Kasimir Sandbacka

UTOPIA DERAILLED

ROSA LIKSOM'S RETROSPECTION OF THE MODERN PROJECT
KASIMIR SANDBACKA

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Rosa Liksom’s retrospection of the modern project

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Abstract
Rosa Liksom is one of the most internationally recognized contemporary Finnish authors and leading Finnish postmodernists. Indeed, the postmodernist aesthetics of her works have received most of the academic attention: features such as irony, dark humor, intertextuality, and parody have been convincingly studied. Liksom’s singular public image has been connected to these aesthetics, but although her cosmopolitanism is often mentioned, her postmodern nonconformity has usually been read in a local and a national context.

Liksom’s engagement with modernity has been only implicitly and insufficiently explicated. This dissertation focuses on Liksom’s works and public image in the broader historical context of the modern project in its 20th century legacy. The study of Liksom’s engagement with the utopianism of the modern project is paramount to a deeper understanding of the politico-ethical underpinnings of Liksom’s works and image.

To examine Liksom’s retrospection of the modern project, this dissertation makes use of a broad range of theoretical approaches, which can be collectively summarized as contextual close reading. The central theoretical framework is Fredric Jameson’s theory of postmodernism. Other important theories are Linda Hutcheon’s theories of postmodernism and irony, Svetlana Boym’s typology of nostalgia, as well as Krishan Kumar’s theory of utopia.

This study elucidates the complexity of Liksom’s engagement with the modern project and bestows new importance on the positive, constructive elements of Liksom’s works that have hitherto gained less attention. Liksom’s works try to salvage something from the history of the modern project instead of merely lingering in the negative attempt to deconstruct historical truths and dismantle the very possibility of such truths.

Below the irony and criticism of utopianism in Liksom’s artistic ethos runs a mournful undercurrent that broods over the lack of agency and political choices we seem to face in our present historical condition, and a nostalgia that reflects upon the lost utopian potentialities of the past. Liksom’s works suggest this process of mourning may result in a tentative prospect of communion between people and cultures based on an understanding of their shared situatedness in a postmodern, uncertain world.

Keywords: Finnish literature, irony, melancholy, metamodernism, modernity, nostalgia, postmodernism, public image and utopianism
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Tiivistelmä
Rosa Liksom on kansainvälisesti tunnettuja suomalaisia nykykirjailijoita ja keskeisiä postmodernisteja. Akateeminen kiinnostus on keskittynyt ensisijaisesti hänen teostensa postmoderniin estetikkaan: teosten ironiaa, musta humoria, intertekstuaalisuutta ja parodiaa on tutkittu ansioikkaasti. Liksomin ainutlaatunen taiteilijakuva on kytketty tähän estetiikkaan, mutta vaikka hänen kosmopolitiittisuutensa usein mainitaankin, hänen postmodernia epäsovinnaisuuttaan on yleensä tulkittu lokaaliassa ja kansallisessa viitekehyksessä.

Toistaiseksi Liksomin suhdetta modernin ajan ihanteisiin on pohdittu vain välillisesti ja riittämättömästi. Tässä väitöskirjassa Liksomin teoksia ja julkisuuskuvaa käsitellään laajemmassa viitekehyksessä, nimittäin modernin projektin ja sen 1900-luvun perinnön kontekstissa. Ymmärtääksemme Liksomin teosten ja julkisuuskuvan poliittis-eettisiä perustuksia syvällisemmin on välttämätöntä tarkastella hänen suhdettaan moderniin utopisuuteen.


Liksomin taiteellisen eettisen ironisuuden ja utopiakriitikin alla kulkee surumielinen pohjavire, joka pohtii nykyisessä historiallisessa tilanteessa kohtaamaamme toimijuuden ja poliittisten vaihtoehtojen puutetta, ja nostalginen pohjavire, joka mietiskelee menetettyjä utopisia mahdollisuuksia. Liksomin teokset antavat ymmärtää, että tämän suruprosessin tuloksesta voi olla mahdollisuus löytää ihmisten ja kulttuurien välinen yhteys, joka perustuu ymmärrykseen siitä, että me kaikki paikannumme postmoderniin, epävarmaan maailmaan.

Asiasanat: ironia, julkisuuskuvaa, kirjallisuudentutkimus, melankolia, metamodernismi, moderni, nostalgia, postmodernismi ja utopiat
Acknowledgements

My initial scholarly contact with the works of Rosa Liksom was my master’s thesis on Liksom’s cartoon-short-prose-hybrid Roskaa (1991). Although my thesis was hardly a landmark of analysis and interpretation, its reviewers were gracious enough to imply that I might yet have the makings of a literary scholar. One of those reviewers was Sanna Karkulehto, who was to become the primary supervisor of this dissertation.

Words fall short when I try to express my gratitude to Sanna, who has not only tirelessly overseen the completion of my dissertation, but has also been my kind guide in the intricate world of academia – a brilliant constant in a spinning constellation. Without her encouragement, I might have never taken my first scholarly steps, without her sage advice, I would have surely become lost, and without her compassion, I would not have endured to the very end. During the twists and turns of this daunting yet wonderful meander, I have not remembered to thank her enough for always setting me back on the right course. I hope these thanks begin to make up for that lack on my part.

I also extend my sincerest thanks to Juha Rissanpää, who has been my supervisor from the very beginning of this dissertation project. A trailblazer in Liksom scholarship, Juha has been a recurring source of inspiration to me. His interdisciplinary perception, his eye for both detail and context, and his down-to-earth advice have been invaluable to both the quality and the completion of my study.

When Sanna left the University of Oulu to become professor of literature at the University of Jyväskylä, she kindly agreed to continue as my supervisor. But the cloud of her leaving also had a silver lining: our new lecturer, Jussi Ojajärvi, agreed to become my third supervisor. This development proved to be extremely beneficial to me, as I could not have hoped for a more astute reader and commentator on my texts. In contact with Jussi’s in-depth theoretical knowledge and sharp argumentation skills, my prowess in these fields has gained more than ample opportunity for development, for which I am ever grateful.

My gratitude also goes to the reviewers of this dissertation, Andrew Nestingen and Urpo Kovala, whose judicious remarks helped finalize this study and pointed towards some very interesting future lines of inquiry. Moreover, I wish to thank our professor Kuisma Korhonen, the chair of my follow-up group, and Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, the second member of my follow-up group, for all their support, as
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I thank Elmer and Anni for their surprising insights and substantiated, albeit at times quite vocal, critique – and their grandparents who took it upon themselves to time and again care for these critics during my dissertation project. And finally, I thank my wife, my love, Anna, who sees purpose where I see confusion, who soothes the tempest of my soul, and who to me is the living proof that there is wisdom in beauty, and beauty in wisdom.

May 2017

Kasimir Sandbacka
List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications, which are referred to throughout the text by their Roman numerals:


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1 Introduction

“What’s taking our happy future so long?” asks a man in RosaLiksom’s latest novel *Compartment No. 6* (2014a, 79; *Hytti nro 6* [2011]). He is a Soviet citizen who laments the perpetual deferment of the communist utopia that had been promised since the glory days of the revolution. The man’s question concerns a mission that is by no means limited to the development of socialism, and that has defined Western culture for centuries, namely the modern project.

Jürgen Habermas maintains that since the French Enlightenment, being modern has meant having a science-inspired belief “in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment” (Habermas & Ben-Habib 1981, 4). As indicated also by the Soviet man’s despondent question, the optimism of the Enlightenment has been overcome by the horrific developments of the twentieth century (Habermas & Ben-Habib 1981, 9). The modern project has become derailed as two world wars, the Holocaust, nuclear warfare, economic and ecological crises have all hollowed out the utopian hopefulness of modernity. Habermas asks: “should we try to hold on to the intentions of the Enlightenment, feeble as they may be, or should we declare the entire project of modernity a lost cause” (Habermas & Ben-Habib 1981, 9, emphasis in original)?

At its core, this dissertation explores how Liksom, one of the most prominent contemporary Finnish authors and artists, responds to this question. If there is one central ideal of the Enlightenment, it must be rationality. In *Compartment No. 6*, this ideal is presented as the very source of humanity’s predicaments: “[A]nimals live by their instincts, and they don’t make mistakes. We people, on the other hand, rely on reason, and we screw up all the time,” (Liksom 2014a, 174.) Yet our ability to reason, and to err, is what defines humanity. The utopian modern project is the central grand narrative that Liksom’s works both deconstruct and reconstruct: they account for its mistakes and its potential. Contextualizing Liksom’s works and artistic image in this historical framework is of paramount importance to the understanding of their politico-ethical implications.

