi's fellow workers indicates a mass murder and a purge of the caravan park, an interpretation that is then disputed in a speech given by the supervisor (KV, 186). Despite the supervisor's account, the protagonist remains skeptical and interprets the event as an act of population transfer, internment, and mass murder. The scale of the operation varies between six and seven thousand people and, as the protagonist concludes based on media accounts, most of them go missing (KV, 190).

After these events, Lumi and her family find shelter within a setting that is almost the opposite of the chaotic caravan park: 'the ellipse house' and its unfinished courtyard (KV, 204–9). If the caravan park is the ghetto of the underprivileged, the ellipse house is a luxury condominium meant for the upper classes. It offers its residents comfort, security, and complete privacy: the courtyard is gated, with towering walls that keep city life at bay and a roof over the yard to fend off the elements (KV, 204). Like most new buildings in the city, this one is supposed to be nearly self-maintaining, with self-cleaning surfaces and a fully automated courtyard. Owing to high demand, the installation of the automation protocol has been delayed; the contractor of the ellipse

house hires Lumi and her family as in-house janitors to pacify the residents of the condominium. For the residents, the ellipse house is a belated utopia; for Lumi and her family, it is a temporary refuge after the purge of the caravan park.

When their contract as janitors draws to an end, the protagonist observes the courtyard of the condominium:

I gathered a full sack of firework waste and other litter that the residents had thrown into the courtyard. It was probably the last time it would be necessary on that site since the automatic courtyard would be able to take care of any waste by itself. That's what they said, at least, and I didn't have a lot of doubts concerning that.

Large trash required heavy means. In order to prevent accidents, the automatic courtyards came with strict guidelines from the suppliers: entering the yard required professional training and industrial protective clothing. The residents of the house were shut out of their own courtyard; they could only observe it from a distance.⁹⁶ (KV, 278)

The trope of waste recurs throughout the novel. In this excerpt, the protagonist recognizes that soon she will not be able to enter the yard without protective clothing; the automated cleaning system cannot differentiate between a person and an item of trash. In other words, the role of a common worker is reduced to trash. Class questions aside, the automated courtyard presents a larger issue: what is the place of a human in the midst of technological development? Closed to entry and admired from a distance, the automated courtyard becomes a spectacle for the eye. As the last sentence of the excerpt implies, the protagonist has reservations about the prospective condition of the courtyard and the effect it has on the residents of the building: according to the narrator, they are 'shut out of their own courtyard' and 'could *only* observe it' (emphasis added). The option of merely observing the courtyard is highlighted in other instances as well: Lumi and her companion are employed as janitors partly because they have the toddler, 'a decorative child,' as Lumi sarcastically articulates the contractor's view on the child (KV, 206). Their value as workers is not based solely on their work input; looks matter, too. During the Christmas season, the protagonist and the toddler decorate the courtyard wearing Santa clothing while the residents peer at them through binoculars (KV, 265).

Throughout the novel, observing places is juxtaposed with more active ways of engaging with them. The novel's representation of places such as the courtyard stands for a development from engagement toward consumption, from usage toward enjoyment. It resembles the situationists' criticism of the so-called 'society of spectacle,' a notion coined by Guy Debord ([1967] 1970). Debord ([1976] 1970) based his critique on the Marxist notions of commodification, commodity fetishism,

96. Keräsin sisäpihalta säkillisen ilotulitusrakettien jäänteitä ja muuta roskaa, jota asukkaat olivat sinne parvekkeiltaan heitelleet. Oli todennäköisesti viimeinen kerta kun sitä tarvitsi tuossa paikassa tehdä, sillä automaattipiha selviytyi itseksensä mistä tahansa roskista. Niin ainakin väitettiin, eikä sitä suuresti epäillytkään.

Suurten roskien tuhoamiseen tarvittiin järeät keinot. Vahinkojen välttämiseksi automaattipihojen toimittajat antoivat ankarat ohjeet, joiden mukaan pihoille ei saanut mennä käyskentelemään muuten kuin ammattiopetuksen kautta ja suojaovussa. Se sulki tavalliset asukkaat pois omalta pihaltaan; heille jäi pelkkä katselumahdollisuus.

and reification. All three concepts depict different aspects of the same phenomenon, namely the expansion of capitalist, market-based thinking into other areas of life, such as social relations. As Jussi Ojajärvi (2006, 126) suggests, commodification can be seen as a discursive and institutional practice that inevitably subjugates an increasing range of human activities under capitalist rationality, in other words, the market. This, in turn, leads to alienation. Debord ([1976] 1970) adopts the Marxist notion of alienation and suggests that the sphere of cultural production responds to the threat of alienated separation by bringing forth images and representations that aim to unite the people. 'The spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images,' Debord ([1967] 1970, thesis no. 4) claims. As a result, the sphere of representations inflates, and the roles of experiences and their representations are reversed, the latter taking precedence over the former (Debord [1967] 1970, theses nos. 1–2). People within such a societal structure rely more and more on the mediating role of images; thus, the spectacle becomes the dominant means of communication and the only true arena of social encounter. The society of spectacle directs people toward a more passive stance, as the spectacle is 'an object of contemplation only' (Debord [1967] 1970, thesis no. 2). The ellipse house and the automated courtyard within it represent a miniature society stepping into the age of the spectacle. Ready to 'contemplate only,' the residents of the ellipse house give away their access to the courtyard. This happens under the eye of the disapproving protagonist, who opposes the development because of her profession (the automation of the built environments is rapidly making her unemployed), but also because of more personal reasons. The automatization of the courtyard is yet another sign of the urban development that the protagonist denounces both explicitly (KV, 13) and implicitly.

The case of the courtyard highlights the issue of outsidership, one of the central themes of Verronen's work. Verronen's novels and short stories delve into the lives of outcasts and onlookers, a trait that accounts for the author's reputation as a mouthpiece of the margins. Many of her novels present an outcast protagonist with a special spatial ability and antagonists who, in contrast, lack similar skills or sensitivities. In *Pieni elintila*, a travel story through the Isles of Scilly, the outdoorsy protagonist is contrasted with another character, a helpless upper-class lady. The lady's boat runs into the rocks, and on the islands she is too timid to walk the hiking trails on her own. In other words, her ineptitude presents itself on land and in water. Meanwhile, the protagonist romps through campsites and off-track trails, demonstrating a practical prowess or cognitive aptitude that allows her to keep one step ahead of the lady and even anticipate her tragic death. The protagonist's skills manifest themselves in the social environment too, whereas the lady's social ineptitude leads to a family conflict, and she is murdered in an airplane accident by her own son. In *Luolavuodet*, the speleologist's ability to interpret and map subterranean environments is set against the local small town, which has forgotten its roots as a mining community after switching to the horse racing business. Horse racing, an example of a competitive capitalist enterprise, has overtaken the community's long dependence on the subterranean caves, a development that has led the community to underestimate the danger posed by the porous limestone ground. As a result, a conflict appears between the speleologist and the community. The issue is resolved in a dramatic scene where the

racetrack sinks into an underground cave hall, a prospect the speleologist has long been warning about.

Read in the context of *Karsintavaihe*'s courtyard scene, the alienated condition of Verronen's protagonists, a theme that critics and readers alike have struggled to define, gains new meanings. The complexity of Verronen's discussion on the theme resides in the fact that her works depict alienated protagonists within an alienated community. That is to say, their sense of alienation is not alienation per se – it is a means to pinpoint the alienation of their respective social environments. As the protagonists are alienated from the alienated community, they are, in fact, the opposite. They are the ones who refuse to settle for 'contemplating only,' the ones who do not communicate through spectacle, the ones whose social relations are not mediated through images. Their spatial agency is thus not a skill or an ability but a stance against the society of spectacle and its functioning.

The problematics of agency are highlighted in detail in the following passage of *Karsintavaihe*, which depicts the functioning of the fully automated courtyard:

The courtyard mechanics finished their job, and together with the residents, we took part in a demonstration where they showed how the courtyard functioned, and which features were taken care of by the automation. The plants were watered and fertilized; the withered parts were removed. Sensors oversaw that the conditions were optimal. One could withdraw plants under the surface to hibernate or seed and elevate other plants in their place. The courtyard probably wouldn't require maintenance for ten years, and even then, a mere addition of seeds and seedlings would keep the yard varied. Otherwise, the courtyard would be taken over by perennial plants, which was a decent option too, although most people preferred a little bit of variation. One could do anything to the courtyard. One just didn't have to.⁹⁷ (KV, 296)

After the automation protocol is activated, the courtyard requires very little human intervention. Interestingly, in the passage, the automatics are presented as a way to provide variation for the residents: plants can be withdrawn and elevated, new seeds and seedlings can be added. The options are unlimited: as the demonstration highlights, 'one could do anything.' The caveat, of course, lies already in the next sentence: 'One just didn't have to.' What the demonstration does not explicitly address is that the wealth of options the courtyard offers does not facilitate doing or making but rather something that could be described as editing or curating. It is not the right to make and do but the right to choose from a predetermined set of selections (see generally Crawford 2010, 69). Read against Verronen's depictions of spatial agency, it

97. Piha-asentajat saivat työnsä valmiiksi, ja osallistuimme talonväen kanssa demonstraatioon, jossa meille esiteltiin, miten piha toimi, mitä kaikkea siellä tapahtui automaattisesti. Kasvit kasteltiin ja lannoitettiin, kuihtuneet osat siivottiin pois. Sensorit valvoivat, että olosuhteet olivat optimaaliset. Kasveja voitiin vetää pihan pinnan alle lepovaiheeseen tai vaikkapa siementämään, ja toisia kasveja nostettiin niiden tilalle siemenestä tai taimesta. Pihaa ei välttämättä tarvitsisi huoltaa kymmeneen vuoteen, ja senkin jälkeen pitäisi vain käydä lisäämässä siemeniä ja taimia säiliöihin jos halusi säilyttää pihan vaihtelevana. Muussa tapauksessa vallan ottaisivat monivuotiset kasvit – mikä sekkin oli aivan kelvollinen ratkaisu, vaikka useimmat halusivat vaihtelua. Pihalle voitiin tehdä mitä tahansa, mutta ei välttämättä tarvinnut.

clearly falls on the side of alienation: the residents of the ellipse house are depicted as consumers of the courtyard spectacle rather than gardeners or community members in their own right.

The reader should note that the automation process of the society is depicted through the trope of the courtyard. Compared to the tradition of dystopian literature, the solution is far from obvious. In *Player Piano*, one of the earliest dystopias to address the social problems of technology-driven mass unemployment, the battle between the engineer upper class and the Luddite working classes takes place within massive factories and industrial plants; in *We*, it is the shiny glass city that represents the order of technology and mathematics; and in *Brave New World* Ford's assembly line is the guiding principle of all social organization. Why, then, does Verronen's novel choose the trope of the courtyard?

Courtyards and gardens are liminal spaces between outside and inside: half natural, half built. As Edward S. Casey ([1993] 2009, 122–24) suggests in his reading of built environments, the relation between inside and outside is more complex than our everyday understanding entails. In architecture, Casey points out, these two poles are often represented with a distinct asymmetry; the inside is very rarely symmetrical to the outside, and vice versa. In addition, another often-used feature is the reversal of position. By this, he refers to patios, balconies, glassed-in porches, and other architectural means of bringing the outside in (or vice versa) or blurring the distinction between the two (Casey [1993] 2009, 123). Casey also refers to Gaston Bachelard, whose *Poetics of Space* has a chapter dedicated to 'The Dialectics of Outside and Inside' (Bachelard [1964] 2014, 216–32). For the phenomenologists, the alternation of outside and inside relates to our bodily presence in the world. As Casey declares, '[i]n fact, only insofar as we successfully resolve the tension between inner and outer at the level of our lived bodies are we able to deal with it effectively in the experience of architecture' (Casey [1993] 2009, 124). One might draw a parallel between the spectacular courtyard of *Karsintavaihe* and the brazen ways in which the characters of the novel – or the society around them – make use of their bodies as commodities. The mother of the toddler uses her skin color to get employment (KV, 42), another resident of the boarding house starts her career in prostitution but lands a place in a surrogate mother scheme (KV, 137–40), and yet another ends up in medical trials (KV, 273–75). In the novel's world, bodies and their physical barriers, pores, and interstices are admired and consumed, always at a price. The same applies to the courtyards and other built environments.

An even closer connection between bodily presence and the liminal space of the courtyard is established through the motif of human trash. As depicted earlier, the automated courtyard is not able to distinguish people from waste, which means that the automation protocol, once launched, is dangerous to trespassers. But the courtyard trope is also evoked by the purge of the caravan park: the car depot for the security corporation's vehicles, where the cars are washed after the operation, is an unfinished automated yard like the one within the ellipse house:

The courtyard had been chosen as the cleansing site because of the phenomenal sewerage it possessed. This was due to the automated courtyard that was still under construction; the plumbing remained to be installed. Most of the courtyard consisted of robust latticework

with concrete flooring underneath. And the empty concrete space under the latticework – it had direct access to the sewage system. Perfection.⁹⁸ (KV, 184)

As the narrator remarks, the unfinished installation of the automated system makes the location ideal for the messy work of rinsing the bodily secretions and removing all the pieces of clothing, buttons, and broken toys that are found from the vehicles. Both courtyards depicted in *Karsintavaihe* are interwoven with violent imagery and processes that degrade human dignity. In these two settings, *Karsintavaihe* connects automation, human body, liminal and interstitial spaces such as the courtyard, waste, and violence. The unwanted objects – trespassers within the ellipse house, occupants of the caravan park – are related to excrement and waste that must be drained from the system. These types of metaphorization have been thoroughly researched within genocide studies. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, whose work revolves around various aspects of modernity and postmodernity – or, as he defines them, solid modernity and liquid modernity – argues in his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* ([1989] 2001) that the Holocaust was not a deviation within rational, modern development but rather a phenomenon produced by the very essence of modernity. By this Bauman ([1989] 2001) refers to the modern impulse to produce order, which manifests itself through bureaucratism, taxonomy, division of labor, and such. Bauman presents these tendencies with the powerful metaphor of gardening:

Modern culture is garden culture. It defines itself as the design for an ideal life and a perfect arrangement of human conditions. It constructs its own identity out of distrust of nature. [. . .] Modern genocide, like modern culture in general, is a gardener's job. It is just one of the many chores that people who treat society as a garden need to undertake. If garden design defines its weeds, there are weeds wherever there is a garden. And weeds are to be exterminated. Weeding out is a creative, not a destructive activity. It does not differ in kind from other activities which combine in the construction and sustenance of the perfect garden. (Bauman [1989] 2001, 92)

While Bauman ([1989] 2001, 91) describes the order-making impulse as an aesthetic aspect of modern genocide, it could be seen as a utopian activity, as the gardener's actions are dictated by a vision of a bettered society. This is even strengthened by the millenarian undercurrents of modern totalitarian movements. The work of the modern genocider is thus the work of a utopianist.

In Verronen's novel, the gardening theme is introduced through the ellipse house but also at the paratextual level. The title of the novel, *Karsintavaihe* ('Elimination Phase'), is ambiguous: the Finnish word *karsinta* signifies elimination but can be used to describe the pruning of a tree or a bush and trimming in a more general sense. Together with the eerie depiction of the automation of the courtyard and the topic of overpopulation, the gardening trope links the novel with modernity's darkest moments. Elimination – or pruning, as it appears in the novel – is a rational and

98. Piha oli valittu puhdistuspaikaksi, koska siellä oli loistava viemäröinti. Rakenteilla oli automaattipiha, mutta siihen kuuluvia putkistoja ei vielä ollut asennettu paikoilleen. Joten suurin osa pihasta oli tukevaa ritilää, jonka alla oli tyhjää betoniseinäistä ja -lattiaista tilaa – josta oli yhteys viemäriverkkoon. Täydellistä.

carefully designed attempt to fulfill a utopian project by means of forced migration and mass murder. It is the impulse for order, as suggested by Bauman: the earmark of modernity.

Karsintavaihe, however, approaches the topic from a new perspective: the depiction of the self-sowing and self-pruning garden is a tangible way to represent the technologically altered state of the order-making impulse. In the courtyard of the ellipse house, all the maintenance work is hidden under the ground. In the purge scene of the caravan park, structures of the same kind – the skeleton of the yet to be installed courtyard – enable the security corporation to wash their hands in both the literal and metaphorical senses. The novel suggests that the processes of order-making are hidden and masked. Moreover, hiding the operational logistics is a way to reduce human participation. Technology in these scenes is not merely a technical solution but a social structure – a social machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 90) – designed to eliminate the involvement of humans or citizen agents.

Moreover, by depicting a hidden order beneath the surface of the everyday life, *Karsintavaihe* evokes a notion that has been studied under the label of 'postmodern paranoia' (Bywater 1990; Fisher 1992). The paranoia, which William Bywater (1990, 80) defines with the help of David Shapiro's work *Neurotic Styles* ([1965] 1999), refers to the intense but extremely narrow focus of attention and the subject's intention of identifying and interpreting hidden truths or fragments of meaning within the mass of lies or nonmeaning. In the realm of art and literary criticism, paranoia translates itself into a highlighted suspiciousness and the critic's resistance to the authority of the text;⁹⁹ this is a characteristic feature of postmodernism¹⁰⁰ (Bywater 1990). In the case of *Karsintavaihe*, the paranoia looms over the narrative's main plotline – the search for the missing people – and is depicted through the automatic courtyards and their soon-to-be-concealed mechanical insides. These automated systems and spaces function as symbols of the hidden truth that needs to be deciphered resonate with Jameson's (1991) version of the postmodern paranoia. In what he calls the 'high-tech paranoia' (Jameson 1991, 38), a mode of popular literature, Jameson (1991) detects and highlights the 'mesmerizing' representations of technologies. The captivating power of these representations of technology lies in the fact that, according to Jameson, technology has become a unique 'privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp; the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself' (Jameson 1991, 37–38). Technology, in other words, has gained a special position as a meta-metaphor of postmodernity. From Jameson's point of view, the representations of technologies are such an elemental part of the fictions of late modernity that they could be approached as a 'postmodern sublime' (Jameson 1991, 49). While the sublime is too bold a notion for *Karsintavaihe*, it is clear that the novel

99. The notion of suspicion as a defining feature of the interpretation process dates back to Paul Ricœur's concept of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion.' Ricœur famously coined Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as 'the three masters of suspicion,' whose theories, according to him, can all be classed as theories of false consciousness and who thus promote methods of overcoming it by acts of interpretation. (Ricœur [1970] 2008, 32–36) For a more in-depth exploration of the similarities between Ricœur's and Bywater's views, see Fisher (1992).

100. In addition to postmodernism, paranoia has been connected to modernity and modernist thinking; see Trotter (2001) and Farrell (2007).

thematizes the order-making impulse (or network of power, as Jameson would have it), is imbued with representational difficulties, and addresses these difficulties with its courtyard tropes.

The foregoing analyses suggest that the courtyard trope demonstrates the *modus operandi* of modernity – the order-making – while it simultaneously highlights the postmodern problematics of representation. The courtyard can be read as a deliberate attempt to renew the imagery of these themes. The automated courtyard brings the horrors of modernity within the reach of everyday citizens; it is a domesticated version of the concentration camp, a residential house turned into a purge site, an atrocity hidden in plain sight, between our homes, covered with flowers.

Navigating Dystopian Spaces in Kirkkaan selkeää ('Bright and Clear')

A notable change of tone takes place between *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää*. The former is a depiction of an ongoing development – as the title says, a phase, a period with a millenarian expectation of the coming rupture – whereas in *Kirkkaan selkeää* the horizon of expectation has been reached and left behind. *Kirkkaan selkeää* is a story of a world after. An independent sequel to *Karsintavaihe*, the novel takes off where the previous narrative ends. Masses of people have been displaced from the cities of Europe. In order to prevent a looming pandemic, European countries quarantine most of the continent's southwestern regions, including Portugal and Spain. As the control on the borders gets tighter, societal rules seem to get looser. Workers struggle in slave-like conditions, and the differentiation between social classes leads to extreme segregation. Apart from social and economic difficulties, a further challenge is posed by climate change and an abrupt increase in shortwave solar radiation. In addition to walls on national and continental borders as well as between segregated neighborhoods, the European societies set up roofs and domes for overhead protection. The sky above the continent is indisputably 'bright and clear,' but deadly in terms of radiation exposure.

Kirkkaan selkeää is constructed with two distinct narratives and two different perspectives. The first narrative voice belongs to the protagonist of the novel, who is one of the survivors of the 'elimination phase' depicted in *Karsintavaihe*. She inherits an unreasonable amount of debt but manages to pay it back by being hired as a guinea pig for a staged documentary film of an extreme surgical makeover (KS, 9–16). Several clothing sizes smaller and a lot shorter, the protagonist stumbles upon a crew of hot-air ballooners and imposes herself on them to secure a living (KS, 17–22). After mastering the art of flying the solar balloon, which runs on air heated by solar radiation, she becomes a balloon pilot. Leaving her hometown in Finland, she makes her way to mainland Europe. Like the black swan, a metaphor for a highly unexpected occurrence (Taleb 2010), she successfully guides her black balloon across the continent, thriving in conditions where most people are unable to survive. She first works as a balloon pilot for a group of Danish climate scientists gathering data on the weather anomalies (KS, 32–91); she then travels to Portugal and takes part in a human-hunt of undocumented immigrants (KS, 97–115); performs balloon numbers for an international betting show (KS, 116–34); and finally works as a shoreline cleaner, gathering toxic waste along the coasts of Portugal and France (KS, 160–80). During her travels, she makes friends

and loses them, travels by land, by sea and in the air, and switches jobs, countries, and vehicles. In a constant state of metamorphosis, the protagonist refuses herself any attachment or sentimentality: she absorbs everything but feels nothing. At the end of the novel, she gives up her balloon and settles into a nature dome, an artificial ecosystem built in Finnish Lapland (KS, 191–211).

Alongside the protagonist's travel narrative, another voice and plotline appear. Narrated in short, fragmentary paragraphs that are marked by italics, this character titles himself the 'hidden coordinator' (*piilokoordinaattori*). The coordinator's account comments on the macro-scale changes taking place in the world; moreover, he occasionally observes the protagonist and seems to possess a limited capability to direct her travels around the continent. The narration of the novel thus juxtaposes the micro-level of the protagonist with the macro-perspective of the coordinator, but from time to time these two perspectives intertwine. During her travels, the protagonist gains knowledge of the regulation mechanisms that have caused the increase in solar radiation as well as leading to an abundance of other dystopic trajectories, a development that has been created by the coordinator and his peers; the coordinator, on the other hand, cannot help but admire the protean survival skills of the protagonist.

Although the protagonist, characters, and setting differentiate *Kirkkaan selkeää* from the first novel of the duology, the two narratives are in many ways intertwined. As the following analysis demonstrates, *Kirkkaan selkeää* continues to address the same themes and employs the same spatial tropes as its predecessor. I begin my exploration of the novel by looking at how movement and the means of transportation depicted in the novel modify the perspective of the narrative, and how this affects the spatial experience. After observing the bearings of mobility and movement, this subchapter will then move on to examine various forms of enclosure that contrast movement.

DISCONNECTED: MOVEMENT AND PERSPECTIVE

Kirkkaan selkeää is a narrative of drifting and floating. The protagonist of the novel has no home or any permanent place of residence; instead, she is attached to the black solar balloon, her only worldly possession. As a pilot of the solar balloon, the protagonist is at the mercy of winds, the weather, and the sun. In the following excerpt, the protagonist is addressed by Anne, her boss in the climate project. Anne is pleased with the protagonist's skill in handling her balloon:

– Simultaneously, we're starting to get a hold on what's happening to the actual weather, Anne told me. – You've been very helpful. You can't miss the air currents because you can't burn. You don't even vent too much.

No-one had told me that unregulated floating was important, but Svend had brought up meteorological balloons. I had most likely imitated those things, although my balloon wasn't able to fly nearly as high as they could. Anyway, I was glad my attempts had been useful.¹⁰¹ (KS, 66)

101. – Samalla on alkanut selvitä, mitä oikealle säälle on tapahtumassa, Anne kertoi. – Siinä sinusta on ollut paljon hyötyä. Et pysty hukkaamaan ilmavirtauksia, kun et voi polttaa. Et edes auo venttiilejä liikaa.

In the passage above, the solar balloon that the protagonist pilots is praised for its lack of steering capability. Free-floating, it turns out, is the best way to collect data for the climate project that the protagonist is assisting. As it is situated in the early phases of the narrative, the scene attracts a symbolical reading: the free-floating solar balloon is a materialization of the protagonist's ability to survive in the postapocalyptic world. Her random, accidental wandering around the continent is a survival story but also an analysis of the forces moving society. The protagonist, with a loose itinerary and even a looser set of morals, is thus a sensitive indicator of the current state of the novel's world.

