

Crippled City: Joel Lehtonen's *Krokkelby* as a Radical Inversion of Finnish National Romantic Landscapes

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*In the novels *Rakastunut rampa* (A Cripple in Love, 1922) and *Henkien taistelu* (The Battle of the Spirits, 1933), Joel Lehtonen has constructed an imaginary environment that is at once one of the most disturbing and one of the most original landscapes to be found in the Finnish literature of the last century: the suburb of Krokkelby. This deformed landscape, neither city nor countryside, is composed of disconcerting natural elements and crooked houses, and inhabited by grotesque characters. This article analyses the ways in which the literary landscape of Krokkelby constitutes a radical inversion of more traditional images of Finnish symbolic landscapes, such as the national-romantic lake district of Eastern Finland, and the complex images of turn-of-the-century Helsinki. In Lehtonen's novels, we find a carnivalisation of the proud and pure expanses of Karelia: a degenerate wasteland, filled with derelict houses; a Dante-esque scatological nightmare. The satirical and pessimistic way in which Lehtonen describes these suburban surroundings is prototypical for the direction in which literary descriptions of Helsinki and its suburbs were gradually evolving from the 1920s onwards: towards an ever more generic city, an in-between landscape of uprooted countryside and deformed cityscape. These descriptions foreshadow later representations of what arguably has become the most influential symbolic landscape in modern Finnish movies and literature: the suburbs.*

Introduction

In Finnish literature of the 1920s and the 1930s, new urban and suburban environments appear, challenging more traditional national-romantic literary landscapes and the earlier dichotomies of discourses on the city and the country. These new environments include the burgeoning descriptions of particular and often socially defined central urban neighbourhoods, but most importantly, the

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generic fringes and the margins of the city in which the rapid changes of society were also visible in their most urgent forms. One of the most original examples of such new urban symbolic landscapes can be found in Joel Lehtonen's final novel *Henkien taistelu* (*The Battle of the Spirits*, 1933). It is a novel set largely in and around the imaginary suburb of Krokkelby, in surroundings that had earlier been introduced by Lehtonen in *Rakastunut rampa* (*A Cripple in Love*, 1922). This essay examines how, in both novels, the symbolic landscape of the suburbs is given shape.

After a short introduction, I will analyse how space in *Henkien taistelu* is constructed first of all as a satirical exaggeration or deformation of more traditional Finnish natural landscapes. In Lehtonen's novels, we find a carnivalised version of the idealised Eastern Finnish forests and lake districts. Through overt references to iconic Finnish landscapes, and through the self-reflexive manner in which the narrator exhibits his use of literary conventions and genres, Joel Lehtonen takes aim at some of the more conventional methods of framing and structuring the landscape in literature and the arts, and at the value systems lying behind them. In *Rakastunut rampa* and *Henkien taistelu*, the exploration of the suburban fringes of the Finnish capital takes on the form of a dystopian critique of the present social, cultural and political state of affairs: the diseased body of the city becomes a symbol of the ailing body politic.

The Margins of the City as Testing Ground

Late in the year 1929, two fanciful characters are approaching Helsinki by train, travelling by way of Turku at the end of a journey that began in Paris. These two men have as their explicit purpose to explore the (sub)urban landscape of Krokkelby in order to gain a better understanding of the world in all its ramifications. They are an unlikely couple. On the one hand, we find Kleophas Leanteri Sampila, a naïve and good-humored graduate forester working for a forest industry company. Sampila has taken a year's leave from his position in order to get to know the world, but he is already on his return journey to Finland after a short and disconcerting trip to Paris. On the other hand, there is Victor Sorsimo, a beer factory owner who is, in fact, a devil in disguise; a corporal in the army of Barbuel, the general of the demons. Sorsimo, also known as "the devil in the bottle" (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 13), has chosen as his task to bring his companion Kleophas to destruction. The scene describing the approach of Sampila and Sorsimo towards the Finnish capital comes some one hundred pages into Lehtonen's novel *Henkien taistelu* (1933/1966), a novel which is primarily concerned with dissecting the urban landscape of Helsinki, its imaginary suburb of Krokkelby, and its inhabitants. The gloomy work, which has not without reason been called misanthropic (Tarkka 1966, 92), would be Lehtonen's

last novel; the year following the publication, in 1934, Lehtonen committed suicide by hanging.

