

Entangled Discourses in a *Bildungsroman* of Soviet Estonian Modernity: From an Ugly Duckling to a Space Princess?

Silvia Rannamaa's (1918-2007) *Kadri* (1959) and its sequel *Stepmother* (*Kasuema*, 1963) certainly belong to the most popular Estonian youth novels. Set from mid-1950s to 1961, they were a cult read since their publication until 1980s and still remain relevant today, both parts having been re-issued four times since the collapse of the Soviet Union. *Kadri* opens with its teenage protagonist's first diary entry in her new notebook:

I have always read and heard that in our land the children are happy, that the children have a carefree childhood. I agree with that, if I think of Anne Puust or any other classmate of mine. Only one thing I don't understand: if I too live in the same happy land, why am I so unspeakably unhappy? (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 7)

On the first pages of the novel *Kadri* pours out her misery of not having parents, of living in poverty in a damp cellar flat with her strained and often harsh grandmother, of having no friends. She is mocked and ignored at school: other children look down on her because of her drab appearance, lack of social skills and poor study results. It is remarkable that *Kadri*'s words contradict one of the most dominant Soviet discourses throughout the regime's existence: that of the happy Soviet childhood and of children as, in Stalin's words the only privileged class in the country. The children were projected as a "prototype" for the whole young Soviet state (Balina and Dobrenko 2009, p. xviii), so their happiness was not a practical goal, but a "legitimising sacred value. The state ability to guarantee happiness to children was ... a key instance of the country's status as a kind of an earthly paradise," the cultural historian of modern Russia, Catriona Kelly explains (2009, p. 9). Thus, as Kelly observes, "it became difficult from the mid-1930s to to address in print cases of childhood unhappiness within the Soviet Union itself" (2009, p.7). Even, if there was, of course, data of poverty and abuse of children, officially "unhappiness was the lot of children and adults abroad ... and in Russia before 1917" (Kelly 2009, p. 7).

Furthermore, as already Soviet period critics (Kalda 1963, Krusten 1978) indicate, the poetics and style of the *Kadri* books jumped out against the paradigm of Stalinist socialist realism, dominant in 1950s and into early 1960s. The latter demanded depicting "life in its revolutionary development", which in its strong form meant the the duty to depict not only the future, but also the present as bright and cheerful, and to contrast these with the darkness of

the capitalist past, thus resulting in a strongly idealised picture of the situation the readers were currently experiencing (Epner 2001, p. 378). The literary characters had to be created as “social subjects“, i.e. their qualities determined by class position alone, thus clamping down on the depiction of psychological development (Epner 2001, pp. 378-379), as well as on nuanced engagement with human socialisation and individual-collective relationships. As Krusten points out in her 1978 article, Rannamaa’s books differ by being psychological novels, principally focused on “the story of Kadri’s internal development“ (p. 509). They present the characters and their surroundings in a non-idealised manner and involve the reader in a “wide diapason of emotions“ (*ibid.*, p. 512).

Rannamaa herself later explains that even if she did want to get published, she had simply lacked the skills to approximate the prescribed model more closely. She grew up with English and American “girl books” like Frances Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) Jean Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912) and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868-1869) as her teenage favourites, and both their aesthetics and their moral outlook had been engrained in her (Rannamaa 2001). The first person narrative mode enabling a subjective account of the world and of the inner life of the protagonist was almost non-existent in the Soviet literature of the time. Here too Rannamaa must have received inspiration from English classics, and also, of course, from the pre-WWII female narrator novels closer to home that Rannamaa similarly mentions among her favourites (Rannamaa 1998, p. 214), such as Betti Alver’s *The Wind’s Lover* (*Tuulearmuke* 1927) or *The Young School Mistress’s Safety Valve* (1930) by the Finnish author Hilja Valtanen, the latter written in the diary form.ⁱ

On the other hand, the *details* of Kadri’s life challenges are specific to her time and place. It emerges that her father had disappeared during WWII, never returning: something that the grandmother refuses to talk about. (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 7) Kadri’s mother had died just after the war when Kadri was very young: ostensibly of angina, but it is later suggested also of a broken heart over her husband (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 91). The family home had been destroyed in the war (just as Rannamaa’s own home had been wiped out by the 1944 Soviet bombing of Tallinn (Rannamaa 2001)), so they ended up in the cellar flat. Kadri finds solace in fairy tales, imaging herself to be someone capable of positive change: Andersen’s Ugly Duckling or the beautiful bewitched swan-princess in Pushkin’s *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. Furthermore, as part of Kadri’s self-reflection the diary engages with both her daily experience of Soviet youth life (e.g. pioneer and Komsomol meetings) and the thought-patterns and frames of reference of the time, such as the very *expectation* to be a *happy* Soviet

child, the promise and wonderment of science and Soviet technological modernity, or questions of honourable behaviour for Soviet youth.

Thus the Kadri novels, in their particular creative form present a tangle of divergent and often contradictory strands inflecting the socio-political, cultural and literary phenomena and interconnections operative at the time of their writing. Some originate from Rannamaa's memories and reading background of the interwar period, others from the experience of WW II, yet others from the impact of the Soviet period. The last, in its turn, involves the official demand to approximate the model of socialist realism hegemonic in the 1950s and the subtler forms censorship and self-censorship required by the confined situation of publishing at that time, but also the hopes, the inspiration and the new writing models in the 1960s, and finally the currents of resignation in the 1970s, when Rannamaa published a new revised edition of *Stepmother*. The strongly transformed screen version of *Stepmother, Well, Come On, Smile* (1985, dirs. Leida Laius, Arvo Iho) intensifies the subdued socially critical elements in the novels and thus invites a differently focused look on the mesh in the 1980s.