Although sensitive to the changes around her, the protagonist is simultaneously detached from society. Positioning her up in the air, the narrative underlines her close contact with the natural forces, the winds, and the air currents. The protagonist uses hardly any cultural or technological means to combat the elements; as Anne says in the excerpt, the solar balloon cannot burn – fire being a classic symbol for the human taming of the elements of nature. The protagonist's intimacy with nature thus signifies distance from culture; the role of an indicator is also that of the onlooker and outsider. This point of view is also presented on the level of plot, as the protagonist moves from one group of people to another, changing friends and allegiances as often as she does job assignments.

Ballooning as a mode of transport has a very specific set of inter- and extratextual associations: in his essay, Paul Keen (2006) observes the English 'balloomania' that followed the first manned balloon flights in France in 1783. Keen (2006, 508, 523–24) makes a compelling case by presenting the ballooning frenzy as a conflict between the two dominant cultural trajectories of the enlightened eighteenth century. In the public discourse – literary journals, plays, poems, ballads, satirical cartoons, almanacs, and other forms of oral and print culture – ballooning came to be presented as a scientific and intellectual enterprise, the herald of progress (Keen 2006). Simultaneously, it was seen as a symptom of the hunger for spectacle of the modern, novelty-admiring culture: put simply, a sign of societal and cultural decline (Keen 2006). The case of ballooning shows how the Enlightenment project of creating public curiosity around the realm of science and discovery descended into crisis, not because of unpopularity but precisely because of its newly gained favor (Keen 2006, 522–23). As Keen puts it, '[t]he dream of a public culture depended as much on the adequate regulation of popular interest as on its actual encouragement' (Keen 2006, 522). The institutions and spokespeople of the new enlightened publicity were set aback by their own success, as the ballooning frenzy spread and developed into a trend; instead of educating people, which was the effect the intellectuals sought, it seemed to evoke symptoms of undesirable mass hysteria.

How, then, does this relate to *Kirkkaan selkeää* and its use of the ballooning trope? Interestingly, the problem of public awareness is brought up on the very first page of the novel. In a section narrated by the hidden coordinator, the speaker expresses a cynical view of the political paralysis of the public:

Kukaan ei ollut kertonut minulle, että säätelemätön ilmassa pysyminen oli tärkeää, mutta Svend oli maininnut säähavaintopallot. Niitä kai olin huomaamattani jäljitellyt, vaikka en päässyt likikään yhtä korkealle. Hyvä jos siitä oli ollut hyötyä.

Back in the day, I used to think that if people were to recognize all the ways that they were being deceived, they would immediately revolt. I haven't held that belief for a long time. Now I think that if everything came out, nothing would happen.¹⁰² (KS, 5)

In this passage, the public exposure of the mechanics of deception is stripped of its potential; the speaker claims that the audience is too disillusioned to take interest in their own matters. As the story progresses, the public audience that is represented in *Kirkkaan selkeää* craves the spectacle – almost as a haunting memory of the balloon frenzy of the 1780s – as the second chapter of the novel shows in a flashback about how the protagonist is able to negotiate herself out of an inhuman debt with the help of a TV documentary (KS, 10–13).

The tension between the spectacle as a sign of decline and public awareness as a progress-driving force is brought about in many other instances within the narrative. As Keen (2006) suggests, ballooning in the eighteenth century was an arena where concern over these trajectories was voiced. This is also the role played by the trope in Verronen's novel: The protagonist's first assignment as a new balloon pilot is to collect climate data for a group of dissident scientists. The aim of the group is to prove that the extreme weather conditions and the increase in shortwave UV radiation are not side effects of climate change but developments that are human-made and consciously regulated. The publication of the data is, however, thwarted by a clever propaganda campaign, and the protagonist, looking for new sources of livelihood, ends up performing circus tricks for an international betting agency. In other words, the protagonist and her balloon proceed from scientific research to the betting industry. Science and publicity, the two constituents of ballooning in eighteenth-century England, remain present in the twenty-first-century dystopian novel. Moreover, with the voice of the hidden coordinator, *Kirkkaan selkeää* recreates the composition of the eighteenth-century public debate: above the crowd, there is the disillusioned and cynical observer, an authority that makes value judgments and directs the public eye where they deem necessary. This power structure is only dismantled at the end of the novel, wherein authority is ceded from the hidden coordinator to the protagonist (KS, 211).

The balloon's role as a symbol for epistemic endeavor is mainly rooted to a change in perspective. In addition to making humans airborne, ballooning had the revolutionary aspect of granting the aeronauts the bird's eye view (see Keen 2006, 514). This is highlighted in one of the most well-known works of ballooning fiction, Jules Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon* ([1869] 2002), which is a story of African exploration and the search for the source of the Nile. In the novel, the narrator highlights the views from the balloon over the landscape below (Verne [1869] 2002, 153). Ballooning, in Verne's adventure novel, is not only a means of reaching the continent of Africa but of seeing it as well. As a literary trope, ballooning is closely associated with the panoramic view, which refers to seeing the landscape from an elevated position. The nineteenth-century panorama was a popular medium at the time but, as Ameel (2021)

102. Ajattelin joskus, että jos ihmiset saisivat tietää, millä kaikilla tavoilla heitä vedätetään, he tekisivät vallankumouksen heti.

En ole enää pitkään aikaan ollut sitä mieltä. Nyt arvelen, että jos kaikki paljastuisi, mitään ei tapahtuisi.

points out, the roots of the panoramic gaze in literature are significantly older. The all-seeing and all-knowing perspective of panoramic view can be traced back to the Greek epic, where it appeared in the form of *teichoscopy*, the view from the wall. In dramaturgy, the *teichoscopy* is the established practice of having a character describe events that supposedly take place outside the stage; with the *teichoscopy* technique, the focus is placed upon the viewing character, who functions as a mediator of the events taking place beneath them (Pavis 1998, 381). The tradition of *teichoscopy* links the panoramic view with epistemological questions of knowing and perceiving, and the relation between showing and telling, mimesis and diegesis. Comparing the traditional technique with Verronen's novel, one can conclude that the *teichoscopy* or panoramic view functions in *Kirkkaan selkeää* as it does in the Greek epic: instead of merely guiding the reader's attention to the developments of the storyworld, the panoramic view underlines the observer's role, and renders her as the point of interest.

However, Verronen's balloonist also modifies the trope of panoramic perspective. In Verronen's contemporary novel, visibility plays a lesser role than in Verne's colonial romance or the Romantic pictorial tradition, the latter of which is considered the most influential handling of the panoramic perspective in Western art. The protagonist downplays the importance of visual perception ('visuals were inaccurate because of the monotony of the landscape'¹⁰³ (KS, 21)). Instead of her eyes, she observes the journey with her body and mainly with her palmtop. In any case, the observations of the pilot are not of any real significance, as the valuable information – the weather data – is collected by the research team and its technological equipment. Unlike in Verne's vision, scientific discovery in Verronen's dystopia is not carried out by means of empirical observation but by throwing oneself on the mercy of the winds and air currents. In this setting, the role of the observer is challenged. The truth, in the postmodern novel, is a chaotic thing, hidden beneath endless sets of data; patterns that need to be identified and codes that need to be cracked. This is the exact opposite of the conceptual history of the panorama, which has been linked to the nineteenth-century prison design of the panopticon and Foucault's (1986) analysis of it as a disciplinary technique. The panoramic perspective, bound up as it is with the techniques of power and surveillance, seems to be under attack in the novel. Instead of granting the subject a position of power, the panoramic view offers encrypted information, landscapes that are enclosed and air currents that need to be calculated with computers. Power, in this scenario, has been subjugated by information, and, instead of disciplinary practices, the novel's rulers consolidate their position with risk assessment protocols.

The panoramic perspective of the balloon can be linked with the openness of Verronen's wilderness tropes. As stated in the previous chapter, Verronen's wildscapes are vast and open spaces that provide the protagonist an open view. This, of course, resonates with the panoramic perspective. Another connecting element is the underlying danger: open spaces render the subject visible and vulnerable. Similarly, ballooning, as smooth and swift as it is, makes the protagonist an easy target for both the elements, such as winds, storms, and UV radiation, and human interference. *Kirkkaan selkeää* and its ballooning protagonist can be seen as the most extreme version of Verronen's spatial poetics of openness: a protagonist that travels through

103. [N]äköhavainnot olivat epätarkkoja, kun maisema oli yksitoikkoinen.

the landscape without actually being in contact with the ground – or having much control over her route, or direction, even – is truly an isolated and detached figure.

The protagonist's isolated point of view and her physical and mental detachment from the society on the ground give the character an erroneous sense of superiority. After she reaches the quarantined areas of Spain and Portugal (KS, 97), this stance is confirmed by her choice of occupation, as she takes up the task of hunting down undocumented immigrants. Physical distance – the altitudes she is able to reach with her balloon – is turned into emotional and, more importantly, moral distance when she accepts her position as a manhunter. To such a degree, she is a corrupt counterpart of Lumi, the protagonist of the preceding novel: both of them focus on tracking people, but with opposing intentions and outcomes. *Kirkkaan selkeää* opens with the protagonist, Tiksu, hunting down a sickly chipless¹⁰⁴ person and handing him over to the patrol of a security corporation (KS, 6–8). In this regard, the panoramic view and the ballooning trope reveal their other side, the historical burden of colonialism: as *Five Weeks in a Balloon* and many other ballooning fictions of the nineteenth century demonstrate, airborne travel functioned as a vehicle for the colonial gaze. With the bird's eye view, the Western explorer and conqueror was able to approach the unknown area as *terra nullius*, nobody's land; a land that was void of legal ownership, history, culture, or even human presence. The superiority granted by the altitudes thus anticipated territorial conquest. Verronen's dystopian novel, although a product of a postcolonial era, utilizes these historical connotations to express asymmetries of power.

The asymmetrical position of the protagonist and the intertextual and generic connotations that the narrative evokes through the ballooning motif have a profound effect on the spatiality of the novel. Instead of lived spaces, the spaces of *Kirkkaan selkeää* are landscapes that the protagonist observes or terrains that she must cross. The protagonist's role as an indicator of the current developments and her bird's eye view over the novel's spatial realm generate a sense of navigating the space rather than living in it. The pursuit of navigating space is further highlighted with the journey plot formula. Before reaching the midpoint of the novel, the protagonist has already traveled from Finland to Denmark, and onward to Spain and Portugal. By emphasizing the traveling of the protagonist, the novel guides the reader's interest in the alternation of landscape and locations and highlights their sequential nature rather than their unique characteristics. Alternatively, the journey plot can be seen as a balancing element for the protagonist's coincidental drifting; as Kai Mikkonen has suggested, the travel as a motif and metaphor increases narrativity, 'since the idea of travel personalizes the experience of time and space through the subjective perspective' (Mikkonen 2007, 302).

The emphasis on travel also gives *Kirkkaan selkeää* further genre associations beyond dystopia. Dystopias rarely involve a journey plot formula, which separates them from their predecessor genre, utopian fiction. As Fátima Vieira (2010, 7) demonstrates, the utopian formula consists of a traveler's entry to an unknown world, where they are granted a guided tour, after which the traveler returns home, bringing with them a message of a better society. Dystopian novels, on the contrary, tend to

104. In the novel's world, every citizen is expected to install an electronic chip in the neck vertebra; a chipless person is considered an outlaw.

grant their protagonists less room to roam, the confined spaces being a symbol of the distress faced by individuals within the dystopian social order.¹⁰⁵ In *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the utopian resides in the protagonist's migration to the Iberian Peninsula, to an area that gains a sense of frontier Romanticism. The Iberian part of the narrative even includes an episode that emulates most features of a utopian narrative: the protagonist and her companions enter the enclosed island of Berlenga and are forced to stay on the island because of a storm (KS, 160–68), which resembles the castaway theme of many utopian narratives. In a novel that is mostly set in deserts, the outskirts of cities and abandoned holiday camps, Berlenga stands out, as it is a restricted safe haven for the super-rich, a utopian enclave within a dystopian world. In addition to literary utopia, the journey plot formula employed by the novel might associate it with apocalyptic and postapocalyptic fiction. In these genres, the loose and vagrant lifestyle of the protagonists emphasizes the disjointed reality and the breakdown of organized human society.

The protagonist, although a master in navigating the hostile environments, faces a challenge in the form of a dancing frenzy depicted in the novel. During her journey, the protagonist observes the trend of large-scale dancing events, which gather thousands or even tens of thousands of people. With the help of medical stimulants, the dancers are able to spend days, sometimes even a week, dancing hypnotically. The aftereffects of a dancing event are depicted in the following scene:

Lasse and Irina returned from the dancehall energetic and in good spirits. They swore this time wouldn't be their last and took the recovery dose right away.

'There were lighting panels with instructions for beginners,' Irina said. 'Simple and specific instructions. You got the warm and fuzzy feeling of being looked after.'

'Without the guidance I wouldn't have realized that you have to take the recovery dose when you're still conscious,' Lasse said.

'And now, we're off to bed. Do not try to wake us up. They say it's either difficult or impossible, and unwise.'

I let them sleep in. Unfortunately, the pooch didn't get the hint. All the dog knew was that there was something wrong with its owner, as she didn't wake up to it licking her face or shoving with muzzle or paw. The poor animal got scared and howled for hours despite my reassurances.¹⁰⁶ (KS, 175)

105. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. In *Brave New World*, for example, the protagonists take a trip to a Savage Reservoir outside the World State.

106. Lasse ja Irina palasivat tanssihallista hilpeinä ja energisinä – ja vanhoivat, että menisivät toistekin. He ottivat heti toipumisannokset.

– Siellä oli aloittelijoille ohjeita valotaululla, Irina iloitsi. – Tarkkoja ja yksinkertaisia ohjeita. Tuli sellainen lämmin tunne, että meistä pidetään huolta.

– Jos ei olisi opastettu, en olisi älynnyt, että toipumisannos pitää ottaa nyt kun on vielä voimissaan, Lasse säesti. – Ja sitten vain nukkumaan. Älä yritä herättää. Se on kuulemma vaikeaa tai mahdotonta, ja epäviisasta.

Annoin heidän nukkua. Valitettavasti turrikka ei ymmärtänyt tilannetta, se hoksasi vain, että sen emännässä oli jotakin outoa. Tämä ei herännyt kasvojen nuolemiseen eikä kuonolla tai tassuilla tönimiseen. Eläinparka hätääntyi ja ulisi tuntikausia rauhoittelustani huolimatta.

After dancing for the first time, the protagonist's two friends are instantly hooked. In the excerpt, the two characters point out how safe and secure they felt during the event, and that the feeling of being looked after is an elemental part of the allure of the events. Simultaneously, the scene implies that danger awaits: the warning that waking up the dancers is 'difficult or impossible, and unwise' and the pet dog's reaction underscore that sleep after the dancing event resembles death.

The dancing frenzy is a cultural motif that is often related to societal and existential crises. In the Late Middle Ages, the pictorial motif known as *danse macabre* ('dance of death') became a means to represent death, especially the potent threat of plague and famine, and its presence in the society. The key message of the motif is that death affects every estate, the rich and the poor; regardless of age or beauty, one cannot escape it. In *Kirkkaan selkeää* as well, the dancing frenzy coincides with the fear of the epidemic and quarantine measures. Interestingly, the novel's dance events share the societal message of the unity and solidarity of humankind that is evoked by the *danse macabre* motif, as the dance events are the only occasion where people of different ranks (with different color codes) still meet and interact with each other.¹⁰⁷ Another instance of a dancing frenzy are the marathon dances that became popular during the Depression of the 1930s. The phenomenon is famously captured by Horace McCoy's novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* ([1935] 2010), which examines the dance marathons as a form of exploitation that was based both on economic inequality and the distorted culture of show business. The dance events of *Kirkkaan selkeää* bring together both the connotations depicted above. They are occasions and rituals that arise from the fear of disease and death, but also another variation on the theme of spectacle that haunts the novel and its predecessor, *Karsintavaihe*. Moreover, the dance events also have a specific spatial aspect: they hinder the protagonist's physical and epistemological progress. In Denmark, while the protagonist is working for the weather research group, a dance event halts the investigations of the group (KS, 70–72), and in France, as the protagonist is heading back to Finland, her friends' dance enthusiasm nearly stops their journey (KS, 175–76). This can be connected to the dance events' nature as mass events and as a form of comforting and strictly controlled entertainment,¹⁰⁸ something that is suggested in Lasse's and Irina's comments. In terms of spatiality, dance has been connected to a loss of orientation. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, 128) shows, dancing is a specific form of movement that 'dramatically abrogates historical time and oriented space.' By this Tuan (1977, 128–29) means that all the aspects of movement that make up dancing, such as the presence of music or some kind of a beat, and the freedom to move sideways and backward instead of merely progressing forwards, render the dancer's experience of time and space exceptionally loose.

107. This might derive from dance's role as an element of ritual, or its association with the carnivalesque; the latter, especially, seems like a plausible claim. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, 154–66), the carnival played a central role in the popular culture of the Middle Ages, representing a counter force to the official culture that was dominated by the church and the court. In Bakhtin's carnivalesque, high becomes low and low becomes high; in other words, distinctions between the ranks are blurred, very much like in *Kirkkaan selkeää*'s dance events.

108. In Huxley's *Brave New World* ([1932] 1982), dance is part of the soma ritual, a form of dulling entertainment that is meant to keep the citizens satisfied and obedient.

AGORAPHOBIA: MOTIFS OF ENCLOSURE

The geography of *Kirkkaan selkeää* is dominated by an element of partition, as Europe has put the Iberian Peninsula in quarantine. In the novel's society, a fear of epidemic diseases that supposedly ravage the continent of Africa has led to extreme control measures: The southern borders of Europe are sealed and immigrants crossing the border are hunted down, an operation that employs the protagonist and her balloon crew. In addition to the border control, quarantine centers are set up on the Spanish–French border. The early introduction (KS, 27–28) of the figure suggests that the quarantine will play a central role in the narrative; this is confirmed when the protagonist decides to cross the border and enter the quarantined area (KS, 97).

However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that the border is porous. The reader receives the first hint of this in the early pages of the novel, when the protagonist observes dancers of African origin on a cruise ship and wonders whether the quarantine truly exists and for what reason (KS, 27–28). When the protagonist decides to enter the quarantined zone, it happens in good order, without any trouble (KS, 96–97), and after months spent in the quarantined area she recrosses the border in an equally casual manner (KS, 172–73). As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that the seemingly closed border functions more like an open and porous border zone, as it is an area of intense inter- and transaction. The novel's depiction of the border zone reflects developments taking place in academic border studies:¹⁰⁹ the scholarly discussion regarding borders has, to an increasing extent, started to distance itself from the essentialist understandings of borders by emphasizing the notions of permeability and border practice (see, e.g., Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012). In the case of *Kirkkaan selkeää*, however, the narrative underlines the dissonance between the public understanding of the border and its actual functioning as a permeable border zone. One might suppose that the frailty of the quarantine border would play out as a positive, antidystopian element within the grim narrative. The effect is quite the opposite: the insignificance of the quarantine and the detected dissonance between the public image and the true status of the border add to the mood of suspicion, paranoia, and cynicism.

Instead of the border trope, *Kirkkaan selkeää* develops another spatial motif that becomes central for the whole narrative – and the previous novel, too. While traveling Europe and observing the empty landscapes and small units of people that she discovers, the protagonist of *Kirkkaan selkeää* inevitably comes to the conclusion that the continent is in the process of closing up. In the novel's world, open spaces are roofed and fenced in, and a virtual world replaces physical activities: 'No one cared for a walk on the beach nor a dip in the cold sea. They refused to understand the pleasure of such activities'¹¹⁰ (KS, 63), as the protagonist laments. These societal and psychological tendencies are reflected in the novel's representation of spaces and places. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist encounters shelters, canopies, sheds, tunnels, covered squares and streets, and people who refuse to leave their safe indoor spaces. A culture of agoraphobia has taken over the novel's world.

109. This also applies to the preceding novel, *Karsintavaihe*, which depicts a world of flows and large-scale migrations and transfers of population.

110. Kukaan ei lähtenyt kanssani kävelemään rannalle saati pulahtelemaan kylmään mereen eikä suostunut ymmärtämään tuollaisten toimintojen nautinnollisuutta.

Even the landscapes navigated by the protagonist are enclosed in a very tangible sense. While flying in Denmark with the scientists, the protagonist acknowledges that the most hazardous phase of each flight is landing, as open landing spots are scarce (KS, 53). This is due to the crop protection chemicals that are sprayed on the energy fields, and the roofings that are being installed over the organic fields. Both protection procedures are taking place because of the increasing ultraviolet radiation. Like plants, people need protection from the radiation, a need that modifies the built environment. The increase in solar radiation, on the other hand, has made solar energy more accessible and encouraged the construction of solar panels and large solar plants that have taken over parking lots, roadsides, and wastelands (KS, 53, 78).

The novel's take on the landscape enclosure is more complex than the surface would suggest, as the depiction of the solar radiation is connected to the environmentalist rhetoric of pollution. Like pollutant emissions, radiation is ubiquitous, a furtive threat that falls upon people without notice. In his discussion of the pollution trope,¹¹¹ Garrard (2004, 5–13) traces the history of the concept and its recent use in postwar environmentalist writing. He specifically addresses the difficulty of detection and perception of the pollutants as a foundational component of the trope. As the human senses are not able to detect pollutants, awareness of the problem creates a sense of uncertainty, even paranoia. The pollution trope exemplifies the friction between the lay understanding and the scientific-technological authority of modern society. Referring to Ulrich Beck's notion of the 'expropriation of the senses,' Garrard (2004, 11–13) sees the pollution trope voicing the anxiety of the layman, while the trope itself takes part in the cultural and historical process of redefining – and, most importantly, expanding – the meaning of pollution, contamination, and toxicity. In his later reflection on the role of the layman understanding of environmental risks, Beck has pointed out that 'the technological monopoly on the perception of hazards' (Beck 2018, 75) has a detrimental effect on the trust between the public audience and scientific community. A similar lack of trust and spirit of doubt can be detected in the world of *Kirkkaan selkeää*.

In *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the pollution trope is modified, and thus contradictory. By presenting sunlight as the immaterial hazard (instead of, for example, noxious emissions), Verronen's novel blurs the division between human-induced pollution and nature. This categorization is made even more complex as, throughout the narrative, the protagonist discovers more and more hints that lead her to believe that the radiation issue has a backstory that has been concealed from the public. She becomes suspicious during the weather research project in Denmark, and her doubts are finally confirmed during her visit to Berlenga, the fortified island (KS, 163–67). As a storm traps the protagonist and the inhabitants of the island indoors, she learns in a conversation that the extreme radiation levels are the result of a climate engineering project. Ultraviolet radiation is thus, as a pollutant, both natural and manmade. However, the novel still retains the core of the pollution trope, which is the questioning of the individual's perception and the technological authority of knowledge, as coined by Beck (2018, 75): as the suspense of the narrative is built around the mystery of the

111. Lawrence Buell (2001, 30–54) refers to the same phenomenon with his notion of the 'toxic discourse.'

extreme radiation, the plot of the novel can be understood as the individual's revolt against the totalitarian monopoly on knowledge.

The landscape enclosure and protection against ultraviolet radiation is only one of the multiple examples of agoraphobia in *Kirkkaan selkeää*. The city dwellers and suburban populations alike all withdraw under their roofs and into small spaces, avoiding nature, noncultivated areas of land, and gatherings on the streets or other public spaces. The protagonist holds an opposition to these societal developments, and this opposition manifests itself through her spatial preferences and practices. As in *Karsintavaihe*, her anachronistic behavior is similarly a sign of dissidence: in *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the protagonist is associated with open places, expanses, and the experience of being in the open. Her occupation as a balloon pilot is, of course, the most tangible example of this association. But throughout the narrative the protagonist is depicted seeking open air or breaking out of closed constructions. In the excerpt below, the protagonist is at the beginning of her journey. She has boarded a ship that will take her to Denmark with her balloon. The protagonist has anticipated an opportunity to breathe fresh sea air, but her expectations are not met:

The voyage was a lot drearier than I had expected.

The worst part of it was that I couldn't roam around the outer decks. The panel sails with their solar cells had been placed there, as well as other equipment that assisted and secured the course of the ship. If willing to spend money, one could buy a cabin with a patio – but they were glazed, too. One could only smell the sea air through the ac machine.¹¹² (KS, 27)

The protagonist's desire to enjoy outdoor experiences is contrasted with the ship infrastructure that prevents access to the decks, as well as with the commodified experience that the sea passenger is able to purchase. In this case, both the technological and the commercial systems are presented to hinder and limit the individual's scope of agency. In this case, agoraphobic behavior is depicted as a symptom of larger sociopsychological changes that threaten the individual's autonomy.