Traditionally, temptation by the devil is described as taking place in the wilderness or in an empty desert – the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert, and that of the Saint Anthony, are two particularly well-attested cases. Another landscape typically depicted as a tempting environment, a degenerating seedbed of vice to which people eventually succumb, is, of course, the Metropolis, and even saints such as Augustine and Jerome confessed to being “allured and teased by sensuous images of Rome” (Mumford 1961, 246). In the case of our two companions, it is significant that the devil in the bottle does *not* want to tempt the pious Kleophas in a truly large metropolis – he would have had the chance to do so in Paris, where they met – and not in a desert or god-forsaken wilderness. The devil is leading his victim to a new urban symbolic landscape, one which will take on ever larger proportions in literature and media representations of the city as the twentieth century proceeds: the margins of the city, and the suburban landscape. By means of the Helsinki suburb of Krokkelby, the devil wants to show his victim the world in all its viciousness. In his discussion with Sampila, however, the devil suggests that Krokkelby may be instructive in more positive terms: it is a place where “you can see and learn a thing or two, if you should wish to” (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 91).¹ The Finnish capital and its suburb Krokkelby thus take on the form of a particular metaphorisation of the city, that of an *imago mundi*, which, in Henri Lefebvre’s words, constructs the citizens’ “representation of space as a whole, of the earth, of the world” (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 243–244). By an examination of the city, one might claim to see metonymically the full world in its totality. Such a vision of the city was already present in one of the many literary texts that function as inspirations for *Henkien taistelu*: Alain-René Lesage’s satirical urban novel *Le Diable Boiteux* (*The Devil in the Bottle*, 1739/1707), which in turn is based on the text *El Diablo Cojuelo* (*The Devil in the Bottle*, 1660/1641) by the Spanish author Luis Vélez de Guevara. In Lesage’s novel, the city is clearly and overtly approached as an *imago mundi*: when the devil in disguise is about to guide an innocent student through the Spanish capital, he claims that a tour through nightly Madrid will teach the student about everything that happens in the world (Klotz 1969, 39).

In many respects, *Henkien taistelu* is still strikingly relevant today. In the novel, Helsinki and its suburbs in 1929 are in the throes of the Prohibition²; there is talk of a growing economic crisis, but while many live in poverty and need, in overcrowded housing conditions, others are getting ever richer, buying and building the most preposterous real estate. Politically, the country is in turmoil, the extreme right is

1 All translations are by myself, unless stated otherwise.

2 During the Finnish Prohibition (1929–1932), the production, smuggling and consumption of illegal alcohol spiralled out of control, as did occurrences of alcohol-related crime (see Määttä 2007).

gaining support, and large segments of the population are deeply dissatisfied with how the country and its economy are run. The way the landscape is imagined and experienced in this almost apocalyptic world view is firmly attuned to the pessimistic message of the novel as a whole – the imagined landscape is presented here as the quintessential symbol for both the dissatisfaction of the people and the poor state of affairs in Finland. The dystopian vision of society and of the people that inhabit the near-infernal landscape is thoroughly grounded in the cultural pessimism that held much of Europe in its thrall in the inter-war period and that found its expression in avant-garde movements like German expressionism, a movement to which Lehtonen's work is not unconnected.³ This cultural pessimism was exhibited in the work of a whole series of authors and thinkers commenting on a world in disarray, from Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918–1923) and Herman Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos* (1920) to Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) and Huizinga's *In the Shadow of Tomorrow* (1935), and in Finland, Tatu Vaaskivi's *Huomispäivän varjo* (*The Shadow of Tomorrow*, 1938).

In terms of genre, the novel *Henkien taistelu* is closely related to earlier literary genres with clear moral dimensions, in which characters and space take on universalist proportions; genres such as the medieval mystery play, the renaissance picaresque novel, and, in particular, the Menippean satire.⁴ The landscape is thus quite literally a *symbolic* landscape, an environment that functions as an “exemplum”, a moral warning one should bear in mind.⁵ This is most explicitly the case if we choose to read *Henkien taistelu* as an exponent of the Menippean satire. As such, the space in the novel is defined by two characteristics. First of all, we find the three-layered spatial structure typical for the Menippea (heaven, earth, and imagined hell). This juxtaposition of the image of the city with spheres belonging to the religio-mythological is essential for the philosophical and universalist nature of the novel, in which the plot is structured as the test of a philosophical idea. Second,

3 On the link between Lehtonen's literary landscapes and those of contemporary Finnish fine artists, see e.g. Sarajas 1965, 62.