This thesis examines how the modern project and its twentieth century legacy are reflected in Liksom’s works and in her public image. In this examination, I focus on three works: the short prose collection *Bamalama* (1993a), and the novels *Kreisland* (1996) and *Hytti nro 6* (2011, *Compartment No. 6* [2014a]). *Bamalama* has been translated into French, *Kreisland* into German and Danish, and *Compartment No. 6* into fourteen languages. Altogether, Liksom’s works have been
published in some twenty languages, making her one of the most translated contemporary Finnish authors. *Compartment No. 6* received both the Finlandia Prize and the English PEN Award. Some connect Liksom’s works to so called blank fiction, which is preoccupied with “violence, indulgence, sexual excess, decadence, consumerism and commerce” (Annesley 1998, 1, 139). Liksom’s fiction is seen to occupy various, even conflicting, positions by making use of “an ethically neutral pastiche of contemporary ‘voices’” or to “walk the tightrope between an ironic modernism and a more ‘blank’ postmodernism” (Pawling 2002, emphasis in original). Chris Pawling compares her to Kathy Acker, Brett Easton Ellis and other writers of the American “Blank Generation,” who in the late 1970s and 1980s wrote works depicting edgy lifestyles outside bourgeois society. One of the key features that Liksom shares with the Blank Generation is the representation the postmodern condition without the contemplative posturing of “academicist” postmodernism. (Pawling 2002).

Clearly, the ambiguity of Liksom’s stance towards the ideals of modernism and the modern project has been noticed. Liksom’s postmodern nonconformity has been read in a local and national context, though her cosmopolitanism is often mentioned. The intertextual and parodical relation of her works to classic texts and Enlightenment philosophy has gained scholarly attention (see Kantokorpi 1997, Kirstinä 2007). However, Liksom’s works have not been analyzed in the broader historical context of the modern project. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap by exploring the multitude of means by which Liksom engages with the ideals of the modern project. Liksom’s works are not utopian fiction as such, but nonetheless engage with the utopian desire of the modern project.

Rosa Liksom is the pen name of Anni Ylävaara who was born in Ylitornio, a village in Finnish Lapland, in 1958. Since the beginning of her career, her public image has been unique in the field of Finnish literature. From the very start, she chose to hide her identity behind a pseudonym, and reinforced the division between her private and public personas through the construction of an idiosyncratic artistic image. In photographs, she hid behind sunglasses and odd outfits, and in interviews, she gave suspicious statements about her past and her background. What emerged was an almost mythical narrative of a naturally gifted author who escaped her meager beginnings in a small village in Lapland to become a cosmopolitan (Ridanpää 2005, 71; Märsynaho 2010, 209) – and a globetrotter well versed in a wide range of cultures and sub-cultures. The promotional material of her former publisher followed her journey from the margins of Lapland, through Brezhnev’s Soviet Union, Norwegian fish factories, and the free town of Christiania in
Denmark, to the center of Finnish cultural life (Sandbacka 2012, 23). She has held jobs as a youth worker, radio journalist, baker, farm worker, and dishwasher (Kirstinä 2013, 82). This impressive range of first-hand experience of different parts of society and different cultures ostensibly guaranteed the authenticity of Liksom’s prose.

Yet Liksom’s quirky public image has played on this authenticity and questioned it to the point of parody (Märsynaho 2010, 209). Dressing up as a Finnish soldier (before military service became an option for Finnish women), a traditional Sámi woman, a Barbie-doll, or a train conductor from her own novel, Liksom mixes her northern origins with pop culture and her fiction. In addition to being an author, she is a visual artist, cartoonist, photographer, and video artist. All of the different media she makes use of come together with her peculiar image to form a postmodern Gesamtkunstwerk, of sorts. Her play with ambivalent identities has been interpreted as a postmodern parody of the traditional agrarian writer, but also as attention-seeking (Kantokorpi 1997, Niemi 2007, 14). After receiving the Finlandia Prize for Hytti nro 6 in 2011, her publicity strategy became more open and sincere. In an interview in 2012, Liksom said that she had previously shunned publicity because she wanted to protect herself. She describes the Finlandia Prize as a contract, which requires acceptance of the publicity that comes with the prize. (Nousiainen 2012, 24, 26.) The confluence of Liksom’s biography and her works has been the object of speculation from the early years of her career. Finnish philosopher Esa Saarinen, an acquaintance of Liksom, suggested in a 1991 interview that strange things seem to happen around Liksom, who then records them in her fiction. Moreover, Saarinen claimed that Liksom’s “strength is in her ability to move in social strata, where nobody else can move, and from which nobody else can draw inspiration.” (Kemppainen 1991.) Liksom sometimes plays down the connection between her life and her fiction; at other times, she seems to be deliberately pointing to it.

In the beginning of her career, Liksom became known for her darkly humorous, uncompromising short prose that renewed the genre in Finland to the extent that she has been called the “foremother of new short prose” (Kirstinä 2013, 82). Though her early short prose is at times hyperbolically violent, hysterical, and even cynical, it was often interpreted as a reasonably realistic and authentic depiction of life in the margins of the Finnish society (Märsynaho 2010, 210), or other milieus familiar from Liksom’s travels. In her short prose, marginalized, troubled people

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1 All translations from Finnish to English by KS, unless otherwise noted
make their way through life without benefitting from the wellbeing and abundance that progress has granted those more fortunate than them. Broken families, twisted relationships, mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and poverty are just a few of the troubles that Liksom’s characters face.

Liksom is one of the foremost representatives of Finnish postmodernism (see e.g. Hosiaisluoma 1999, 258; Lyytikäinen 2004, 220; Ridanpää 2005, 277). The worldview of her early works has been described as postmodernist in the sense that it does not attempt to grasp totalities or universal experiences, but rather depicts alternative, parallel subcultures, and kitschy spaces that lack a sense of history and a vision of the future (Hosiaisluoma 1999, 258). Her characters often succumb to apathy, like the young man at the end of the first story of Liksoms’s first short prose collection Yhden yön pysäkki (1985, partly translated in One Night Stands [1993b]): “At nineteen, he slouched, white-faced, in his easy chair and let his belly grow. He was waiting for it to be time for the autopsy and the report that would confirm the destruction of his interior organs.” (Liksom 1993b, 2.) Liksom’s short prose stories give the reader ironic and embellished glimpses into strange, frantic lives in the social and geographical peripheries. Even the titles of her early collections evoke a sense of momentariness: Yhden yön pysäkki (“One Night Stands”) and Unohdettu vartti (1986), which translates to “Forgotten fifteen minutes,” a bleak reversal of Andy Warhol’s “fifteen minutes of fame.” Since the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, the form of Liksom’s works has caught up with her postmodernist ethos, as her writing has become even more fragmentary, ironic, satirical, and intertextual.

At their shortest, Liksom’s stories are just once-sentence flashes that nonetheless capture the fate of a person or the central predicament of that person’s life. These flashes can be joyful, as a one-sentence story in Roskaa (1991, 222), a hybrid collection of cartoons and short prose: “The man loved the woman despite of the hump”; or unsettling, as the following one-sentence story in Liksom’s latest short prose collection, Väliaikainen (2014b, 43): “If my genitals are mutilated, Finns will give me a long look; if not, my family will find me odd.”

The fragmentariness of Liksom’s short prose is carried over into the structure of her novels. Kreisland and Reitari (2002) consist of short episodes told by a number of different narrators with very subjective and peculiar outlooks. While Compartment No. 6 is not quite as fragmentary as her earlier novels, it too is

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2 One Night Stands is an anthology that contains stories from Yhden yön pysäkki, Unohdettu vartti, and Tyhjän tien paratiisit (1989, Dark Paradise [2007]).
3 “Rubbish.”
4 “Temporary.”
intermittently narrated through the subjective observations and memories of its two main characters. The two novels discussed in this thesis, *Kreisland* and *Compartment No. 6*, are both retrospective assessments of the utopianism of the modern project – and reflections on its future.

The importance of the modern project as a historical context of Liksom’s works and artistic project is evident from several recurring dichotomies of her texts. Marginal versus central, rural versus urban, traditional versus progressive, collective versus individual, and even feminine versus masculine are all polarities that relate to the tension between premodernity and modernity. Another set of dichotomies that can be read in Liksom’s texts spring from the tension between modernity and postmodernity: idealism versus skepticism, authenticity versus artificiality, and universality versus relativism. It is no coincidence that *Kreisland*’s narrative is contemporary to the transformation of Finland from an agrarian to an industrial society, no more than it is happenstance that the novel ends with the birth of a child called Elvis, a harbinger of a postmodern pop culture society.