To help to gain insight into the entanglement and ambivalent interaction of the discourses, moral codes and emotional blueprints in the Kadri texts, I propose to approach the coming-of-age duology as a *Bildungsroman*, drawing upon Franco Moretti who sees the genre as a 'symbolic form of modernity': one troping and narrativising overwhelming historical change and problems relating to modernisation in a particular "human size" model, that of the story of social and psychological maturation of a young individual struggling to find his or her place in the world (Moretti 2000, p.). This emplotment can be executed in a variety of different ways, reflecting and constructing *particular* cultural-political models of modernisation. Thus even if Moretti's study concerns primary modernisation in 18th-19th century Western Europe, I find his ideas helpful for analysing my case of early Soviet Estonia where the Soviet model of modernity had been forcefully superimposed on the preceding inter-war period model, producing a complex result.

Further, for a specific insight into this complexity, i.e. to analyse the entanglement of discourses in contradiction and in conflict with one another in the Kadri-novels, I also draw upon studies of postcolonial *Bildungsroman* (Byrne 2006, Nyatetu-Waigwa 1996).ⁱⁱ Namely, I conceptualise the Soviet management of non-Russian territories as a form of colonial modernisation, corresponding to the definition of colonialism as "appropriation and exploitation of another geopolitical territory, together with an organized interference in its

rule and culture” (Anne McClintock qtd. in Childs and Williams 1997, p.227; for an influential and pertinent discussion of Soviet colonialism see Annus 2012 and Annus 2017).

Namely, it needs to be emphasised that in deploying the concept of entanglement in a postcolonial context I do not presume a situation of a synthesis, or even hybridisation of clashing and diverging ideas. As Sarah Nuttall has pointed out in reference to the South African case, although entanglement refers to relationships of entwinement this need not at all be harmonious or peaceful: “it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited“ (2009, p.1). Entanglement can easily occur in situations of hostility and conflict. However, the different strands will be discussed as interrelated: they are not completely separate in the respect that their production of meanings in the novel is interdependent.

Postcolonial *Bildungsroman* and entanglement

The concept of *Bildung* is rooted in the pre-modern ideas of the man carrying in his soul the image (*Bild*) of God, after whom he is fashioned and which he must nurture in himself. It acquires a variety of new associations and significance in Germany at the end of the 18th century, broadly coming to designate a secular-humanist idea of (self-)cultivation and (self-)formation (Dumont, p. 82). According to that each human being carries an irreplaceable individuality, which, however, can and ought to be developed towards harmony and maturity only through enriching engagement with the diversity of the world. Further, especially with Herder’s work the idea of individual *Bildung* came to be paralleled by that on the collective level: like each person, each culture or people (*Volk*) is also unique and unfolds itself through a distinctive *Bildung* process (Dumont 84, Boes pp. 51-52).

The beginning of *Bildungsroman* is commonly retrospectively dated with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795-1796), although novels fitting what later became known as the *Bildungsroman* model already appeared earlier in the 18th century (Hardin 1991, p. ix); Jane Austen’s novels can be mentioned as examples of early *Bildungsroman* in England. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) famously identifies *Wilhelm Meister* as the archetypal *Bildungsroman*, characterising its poetics as teleological: “[t]he dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony” (qtd. in Redfield 1996, p. 40). The

ideal-typical plot pattern of the traditional Western *Bildungsroman* would have a young protagonist leave home, frequently with a conflict between generations involved. S/he goes into the wider world, often travels from province to metropole and goes through a pattern of experiences, develops and matures as an individual, and is then either reconciled with society, or at least consolidates his/her attitude towards it. Towards the end of the novel s/he typically gets married or engaged and frequently, at least for a brief period returns home where s/he is recognised as an adult member of society with legitimate agency (Nyatetu-Waigwa 1996, p. 1, Buckley 1974, p. 18).

It is, on the one hand, an ancient rite of passage story about initiation story, but, as Moretti points out, one told in a particular cultural situation: a modern one where the perception of the child/adult relationship is transformed and there emerges an understanding of youth as a relatively long period of apprenticeship, during which the young person searches for his/her place in the world which need not resemble the one of his/her parents (Moretti 2000, p. 4). Moretti's emphasises that what is quintessentially modern about the *Bildungsroman* is the idea that it is not enough for the protagonist simply to accept his society and follow its "standards of normality" (Moretti 2000, p. 16). His/her acceptance and integration must be perceived as voluntary and satisfying: "it is not enough for modern bourgeois society simply to subdue the drives that oppose the standards of 'normality'. It is also necessary that as a 'free individual', not as a fearful subject, but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as one's own" (Moretti 2000, p. 16).

The finale and the outcome of a classical *Bildungsroman* is the "happiness" of the protagonist who is concluding a marriage — an obviously suitable trope for a circumstance, where a modern free individual willingly limits his/her own freedom, symbolically "a 'pact' between the individual and the world" (Moretti 2000, p. 22). Furthermore, the symbolic function of marriage is confirmed by the *Bildungsroman* marriages frequently being bourgeois-aristocracy "mésalliances", eventually accepted by both families. Thus they (re)create harmony between the classes, demonstrating that a modern social symbiosis can function based on a pact of free will and mutual understanding.

However, to represent the conflicting ambitions of modernisation, the contradictory strives for freedom and change on the one hand, and for harmony and stabilisation on the other, the *Bildungsroman* form "will of necessity be *intrinsically contradictory*" (Moretti 2000, p. 6), at that not necessarily solving the problem of contradiction, but rather learning "to live with it,

and even transform it into a tool for survival” (Moretti 200, p. 10). Perhaps exactly the ability to work with the controversies and dilemmas of modernisation in a particular way could be an important reason for the continuing viability and popularity of the genre in different contexts, beyond its classical versions (cf. Lima 1993). For example, in the archetypal Goethean *Bildungsroman* the protagonist is a man and even if some of the early works in the genre have female protagonists, their *Bildung* necessarily differs. The works by Louisa May Alcott and Jean Webster that Rannamaa used as her partial models feature complex and developing young women who have strong ideals, who believe in the power of humanist education, and who wish to both realise their talents and to help the world. It has often been said that these books’ success in their time was to an important extent based on the more or less convincing way (the readers’ opinions vary, how convincing it is found to be) how they managed to lead their unconventional heroines to such romantic relationships and other individual life choices that let them integrate in their society without gravely betraying their ideals. Thus they could convey performative models for the increasing number of educated young women.