4 Literary critics of Lehtonen's novel have suggested various generic classifications; one, inspired by the novel's subtitle, would be the roman-à-clef (Kauppinen 1966); more commonly, *Henkien taistelu* has been widely read as a picaresque novel, in which the protagonist's journey through various layers of society is described in fairly undetached fragments (see for example Turunen 1992, 111). One of the earliest critics, Rafael Koskimies, has drawn attention to the fact that the picaresque is not much more than the generic starting point of *Henkien taistelu*, in which elements of the traditional picaresque novel are used in order to produce a satirical critique with a distinctly modern intellectual and artistic content (see Koskimies 1933/1936, 74–75). As H. Riikonen has pointed out, *Henkien taistelu* can be considered a typical example of a Menippean satire (Riikonen 2007). On the characteristics of satire, see Kivistö 2007; on the characteristics of the Menippean satire, see e.g. Bakhtin 1984, 114–119; Riikonen 1985; Käkelä-Puumala 2007.

5 In Joel Lehtonen's work, the innovative use of literary genres and of complex intertextual references is particularly significant. Lehtonen, a translator of amongst others the Decameron, Stendahl, and the brothers Goncourt (Schoolfield 1998, 134), had a far-ranging knowledge of international literature, which is visible in the staggering amount of intertextual references in *Henkien taistelu*. A profuse amount of references to other texts is also a characteristic of the Menippean satire, which can be considered as an exceptionally self-conscious genre. In *Henkien taistelu*, direct reference is made to one of the most classical examples of the Menippean satire: Petronius' Satyricon.

the description of the spatial planes is profoundly carnivalised. It is viewed through a satirical looking glass, turned inside out, and presented through extensive use of oxymorons. The generic framework of the novel does not, however, remain stable throughout; on the contrary, it shifts and moves constantly, and this is also true for the narrative perspective. Towards the end of the novel, the experience of urban space breaks away from a satirical tone couched in comical terms, and moves into the realm which Irma Perttula has called the “subjective grotesque” (2010), a change that adds a much more pessimistic layer of meaning.

A Diseased (Sub)Urban Landscape: Krokkelby

The urban world we find in Lehtonen’s *Rakastunut rampa* and *Henkien taistelu* resembles to a degree the gloomy London in Dickens’ later novels, a landscape that has been described by Richard Lehan as a “strange, eerie, primitive world” at the edges of the city, inhabited with “almost mutant outcasts”; a world in which the city has turned itself and its near surroundings into a wasteland of “physical debris and human dereliction” (Lehan 1998, 44, 41). In the case of Lehtonen’s novels, the area which appears most prominently borders not only on the city and the country, but also on the imaginary and the real. Krokkelby is an imaginary suburb of Helsinki, but it can be related to areas in or around the factual, geographically locatable city of Helsinki. In both novels, Krokkelby is situated at the eastern fringes of the Helsinki peninsula, close to the Vanhakaupunki area (literally the old town) and the mouth of the Vantaa River. Krokkelby has been identified on various grounds with a number of existing Helsinki suburbs, notably with Oulunkylä, Kumpula and the western Helsinki area of Haaga-Huopalahti (Palmgren 1989; Pulkkinen 2004; Kallinen 2011). I would like to stress, however, that Krokkelby is precisely defined by the fact that it is an *imagined* place. The neighbourhood does not have any location in the physically and geographically identifiable city of Helsinki. This is one of the reasons why it has the capacity to take on such strong and universalist symbolic overtones.

In *Henkien taistelu*, the spatial environment – like all other elements of the narration – is carnivalised, in the Bakhtinian sense, and is presented in a way that turns familiar elements inside out: it is space which is, in Bakhtin’s words, “drawn out of its *usual* rut, ... to some extent ‘life turned inside out’, ‘the reverse side of the world’ ‘*monde à l’envers*’” (Bakhtin 1984, 122). The satirical reversal of the world is described as a deliberate representational strategy at the very outset of the novel by the limping devil who guides both the protagonist and the narration in *Henkien taistelu*:

I intend to show him [the protagonist, Kleophas Sampila] what people, not without a kind of pride, call life, as if in a film visited by the scissors of the censure, only with

the difference that I shall cut out the *harmless* parts, the quiet, nice people, and shall direct a blinding light from the projector on the corrupt sides of the average citizens and even the exemplary ones. I shall represent it all, intentionally, as largely disconnected episodes; the result, I hope, will be confused and imprecise, like the time in which the world is now living. (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 23)⁶

The devil, in his prologue, stresses how he will describe *people* in a satirical light, and the novel's subtitle, in particular ("A Story about Our Famous Citizens"), draws the reader's attention to the character description. But the devil's words can be equally applied to the carnivalesque description of the spatial surroundings in *Henkien taistelu*, whose "confused and imprecise" description will be representative of the contemporary times of turmoil.