The modern project produced several political ideologies and social models that promised to improve the lives of their adherents. These promises and their eventual betrayal are at the forefront of *Kreisland* and *Compartment No. 6*, but can be found in *Bamalama* as well. During the twentieth century, the modern project turned against itself as these different ideologies vied for dominance. The antagonism between capitalism, fascism, and communism culminated in the Second World War and the decades of Cold War that followed. Situated between Western capitalism and Eastern communism, the Nordic countries adopted features from both models and ideologies (Kananen 2015, 1) – a process allegorically parodied by *Kreisland*’s protagonist Impi Agafiina, who goes through phases of fascism, communism, and capitalism. For both historical and geographical reasons, the Nordic countries developed distinctive welfare state models, which embodied many of the emancipatory ideals of the modern project.5

The social groundwork for the establishment of the welfare state was set during the period of modernization. It consisted of three key structural and institutional transformations: the modernization of agriculture, the emergence of universal education, and the emergence of the modern polity (Kananen 2015, 25, 32). In

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5 It is noteworthy that Finland’s history as a part of the Russian empire from 1809 to 1917, and the 1300-kilometer border it shared with the former empire in many ways set Finland geopolitically apart from the other Nordic countries. After the two wars waged against the Soviet Union in 1939–1944, Finland’s political leeway was curtailed by Soviet interests, even though Finland never became a member of the Soviet bloc.
Finland, the decline of the agricultural workforce began only between the 1930s and 1950s (Kananen 2015, 60) – the very period covered by Kreisland. The first modernizing steps were taken in the reforms that followed the great famine of 1866–1868, and Finland’s transformation from an agrarian to a modern society was completed with the country’s urbanization some hundred years later (Kananen 2015, 58; Stark 2006, 12). Universal education was achieved during the 1940s. Universal suffrage was established in 1906, but modern polity was truly established only by the first democratic elections in independent Finland in 1919. (Kananen 2015, 61–67.)

During the post-war period the emancipatory measures begun by modernization were continued. The distribution of well-being became increasingly equalized due to the expansion of public services (Kananen 2015, 74, 168–169.) For several post-war decades, the Nordic welfare model seemed capable of combining increasing equity with economic efficiency, offering similar opportunities to the majority of the people. However, by the 1990s, the ideals of the so-called international competition state paradigm that argued for minimal unemployment insurance, low taxes, relaxed employment protection legislation, and in general anything that increased the supply of labor, challenged the previous welfare state paradigm (Kananen 2015, 94–96). The new economic paradigm shifted the expansion of the Finnish welfare state into a decline that was expedited by the deep recession of the early 1990s.

The late 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed Liksom’s turn towards a more postmodern, parodical form of expression (see Kantokorpi 1997, 13), represented in this dissertation by Bamalama and Kreisland. As the idealism of the modern project crumbled in favor of global laissez-faire capitalism, Liksom, like many others turned to a new aesthetics that was incredulous towards the grand narratives of the ageing century. Compartment No. 6 returns to the very historical temporality that preceded the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This return is an attempt to rethink the historical choices and consequences of the postmodern era, not a longing for the modern era and its political tensions or systems. Did we make proper use of the opportunities the past century provided? Liksom’s characters are usually too caught up in their present predicaments to visualize a realistic alternative future, or to even voice the question posed by the soviet man in Compartment No. 6. Yet the question echoes in the downcast destinies of Liksom’s short prose and is amplified in Liksom’s historical novels. What is taking our happy future so long? Did the modern project fail? Should its ideals be abandoned?
The research done on Liksom is not overly abundant considering the important part she has played in the reformation Finnish short prose (see Kirstinä 2013, 82–84), her prominence as a Finnish postmodernist, and the scope and versatility of her oeuvre. Perhaps the most extensive research on Liksom’s works has been done in the field of reception studies. The articles in the collection Nainen, mies ja fileerausveitsi. Miten Rosa Liksomia luetaan? (Eskola (ed.) 1996) explore readers’ reactions to a short prose story by Liksom. Some of the articles connect Liksom’s fiction to a change in modernity, namely the erosion of tradition and universality described by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (1994) as reflexive modernity. Katarina Eskola notes that the readers who contributed to her research (35 Finnish adults and 32 adolescents) tended to reject the reflexive modern features of the text, such as ambivalence, living in the present, hedonism, and shifting gender positions. They responded favorably towards modern ideals of equality, but were inclined to interpret Liksom’s story in the framework of traditional familial and relationship models. (Eskola 1996, 51, 70–71.)

The international reception of Liksom’s text has also been studied. Raine Koskimaa (1998) compares Finnish and German readings of Liksom. Interestingly, Finnish readers more often stressed the importance of social institutions and displayed a degree of commitment to the modern project. Contrastingly, German readers were more interested in the action portrayed in Liksom’s text, which Koskimaa considers to represent a postmodern preference for the visual over the literary. (Koskimaa 1998, 132–133.) This exploration of Liksom’s international reception is continued in a 2002 thematic issue of the journal CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the articles of which discuss readings by readers from Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, and Great Britain (Kovala 2002). While many of the findings of the articles on Liksom’s reception are interesting and connected to questions concerning the modern project, it is also worth noting that they are all focused on readings of a single story from Liksom’s Tyhjän tien paratiisit (1989, Dark Paradise [2007]). One must take care, then, not to draw overly sweeping conclusions about the entirety of Liksom’s works (and their reception) based on these studies. As Koskimaa (1998, 9) points out, his object of research is Liksom’s story as seen by the readers, not the story itself.

Of Liksom’s novels, Kreisland has so far received the most scholarly attention. Leena Kirstinä’s in-depth analysis maps out Kreisland’s network of intertextual connections as well as its generic features. She notes that Kreisland follows an epic form, but also connects the novel with the traditions of the Bildungsroman, Rabelaisian carnival, travesty, horror fiction, and the epistolary novel. Important
subtexts are the Bible and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Emile, or On Education (1762) and early twentieth century Finnish naturalism. (Kirstinä 2007, 107–108, 113, 122–123, 129.) Kreisland is a postmodern melting pot of genre parody and pastiche. While the historical contexts are more implicit than the intertextual connections in Kirstinä’s reading, she nonetheless suggests that the novel’s ending is a metaphor for post-WWII Finland, and the Americanization it is headed for (Kirstinä 2007, 135).

Mervi Kantokorpi (1997) notes the parody of modern melancholy in Liksom’s works preceding, and including, Kreisland. In Liksom’s prose, modern, urban subjects long for the northern, agrarian origins they have been expunged from (Kantokorpi 1997, 11-12). According to Kantokorpi, Liksom’s early works were read as authentic depictions of the world that ranges from rural Lapland to urban Helsinki. The postmodern, self-reflexive direction Liksom took in her late 1980s and 1990s works (Tyhjän tien paratiisit, Bamalama, Kreisland) was initially not understood by some critics. In those works, “the whole Liksomian textual strategy transforms into a commentary of itself and other contemporary language worlds,” Kantokorpi (1997, 13) writes. Furthermore, Liksom’s postmodern public image has been almost unbearable for a nation that nostalgically yearns for authenticity (Kantokorpi 1997, 20). Compartment No. 6 continues Liksom’s exploration of modern melancholy, but now tangibly influenced by the “world-philosophical seriousness of 19th-century Russian literature” (Kantokorpi 2011).

Cultural geographer Juha Ridanpää considers Liksom’s art to be an emancipatory project that challenges the traditional and romanticized image of northernness. Liksom writes against an anti-modernist and masculinist genre of Lapland literature: in her works, women are not deprived of agency, and northern exoticism is not necessarily heterosexual or overly serious. (Ridanpää 2010, 324–327, 331.) Liksom deploys a range of strategies to prompt an ironic reading of northern stereotypes. She may, for example, underscore the romantic aspects of nature to the point that they become hyperbolic and implausible, or recontextualize a romantic narrative in an ironic manner. At times, these ironic clues are obvious, but sometimes they remain quite ambivalent. (Ridanpää 2005, 248.) Nothing seems to escape Liksom’s ironic ridicule, but as Ridanpää (2005, 256) points out, laughing at social injustice is a central tool of her emancipatory project, not a rejection of that project.

The importance of modernity as a resounding board for Liksom’s postmodernism has been established by previous research, but a profound analysis of the subject matter has been lacking before this dissertation. Moreover, Liksom’s
works have not been thoroughly interpreted in the context of modernity’s utopian ethos, namely the modern project. In fact, the utopian aspects of Liksom’s works have gone almost unnoticed. The melancholy and the nostalgic aspects of Liksom’s works and image have gained some deserved attention, but have by no means been meticulously explored, let alone theorized in connection with each other, with utopianism, and with the modern project. The dissertation at hand fills this scholarly gap.
2 Objectives and scope

The objective of this dissertation is to examine how the modern project and particularly its twentieth century developments are discussed in the works and public image of Rosa Liksom. The central theoretical and historical context of this examination is the postmodernist repudiation of modernist aesthetic, epistemological, and ethical ideals, as well as the postmodern skepticism towards the progressive historical trajectory and the utopian impulse of modernity. My dissertation investigates the extent to which Liksom takes part in this postmodernist critique of modernity and modernism, and explores the forms this critique takes in her works and public image as an author and artist. The main research question can be divided into five sub-questions that correspond to respective articles as follows:

- **Main research question**: How is the modern project in its twentieth century legacy discussed in the works and public image of Rosa Liksom?
- **Sub-question 1 (Article I)**: Is Liksom’s ironic stance on the modern project and its utopianism merely reproachful?
- **Sub-question 2 (Article II)**: How are the contradictions and dichotomies of the modern project expounded by Liksom?
- **Sub-question 3 (Article III)**: How does Liksom discuss nostalgia as a modern sensibility, and the modern project as an object of nostalgia?
- **Sub-question 4 (Article IV)**: What features of the modern project does Liksom suggest can, or ought to be, recovered after the postmodern repudiation of the modern project?
- **Sub-question 5 (Article V)**: How does Liksom’s public image negotiate between the discourses of modernism and postmodernism?

