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Worldly themes and vernacular literature: Aino Kallas on gender, ethnicity, and class

Katarina Leppänen

This chapter explores the work of the Finnish-Estonian author Aino Kallas (1878–1956, née Krohn) in the early twentieth century, particularly her literary thematization of Estonian traditions and culture as part of a national awakening. The aim is to highlight instances where she uses vernacular tales as something more than expressions of the local. I argue that her work should be understood as taking part in the creation of a legitimate foundation for a sovereign people. Kallas did not understand the vernacular as isolated from the cosmopolitan; instead, the vernacular for her was a blend of local and foreign elements, even when it was dedicated to furthering national interests.¹ In this chapter the term *vernacular* refers not only to language but also traditions, rites, practices and material culture, and literature, which were central means of creating local and vernacular forms of belonging to, and affiliation with, a place. In accordance with this wider definition, the vernacular is seen as communicating a sense of commonly shared history and identity as well as familiarity with the local, which could be used in opposition to imperial and cosmopolitan masters.

Historically and geopolitically, the Gulf of Finland, with Finland to the north, Russia to the east and Estonia to the south, has been a region not only of wars but also of vibrant cultural exchanges and negotiations. My approach is methodologically inspired by Shu-Mei Shih's "relational comparison," which regards text and context as closely connected and interdependent (2013). Finland gained independence from imperial Russia in 1917, and Estonia became independent in 1918. Both countries had previously been part of the Swedish

¹ As the focus will be on Kallas's works, the political discussion of nation-making will not be further explored here. For political and literary developments and general historical comparisons between the two nations, see Koistinen 1999; Stråth and Sørensen 1997; Kaljundi 2015b; Branch 1999.

Empire, and Estonia had further historical experiences of German, Polish, and Danish rule. Aino Kallas's life and texts will be used as a prism for my investigation, as she is often seen as a hybrid figure that manages to represent both nations (Olesk 2011; Leppänen 2013, 2017). Throughout her life, she continued writing in Finnish while exploring mainly Estonian themes. Aino Kallas was involved in societal movements for national awakening in both countries and participated in the literary scenes on each side of the Gulf of Finland, as did many others in the relatively small intellectual circles. This was made possible because of the similarity between the Finnish and Estonian languages, and it was strengthened by similar conditions under Russian rule and censorship. I therefore write about Finland and Estonia, not as mutually distinctive in their processes of nation-building but, rather, as acknowledging the fundamental relationality of their literary and cultural histories.

In her writing, Kallas reworks historical narratives and emphasizes vernacular details, engaging implicitly and explicitly with political and nationalist themes in a great number of fictional and autobiographical texts, which have been explored by literary scholars (Laitinen 1973, 1995; Leskelä-Kärki 2006; Melkas 2006; Kurvet Käosaar and Rojola 2011a). Kallas's husband Oskar Kallas, her father, and her brother were all folklorists while her sisters were engaged in literary and educational endeavors, and she was deeply aware of the process of uncovering and inventing the vernacular as a foundation for new nations. Her brother Kaarle Krohn had assigned her a role as literary author, viewing this as an important task for the Fennoman (Finnish-minded) movement. Kallas's works reflect the complexities of nation-making and the vernacular while critically commenting on injustices based on class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity—themes that will be further explored in this chapter. Her novels and short stories are filled with strangers, liminal figures, and outcasts, who, despite the insignificance of their power historically, were instrumental in founding a nation (Leskelä-Kärki and Melkas 2009). Without a legitimate people, there could be no legitimacy for an independent nation state, as Anthony Smith has argued (1999).

In this chapter, I will analyze two short stories, "Ingel" (1904) and "Häät" (1905), translated in the collection *The White Ship* as "Ingel" and "The Wedding" (1924), and the novel *Barbara von Tiesenhusen: Liivinmaalainen tarina* (1923), translated as *Barbara von Tiesenhusen: A Livonian Tale in Three Novels* (1975). I start by foregrounding some aspects of theory in world literature in order to discuss the implicit methodological globalism that is evident in parts of the

scholarly field. The theoretical positioning is followed by a short historical background to give the reader a rudimentary geopolitical context to my readings. My subsequent analysis focuses on three of Kallas's texts, highlighting especially how power and conflicts are addressed in her narratives. The chapter ends with a discussion on how this case study of Kallas's work can contribute to a more complex and nuanced understanding of world literary relations from a historical and regional perspective.