In this context it is important to note here that Karl Morgenstern (1770-1852), a relatively little known ethnically German professor at Tartu University (now Estonia, then Czarist Russia), who coined the term *Bildungsroman* in 1812, long before Dilthey’s (independent) influential formulations mentioned above. He also specifically emphasises the importance of the *didactic and performative* aspects in the *Bildungsroman*. As novels like *Wilhelm Meister* represent the progress of the protagonist “to a certain stage of completion” and thereby they also promote “the development of *the reader* to a greater extent than any other kind of novel” (qtd. in Boes 2012, p. 27, my emphasis). There is also a clear patriotic and modernising dimension: there is no German state, but Morgenstern celebrates Goethe’s novel for presenting specifically German thought, life and “morals of our time” through the novel’s “hero, its scenery and development” (qtd. in Boes 2012, pp. 2-3). In his reading, to paraphrase Moretti and to draw upon the genre theorist John Frow, the *Bildungsroman* genre is seen as “a form of symbolic *action*”, creating “effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility”, attempting to shape the ways the world is understood and engaged with (Frow 2006, p. 2).

The narratives of formation in different postcolonial cultures relate to the Western *Bildungsroman* tradition, but have become significant exactly as way of addressing the *particular* problematics of modernity in a colony, centrally dealing with the ambivalence that modernity is seen both as alien and imposed, and potentially still full of emancipatory promise (cf. Cheah 2003, Shannon 2003). As I have argued elsewhere (Peiker 2006, Peiker 2015)

Estonian and other East-Central European narratives of *Bildung*, such as in many ways resemble the postcolonial rather than the Western variety, both in their thematic content and in their structure. Postcolonial *Bildungsromane* tend to be far more explicitly political in their themes than the traditional model: at least in the sense that in their worlds the protagonist's personal fate and formation cannot easily be separated from those of his/her identity collective. However, in postcolonial *Bildungsromane* the avenues for development and transition to the adulthood, political or otherwise, may not be many and usually they cannot take the protagonist to the stage of completion where they reach a symbolic citizenship pact with his/her society (Nyatetu-Waigwa 1996, Lopez 2001). Similarly to classical *Bildungsromane*, postcolonial novels draw upon the marriage/romance trope, but it is re-written as accounts of failed relationships and complicated ambivalent desires between the coloniser and the colonised: the "social contract" remains unsigned and "mésalliances" impossible.

In our context it is important to note that for the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* not only the marriage trope, but also the symbolism of child/parent dynamics is central to modelling the protagonist's trials and possibilities relating to his/her socio-cultural inheritance on the one hand, and socio-cultural reproduction on the other. Generational discontinuity is an issue in the *Bildungsroman* genre as a whole, but in the postcolonial version the cultural cleavage between the childhood home and the (currently legitimate form of) modernity is more severe. Filiation is not a natural given, and often it is through the figures of orphans and abandoned children that the novels explore issues of "unstable origins" and competing "discourses of nation" (Byrne 2014). The end result is likely not a clear symbolic pact between the protagonist and the home/society, but rather a mesh of contradictory and ambivalent discourses mentioned above. However, as we see in the case of the Kadri novels, these can be shaped into a *Bildungsroman* with a performative and didactic dimension. **The lack of correspondence between reality and expectations, the promise and the alienness of Soviet modernity do not annul the Bildungsroman features as the genre is heterogeneous and open to different "uses" (Frow 2006)**

Rannamaa, her work and its reception

Silvia Rannamaa's small *oeuvre* is almost entirely focused on writing about and for children and young people. It is people in the phase of development that interest her, she has said, and that is why she has been especially interested in the young (Tali 2005). Born 3 March 1918 she was herself a week older than the Estonian Republic, the independence of which was

announced 24 February, and grew up in the new state. Her essayistic memoir *Since Tender Age* (*Maast madalast*, 1990) grants insight into a particular Tallinn working class family, yet also into the urban social and cultural life of the time. Rannamaa's mother was an Estonian factory worker, her father a Karelian naval cadet studying in St. Petersburg; the marriage only lasted for two years. After Rannamaa's grandfather died a few years afterwards, she grew up in a household of women: her grandmother, mother, and mother's younger single sister.

Rannamaa depicts the relative poverty of the household, and talks of the mother's and the aunt's bitter resentment of the meagreness of their school education, yet the lively and cultured atmosphere she conjures up is not unlike the one that countless readers most remember about *Little Women*, and is entirely different from the depiction of misery and spiritual loneliness in the beginning of *Kadri* (Alcott too, of course, also describing hardship and deprivation, though of a different era and of a different social class). Music making, reading, imaginative games and drama performances with neighbourhood children are all part of the home life, and so are occasional family visits to theatre, cinema and opera. It is interesting that the topic of self improvement through creative home making, one very important in the *Kadri* books, as well as in their Anglo-American models hardly comes up autobiographically at all, thus probably implying its *symbolic* significance in her *Bildungsroman*.

Rannamaa got a secondary education at the reputable Tallinn City Commerce Gymnasium for Girls. University studies were postponed because of the lack of financial means; finally, 1943 she did start studies of German philology at the University of Tartu, but these were cut short in the turmoil of the war and never taken up again. Rannamaa started writing already as a schoolgirl, but published her first story only in 1955, earning her salary as a telephonist and then as an accountant. The *Kadri* books are her most influential works, though she is also remembered for the modern fairy tales in *The Little One of Nösperi Nönn* (*Nösperi Nönni Natuke*, 1977) and the collection of dog stories, *The Imprint of a Little Paw* (*Väikese käpa jälg*, 1985).