The research material consists of three works by Liksom, the short prose collection *Bamalama* as well as the novels *Kreisland* and *Compartment No. 6*. The selection of these works is motivated by their genre, their importance and particular positions in Liksom’s oeuvre, their historical context, and their thematic content. In addition, Liksom’s interviews as well as literary critiques of *Hytti nro 6* will be discussed in relation to Liksom’s public image.

*Bamalama* has been described as the pinnacle of Liksom’s short prose (Kantokorpi 1997, 16; Lyytikäinen 2004, 220) and as the collection in which Liksom’s humor is at its darkest (Kirstinä 2013, 83). *Bamalama* consists of 51 short prose stories that are one to four pages long, and a slightly longer short story, “Erikoisosasto” (“Special force”), which is fifteen pages long. The stories in the
first half of the collection are predominantly set in Helsinki or other urban centers: Stockholm, Amsterdam, New York, Las Vegas, Miami, Moscow and St. Petersburg/Leningrad. The stories in the latter part of *Bamalama* are mostly set in rural Finnish Lapland. About half of the stories set in Lapland are police satires in which the police force is depicted as unprofessional and prone to excessive violence. “Erikoisosasto” satirizes the special forces of the police but is set in an urban environment.

Reminiscence, childhood, departure, relocation, travel, and homecoming are recurring motives in *Bamalama*. Nature and the countryside are often depicted as hyperbolically idealized, whereas urban environments often come across as artificial, bleak or discouraging. A nostalgic longing for the north, nature, and the countryside is discernible particularly in the stories set in urban environments. Conversely, the idealized picture of the provinces is subverted in the stories set in Lapland and other rural areas. *Bamalama*'s most complex expressions of nostalgia are found in the three stories set in Leningrad or St. Petersburg (which I call the Leningrad-stories), in which the past is simultaneously an object of wistful longing and heartbreaking sorrow, as well as – in a story about a woman who buries her grandchild alive – a source of trauma and unyielding terror that is passed down the generations.

*Bamalama* continues the more parodic, self-reflexive style in Liksom’s prose begun in *Tyhjän tien paratiisit* (Kantokorpi 1997, 13). Compared to previous short prose collections, *Bamalama*'s aesthetics are more noticeably postmodernist. The historical context of the work is equally important to the objectives of this research. *Bamalama* was Liksom’s first short prose collection to be published in the 1990s (excluding the hybrid cartoon collection *Roskaa*), a decade of major turning points in Finnish society, culture, and the nation’s place in the global geopolitical system. Two severe shocks, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the serious economic depression that devastated Finland in the following years, were either very recent or ongoing crises at the time of *Bamalama*'s publication and have left their mark in the collection. The Finnish word for depression, “lama,” is even embedded in the work’s nonsensical title. The double-shock of the collapse of the Soviet block and the deep depression that was preceded in the 1980s by a liberalization of the financial markets – known back then in Finland as the “casino economy” – made for an appropriate moment to assess the modern project in its two antagonistic, namely communist and capitalist, manifestations. Several of the major themes of *Bamalama*, urban misery and nostalgia for the countryside, touch on issues of modernization and the changes it has caused in the Finnish social
structure. Discussion of the modern project can also be found in the stories that contemplate the history of the Soviet Union. Rural dilapidation, urban desolation, and the retrospection of modern ideologies are also themes that overlap those of the two novels examined in this dissertation.

*Kreisland* is Liksom’s first novel and a more historically comprehensive account of the modern project than the short prose collections she had published till then. The novel’s narration is hyperbolic, ironic, and irreverent towards historical facts and official truths. Through the anecdotal accounts told by a diverse ensemble of narrators, *Kreisland* depicts the story of its two contrasting protagonists. Impi Agafiina and Juho Gabriel are born in Finnish Lapland sometime around the late 1920s. Mystical omens accompany their births and they are clearly destined for greatness. But whereas Impi Agafiina sets out to fulfill her political ambitions and explore the modern world, Juho Gabriel remains in his meager surroundings and focuses on the daily chores of the homestead unperturbed by the upheavals of the twentieth century. In the end of the novel, their stories finally converge as Impi Agafiina, disappointed by the unfulfilled promises of fascism, communism, and capitalism, returns to Lapland and marries Juho Gabriel.

Like Liksom’s short prose, *Kreisland* challenges traditional definitions of genre (see Lyytikäinen 2004, 220). To some extent, the narrative structures familiar from the short prose still linger in the novel, namely the short segments narrated by changing in/diegetic first-person narrators intermitted by the ironic synopses of an impersonal, extradiegetic narrator. Aesthetically, it continues and intensifies the postmodernist direction of *Bamalama*, and could very well be described as the most postmodernist of Liksom’s prose works, certainly of her novels. As *Kreisland* was published just three years after *Bamalama*, the historical context of the two works is quite similar. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1990s Finnish depression are still the central turning points that loom in the novel’s background and prompt an assessment of the major twentieth century ideologies and their flaws mainly from a Finnish perspective. *Kreisland* is particularly interesting and important to this research due to the ironic retrospection of the modern project and its utopian ambitions that permeates the novel.

Liksom’s latest novel *Compartment No. 6* is in many ways a return to the themes explored in *Kreisland*. It too is an account of the failures of modern utopianism, but this time the focus is on the Soviet Union. In *Compartment No. 6*, an unnamed Finnish girl travels on the Trans-Siberian express from Moscow to Mongolia during the final years of the Soviet Union. She is forced to share a compartment with an unruly Russian man, who passes the time by telling rude
anecdotes about his life and about his vast home country that he both loves and despises. Despite the disgust the girl initially feels for the man, and in spite of the man’s condescending attitude toward the girl, the two travelers ultimately establish a tentative friendship.

An interesting detail ties the timelines of *Kreisland* and *Compartment No. 6* together: whereas *Kreisland* ends at the dawn of the space age and the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in 1957, the Finnish protagonist girl of *Compartment No. 6* recounts that her interest in the Soviet Union began when her father took her to visit the Kosmos pavilion at the National Economic Achievement exhibition, 

6 “a shrine to the Soviet cult of outer space” (Liksom 2014a, 54). Yet *Compartment No. 6* is more a response to *Kreisland* than a straightforward continuation of it. It is more somber and realistic than the satirical pseudo-historiography of *Kreisland* and employs modernist aesthetics alongside postmodernist features that nonetheless remain. If *Bamalama* and *Kreisland* contain parody of the central themes of Liksom’s previous works (see Kantokorpi 1997, 13), and are to an extent a postmodern retrospection or re-contextualization of those themes, *Compartment No. 6* is yet another instant of return and re-evaluation. The modernist sincerity that offsets the postmodern irony in *Compartment No. 6* can be read in the light of recent theories about the end or the intensification of postmodernity. However, as Kirstinä (2013, 84) has noted, a certain naïveté, lyricism, and gentleness have always been present beneath the rowdy exterior of Liksoms’s prose. The analysis of this lyricism of *Compartment No. 6* may therefore shed light on the solemn side of Liksom’s prose in general, and on how her fiction balances postmodern irreverence and modernism with a more committed political stance (see Pawling 2002, 4–5).

Finally, the inclusion of Liksom’s public image in the scope of this research needs to be justified. There are two reasons for this. First, since the beginning of her career, Liksom has had a very singular public image that can be described as “a performance that utilizes the media-saturated consumer culture’s taste for shocking novelties” (Märsynaho 2010, 209) or an “unbearable yet desirable fabrication” (Kantokorpi 1997, 20). The few interviews she gave during the beginning of her career have been called “un-interviews”: they all repeated the dubious tale about Liksom’s humble beginnings in Finnish Lapland and how she became an author and an artist almost by accident (Kantokorpi 1997, 7). The photographs published

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6 The Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy was a permanent (1959–1992) exhibition in Moscow that displayed the industrial, cultural, scientific, and technical accomplishments of the Soviet Union.
alongside the interviews, Liksom often wore strange outfits and her trademark sunglasses, reinforcing her anonymity, or rather pseudonymity. This “aesthetics of absence” has been regarded a postmodern parody of modern authenticity (Kantokorpi 1997, 8), but has also been seen as a promotional strategy (Niemi 2007, 14). Be that as it may, it is evident that Liksom’s public image is part of her artistic project and its postmodernist ethos, and thus bears on her literary works. It is therefore a justified, even necessary object of this research.