Theoretical perspectives

Terms such as *cosmopolitanism* and *world literature* draw our immediate attention to phenomena that transcend place. A cosmopolitan person is one that belongs nowhere and everywhere at the same time; she is "at home in any place; free from local attachments or prejudices," a world citizen. Similarly, world literature can be identified as that which "gains in translation" and circulates in a global world system, due to form, style, or genre (Apter 2013; Damrosch 2003; Walkowitz 2015). Terms like the *vernacular*, *minority*, or *national literatures* have quite the opposite connotations, often referencing local and place-bound peoples, languages, and cultures, and therefore signalling limited circulation and interest (Pollock 2000: 596). If the vernacular and the cosmopolitan are understood as mutually exclusive, literary history is left with several unsolvable problems. As the Introduction to this volume shows, new perspectives on world literature can be gained by more closely analyzing the interplay between binary concepts such as vernacular/cosmopolitan and local/global, rather than viewing them as mutually exclusive opposites.

Instead of the biases of a methodological nationalism, duly recognized and widely discussed for the last decades in the humanities and especially in the social sciences, we now seem to face its opposite, a methodological globalism.² The concept of methodological globalism aims to capture the idea that the only phenomena that merit serious scholarly interest and can contribute to understanding our modern or postmodern world societies must circulate

² A number of sociological and political theories, from Marxist to conservative, have warned against methodological nationalism. See, e.g., Luhmann 2012; Wallerstein 2004; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002.

globally. Yet, studying small literatures and languages, it becomes evident that that which does not circulate globally can still be part of a global development, a study of the local can contribute to understanding the global. Only in a naive sense is the influence of the local, the vernacular, or even the national restricted to only one place—these are truly global phenomena. Further, much of world literature theory builds on the premise of a presumed dynamic between center and periphery, which emphasizes differences in cultural and economic power that are rooted in relations based on domination and colonialism (WReC 2015). Colonial relations are clearly present in the geographical area studied here, but the Russian Empire did not impose its culture and institutional standards to the same extent as the British and French Empires did. The connection of the center and periphery in both economic and cultural terms reflects a different dynamic (Annus 2014; Thompson 2000). For example, the Russian language never achieved the status of a learned, or even administrative, language in either Finland or Estonia, as it did not replace formerly dominant languages, such as Swedish and German, nor local languages or dialects. Russian was never cosmopolitan in the same sense as, for example, English, French, or Spanish was. Of course, I am not suggesting that the postcolonial and world literary studies are in any way unimportant or outdated; these fields have had a decisive impact on how we understand world literature. However, when viewed from the Northeastern European perspective, these disciplines offer too limited an understanding of the dynamics of world literatures, and as many have pointed out, they risk furthering Eurocentrism or Westernism at the cost of transnational dynamics between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan. Thus, this chapter investigates whether the vernacular can be theorized, in time, in space, and in literary history, in a manner that interacts with and contributes to questions in world literature theory, without relying on the premises of methodological globalism.

My exploration of vernacular/cosmopolitan dynamics draws on both Sheldon Pollock's and Alexander Beecroft's works. Especially appealing is Pollock's emphasis on active language choice as culturally and politically motivated actions and practices, rather than as mere ideals expressed in declarations or propositions. The importance of the distinction between action and declaration lies in the fact that actions bring about change in the world, and this perspective emphasizes that literary languages are purposefully constructed by actors who have cultural and political aims. For the purpose of this chapter, I thus understand the writing of literature as an activity and Kallas's writing as an intervention in

the cultural and political arena. The vernacularization of literary and political discourses bring geocultural and political entitlements, and a corpus of literature was essential, as Pollock writes, in creating a vision of interdependence between political power and culture. Beecroft makes similar arguments regarding the vernacular by shifting focus to literature's role in creating self-reflective communities when he claims that a "language is a dialect with a literature" (2015: 6). Beecroft's and Pollock's literary examples differ greatly from those of the Baltic region in the beginning of the twentieth century, both in terms of scale as well as the historical and geographic specificities. However, both Pollock and Beecroft offer tools for reconfiguring literary history in other contexts (Pollock 2000: 592, 612).

According to Shu-mei Shih's definition, world literature is comprised of "texts from different parts of the world [that] are related to each other through their partaking and representation of world historical events" that make a transversal exchange possible (2016: 141). She is interested in horizontal and vertical interconnections that mutually enrich cultures, aspects that she points to as often lacking in world literature studies and transnational studies (Shih 2015: 432; Lionnet and Shih 2005: 2, 4). In many contexts references to historical roots (and sometimes even imaginary early nations) are important for emerging cultures to prove that they share and build on "a common faith within a relatively coherent territory," and therefore qualify as having a history of relevance to the nation (Hroch 1999: 98). Interestingly, the history of the people and their literatures in Finland and Estonia very much rely on deep connections to the same oral literatures and myths, as they base their respective literary cultures in the same *ur*-stories that were collected and literarized by Elias Lönnrot's in the national epic *Kalevala* (Koistinen 1999: 35).