The first and most radical carnivalisation or satirical exaggeration, with which we can identify Krokkelby, and which amounts to the most fundamental characteristic of the suburban landscape in Lehtonen's prose, is that of *deformity*; of being unnatural, diseased, crooked, and crippled. Krokkelby is a profoundly deformed landscape, neither city nor countryside, made up of repulsive natural elements and crooked houses, and the elements constituting the landscape are symbolically intertwined with the grotesque and deformed characters that inhabit it. In the words of Sampila, Krokkelby seems to be "scrapped together with debris from the countryside and refuse from Helsinki" (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 232). The link between Krokkelby and deformity is a semantic one to begin with. The very name of this imaginary environment is made up of two parts, the suffix *-by*, a common Nordic suffix in toponyms, which today has the meaning "village", added to the root *Krokkel*. *Krokkel* resembles the Swedish word *krokig*, meaning "bent", "crooked", "hooked". The Swedish word *krokryggig* means "hunchbacked" and this brings us to the literary character that was closely connected with the Krokkelby environments: Sakris Kukkermann, the "Cripple in Love" in Lehtonen's 1922 novel by the same name (see Perttula 2006). Krokkelby, then, could be translated as Crookedville or Crippleby: a deformed, crippled city, symbolic of a society verging on moral bankruptcy.

From the very outset, Krokkelby is referred to as a disease-like extension to the body of Helsinki: the devil in the bottle introduces it to Sampila with the words that it is a "village, which like a bump, has grown onto the side of Helsinki" (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 91). This rendering draws on the traditional imagery of the city-as-body, and reads the suburb as a deformity of the normal urban fabric. The body is one of the most potent metaphors with which the city can be conceptualised, a descriptive strategy to which, according to Lefebvre, recourse is especially made when the city and its representatives feel under threat (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 274; see also Grosz 1992). But the metaphor of the body can also be used in a sense that equates the city with the body politic, attributing perceived diseases in society

6 The translation is by Ahokas 1973, 201–202.

to the ailing body of the city. This metaphorisation allows for the concept of the city as a diseased body, which is an image that has been used in describing London, in particular (Williams 1973, 146). Raymond Williams has pointed out that the consequence of this image is a broader vision of society as rotten: if the city “was seen as monstrous, or as a diseased growth, this had logically to be traced back to the whole social order” (ibid.). Lehtonen is one of the first authors to apply such thinking to the literary image of Helsinki and its suburbs, and in *Henkien taistelu*, the vision of the expanding suburban environment as a deformed, unhealthy, crippled landscape takes on ever stronger overtones as the novel proceeds.⁷ The idea of deformity in the novel does not only pertain to the city, but in *Henkien taistelu*, everything and everybody is to a greater or lesser extent disturbingly distorted. The strangely deformed houses built in Krokkelby are in fact literally referred to as ‘mirroring’ their owners. One of the many bootlegging inhabitants of Krokkelby proudly proclaims that his house, a monstrous construction resembling a Kirgizian yurt with galvanised sheet metal roof, “shines, so that I can see my reflection in it” (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 104).

Reversal of National-romantic Landscapes

If the city appears in these novels as a crippled body, and the suburb as a disease infecting the ordered societal organism, Krokkelby’s landscape is also presented as a negative reversal of traditional Finnish natural environments and natural-romantic symbolic landscapes. Landscapes, of course, are more than mere territorial categories: they constitute ways of seeing and structuring cultural environments; landscapes are produced, and as such, they entail specific value systems (Raivo 1997). As Sharon Zukin points out, landscape “connotes a contentious, compromised product of society” (Zukin 1991, 16), and in *Henkien taistelu*, the deliberate juxtaposition of a marginal locality with iconic landscapes from the Finnish national-romantic canon constitutes an integral part of Joel Lehtonen’s endeavor to create a literary image of a society profoundly at odds with itself.