Agoraphobia was clinically described by psychiatrist Carl Otto Westphal (1872), who coined it as a fear of large, open spaces. As many theoreticians have noted, the notion of agoraphobia has been a central part of the discourse on modern cities and urbanism from the nineteenth century onward (see Carter 2002; Reuter 2007; Vidler 1991). Instead of a merely diagnostic category, agoraphobia can thus be understood as a metaphor that summons the anxieties and criticisms evoked by urbanization, modern architecture, urban planning, and the societal and cultural developments linked to them (Bankey 2004; Vidler 1991, 35); as Anthony Vidler (1991) points out, agoraphobia appeared most often as a means to depict and examine urban alienation and estrangement. This background suggests that the presence of agoraphobic practices in *Kirkkaan selkeää* should be considered also in relation to the duology's

112. Laivamatka oli ankeampi kuin olin odottanut.

Ikävintä oli, että en voinut kuljeskella ulkokansilla. Siellä oli aurinkokennoin varustetut paneelipurjeet ja muuta laitteistoa, joka auttoi ja turvasi kulkua. Jos oli valmis maksamaan, saattoi ottaa hytin, johon kuului oma ulkoterassi – mutta terassitkin olivat lasitettuja. Meri-ilmaa pääsi haistelemaan vain ilmastointilaitteiden kautta.

previous novel *Karsintavaihe* and its particular focus on the juxtaposition of the city and the home. As Esther da Costa Meyer (1995) suggests in her influential essay on agoraphobia, the pathology derives its power from the division of space into public and private, as the phobia hinders the subject's ability to leave the private space that they consider safe. According to feminist scholars, Costa Meyer among them, this reflects agoraphobia's status as a gendered pathology (see also Davidson 2003). The first novel of the duology, *Karsintavaihe*, stages totalitarian development through urban planning and the protagonist's dissidence through her fascination for anachronistic housing solutions. In the second novel of the duology, the conflict between the public and the private occurs in a more latent form, through the metaphor of agoraphobia.

The agoraphobic reactions and practices that are staged in *Kirkkaan selkeää* have a clear connection to open spaces. This is reflected in the settings of the novel: The island of Berlenga, a safe haven for the rich, is dug into the rock. The Western Europe that the protagonist discovers during her travels is empty, as people have resorted to virtual reality. Even the manhunters of the Portuguese coast avoid open air at all costs and rely on robotically assembled strongholds (KS, 105). The fearful, nearly terror-stricken affect that is linked to open spaces in *Kirkkaan selkeää* resonates with the topic of population transfer, a key theme of the previous novel. Both novels highlight the experience of emptiness and the horror it evokes. *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää* seem to comment on earlier dystopias and their focus on the threat of population growth: in Verronen's novels, the cramped urban scenes of the dystopias of the 1960s and 1970s and the cyberpunk of 1980s are replaced with wide open plains that echo their emptiness.

As a work of dystopian fiction set in the future, *Kirkkaan selkeää* develops the metaphor of agoraphobia to the direction of science fiction. A culmination of the novel's take on agoraphobia is found at the end of the novel, which takes place in a complex of nature domes and wildlife and ecosystem sanctuaries located in Finnish Lapland. After traveling Europe, the protagonist settles down in the dome complex. In the excerpt below, the protagonist observes the dome complex for the first time:

I had the chance to take my time and marvel at the nature dome complex that spread over ten square kilometers and was still growing. The screen showed me the blueprint of the place, as well as impressive photos of different locations. The complex had an abundance of hotels and recreational and athletic facilities. On top of that, the complex had an array of closed domes, each with their own unique, closed ecosystem. The locker rooms had no windows, but the best hotel rooms had a direct view of the interior natural landscape.¹¹³ (KS, 193)

Later, she develops an interest in wildlife, polar bears especially, and is employed as a zookeeper in the zoo dome of the complex. The purpose of the dome complex is to

113. Saatoin kaikessa rauhassa ihmetellä kuvaruudulta kymmenien neliökilometrien laajuisen ja yhä kasvavan luontokupukompleksin pohjapiirrosta ja näyttäviä kuvia, jotka esittivät paikan eri osia. Varsinkin hotelleja ja huvittelu- ja urheiluharrastustiloja oli runsaasti. Lisäksi oli suljettuja kupuja, joihin kuhunkin oli rakennettu omanlaisensa, liki omillaan toimeen tuleva ekosysteemi. Siinä missä lokeroissa ei ollut ikkunoita lainkaan, parhaista hotellihuoneista avautui näkymä sisälle luontomaisemiin.

conserve endangered flora and fauna, but, as the passage above demonstrates, it serves the recreational industry as well.

The dome theme of *Kirkkaan selkeää* is a modification of the common science fiction trope that addresses the juxtaposition of the city and the countryside, as I have suggested elsewhere (Kankkunen 2017, 66–68). In this trope, the dome marks the enclosed realm of the city, highlighting its rejection of countryside, wilderness, and nature in general. In classic dystopias, such as *We*, Hannu Salama's *Amos ja saarelaiset* (1987), and Kari Hotakainen's *Bronks* (1993), the dome protects the sanctity and the purity of the community and its ideology: the rational technocracy of *We* or the Christian sect of *Amos ja saarelaiset* (Kankkunen 2017, 67). In science fiction and classic dystopias, the dome protects society's order and values, which makes it the keeper of the (seemingly) utopian ideals. In the dystopian tradition, these ideals are challenged by the protagonist and thus proven to be dystopian. The protagonist's revolt, then, involves a breakout from the dome and an escape into nature, a flight that resembles a pastoral retreat to nature and countryside.¹¹⁴ Verronen's version of the dome trope rewrites it in many ways: to begin with, the dome is not associated with urbanity but with wilderness. The utopian ideals that the society of *Kirkkaan selkeää* protects – covers under the dome – are thus associated with the peripheries instead of the urban centers of power. Since the dome complex is built to protect the disappearing wilderness, one might assume that the complex would be a testament to pristine nature and the last sphere of life that has not been modified by human interference, but, as the previous quotation demonstrates, the logics of the nature domes are quite the opposite. The dome complex is yet another variation of the courtyard trope of *Karsintavaihe*, a setting of nature that is rendered into a spectacle and commodified for the purposes of the market economy (Kankkunen 2017, 67–68). The sanctity that the dome system protects is the sanctity of the consumer community: the right to experience, the right to leisure, and the right to buy all this for a good price.

The novel's revision of the trope is made even more complex by the fact that, instead of it being the setting for the protagonist's daring revolt and a spatialization of the order that the dissident shatters, symbolically or tangibly, the dome of *Kirkkaan selkeää* functions rather as a setting for a compromise. In the following excerpt, the first-person narrator has just returned to her small room in one of the domes and plans to spend the evening there cozying up and watching a magnificent snowstorm:

I knew that the snowstorm had been arranged here for some major movie production and to test the domes' new regulation system. The large screen gave the impression that my

114. In *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the pastoral chasm between the urban and the rural environment is further played out in the protagonist's status as a vagrant character. She is a visitor in the countryside – a visitor who quite literally keeps her distance from the soil, as she travels in the air in her balloon. The social and geographical mobility of the protagonist and her employment in the gig economy all form a stark contrast to the values and lifestyle that have traditionally been associated with the countryside. As much as the novel aims to depict the loss of spatial agency as a general trait of the storyworld – a trajectory that affects the society as a whole – the viewpoint of the novel is limited to the urban dweller and her experiences. The storylines move between numerous rural and semirural landscapes but, as these landscapes are desolate and empty, the rural viewpoint is lost in the narrative.

locker room was at the top of the dome; but that was a simulation, that's all. But one had to accept some amount of simulation, otherwise it would be impossible to live.¹¹⁵ (KS, 205)

The mood of the episode wavers between comfort and resignation. The dome complex becomes the terminal point of the narrative and a safe haven for the protagonist – in other words, her home. Similarly, it is an enclosed and controlled environment, the kind of place that the protagonist has been avoiding throughout the narrative. The ending of *Kirkkaan selkeää* thus redefines and blurs the boundary between wilderness and culture or reality and simulation, leaving the protagonist to occupy a space that is both natural and manmade. Moreover, the scene also revises the division between private and public space; the simulation offers a technological solution to the anxiety of the agoraphobic subject, as it enables them to experience open spaces without truly being exposed to them. Having mapped the world's open spaces and confirmed their lack of real boundaries, the protagonist finally catches a glimpse of utopia within a closed system.

The analyses above have also highlighted the novels' ambiguity regarding the distinction between literary utopia and dystopia. Both novels involve various depictions of sites that function as utopian enclaves: these include the caravan park for the activists, the ellipse house and the automated courtyard for its residents, the island of Berlenga, and the nature domes in Lapland. This oscillation between the utopian and the dystopian can be interpreted as a characteristic of critical dystopia, the successor of the classical dystopian genre. In Verronen's novels, the presence of utopian counter-sites can also be interpreted as a demonstration of the effect of viewpoint and the heterogeneity of the depicted society; both novels seem to construct a society that is divided between separate actions and thus unable to dream of a jointly shared utopia.

Kirkkaan selkeää portrays a subject that observes, detects, and analyzes spatial conditions around them, and a society in which expropriation of the senses and general paranoia has led to a profound collapse in the public's willingness to engage with their environment. Juxtaposed with other works by Verronen, these two novels present spatial settings and tropes that have been reduced, commodified, limited, or otherwise altered in a manner that takes away their immediacy, individuality, and distinctiveness. But, as the ending of *Kirkkaan selkeää* suggests, the mediated and regulated space can, in some ways, provide experiences that nurture the human subject.

115. Tiesin, että lumimyrsky oli tilattu alueelle jotakin suurelokuvaa varten ja samalla myös uusien kupujen säätelyjärjestelmien testaamista varten. Kookkaan kuvaruudun luoma vaikutelma siitä, että koko kopperohuone oli kuvun huipulla, oli pelkkä simulaatio. Mutta jotkin simulaatiot oli pakko hyväksyä, muuten ei voinut elää.

Homecomings and Homesteading

This chapter focuses on the spaces and activities of homecoming and homesteading in Verronen's works. The homescapes of Verronen's fiction relate to the characters' identity-seeking activities, which makes them sites of complex psychological processes and dramatic events. A specific characteristic of homes in Verronen's narratives is that they are often accompanied by other highly suggestive and loaded spatial tropes; this 'spatial intertextuality,' as one could call it, connects Verronen's homescapes with various cultural and historical contexts but also makes deciphering them more demanding. In the author's earliest works, homes mainly serve as points of departure in stories that revolve around journeys, vagabond characters, and adventurous settings. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the role of homescapes remains trivial as the wanderers and drifters of Verronen's earlier works evolve into explorers, scientists, and researchers with an equally independent and restless disposition. Many of her latest works feature individuals or groups who are deprived of homes, such as indigenous peoples (*Vanhat kuviot*), undocumented immigrants (*Varjonainen*), or groups that depend upon modern state-run welfare services, such as prisoners (*Luotettava ohikulkija*) and children taken into custody (*Osallisuuden tunto*). In these narratives, the right to housing – and the concept of home, in general – is proven to be highly unjust and dependent on social and economic status as well as pure chance.

When Verronen's narratives eventually shift their focus on the home, it is one of intense dynamics. The act of homecoming, a trope that dominates many of Verronen's later works, often involves revisiting childhood and unraveling the trauma of dysfunctional family dynamics. Moreover, Verronen's works employ a set of very specific and distinctive imagery as well as plot patterns that convey the emotional intensity of homecomings. Her protagonists assume the roles of mercenaries, infiltrators, and partisans, while her plots involve dramatic events such as crime, murder, and matricide that associate homecomings with the emotionally charged genres of mystery fiction, crime fiction, and tragedy. Frequently appearing spatial settings such as islands and spatial activities like polar exploration underline the extreme and dramatic nature of homecoming.

Aside from homecomings, where characters return to a familiar homescape, Verronen's works of fiction often represent home in the context of homesteading, i.e., acquiring a new home or settling in a new place that then becomes home. Edward S. Casey ([1993] 2009, 290) considers homesteading not only as setting up a new place of

residence but also as a process that has a specific temporal dimension and orientation toward the future. In Verronen's narratives of homesteading, home is something that is actively chosen, established, and maintained. The process of homesteading might be a psychological and individualistic practice that calls for emotional work and introspection, such as in *Pieni elintila*, but it might just as well unfold as entering into new alliances with the place and its surroundings, a process of interaction and legwork, as in *Saari kaupungissa*. Either way, Verronen's narratives of homesteading employ the sense of dislocation just as much as they rely on the notion of feeling at home; they test the boundaries between the familiar and the strange.

The following subchapters explore the thoughts and patterns of movement as well as associative spaces and their meanings that revolve around homes in Verronen's novels *Pieni elintila* and *Saari kaupungissa*. *Pieni elintila* unfolds as a narrative where the centripetal ideas of homecoming are contrasted with centrifugal elements and other spaces that are introduced in the narrative through the protagonist's peculiar interests and hobbies. The novel employs classical literary tropes, such as the homecoming of the Greek epic and tragedy, and spatial concepts, such as the notion of living space (*elintila*), which presents itself in the novel's title. The following analysis of the novel unpacks these puzzling elements and considers their significance to the notion of home. The second novel analyzed in this chapter, *Saari kaupungissa*, extends the idea of home from the family, the household, and the built dwelling to the hometown. Homesteading, in this instance, refers to the protagonist's experiences while settling down in an alien city. The latter subchapter examines how the process of homesteading is mingled with allusions to earlier Helsinki literature and its trope of the arrival in the city, and the theme of pioneer farming in the Finnish family saga. The analysis observes the particular spatial tropes used in the novel, focusing especially on the island/islet and its complex functions in Verronen's works.

Before delving into the analyses, I introduce the concepts used in this chapter. These are home, homecoming and its literary trope *nostos*, and homesteading.

HOME (HOMECOMING; NOSTOS; HOMESTEADING)

In most contemporary conceptualizations of home, primacy is given to the idea of home as an intertwining of a place and a set of imaginations, emotions and cultural meanings; a concept that can best be understood as a 'relation between material and imaginative realms and processes' (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 22). Moreover, in cultural studies and human geography, the concept of home has increasingly been approached through the lens of homemaking practices (see, e.g., Wood and Beck 1994). This means that home is perceived as a social and cultural process that is dependent on activities that organize the material and social realm. These two perspectives are reflected in how home is understood in this study. As the following subchapters will demonstrate, Verronen's narratives that revolve around home attain a level of emotional and dramatic intensity that stands out among the works of the author and also among those of her contemporaries. These aspects of the home narratives can best be grasped by observing the symbols, themes, and spatializations that cluster around the concept of home in Verronen's works, and by looking for genre-specific narrative devices and tropes that the texts employ. The other frame of reference, the constructivist view on homemaking practices, comes forth in this study as we move from examining the internal dynamics of homes to how they relate to their

surroundings. This is, of course, a specifically spatial view of home and can be linked with the problematics of defining home and its limits; as Casey presents, home is 'something more than a house' yet at the same time 'home is also something less than a house' (Casey [1993] 2009, 299). Home exists and gains meaning in relation to other places.

Home, in this chapter, is most often approached in relation to the patterns of movement depicted in the narrative. This viewpoint serves the needs of literary analysis well, as it combines examination of the plot and events with that of the spaces and places of the narrative. However literary, this point of view is inspired by the pioneers of the spatial turn. For geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, 127–28), home is a place to withdraw into and venture from. A similar emphasis can be found in the thinking of Casey ([1993] 2009, 290), for whom home is the inevitable end point of any journey. For both scholars, home is a concept that gains its meaning in relation to movement and journey – and especially the idea of return. Casey ([1993] 2009, 115–16) presents that a place of 'full-fledged dwelling' must allow repeated return, in other words reaccessibility. Compared to the traditional ideas of home as a site of permanence and as a fixed location, Casey's notion of reaccessibility is markedly minimalistic and flexible, as it encompasses not only the sedentary but also the nomadic realizations of home: a tent might not have a permanent location but it surely allows for repeated return. The acts of repeated return give rise to 'felt familiarity,' the sense of *familiaris*, which in Casey's formulation refers to the emotional and intimate aspects of a dwelling place (Casey [1993] 2009, 115–16). Based on these formulations, the concept of home applied in this study pays specific attention to the acts of departure, arrival, and return, which often can be approached as variations on the theme of homecoming.

The following analyses of Verronen's homecomings are complemented with the examination of the *nostos* theme, as it is one of the literary influences for the author's homecoming narratives. *Nostos*, the tragic homecoming of the classic Greek literature, was traditionally linked with war heroes or exiled citizens and their return to the sphere of civilian life (Alexopoulou 2009, 7–11). This story-pattern is shared by both the Homeric epic and the classic Greek tragedy. As Marigō Alexopoulou (2009, 3–5) shows in her study, *nostos* focuses on an absent hero-figure returning home, but the scope of the topos is elaborated with a complex pattern of remembering and forgetting, disguise and recognition. Moreover, the ancient Greek homecoming is always ambivalent: the returning hero is potentially dangerous since he is in a transitional stage. Danger and, more importantly, tragedy await in the event of return, since the absence of the hero has significantly altered his home: the hero returns to a place that is not the same place he left – a true return is therefore impossible (Alexopoulou 2009, 3–5). This ambivalent quality of the homecoming lies at the heart of the *nostos* theme (Alexopoulou 2009, 3–5).

Many of Verronen's works of fiction revolve around a homebound journey that cannot be described as homecoming in the traditional sense. These narratives often involve a process of settling in, and a foregrounding of the interaction between the character and the place. Following Casey's ([1993] 2009, 290) distinction between journeys that end in homecoming – a return to a previously known homeplace – and those that result in homesteading, which means setting up a home in a new place, this study approaches the latter processes with the concept of homesteading. In his

conceptualization, Casey highlights the role that time plays in this spatial – or, better, placial – development:

The homesteading place is typically unknown to me, or known only from accounts given by others who have preceded me. But I am determined to settle down for a long term in this novel place. [. . .] In homesteading, then, we witness once more the deep alliance that can be effected between time and place. (Casey [1993] 2009, 290)

A person coming home might leave almost immediately, while the homesteader has to stay and establish a relationship with the place (Casey [1993] 2009, 291–93). In the following analyses, the notion of homesteading allows us to examine the valorization of self-sufficiency and isolationism in Verronen's fiction and demonstrates how these themes are interrelated to the idea of home.

Living Space and the Troubles of Homecoming in Pieni elintila ('The Tiny Living Space')

Pieni elintila is an ambiguous novel that presents a complex set of locations: past and present homes, islands, glaciers, and an apartment with surprising dimensions. The novel depicts three different homecomings and one experience of homesteading which are all embedded within a travel story. The protagonist, Natalia, is on the move, traveling within a group of islands, and her travelogue is interwoven with flashbacks to her personal history. The protagonist's journey through her family history is paralleled with events on the Isles of Scilly involving another family and set of characters who are overshadowed by their past. As the journey on the islands progresses, the reliving and reexperiencing of childhood memories takes on a resentful and vindictive purpose. The focus of the narrative is, however, on the personal development of the protagonist and her 'tiny living space' of the title. The novel depicts her struggle between two partially contradictory needs: the maxim of adaptation and submission, which guides her to remain in the margins, and the need to establish a space of one's own, which requires acts of demarcation, exclusion, and possibly expansionism, both physically and mentally. As the title suggests, the protagonist is successful in her attempts at establishing a habitat, but it is a habitat of surprisingly small scale.

The novel is structured around two alternating and intermingling storylines: one that depicts the protagonist's growth from childhood to adulthood in Finland, and another that follows her journey on the Isles of Scilly, situated off the tip of Cornwall, England. The first storyline is titled 'Before' ('Ennen') and the second 'On the Way' ('Matkalla'). The storylines are presented chronologically and appear alternately; a chapter belonging to the 'Before' storyline is always followed by a chapter of the 'On the Way' line. Both are narrated by the intradiegetic first-person narrator.

The coming-of-age storyline depicts Natalia's childhood, adolescence, and student years. It is a story of constant resistance to external pressure, a bitter reminiscence of a narrow-minded community in rural Finland as well as a depiction of a distrustful and emotionally distant family dynamic. From an early age, Natalia must learn how to hide herself and become as inconspicuous as possible: "Never be sure that you know what you are doing," was the most memorable lesson I received in my childhood home when

it came to good behavior, or the right kind of existence for that matter'¹¹⁶ (PE, 37). Simultaneously, however, the narrative depicts her as a morally ambivalent character, whose disbelief in her own power of influence and unwillingness to stand out are compensated by her ability to manipulate the people around her, often in revenge. The protagonist studies at a university but leaves without a degree (PE, 41–44), a decision that seems to anticipate her voluntary withdrawal to the margins of the society. Living a markedly modest and frugal life, she focuses on her specific interests, such as lichen and the history of Antarctic exploration, and scrapes by on odd jobs and selling artistic illustrations to journals. Natalia's unconventional life choices and obsessive interest in marginal subjects create an aura of mystery around her character. The culmination of this storyline is the protagonist's purchase of a mysterious miniature apartment (PE, 150–57). After years spent in a repressive family home, then in temporary lodgings without a clear focal point for her life, the protagonist is finally able to establish a long-term relationship with a place. The renovation of the seven-square-meter apartment thus gains symbolic meaning, as the protagonist finally has the means and willingness to settle down and start the process of homesteading.

The travel storyline presents the protagonist in a starkly different environment: traversing rocky islands and sleeping in her small tent, Natalia is exposed to the elements but safely distanced from the social circles of the islands. For the protagonist, the islands turn into a space of remembering and self-reflection as her journey progresses and the long solitary walks and occasional human contact allow her to delve deeper into the memories of childhood and its family dynamics. 'On these islands, one could practice'¹¹⁷ (PE, 118), the first-person narrator observes. Although seemingly different from the protagonist's childhood environment, the harsh Cornish islands mirror and resemble Natalia's emotional landscape. The retrospective and self-reflective aspects of the travel story are highlighted as the protagonist is suddenly drawn to a British family and witnesses a developing family tragedy (PE, 47–50, 62–69). A dissonance between the coming-of-age and travel storylines is clear: the protagonist's past is depicted in all of its mundane detail, whereas the tragedy of the travel storyline reaches imaginative heights. The modesty of the protagonist is contrasted with the flamboyant lifestyle of the British family matriarch, Lady Dorothy, who is in possession of wealth and prestige, yet struggles with problematic family relations. Having been raised in a repressive family herself, the protagonist relates to the black sheep of Dorothy's family, Edmund, whom she also happens to meet. The protagonist soon becomes suspicious of the series of strange accidents that seems to haunt Lady Dorothy's journey. Natalia's presentiment turns out to be accurate: in a short discussion in the middle of a storm, Edmund confesses to Natalia the grudge he holds for his mother and his fantasy of killing her (PE, 184–91). After completing her trip, Natalia learns that Lady Dorothy has been killed in a plane crash (PE, 206), and instantly knows that the incident was caused by Edmund.

The narrative includes three separate homecomings, which all take place at the end of the narrative. The first is Natalia's return from the Isles of Scilly to her miniature apartment (PE, 204). The second takes place as Edmund returns to his mother on the

116. 'Älä koskaan ole varma, että osaat', oli mieleenjäävien opetus, jonka kotoa sain, kun hyvästä käytöksestä ja oikeanlaisesta olemisesta puhuttiin.

117. Näillä saarilla saattoi harjoitella.

islands. These homecomings are part of the travel storyline, whereas the third, adult Natalia's return to her childhood home, is the end of the coming-of-age storyline. In this scene (PE, 192–97), the protagonist reluctantly revisits her extended family at the wedding of her little sister.

DISLOCATIONS AND THE *NOSTOS* TRADITION

Most of the narrative takes place on the Isles of Scilly, as the travel storyline makes up the largest part of the novel. The archipelago is a space that highlights in-betweenness, a quality that is reinforced by the fact that the travel storyline consists of the protagonist's journey from one island to another. As the characters in the travel storyline are constantly arriving on an island or departing from one, they are in an ongoing state of dislocation. The theme of displacement is further evoked by the geographical coordinates of the novel: the protagonist, a Finn traveling in Cornwall, navigates through a foreign culture and places she knows only superficially. The Isles of Scilly in themselves reflect a sense of peripherality, or dislocated identity: as it is accessible only by coastal ships, the group of islands is a separate entity from mainland Britain yet connected to it. This is underscored in the character of Lady Dorothy, who, as a member of the nobility, personifies not only the upper classes of the British society but also the central government and its role in relation to peripheries. This is depicted in the conflicts between the islanders and Lady Dorothy and her companion: "Make a call to your MP and ask them to stop the ebb and flow of the tide"¹¹⁸ (PE, 49), advises one of the islanders when the couple is unhappy with the local anchorages.