When Jacques Rancière argues that literature "makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals" (2011: 4, 13), his characterization could just as easily apply to Lönnrot as to the French modernists he was interested in. The hierarchical manner of distinguishing between matters worthy of literary representation and matters unworthy of such acknowledgment, as theorized by Rancière, gives legitimate space for representing lives that have previously been unrepresented. When it comes to understanding how vernacular experiences and lives are communicated in literature, Rancière offers valuable inspiration.

Pollock's insistence on the importance of literarization as an activity, Rancière's emphasis on literature as an essential stage for voices that challenge

exclusion, and Shih's focus on understanding literary history in close interplay with world history all guide my analysis of how Aino Kallas's work addresses class, gender, and ethnicity at a time when such issues were widely prevalent in the public discourse.

From the periphery

It is evident that many of the characteristics of vernacularization, often identified as recurring step-by-step over a long period in established nations, appear to be condensed in emerging nations. In a 1918 survey of the Young Estonia movement Aino Kallas describes this as an extraordinary cultural acceleration (see Hinrikus 2020). Pascale Casanova, for example, describes the development in Italy where Dante's fourteenth-century proclamation of the superiority of the vernacular language did not gain political form until the nineteenth-century unification of Italy. Casanova further writes about a process of "depoliticization" as literature freed itself from the political and national authorities it had helped to establish, and describes the process as happening "little by little" (2004: 37, 56).

The development of the Finnish and Estonian written languages commenced during the Reformation, which introduced vernacular liturgies and translations of Luther's *Little Catechism*, and the publication of the first ABC books in Finland in 1543 and in Estonia in 1575. People were encouraged to learn to read in order to further Protestant Christianity. However, as the Fenno-Ugrist Cornelius Hasselblatt argues, the Counter Reformation also produced vernacular versions of the *Catechismus Catholicorum* in 1585 (Hasselblatt 2006: 106, 109, 125). These first steps in the sixteenth century, though significant for later developments, were not politically charged, and literary culture in the vernacular started developing as late as the mid-nineteenth century. The timeframe from the publishing of the epic *Kalevala* (1835) and the first Finnish language novel, Aleksis Kivi's *Seven Brothers* in 1870, to the independent state in 1917 is exceptionally short compared to the political and cultural development of many other European countries. In this situation national narratives played an important role, as the nation relied on pre-national folk traditions and fantasies of a pre-modern community as its source of origins, with customs and songs understood as traces of a culture predating foreign dominations (Annus 2014). It was clear that a nation required its people and its own language, and that folklore in the form of songs and folktales should be gathered in order to consolidate a state (Nisbeth

1999: 80–1). Vernacular languages were engaged and activated by elites who communicate in old languages (in this case Swedish and German), but had “full awareness of the significance of their decision” in using vernaculars “as modes of literary (and intellectual, and political) communication,” to borrow Pollock’s description (2000: 592–3). States emerging in the beginning of the twentieth century had a set template to emulate: they aspired to achieve status as modern European states with strong national cultures and literatures, just like other modern states around them, although they could be seen as lacking in genuinely authentic cultural history of any greater quality (see, for example, Leerssen 2006; Berger and Lorenz 2011).

Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), academic, politician, and Finnish-minded publicist, asserted that without its own language and literature, Finland could not constitute a nation-state—the Finnish people would die unless they had a national awakening. Thus the Swedish-speaking elite, to which Snellman belonged, needed to re-educate themselves and learn Finnish (Savolainen 2019: 354). The Finnish speakers, on the other hand, needed to raise their level of education to meet the needs of a new national culture. It was of utmost importance that local authors, whether they wrote in Finnish or Swedish, promoted the national cause. Aesthetic judgments were thereafter based on how well literature lived up to nationalist political aims, a theme that has been thoroughly explored in joint projects by Finnish and Estonian researchers in the anthology *Kaksi tietä nykyisyyteen: Tutkimuksia kirjallisuuden, kansallisuuden ja kansallisten liikkeiden suhteista suomessa ja virossa* (Two Roads to the Present Day: Studies in Literature, Citizenship and the National Movements in Finland and Estonia; Koistinen 1999). This echoes the cultural relativism of Johann Gottfried Herder and the Romantics who promoted the idea of strong, unique, equal cultures that were grounded in artistic representations in the vernaculars, without which the feeling of national identity was impoverished (Honko 1999: 29). After the independence in 1917 and the civil war in Finland, it was even more important for the nation to create an identity of its own, to resist foreign influence, and to criticize the elite for its Europeanness. However, literary themes and inspiration were sought in European and Russian literary trends, and the rationale behind the discussions about the appropriate aesthetic style or the proper depiction of national subjects in literature were in essence international rather than national. Thus, in the Baltic region, too, national literatures were more international than their local *language* may at first sight convey (Sevänen and Häyrynen 2018: 18). In states without glorious pasts or long-established national symbols to fall