At the beginning of *Henkien taistelu*, the devil in disguise immediately points out to his victim how ugly and unnatural the features of Krokkelby’s landscape are, arguing that the landscape significantly does *not* include a lake, “the soul of the Finnish landscape” (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 101–102). The devil, in his oxymoronic style, continues almost immediately after this passage with a eulogy of how natural, and indeed how typically Finnish, the very same suburban landscape in

⁷ *Henkien taistelu* can be (and has been) read as a political satire, up to the point where the “spirits” in the title are defined as communism and fascism. This would, however, provide a profoundly reductionist reading of the novel. The spiritual battle might as well refer to the moral or philosophical testing of ideas, or conversely, to the “battle of the spirits” during the Finnish Prohibition (1919–1932). Like the monstrously deformed landscape it conjures up before the reader, the fragmentary and protean text of *Henkien taistelu* ultimately defies conclusive interpretation.

fact is. In the devil's words, Krokkelby is situated like an ideal Finnish landscape amidst swamps and forests, and he continues: "The swamp and the forest - they are almost the metaphors of Finland, aren't they?" (ibid., 102). But the speech of the devil continues in a satirical tone, connecting these traditional metaphors of the Finnish landscape with strong negative overtones:

A lonely, reclusive forest, and a submerged, icy bog – and amidst both, here at our feet, this charming village that I would like to extol to you. (Ibid.)

That "charming village" of Krokkelby, then, is situated in the middle of swamps and forests, but the forest is described as "lonely" and "reclusive", and the swamp as a "submerged, icy bog". The swamp, moreover, is often used in the prose of Joel Lehtonen as a symbol of madness and atavistic instincts.⁸ The "positive" description, then, with reference to traditional natural landscapes is infested with negative meanings: the happy connection with these Finnish icons, the swamp and the forest, are immediately turned upside down by the negative connotations attached to both.

Krokkelby is situated close to the waterfront, and from the highest storeys of its villas not only is the river Vantaa visible, but also the sea bay near the rapids of the Vanhakaupunki district. The waterscape of Helsinki, which one might suspect to have potential for positive, even aesthetic experiences is on a number of occasions negatively juxtaposed with the healthy waters of Eastern Finland. In *Rakastunut rampa*, the novel with which Lehtonen introduced Krokkelby, the comparison between the healthy Finnish lake district and the unhealthy, unnatural coastal area of Krokkelby is explicitly spelled out. In this novel, young Nelma, a girl who is originally from eastern Finland and who has moved to Helsinki, feels repulsed by the city and its depressing natural surroundings. She hates "that gloomy sea, which looked dreary, she found even its water disgustingly murky" (Lehtonen 1922/2006, 137). Nelma negatively juxtaposes the hateful waterfront of the Helsinki suburb, which she calls "an oppressive and brooding landscape", with the healthy bright lakes at home:

... And again, that water: thick and sticky... The sea smelled bitter... she thought it stank.

Forever were lost to her the bright-watered lakes of her home, and their sandy, quiet beaches! (Ibid., 154)

⁸ In *Henkien taistelu*, the image of the swamp is repeatedly linked to the protagonist's gradual loss of mental balance towards the end of the novel. Sampila describes the atavistic, hereditary evil within him, for example, as the "water at the bottom of a swamp" (Lehtonen 1933b, 270).

In *Rakastunut rampa*, young Nelma can still dream of the “bright-watered lakes of her home”, but in the dystopian world vision of *Henkien taistelu*, the lake district no longer offers salvation. The pastoral qualities of the countryside have lost their power, and when Sampila pathetically quotes Horace’s “O rus quando ego te aspiciam” (“Oh countryside, when shall I see you again”) the effect is distinctly comical (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 178). The satirical attitude towards national-romantic landscape imagery which is visible in the description of Krokkelby is taken to extremes in two mocking references in *Henkien taistelu* to what are arguably the most iconic Finnish national romantic symbolic landscapes: Koli and Punkaharju. Koli, in northeast Finland, is one of the most quintessentially Finnish landscapes. In Lehtonen’s novel, this landscape, or more precisely, its representation in the canonised painting by Eero Järnefelt, is ironically described by the devil as the bombing of Port Arthur, the famous Russian naval fortress attacked by Japan in the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905): “people think, for example, that Järnefelt’s Koli is the bombing of Port Arthur, because it seems to have those puffy clouds coming from an artillery gun barrel” (ibid., 154). The devil’s joke expresses a deep lack of respect for Finnish canonical national-romantic landscapes – but it can also be understood as a harsh critique which the poor knowledge the devil’s contemporaries have of art (and, perhaps, also of recent history).