Kadri and *Stepmother* (*Kasuema*) share the protagonist Kadri Jalakas who is 13-14 during the first part and 16-18 in the second, as well as a number of other central characters. As can be inferred from her narrative, Kadri was born 1943-1944 and her diary entries date from mid-1950s to 1961 when Gagarin flies into space the event is discussed at the end of the first editions of *Stepmother*.ⁱⁱⁱ Between the 1960s editions and that of 1970 Rannamaa made a

significant alteration to the text of *Stepmother* in this respect that I will discuss later. However, she declined the glasnost period offers to recreate the “uncensored” versions of her texts: she thought they worked best as genuine products of their time, acknowledging the multiple strands that came together in the books (Tali 2005). To a great extent they were moulded by outward pressure, not only direct state censorship, but also guidance and editing by the publishers and the author’s own internalised sense of self censorship^{iv}. The “girl book” genre was officially banned in the Soviet Union from the 1930s as petty bourgeois, but the Kadri books became possible with the beginning of the thaw and the supportive editor-in-chief, aided by the obscurity of the Estonian language and the relative marginality of the children’s literature (Jaaksoo 2014).^v The end result was a compromise, Rannamaa says, but emphasises that “in the things that mattered most to her”, she had got her way (Rannamaa 2002). The texts thus entangle both direct external influence and the author’s own ambiguous and fluid engagement with the different commitments, fears and ideals active in the Estonian society of the post-Stalinist period.

The books became immediately popular among young readers, but its themes and distinctive poetics were also appreciated by adults.^{vi} Especially *Stepmother*, with its realistic set of colourful characters and exciting intrigues at a mixed-gender boarding school, presented by the sensitive and witty narrator, was a cult reading for Estonian teenage girls throughout 1960s – early 1990s. In 1985 an influential socially critical film *Well, Come On, Smile* (*Naerata ometi*, dirs. Leida Laius and Arvo Iho) was made based on *Stepmother*, reset at an orphanage of its contemporary 1980s. Despite the Soviet ideological clichés and preoccupations the books contain, today too the Kadri phenomenon retains some of its attraction. Many schools choose to schedule them as required reading – in paradoxical difference from the Soviet period when they were not part of the school programme. Not counting audio-books, *Kadri* has been re-published nine times after its original publication: 1962, 1965, 1970, 1978, 1984, 1990, 2002, 2010, 2018, and *Stepmother* seven times: 1965, 1970, 1978, 1990, 2003, 2010, 2018. The books have also been translated in a number of Eastern bloc languages (Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Czech, Slovak, Georgian, Armenian) during the Soviet period and 2002 into Finnish, but do not seem to have gained the impact similar to Estonia. Despite the strong cross-generational significance of Kadri for the popular consciousness in Estonia, the books have received little academic attention. Reet Krusten’s concise article “Silvia Rannamaa and Kadri Jalakas today“ (“Silvia Rannamaa ja Kadri

Jalakas täna“, 1978) offers the most analytical account of the poetis and the reception of the Kadri novels, before my own studies (Peiker 2018, Peiker forthcoming).

Kadri’s diary as a postcolonial *Bildungsroman*: parents, houses, homes

[Quietly and for a present day Estonian reader occasionally perplexingly, Kadri’s diary incorporates the ambivalences and opaque spots of the era. A text-immanent reading can also analyse this in terms of narrative focus only through Kadri: the reader gets the whole information through the young protagonist trying to find her bearings in the family and in the society. A number of the ethical questions that she faces remain without a conclusive answer. The narrative gaps and deficient moral transparency were pointed out as flaws by some contemporary reviewers (e.g. Välipõllu 1961, p. 572); Krusten 1978 too considers Kadri’s disinclination to express moral disapproval exaggerated (511). At the same time, as indicated above, the duology does not lack the collective and individual didactic aspect associated with the *Bildungsroman* genre, but intertwines hesitations and period clichés with passionately felt messages that are presented with conviction as without ambivalence. Inviting the readers to empathise with the life lessons of Kadri and her mates, it socialises them into a particular moral thought-world.] – võib-olla see lõik lõppu conclusionisse hoopis?

Kadri starts her account of her “sorry life“ (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 9) while lying in hospital, run over by car, in her despair of havng been falsely accused of theft at school. The diary is the only place she can confide her unhappiness, she feels; at the same time the writing also functions as a screen of privacy to pull between herself and the intrusive curiosity of the other patients in the ward. Having dreamt of being a bewitched princess to be rescued, as a character in a realist novel she meets her “fairy godmother“ in the person of a superficially “ordinary” fellow patient, a novelist called Elsa Sarap. Aunt Elsa (as Kadri calls her older friend) breaks through her shell of self-pity and encourages her talents, making her better equipped to interact with the world and develop herself. This encounter turns the hospital into the first site of Kadri’s *Bildung*. Aunt Elsa can be seen as the most important didactical voice in the novel: her ideals as further interpreted and aspired towards by Kadri colour the whole dilogy.

Though having a crippled leg herself, Elsa’s credo is “everyone is the smith of his/her own fortune“: not in the sense that a capable person ought to be able to control his/her fate and make it a fortunate one, but rather that any circumstance of life, even a tragic misfortune, can be “forged“ in qualitatively different ways. Corresponding with Kadri, when the girl is

transferred to recover at a sanatorium, Aunt Elsa writes: There are plenty of people who lament, when they lose a little finger: now everything is finished, life is over. They may cry over the missing finger until they are too old to work with the nine that they have. It is the psychology of such people that is handicapped. . . . Should a grouch like that find ten roubles, s/he is positively unhappy that s/he didn't find twenty. S/he does not give a thought to the person who lost the money. . . . You see, Kadri, it is not worthwhile to be the cause of one's own unhappiness [in such a way] . . . Everything depends on one's attitude and perspective. . . . Always and everywhere try to see the natural good, even then, when the good is temporarily latent or hidden. Always fight for the good to prevail. (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], pp. 39-40)

Significantly, Aunt Elsa is also an enthusiast of modern science and the opportunities it can give people to improve their lives. At her initiative, Kadri is shown to a medical professor who can diagnose her with an eye disability that turns out to be the cause of many of her health and learning problems, and she then undergoes a successful state-of-the-art operation. This is a symbolic moment in Kadri's life: Aunt Elsa helped her to see life and its potential clearer in more sense than one (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 119).