back on, myths and imaginations were very important for creating a common territorially bound identity. Cultural consolidation was the main long-term strategy for strengthening the state, and there was a strong commitment to the national project from the majority of authors and artists (Sevänen 1999; Alapuro 1999: 112, 115).

Vernacular themes and style

The stories by Aino Kallas analyzed here activate vernacular historical material that could be used for the national political struggles of her time. The first set of material was partly collected from people Kallas met during her stays in the Estonian archipelago, which described peasant life of the mid-nineteenth century.

The second set of texts consisted of old chronicles such as Balthasar Russow's *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt* (1578).³ The chronicles are the first more comprehensive literary sources of Baltic history, and Russow described them as tales of how Livonia was first founded and christened, its rulers and knights, and what surprising and fantastic things had happened there. Even during Russow's lifetime the importance of these vernacular stories was noted, and in a second edition he added more tales depicting peasant rituals and religious traditions, such as weddings, christenings, and funerals. He also added more details to support his major theme, which was the nobility's abuse of power. Stories dealing with historical injustices, the settlement of scores with ruthless masters, the defense of the weak and oppressed, and descriptions of the ordinary people's sorrows and joys instilled a belief that twentieth-century Estonians were a community.

As historian Ann Rigney (2001) has argued, readers attribute representative value to works of historical fiction because the genre combines facts with

³ The chronicles that Kallas relies on are mapped in Laitinen 1995: 84–7. The stories she rewrites are shortly mentioned in several publications: Russow was translated by Eduard Pabst from Low German to modern German in 1845; Johannes Renner (1525–1583), *Livländische Historien* (first published in 1876); Christian Kelch (1657–1710), *Liefländische Historia* (1695). A research article by A (August Alexander?) von Dehn in *Sitzungsbericht der gelehrten estnischen Gesellschaft* (1885) is the one closest to Kallas's adaptation and it introduces material from new sources, including Swedish archives. Russow's chronicles were published in Estonian translations by Kaarel Leetberg in two volumes (1920–21). The edition used here is Balthasar Russow, *Liivinmaan kronikka 1584*, translated by Timo Reko (2004).

invented elements. In the anthology *Novels, Histories, Novel Nations: Historical Fiction and Cultural Memory in Finland and Estonia* the contributions show, through Finnish and Estonian case studies, how a highly selective retelling of historical events was used in order to create cultural memories that could resist the dominant cultures of Swedes and Baltic Germans (Kaljundi, Laanes, and Pikkanen 2015: 11). But who is entrusted with writing historical novels? The answer is not free from power dynamics and genre conventions, especially in periods of intense nationalism. Kukku Melkas has written about how Kallas was, in fact, breaking genre conventions (Melkas 2006: 54–70). Taking inspiration from historical tales was not a nostalgic or Romantic gesture; rather it has been a foundational strategy in female authors' attempts to place themselves on the stage of world history. As Rita Felski has argued, "the meaning of history lay less in its past than in its as yet unrealized future" (1995: 31, 147–9). In Estonia, re-activating Russow's chronicles seems to have functioned as a way to own history and to create a modern Estonia out of available sources, and Kallas adopted this culturally acceptable practice. Rewrites of the chronicles were published regularly in the Estonian newspapers, and several of the basic storylines were thus widely known, but Kallas's perspective often shifted from male protagonists and heroes to the destinies of female characters. The literary scholar Kai Laitinen notes that such close reliance on existing stories would probably have raised questions of plagiarism had she published primarily for the Finnish market (1973: 136). However, for Kallas it was not only a question of finding inspirational themes in the chronicles; she further strived for a stylistic resemblance to "a Russowian rhythm" and generously used Latin as well as biblical language to create an archaic tone (Laitinen 1973: 75, 116). In an essay on aesthetic principles from 1912 by the esteemed Estonian author and translator Friedebert Tuglas (1886–1971), the importance of vernaculars, proverbs, riddles, and colloquialisms in modern literature are emphasized. He was a leading member of Noor Eesti (Young Estonia) a national, political, and literary movement, and the vernacularization carried specific political overtones. The Young Estonians, who counted Kallas as their only female member, experimented with style and were not interested in reviving the Estonian peasant language but, rather, sought to create a new Estonian literature according to international models of modernist and decadent intellectual discourse (Hinrikus 2015). Yet, it was important that a language had a history that gave it exotic and lyrical depth, as opposed to, for example, the new "Americanized language" that lacked both depth and history (Tuglas cited in Laitinen 1973: 76). Archaic or vernacular

style was deemed especially suitable for artistic prose, and Kallas termed her style *proosaballadi* (prose ballad).