The protagonist's sense of dislocation is articulated and emphasized with a specific motif, that of the Antarctic exploration. The opening chapter of the travel storyline depicts how the protagonist arrives on the Isles of Scilly with very few plans: she is drawn to the ocean, she wants to sketch the plants and surf of the islands – and, most importantly, she wants to visit the memorials of long-gone explorers. The chapter opens as follows:

– Do the folks here still remember Edgar Evans? I asked the seller of the modest tourist center of Rhossili, a small village located in the south of Wales.

I was expecting a negative answer. For me, Evans was interesting, but I had never heard or read of anyone else he would be important to.

Evans had been one of the lesser heroes of the Antarctic exploration: a regular sailor who had not written a memoir, and hardly even any letters. The little that had been said about him in the books was mostly negative.¹¹⁹ (PE, 8)

118. 'Teidän on parasta soittaa parlamenttiedustajallenne ja pyytää häntä tekemään aloite vuorovesien lakkauttamisesta [. . .]'

119. – Vieläkö ihmiset täällä muistavat Edgar Evansin? kysyin Rhossilin, pienen eteläwalesilaisen kylän vaatimattoman matkailukeskuksen myyjältä.

Odotin kieltävää vastausta. Minulle Evans oli tärkeä, mutta en ollut kuullut tai lukenut kenestäkään toisesta, jolle hänellä olisi ollut merkitystä.

Evans oli yksi antarktisten tutkimusmatkojen vähäisemmistä sankareista: tavallinen merimies, joka ei kirjoittanut muistelmia eikä juuri kirjeitäkään. Se vähä mitä hänestä kirjoissa kerrottiin, oli enimmäkseen kielteistä.

The reader is informed of the protagonist's determined, nearly obsessive interest in Evans, while being made aware of the explorer's shortcomings and character flaws. Moreover, the narrator downplays Evans's role in the history of exploration, a choice that seems to reflect the protagonist's own position: at the end of the chapter, the first-person narrator confesses that her interest in Evans clearly puts her in a marginal position among the village inhabitants and other tourists (PE, 11). Not only is the protagonist, a Finn in Cornwall, out of place, but so too is the explorer she admires. Even more so, the motivation of the journey – the protagonist's interest in the Antarctic exploration – seems dislocated: Rhossili and the Isles of Scilly do not, based on the chapter, seem like somewhere one would go to study the history of Antarctic exploration. The setting's connection to the protagonist's hobby is contingent, to say the least. All in all, the protagonist's journey lacks clear motivation – even more so, because it is her second visit to the islands – which invites the reader to consider the possibility of an unconscious incentive or a larger mystery at the heart of the narrative.

The spatial dislocation depicted in the travel storyline reflects the protagonist's experiences of social exclusion and repression. Her psychic dislocation, the product of her childhood trauma, is depicted in the coming-of-age storyline. In the episode (PE, 5–7) that opens the novel and the coming-of-age storyline, the protagonist recounts the origin of her first name:

My first name was a mistake. The kind of mistake that small and insecure people make when they truly mess up in the most embarrassing way. My parents would have never intentionally given me a Russian name. They simply didn't know where 'Natalia' comes from and lacked the wit to find out.¹²⁰ (PE, 5)

At school, Natalia's name becomes a red flag for her bullies: she is labeled as a communist and associated with other xenophobic stereotypes of Russians. The name Natalia's parents have given her thus associates her with a foreign origin. Despite the constant abuse at school, the protagonist ends up defending her name at home, since her parents have come to acknowledge their mistake and have begun suggesting a change of name, which the protagonist declines (PE, 6). The scene highlights the mechanics of social exclusion at play in a small rural community and demonstrates how the insistence for uniformity within a group results in suppressive acts.

The opening episode of the novel positions the protagonist between familiar and strange, West and East, political right and left. Conversely, while the episode underscores the in-betweenness of the protagonist, it does provide the setting: the force of the parents' and school children's reaction to the protagonist's name locate the setting somewhere in Ostrobothnia, west coast of Finland, the territories historically associated with the Lapua movement, a Finnish fascist movement of the 1920s and the 1930s. As the narrator remarks, Natalia's bullies use a hit song of their time, 'Natalia,' to ridicule the protagonist (PE, 7), which situates the scene around the 1970s and in the years of Taistoism (*taistolaisuus*), the procommunist political and cultural movement

120. Etunimeni oli erehdys, sellainen kuin pienten epävarmojen ihmisten tekemät erehdykset nolouimmillaan ovat. Vanhemmat eivät olisi ikinä tieteen tahtoen antaneet minulle ryssänimeä. He vain eivät tienneet mistä 'Natalia' oli lähtöisin eivätkä ymmärtäneet ottaa selvää.

in Finland. The song, based on Elvi Sinervo's¹²¹ 1944 poem, has traditionally been interpreted as a depiction of a female partisan's or reconnaissance parachutist's time in Finnish prison,¹²² and became popular in an arrangement performed by the leftist song group Agit-Prop. The name dispute provides the reader with temporal and spatial coordinates, but it also underlines the complexities linked with them. By gesturing toward the rise of fascism and the procommunism of the 1970s, the episode refers to the deep division between opposing political forces in Finland and problematizes Finnish national and cultural unity.

The scene and its depiction of Russophobic attitudes activate the epistemic frame of war that is already suggested by the title of the novel. The titular living space of the novel carries a connotation of the German geopolitical concept *Lebensraum*, which resulted in settler colonialism and territorial expansionism, especially during the rule of the Nazi Party.¹²³ *Ryssä* ('Russki' in the translation), a pejorative for Russian, was commonly used in Finnish war propaganda during the Fenno-Russian wars of the Second World War. The first episode of the novel thus links the conflicts caused by the protagonist's name to the main cultural, political, and geological positions in the country, and carries a remembrance of warfare and territorial dispute. The belligerent allusions of the novel can be seen as a demonstration of Finland's war trauma and the intertwining notions of home, homeland, and war in Finnish culture. They also function as markers of existentialist estrangement and a more general sense of otherness.

Wars, conflicts, and a sense of estrangement are also markers of another character of the novel, Edmund. The character himself is absent from most of the storyline, but he becomes the center of the storyline's dramatic suspense and its release, which, besides the plot progression, is constructed around the protagonist's aim for the journey. Throughout the novel, the narrator-protagonist expresses her confusion about the motivation of her trip: it is her second journey to the Isles of Scilly, yet she is not sure why she has felt the urge to come back (PE, 21, 117–18). The motivation suggested in the second chapter (PE, 8–11) – the urge to follow in the footsteps of Antarctic explorers – seems to have faded away by the fourth chapter. The protagonist's uncertainty about the motivation behind her journey and the more general sense of dislocation together shift the narrative in the direction of a mystery story. Structurally,

121. Elvi Sinervo (1912–1986), poet, writer, and translator, was a leading figure in the left-wing cultural society Kiila. Kiila gathered leftist and prosocialist artists with a special focus on working-class literature. As an active communist and a leader of the Finland–Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society, Sinervo was sentenced to prison in 1941. Sinervo's poetry was rediscovered during the Finnish political singing movement of the 1970s.

122. The persona of the poem addresses their cellmate Natalia and depicts the anger and frustration that the foreigner experiences in a prison abroad while her country, Ukraine, is suffering. The poem itself doesn't identify Natalia as a partisan; this dominant line of interpretation is based on biographical details of Sinervo's years in prison and a false account of the identity of her cellmate. In 2004, reporter Miska Rantanen of *Helsingin Sanomat* discovered that Sinervo's cellmate Natalia Tusula-Vereschjagin was in fact a Finnish citizen convicted of espionage (Rantanen 2004). Rantanen's article appeared after the publication of Verronen's novel, which makes the partisan figure still relevant to the interpretation of *Pieni elintila*.

123. For a discussion of the concept of living space, see the next section of this subchapter.

this can be seen in how several chapters of the travel storyline end with the first-person narrator's speculation about the motivation of her island trip (PE, 11, 117–18), which then develops into somewhat vague realizations over her growing interest in uncovering the story of Dorothy and her family (PE, 104, 118). Finally, the protagonist acknowledges – again, at the end of a chapter – that she is interested in Dorothy's second son, Edmund, not in his mother (PE, 164). These chapter endings leave the reader in anticipation, which makes them function as cliffhangers. Gradually, Natalia learns that Dorothy has always been partial to the other siblings of the family, so much so that Edmund has been neglected and abused – a detail that resonates with the protagonist's own experience of growing up and evokes a sense of identification with him. The culmination of the travel storyline is the meeting between Natalia and Edmund. During a short conversation on the island of St. Mary's (PE, 184–91), Edmund tells Natalia how his resentment led to his radicalization in a terrorist group, and how he ultimately ended up as a mercenary in a foreign war, working under a fake identity for a foreign surveillance service. Edmund has now returned to England to exact revenge on his family and, most importantly, his mother. He continues his life under the fake identity and wears a disguise in order to remain unnoticed.

The conflictual background – the political and geopolitical conflicts that are exposed by her name – connects Natalia to Edmund. Moreover, Edmund's status as a radicalized mercenary resonates with Natalia's association with her partisan namesake of Sinervo's poem and the Agit-Prop song. Mercenary and partisan are both archetypes of homelessness: a mercenary enters foreign wars and fights for money, not for their homeland, thus disparaging the nationalistic values often linked to war, whereas the partisan infiltrates another country in disguise to commit acts of terror. In other words, both these characters are able to mimic national identities and thus capitalize on the nationalist sentiment associated with them. Both bring destruction wherever they go; both are also dislocated by entering enemy territory. (Kankkunen 2014)

Enigmatic and imaginary as they are, the characters of Natalia and Edmund and the relationship between them, as well as the tragic plotline of the travel storyline, can be understood if *Pieni elintila* is read in the context of Greek epic and tragedy, and especially their theme of *nostos*, homecoming. In Greek tradition, *nostos* involves the war hero's return home by sea but, as Alexopoulou (2009, 3–11) highlights, a significant part of the theme's dramatic intensity comes from the returnee's quest to restore his identity and position in society. This can be derived from the Greek epic's and traditional tales' use of space as an expression for the dichotomy between of self and other, as Mary Kuntz (1993, 87) points out in her study. According to Kuntz (1993, 87–88), the Greek tradition that preceded tragedy relied heavily on the identification between the hero and his home, but, as the narrative requires a change of status, the hero must venture to the world beyond home, which thus makes the opposition between home and the outside world a paradigmatic component of character formation. In this, Kuntz (1993, 87) refers to the morphological model developed by Vladimir Propp (1968, 25–65) and its functions XI (the hero's departure) and XX (the hero's return). The theme's focus on shifting locations and identities also gives rise to its distinctive emotional quality: as Alexopoulou (2009, 108–11) underlines in her study, *nostos* is a theme that relies on ambivalence, loss of idealism, and the developing awareness of the impossibility of return. The *nostos* theme is built upon an idealistic

longing for home, while the intensity of the topos is based on the conflict between the characters' expectations and the reality of the return.

The various homecomings of the novel share the ambiguous quality of return in the Greek *nostoi*. Both Natalia and Edmund return to their childhood homes over the course of the novel, although Edmund's return is more symbolical in the sense that it involves an encounter with his mother instead of a visit to his physical home. Natalia, on the other hand, is depicted in two different instances of homecoming: in the coming-of-age storyline, she visits her family during her sister's wedding (PE, 192–97); in the chapter that closes the storyline, and in the travel storyline, she returns to her miniature apartment from her trip to the Isles of Scilly (PE, 204). Aside from Natalia's return to her tiny apartment, neither of the novel's returns is unproblematic or complete, since they all end with discord between the returning character and those receiving them. During his homecoming, Edmund schemes against his siblings and ultimately kills Lady Dorothy, whereas Natalia, returning home for the wedding, is greeted with suspicion and judgment from her mother and aunt. The third homecoming of the narrative, Natalia's return to the tiny apartment, also gives rise to a sense of discord between the returnee and the home environment: as a result, she embarks on a process of cleaning out the apartment and reorganizing most of the furniture. 'After two whirlwind weeks, the rooms looked a lot more spacious than before' (PE, 204),¹²⁴ the first-person narrator concludes. The ambiguity of these episodes underlines the fact that homecoming activates differing understandings not just of home but of the person returning. As Alexopoulou (2009, 31) states, the *nostos* topos is one of dislocated identities and the conflicts that arise around these dislocations. Natalia, however, is somehow able to rise above these conflicts, as the general mood of her homecoming experience is relieved: 'All in all, the wedding reinforced the conception I had of my family: they were normally strange, hardly worse than people on average' (PE, 197).¹²⁵ The chapter ends in a hopeful tone of forgiveness, acceptance, and catharsis, emotions that have been completely absent from the previous chapters of the coming-of-age storyline.

These parallel homecomings underline the interpretation that Edmund is Natalia's doppelgänger or evil twin, as I have presented elsewhere (Kankkunen 2014). The ordering of events between the two separate storylines supports this claim: Natalia's cathartic wedding experience in the coming-of-age storyline (PE, 192–97) is situated right after the meeting of Natalia and Edmund in the travel storyline (PE, 184–91). In this meeting, Edmund confesses that he plans to murder his mother. In other words, Natalia is able to face her childhood family only after Edmund has articulated his hatred for his mother; Edmund thus functions as a spokesperson for the protagonist's suppressed anger. Once that anger is voiced, the protagonist is able to reconcile with her problematic family background. The family and the childhood community, which have been presented throughout the storyline as a source of great anxiety for Natalia, are now depicted in a different light: comedy has replaced tragedy, and the protagonist is able to observe the limitations of her relatives with a sense of humor. Another link between the characters is established through Natalia's drawing: Natalia

124. Kahden viikon myllerryksen jälkeen huoneet näyttivät paljon avarammilta kuin ennen.

125. Kaiken kaikkiaan häät vahvistivat entisestään käsitystäni siitä, että sukulaiseni olivat tavallisen kummallisia, eivät juuri pahempia kuin ihmiset keskimäärin.

tries to prevent the murder by offering Edmund her painfully sharp-sighted sketches of Lady Dorothy (PE, 190–91); instead of killing his mother, Edmund could sully her in British tabloids. After the deaths of Edmund and Dorothy, Natalia draws another series of sketches of Edmund's tragic life and publishes them in a gossip magazine (PE, 208). The sketching of Dorothy and Edmund is an indirect clue as to the fictionality of these characters: it suggests that perhaps the fantastic storyline describing the fall of the British family is merely a product of the protagonist's imagination. (Kankkunen 2014)

The dependence between the protagonist and the character of Edmund is implicitly anticipated in a scene where the protagonist describes her fascination for lichen. The first-person narrator interprets lichen's nature as a composite organism through the lens of necessity:

A fungus and an alga – or a fungus and a cyanobacterium – composed a lichen when, and only when, the circumstances were so harsh that neither of them would be able to survive alone or would have survived far worse than together. It was a symbiosis of hunger.¹²⁶ (PE, 169)

Lichen's existence, in other words, is dependent on the harshness of the environment, and the symbiosis of the two lifeforms is merely a product of their unfavorable living conditions. The 'symbiosis of hunger' resonates with the novel's depiction of Natalia's and Edmund's childhood families and can thus be interpreted as an allusion to the relationship between Natalia and Edmund, who are drawn together because of their traumatic family backgrounds.

Besides the ambiguous nature of the novel's homecomings, *Pieni elintila* employs multiple allusions to the *nostoi* of ancient Greek literature and drama. The storyline of Natalia's journey through the cluster of islands links the narrative with Odysseus' sea voyage, which is the most influential handling of the *nostos* theme. The setting, however, is not the only element that conflates the novel with the epic, as the novel turns the *Odyssey*'s formula of a sea captain returning to his loyal wife¹²⁷ on its head. Natalia is traveling alone and has left her partner in Finland; the man is a sea captain by profession, a detail that is highlighted by the fact that the first-person narrator refers to him only as the 'Captain' (*Kapteeni*). Moreover, the Captain is married – but not to Natalia. As the protagonist's journey on the islands progresses, the Captain remains ostensibly inactive in Finland and is available to Natalia through text messages (PE 23, 87, 144–45). While inverting the gender roles and erasing the idea of marital fidelity, the novel, however, reiterates the spatial opposition and its strict gendering that, according to Kuntz (1993, 89), form the basis for the epic.

126. Sieni ja viherlevä – tai sieni ja syanobakteeri – muodostivat jäkälän silloin ja vain silloin kun olosuhteet olivat niin ankarat, ettei kumpikaan selviytynyt yksin, tai olisi selviytynyt huonommin kuin kumppanin kanssa. Se oli nälkäsymbioosi.

127. On the gender roles within the Greek *nostoi*, see Tanja Scheer (2018) and Kuntz (1993). As both Kuntz (1993, 87–103) and Scheer (2018) note, the presence of women is a central quality of the home in the *nostos* tradition; however, women can also perform antagonistic functions as obstacles in the hero's way.

A link to another Greek *nostos* is the tragic character of Edmund and the matricide he commits. Matricide appears often in Greek tragedy; the most prominent matricide of the tradition is Orestes, the murderer of Clytemnestra. Edmund's return to his mother from abroad resembles the return of Orestes from his exile,¹²⁸ especially because the relationship between Edmund and Natalia can be associated with that between Orestes and his sister Electra. In Verronen's novel, the protagonist plays the role of Electra, the ambivalent female character who is the witness to Orestes and his murder-plot. Interpretations of Electra's role have varied from the voiceless female suppressing her anger (Simonsuuri 2003, 284–85) to a *femme fatale* who acts as a catalyst for Orestes' deed (Scott 2005, 11–13). Similar ambiguity is attached to Natalia's character, especially in the coming-of-age storyline. These episodic chapters often place the protagonist in situations that require a moral choice and portray various methods of retaliation and revenge. The teenaged protagonist frames school bullies for vandalism (PE, 24–26), provokes neo-Nazis against her malicious employer (PE, 26–30), and denounces her close friend to the police (PE, 59–60). The coming-of-age storyline presents the protagonist in the context of suppressed anger and highlights her fascination with vengeance, while the travel storyline reiterates the Electra–Oresteian arrangement between the seemingly passive yet vengeful female character and the active male character who executes the revenge.

The third shared trait between the novel and the *nostos* theme is the use of disguise. In the Greek *nostoi*, the returning hero conceals his identity until an act of recognition confirms his belonging to the community.¹²⁹ In the novel, Edmund has lived under a fake identity (PE, 187, 189) and disguises himself on the islands, as well as when decoying his mother to the plane (PE, 206–7). The protagonist is the only one who is able to identify him. The disguise in the *nostos* theme, as Alexopoulou (2009, 31–36) suggests, is a marker of the protagonist's deception, yet it also is a divine strategy that deities apply when visiting the human realm. This could be interpreted as an element that highlights the heroes' return as the fulfillment of a divine plan or destiny. But, as Alexopoulou (2009, 7, 31–36) further elaborates, the disguise also underlines the intertwined nature of place and identity: the dislocated hero has lost his social and personal status, and before redeeming them he is only half present, in a liminal state and potentially dangerous, as his return might disturb the balance of the community. In Verronen's novel, Edmund's liminal status is evoked by associating him with animals and bestiality: Dorothy claims that her son has 'the eyes of a wild beast' (*villipedon silmät*; PE, 173–74). When Natalia finally meets Edmund, he picks up a broken dog leash and slaps a nearby bench with it (PE, 186), which indicates Edmund's low status among his family – the character has been treated like a dog – as well as his release from this position – the dog leash is broken – and the possible violent outcomes – the violent slap.

128. Orestes is called to revenge the death of his father at the hands of his mother Clytemnestra; but by killing his mother he commits a sin just as grave as failing to avenge the death of his father. This part of the Orestes mythology is discussed in Aeschylus' ([458 BCE] 2018) *Oresteia*. In the *Electra* tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides, the dramatic interest lies in the absence and return of the hero and in the role of his sister Electra.

129. As Kuntz (1993, 4) points out, the disguise may concern not only the returnee but also his homeplace; in the *Odyssey*, the goddess Athena disguises the landmarks of Ithaca so that Odysseus does not instantly recognize his homeland.

The two characters of the novel, Natalia and Edmund, represent opposing strategies of making home. Edmund represents the act of homecoming – the strategy that is rooted in the past as well as bound by it. He acts on his trauma, is unable to reconcile with it, and, in a desperate attempt at revenge and retaliation, returns to his mother. Her murder takes on an Oedipal tone – another detail that connects the novel to the classic Greek tragedy and its myriad (unsuccessful) *nostoi* – as he poses as a potential romantic candidate in order to lure his mother to the plane (PE, 206–7). Natalia, on the other hand, stands for the act of homesteading, setting up a new place of residence. Both storylines underline her mobility; in the coming-of-age storyline, she is shown out and about different homes, transitioning from childhood to youth and then early adulthood, while in the travel storyline she moves back and forth between the islands. Instead of merely reestablishing connections with her family, she is ready to create new alliances, as with Dorothy and Edmund – and the seaside city in Finland, which then becomes her new hometown as she purchases the miniature apartment. But, as the arrangement between Edmund and Natalia demonstrates, the narrative puts forth a strong argument for the idea that the act of homesteading is only possible after a purgative homecoming.

By relating to the Greek *nostoi*, *Pieni elintila* develops an intense dramatization of the problems of homecoming and family feud. The tragic development between Dorothy and Edmund draws from the Greek tragedy and epic and their ways of staging dislocation and homecoming with island and sea imagery. Moreover, by referring to the Greek *nostoi*, *Pieni elintila* presents home as a source of identity and social status. The return to home is thus an affirmation of the protagonist's identity.

LIVING SPACE: ANTIEXPANSIONISM AND THE BIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

A noteworthy feature of *Pieni elintila* is that, while the novel is clearly a narrative of homecoming and homesteading, it discreetly appropriates another concept than that of the home to describe living arrangements and the sense of belonging. The concept, highlighted in the title of the novel, is *elintila*, 'living space.' The Finnish notion of *elintila* refers to the area that a group of people or a population of animals or plants require to live in and is sometimes confused with the notion of habitat. In contemporary usage, the preferred Finnish term for habitat is either *elinympäristö* ('living environment') or *habitaatti* (habitat), as *elintila* has an infamous association with the notion of *Lebensraum*, a political maxim of expansionism infamously applied by the Nazi Party. If the title of the novel were simply *Elintila*, the narrative would have to tread the fine line between the seemingly innocent Finnish concept of *elintila* and its possible genealogy with the historical notion of *Lebensraum*. Instead, the full title reads 'The Tiny Living Space,' which relieves the word of its expansionist connotations. In the adjective 'tiny' (*pieni*), the title of the novel already challenges the expansionist undertones traditionally linked with the notion of living space. The challenge is reiterated in the coming-of-age storyline, in a pivotal chapter (PE, 150–57) that depicts the protagonist's first attempt to claim a home for herself: in the chapter, Natalia, who has been represented in both storylines as a vagrant and restless character, finally engages in an act of homesteading – but only after finding an apartment that is small enough.

The chapter opens with a windy November day, as the protagonist arrives at the real estate agent's (PE, 150). She has arranged an appointment, and the agent has selected a

handful of apartments for her to consider. But when the agent leaves the office Natalia quickly glances through his other listings and notices that they have been arranged according to their size. She turns the page to see the smallest of the apartments, a mere 7.3m². First, she thinks it must be a mistake, but it is not: 'one can see it from the price and the floor plan' (PE, 150).¹³⁰ The apartment is ridiculously small, almost uninhabitable; but, even before seeing the place, the protagonist experiences a sense of identification with it. She proceeds to buy the flat, and the rest of the chapter describes the conclusion of the sale and the extensive renovation the protagonist carries out in the apartment.