Second, since the publicity related to the Finlandia Prize for *Compartment No. 6* in 2011, there has been an apparent change in Liksom’s relationship to publicity: she is no longer as absent and playful as before, but has been more open and earnest in recent interviews and public appearances. In fact, this newfound sincerity runs interestingly parallel to the change in the tone of *Compartment No. 6*. In some of the interviews since 2011, Liksom reflects on her career and image in a manner that brings to mind the postmodern retrospection of the modern project in her prose. The connection between Liksom’s works and image remains deep, and analysis of her public image can provide important insight into the artistic ethos behind the works. The fact that *Compartment No. 6* contains strong, though ambiguous, autobiographical elements emphasizes the necessity of including Liksom’s image in the objects of this research.
3 Theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical basis of this research project can be divided into three distinct yet interconnected domains. The first domain is the historical contextualization and periodization of culture. By contextualization I mean that specific cultural phenomena (in this case Rosa Liksom) are examined in relation to the broader cultural, political, and economic developments pertaining to the historical situation in which the cultural phenomena have been produced. Furthermore, through what Raymond Williams calls “‘epochal’ analysis” cultural processes can be understood as systems of dynamic interrelations that manifest different dominant formations in different stages of history. History, then, can be divided into periods according to the changing cultural dominants. In order to avoid viewing historical periods as monolithic, homogenous, and static structures that consist only of the cultural dominant, it is crucial to recognize that the past and the future are present in any given period. Residual formations from older periods remain in the shadow of the dominant and emerging formations signal future periods. (Williams 1977, 121.)

The idea that historical periods thus bleed into each other is essential to this thesis. My central proposition is that in addition to the fact that culture contains residual and emerging elements alongside its dominant elements, the residual and the emerging can in fact bleed into each other in an attempt to overcome the hegemony of the dominant.

The second domain is what I call historical attitudes, that is, attitudes towards history. The Oxford Dictionary (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/attitude) defines attitude as “a settled way of thinking or feeling about something” whereas the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/attitude) defines it as “a mental position with regard to a fact or state.” However, there is also an aeronautical definition of attitude, which seems to have allegorical bearing on my theoretical approach. In aeronautics, attitude is defined as “the orientation of an aircraft or spacecraft, relative to the direction of travel” (Oxford) or “the position of an aircraft or spacecraft determined by the relationship between its axes and a reference datum (as the horizon or a particular star)” (Merriam-Webster). If we (in this allegorical sense) take the direction of travel to be the trajectory of time, then attitude corresponds to our orientation towards history. In other words, our temporal attitude describes how our attention is divided between the past, the present, and the future – and what our mental and emotional position towards these temporalities is. The temporal attitudes central to this dissertation are nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism.
The third theoretical domain are rhetorical forms. By rhetorical forms I refer to the strategies by which a text communicates its content, namely the way the text connects what it says with what it means or intends. Though I use the word rhetorical, I see these forms to have social, political, and cultural dimensions. They are, in other words, not only linguistic or formal phenomena. I consider the connection between the said and the unsaid, and between what is said and what is meant, to be an ultimately hermeneutic construction, namely the product of the text’s interpreter. This is not to say that it is arbitrary, however: the hermeneutic process has to be substantiated both textually and contextually. The most significant rhetorical forms that pertain to this research project are irony and the related forms of parody and satire, as well as irony’s rhetorical counterpart, sincerity.

3.1 Historical contextualization and periodization

The theoretical baseline for the contextual approach of this dissertation is set by Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2010), where the two Frankfurt School theorists explore how the Enlightenment (and the modernity that follows it) is constructed dialectically with its other, namely premodern myth. What becomes evident in this dialectic is that the residual elements of a culture are not just disappearing memories of the past, but that they interact with dominant elements, construct them, challenge them, and can ultimately impact the formation of the emergent elements of culture. To abridge Adorno and Horkheimer’s argument in its historical context, the residual myth in modern thought facilitated the rise of the irrational power of fascism in twentieth century Europe. The disenchantment with the modern project that followed laid the grounds for the emergence of a postmodern culture which was skeptical of grand narratives. This interaction of residual, dominant, and emergent aspects is a central interest of this thesis.

Yet the most important contextualizing and periodizing theory to this dissertation is Fredric Jameson’s theory of postmodernism. Jameson (1991, 3) is clear about the fact that his theory is not a stylistic description of postmodernism, but a periodizing hypothesis. According to Jameson, postmodernity7 follows the

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7 Jameson has later reviewed his use of the term “postmodernism” and stated the he should have, in fact, used the term postmodernity when referring to the period (Jameson 2015, 104). I will attempt to be faithful to this revision and prefer the term postmodernity when referring to the historical condition of global capitalism and the term postmodernism when referring to the aesthetics that represent this period. It should be noted, then, that this use of the word postmodernism is broader than a reference to a
completion of modernization. It “is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order … but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself” (1991, xii, 45–46). This modification is the transformation of an earlier stage of monopoly capitalism that pitted colonial empires against each other into late capitalism marked by the emergence of a globalized capitalist system (1991, xviii-ix). For the most part, Jameson takes a critical stance towards postmodern aesthetics, that is, postmodernism. He finds postmodernism more a cultural symptom of late capitalism than a critical project confronting it. Postmodernism has lost the utopian interest of modernity: it is not concerned with imagining new worlds and different futures. Instead it focuses on breaks, passing events, variations, and changing representations – “the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same.” (1991, ix.)

Jameson’s (1991, 6) analysis is made in the “political spirit” of Williams’s theory in which cultural production is classified into residual, dominant, and emergent forms. The central dominant feature of postmodernism is what Jameson calls the “loss of historicity” (1991, 159). Historicity is “a perception of the present as history” (Jameson 1991, 284), in other words, historicity is the historical contextualization and periodization of the present. Instead of historicity, which is the prerequisite of historical agency, postmodernism produces unreal histories (Jameson 1991, 368–369). However, Jameson’s conception of postmodernism is not altogether pessimistic. While postmodernism can disguise the contradictions of global capitalism, by this act of concealment, it simultaneously functions as a “mimesis” of a new postmodern reality, in which no cultural space exists outside these contradictions (Jameson 1991, 49). It can then, perhaps, be understood as a first step towards a “new realism” (Jameson 1991, 49) of sorts: an inchoate attempt to represent the totality of global capitalism, which nonetheless remains unrepresentable, because no vantage point beyond it exists. Jameson describes his own method as “totalizing” in the sense that it attempts to grasp the historical situation in its entirety. At the same time, Jameson makes it clear that the impossibility of conceiving the totality of the social and historical reality is the very premise of his approach. (Jameson 1991, 332.) He distinguishes between two cultural politics in postmodernity: “cognitive mapping” that is “a more modernist strategy, which retains an impossible concept of totality” and proper postmodern
political aesthetics, a “homeopathic” strategy that attempts to undermine postmodern representations from within (Jameson 1991, 409).

Residual forms of modernism and realism, representations of older forms of capitalist production, linger in postmodern culture (Jameson 1991, xii). As Williams (1977, 123) points out, residual forms are always easier to locate and understand than emergent ones, because they relate to past, known social formations. This is true for Jameson as well. In passing, he mentions “the emergent form of a new commercial culture,” which blurs the distinction between high and popular culture (1991, 63), but as a whole, the emergent in postmodernity seems to be more a site of theorization and struggle than something already tangible. Imagining the emergent is a crucial element of Jameson’s (2015, 121) project of historization: “in our current historical situation, a sense of history can only be reawakened by a Utopian vision lying beyond the horizon of our current globalized system, which appears too complex for representation in thought.” In this sense, utopian vision is the prerequisite of historization, not the other way around, as one might assume.

Attempts to theorize what comes after postmodernity have nonetheless been made by scholars who concur with the central principles of Jameson’s theory. According to Jeffrey T. Nealon, capitalism has gone through a further transformation since the late capitalist period for which postmodernism was the cultural superstructure. We have entered a period of just-in-time capitalism that features the expansion of finance capitalism that has become increasingly disconnected from the realm of commodities and services. Postmodern culture has therefore intensified into what Nealon calls post-postmodernism. (Nealon 2012, xi–xii, 27.) Neoliberal capitalism has embraced the deconstructive principles of postmodernism (such as hybridity and multiplicity), which have therefore lost their subversive, critical capabilities (Nealon 2012, 23, 122). Nealon argues that postmodern “hermeneutics of suspicion” should be replaced by post-postmodern “hermeneutics of situation” that focuses on nontruth, which produces effects of truth instead of just focusing on deconstructing the possibility of truth (Nealon 2012, 150, 159). By this he means that we should focus on how fiction, which we know to be nontruth, can nonetheless provide us with important insights into our reality – rather than continue to be preoccupied by the fictionality of our reality and the blurring boundaries of truth and nontruth. There is a clear, if unuttered, utopian ambition in Nealon’s hermeneutics. What is utopianism, after all, if not the imagining of the nontrue, the utopia, in order to produce an effect of truth, namely a change for the better?
Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker also argue that postmodernism has been superseded by a new cultural dominant, namely metamodernism. Many of the modern things postmodernism has declared dead, such as the grand narrative, history, and utopia, are returning in metamodernism. (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2015, 55.) Characteristic of metamodernism is the oscillation between modernist commitment and postmodernist detachment, and associated opposites, for example enthusiasm and irony, or totality and fragmentation. Metamodernism “acknowledges that history’s purpose will never be fulfilled, because it does not exist,” but nevertheless commits to this purpose “as if it does exist” (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010, emphasis in the original). In a sense, Vermeulen and van den Akker’s theory combines the efforts of Jameson and Nealon: metamodernism commits to finding a utopian vision knowing full well that such a vision is unrealizable in its entirety.