However, Kallas did not intend for her archaic style to be merely a way of making historical references, and her attempts to contribute to Estonian culture were discussed and criticized. When her friend, fellow literary author, and yet another Young Estonian Gustav Suits reviewed the novel *Ants Raudjalg* (1907) he thought that she failed to “deal with issues taken from our [Estonian] lives” and would always remain “a ‘stranger’ in our lives” (see also Leskelä-Kärki and Melkas 2009: 37). Her aim, Kallas answered Suits, was to unravel humanity’s eternal and universal questions by exploring them within a national context, and, therefore, the Estonian setting was only one possible scene for this exploration (Kallas 1954: 60–3). Thirty years later, in 1935, the play *Imant ja hänen äitinsä* (Imant and His Mother) was banned because the Estonian Republic (and its all-the-more-openly fascist regime) vigilantly censored cultural expressions that could be interpreted as opposed to an intensified form of nationalism. The accusation was that Kallas’s focus on the anguish of a mother who had lost her son, rather than on the original story’s male heroism, was a serious distortion that amounted to treason.

Kallas’s Estonian novels

In her novels and short stories, Kallas often explores power relations that highlight gender and class injustices in hierarchical and multiethnic societies. The protagonist’s situation as subordinate is based on gender, class, and ethnicity, and the ability to resist domination and injustice is attributed to inner strengths and moral insight grounded in local, vernacular traditions. The evils, one could say, originate from the foreign cosmopolitan German crusaders in the twelfth century that started the oppression. The 700 years of oppression is used as a shorthand for the many masters that dominated the area, but most importantly it establishes a parenthesis in history. There has been a time *before* oppression and there will again be a time of freedom if the movement for national awakening that Kallas participated in succeeded. Connecting contemporary political struggles to the historically oppressed peoples was an important way to sidestep foreign influence in nation-building. What remains as sources of prehistory are local peoples, their traditions, rituals and artefacts, as well as their tales and words. All these are connected to the idea of a vernacular culture,

original and local, which can overturn the foreign powers. What Kallas and the likes of the previously mentioned Tuglas and Suits do is to bring the vernacular into the modern literature of Estonia (again remembering that she wrote in Finnish) by combining inspiration from archaic language, Latin, the Bible, and the *Kalevala* mythology, with local folk tales. They combined world literary sources with the vernacular to create the foundations of a national literature that addressed contemporary concerns. Keeping in mind Kallas's and her family's understanding of literary writing as a complement to other folkloristic scholarly activities, her mixing of local material, historical chronicles, and biblical themes appear as sound methodological choices. For example, among folklorists in this newly established scientific discipline, a debate about the national epic *Kalevala* was raging. Some, among them Kallas's brother Kaarle Krohn, read *Kalevala* as evidence of the deep Christian morals of the Finns, even before their conversion to Christianity. Others, among them the female theosophist Maria Ramstedt, wanted to diversify readings of *Kalevala* by interpreting it in terms of an ancient Finnish cosmology, comparable to the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Qur'an. As such, it could fertilize the contemporary nationalist movement (Harmainen 2013).

The following three stories exemplify how Kallas transforms the vernacular into a mode of resistance. In these stories, the idea of the vernacular is used to identify moments when that which is in opposition to dominant forces surfaces, be it through words, acts, clothes, or traditions. The short story "Ingel" tells the tale of a young peasant wet nurse. The narrative starts by locating her origins in the county of Sörve, before describing the girl as strongly built, ample bosomed, and as having a sweet face that displayed the formation of the "*saariston ruotsalainen sekaveren muovailu*" (archipelagic Swedish mixed-bloodedness) in her features. She radiates an almost vegetative peacefulness while nursing the child of her German lords, while the Estonian energy drains from her body and flows into the "*vierasrotuiseen lapseen*" (child of a foreign race).⁴ Suddenly, Ingel shivers at the memory of her own child, whom she has abandoned. She sends for the boy and finds him malnourished and bruised. She then dresses the two children in each other's clothes, trading rags for delicate laces, and sees that each child could easily be taken for the other. Their differences lie purely in the external markers