The apartment turns out to be in a state of transformation, and not only because of the renovation: right after the sale has been concluded, the protagonist discovers a hidden attic just above her main room (PE, 155) – the apartment has a secret second floor, a space that has been either neglected or forgotten. The apartment, although small in size, not only doubles its surface area but also gains new dimensions, transforming from a single-story into a double-story apartment. The added verticality can be interpreted as a metaphor of the protagonist's growth, while it also evokes a sense of wonder and the fantastic, in the sense described by Tzvetan Todorov ([1970] 1975, 24–40). The process of discovering the second floor is as interesting as the discovery itself. In the passage below, the protagonist reflects her attitude toward the apartment:

I had made the final decision to buy the flat when the real estate agent told me that there most likely wasn't anything special up there. Without exception, people said things like that when there was in fact something, but only a little. So little that it didn't matter for most people. But such was the case of the whole apartment: compared to it, the 'nothing special' of the upper floor was, in fact, worthy of attention.¹³¹ (PE, 155)

The excerpt represents a curious mixture of knowing before actually knowing: the narrator-protagonist seems to imply that she had an inkling of the upper floor while making the purchase. As the passage shows, the ability to perceive, to pay attention, is parallel to the ability to imagine and, most importantly, to transform. This resonates with the thinking of Gaston Bachelard, according to whom our ability to create is just as much about our ability to perceive and be affected by the material world as it is about our inventive power (Bachelard [1964] 2014). In his *Poetics of Space* ([1964] 2014), Bachelard depicts how the interior spaces of our homes, the tight corners and the closed baskets, become abodes for a new kind of thinking, one that reformulates our understanding of the workings of imagination. As Richard Kearney says, 'Bachelard's sense of poetic creation transcends the traditionally opposed roles of the image as either "imitation" or "invention"' (Kearney 2014, xx). Imagination, for Bachelard, is a transformative force: instead of imitating reality, it renders the perceptions, deforming

130. [S]en näki hintatiedoista ja pohjapiirroksesta.

131. Olin tehnyt lopullisen ostopäätöksen, kun olin kuullut välittäjän sanovan ettei yläpuolella luultavasti ole mitään erityistä. Tuollainen tarkoitti lähes poikkeuksetta, että siellä oli jotakin vähän. Ehkä niin vähän, ettei sillä useimmille ollut mitään merkitystä. Mutta sama päti myös koko tuohon asuntoon. Siihen verrattuna yläpuolella oleva 'ei mitään erityistä' oli huomionarvoista.

and re-creating the first images given to us (Kaplan 1972, 2–3).¹³² In the chapter, the protagonist takes up a Bachelardian project of perceiving, imagining, and creating the apartment. Natalia's miniature apartment grows into full verticality¹³³ but only with the help of perceptive imagination. Verronen's characters are often labeled as onlookers but, as this episode demonstrates, their role often surpasses the passive stance of an onlooker. In the scene, as in Bachelard's philosophy of imagination, creation is an act of perception, and vice versa.

The transformation of the tiny abode continues with the apartment opening up to a small garden: after moving in, the protagonist realizes that there is a small strip of land outside her window to which only she has access.

The dead straw was dank under my feet, but I kept pacing barefoot in my third room. It wasn't mine; there were multiple reasons for that. But no one else could enter the place without help. And there was nothing in there that would have attracted visitors.¹³⁴ (PE, 156)

The yard can only be accessed from Natalia's apartment. The same applies to the second floor: instead of doors, it has a hatch that leads to the protagonist's apartment. As these scenes of the discovery of the apartment demonstrate, the living space of the protagonist's is radically unlike the *Lebensraum* maxim: instead of expansionist attempts, it is the turn inward that finally grants her more space. After the belligerent and violent themes employed in the story of Natalia and Edmund, an alternative course of action appears: one of persistence, adaptation, and passive resistance.

The apartment scene, one of the culmination points of the narrative, presents the protagonist in a built environment and in the midst of a process of perception and imagination. The narrative, which mostly takes place in outdoor locations and within natural landscapes, thus stages the protagonist's emotional development by transferring her into the realm of domesticity, although this version of domesticity is markedly different from the multigenerational family homes that both the protagonist and Edmund are fleeing from. Natalia's tiny apartment functions as a place of intimacy, imagination, and withdrawal rather than as a site reproduction, reproductive work, or social and multigenerational relationships. I suggest that the rejection of the latter reflects how the novel relies on the biological understandings of space and place on the one hand, and how it discards them on the other.

132. Bachelard's Jungian-inspired discussion on home has been heavily criticized, since it is not only class-dependent but also antiurban (see, e.g., Shelley 2004). But these criticisms tend to push aside the most important component of the Bachelardian house: the imagination and its potential as a worldmaking force.

133. Bachelard foregrounds verticality in his metaphorical discussion on the house. The verticality of a house, namely the polarity of attic and cellar, grows into a metaphor of dreaming and imagination. According to Bachelard, the attic and the roof represent the conscious work of construction, whereas the cellar stands for the dreamwork of digging deeper and deeper; therefore, a house without verticality is not truly a house (Bachelard [1964] 2014, chap. 1, V).

134. Kuivunut heinä oli kylmänkosteaa, mutta astelin paljain jaloin ympäri kolmatta huonettani. Ei se useallakaan tavalla minun ollut, mutta kukaan muu ei siihen päässyt ilman apuvälineitä, eikä siinä ollut mitään, minkä takia kenenkään olisi pitänyt tulla.

To better understand how the biological imagination affects the novel's spaces and places, one must consider further instances where the notion of living space appears in the novel. Moreover, although the narrative opposes the expansionist connotations of the concept, it is still worth exploring how these connotations are addressed in the novel. The concept that looms behind *Pieni elintila*'s living space, the notion of *Lebensraum*, can itself be seen as a case of appropriating biological concepts for political purposes. The genealogy of *Lebensraum* can be approached as the intertwining of a specific set of biological, geographical, and political imaginations, as Abrahamsson (2013, 38) notes. The concept itself emerged in mid-nineteenth-century German geography, as contemporary geographers sought inspiration from Darwinian thought. These influences coincided with the rise of the nationalist ideology of the Second Reich and its colonial enterprises. Geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), the midwife of the *Lebensraum* concept, synthesized social Darwinist ideas with a misinterpretation of Thomas Malthus's theory of overpopulation. This resulted in an ideological mixture that led him to view population growth as the marker of a state's vigor and future success. Instead of the Malthusian solution, which was population control, Ratzel's geographical resolution to the problem of constant population growth was the state's territorial expansion – the Darwinian battle for survival, but in the form of a spatial battle, the battle for *Lebensraum*.¹³⁵ (Abrahamsson 2013; cf. Liulevicius 2000, 247–65) As evidenced by its complex and problematic genealogy, *Lebensraum* fuses the biological, political and spatial, or geographical. One may assume that Verronen's living space, too, conflates separate realms and modalities. The question of translation makes the issue even more complex: can we equate the Finnish *elintila* with the German *Lebensraum*?¹³⁶

In the novel, the concept of living space seems to develop and take on different nuances as the narrative progresses. Beyond the title, the concept is mentioned

135. The social Darwinist undertones of the *Lebensraum* theory were underlined by the fact that, in Ratzel's discussion, the state appeared as an organic whole, as Abrahamsson (2013) presents. At this stage, the concept of *Lebensraum* mostly lacked its political dimension. The political implications of the concept became actualized as the German of school geostrategy known as *Geopolitik* took interest in the *Lebensraum* interpretation of the Swedish Rudolf Kjellén, famous for his theory of 'the organic state.' It was then Karl Haushofer, the founder and proponent of the Munich school of *Geopolitik*, who added not only the political but also the racial motivation to the *Lebensraum* discourse, emphasizing the necessity of colonial imperialism and warfare as the key components of successful territorial expansion, which, according to him, should be the guiding principle of all state operations. Haushofer's *Lebensraum* then resonated with the nascent National Socialist party and its leader: Adolf Hitler made it a key ingredient and a rhetorical device of Generalplan Ost, the plan for the conquest of Eastern Europe. (Abrahamsson 2013; cf. Liulevicius 2000, 247–65)

136. Historically, the concept of *Lebensraum* has been used in its National Socialist meaning in the Finnish context during the Second World War and in at least one publication. During the Continuation War (1941–1944), supporters of the Greater Finland ideology applied the concept to justify Finland's claims over the areas of Eastern Karelia and Ingermanland. In 1941, a propaganda book, *Finnlands Lebensraum* (Auer, Jutikkala, and Vilkuuna 1941), was issued as a joint project between the Finnish state propaganda and information department, three eminent Finnish professors, Finland's German military attaché Yrjö von Grönghagen, known for his work for the Nazi institute Ahnenerbe, and a German publishing house. The book was never published in Finnish.

twice. The first instance is in a chapter that belongs to the coming-of-age storyline and describes the protagonist's teenage years. In the scene, the first-person narrator describes how the protagonist has taken an interest in the history of Antarctic exploration, but, as with many of her other hobbies and interests, this one too is criticized by her parents. Her mother confronts her about the expensive books she has bought on the subject. For the protagonist, the confrontation is another chapter in the series of suppressive acts she has to endure. 'I didn't ask for much. I led a peaceful and quiet life. But, even so, the tiny living space I needed and wanted was nibbled away – although it wasn't a threat to anyone' (PE, 39).¹³⁷ Living space, in this context, is a metaphor for the individual's selfhood, personal interests, and intellectual pursuits. It is a mental space that, ideally, allows for growth and involves a sense of respect and security. It is, however, noteworthy that the scene introduces the concept in relation to the protagonist's passion for natural sciences and the history of Antarctic exploration. In this manner, the scene anticipates that the novel's application of the concept of living space will take on biological and ecological, (pseudo)scientific, and even expansionist connotations.

The idea of living space as a biological concept is worked into the narrative through the protagonist's second fascination, which is for a specific type of organism, lichen.

I was fascinated by lichen's insignificance and wide geographical distribution: they were next to nothing, yet they were everywhere, especially in those places where nothing else was able to survive. They grew in bare rocks and on snow; on plain wood and concrete. They took the water they needed from thin air and the nutrients from the rock beneath them or from the dust that winds carried. During long periods of drought, they underwent dormancy and were able to revive themselves as water again became available. They turned hardships to their advantage: lichen that dried into crumbs from drought spread with the winds and animals to new areas of growth; and the crumbs had everything they needed to grow again.¹³⁸ (PE, 165)

For the protagonist, lichen is marvelous in its ability to survive hostile environments. What first appears as nature's humble yet successful explorer organism transforms into something delicate and fragile:

Naturally, I spent a lot of time talking about the resilience of lichen and their ability to thrive in sparse conditions. At some point, however, I started to emphasize the delicacy of

137. En vaatinut paljon. Elin hiljaisesti ja rauhallisesti. Siitä huolimatta jopa sitä vähäistä elintilaa, jonka itselleni tarvitsin ja halusin – ja joka ei ollut keneltäkään poissa – yritettiin nakertaa.

138. Minua kiehtoi jäkälissä niiden vähäpätöisyys ja levinneisyys: se että ne eivät olleet paljon mitään, ja kuitenkin niitä oli melkein kaikkialla, ja eniten juuri siellä missä mitään muuta elävää ei ollut. Ne elivät paljaalla kalliolla ja lumen päällä; paljaalla puulla ja betonilla. Ne ottivat tarvitsemansa veden ilmasta ja ravinteet allaan olevasta kivistä tai tuulen tuomasta tomusta. Pitkinä kuivuuskausina ne vajosivat horteeseen, josta ne virkosivat kun saivat taas vettä. Ne käänsivät koettelemukset edukseen: kuivuuttaan mureneva jäkälä levisi tuulten ja eläinten mukana uusille kasvupaikoille, ja monien lajien muruissa oli valmiina kaikki mitä uuteen kasvuun tarvittiin.

their state of balance and their vulnerability in the face of change. [. . .] If nutrients, light and water became more available, lichen ceased to exist.

And there was more to that. As the conditions of their place of growth became more conducive to life – a change partially brought about by the lichen themselves, as they weathered the substrate of the area and produced soil rich in nutrients – attracted other plants. Often lichen was not able to match them in the battle for living space.¹³⁹ (PE, 169)

At this point, the reader is able to conclude that various types of lichen and the polar explorers share the same perseverance when entering new environments. Antarctic explorations are first-time ventures to an uninhabitable land – and, as the narrator reveals, a similar spirit is associated with lichen:

The spore for my lichen enthusiasm had probably been sown by a substitute teacher with a short, unusual name. In a biology course in the sixth year, they said: 'Always remember that the first things to enter anywhere are lichen and moss. You can forget everything else about biology as long as you remember: lichen and moss.'¹⁴⁰ (PE, 165)

Lichen, in other words, is the explorer of the kingdoms of bacteria and fungi. Lichen represents the modest and passive modes of entering new terrain, while Antarctic exploration stands for the dramatic and aggressive aspects of the same activity. Despite their differences, both lichen and explorers are represented in the novel as conquerors and firstcomers. With these developments, the notion of living space gains new meanings: the image of a person's individual mental space that is violated in the protagonist's teenage years assumes notions of movement and invasion. In other words, the protagonist develops intellectual interests that allow her to imagine the opposite of the static and defensive conditions she lives in. Her obsessive interests in the heroic era of Antarctic exploration and lichen are fantasies of freedom, expansion, and invasion. Since both strive to establish themselves in new grounds, these two fields of interest are concealed images of homesteading and stand in contrast to the homecomings of the novel's *nostos* theme. Moreover, this offers a partial explanation to the sense of dislocation and the lack of motivation that linger around the protagonist's journey to the Isles of Scilly: the setting of the trip is less relevant than the act of traveling – that is, the act of reaching out and expanding one's circles.

Although psychologically motivated, the protagonist's interest in the history of Antarctic exploration evokes the expansionist attitude that is the foundation of the

139. Tietysti puhuin paljon siitä, kuinka sitkeitä jäkälät olivat ja kuinka niukoissa oloissa ne viihtyivät. Mutta jossakin vaiheessa aloin antaa enemmän painoa sille kuinka epävakaassa tasapainotilassa ne elivät, ja kuinka haavoittuvia ne olivat olosuhteiden muutoksille. [. . .] Jos ravinteet, valo ja vesi lisääntyivät liikaa, jäkälä lakkasi olemasta.

Eikä siinä vielä kaikki. Kasvupaikan olosuhteiden muuttuminen elämälle suotuisammaksi – muutos, jolle jäkälät itse loivat edellytyksiä rapauttamalla kasvualustaa ja muodostamalla ravinteikasta maa-ainesta – toi paikalle muita kasveja. Usein jäkälät eivät pärjänneet niille kamppailussa elintilasta.

140. Jäkäläinnostukseni itiön kylvi luultavasti se sijaisopettaja, jolla oli lyhyt epätavallinen nimi ja joka sanoi kuudennen luokan biologiantunnilla: 'Muistakaa aina, että joka paikkaa ensimmäisinä tulevat jäkälä ja sammal. Vaikka ette mitään muuta biologiasta muistaisi, niin muistakaa tämä: jäkälä ja sammal.'

Lebensraum concept. This can be seen in how the protagonist's growing interest in the exploration coincides with her turning away from her classmates and peers (PE, 36–38). It is preceded by a phase during which the protagonist develops vengeful thoughts about authorities and adults, and retaliates against them (PE, 24–30). The coming-of-age storyline thus presents the protagonist's evolving interest in the Antarctic as a parallel development to her withdrawal from friendship and increase in manipulative behavior. The association between expansion, expansionist conflicts and the Antarctic can also be read in other works by the author: in the novel *Kylmien saarten soturi*, a total war in the Antarctic region has resulted in a dystopic development and permanently altered the lives of both soldiers and civilians. The Antarctic of the novel is depicted as a cold purgatory for the protagonist, who has been raised as a soldier from an early age but discovers the futility of war during his years in the cold south. The short story 'Valaat ja albatrossit' presents an ecoterrorist with a fixation on the Antarctic. The means and actions of the character have been questionable at best, but the story of his journey toward the Antarctic unravels as a quest for salvation, as a biological and political apocalypse renders the northern areas of the Earth uninhabitable.

Exploration, as a historical phenomenon, is inextricably tied together with European imperialism. The Antarctic exploration, on the other hand, holds a specific place in the cultural history of imperialist imagination, as Tom Griffiths suggests:

In the early twentieth century, Antarctica had been an additional site of European colonial rivalry, the place for one last burst of continental imperialist exploration, which had been such a trademark of the nineteenth century. The heroic era of Antarctica was 'heroic' because it was anachronistic before it began, its goal was as abstract as a pole, its central figures were romantic, manly and flawed, its drama was moral (for it mattered not only what was done but how it was done), and its ideal was national honour. It was an early testing-ground for the racial virtues of new nations such as Norway and Australia, and it was the site of Europe's last gasp before it tore itself apart in the Great War. (Griffiths 2007, 110–11)

From Griffith's description, I would like to highlight the expression 'anachronistic,' as it is relevant to *Pieni elintila*'s handling of the theme. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist's interest in Antarctic exploration is manifested in historical research and historiography: the protagonist collects and studies books on the topic (PE, 9, 38–39, 184, 200–201, 203), chooses her field of study accordingly (PE, 41), and finally moves on from being merely an enthusiastic reader on the topic to giving expert lectures at college level (PE, 119, 205). During her journey on the Isles of Scilly, she visits the memorial of an explorer and a historical exhibition (PE, 9–10). In the descriptions of Natalia's hobby, special emphasis is always laid on the written accounts the explorers have left behind: in two instances (PE, 8, 182) the protagonist comments on the disparity between the amount of documentation produced by the higher-ranking explorers and by the lower-class seamen who formed the backbone of the crew. While drawing comparisons between the leaders of Antarctic expeditions, the protagonist highlights Robert Falcon Scott's literary talent (PE, 180–81). All this means that the historical and narrated aspects of the exploration phenomenon dominate the novel's representation of the topic.

The narrative's evaluative outlook on the concept is reflected in the evolution of the protagonist's preoccupation with Antarctic exploration. What begins as a teenager's idolizing admiration toward the figureheads of exploration (PE, 38) becomes critical observation as the protagonist matures. Antarctic explorers' capabilities in adapting to extreme environments are listed in the novel's most detailed description of the protagonist's pursuit with the history of Antarctic exploration (PE, 177–83). In the chapter, the first-person narrator describes how her focus has shifted from one explorer to another, starting from Roald Amundsen (1872–1928) and ending in Frank Worsley (1872–1943); as the narrator explains, the men were united in their shared understanding that 'life within civilization was a burden to them. It was too complex and filled with vanities. They were not able to adapt to it, didn't understand what was expected of them – or if they did, they were not able to fulfill the expectations'¹⁴¹ (PE, 179). But, as the chapter progresses and the protagonist grows older, she takes an interest in those of the explorers who were able to balance between the expeditions and their private life in civilization (PE, 180–83). As the protagonist's journey in the Isles of Scilly begins, she traces the footsteps of Edgar Evans, whose physical strength was as useful in Antarctica as his quarrelsome character was difficult in England (PE, 8–11). But, by the end of her journey, Natalia's focus has shifted to another explorer, Frank Worsley, whom she considers sensitive, amiable, and adventurous even beyond the glaciers: 'For Worsley, the voyages to the Antarctica were only a single – although remarkable – episode in his colorful life'¹⁴² (PE, 183). This sentence, which closes the chapter on Natalia's exploration hobby, points toward warmer climates and less extreme environments, reflecting the development that has taken place in the protagonist, as well.

Bearing the above-mentioned in mind, I suggest that the novel's notion of living space represents the expansionist undertones of the living space concept in a way that highlights the obsolete and anachronistic nature of these tendencies. The challenge that the novel poses to the concept of living space and its expansionist interpretations is thus not limited to the epithet 'tiny'; it is rather a theme that permeates the whole narrative.

Although critical toward the political implications of the concept of living space, the novel's notion of home nevertheless relies on the biological understanding of place. The concept of habitat, a key component of ecology, refers to a place and its physical features and the plants and animals living there; the emphasis is on the relationship between a given species of population and the resources that the place affords. Therefore, the biological imagination gives the novel's idea of home a very distinct emphasis, one that is grounded on the idea of resources and their allocation. The childhood home depicted in *Pieni elintila* is not a homely home, a refuge, or a safe haven; it is a home of want and greed, a home that allocates scarcity, curbs excess, and does not hesitate to repress. The biologized notion of home has gained ground in contemporary theory as well. In her groundbreaking essay, anthropologist Mary

141. [E]lämä sivistyksen parissa rasitti heitä. Se oli liian monimutkaista ja turhuuksien täyttämää. He eivät sopeutuneet, eivät ymmärtäneet mitä heiltä odotettiin tai jos ymmärsivät, eivät kyenneet odotuksia täyttämään.

142. Antarktiset matkat olivat Worsleylle vain yksi – joskin tärkeä – vaihe hänen värikkäässä elämässään.

Douglas (1991) traces the main function of home to the anticipation of needs and the storage and allocation of resources, which, according to her, can be seen as a form of gift economy (see Mauss [1923–1925] 1967) and through the concept of the tragedy of the commons. According to Douglas (1991, 299–303), many of the practices and traditions we see as part of home life are in fact measures that aim at the preservation of collective goods. These practices of coordination and surveillance include rotation (for instance, sharing of the bathroom) or synchrony (as in with fixed mealtimes) (Douglas 1991, 299–303). Read in the context of Douglas's essay, Verronen's depictions of home as a habitat and a living space yet also as an arena of competition gain new insight. The sense of lack and scarcity that characterize the childhood homes of *Pieni elintila* testify to the emotionally problematic relationships between the parents and the children.

Another feature of *Pieni elintila*'s approach to place as a biological concept is the emphasis that the narrative gives to the process of adaptation. The previous examples have shown that the extreme environments represented in the novel thematize, among other things, problematics of adaptation: to what extent must and can an individual adapt, and what can one learn from the successful instances of adaptation within Western exploration and the realm of biology? Besides the protagonist's obsessions with lichen and Antarctic exploration, the theme of adaptation appears through the events of the plot. Within the travel storyline, Natalia's ability to explore the islands is contrasted with Lady Dorothy's helpless behavior: in multiple scenes, the protagonist literally guides the lady through the pathways and tourist facilities, including the menu sheets of cafes (see PE, 67, 96–100, 127, 146). Spatial prowess is equated with moral superiority, and, as Dorothy's tragic destiny suggests, a lack of adaptability anticipates ruin.

Besides the living space concept's historical and biological connotations, the home of *Pieni elintila* is further evoked through the metaphor of extinction, which, of course, is closely related to the biological imagination of living space and the theme of adaptation. The extinction metaphor appears in multiple works by Verronen, and, as I suggest, often in the context of home. In *Pieni elintila*, it is the character of Dorothy that introduces the extinction metaphor into the narrative. At the beginning of their friendship, the protagonist is informed that Lady Dorothy is known under the nickname Lady Dodo (PE, 113–14), which refers to her outdated worldview. After this, the first-person narrator occasionally refers to the lady by her nickname (PE, 189, 207). The dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) was a nonflying bird species that lived on the island of Mauritius and went extinct in the seventeenth century. The nickname thus creates a connection between the character of Dorothy, her haplessness and comic impracticality, and the nonflying bird that has been regarded not only as a symbol of extinction (for the symbolism of the dodo, see, e.g., Fuller 2002) but of obsolescence as well; in English, the species appears in idioms such as 'dumb dodo' and 'dead as a dodo' (Palmatier 1995, 109, 113, 128). The death of Lady Dorothy (PE, 206) complements the connection with the bird species: she dies in a plane crash, the flightless lady.

The extinction metaphor receives a broader development in the novel *Keihäslintu*. Published in the same year as *Pieni elintila*, it could be regarded as a parallel work to *Elintila*. The novel consists of multiple individual stories, starting with a short scene where the two child protagonists come to terms with the cruelty of adults: one of the parents kills the pet bird of his son (KL, 7–9). The namesake section of the novel, the

'Keihäslintu' section (KL, 141–75), is the story of a woman's love affair with an extinct bird species, the great auk. The woman follows her fixation around the continent visiting museums, meeting with ornithologists and tracing the preserved eggs and the mounted specimen of the species. Her approach to the loss of the bird is as rational and scientific as the methods she uses to get close to the species. This is how the first-person narrator describes the reasons for the great auk's extinction:

In order to swim and dive better, the great auk had – at an evolutionarily slow pace – given up the ability to fly. In the light of its extinction, it was a tragic mistake, but that's how evolution works: species adapt to existing conditions, not to the future circumstances that they cannot know.¹⁴³ (KL, 160)

The passage conjoins two ways of interpreting the bird's extinction, representing it either as a 'tragic mistake' or as a natural case of adaptation. Of these, the latter, the rationalized explanation, receives the narrator-protagonist's approval. As the story of the woman and the great auk draws to an end, it becomes evident that the hunt for the extinct bird has been a vehicle for the sorrow and loss in the protagonist's family: the last scene (KL, 175) depicts the protagonist in bed together with her husband, who is moved to tears by the great auk's destiny, evidently because it reflects his own childhood trauma of loss. Simultaneously, by naming the man, the scene reveals that the couple have already appeared in the novel as the characters of the first story: the man is the boy whose father put down his pet bird, and the woman is his childhood friend who had to witness the killing. The search for the great auk can therefore be interpreted as the protagonist's means to construct a narrative of rationalization, compensation, and healing around the trauma of violence and her lover's experience of loss.