Kadri thrives, going back to school, working hard at her studies and winning the respect and friendship of her new classmates. At that, Elsa's moral outlook of liberal ideals and a (secularised) vision of the divine image latent in every situation and soul is here entwined with prevalent discourses of the era, hinting at the value of the friendship between Soviet peoples. Having been a weak pupil, Kadri is specifically empowered by learning good Russian "thanks to a [female] friend at the sanatorium and that she didn't speak Estonian" (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 44). Now Kadri is not only singled out for praise by the teacher, but she can help others in the subject which enables her to win respect and develop a deep friendship with a male classmate, Urmas, like she had never had before. However, interestingly the Russian-speaking friend herself resembles a footnote: differently from other minor characters that are each given memorable traits, we learn nothing at all about her (besides her not speaking Estonian) and she is never mentioned again in the duology.

As Kadri's life takes a turn for the better, a further strange event changes her life. Her father turns out to be alive and comes to find her. It emerges that "the turmoil of the war" (91) had taken him to the West, he had lived in Sweden for a while, but had now returned to settle in Soviet Estonia, and had a job in a factory.^{vii} Kadri's grandmother who blames him for her

daughter's death is to a degree reconciled with him, even if they never become a family unit. At the end of the first part of the diary Kadri and the grandmother move into a one room fifth floor flat in a new house built by Kadri's father and his workmates.

As in many other *Bildungsromane* (both Western and postcolonial), the living spaces and the aspiration towards a true home play a central and symbolically important role for the protagonist's life-path. During the initial part of Kadri the cellar flat is depicted as an "anti-home" (Lotman 2001, p.185), a prison the bewitched princess does not belong to and wants to escape. However, it is part of her formation that she learns to understand and appreciate her tenacious grandmother and feels she "would not leave her even to go to a king's palace" (Rannamaa 1978, p. 93). She is overjoyed about the new modern flat with its "windows right into the sky" (p. 106). Yet she reconsiders her initial judgement that there is nothing in the cellar flat that is good enough to take into the new one: she recreates their existing furniture repainting it and furthermore, builds handsome bookshelves from old butter boxes (pp. 107-108).

The contemporary reviewer Välipõllu specifically criticises the finale of Kadri for equating happiness with a cosy home and material possessions "like in a Christmas story of former times" (1961, p. 572). Indeed, unusually for the discourses of the era Kadri emphasises how much she "loves beautiful things" Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 118). However, this pleasure is related to making and individualising them, "being quite a bit of an inventor" (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 108). Both at the end of *Kadri* and later in the case of boarding school in *Stepmother*, Kadri does not so much acquire a home or reach a home (as is typical of many classical *Bildungsromane*, see e.g. Gilbert and Gubar pp. 342-371 on *Jane Eyre*), but *makes* her home from the same supplies that had been part of a space seen as anti-home. Inspired by Aunt Elsa's credo that one can forge one's own fortune, she comments on her furniture project in *Kadri*: "we shouldn't only see in things how ugly they are now, but also how beautiful they can be made" (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 108).

Thus Kadri can be said to advocate an ameliorative approach to life learned from Elsa: one somewhat different from official Soviet progressivism, with the latter's emphasis on the individuals' compliance to collective and collectivist happiness (cf. Annus 2018, p. 113, and Balina and Dobrenko 2009 on the Soviet model of modernity). Essentially it is the liberal values of individual resourcefulness and responsible inter-action with others that Kadri sees as the source of advancement and moral good. At that, the novel presents improvement as

precarious, neither inevitable nor indelible, although there remains a potential to rise from the ashes, and the moral duty to make an effort to do so.

Kadri's cosy home life does not last for long: *Stepmother* starts in a changed situation. The grandmother has died after a long illness; the father has married a beautiful young woman Gina with whom Kadri, still mourning her grandmother, does not get along. When Gina becomes pregnant, Kadri bitterly follows her hints and volunteers to leave the small flat for a boarding school. It is also the boarding school, not only Gina, that can be seen as the stepmother of the multi-referential title: a body providing a home for children and young people from variously difficult, broken, poor or disabled families.

While the duology is the story of Kadri's development, her *Bildung* and problems of socialisation, as indicated above, this story is to a great extent told through the descriptions and tropes of inter-generational relationships. Though the domestic tragedies and their impact on the children, as well as their wit and resilience, are depicted very realistically and specifically in *Stepmother*^{viii}, the boarding school students and their dysfunctional families can also be interpreted as a comment on the society at large. This interpretation is strongly foregrounded by the directly sociocritical 1985 film based on the novel, but it is also a repeating topic for Rannamaa to discuss the relationship between cross-generational heritage and social ills. In her essayistic memoirs *Since Tender Age (Maast madalast, 1990)* she goes so far as to talk about the "frighteningly many mutations" that the difficult history of foreign oppression has caused among Estonians across centuries, making many of them "drunkards, slow-witted, suicides, handicapped in various ways already in the mother's womb", as well as putting their family relations under strain as secrets had to be kept even from one's closest family (Rannamaa 1990, pp. 62-63).