⁴ English translations are my own. References to the stories in Finnish are consequently to Aino Kallas, *Valitut teokset* 2008 [1970: 382]. English translations are available in Aino Kallas, *Three Novels* (1975) and Aino Kallas, *The White Ship: Estonian Tales* (1924).

of wealth. She comes to fully realize the injustice and absurdity of her feeding the little baron, a new generation of masters. The lady of the mansion returns unexpectedly, but Ingel accepts the cost of transgressing social class; “The lady will beat me bloody and drive me out on the road. Let her beat me and drive me out. I will take my child and leave” (389).⁵ The story ends with the understanding that Ingel will be on her own with the child because the father had set out to sea to avoid being drafted to the army. The exact year of the story’s events is unclear, but the story most likely takes place after the full abandonment of serfdom in the mid-1800s since Ingel is actually free to leave.

In the second story, “The Wedding,” the exploration of women’s predicament in the power relations between peasants and Baltic Germans continues. It is set in the early nineteenth century and tells the story of a traditional wedding with detailed descriptions of rituals and ceremonies. The bride sits in the middle of the room as guests toss coins into her lap for good fortune. Events take an unexpected turn as an elderly man approaches, looking like he is going to a funeral rather than a wedding. It turns out that the lord of the mansion requests for the bride to go to the mansion for the night. Her parents and all the guests are horrified but ready to submit to the master’s unquestionable power. The bride turns to the groom and asks if he could take her back after such a night, and he replies that he could, only it would not be the same. A strong instinct of wrongdoing is awakened in the bride, and they decide that she will stab the lord and that they are willing to take the punishment of forced labor in Siberia.

The third story that turns the vernacular into resistance is the novel, or prose ballad as Kallas chose to call it, *Barbara von Tiesenhusen* (1923). It is based on fragments from the previously mentioned sixteenth-century sources as well as nineteenth-century research articles. The narrator is the vicar of Rannu, Matthæus Jeremias Friesner, telling the tale of the young maiden Barbara of German nobility, who falls in love with the clerk Franz Bonnius, a German of lower class. Relationships between nobles and plebians were forbidden by the Pact of Pärnu and enforced by the Livonian Order of the Teutonic Knights, dictating that relationships transgressing class should be punished with death by starvation. Barbara refuses to follow the law, and a court is assembled, consisting of her brothers and brothers-in-law, including the wretched Friesener, who is rooting for Barbara and Franz. Franz escapes, but Barbara is left to the mercy of her brothers, who drive her out on the wintry Lake Võrts, cut a hole in the

⁵ Rouva pieksee verille ja ajaa maantielle. Antaa piestä ja antaa aja. Minä otan lapseni ja menen.

ice and drown her. Franz turns out to be a strong and vindictive man who gathers a guerrilla army of men with similar faiths to take revenge on the entire Tiesenhusen clan.

Resistance: Gender and class

The three stories I have summarized differ greatly, in regards to elements such as time (spanning the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries) and genre (two short stories and a novel), and also because of Kallas's stylistic development as an author over fifteen years. However, Barbara's destiny bears a resemblance to Ingel's and the bride's situations. Although she belongs to the ruling class, Barbara is totally subordinate to her male relatives and the laws of the Teutonic order. The story hints repeatedly at her unwillingness to behave according to her class and gender. When Barbara is still a child, the narrator warns that her strong-headedness would surely cause problems. She rejects lavish dresses in gold her loving stepmother ordered for her. She is repelled by the excessive and Satanic eating and drinking not only of the knights, but also the burghers and the non-German local farmers. She is appalled by the customary bloody bear and dog fights. Her actions suggest that she rebels against the expectations of classed and gendered behavior. Gender is also integral in "Ingel" because of the intimate service she provides as a wet nurse. She is giving her body, which in a sense is her blood, to a stranger. The abandonment of her own child is a key sacrifice she has to make because of poverty. It is the double burden for lower-class women to shoulder the responsibility as domestic labor for the upper classes, as well as carry the responsibility of their own children. In this story, Barbara abandons hers to strangers, which causes her grief. Of course, there are also gendered differences within the classes. For example, the male serfs do work in the fields and gardens, rather than having the master's child feeding off their own bodies, and Ingel's husband/fiancé can leave while she is left behind. "The Wedding" raises significant questions of the relationship between power and sexuality. Notably, the protagonist not only challenges the power of the master; her will to self-determination goes against the norms of all the villagers. Her resistance thus reaches beyond personal liberation, as it disrupts the attitudes of a whole society.