Transplanted into the human realm, extinction in *Keihäslintu* grows into a metaphor for the outcome of moral evil: as a self-induced tragedy, it is the obvious and justifiable result of cruelty, neglect, violence, narrow-mindedness, short-sightedness, and emotional and intellectual incapacity. Extinction as a metaphor appears multiple times in the other stories of the novel as well: The other sections do not discuss extinctions of fauna and flora but deaths of nations, communities, and ideologies. These include a depiction of how a country under a dictatorship strives to conceal its falling birth rate (KL, 71–78) and a story of a medieval manuscript that reveals how a group of Irish monks, driven by their fanatical and demanding leader, settles in Greenland, only to disappear as they all die (KL, 79–85). The case of the great auk is, in fact, the only incident of the novel where extinction appears in the sense of the extinction of animal or plant species, and, even in this section, the emphasis seems to be in the treatment of and atonement for human violence. This line of interpretation is further supported by the fact that the extinction of the great auk was partly caused by human activities. The same applies to the dodo.

143. Kyetäkseen paremmin uimaan ja sukeltamaan siivetönruokit olivat aikoinaan evolutiivisen hitaasti luopuneet lentotaidosta. Sukupuuton valossa se oli traaginen erehdys, mutta niin evolutio toimii: eliöt sopeutuvat oleviin oloihin, eivät tuleviin, joista eivät vielä mitään voi tietää.

Verronen's extinction metaphor takes its most detailed and powerful form in the context of family relations and their problematics, as in the case of the father killing the child's pet in *Keihäslintu*, or the mother neglecting her son in *Pieni elintila*. Here, Verronen plays with the semantics of Finnish language. The Finnish expression for extinction, *sukupuu*, is a compound of two different words: *suku* for (extended) family and *puutto* for lack and disappearance. Extinction is therefore an absence or disappearance of family. The metaphor of extinction evokes the results of moral evil within the family unit, and especially that of parents against their children. The metaphor expresses a symbolical demolition of the family unit; it can be understood as the children's refusal to procreate and continue the family line. By associating this refusal with the frame of the human-induced extinction of species, Verronen's narratives invite the reader to acknowledge the tragic yet justified nature of this refusal. The extinction metaphor, therefore, functions as a rhetorical device to evoke an empathetic response from the reader. It also functions as a means of normalization, as it establishes an analogy between the loss of species and the disconnection between the younger and the older generations within a family unit, or within a group of people. As a metaphor for human behavior, it is cruel and cynical, and leaves very little room for hope. More importantly, as a metaphor that appears repeatedly in the author's works, always in the context of intergenerational injustice and represented with the help of spatializations, extinction, in Verronen's poetics, signifies the destruction of home. Also present in Verronen's dystopian duology *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the extinction metaphor marks the rejection of the temporal aspects of human life – intergenerational continuity, family life, history – and favors the spatial experience.

Saari kaupungissa ('Island in the City'): Back to Place

Saari kaupungissa depicts the protagonist moving to a city, and the ensuing experiences of adapting herself to her new hometown. It brings together familiar features of Verronen's prose while giving them a fresh, unexpected form. In the novel, the sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity that so often permeates Verronen's short stories, dystopias, and works that lean toward the fantastic is shifted and projected onto the streets and shores of Helsinki. The call of the wilderness – particularly the protagonist's attraction to islands and other sites of nature – plays a large part in the narrative. This attraction is still associated with extreme conditions and even the risk of death, but in a less dramatized and more abstract sense than in previous works by the author. Stylistically, the novel is the culmination of Verronen's unassuming, minimalistic style of narration, yet it contains poetic interludes that elevate the everyday spaces and highlight their metaphorical function within the narrative.

The novel is a narrative of homesteading, as it depicts setting up a new home and establishing a meaningful connection with a place. The protagonist is settling down, but she is constantly on the move, which is typical for Verronen's protagonists. The fragmentary narrative takes the reader to the streets of the city, to meet the neighbors, to make their way through the reeds of the shoreline and access hidden islands via sea ice. An abundant array of locations and places presents itself to the reader, but only in passing, at brief intervals. The narrative is all astir, going through

stoppages, taking U-turns, and changing its course, but most of these detours take the protagonist to other inhabitants of the place. The city of the novel presents itself as a parade of encounters. These narrative choices reflect the reformulation of the concept of place that has been developed in the work of Doreen Massey and Casey, a formulation that underscores the connections held by the place and moves away from the isolated and essentialist notions that have been linked with the idea of place. Within the novel, the themes of connection and interdependence are correlated with the protagonist's journey of character formation. As usual in Verronen's writing, this juxtaposition takes a particularly spatialized form. The tension between independence and interdependence, or the individual and the community, is already present in the novel's title, 'Island in the City.' The title mentions two separate realms, the island and the city, in an adpositional setting: the island is in the city. Both these locales appear in the novel as settings, yet the reader is also directed toward a metaphorical reading of the title, as the protagonist's name Aisla resembles the English 'isle' and the Spanish 'la isla,' and thus associates her with the island.

The novel consists of loosely connected episodes that center on the protagonist. The starting point of the narrative is her move to a new city, which is not named but can be recognized as Helsinki, the Finnish capital. The novel is narrated by an extradiegetic third-person narrator, and the chapters, or episodes, are divided into four cycles. Most episodes are short; especially fragmentary are the episodes in the first two cycles, 'The City' and the 'Generations,' in which a typical episode occupies only one or two pages. The protagonist, Aisla, is the focalizer of the first and the last cycle. In the first cycle, titled 'The City' (Kaupunki), Aisla has just relocated and explores the urban life around her: the cycle is a collection of her encounters with passers-by, neighbors, and the waterfront of the seaside city. The second cycle, the 'Generations' (Sukupolvet), consists of short flashes of family history, beginning from the early settler past of northern Finland and ending up in the 1960s: a depiction of the protagonist's roots in the north. The third section, titled 'The Acquaintances' (Tuttavat), takes the reader to foreign countries and the margins of society, where the friends of someone – presumably the protagonist's – live. In the fourth cycle, which is titled 'Aisla,' the viewpoint is again Aisla's. This cycle hosts, among others, the longest episode of the novel, a vivid account of Aisla's participation in a reality television show, a robinsonade-like survival contest that takes place on a desolate island in front of the city. Throughout the novel, the style of the narration is declarative, even minimalistic.

Saari kaupungissa employs an array of spatializations to depict the internal processes and emotions inherent to the experience of settling into a place – or the world. The following sections will first analyze these spatializations: the island, the mainland, and the realm of in-between. After that, I reflect on how the novel draws connections with the Finnish family saga and its tradition of representing homesteading in a specific agrarian context. The final part of the subchapter then moves on to examine how the insular settings of the novel develop the theme of isolationism and independence and how the juxtaposition of independence and interdependence, or island and the city, is finally resolved.

SPATIALIZATIONS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

The novel's first cycle, 'The City,' has ten episodes and three italicized interludes. The interludes differ from the episodes of the cycle, as they describe a specific

spatial setting: The first (SK, 7), which also starts the novel, is a *mise-en-abyme* of a newspaper photo and a short account of an article next to it, describing the sea ice and the pathways that the people exercising outdoors have created on it. The second interlude (SK, 17) describes a safe box for people, which is an art project in a museum. The box is a hermetically sealed, see-through glass container that is meant to shelter people who feel threatened in public spaces. The catch, as the narrator remarks, is that, while one can get in by oneself, exiting the structure, on the other hand, requires participation from someone who is outside the box. This is due to the opening system of the safe box: if the box is empty, anyone can go in and press a button inside to close the box. If the person inside the box wants to exit, they need to press the same button inside the box again – but, in order to activate the opening mechanism, someone outside the box has to press a second button. The third interlude (SK, 31) is a description of a reedbed, a liminal setting growing between an island and the mainland.

The first of these interludes, the one that starts the whole novel, presents the sea ice as a utopian setting free from conflict:

There were no problems, no arguments, no demands. Everyone thought it was jolly that people created their own pathways on the ice, and they did their best to promote it. The pumpings that caused currents had been ceased for the winter, so that the ice wouldn't become weaker.

*The photo of the article was graphically beautiful. All the shores had been cropped off. [. . .] There were pathways and trails; shortcuts, mostly, of which one had been stamped hard and widened up to one meter; and a smaller number of silly winding tracks that the passers-by had made to amuse themselves.*¹⁴⁴ (SK, 7; italics in the original)

The passage is not based on an observation of the actual fictional world but describes a newspaper article with a photo that itself interprets the annual natural phenomenon as a source of amusement, playfulness, and good rapport. The sea ice, according to the article, is an event that brings the townspeople together, an extension of the city proper and an ideal setting where the conflicts of urban life cease to exist. The episode makes use of a pattern that could be described as a trope in Helsinki fiction; namely, semiurban nature walking. As Lieven Ameel (2013, 141–43) states in his study of the turn-of-century Helsinki fiction, instead of urban street scenes, Helsinki *flânerie* is traditionally connected with the seashore and the forests of the city. The scene thus links Verronen's novel with the tradition of Helsinki literature. It simultaneously gestures toward the postmodernity of the novel's cityscape, as the scene is a description of a mediatized representation of the city. In this way, the narrative lays the ground for the presence of media and their role in the protagonist's urban experience, a topic that is elaborated on later in the novel, in the episode of a reality television program (SK, 123–46). Since the sea ice interlude is the opening of the novel, it also offers the reader

144. *Ei ollut mitään ongelmia, ei kiistoja, ei vaatimuksia. Kaikkien mielestä oli hauskaa, että ihmiset talloivat jäälle polkujaan. Kaikki tekivät parhaansa edistääkseen sitä omalta osaltaan. Virtauksia aiheuttavat pumppaukset oli lahdella lopetettu talveksi, jotta jää ei olisi heikentynyt. Jutun kuva oli graafisen kaunis. Siitä oli rajattu pois kaikki rannat. [. . .] Oli polkuja ja jälkiä: suurin osa oikaisureittejä, joista yksi oli kovettunut sileäksi ja levennyt metriseksi; pienempi osa hassuja kiemuraisia jälkijonoja, joita kulkijat olivat tehneet huvikseen.*

aesthetic and formal guidance. The *mise-en-abyme* of the photo that complements the article can be seen as a metafictional key for the novel's composition: like the photo that presents only the pathways on the ice and excludes the framing – the shoreline of the city – the narrative consists of separate, loose episodes without a marked beginning or ending. The graphic, plain beauty that the narrator attaches to the photo could also refer to the simple, reserved style of the prose.

When the narrative progresses, the sense of social harmony and mutual trust of the sea ice passage receive a different coloring. The nonitalicized episodes of the first cycle 'The City' consist of meetings with strangers in the city space. The protagonist makes her first appearance in the episode following the sea ice interlude. This episode (SK, 8–10) is a depiction of Aisla's attempt at obtaining a set of telephone directories, which she wants because of the maps and the lists of local services they contain. She goes to the office of the telephone company and asks for the directories, but the customer service person seems to be embarrassed at their high price; instead of buying the directories from the company, Aisla could turn to a man who sells them for a quarter of the price, the clerk suggests. Following her advice, Aisla sets up a meeting with a mystery man who sells them from the trunk of his car. As the arrangement progresses, the protagonist's confusion grows: it seems unlikely that a black market exists for such things as telephone directories. Moreover, as the seller arrives at their meeting point, Aisla notices that his smoke-gray sports car oozes money and wealth. The seller, on the other hand, 'seemed like the manager of a construction site, one who had worked hard beside his subordinates his whole life'¹⁴⁵ (SK, 9). The episode tells the reader that the protagonist has migrated to a new place – since she doesn't have the telephone books – but is also a demonstration of the narrative's furtive humor: the harmless task of getting the telephone directories turns into a scene that resembles a drug deal or other forms of illegal trade. The scene underlines the protagonist's sense of dislocation: while attempting to get herself a means of orientation, a map of the city, she gets tangled in a web of peculiar arrangements and twilight business.

The sense of bafflement that the protagonist experiences during the telephone directory deal characterizes most episodes of the first cycle. A self-made guru reads Aisla's aura on the street (SK, 13–15); her neighbor becomes fixated on decorating the yard with women's panties and maps of Finland (SK, 18–23); a teenager with an alarmingly intense need to discuss shoes scares the protagonist off (SK, 25–26). The streets of the city are full of contradiction and confusion. As the cycle progresses, the reader is encouraged to ask whether the sea ice of the first episode is only a thin layer that keeps the contingency and inconsistency of human life away from sight?

The contrast between the utopian beginning of the novel and the conflict-situations of the first cycle reflect one of the major themes of the novel, the juxtaposition of the individual and the community. On the one hand, there is the shared sense of communality highlighted in the newspaper article and, on the other, the individual's confusion in social encounters, a topic that receives attention in the chapters following the sea ice episode. The narrated, mediated, and thus distanced version of the social space is a utopian one, but the individual's lived experience is quite different from it. It is important to notice, however, that the strange encounters of the 'City' cycle mark

145. [N]äytti rakennustyömaan pikkupomolta, joka oli ikänsä paiskinut samoja duunarihommia kuin alaisensakin.

the protagonist's move to the city; in these episodes, she is a newcomer, a migrant. The protagonist's sense of confusion and the social conflicts she experiences can be seen as a reflection of the trope of disorienting arrival to the city, a common feature of twentieth-century Helsinki literature, as Ameel (2013, 102–6) notes. In his study, Ameel identifies the trope, which involves depictions of paralysis, disorientation, and incapacitation – embodied, physical experiences that are directly linked to the ability to move – as 'a shock felt by characters crossing the threshold into modernity' (Ameel 2013, 104). The tendency to link urbanity with the experience of shock, as Ameel (2013, 104) points out, dates back to Georg Simmel's (2005) and Walter Benjamin's (2006) influential representations of the modern city. In Verronen's contemporary rendering of the trope, experiences of paralysis and shock are replaced with dreamlike strangeness and understated humor. The city and its inhabitants might come across as strange and unpredictable, sometimes even conflictual, but the protagonist's response is more curious than shaken.

Later in the cycle, the contingencies of city life start to appear less distressing for the protagonist. In the latter part of the first cycle, Aisla begins to experiment with the sense of confusion and shock. She does a bungee jump (SK, 35–36), takes part in a flash mob (SK, 32–34), and starts to practice ice-hole swimming (SK, 37–39). In the last cycle of the novel, the protagonist herself starts to show signs of eccentric behavior. An exemplary case is the chapter titled 'Tuntemattomat' ('Strangers,' SK, 115–22), which can be interpreted as an adaptation of the classic flaneur trope of city literature. In the episode, the protagonist becomes aware of a family of grandparents and their grandchildren who spend their time in a café at a department store and, after observing them, decides to follow the group as they continue their journey through the city. This event is a starting shot for Aisla's new pastime of shadowing people of her hometown. The chapter alludes to Edgar Allan Poe's ([1840] 2020) classic short story 'The Man of the Crowd,' a depiction of a unexplainable and monomaniac hunt in the streets of London. The first-person narrator of Poe's story feels a sudden obsessive urge to follow an unfamiliar man as he moves in the streets of the city and among the crowd; but, as fast as he paces and as hard as he tries to reach the man, the narrator is unable to get to him. Finally, after a long and devastating race, the narrator concludes that the man 'is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds' (Poe [1840] 2020). In his treatment of the flaneur, Walter Benjamin (2006, 72–80) interprets the short story's 'prolonged pursuit' as a depiction of an urge to avoid one's own company, in which the necessity to remain among the crowd is a marker of the flaneur's obsessive-compulsive flight from solitude, and simultaneously his quest to recognize and interpret this urge. In his treatment of the Helsinki literature of the twentieth century, Ameel (2013, 135–36) associates Poe's short story with the Freudian uncanny, concluding, however, that in Helsinki literature uncanny encounters are mostly related to the social questions of the period and that the strangers met among the street crowd 'are no complete strangers but turn out to be ghosts from the past' (Ameel 2013, 136) that guide the protagonist to reevaluate their past life choices. Read in this context, Aisla's monomaniac interest in the strange family in the café refers to the problematic relationship between the individual and the city crowd, and as a depiction of the protagonist's state of mind as someone who struggles with her solitude.

The episode, however, makes several variations on the theme of the obsessive pursuit among the crowd. Most significantly, the mood of the episode and the emotions it evokes suggest that it is a conscious rewriting of the theme. The objects of the protagonist's obsession are depicted in an extremely banal manner, a choice that removes all the uncanny that has been traditionally linked with the theme of prolonged pursuit. The narrator describes the family as follows:

In that specific family, the relationships between the family members were most obviously good. The children seemed to be having a great time, and so were the grandparents. They were all trusting and relaxed, no one was cranky or bossy, tense or weepy. No one was in a hurry, or anxious, or nervous.¹⁴⁶ (SK, 115)

The description is mundane and pedestrian, and it highlights the harmonious interaction between the family members in a manner that resembles the opening episode of the novel and its utopian depiction of the people on the sea ice. By repeating this ideal arrangement and by repeatedly placing the protagonist as a viewer and an observer of – but not a participant in – it, the novel simultaneously marginalizes and questions these functional and satisfactory social events and depicts the protagonist's pursuit of them. It is, furthermore, noteworthy that the people being shadowed by the protagonist are specifically a family. This connects the episode with a common motif of realist and naturalist literature, an orphan figure gazing longingly at a family. This echoes the narrative's main theme of homesteading and gestures toward the second cycle of the novel, which revolves around the protagonist's familial history.

The narrative and formal devices applied in the novel, especially focalization, further highlight the juxtaposition of the individual and the community. The protagonist is the focalizer of the first and the last cycle, but in the middle cycles of the novel, the 'Generations' and 'Acquaintances,' she is not present as a focalizer – or in any other way. Thus, in the novel as a whole, focalization shifts between the protagonist, distant relatives and ancestors, and old friends. This means that the shifts in the novel's point of view repeat the juxtaposition between the individual and the community: voice is given to both the protagonist and the community preceding her or surrounding her. This is not uncommon in the genre of the short story cycle or sequence, also known as the composite novel¹⁴⁷ (for the definition of the genre, see Dunn and Morris 1995). Forrest L. Ingram's (1971, 19–20) classic study on the short story cycle maintains that the essential feature of the genre is the tension it creates between the one and the many: a short story cycle balances the individuality of each episode and the relationship these episodes establish with each other. Michelle Pacht (2009) goes as far as stating that, in contemporary fiction, the problematics of identity and the contrast between the individual and the community are among the most important themes and uses of the genre. According to Pacht, 'the short story cycle

146. Mitä ilmeisemmin tuossa perheessä ihmisten väliset suhteet olivat hyvät. Lapsilla näytti olevan hauskaa, isovanhemmilla samoin. He olivat kaikki luottavaisia ja rentoja, kukaan ei kiukutellut tai komennellut, ei ollut kireä tai itkuinen. Kenelläkään ei ollut kiirettä, kukaan ei hätäillyt eikä hermoillut.

147. For an analysis of the genre of Verronen's two other composite novels, *Keihäslintu* and *Luotettava ohikulkija*, see Anni Grönroos's (2006) master's thesis.

can express both the plight of an individual and the fate of a community through its very structure' (Pacht 2009, 1). In relation to these formulations, *Saari kaupungissa* presents a set of conflicting tendencies: on the one hand, the novel has a single protagonist, and even the cycles that are not directly focalized by her are linked to her by the paratexts, namely the titles of the cycles (Generations, Acquaintances). This creates cohesion throughout the novel. On the other hand, the communities, or to be precise, the members of the communities who function as focalizers in the middle cycles, are rather distant from the protagonist. They are either long-gone ancestors or forgotten friends from earlier years and earlier life phases of the protagonist. In her new hometown, the protagonist appears isolated; and in this setting, the focalization never shifts from the protagonist. There are no voices but hers alone.

After presenting the pathways on the sea ice and the everyday reality on the streets of Helsinki, the novel introduces a space that lies somewhere between them. The last poetic interlude of the cycle takes us to the shoreline of the city:

The reeds took over shallow side bays and connected islands to the mainland.

The former meant that the island and the mainland had become one in the eyes of the spectator. In reality, the island might have become more difficult to reach than before. Because of the reeds, it might not be possible to go ashore by boat. Wading was uncomfortable, and the bottom of the reed bed was still so wet that, without wading boots, duckboards, or something else that took extra effort to build, it was impossible to reach the island with dry feet – even during low tide.

Some people hated the reeds, as they hated everything that was fragile, weak, and indefinable, but still resilient, and often also victorious. They would have wanted to reach the island on their own.

The reeds just kept growing; it was their nature. For some people, they were beautiful.

But the reeds would only be a mark of a transitional period, if allowed to grow freely. They grew and withered, and when there was enough withered reed on the reed bed, the willows would come. And a little later, the alders. And then many others. At that point, the bay was no more, and the island had truly become one with the mainland.¹⁴⁸ (SK, 31; italics in the original)

148. *Ruovikko valtasi matalia sivulahtia ja yhdisti saaria mantereeseen.*

Jälkimmäinen tarkoitti, että maiseman katselijan mielestä saari ja manner olivat yhdistyneet. Todellisuudessa saari saattoi olla aiempaa vaikeammin saavutettavissa. Veneellä ei ehkä ollut ruokojen takia mahdollista päästä rantaan, kahlaaminen oli epämurkavaa, ja ruovikon pohja oli yhä niin märkä, ettei saareen päässyt kuivin jaloin edes matalimman veden aikaan tai ilman pitkävärtisiä kumisaappaita. Tai pitkospuita tai jotakin muuta, jonka rakentaminen vaati ylimääräistä työtä ja vaivaa.

Jotkut vihasivat ruovikkoa, niin kuin he vihasivat kaikkea hentoa, heikkoa ja epämääräistä, joka kuitenkin oli sitkeää ja usein lopulta voittoisaa. He olisivat halunneet saavuttaa saaret omilla ehdoillaan.

Ruovikko vain kasvoi, se oli sen luonto. Toisten mielestä se oli kaunis.

Se oli välivaihe, jos se annettiin kasvaa rauhassa. Kun kuihtunutta ruokoa oli kertynyt ruovikon pohjalle riittävästi, tulivat pajut, ja vähän myöhemmin lepät ja monet muut. Siinä vaiheessa mitään sivulahtea ei enää ollut, ja saari oli todella yhdistynyt mantereeseen.

The passage analyzes the liminality of the reedbed, which is something between land and water and escapes clear definition, as well as visitors without proper gear. It is the opposite of the sea ice presented in the first interlude: a slow, gradual process instead of the drama of the freezing and breaking ice. It is tangled and messy, like most organic processes are, instead of the pure and clean presence of the ice. In terms of movement, it is a jungle that captures and restrains instead of providing access, like the sea ice. But ultimately it is the only way an island can permanently merge with the mainland.

In the excerpt above, integration is a geological and biological element, but, since the island bears a symbolic connection with the protagonist, integration refers also to her position as a migrant. The name of the protagonist is a hint into this direction: a Finnish synonym for the word *ruovikko*, reed, is *kaisla* – a word that bears a close resemblance to the name Aisla. The scene metaphorically represents the protagonist's process of settling into a new locale, too: she is integrating and, as the passage above demonstrates, this process will take some time. The reed metaphor is thus an articulation of the novel's philosophy on homesteading, inhabiting, and learning. This can be interpreted in relation to contemporary constructivist theories of learning (see, e.g., Glasersfeld 1995), which approach learning as a process of integrating new experiences with previous knowledge; a process of learning can therefore only take place if the previous knowledge is activated first. This resonates with the composition of the novel, since the cycle following 'The City' is a look into family genealogy – the 'Generations' (SK, 41–58). The novel's structure thus suggests that the protagonist's integration into her new hometown can only take place after a glance at the line of settlers in her family. A similar structure can be found in *Pieni elintila*, in which the protagonist's return to the home she has built for herself can only happen after she has experienced a cathartic homecoming to her childhood home and family.