The figure of Kadri's father Ülo is an odd presence in the novel. It is specified he was a radio-telegrapher on a ship during WWII (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 97), but Kadri (or the reader) never learns exactly what he did in the West, how he got there, or how he arranged his return. It is also ambiguous whether the reasons he left his wife and young child without making any contact were fully to do with the political situation, or if it was also connected to personal relationships. The opaqueness that puzzles the teenage narrator parallels the silence about war time secrets and betrayals that many of the book's initial readers would have experienced in their own families.

At the end of the day it is her “outwardly rugged, but dutiful and fair” peasant-rooted grandmother, called Kadri like the narrator, who she considers the only person in the world she had felt entirely at home with (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 125). However, it seems to be part of Kadri’s maturation process to learn to live with the uncertainty and lack of immediacy in her relationship with her father. She does not condemn her father, and neither does the novel: neither he nor Gina is in any way punished by the plot, as it would happen in a socialist realist work. Furthermore, even if Gina comes over as insensitive and conceited in Kadri’s account, Kadri’s very sympathetically presented boyfriend Urmas (whose own father is a violent alcoholic, so he helps the mother to take care of the younger siblings) reproves her for not making a more wholehearted effort to solve her problems with Gina (*ibid.*, pp. 142-43). As Kadri rejoices at the birth of her little sister, she promises herself to “forget all unpleasantness there has been with the stepmother” (*ibid.*, p. 154).

At the same time, the primary school age girls at the boarding school who she talks to and plays with become no less important to her: she feels she has “more sisters than the little one at home” (*ibid.*, p. 190). Kadri, in her own turn, develops into an inspiring and eye-opening Aunt Elsa figure for the deprived children, two of whom emerge as fully-fledged “round” characters in the novel. The boarding school which initially had been a barely bearable anti-home (*ibid.*, e.g. p. 160) gradually becomes the main locus of Kadri’s attachments and relationships. By the final third of the book she with surprise confesses that when on holiday at the family home she feels “homesickness for the boarding school”; “for the independence, opportunities and mates there” (*ibid.*, p. 258). Symbolically, at that point the previously bleak dormitory is redecorated and creatively “interior designed” in a joint effort of older and younger girls to make a real home (*ibid.*, pp. 258-262).

Significantly, towards the end of the novel these developments are interrupted by an out-of-the-blue tragedy. Kadri’s schoolmate Enrico is critically injured in a fight with escaped prisoners while he bravely saves Kadri from their attack. Enrico had already first been introduced in the first part of the dilogy as a mean bully in his childhood, again from a family of alcoholics. Once Kadri meets him again at the boarding school he has acquired a good name, yet makes Kadri the object of his taunts and, to her greatest mortification, has her notebook with her poems stolen. It turns out, however, that Enrico is in love with her; during their long conversations at the hospital a number of misconceptions are refuted, and both Kadri and the reader see the “temporarily latent” good (cf. *ibid.*, p. 40) in him.

There is every encouragement to believe that Enrico is going to recover, yet one day Kadri is entirely unexpectedly informed by the nurse that he is dead. It emerges that Enrico's unstable mother had come to visit him, making a rude scene, as well as smoking in the ward.

Afterwards Enrico had collapsed and died trying to open the window, too embarrassed to ask for help. In her authorial preface to later editions, Rannamaa reveals that readers often ask her why she let Enrico die (Rannamaa 1978, p. 375). It makes her glad every time they say they feel sorry for him, she writes: "one must feel sorry for a human being! That was the main reason for Enrico's death". One should not forget, she explains, even when young, that we don't necessarily have "a thousand years to get to know one another ... The more seriously we relate to the main issues in life, the more right and reasons we will have to laugh and be happy (Rannamaa 1978 "Autori", p. 375). Thus despite the Kadri novels' ambiguity and detachment in a number of aspects, they do send a strong didactic message about the duty to care for human lives and the belief in individuals' ability and responsibility to make their own and others' fortunes better, even if in an unstable environment. Reet Krusten perceptively points out that the widely read books themselves became a kind of a "collectively shared Aunt Elsa" (509): a wise mentor who comforts and encourages the readers.

The novel ends with Kadri holding her little ward Sass, as she comforts her in their dimly lit dormitory, both grieving over Enrico's death. She writes: "Something akin to a smile flickered through me this morning, even if I would have wanted to howl with pain. It was love that awakened it in me and I realised with clarity, how life was starting to give me its first conscious tasks" (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 371).

The dream of flying, *Bildungsroman* romance and the "pact' between the individual and the world"

Kadri's favourite book in her early childhood is Pushkin's "The Tale of Tsar Saltan", in particular the figure of the benevolent bewitched swan who eventually turns out to be a princess (Rannamaa 1978 [1959], p. 16-17). Different tropes relating flying and transformation pattern the whole duology. Kadri (and Rannamaa in her interviews) have associated Kadri's story to that of Andersen's "Ugly Duckling" where the young bird unsatisfactory as a barnyard duck eventually grows up to be a graceful swan. However, the network of connections related to flying is both more far-reaching and more twisted than the plot of personal metamorphosis or earning the respect of one's immediate peers, even if these features play an important role in the *Bildungsroman*.

The swans become an embodiment of existential yearning for young Kadri in the first part of the bilogy: for something that she strongly wants to, but cannot put into poetry (77). On the one hand it pertains to first love and schooltime romance. It is Kadri's boyfriend Urmas who first points out a beautiful flock of swans in the sky to her that they associate with the fairy tale birds of Pushkin and Andersen (64-65), and later he draws an *ex libris* for Kadri, depicting that scene. They also amount to a source of empowerment of cosmic dimension, as Kadri's magic lines from Tsar Saltan are the description of the unearthly beauty of the swan-princess: "In her braids, a crescent beams,/On her brow, a bright star gleams."