All three women reach breaking points and dare to rebel, by both speaking and acting according to their own convictions and against institutional powers in the form of masters, landlords, brothers, and the law. The literary plots force

them into processes of political subjectivation, and their rebellions from below question the ethnic and social hierarchies from gendered perspectives. One decisive class difference is that Ingel's and the bride's realization overcomes them: they are struck by sudden clarity when they understand that they can defy the social order. In the short stories, emotions take physical forms such as dizziness, sudden urges, and rushes of instincts, and insights. They are propelled to refuse their lot as women, as peasants, but this refusal is not politically rationalized. A related story by Kallas (1913) dealing with the 1905 peasant and workers' uprising in the Russian Empire tells the tale of the "Death of old Org," a man who cannot understand the anger of the mob of farmhands. Org is shocked that they burn down the mansion instead of putting out the fire. He never grasps the politics of his time (the mob is a socialist uprising) while Ingel, Barbara, and the bride come to understand their own place in the social hierarchy and their power to actually challenge authority. Contrary to Ingel and the bride, Barbara's actions are rationally thought through and executed. She seeks the vicar to have him not only read her the Teutonic Law but to discuss his learned interpretation of it. She even challenges him by questioning how the law can be reconciled with the Christian ideology of love and equality. Reason, rather than instinct or sudden emotions, leads to her defiance of society's gendered and classed order.

Regardless of their different paths to resistance, these female protagonists all share a stoic attitude toward being punished for their transgressions. None of them question the rightfulness of retribution and they take full responsibility for their actions. In the context of nation-building, their actions and responses show the political strength that can be won from the vernacular, that is to say, in the form of the people, their way of life, and traditions. They are not pure or untainted by foreign elements or lifestyles, but they have an alternative source of reasoning founded on vernacular, or traditional, thinking. Barbara finds strength in joining the local people's lives, the bride finds strength in a genuine love and sexuality that is in direct defiance of the masters' predatory sexuality, and Ingel awakens to her own historical role as a facilitator for the masters.

Belonging: Ethnicity and the vernacular

In the search for origins, the vernacular is and has been a central element. Whether the vernacular appears as language, as customs, or as a historical attachment to territory, it has been seen as a guarantee of authenticity, which, in

turn, is a prerequisite in the logic of nation-states. Yet, most vernacular cultures have always been mixed, including Nordic and Baltic ones.

The characters in Kallas's stories come from different places, but she always assures the reader that they nevertheless belong in their local setting. Ideas of race and blood play a central role in her thinking, but they are not used in a simplified racist manner (Kurvet-Köosaar 2011; Hinrikus 2015). On the one hand, race and class interact in "Ingel," as her peasant mixed-bloodedness is commented on in a positive manner. On the other hand, there are "foreign races" such as Ingel's German masters. However, their negative characteristics are primarily products of their abuse of power rather than their Germanness. As Barbara's fate shows, the abuse of power can just as well be directed at a woman from one's own people. When it comes to distinguishing between those in power and those without, Kallas uses the term *epä-saksalainen*, un-German, to refer to the local inhabitants in order to divide peoples and languages into two groups. Defining people by what they are not allows Kallas to be inclusive regarding those who belong to a society. Considering that the Estonian state did not exist prior to the twentieth century and that modern Estonia consists of several counties, it would indeed have been historically incorrect to call the different peoples Estonians. Thus, Kallas does not present any "pure" Estonians as those who unveil and reject German power; instead the dilemma of mastery is expressed by women of what we today would identify as an ethnic minority of mixed race, a member of the peasantry who is willing to murder, and a lady of nobility who refuses to follow the law of her class. However, some of Kallas's Baltic German contemporaries viewed her as a dangerous agitator (Laitinen 1973: 86).

The sense of the ethnic authenticity of the people is further emphasized by sartorial markers such as Ingel's traditional Sörve dress for women or Barbara's rejection of the extravagant dresses that would be suitable for a woman of her class. There is joy and innovation in the vernacular traditions, and some are made up just for fun. This is the case with Ingel's local hat, a "silly, playful headdress made up at some reckless, joyous moment" (382).⁶ Of course, such attire was mostly worn on festive occasions, and it is most unlikely that everyday chores were carried out in colorful tassels, but the description gives Kallas the chance to firmly ground Ingel in the local tradition by having her wearing local attributes, a kind of sartorial performance of ethnic authenticity. The passage about the hat

⁶ *hullunkurinen, veikistelevä päähine, keksitty jonakin ylimielisenä, ilosta pulppuavana hetkenä.*

signals two things: first, there is such a thing as vernacular dress, and, second, the vernacular can be fictitious and does not necessarily need to originate in anything deeply authentic. Naming exact locations and the natural world more generally signals the vernacular (Melkas 2011: 54). Kallas often names lakes and places, which strengthens the air of authenticity without there necessarily being any connection to a place in the chronicle she is creating.