3.2 Historical attitudes: nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism

The three historical attitudes discussed in this thesis – nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism – are in many ways interconnected and are significant phenomena in the cultural history of modernity and postmodernity (see e.g. Grönholm & Paalumäki 2015). The terms nostalgia, melancholy, and utopia, but also terms such as longing, mourning, hope, et cetera, often cohabit texts of cultural or literary theory. Nostalgia is sometimes considered to have utopian qualities, while both melancholy and nostalgia seem to contain varying degrees of longing and wistfulness. They can be regarded as idealistic, totalitarian, naïve, progressive, or deluded depending on the theoretical background and political preferences of the writer in question. What is often lacking is an explication of the multifarious ways in which these terms relate to each other, the properties they share, the properties that differ between them, and perhaps even a realization that they could be subsumed under a common rubric. I have gathered these terms under the rubric historical attitude. Through a systematic classification, I demonstrate that nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism can all be seen as ethical and cognitive outlooks on history, but also that a nuanced theoretical approach which is capable of differentiating between subtypes of nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism is required to explore their politico-ethical implications. I will first provide a concise definition of the three historical attitudes and then consider the relationships of the terms to each other and to the theories of periodization outlined in the previous section (3.1).
The term nostalgia is a neologism from the Greek words *nóstos* (homecoming) and *álgos* (pain). It was invented by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in the 17th century to describe the homesickness felt by Swiss soldiers fighting abroad. (Grönholm & Paalumäki 2015, 11.) During romanticism, the concept of nostalgia transformed from concrete homesickness into a more abstract sense of longing (Rossi & Seutu 2007, 10). Svetlana Boym differentiates between two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes *nóstos*, and strives for a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost, idealized home. It is unconscious nostalgia that represents tradition and absolute truth. Reflective nostalgia delays homecoming by lingering in *álgos*, the wistful pain of longing. It is skeptic of absolute, official truths. Whereas restorative nostalgia is often nationalist and conservative, reflective nostalgia can challenge monolithic national identities and enable the construction of a more pluralistic collective memory. (Boym 2011, xviii.)

Melancholy is by far the oldest term of the three as it originates from Ancient Greece. The term was first used by Hippocrates in the century BCE to describe one of the four human humors and signified an imbalance of black bile (*melas* = black, *khole* = bile) (Radden 2000, ix). Historically, melancholy has referred to a broad spectrum of psychological and physiological phenomena and has made its presence known through a wide variety of symptoms (Radden 2000, 4–5). Though my theoretical approach in this dissertation is more contextualizing than psychoanalytical, my use of the term melancholy has its roots in Sigmund Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia. Freud theorizes that melancholia is a morbid form of mourning. Both are reactions to the loss of an object of love (a person or an abstraction). Whereas mourning involves the slow and painful acceptance of loss, and subsequent return to reality, melancholia is marked by a pathological inability to release the lost object. Mourning ends with the ego becoming free again; melancholia leads to self-accusation, loss of self-esteem, apathy, and inhibition of activity. Freud even suggests that in melancholia, the experienced loss may be unconscious. (Freud 2000, 283–285.)

Following Freud, Ceren Özselçuk (2006, 227) connects melancholia to a politics of resentment: “the resentful subject identifies with a state of powerlessness [and] is unable to act upon and reconfigure her injury, preparing the

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*R There is no consistent historical distinction between uses of the terms melancholy and melancholia (Radden 2000, 7). For the purposes of this thesis, however, I considered melancholy a depressive mood, of which melancholia, as described by Freud is a severe form. Melancholy, in my definition, includes both melancholia and mourning.*
ground for melancholy to set in.” Özseçuk writes in a Marxist theoretical framework, and ties melancholic politics of ressentiment to a “modernist’ form of working-class struggle,” in which both the working class and left leaning intellectuals occupy a powerless moral high ground, which ultimately “breeds a perverse desire for the continuation of capitalism.” It seems plausible that this attachment to impotent superiority is generalizable to melancholia in any subjugated social position. This is not to claim that this is all melancholia is, but simply to clarify that the feature of melancholia that is central for the purposes of this dissertation, is a sense of hopelessness that change could ever occur or that an undesirable status quo or course of history could ever be altered. What I mean by melancholy is a melancholic historical attitude that includes both melancholia and mourning.

Like nostalgia, the term utopia originates in the early modern period. It was famously coined by Thomas More from the Greek words *u* (nowhere) and *topos* (place) and has a double meaning: utopia (nowhere place) and eutopia (good place). (Grönholm & Paalumäki 2015, 11). Krishan Kumar (1987, 3, 425) posits that the Western utopian tradition that follows More (and has its classical and Christian predecessors) is the only properly utopian tradition and has no counterparts in other cultures or eras. While this claim seems rather sweeping, what seems evident is that the history of Western modernity has strong ties with the utopian tradition. Ruth Levitas (1990, 4–6, 180) states that utopia has usually been defined in terms of content, form, or function, but maintains that none of these approaches provide an adequate and comprehensive definition by themselves. She argues against an essentialist utopian desire that would reside in human nature. Instead, “utopia arises as a socially constructed response to an equally constructed gap between the need and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it.” (1990, 181.) Levitas’s (1990, 199) quite broad definition for utopia is “the desire for a better way of being” and she is willing to include the conservative idea that preserving the status quo will eventually lead to a better life for all in the sphere of utopia (Levitas 1990, 187–188). Yet there is a difference between compensatory and transformative utopias: the former need not be plausibly attainable or even abide by the known laws of nature, whereas the latter must at least project a modest sense of hope of change (Levitas 1990, 88, 190–194). The transformative form of utopia applies better to the modern project, due to its core belief in progress and the very concrete (albeit at times dreadfully misdirected) attempts at attaining political utopias. To make a distinction between the imagined
alternative world or place, utopia, and the desire to imagine it, I use the term utopianism for the latter.\(^9\)

Boym notices the frequent overlap between nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism. She brings up the English 17th century scholar Robert Burton, who in his comprehensive *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621–38) no less than proposed his own “poetical Commonwealth,” or “Utopia” as a possible cure for melancholy (Boym 2001, 5, 358; Burton 1973, 109). Nostalgia too, has a “utopian element” (Boym 2001, 322). In historical medical accounts, nostalgia and melancholy had some similar symptoms (Boym 2001, 55). Boym even makes the connection between nostalgia and melancholy (and implicitly utopianism) in terms of her own theory of nostalgia:

Reflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia. While loss is never completely recalled, it has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory. Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future. (Boym 2001, 55.)

Boym connects reflective nostalgia to both of the Freudian concepts of melancholia and mourning mentioned earlier, yet seems to consider the connection to mourning to be more profound. Furthermore, she describes that reflective nostalgia also points to the future, which implies the presence of a utopian element. The three concepts, or what I call historical attitudes, are so thoroughly involved in their mutual psychological workings that the conceptual borders between them become blurred. In order to highlight the differences – and interactions – between these concepts, they should be defined in relation to a broader theoretical framework that is independent of their respective definitions. I suggest that this framework can be imported from my first theoretical domain, “historical contextualization and periodization,” namely Williams’s theory of epochal analysis.

An interesting, and perhaps by now evident parallel can be traced between the residual, dominant, and emergent of Williams’s epochal analysis, and the historical attitudes that make up the second domain of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Nostalgia, melancholy, and utopia all seem to have their preferred cultural formations in the sense that they correspond primarily to particular

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\(^9\) In his *Utopianism* (1991), Kumar does not provide a concise definition of utopianism, but seems to implicitly regard it as the practice and tradition of coining utopias (see e.g. 1991, 44, 47). Kumar’s focus is foremost on the literary form of utopia, whereas I regard utopianism as a desire and attitude that can also manifest in literary works that are not formally utopias.
temporalities. This is manifest in the case of nostalgia, which is primarily concerned with the past (the residual), and utopia, which is primarily concerned with the future (the emergent) (see Grönholm & Paalumäki 2015, 9). Moreover, if melancholia is understood as a pathological ressentiment, “in which self-absorption in injured identity produces a backward-looking politics, a resistance toward relinquishing the loss … and a withdrawal from the search for new possibilities” (Özselçuk 2006, 227), this seems to indicate an attitude caught in the present (the dominant) – though perhaps more anti-utopian than anti-nostalgic. These relationships are illustrated in table 1:

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<tr>
<th>Temporality</th>
<th>Cultural formation</th>
<th>Historical attitude</th>
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<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Melancholy</td>
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<td>Future</td>
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This table functions to demonstrate that the cultural elements and historical attitudes share a basic relationship with certain temporalities. However, the relationships between historical attitudes and temporalities can be far more complicated (see Grönholm & Paalumäki 2015, 10). In this dissertation, I demonstrate how historical attitudes bleed into each other, become intertwined, and combine with cultural formations in ways that defy the basic relationship demonstrated by the table. Utopianism can be found in residual elements of culture, and nostalgia can be directed at those residual elements which in a past time were unrealized emergent elements. In this scheme, melancholy is something which traps one in the present, but can contain the seeds of nostalgia or even utopianism, if the apathy and lack of hope it inflicts are overcome. The relationship between a cultural formation and a historical attitude should, then, be taken as a generalizing outline that serves as an analytical starting point. By no means should it be regarded as an iron cage that confines the historical attitudes to their respective cultural formations.