The carnivalisation of the Punkaharju landscape is more complex, and runs through a variety of chapters of *Henkien taistelu*. The Punkaharju landscape is one of the prime examples of a Finnish national-romantic landscape, and as such an important cultural product, framed and to a considerable extent produced and reproduced (Karjalainen 1989, 290). In Lehtonen’s novel, Punkaharju is the subject of an elaborate economic scam devised by a parvenu businessman visiting Krokkelby on a number of occasions; the businessman intends to “buy” the landscape and to turn its forest lands into profit. Not surprisingly, the plan eventually does not succeed, but it is instructive for the way in which everything in the novel – people, houses and landscapes alike – is presented as a potential commodity, and as a possible target for commercialization. The processes involved in the Punkaharju scam are symptomatic of the far-reaching commodification of the landscape, its features and its inhabitants, that is discernable in *Henkien taistelu*. Similar processes have been analysed in detail by Marxist thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) and David Harvey (1989). Lefebvre argues that the early decades of the twentieth century saw a rupture in the way space was experienced and produced, and describes the advent of what he calls “abstract space”, which homogenises environments in the way they are put into action in capitalist (late) industrial societies.

We already know several things about abstract space. As a product of violence and war, it is political; instituted by a state, it is institutional. On first inspection, it appears homogeneous; and indeed it serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them – in short, of differences. (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 285)

What Lefebvre calls “abstract space” levels and homogenises the complex layers of historical space, and reduces differences. Dominating space, it draws the most heterogeneous elements into a process of commodification.⁹ Following the thinking set out by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1974/1991), we can say that the processes at work in the suburban space in *Henkien taistelu* involve the “mobilisation of space for the purposes of its production”, and that they are guided by the dictum that the “entirety of space must be endowed with *exchange value*” and drawn into the orbit of the “commodity world” (Lefebvre 1974/1991, 336–337). As Lefebvre points out, such a process inevitably leads to a gradual destruction of nature, precipitated by “the economic wish to impose ... traits and criteria of interchangeability upon places”, with the result that places are gradually “deprived of their specificity – or even abolished” (ibid., 343). The effect is a degradation of both town and country “into an undifferentiated mass” (ibid., 55).

Ironically, in Lehtonen’s *Henkien taistelu*, Sampila himself is part of the machinery that industrialises the idealised natural landscape of Finland: he is a *forstmestari*, a “graduate forester” working for an industrial company. Abstract space and its commodifying *tabula rasa* lies at the core of the critical view of landscapes visible in *Henkien taistelu*: the suburban landscape is not only a disease, infecting the body of the city, but landscapes themselves, like their inhabitants, can be corrupted, sold, treated as commodities, dismembered and disfigured in the name of an economic programme that disregards humanity itself. In Lehtonen’s prose, the threat of a commodifying “abstract space” is present at all spatial and social levels, but the effects are most immediately visible in the capital’s expanding fringes.

Gradually, throughout the novel, the monstrous characteristics of the surroundings and of Krokkelby’s inhabitants start to dawn on the protagonist. This change from a satirical description towards an inwardly, personally felt misanthropic vision is connected in the novel to a gradual change of perspective and focalisation. As the novel proceeds, Sampila’s experiences are narrated less and less through the satirical voice of the bottled devil, and more and more through focalisation of Sampila himself, who is tossed between conflicting feelings of repulsion, irony and despair. The workings of the devil start to have their effect, and Sampila begins to feel so upset by how his opinions of society have changed, that he wants to leave Krokkelby:

9 The homogenizing process involved in abstract space can be considered as a more radical expansion of the “levelling” brought about by the force of money in the Metropolis, as described by Simmel (1903/1969). The effects of the accelerating expansion of what Lefebvre calls “abstract space” also bear some similarities to the more recent notions of non-places, places set apart from history and contrasted with “places of identity, of relations and of history”; a concept developed by Marc Augé (1992, 43), and to Edward Relph’s notion of placelessness (1976). What is involved in this levelling of complex personally lived places is, in part, a set of processes defined by Marshall Berman in *All That is Solid Melts in Air* (1982/1989) as being informed by “a will to change ... and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart” (Berman 1982/1989, 13).