In the novel *Barbara von Tiesenhusen*, the Barbaras, Ingels, and brides of the world come together. Friesner, the benevolent narrator, describes how Barbara seeks the company of the pagan peasants all the more frequently and how she seems to prefer them to the company of the knights and ladies of the castle. She learns their language and takes part in their storytelling and singing; she even writes their stories down, which could be a hint of the first woman to collect and transcribe oral stories. For Kallas she was perhaps something of a chronicler, like Russow, her mission similar to Kallas's own, to collect folklore. Barbara's extensive contact with the peasants in the novel is an aspect introduced by Kallas and does not, to my knowledge, appear in any of the sixteenth-century chronicles or in any of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations that were available to her. Reading these selected stories together suggests that women can create room for both resistance and reconciliation between hierarchical ethnic, class, and gender differences, but it is not easy. The resistance and reconciliation are evident when Barbara's brothers are about to drown her and the peasant men, who were ordered by her brothers to make a hole in the ice, refuse to sink her into the water because she has been good to their wives and children. The peasant men thus side with the noble woman, who had accepted their lives as equal, maybe even superior, to those in her own class. As Finnish literary historian Kukku Melkas has pointed out, Kallas has mainly been read in the framework of romance and women's passion. Instead, Melkas suggests a more contextual reading that acknowledges Kallas's genre-transgressions and her historical tales as ways of producing knowledge and power as a strategy for resistance and change (Melkas 2006: 19, 22, 36, 53–4).

Uses of the vernaculars: Toward a conclusion

Kallas's literarization of vernacular oral tales along with her way of representing rituals and traditions brought vernacular aspects of everyday life into Estonian literature. This was one of the modernist aesthetic-political purposes of the

literary scene in Estonia, as well as in Finland, at the time of national awakening (Raun 2009: 120–3). The peasants' and serfs' lives, experiences, and material objects were dealt with as noteworthy in their own right. Kallas's archaic language and style can be seen as a way to combine vernacular literary themes with a cosmopolitan style. Expanding on Beecroft's argument that national literature is "marked by a rapture with the cosmopolitan past" and entails a "marginalization" of other local languages, Kallas's style rather emphasizes their simultaneity (Beecroft 2015: 200, 198, respectively). The archaic/cosmopolitan is then not in opposition to the local/vernacular; on the contrary, it enhances the historicity of the local. The vernacular was, Kallas's style and method suggests, already cosmopolitan. Thus, Kallas connects to the vertical historical repository of the chronicles, to borrow Shih's terminology, by exploring class-determined, bodily, and sexual subjectivities historically (Kurvet-Käosaar and Rojola 2011b: 8–11). Exploring oral tales, traditions, and the folkloric emphasizes the historical continuity of the peoples (Beecroft 2015: 228).

An analysis of the works of Aino Kallas can give some indications as to how vernacularization was put to work in a nation-making project, and how ambivalence and difference could be dealt with in literature. While literature can function as a medium to convey normative values and imaginations, it can also be "a medium of thought and imagination in which questions of what is valuable for us and how to understand the value of literature are articulated from new perspectives and addressed in an open process of exploration" (Meretoja 2015: 3). My reading of Kallas suggests she is writing in the spirit of exploration of national histories rather than in a normative manner. Perhaps the most important contribution that the study of small national literatures can offer to the field of world literature studies is complexity. As I have shown here in relation to Kallas's work, when the concept of the vernacular is applied as an analytical tool in relation to small literatures, the dynamic between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan appears more clearly. By intertwining the two, she shows that the cosmopolitan is always present in very local and vernacular stories. Smaller literatures call for renegotiations in world literature theory by bringing a variety of examples that require recontextualizing theories, in terms of similarities, differences, and the purported universality of their claims. The dialogue between major and minor literatures illuminates world literary theories because, of course, the scholarly field has its own power relations that include some and exclude others. To understand world literature as only already translated literature or literature that has traveled is to be seduced by the lure

of methodological globalism. World literature can instead be understood as something that engages with world history, and as part of the nation-making processes in local languages as in this example from the northeastern periphery of Europe. Engaging with vernacular themes was most certainly part of shaping both literature and history. Such engagement always takes on local forms suitable for historical, political, cultural, and social contexts.

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