The 'Generations' cycle can be approached as a metatextual comment on the Finnish literary canon. In his critique of the novel, literary scholar Pertti Lassila (2007) suggests that the cycle can be read as an ironic take on the Finnish family saga and its literary conventions, which, according to him, are extremely viable yet clichéd.¹⁴⁹ The Finnish family saga focuses on providing reason, purpose, and meaning, and mediating the conflicts between the personal and the historical in a way that is unique within the field of (Finnish) literature (Nagy 1986); and it seems, as Lassila (2007) points out, that this very function is challenged in Verronen's novel. Instead of a multivolume book series – the common format of the Finnish family saga – the 'Generations' is a fifteen-page section within a single novel. Instead of providing a longitudinal section with a sense of continuity, the 'Generations' consists of eight short episodes that seem to be completely independent from each other: They do not share characters, locations, or any other hint of consistency with the exception of the titles

149. Throughout the twentieth century, the genre of family saga, often in the form of multivolume book series, persisted in the field of Finnish literature, gaining popularity and national importance in a way that was unique among other Nordic literatures ('Sukuromaani' 2021). The genre provides a longitudinal section of the history and ties together the ups and downs of a given family and the historical and societal development (Nagy 1986). Matti Klinge (1980) has highlighted the genre's function as a means of constructing a national narrative around the idea of Finnish state and nationhood.

of the chapters. The eight separate chapters are titled with numbers that start from 19 and proceed at irregular intervals until the number 1, which is the last chapter of the section and presumably depicts Aisla's parents, the first generation preceding the protagonist.¹⁵⁰ The descending ordering of the chapter numbers is the only element of cohesion between the chapters. Besides the numbering of the chapters, nothing in the chapter episodes seems to point toward the protagonist or reflect her life in contemporary Helsinki – or, more importantly, create a coherent story around the family. The episodes are random and inconsistent, just like the protagonist's interactions with the passers-by on the streets of the city.

Read in the context of the theme of homesteading, one could, however, suggest that the cycle should not be reduced to satire or critical commentary. Despite its apparent haphazardness, the 'Generations' provides a new point of view for the protagonist's process of settling into her new hometown. The cycle introduces the tradition of pioneer farming, a theme that runs through most of Finnish classics, including Aleksis Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* and Väinö Linna's *Täällä Pohjantähden alla*. Like these classics, the episodes of the 'Generations' cycle establish an integral connection between land and home: the first chapter (SK, 43–44) of the section depicts how its female protagonist, Kerttu, the nineteenth generation preceding Aisla, travels to a new settlement in the far north and shakes off the fear of the wilderness that has been imprinted on her in her home village. The second episode, which presents the thirteenth generation preceding Aisla (SK, 45–46), focuses on a house-building plans of a flock of brothers, their competition over hierarchy, and their father's hopes to extend their farm. In the fifth episode – the fourth generation preceding Aisla – (SK, 51–52), a confrontation develops between those of the family members who are settled farm owners and those whose lifestyle requires moving around the parish; and, in the last episode (SK, 57–58), wife and husband argue whether they should invest in a house in the new township or buy a plot of land in their home village. Altogether, five of the eight episodes concern relocating to a new place, building a house, or planning to build one, setting up a pioneer farm, or sharing an estate between the heirs. Even those episodes that do not directly touch the theme of pioneering, such as the sixth episode (SK, 53–54), relate to it somehow; in the aforementioned episode, the protagonist, Aukusti – the third generation preceding Aisla – recognizes his urge to travel to the United States once again, and follows this yearning despite being aware that it makes him seem foolish in the eyes of the villagers; unlike most people who emigrate to the States in order to build themselves a farm, he is looking for a spiritual and emotional experience, a journey toward the 'wide open spaces' (*avarammat alat*, SK, 54), rather than an economically reasonable solution, as he acknowledges. Although Aukusti's solution goes against the grain of his contemporaries and predecessors, he nevertheless acknowledges the pioneer tradition and positions himself in relation to it. The 'Generations' cycle, in other words, contextualizes Aisla's move to the new hometown and relates it to the hard work of pioneer farming within the premodern agrarian society. Moreover, the cycle suggests that there are similarities between the past and present experiences. In the episodes of the cycle depicted above, the act of moving and founding a pioneer farm is associated with social confrontation

150. The cycle involves episodes from generations 19, 13, 8, 6, 4, 3, 2, and 1. As can be seen from the list, generations closer to Aisla are more likely to be included in the cycle.

and upheaval, which resonates with the confusing interactions Aisla experiences in her new hometown.

The theme of pioneer farming that is introduced into the narrative in the 'Generations' cycle thus shifts the interpretation of the whole novel. Among other things, it elaborates on the biological imagination that is called into action with the reed metaphor. As mentioned in the 'Wild Spaces' chapter of this study, the plant kingdom and animal realm appear very rarely in Verronen's works: instead of nonhuman species, the author's depictions of wilderness focus on spatial aspects. The only significant exception to this is the theme of extinction, which is discussed in the 'Living Space and the Troubles of Homecoming in *Pieni elintila*' subchapter of this volume. The emphasis placed on the reed metaphor in *Saari kaupungissa* can, however, be understood through the idealism of place that is often associated with the theme of pioneering in literature and American naturalist thought (see, e.g., Thoreau [1864] 2004). While these associations concern the North American rather than the Finnish manifestation of the cultural imagination of pioneering, I suggest that similarities between the two exist. In his treatment on the notion of homesteading, Casey ([1993] 2009, 291) emphasizes achieving what he calls 'co-habitancy,' a certain settled and established way of dwelling in the place among its other inhabitants, humans or not. Describing the notion as a union between nature and culture, Casey ([1993] 2009, 291) tracks the notion back to Henry David Thoreau's ([1862] 2008) influential essay on walking and develops further Thoreau's thought with a contemporary emphasis on ecology:

In homesteading (at least that of an ecologically sensitive sort), one seeks to attain an on-going co-habitancy with one's new home-place and its denizens. Indeed, only by a concerted and prolonged co-habitation between the homesteader and the land can homesteading become something more than forced exploitation of the region. (Casey [1993] 2009, 291)

Casey's notion of homesteading is thus a mixture of American naturalism and nature writing, early ecocritical thought, American frontierism (evoked by Thoreau) and phenomenology of place. Casey's treatment of co-habitancy sheds light on the values, hopes, and expectations that contemporary ecocritical and spatial thought attach to the notion of pioneering and the history of settler farming. The idea of dwelling somewhere beside something else represents a harmonious and desirable state of being; in *Saari kaupungissa*, the thickets of reeds replace the crops that grow on the cleared fields that shape the lives of the generations in the 'Generations' cycle. The imagery of homesteading, although slightly modified, still relies on organic growth and the reclaiming of land: for the forebears, it was the process of clearing fields from the forest, whereas in contemporary Helsinki the land is reclaimed from the sea. As an imprint of the agrarian past, the golden reeds grow, joining people to the land and land to the people in a similar way as grain crops did in the past.¹⁵¹

151. These connotations deviate from the classical Greek tradition, where reeds (and reed pipes) are associated with the god Pan and thus with shepherds and wilderness. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* involves a scene between Pan and the nymph Syrinx, who is pursued by Pan and turned into reeds. Pan then cuts the reeds and turns them into a reed pipe (Ovid and Melville 1998, 1.687–1.719).

In its depiction of places, *Saari kaupungissa* does not foreground or maintain idealist or essentialist notions of place. Although the episodes of the 'Generations' cycle are mainly set at home, they are far from being representations of immobile and static past. The characters of the episodes include settlers (SK, 43–44, 45–46), immigrants leaving Finland for the United States (SK, 53–54), and a group of Kalmyks entering the country from Russia (SK, 47–48). In the novel, the past of Finland is made up of people moving, leaving, and establishing connections. A similar ethos dominates the two cycles that depict the protagonist's experiences in her hometown. The specificity of the place is not evoked with the help of toponyms or landmarks, nor does the narrative register the built infrastructure of the city; the focus is on the sudden encounters and contingent trajectories between the people. The city manifests itself in social contacts, encounters, and connections. Even the fragmentary composition of the novel guides the reader to construct connections between the episodes. The city itself is in direct contact with its adjacent areas and has fluid geographical boundaries, as various episodes of the novel demonstrate. The article on the sea ice (SK, 7), for instance, highlights the shifting borders of the city. The borders of the city are porous and indefinable; the protagonist is drawn to the islands and to the recreational areas on the fringes of the city proper. Even most of the islands in the novel are connected to the mainland, by either the sea ice or the reedbed. The Helsinki of the novel is defined by its fringes, and especially by its semiwild and semiurban recreational areas. The sense of place in the novel springs from connectivity and flexibility rather than exclusion and withdrawal.

All the above connects the novel's view on place with Massey's (1994) formulation, which rejects the idea of a place's identity as a product of its internal qualities, and presents the place as a product of its relations and connections. The central point in Massey's thinking is that place is dynamic rather than static. This quality is highlighted in Verronen's novel by its composition – a fragmentary narrative demands that the reader constantly reorganize their mental landscape – and by the essence of specific spatial settings. In *Saari kaupungissa*, all the highlighted spatial settings are in the process of metamorphosis: the sea ice is a temporary phenomenon, the reeds grow and redraw maps, and the seashore of the city alternates from calm to stormy, from docility to absolute wilderness. As a result, place in *Saari kaupungissa* presents itself as something that is dynamic.

Although the novel embraces the sense of place and local experience, some parts of the narrative indicate the presence and influence of the global condition. Globalized spatial relations are highlighted in the third cycle of the novel, 'Acquaintances.' The cycle consists of three episodes, two of which are stories of Finns who become expatriates. In the first story (SK, 67–73), a man narrowly survives after sitting in a bus next to someone carrying illegal fireworks. While talking with his fellow passengers, the protagonist does not understand the foreign expression for the firework but intuitively hops off the bus only minutes before the fireworks cause an explosion. The other episode (SK, 61–66) is the story of an ecologically minded idealist who marries a pragmatic engineer. The couple moves to the United States but the idealist decides to end the marriage as soon as she is arrested for walking on the street. The first story presents a critical view on language and its limitations as a means of communication; the second one relates a love affair with emigration, and the ability to move in space with mental freedom. Both episodes end with the characters' return to Finland. By

presenting two failed experiences of emigration, the cycle underscores the difficulties and risks that are attached to the act of emigrating abroad. The episodes can be seen as reflections of Aisla's slow but successful process of integration, while they also seem to comment on the current state of affairs of Helsinki, Aisla's hometown. The title of the cycle, 'Acquaintances,' suggests that, in the everyday life of the Finnish capital, the global condition is still at the level of acquaintanceship: something to be explored and consumed for the fun of it, but at the same time distant, alien, and often set up to fail. The global connections receive critical treatment in the novel. However, they are present as a sign of a change in urban experience.

THREE INSULAR EPISODES

As much as the narrative highlights connections, encounters and mobility, it is the isolated insular setting that dominates the narrative, especially toward the end of the novel. In order to further analyze the novel, the following section examines three separate episodes with insular settings. In *Saari kaupungissa*, the island is not only a symbolic spatialization of the protagonist but also functions as a setting since the archipelago of Helsinki is present throughout the narrative. The central episodes of the novel take place on an island. The following one (SK, 27–29) belongs to the first cycle of the novel.

On a sunny winter afternoon, Aisla enters a tiny islet. It is situated just in front of the city, only two hundred meters away from the mainland, in a bay that has been tamed by bridges. The weather is beautiful and the sea ice around the islet is filled with outdoorsy people walking, skiing, skating, and ice fishing. She sees a huge power line, held up by a pillar on the islet, and multiple kites floating and buzzing in the air. On a bright day like this, close to a city like this, the protagonist imagines how one could shut out the surrounding world: would it be possible to not hear the voices of the traffic and the people enjoying the winter day? Would it be possible to forget the city, to hide, to vanish? It seems so: 'The voices of people fooling around on the ice sank somewhere, into a vast space that could have smothered more of them'¹⁵² (SK, 28).

A couple of years before, the narrator explains, a healthy young man came to the islet just like Aisla today, walking on the sea ice. A day after his arrival, a heatwave began to soften the ice, and soon the islet was cut off from the mainland again, surrounded by open sea and reeds. Next summer, the islet is visited by three mechanics maintaining the power line. As they climb up the pillar, one of them sees something:

Eventually, the one who had done the observation went there alone. He found a man sitting on an insulated cushion, back against the alders, gazing into the distance with eyes that had been picked out by the birds.¹⁵³ (SK, 29)

The body has no signs of violence, no indication of a sudden seizure. The death of the young man remains a mystery. No answers are provided.

152. Jäällä ilakoivien ihmisten äänet upposivat jonnekin; suureen tilaan, johon niitä olisi mahtunut enemmänkin.

153. Havainnoin tehnyt oli lopulta mennyt yksin. Ja löytänyt miehen, joka istui lämpöä eristävällä alustalla, selkä lepänrunkoja vasten, ja katsoi lintujen runtelemilla silmillään jonnekin kauas.

The episode that appears in the early pages of the novel unpacks several repeating elements of the narrative. It presents the seaside of the city as a liminal place that interweaves culture with nature, and life with death. It reiterates the spatial arrangement of the novel's title, island in the city. It also understatedly introduces the mythical allusions in the novel: the islet is the nesting place of swans, and the corpse's eyes are mutilated by birds, although not necessarily the swans. In Finno-Ugric mythology, the long-necked swan was believed to be able to dip its head as far as the other levels of the world, particularly to Tuonela, the land of the dead. The islet thus gains a subtle mythological dimension.

The episode is narrated by an extradiegetic narrator who observes Aisla observing the islet through the eyes of the young man. The focalization does not shift from Aisla to the man, but the narrator indicates that Aisla is mimicking the supposed estimations and reactions of the man in relation to the place, and that she is trying to adopt his viewpoint. Rather than trying to imagine his mood or reasoning, Aisla focuses on his perceptions of the place and his interactions with it. The episode underscores sensory perceptions, especially sound, but also Aisla's act of spatial imagination as a space-constituting and even space-giving ('the voices [. . .] sank somewhere, into a vast space') element. Moreover, the narrator's choice of words suggests that Aisla approaches the death not as a tragedy or an accident but as an act of free will: she scans the islet looking for 'the best place to hide' ('*paras piilo*,' SK, 28) – as if she knew the man came to the islet looking for a hiding place – and strains her senses to first register and then block out the soundscape of the surrounding city – as if she knew the man was trying to distance himself from the city. In other words, the episode suggests that her little spatial play is built on the assumption that the man came on the islet with the intention of dying; that the incident was planned and that he deliberately chose this location to be his place of death. In this vein, the aura of mystery lingers no longer only on the death itself but on its setting as well.

The themes of the islet episode – death and withdrawal – allude to a classic of insular texts, John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. The work is known especially for its XVII. Meditation and its use of island as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of people:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee. (Donne 1623, 275, XVII. Meditation)

Like the islet episode of the novel, Donne's poetic treatment of the island associates interconnectedness with the event of death. Mortality is the ultimate common denominator; just as inevitably death sets us apart from each other, it also creates a sense of shared fate and does away with artificial lines of demarcation between people. Both texts employ sound as an expression of the interconnection: for Donne, it is the sound of the church bells, and for Verronen's protagonist the hum of the city and distant traffic.

In the islet episode, the result of the narrative devices used, especially the manipulation of the viewpoint, is a double exposure of the place. The scene represents

the place as a crossing of two stories, Aisla's and the man's. When entering the site of death, the protagonist is not looking for isolation. On the contrary, she exercises her spatial imagination to empathize with someone, the deceased she never knew. Two people, seekers of solitude – the one looking for a place to die and the other following his trail – join their trajectories. In this way, the islet, a refuge for solitude, turns into a meeting point.

An island serves as a site of contact in another episode that is, together with the following episode, the turning point of the narrative. This episode, titled 'Survival' ('Selviytyminen,' SK, 123–46), sends Aisla to an island for over two months as a participant of a reality television show called *The Island Survivor* ('Saariselviytyjä'). The demanding contest takes place on a small desolate island in front of the city. Despite its central and thus accessible location, the show advertises itself as the most authentic outdoor survival reality program ever filmed. The contestants are given a knife, a blanket, a water bottle, and a headlamp camera; after that, they are left to their own devices without any contact with the outside world. There are no missions, no tests, no votes, no camera crews – and no food; the long days of the contestants consist of gathering edible grass, leaves, and roots, and keeping themselves warm. The only way for the contestants to get away from the island is to give up and resign from the race. Aisla is one of the last people remaining on the island, and is finally announced the winner, since her only competitor is caught cheating; he has a hidden food storage in one of the trees on the island. Despite her victory, the result of Aisla's endurance trial is a sense of emptiness: 'She hadn't learned anything relevant about herself. [. . .] And she wasn't sure whether she had expected something else or not. Nothing had emerged but, then again, she couldn't say that it was disappointing, either' 154 (SK, 146).

The episode is a postmodern robinsonade, a reworked version of the classic shipwreck narrative. Instead of social isolation, the postmodern version offers the islanders the comforts of companionship – but this companionship is distorted by the presence of cameras and the ongoing competition. Instead of the omnipotent ideals of the Enlightenment that spark Robinson Crusoe into action, the contestants are guided by their hunger. They do not cultivate or develop the island, nor do they establish any rules or organization; they merely graze on the island until it is barren. Then they leave, feeling just as empty as the consumed island. The episode can be read as a satirical, even cynical depiction of the postmodern condition, which is characterized by an absence of values and ideals and the presence of a market capitalism that takes the form of all-encompassing competition and mediated storytelling.

'Survival' is yet another example of Verronen's use of an island as a mediated, illusory, and grotesque reflection of contemporary society (Ameel and Kankkunen 2017). In the context of *Saari kaupungissa*, it is the culmination point of the juxtaposition between the individual and the community: one after another, the contestants resign, so that at the end of the episode the community is undone. But the erasing of the community seems to be just as fatal for the winner as well: after her victory, Aisla is not able to verbalize her experience or even define if there was an experience at all (Ameel and Kankkunen 2017, 267).

154. Hän ei ollut saanut tietää itsestään mitään olennaista uutta. [. . .] Hän ei ollut varma, oliko hän odottanut vielä jotakin muuta. Mitään ei ollut ilmaantunut, mutta ei sitä voinut pettymykseksikään sanoa.

After the traumatic and cathartic deconstruction of the community – and the individual – the protagonist ventures into the Helsinki archipelago once again in an episode that follows the ‘Survival.’ This time she is not a participant in a media spectacle but a spectator of a small performance (SK, 147–51). The specifics of the performance are not revealed but the narrator describes how the small island is turned into a series of story sections that the audience can freely access. The opening of the episode focuses on the fellow participants that the protagonist encounters:

There was something familiar about the people who had gathered on the dock. Aisla had almost anticipated it. Those who were fascinated by an unconventional theatrical performance – a radio play, a guided tour – on a small local island on a dark evening in late August had to have something in common. [. . .]

The ferry could carry 30 people: those who had a ticket to the performance, hardly anyone else. The performance was not a mass event, and not only because of the ferry. Aisla knew the island, its paths, and buildings. She had been there before, several times, in daytime. The island could not accommodate large crowds, it didn’t have such a site, indoors or outdoors.¹⁵⁵ (SK, 147)

The episode forms a clear contrast to the previous chapter, the Saariselviytyjä episode, and its island experience. As the narrator highlights, the performance is not for the masses, unlike the reality television show. Even the faceless, anonymous, depersonalized nature of the audience is questioned and challenged at the beginning of the episode, as the protagonist notices a sense of familiarity among the small crowd. The performance depicted in the episode can be approached as a ‘landscape narrative,’ a type of narrative performed on site, as Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu (2016, chap. 7) define the genre. According to them, the prototypes of landscape narratives are to be found in all religious traditions and their pilgrimage practices; the main purpose of a landscape narrative is to create a sense of participation (Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu 2016, 215). This is also Aisla’s experience of the performance:

The stories told were not that important, really. Nor were the effects. Their significance lay in the fact that they created a space where one could think one’s own thoughts. One could sense the presence of other people and come to understand that the performance wouldn’t be the same if one were to go through it alone. Or with a bunch of completely different people.¹⁵⁶ (SK, 149)

155. Laiturille kerääntyvissä ihmisissä oli jotakin tutunoloista. Se oli Aislasta melkeinpä odotettua. Heissä, joita kiehtoi epätavallinen teatteriesitys – kuunnelma, kiertokävely – pienellä lähisaarella elokuun lopun pimeänä iltana, täytyi olla jotakin yhteistä. [. . .]

Yhteysveneeseen mahtui kolmisenkymmentä ihmistä: kaikki esityslipun lunastaneet eikä juurikaan enempää. Näytös ei ollut mikään massatapahtuma, eikä se johtunut pelkästään veneestä. Aisla tunsu saareen, sen polut ja rakennukset. Siellä ei ollut paikkoja, joissa suurelle joukolle olisi voitu esittää jotakin, ei sisällä eikä ulkona.

156. Kerrotut tarinat eivät olleet sinänsä niin kovin tärkeitä. Eivätkä tehosteet. Niiden merkitys oli siinä, että ne loivat tilan, jossa saattoi alkaa ajatella omiaan. Saattoi aistia muiden ihmisten läsnäolon ja ymmärtää senkin, ettei esitys olisi lainkaan sama, jos sitä olisi kulkemassa läpi yksin. Tai aivan toisenlaisten ihmisten kanssa.

The performance gives Aisla ‘a space where one could think one’s own thoughts.’ This is contradictory, because the episode can be read in the context of participatory art, community art, and relational aesthetics. As Hanna Kuusela suggests in her study on the topic, works of art that draw from these theoretical and philosophical orientations tend to underline their attempt at democratizing art, reversing hierarchies, and strengthening community spirit; but just as often, she claims, their promises fall short, and the sought-after communality gives way to a heightened sense of individuality (Kuusela 2020, 102–11). The protagonist’s experience in the excerpt above seems to reflect an oscillation between the presence of other people and her own private experience, like that observed and criticized in Kuusela’s study.

The episode concludes the novel’s many allusions to mediated representations of the island and the waterfront; after the newspaper article and its utopian sea ice and the grotesque televised survivor competition on the island, a modest landscape narrative performance offers the protagonist a sense of catharsis.

The association between an insular place and a performance, a spectacle, or a mediatized event is particularly interesting, as it appears in many of Verronen’s works. The Helsinki archipelago plays a significant role in Verronen’s nonfictional writing, too. In the 2010s, Verronen published two works of local history: *Sulhanen, Lapinniemen viimeinen saari* (‘Sulhanen, the last island of Lapinniemi,’ 2014) and *Varjosaari, piilossa keskellä Helsinkiä* (‘Varjosaari, hidden in the middle of Helsinki,’ 2019c), which document the history of two small islets. In *Sulhanen*, the narrator lays the groundwork for the ensuing history of the island by referring to a game of make-believe she has occasionally played: since reading an article on micronations, she has been on the lookout for a suitable place to build a sovereign state of her own. Her preconditions for the place include easy defensibility, but that should not come at the cost of proper transportation connections: after careful consideration, the narrator’s conclusion is to start looking for an islet within rowing distance from a Helsinki Metro station. The place she finds is Sulhanen, a little islet close by the Länsiväylä highway. The point of interest here lies in the notion of a micronation, which refers to a political entity that considers itself sovereign yet is not recognized by international organizations and governments (see, e.g., Strauss [1979] 1999). In addition to political and ideological aspirations, modern micronations are often associated with artistic purposes and role-playing and rely heavily on the Internet; they should therefore be distinguished from the notion of a microstate, a legally recognized state that is small in geographical area and population. Douglas McDougall (2013, 231) defines micronations as ‘performative fictions,’ highlighting the phenomenon’s deep connections to utopian writing. The narrator’s remark on the micronation phenomenon in *Sulhanen* thus activates several frames of reference, some of which point to literary utopias and utopian thinking, and others that underscore the island’s potential as a site of performance. The latter, especially, seems to be in line with Verronen’s fictive islands. In *Saari kaupungissa*, the island is a site of nature, but also a site of performance and narrative.

That being said, the micronation association naturally sheds light on the function of island as a symbol for autonomy and isolation in Verronen’s poetics of space. As McDougall presents in his article,

Islands do still offer distinct identities and spaces in an increasingly placeless world, but the island as metaphor, the 'designed island,' also tells us something important about the 'art of isolating' in social organisation, which is crucial to all micronations (which are frequently artificial islands): the imagining of the island utopia is really the imagining of an in-between space. (McDougall 2013, 240)

Islands, in other words, are places of in-between, which makes them suitable for micronation performances. The 'art of isolating,' in McDougall's words, could refer to the role of island in *Saari kaupungissa*. Although many of the novel's episodes – the article on the sea ice, the death on the islet, the reality TV show or the landscape narrative performance – contain acts of isolation, they also maintain the hope for encounters and sometimes even intimacy. The islands and islets of the novel clearly function as places of alternative order, or as heterotopias¹⁵⁷ that simultaneously represent and challenge the social order. The heterotopian potential of the island is further evoked in *Sulhanen*, wherein another reason that the narrator gives for her sudden interest in the islet is even more eccentric than her interest in micronations: the local newspaper is asking for its readers' help in finding the most centrally located outhouse (*huussi*, a lavatory typical for the Finnish summer cottages) in the capital city. The narrator sends in the one in *Sulhanen* as her suggestion. The outhouse anecdote underscores the heterotopic nature of the islet: it is a place where the city gives way to the countryside, a place of opposition, a memorial to the agrarian past – but also a comic element.