He really wanted to move away from this village, this half-city in the neighborhood of Helsinki, which the struggle for life, as he called it in his thoughts, had certainly ruined, distorted, brutalised... (Lehtonen 1933/1966a: 231)

A Landscape of Flesh and Dirt

The final and most disturbing reversal of the urban landscape in *Henkien taistelu* is the change of a fertile childhood landscape into the derelict wasteland of human refuse which takes place towards the very end of the novel. This happens in one of the final chapters, aptly entitled “The Tombs”. Kleophas Leanteri Sampila has a dream in which he finds the idyllic countryside environment of his childhood suddenly transformed into a graveyard.¹⁰ It is an infernal landscape, but even worse than hell, since there are no devils or dead souls, in fact nothing at all except filth and flesh. The sudden, disconcerting vision of a hellish landscape of human flesh is part of a larger frame of reference in the novel, which sees the humans passing through the urban landscape in terms of the decaying flesh they will become when nature runs its course. A crucial image in this respect is that of the late medieval painting of the dance of death at the St. Mary Church in Lübeck, which Sampila has seen during his travels (Lehtonen 1933/1966b, 250). But in the industrialising world, the link between humans and mortal flesh takes on an even more distressing meaning than the one found in the late medieval, plague-inspired image of the dance of death. Industrial warfare and the dehumanising routines of grand-scale factory work have shown that human beings, too, can become part of a rationalised and devouring food chain. A profoundly pessimistic vision of humanity makes Kleophas Sampila look with disgust at the spectacle of his fellow citizens sunbathing at the Helsinki beach:

There’s also the kind of people that stroll in their bare shirts along the Helsinki streets, glowing in the summer heat, and that plod to the public beach, where Kleophas, too, once had strayed, as if this political turmoil did not concern them in the least. No, they are just lounging about there in the sand, or throw a somersault in the sunshine, those thousands, tens of thousands of people, almost naked, on their stomachs, on their backs, eyes in the glaring sand – on their backs as if they are bronze statues cast down, black like mulattoes, on their stomachs like dough – while the loudspeaker is trumpeting wailing saxophone melodies. Healthiness: flirting, adventures! – And it’s like that all over the country... such – flesh! To Kleophas it is flesh! It seems as if he feels a strange repulsion towards flesh. (Lehtonen 1933/1966b, 178–179)

10 A visit in hell is a typical episode in Menippean satires (see Käkälä-Puumala 2007, 184–188), as is the “crisis dream” (see Bakhtin 1984, 152–153). The profoundly misanthropic view expressed in Sampila’s dream, however, and the disconcerting effect the hellish vision has on the protagonist, run counter to the satirical and comical tone of the Menippea, and indicate a gradual shift of genre away from satire, towards the subjective grotesque.

The flirtatious mood of the age, accompanied by jazz music, sunbathing and loose clothing, is sharply juxtaposed in Lehtonen's novel with a vision of mortal flesh awaiting its tribulations in hell. Immediately after the passage above, Sampila is invited to the farewell party for the bottled devil. Looking down at the panorama of Krokkelby, which he perceives as a threatening painting by Da Vinci, he is able to discern some sun-bathers on the rocks further off:

Further away, on the top of a rock, where the whitewashed tower of a villa shimmered, small beings moved around: half-naked sun-bathers, – or they were lying motionless on the rock as if on a torrid stove or as meat on a grill. (Ibid., 181–182)

In Sampila's grotesque vision, the tiny sun-bathing figures visible in the panoramic view of Krokkelby literally appear as meat on a grill. The description of the Krokkelby rock as a "torrid stove" on which to grill human flesh is one of a number of recurring and disturbing references to human beings in terms of flesh in the novel, which reaches a climax in the image of the slaughterhouse. In the chapter immediately following the nightmare vision in the chapter "The Tombs," Sampila's mental balance is decisively shaken when he is confronted with a hellish scene taking place within the Krokkelby slaughterhouse he happens to pass by – a building which is conveniently situated next to a sausage factory (Lehtonen 1933/1966b, 258ff). The disturbing view of brutal slaughter, in which, amongst others, a bull is being stabbed and bleeding profusely, the head of a pig is being crushed with an axe-hammer, everything accompanied by the defining roar of the various animals, functions as a concretization of the inferno Sampila has just encountered in his nightmare. The fact that most of the characters in *Henkien taistelu* have animal names and often animal-like characteristics makes the presence of a slaughterhouse in the middle of Krokkelby all the more forbidding (Tarkka 1966). It can be interpreted as a tangible reminder of the industrialisation of the food chain, which bodes ill for the future of the human beings in Krokkelby, too. The link between flesh and the slaughterhouse might have been received with added disgust by contemporary readers, since only a few years before the appearance of *Henkien taistelu*, in 1931, Helsinki had been shocked by the findings of human body parts in the outskirts of the capital (not that far, in fact, from the Old Town area), and a widely mediated rumor claimed that human flesh had been mingled into food at a local meat grinding factory (Häkkinen & Similä 2010).