Williams makes a distinction between alternative and oppositional practices with regards to residual and emergent cultural formations. Practices that differ from the cultural dominant may either aim to exist alongside it (alternative) or to challenge it (oppositional). (Williams 1982, 41–42.) In a similar fashion, a restrictive form and an enabling form can be distinguished in all three historical
attitudes. Compensatory utopianism, restorative nostalgia, and melancholia share a passivizing, lulling kinship that discourages the exploration of future possibilities and transformative politics. Contrastingly, reflective nostalgia, mourning, and transformative utopianism provide cognitive tools for imagining a different future. The forms of historical attitudes are outlined in table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical attitude</th>
<th>Restrictive form</th>
<th>Enabling form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgia</td>
<td>Restorative nostalgia</td>
<td>Reflective nostalgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melancholy(^{10})</td>
<td>Melacholia</td>
<td>Mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utopianism</td>
<td>Compensatory utopianism</td>
<td>Transformative utopianism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This theoretical scheme allows us to map the different interrelations and overlaps between the particular forms of historical attitudes. Though reflective nostalgia, mourning, and transformative utopianism share a certain progressive kinship, they rarely come in pure forms but can include elements of restrictive historical attitudes. As Boym (2001, 55) notes, reflective nostalgia can contain elements of both mourning and melancholia. However, she goes on to point out that, “[r]eflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning.” I would rephrase this in my theoretical framework that reflective nostalgia has a primary affiliation with mourning, but can contain elements of melancholia as well.

A similar parallel can be drawn between nostalgia and utopia. Restorative nostalgia longs for the unrealizable return of an idealized past and is thus affiliated with compensatory utopia. Both restorative nostalgia and compensatory utopia conjure up an imaginary world that acts as an illusory response to problems in the real world. Conversely, reflective nostalgia and transformative utopia share an interest in the latent potentialities of history and consider the (lost or future) possibilities of their realization.

The congruencies between melancholy and utopianism are equally clear. Melancholia is unable to imagine the possibility of societal transformation, in other words, imagine a change in the dominant cultural formation. It resembles compensatory utopianism, which imagines an illusory, unfeasible world that

\(^{10}\) The term melancholy is somewhat problematic as it is often used interchangeably with the term melancholia used by Freud to describe the negative, morbid form of mourning. I have however opted to keep melancholy as the general term for the historical attitude, since it is often referred to also in a non-Freudian framework, and alternative terms such as depression, grief or sorrow lack the cultural, modernist connotations of melancholy.
provides no real alternative to the present world. Both melancholia and compensatory utopianism therefore remain trapped in the dominant. Mourning is the cognitive process of overcoming this entrapment: as the process advances, transformative utopianism can begin to emerge.

The theoretical implications of applying this matrix of historical attitudes to the interpretation of texts can be explored through two of Jameson’s central terms, namely the political unconscious and cognitive mapping. The political unconscious is the text’s unconscious relationship to the social totality. Cognitive mapping is a more conscious effort to explore this relationship. (Jameson 2007, 157.) In an interview Jameson clarifies the difference between the terms:

\[T\]hey’re both epistemological ideas. The political unconscious implies that certain kinds of knowledge about society are encoded in literary texts and their forms. The analysis I propose is designed to make it possible to recover that knowledge. Thenotion of cognitive mapping insists much more strongly on the way which art itself functions as a mode of knowledge of the totality. (Jameson 2007, 157.)

Moreover, the political unconscious “is more interpretative and retrospective,” whereas cognitive mapping is future-orientated consideration of utopian potentialities (Jameson 2007, 157).

When placed in Jameson’s theoretical framework, restrictive historical attitudes are expressions of the political unconscious, while enabling historical attitudes imply a process of cognitive mapping. It is noteworthy though, that a sliding scale of greys is a more appropriate description of actual manifestations of historical attitudes in texts than a black-and-white dichotomy. Jussi Ojajärvi (forthcoming) suggests that “the political unconscious is, in a way, incomplete cognitive mapping.” Restrictive historical attitudes can very well be expressions of discontent and critical towards the present state of things, but lack the transformative potential of enabling attitudes. Restrictive attitudes are caught in a vicious cycle of illusion and disillusionment: they either take comfort in illusory, compensatory solutions, or doubt the very possibility of ever finding a solution.

Although the terms “enabling” and “cognitive” do suggest a degree of epistemological superiority to the terms “restrictive” and “unconscious,” these terms should not be taken to automatically suggest an ethical superiority.

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11 One could also outline a similarity between melancholia and anti-utopianism: a cynical attitude that rejects the whole category of utopian thought as inherently flawed and dangerous (see Kumar 1987, 100–101; Levitas 1990, 3).
Transformative utopianism can go awry, and the concrete manifestations of utopianism can be more projects of exclusion than inclusion. Not all emergent cultural formations are necessarily welcome ones, nor do all residual formations deserve to be forgotten.

3.3 Rhetorical forms: irony and sincerity

The matrix of historical attitudes is further complicated in texts by the rhetorical forms used. Irony has a fairly simple definition that can be dated back to the Roman orator Quintilian: saying what is contrary to what is meant—although the term has its origins in Ancient Greece. Plato was the first to use the term eironeia to describe artful double meaning. Yet this simple definition hides a perplexing complexity (Colebrook 2008, 1–2; Quintilian 1986, 401.)

This dissertation’s central theorist of irony is Linda Hutcheon, who calls irony “the mode of the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen” (Hutcheon 1995, 9). She approaches irony in its social and political contexts (Hutcheon 1995, 4). Conceiving irony is a political, deliberate act: “To call something ironic is to frame or contextualize it in such a way that, in fact, an intentionalist statement has already been made—either by the ironist or by the interpreter (or by both)” (Hutcheon 1995, 112). Hutcheon (1995, 117) maintains that irony is a “modality of … attribution”: it signals that the interpreter assigns a particular meaning and value to the text. The interpreter is central to the conception of irony, but the ironist is not necessary for all instances of irony. Other elements that take part in the production of irony are the text, the context, and the discursive community of the interpreter (and possibly the ironist). The interpreter’s intention to read a text ironically is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the conception of irony. Both the text and its context have to invite an ironic interpretation. In addition, the interpreter has to belong to a discursive community that permits and enables an ironic interpretation of the text. (Hutcheon 1995, 117.)

Discursive communities are constrained by “space and time … class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice—not to mention nationality, religion, age, profession, and all the other micropolitical groupings in which we place ourselves or are placed by our society.” We all belong to many different and often contradictory discursive communities. It is the overlapping of these communities that makes irony possible. (Hutcheon 1995, 88.) We can only share a sense of irony with someone whose discursive community (by definition) intersects our own.
The relationship between irony and postmodernism is contentious. Irony’s politics hinge on what is perceived as postmodernist aesthetics compared to modernism. There is a tendency to place irony on the side of the fence where one believes political agency stands. Hutcheon (1988, 4) has stated that irony has a “governing role” in postmodernism. Jameson, on the other hand, has questioned the very possibility of irony in postmodernism. He regards both irony and what I would call his historizing hermeneutics, namely cognitive mapping, to be first and foremost modernist forms or strategies. (Jameson 1994: 92, 1991, 409.) He considers postmodernist, “homeopathic,” aesthetics politically rather impotent and argues that postmodernism resorts to pastiche and “blank irony” rather than to parody or irony (Jameson 1991, 17, 409). Hutcheon, who sees irony as an essential element of postmodern aesthetics, is also more hopeful with regards to the complicit politics of postmodernism’s “inside-outsider” position (1988, 201).

Although I call sincerity the rhetorical counterpart of irony, it is too much of a simplification to define it as an unironic connection between what is said and what is meant. Irony and sincerity together do not cover the whole range of utterances. One can write or say something disingenuously without being ironic, and carelessly without being particularly sincere. Similarly, one can interpret a text as being something other than ironic or sincere.

Lionel Trilling (1972, 6, 11) suggests that sincerity was a more lenient precursor of authenticity, and was a prominent characteristic of Western culture for some hundred years before modernism and existentialism. Authenticity refers to a more strenuous moral experience than ‘sincerity’ does, a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in, a wider reference to the universe and man’s place in it, and a less acceptant and genial view of the social circumstances of life (Trilling 1972, 11).