However, Kadri and Urmas watch the swans on the same day Urmas has a – victorious – violent fight with Enrico (the same discussed in the previous subchapter) because he had once again bullied and this time seriously injured a younger boy, viciously pushing him down a skiing slope. The children are repeatedly questioned about the assaulter on the little boy at the pioneer meeting, but they refuse to tell, even if the pioneer leader emphasises the false honour in hiding crime: "meanness and evil can be overcome only by fighting them" (69). Kadri partly agrees with this argument, partly with her peers who see any telling on others as immoral ("meanness and betrayal"), and partly just fears her peers' contempt, if she should tell. Once again the readers, together with the protagonist, are refused certainty and have to draw their own conclusions: there is no fairy tale like morale at the end. Urmas says to the director that one day the guilty party himself will talk, but we do not learn whether that happens, only that Enrico is transferred to a school for problem children. The children involved are not collectively punished or shamed, as the Makarenko model would advise; the matter is simply dropped until we meet Enrico again in *Stepmother*. In a vague way the evocation of the swans counterbalances the unresolved crisis of these events, and lets Kadri and Urmas overcome their own conflict that had resulted.

Certainly, flying and the sky are very old metaphors that at different times and with different authors are associated with noble human aspiration or with misplaced arrogance to try to rank with the gods. The humankind looks up to the divine and falls down to Hades or hell. Yet it is significant in the present context that they acquired a very important role in Soviet rhetorics and iconography. Aviation developed in Russia before the establishment of the USSR, however, "the airplane, and later the spacecraft, became the symbol of Soviet modernity, replacing the train as a symbol of late-imperial modernity" (Strukov and Gosciolo 2017, p. 20). In the Stalinist period the connections between Soviet science and fairy tales were prominent: the Soviet science made them "“come true” ... [f]ighter planes were the modern equivalent of

magic carpets, the pilots soaring like the eagles who carried fairy tale Ivans and back to the Russian kingdom” (Strukov and Goscilo 2017, p.12).

During the thaw the Soviet success in space flights embodies the exceptionalism of Soviet modernity to achieve supreme mastery of the forces of nature and to cross terrestrial and human boundaries in the – peaceful – service of mankind. Yost, analyzing the rhetorics and reception of the gigantic Soviet exhibitions organized in Latin America in the 1950s-1960s for the promotion of Soviet culture, science and technology, notes that since the successful launch of Sputnik in 1957 the USSR “could credibly claim world leadership in science” (Yost 2015, p. 26). This ushered in a new era and Juri Gagarin, the first human to fly into space in 1961 became one of its primary symbols and internationally recognized public faces. He was “billed as the Columbus of the Cosmos” at the 1962 exhibition in Rio de Janeiro, and in Havana Soviet education was advertised to the audience by “a marble model of Moscow University suspended ... against the heavens”, inviting “young exhibition goers to apply to this prestigious university”. Artists in the Soviet Union were encouraged to depict cosmonauts, and, first of all, Gagarin as a “true people’s hero”, the embodiment of the greatness of the Soviet man, a new kind of human being, the builder of communism (Taidre).

The enthusiasm for space discovery also caught on in the late 1950s - early 1960s Estonia. Many contemporaries, most of all intellectuals and students, remember the period as one of huge cultural dynamism which could be compared to the renewal movements at the beginning of the 20th century (Lauristin, p.87-90; p. 122) and the hope was “so big one could die for it” (Lauristin, p.30). The discourses and iconography of space flights, though officially promoted were not primarily regarded as a line of ideological propaganda. Rather it resonated with the atmosphere hopeful for modernization: both political renewal and technological progress. On the one hand, the “space discourse” permeated everyday life through space inspired sweets and toys; 1962 the large modern Kosmos cinema was opened in Tallinn and the New World district streets gained names like Comet and Saturn. However, tropes relating to space and the grandeur of human aspiration acquired a big role in innovative poetry with the vers libre poems by Jaan Kross *The Discovery of the World (Maailma avastamine, 1962)* ja Paul-Eerik Rummo *The Burning of Giordano Bruno (Giordano Bruno tuleriit, 1961)* most widely known and symbolic of that spirit.

Later criticism – space flights fine, but everyday life miserable. The Gagarin joke:

Дочка Гагарина отвечает по телефону: ‘Папа летает вокруг Земли и вернется в 19.00, а

мама ушла по магазинам, и когда вернется—неизвестно” (Smolitskaia 391).

The progress empty make-believe. However, during the thaw in Estonia also a lot belief into the struggle. The period of the 1960s as the period in the beginning of the 20th century: struggle for political liberation and cultural renewal. Tropes relate to space flight, investigation and discovery – Kross, Rummo.

This is reflected in Rannamaa’s novel very directly in a particular way. In the first two editions of *Stepmother* (1963 and 1965) the wistful-serene ending of Kadri cradling Sass quoted at the end of last subchapter is taken further in hopefulness by an epilogue-like final section in the novel, set about one year after the previous entry in the diary. This section is mainly dedicated to Juri Gagarin’s flight into space, celebrated by Kadri as a symbolic event. She writes jubilantly: “A human being, my compatriot, built a second floor on top of the low ceiling of our home. So spacious that it can accommodate the light of the whole universe!” (Rannamaa, “Kasuema” 273). Sass now wants to become a cosmonaut and Kadri believes she has just the right spirit for it: we’ll sure have to bring her back to Earth by force to avoid her scampering off to some other galaxy in her hyper-eagerness” ((Rannamaa, “Kasuema” 273). At the end of the epilogue Kadri’s old boyfriend Urmas also reappears in the plot and the finale resembles the traditional model of the *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist voluntarily integrates into his/her society:

Urmas ... takes my hand and we run together. I am breathless with happiness and would like to start doing great things right away. ... Again Gagarin comes to my mind and his conversation with the Earth and quite unexpectedly four simple words of it in which I suddenly discover the whole great meaning of life: I CONTINUE THE FLIGHT!” (Rannamaa, “Kasuema” 284-285, capitals in the original)

There is no direct *mésalliance* or exogamy involved in the solution, but the trope can certainly be seen approximated by the domination of the “Space Prince” (Rannamaa, *Kasuema* 274) Gagarin in the epilogue.