Landscape and Class

The slaughterhouse is not the only non-residential building that takes on symbolic significance in the novel. Mention is made on various occasions, significantly, of the beer factory of Vihtori Sorsimo – the medium of the devil in the bottle – and of a cement brick factory, buildings that can be seen to represent, respectively, the degenerative alcoholism fought by the Prohibition, and the grotesque building

projects disfiguring the face of the Helsinki cityscape. In *Rakastunut rampa*, the picture of disruptive industrialisation and commodification is completed with a fourth building in the setting of Krokkelby: that of the shelter for fallen women. The presence of these four symbolically-charged buildings in the suburban landscape can be seen as symptomatic of the way in which the suburb in Lehtonen's prose has become the symbol for the gradual, sprawling dispersion of industrialisation's disruptive influence throughout space, and the crippling, debilitating effects of this evolution.

If the suburban landscape in Lehtonen's novels is defined by the processes of industrialisation and commodification, the way the characters in these novels experience their surrounding space and their movements through space, is guided by the social class they belong to. Examined from this perspective one can say that the description of Krokkelby in Lehtonen's novels also represents a reversal of earlier representations of the social geography of turn-of-the-century Helsinki, with its clearly structured social boundaries that were hardly ever transgressed except through elaborate ritual. Krokkelby does not only present a motley environment in terms of its buildings and the way it combines elements of various symbolic landscapes; it is also extremely diverse in its combination of various classes of people. This is a world in which the parvenus found in Onerva's 1911's collection of short stories *Nousukkaita (Parvenus)* have risen to be the leading members of a society gradually turning on itself. In the urban fringes of Lehtonen's novels, we find prostitutes, liquor runners, working class people on their way upward in society, and men of position on their way downward.

In the centre of the city, and in a number of clearly-defined working-class districts, a particular locality signifies belonging to a particular social class – as people move through these localities, their social class changes accordingly, and in this sense, the characters' trajectories through the urban landscape function as metaphors for social rise and fall. The formerly successful Myyrimö, for example, has been forced to take up residence in a gloomy cellar in the environment of the working class districts of Sörnäinen and Vallila, a “terrible place”, which Sampila imagines to be inhabited by dangerous gang members looking like Apaches from the Western movies, and with people planning their shady business in the shadows and the fog (Lehtonen 1933/1966b, 43–45). Another of Sampila's acquaintances, the successful art dealer and swindler Mikael Reineck (a reference to Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs*), has made a journey in a different direction, ending up in a large private palace in the up-market Kaivopuisto neighbourhood (ibid., 51). And when Sampila takes a tram to leave the center of the city, he meets yet another of his acquaintances, Maimanen, who is an impoverished drunkard, and lives in the area around the street Hämeentie, a locality which constitutes, again, a clear marker of the character's downward social mobility (ibid., 111).

The wanderings of the protagonist of *Henkien taistelu* stand outside such social trajectories, since Kleophas Sampila's position is by definition that of an eternal outsider and spectator: he does not belong to the environment he comments upon. Neither does he really represent a social class, but rather an (at first optimistic) idea of society which is tested by exposure to the suburban environment. In the course of the novel, Sampila's excursions into Krokkelby and Helsinki shatter his optimistic view of the world. The "struggle for life", which so fatefully has "ruined, distorted, brutalised" (Lehtonen 1933/1966a, 231) Krokkelby and its inhabitants, also starts to weigh down on him, and the extended sojourn in this depressing suburban symbolic landscape is to prove his ruin. At the side of some nondescript forest road in the vicinity of Krokkelby, Sampila, disillusioned and resigned to his fate, is killed by a tramp for no particular reason or purpose.

Conclusion

In the novels *Rakastunut rampa* and *Henkien taistelu*, Joel Lehtonen has constructed an imaginary environment that is at once one of the most disturbing and one of the most original landscapes to be found in Finnish literature of the last century. The imaginary suburb of Krokkelby is a deformed landscape which is neither city nor countryside, but constitutes a radical inversion of more traditional images of Finnish symbolic landscapes, such as the national-romantic lake district of Eastern Finland, and the complex images of turn-of-the-century Helsinki. The satirical and pessimistic way in which Lehtonen describes these suburban surroundings is prototypical for the direction in which descriptions of Helsinki and its suburbs were gradually evolving from the 1920s onwards, foreshadowing later representations of what arguably has become the most influential symbolic landscape in modern Finnish movies and literature: the suburbs.

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