Ultimately, the protagonist does not settle on an island, or in the city. At the end of the narrative, Aisla discovers a new pastime that takes her to the waters of the Baltic Sea. In the second-last episode of the novel, she starts to experiment with a canoe and slowly teaches herself to paddle. The episode shows Aisla paddling in the small bays of the city's seashore:

Fourth time in the water. Aisla no longer emptied and inflated the canoe every time. The janitor who lived next to the shore had watched her pumping and had promised her that she could leave her canoe on the wall of the outbuilding. A mooring in the city center. No doubt the whole undertaking was so whimsical that it evoked compassion.

As the wind started to push the bow towards the opposite shore, Aisla let it happen, although she was still a hundred meters from the end of the bay. Whatever, the winds and the waves were there to be befriended. The two hundred meters of the open bay felt nice – she had seen her fair share of the shoreline's reeds. The canoe even remained roughly in the right direction.¹⁵⁸ (SK, 160)

157. Heterotopia, coined by Michel Foucault in his essay 'Of Other Spaces' (1986), is a concept that refers to spaces that are 'other' in relation to their context: either 'other' in the sense that they deviate from the context, or 'other' in the sense that they represent their context and mirror it. According to Foucault, heterotopias often represent or allude to other spaces. He presents multiple subcategories of heterotopian sites: heterotopias of deviation, for instance, include places such as asylums and prisons: places that isolate and contain people whose behavior is deviant. Heterotopias of crisis, on the other hand, are places for those who are undergoing a liminal life stage; Foucault uses the example of a boarding school (Foucault 1986).

158. Neljäs kerta vesillä. Aisla ei enää tyhjentänyt ja täyttänyt kanoottia joka kerta. Rannan läheisyydessä asuva talonmies, joka oli katsellut hänen pumppauksiaan, oli luvannut että

The episode presents the protagonist as being both embedded in the city – as she has ‘a mooring in the city center’ – and in the process of venturing into open waters. The scene uses the metaphor of setting sail, the idea of venturing out, starting a new chapter in one’s life, or maturing into full agency. Moreover, by positioning the protagonist on the water at the end of the narrative, the novel presents a subtle yet noticeable rejection of the agrarian ideals of homesteading as a process of being rooted in a specific place, and the more general association between home, homesteading, and landownership that is evoked in the ‘Generations’ cycle. Like the reedbed and the sea ice, the two spaces highlighted in the interludes, Aisla belongs to the realm of in-betweenness. Instead of the island or the city, she chooses the ability to freely move between them (Ameel and Kankkunen 2017, 270). In this way, the problem presented throughout the novel, the conflict between the individual and the community, is resolved through inclusion: instead of resorting to one or the other, the protagonist chooses to establish a connection between the opposite poles.

The two novels discussed in this chapter, *Pieni elintila* and *Saari kaupungissa*, are narratives of home that differ in the extreme. *Pieni elintila* unfolds as a struggle between the centripetal idea of homecoming and the centrifugal notion of living space with its expansionist connotations. The plot-driven novel develops into an imaginative tragedy that challenges the reader with its unexpected allusion to the problematic concept of *Lebensraum*. *Saari kaupungissa*, on the other hand, steers clear of the element of shock and dramatic suspense and relies on minimalistic, even banal fragments of urban life. Both narratives, however, draw inspiration from literary tradition as they present the gradual processes of coming home or settling into a new homeplace. The Greek *nostoi*, the figure of the flaneur, and the theme of pioneer farming are fused with highlighted spatial settings, such as islands, in order to convey the experience of creating a relationship with a place, or of renouncing one.

Pieni elintila, which operates with concepts such as expansionism, adaptation, extinction, and living space, brings forth the biological imagination regarding the notion of home. It is a complex cluster of meanings that seems to suggest a very specific relationship between an individual and their home: a relationship that is built on the idea of external forces and surroundings directing and having control over the individual’s internal and emotional needs, as well as the normalization of this state of affairs. Yet toward the end of the narrative an alternative approach is offered in the form of the tiny apartment and its symbolic representation of the power of imagination and the need to turn inward.

In *Saari kaupungissa*, on the other hand, the trope of the island seems to underline the autonomy of the individual, yet as the novel progresses the setting of the island is progressively associated with the notions of performance, spectacle, illusion, and mediatized representation. Although the novel distances itself from the agrarian ideal of pioneering and homesteading, the metaphor of reedbed still maintains the idea of

hän voisi säilyttää kanoottia ulkorakennuksen seinustalla. Venepaikka keskellä kaupunkia. Epäilemättä koko hanke oli niin hassu, että se herätti myötätuntoa.

Kun tuuli alkoi alkumatkasta painaa keulaa kohti vastarantaa, Aisla antoi sen tapahtua, vaikka hän oli vielä sadan metrin päässä lahden päästä. Mikäpä siinä, tuulen ja aaltojen kanssa saattoi tulla tutuksi. Parinsadan metrin selkävesiosuus tuntui mukavalta, ja rantaruovikkoo olikin jo tullut katseltua. Kanootti jopa pysyi suunnilleen suunnassa.

integration and cyclical growth. While *Pieni elintila* renounces intergenerationality and family, *Saari kaupungissa* proposes that other kinds of connection and relation are still possible. The latter suggestion is put forward by presenting place as something that draws its particularity from its connections.

Conclusion: Harassing Habitats

The subtitle phrase of this study, *Harassing Habitats*, is an intentional double entendre, as it can be understood as either a description of habitats or something that is done to them. In English, the earliest survived written records of the noun habitat date back to late eighteenth-century botanical and zoological texts.¹⁵⁹ The word habitat derives from the Latin verbs *habitare*, signifying ‘to live, inhabit, dwell,’ and *habere*, ‘to have, hold, possess.’ The Latin root of the noun thus marries dwelling with ownership and possession. (Harper 2001a.) The modern usage of the term in biology has three slightly different meanings. It can refer, first, to a set of conditions that are suitable for a living being or a population, second to a specific place in which a population naturally occurs, and third to a certain area that is distinguishable from other areas. In common discourse, habitat refers to a place where a person lives.

The meaning of ‘habitat’ conveys an image of what the fictional environments in Maarit Verronen’s fiction are: they are not merely spaces to be examined in their abstractedness, or places interesting in their particularity, but rather something that surround, nourish, and enable the human agent, namely the character. The coexistence of the habitat and the agent manifests itself as a process of continuous interaction and adaptation. This interdependency is the defining feature of Verronen’s place–character relationships, wherein space functions as a means of character creation and worldmaking. Verronen’s works place a special emphasis on how human habitats mold and remold their inhabitants, and how human actions are dictated by the need to adapt to external conditions. *Saari kaupungissa*, for instance, is a postmodern *Bildungsroman* in which the temporal structure is partly replaced with a spatial frame. The fragmented, episodic novel centers on the protagonist’s evolving relationship with her new hometown; the development of her character does not unfold through accumulation of time but through episodic encounters with separate parts of the city. The novel gives shape to a selfhood that is determined in relation to space instead of history or past, much in the way as Michel Foucault famously described in his essay ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1986).

In this way, the notion of habitat reveals the crucial stance of this study, namely that a habitat, being a living space or a place of residence, is a lived place. This reflects

159. The adjective habitable, directly sourced from Old French *habitable*, appeared in the fourteenth century and is thus significantly older than the noun habitat (Harper 2001a).

the two domains of spatial theory that guide this study, namely the phenomenological and poststructuralist lines of thought. Despite their diverging emphases, both of these schools approach space as something that is constantly produced and perceived, and thus developing rather than being fixed and definite.

The notion of habitat and its roots in biology and ecology resonate with the ethos of the author's works. As ambiguous as Verronen's works sometimes are, with their reserved protagonists and their curious, even nightmarish settings, the governing idea is always a belief in the project of reason, and trust in humanity's attempts to understand our surroundings. Verronen's narratives are stories of exploration, curiosity, and observation. Her characters are researchers by nature, attuned to the world they inhabit: they wish to study their surroundings, familiarize themselves with them, and learn how to dwell in them. However dystopian, Verronen's narratives remind us that the methods of observation, experimentation, and honest reflection might still work when everything else fails.

But, as modern ecology has distanced itself from the harmonious notions of ecosystems and habitats, literary scholarship has also shifted away from the romanticization of nature. In this vein, the habitat examined in this study is not merely a pastoral dream but contains the dangers of exclusion, parochialism, and repression. The Latin roots of the word habitat – to live and to possess – cast a dark shadow over the notion. To inhabit is to possess, and vice versa: the battle for living space is a battle of life and death. The protective and nourishing habitat is also a site of exclusion, and where there is exclusion there are also seeds of rebellion, border violation, and infiltration. This leads us to the other part of our subtitle, the notion of harassing. According to Merriam-Webster ('Harass' 2018), the definition for the word harass is 'to exhaust or fatigue,' 'to annoy persistently,' or 'to worry and impede by repeated raids.'¹⁶⁰ In the context of this study, harassing refers to both the effects caused by the literary habitats and the acts performed against them.

The expression of habitats that harass is my way of highlighting the strangeness and unfamiliarity of Verronen's literary spaces. The dreamlike, uncertain storyworlds of Verronen evoke a sense of confusion. Such is the effect of the fantastic, yet allegorically logical geography of *Pimeästiä maasta*, or *Luolavuodet*, which presents the age-old but reworked trope of the cave.

Yet the subtitle of this study has a second meaning, that of habitats that are harassed. Verronen's narratives often depict disturbing or threatening offenses to the spatial order. Her characters might cross impenetrable boundaries, like in the novel *Pimeästiä maasta*, or appropriate marginal and peripheral sites, thus offering alternative and dissenting strategies of inhabiting, like in the novels *Karsintavaihe* and *Kirkkaan selkeää*. Such disruptive events not only foreground space but also dramatize it, making them instrumental elements of the plot. Simultaneously, acts of border crossing, squatting, and other means to problematize spatial conduct lend themselves to the tackling of ethical and moral questions.

160. The root of the word harass is the sixteenth-century French word *harasser*, which means 'to tire out, vex.' According to the OED (Harper 2001b), another possible root is the Old French *harer* 'to stir up, provoke, set a dog on,' which derives from the Frankish *hara*, 'over here, hither' and the Old German *hier*, 'here.'

In *Terrains of Imagination in Contemporary Finnish Literature. Harassing Habitats in Maarit Verronen's Fiction*, the starting point of my analyses has been the conception of relational space that is socially and culturally constructed, as well as the recognition of the inherent spatiality of late modernity. To this end, I have profited from many theories and concepts developed for spatial studies. My study thus contributes to the growing movement of reading literary spaces with the conceptual help of spatial theory, while bearing in mind the specificity of literature: the presence of genre and the tradition of literary tropes. This study also draws on the field of environmental criticism and ecocriticism and establishes a connection between spatial and ecocritical readings of literature in its analyses of Verronen's texts. The selected primary literature consists of Verronen's works from three different decades, beginning with the author's artistic breakthrough novel *Pimeästä maasta* and ending with the dystopian novel *Kirkkaan selkeää*. My study gives an overall picture of Verronen's central poetic strivings and themes, all linked to her presentation of spaces.

The theoretical and methodological part of this study has focused on the evaluation of spatial theory and its application for purposes of spatial literary studies. In order to further the field, I have provided an outline of the different approaches within spatial literary studies. As these kinds of categorizations are still rare in this area of literary scholarship, the outline this study has presented provides points of departure for coming theoretical-methodological discussions. One of the emergent topics among these is the relation between spatial literary studies and ecocriticism; to answer some of the questions, I have discussed the similarities and differences of the two analytical approaches from the viewpoint of wilderness and its conceptualization.

This study has outlined a set of concepts for the use of spatial literary analysis. I have suggested a division into proto-tropes, spatial tropes, generic conventions, and spatial reception processes. Proto-tropes include the concepts of space and place, and refer thus to the underlying theoretical fundamentals of the general spatial theory. The category of spatial tropes refers to spatial figures that are culturally constructed, and, in the case of literary fiction, cross-generic. The third category, generic conventions, underlines that literary genres have their own sets of spatial tropes, processes, and practices that can be examined. With the fourth category, spatial reception processes, the focus of analysis shifts from space to the subject's relationship with space.

As I suggest, Verronen's oeuvre can be characterized as a journey from fantastic to realism, although this crystallization naturally overlooks some aspects of the author's development.

In my analysis of Verronen's fantastic works, I have shown that Verronen's allegorical fantasy draws its specific quality from the juxtaposition of binary semantic oppositions that are presented through spatializations. To demonstrate this, my analysis of the novel *Pimeästä maasta* has examined how the spatial intertwines with the events of the plot, building on the thinking presented by one of the predecessors of the spatial turn, Ürij Lotman. The use of the spatialized semantic oppositions, I suggest, is the source of the emotional intensity of Verronen's early works. Furthermore, it is also the narrative device that conjoins Verronen's works with myths and archaic forms of storytelling. I have also paid attention to the curious relationship between many of Verronen's protagonists and the spaces around them: a relationship that can best be approached through the historical concept of monomania. In the case of *Luolavuodet*, I have observed how the novel and its various elements integrate into

a narrative of spatial meaning-making, and how this process of making sense of one's surroundings translates into a larger, allegorical representation of epistemological and emotional self-discovery.

While reading Verronen's wilderness narratives, this study has combined the spatial and the environmental points of view. As I have shown, Verronen's narratives intertwine representations of wilderness with the theme of (social) alienation, an emphasis that highlights the wildscapes' significance not just for the individual but for society as well. Notions of wilderness are in many ways attached to the framework of localist, nationalist, and, to a growing extent, globalist perspectives; and, as the early reception of Verronen's works has demonstrated, a deviation from the nationally established imagery of wilderness presents itself as a conspicuous choice. The open, threatening, and often extremely cold prototypical landscape of Verronen's novels and short stories can be associated with the rise of individuality in late modern culture. Wilderness plays a pivotal role in the overall interpretation of the author's oeuvre as well. In my reading of Verronen's mysterious and often inexplicable narratives, I have argued that the eccentric behavior can be understood as misplaced spatial practices: as protocols of wilderness that suddenly manifest themselves in urban and inhabited environments.

I have observed Verronen's two dystopian novels as specimens of a genre that I consider particularly spatial in nature. The reading of the novels shows how these narratives employ spatial settings to comment on and represent phenomena of late modernity, such as the rapid change, and how they are intertwined with notions of critical cultural theory and postmodern thought, such as the critique of the spectacle. I have approached the novel *Karsintavaihe* as a narrative that makes multiple allusions to concerns about the destructive and violent aspect of modernity, or what Zygmunt Bauman ([1989] 2001) has deemed the order-making impulse of modernity, and pointed out how these allusions receive a spatial form in the novel, which further adds to their dramatic and thought-provoking nature. In the sequel novel *Kirkkaan selkeää*, the critical observations are supplanted with a sense of detachment and mechanics of repression, the latter of which is represented through motifs of agoraphobia, which refers to anxiety caused by certain spatial cues. The dystopian duology examines anxieties of urban planning and modernity: in *Karsintavaihe*, these fears find their expression in the rapid change of the urban fabric and the continuous cycle of demolishing and building. In the sequel, the symptoms of agoraphobia convey the unresolved contradiction between the public and the private space.

The analyses have shown that Verronen's contemporary works draw from earlier traditions and develop classic literary spatial tropes toward new directions. The novel *Luolavuodet* revisits the trope of the cave and reimagines it as a network that renders movement and exploration possible and calls for a process of mapping. In this way, the traditionally gendered trope receives a revolutionary open and dynamic interpretation. Verronen's homecoming narratives, especially the novel *Pieni elintila*, make use of the ancient Greek theme of *nostos*, the homecoming of the war hero, and thus draw on the classic Greek tragedies and their spatial arrangements. A third recurring element is the castaway narrative, or the genre of robinsonade, which presents itself as a source and a reference point for most of Verronen's narratives that concern the notion of wilderness and the juxtaposition of the individual and the community. I have observed how the castaway narrative not only brings forth

Verronen's commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of progress and rationality but also functions as a vehicle for social criticism, as in the novel *Saari kaupungissa* and its depiction of the island-based survival competition.

Finally, I have analyzed Verronen's narratives of home, and suggested that, in addition to the Greek theme of *nostos*, they often represent home in the context of homesteading, which refers to settling in a new place that only gradually becomes home. In this way, Verronen's homes are imbued by experiences of dislocation, as in the novel *Pieni elintila*. Moreover, the focus on homesteading presents home as something that is actively chosen, worked and reworked; it highlights the place's individual and identity-related nature.

This study has also demonstrated how Verronen's spaces and places make use of the biological imagination, and how this biological and ecological understanding is activated especially in relation to the concept of home. I have marked and observed the use of the biological imagination with the notion of living space and analyzed its connection with the problematic discourse of *Lebensraum*. The biological imagination is also evoked by the metaphor of extinction, which in my reading represents the problematics of intergenerational relationships, and an overall disbelief in temporal trajectories: another demonstration of how the spatial is foregrounded in favor of the temporal in Verronen's poetics. The homescapes of Verronen's works demonstrate particularly well the tug of war between centripetal and centrifugal ideas that is characteristic of the author's spaces. The study has examined the expansionist ideas embedded in Verronen's narratives as well as the withdrawn and isolationist representations that form a stark contrast to the former; and, as I have demonstrated, it is the introverted and antiexpansionist that finally gains ground in the author's narratives. The novel covered in the last analysis chapter of this study, *Saari kaupungissa*, is a commentary on and a rewriting of the Finnish family saga and the trope of pioneer farming. As my reading of the ending of the novel exemplifies, Verronen's spatial poetics turn away from the association between land and home, or pioneering and homesteading, and seek alternative forms of attachment.

Terrains of Imagination in Maarit Verronen's Fiction. Harassing Habitats in Contemporary Finnish Literature has also demonstrated that Verronen's fantastic landscapes and figures who inhabit the margins, position themselves as outsiders, and live lives of dislocation, nurture the humane and democratic ethos that connects them to the so-called great tradition of Finnish prose fiction (on the great tradition, see Laitinen 1984; 1997). By finding worth and value in the peripheries, attesting to the inherent worth of the individual – and manifesting these traits through spatial tropes and spatial themes – the narratives affirm the connection between space and multiplicity, or space as the sphere of multiplicity in the sense that Doreen Massey (2005, 60) suggests.

My choice of examining Verronen's work from the point of view of spaces and through the current reevaluation of space and place in culture and literature also highlights how the more general characteristics of contemporary fiction come into view in her work. Maarit Verronen's works crystallize many of the phenomena of contemporary and postmodern literary fiction: the blurring of genre boundaries, the interest in the storyworld and worldmaking, the presence of environmental problematics, a fascination with the dystopian genre, and the exploration of individualism as a cultural and sociopolitical trend. Her originality, however, lies

in the way in which she handles the spaces in her narratives or narrates through presenting spaces.

By emphasizing the above-mentioned in my readings, I have illustrated the constructed and negotiated nature of space and place. We don't move through spaces or live in places – instead, we practice them and they practice us. Literary narratives present us with a unique arena of cultural construction and practice-sharing, and, as the rise of dystopian fiction, for instance, demonstrates, it is an arena that is still viable and active. In order to study and understand the workings of this arena, we must be attuned to not only the spatial theory but also the stratified layers of history and culture from which the above-named spatial tropes and conventions arise.

On a more general level, Verronen's fictive worlds and my spatial analyses of them has provided perspectives that may be of interest for future studies on literary and cultural space. Verronen's obsessive characters and my reading of them as spatial agents with monomaniac pathologies prompt me to wonder whether these kinds of spatial relationships may offer us cues on how to reimagine our role in the times of unseen environmental uncertainty and rapid globalization. The problematics of spatial agency are equally central for Verronen's dystopias, which juxtapose observing spaces and engaging with them. As I have stated, these narratives provide us inspection on the difference of the two and put forward a strong argument in favor of active engagement. This active, open, resourceful, yet also vulnerable approach carries an ethical dimension and resonates with the author's reliance on rationality and empiricism. Furthermore, many of Verronen's narratives discussed in this study mediate the relationship between culture and nature. By understanding wilderness as ex-centricity and as a set of practices and thus rather a mindset than a physical environment, we might be able to move past the debates where the notion of wilderness is linked with romanticist and essentialist intentions.

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Appendix: List of Works by Maarit Verronen

- Hyvä näin* (2023) ('It's All Good')
- Orionin vyö* (2022) ('Orion's Belt')
- Turvaa ja taidetta – tarinoita liikennemyröistä* (2021) ('Safety and Art – Histories of Traffic Circles')
- Muutama lämmin päivä* (2019) ('A Few Warm Days')
- Varjosaari – piilossa keskellä Helsinkiä* (2019) ('Varjosaari, The Isle of Shadows – Hidden in the Middle of Helsinki')
- Hiljaiset joet* (2018) ('Silent Rivers')
- Puutornimuuntamot – tarinoita sähkönsirrosta* (2017) ('Wooden Distribution Substations – Histories of Power Transmission')
- Sulhanen – Lapinniemen viimeinen saari* (2014) ('Sulhanen – The Last Isle of Lapinniemi')
- Varjonainen* (2013) ('Woman of Shadows')
- Vanhat kuviot* (2012) ('The Old Daily Round')
- Pieni kumikanoottikirja* (2011) ('The Little Book of Rubber Canoeing')
- Kirkkaan selkeää* (2010) ('Bright and Clear')
- Normaalia elämää* (2009) ('Normal Life')
- Karsintavaihe* (2008) ('The Elimination Phase')
- Saari kaupungissa* (2007) ('Island in the City')
- Osallisuuden tunto* (2006) ('The Sense of Complicity')
- Keihäslintu* (2004) ('Spearbird')
- Pieni elintila* (2004) ('The Tiny Living Space')
- Luotettava ohikulkija* (2002) ('A Passer-By You Can Trust')
- Kylmien saarten soturi* (2001) ('Warrior of the Cold Isles')
- Löytöretkeilijä ja muita eksyneitä* (1999) ('The Explorer and Other Lost People')
- Luolavuodet* (1998) ('The Cave Years')
- Matka Albaniaan* (1997) ('A Journey to Albania')
- Kulkureita & Unohtajia* (1996) ('Wanderers & Forgetters')
- Pimeästä maasta* (1995) ('Out of the Dark Lands')
- Viimeinen lapsitähti ja muita ylimääräisiä ihmisiä* (1994) ('The Last Child Prodigy and Other Surplus People')
- Yksinäinen vuori* (1993) ('The Lonesome Mountain')
- Älä maksa lautturille* (1992) ('Do Not Pay the Ferryman')

Author

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Abstract

This study examines experienced space in Maarit Verronen's works of prose fiction. The study aligns itself with the contemporary approach often referred to as spatial literary studies, a movement connected to the spatial turn within the humanities. Theoretically, the study draws on multiple fields of spatial studies, from semiotics of space to critical theory and poststructuralism. By providing a categorization on different approaches within spatial literary studies, the study promotes literary studies that utilize spatial theory and explores how spatial concepts can be effectively used as tools for close reading.

Since the study aims to provide a longitudinal section of Verronen's oeuvre, the selected material spans the author's early works, from the 1990s to the late 2000s. The corpus involves six novels and two short stories. The analysis begins with the fantastic realms of Verronen's early career, proceeds to consider wilderness and wild spaces, turns to visions of dystopic futures, and concludes in the narratives of homecoming and homesteading. The study shows that Verronen's fantasy draws its allegorical potential from the juxtaposition of spatialized binary semantic oppositions. By analyzing Verronen's dystopian novels, the study unravels the spatial nature of the genre and the critical potential it encompasses. Verronen's narratives on wilderness are approached through the notion of spatial practices and in the context of alienation and postpastoralism. Finally, the analysis on the literary homes and the acts of homesteading in Verronen's novels foregrounds the open, connected, and inclusive nature of the contemporary notion of home and new forms of attachment to place, both of which are under an active debate in spatial literary studies.

By bringing together spatial literary studies and Verronen's works, this research adds to the study of Finnish literature and contemporary literature's emphasis on space, spatiality, and environmental issues. Moreover, the study contributes to the knowledge on the genres of fantasy and dystopia, as well as to the study of classic literary tropes and their contemporary manifestations. As the study contextualizes Verronen's works within Nordic and European literatures, it draws attention to the thematic and stylistic connections that link her writing to broader literary trends and traditions.

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