In the further five editions of *Stepmother* the epilogue is dropped, so there is no happy couple, Gagarin or family/social integration. The relationship with Enrico and his death thus carries a much greater weight in this version of the plot. Why does Rannamaa remove the epilogue according to Jaaksoo

The happiness theme typical for *Bildungsromane* is also introduced before the epilogue and thus remains in the post-thaw editions. However, the post-thaw version does not resemble the traditional Bildungsroman marital happiness model anymore: Kadri gives a silent vow to her dead beau Enrico that she will “fight for happiness and not only for [her] own one” (Rannamaa, Kadri 370-371). “I want to fight so there would be fewer blind chances and nobody would hurt a child (371),” she writes. Thus, in this post-thaw version of the novel Kadri has a sense of identity and belief in her own agency, but the novel does not depict a society that Kadri could integrate into. The world of “the parents” seems too full of hurt, insecurity and unfairness to recreate its models of family/society and, without the Gagarin trope, the idea of a new era also remains colourless and unconvincing.

This social-critical interpretation of *Stepmotheris* amplified by the film version in 1985 and even more so by the film’s reception. For example, if in the novel the boarding school staff, though not idealised, is presented sympathetically, the reviews of *Well, Come On, Smile* liken its orphanage setting to the psychiatric hospital in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* (Laasik). **There is no trope of flying in the film. The Kadri figure looks downwards, not upwards at the end of the story – towards children playing in the yard. However, even if the film is a much darker work than the novel, its ultimate message is the same: it is the protagonist’s care for — someone else’s — children that brings a flicker of a smile on her face in the final scene, indicating that there will be a new beginning after a rupture.**

In conclusion

We are on an island at the edge of worlds, we who belong together ... //It is seldom that people come sharing a common ship./Everyone arrives in their own boat.// There is not so many of us that we could afford to lose anyone.//Because we have our task,/and this cannot be done alone./We guard the treasure of our island... // The ones who laugh [at us] have never been to the small island//They speak a different language./The language has many words that fly from the mouth like slingstones to hit hearts/Sometimes we try to learn that language,/but it is only laughable or sad.//A seagull cannot fly with the wings of the sparrow./But in their opinion it is foolish and inappropriate to fly./The correct thing to do is to swim,/to swim with a current.//... Their only concern is to align to each others tales.//Their pleasure is to break things,/because that is said to bring luck./They are sure that they hold the treasures of

the world,/but they don't know that we have the key/on our wild island at the edge of worlds/which has the shape of dreams/and the colour of yearnings/and from the soil of which /ever-nurturing, self-flourishing soil of which/seeds creative thought/stems wise word/ and gives birth to good deeds. (Rannamaa 1978, pp. 301-302).

To use the poem in the conclusion to bring together different threads or to put it in the flying section? It has resemblance to the space period poems in vers libre, such as Kross's and Rummo's. In *Little Women* the main character is compared to a seagull and her sisters to different birds, part II ch 36: You are the gull, Jo, strong and wild, fond of the storm and the wind, flying far out to sea, and happy all alone. Meg is the turtle-dove, and Amy is like the lark she write about, trying to get up among the clouds, but always dropping down into its nest again. Dear little girl! She's so ambitious, but her heart is good and tender, and no matter how high she flies, she never will forget home. I hope I shall see her again, but she seems so far away.

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ⁱ One of the few examples of the first person narration at the time is Rannamaa's own short story "Unlucky Day" (1958, "Vasaku jala päev") that received a second prize at the short story competition of the Writers' Union, but was also criticized for vagueness and lack of social bearing.

ⁱⁱ I use the term "postcolonialism" as customary in Postcolonial Studies to refer to the whole period after colonisation, rather than only to that after decolonisation. It refers to "the consequences of colonialism from the time of its first impact – culturally, politically, economically" (Nagai 239), covering both the colonial period(s) and period(s) of independence. I will elaborate on the concept of "postcolonial *Bildungsroman*" in the following subchapter.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are no actual dates in the diary, the entries are marked by weekdays (e.g. *On Saturday*).

^{iv} The first edition of *Kadri* bears the stamp of the censor's office, but by the time *Stepmother* was

^v Jaaksoo (b. 1945) is a publisher, a scholar of children's and youth literature, and was a personal acquaintance of Rannamaa. Jaaksoo points out that elsewhere in the Soviet bloc too the interpretation of the ban was fluid, even if formally it was never lifted (2014). One could draw a certain parallel with the film *Well, Come On, Smile* based on *Stepmother* that participated in the 1987 Berlinale film festival in the children and youth films category, winning the UNICEF prize. The film expert Joachim-Hans Schlegel later remarked in reference to that occasion: "What tends to be forgotten in today's analyses of film history ... is the fact that the initial impetus for the unvarnished portrayal of the problems in Soviet society ... came from children's and youth films" (Berlin International Film Festival 1987).

^{vi} Also the critics Reet Krusten and Maie Kalda argue that the topics and literary qualities make them relevant to adults as well – and in certain respects especially to adults (Krusten 509; Kalda). Rannamaa herself relates in an interview that right after *Stepmother's* publication she once went up to a huge queue in the hope of having chanced upon oranges or some other goods in short supply, only to find that it was her own novel that the people were queuing for (Tali).

^{vii} The fictional topos of an honest Estonian exile disenchanted with the West was not an unknown one, although in real life a naïve returnee would have been imprisoned. The manner the scenario is depicted in the novel, it more resembles the return of the deportees during the same period (from Stalin's death). I am grateful to Andres Jaaksoo (2014) and the historian Linda Kaljundi for their comments on this matter.

^{viii} Rannamaa actually stayed at the Pukavere boarding school near the town of Rakvere, sharing the sleeping quarters with the female students, in order to do research for the book (Rannamaa 2002).