My conception of sincerity does involve a certain leniency when compared to the stricter ethos of being true to one’s authentic existence. However, this leniency springs from postmodern knowledge rather than from premodern innocence. This knowledge involves an incredulity towards a stable, authentic core of our being that would be reachable by a process of determined ethical self-realization. Though our temperament is no doubt partially biologically determined, this scarcely serves as the basis of our identity, which is socially and politically constructed, constantly mutating from one time and context to another. My definition of sincerity, then, is a way of communicating which attempts to be an accurate and thoughtful representation of the self that is aware of its provisional and constructed nature.
Like authenticity, it can represent a challenge to dominant cultural assumptions and norms, but simultaneously is aware that it cannot completely escape or rise above its cultural situation. The sincere connection between what is said and what is meant is then based on a self-consciously provisional and pragmatic understanding of truth.

With regards to interpreting texts, I suggest that reading sincerity follows the same hermeneutic process as reading irony. The interpreter needs to have an intention to read a text sincerely, both the text and its context need to invite a sincere interpretation, and the interpreter needs to belong to a discursive community that permits and enables a sincere interpretation of the text. Sincere statements need not be simple ones, and sometimes, as in *Compartment No.6*, instances of sincerity are found only by reading through the irony of the text.

Ironic and sincere interpretations of historical attitudes in texts affect the categorization of those attitudes. Irony can signal that the historical attitude expressed in the text is something other or more complicated than is initially apparent. For example, an ironic interpretation of what ostensibly resembles transformative utopianism, may lead us in several directions. utopianism may not be as transformative as it claims, in which case it is actually a manifestation of compensatory utopianism. If the depicted utopianism is transformative, but tragically misguided or destructive, one can justifiably describe the implicit historical attitude as melancholia rather than transformative utopianism. Conversely, to interpret a historical attitude as sincere is to attribute a great degree of ethical commitment to that attitude. In other words, a sincerely expressed attitude is not a capricious whim, but the result of a conscious cognitive process.

The interpreter has to carefully differentiate between the (often fluctuating) attitudes of the different fictional characters and narrators, and the text as a whole. As is always the case with interpreting irony or sincerity, the context is paramount. This is where the three domains of my theoretical framework come together from the broadest historical periodization and contextualization, across the understanding of the matrix of historical attitudes, to the particular texts and their rhetorical forms.

### 3.4 Methodology

Methodology is a tricky matter in literary studies, the scholars of which are often engaged in a very intuitive process of interpretation, contextualization, and theorization which is not always easy to systematically describe. There is even a
certain aversion of the word method. Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, for example, have written an introduction to the key concepts of the humanities called The Theory Toolbox (2003). In the end of the introductory chapter they write: “[W]e’re interested in theory as a toolbox of questions and concepts to be built and experimentally deployed rather than as a menu of methods to be chosen and mechanically applied” (Nealon & Searl Giroux 2003, 8). In their conception, a method is something mechanical, almost automatic, which of course is the very opposite of an invested hermeneutic process. But, one wonders, whether the building and experimental deployment of concepts is not itself a method. This is at least how I conceive my method: a systematic rummaging in the toolbox in an attempt to find tools that work – not the mechanical application of an a priori chosen tool. An upside to this search for tools is that sometimes one grabs a new tool that can be applied to a problem one was previously oblivious to. In the following, I will explain my method in more detail.

All of my three theoretical domains (historical contextualization and periodization, historical attitudes, rhetorical forms) are contextual in the sense that the context is an indispensable component of whatever interpretative operations they enable. This is to say my reading is clearly not a formalist one. I make use of the first theoretical domain (historical contextualization and periodization) to account for broader historical contexts, such as modernization and globalization. The second domain (historical attitudes) is situated somewhere between the first and third domains in the sense that it allows me to focus on particular textual instances, but simultaneously contains a temporal orientation to the past, the present, or the future. I deploy the third domain (rhetorical forms) predominantly to engage particular textual instances – from which I nevertheless compound broader conclusions concerning the use of rhetorical forms and their effect on the historical attitudes that are displayed.

My method of research, which in very general terms can be called contextual close reading, can be more accurately described by using a general interpretative model derived from Hutcheon’s hermeneutics of irony. Perhaps the reason that Hutcheon’s theory of irony is so convincing is that it actually provides a more general hermeneutical or interpretative model. To quickly summarize Hutcheon’s model, interpreting irony has three prerequisites: 1) the interpreter has the intention to read something as ironic, 2) something in the text and its context invites an ironic interpretation, and 3) the interpreter belongs to a discursive community that allows the interpreter to read something as ironic (Hutcheon 1995, 112, 117). Based on Hutcheon’s (1998) observation that irony and nostalgia share a hermeneutic affinity,
I suggest in Article III that reading nostalgia follows a similar interpretative model as irony, and in the previous section (4.3), I propose that this model can be applied for sincerity as well. In fact, Hutcheon’s model applies to a broad range of politically and contextually charged tropes including, for example, melancholy and utopianism. It is a model of contextual reading.

The three preconditions of interpretation theorized by Hutcheon have their counterparts in the methodological structure of this dissertation. I will call them the prerequisites of the method. First, the interpreter’s intention has its counterpart in the objectives of research, namely the research question. The research question determines to a large extent what kinds of answers can be surmised: it is the intention to interpret the object in a specific context. Of course, the question can be modified during the process. Second, the text and context have their obvious counterparts in the objects of research and their historical frameworks. Third, the discursive community of the interpreter has its counterpart in the theoretical community of the researcher. In other words, the theoretical background and views of the researcher also partly determine the research findings that are available to the scholar. However, I want to stress here that I do not wish to downplay the other discursive communities the researcher belongs to. We are all actual people situated in a world that exists outside literary theory, and our own situations and contexts no doubt affect the way we read. No doubt my own background as a Northern Finnish scholar of literature opens up some interpretative possibilities due to, for example, the familiarity of some milieus of Liksom’s fiction and their immediate cultural context. Simultaneously, I could be blind to points of view granted by a greater degree of distance.

Keeping this caveat in mind, my method is formed by the interrogation of the relations between research objectives, text/context, and theory. This interrogation involves questions such as: why are the research questions we ask important concerning this specific object of research? What theory provides us with the best conceptual tools for answering the questions we have chosen to pose? How does our theory affect our perception of a particular text? In fact, the prerequisites of the method are only meaningful in relation to each other. The research objectives are meaningful if they pose questions that the object of research can help answer and vice versa. Similarly, theory is only relevant if it helps to structure and clarify the objectives of research and if it enables the researcher to extract findings from the object of research. In literary studies, these findings are interpretations of a text in its particular context. During any research process, these preconditions are in
constant interaction and modify each other. My method is not, in other words, a simple deployment of theory to the object of research.

My theoretical framework has during the different stages of its formation had an impact on how I now view Liksom’s works and image, and on the research questions I ask regarding Liksom. Simultaneously, the research questions I ask have led me to choose complementary elements from different theories. Some theories prove more fruitful than others in analyzing specific texts. The texts and their context give rise to particular questions and seem to better respond to certain theoretical approaches than others. The interrelation between method and its prerequisites can be illustrated by the following figure:

![Methodology Diagram](image)

**Fig. 1. Methodology.**

Method, then, is the interaction between the three prerequisites, depicted in figure 1 as the tips of a triangle. This interaction is synchronic, that is to say, it is not useful
to arrange the three prerequisites in a chronological order, where one would be the cause of the next.

To give an example, in Article III that explores the ironizing of nostalgia in *Bamalama*, it is impossible to point to a methodological prerequisite that would have preceded the others. Rather, it was the combined impetus of my theoretical framework, my research objective, and the text along with its context that gave rise to the method. I had familiarized myself with Hutcheon’s theories of postmodernism and irony, which partly led me to her theory of nostalgia and related theories. My research objective that focused on Liksom’s retrospection of modernity led me to ask questions related to nostalgia. Simultaneously, the nostalgic elements of *Bamalama* influenced both my theoretical approach and my research questions. The research related to the article consisted of a constant interrogation and re-evaluation of these relations. What this meant in practice was looking for instances and structures of nostalgia and irony in the text, attempting to apply different theoretical approaches to those structures, and trying to formulate and re-formulate questions and perspectives that would contextualize the text in interesting, relevant ways, and lead to significant findings.
4 Article summaries and findings

The articles are listed in this thesis in the order they were written, with the exception of article V, which was written first. This order shows the thought process behind the theoretical and conceptual developments of my research. Article V, which explores Liksom’s public image, is last for several reasons: first, I wish to emphasize Liksom’s works over her image, and second, this order more or less follows a chronology of narrative temporalities. Articles I and II explore Kreisland, which is set sometime between the 1920s and the late 1950s. Article III focuses on Bamalama, the stories of which are set in undisclosed and probably varying years during the 20th century, but from what temporal hints can be gathered, predominantly later than the events of Kreisland. Article IV analyzes Compartment No. 6, which is set in the late 1980s, roughly around the same time as Bamalama’s stories (the narrative chronology of Bamalama and Compartment No. 6 could arguably be reversed). And while one cannot perhaps speak of narrative temporalities in the context of Article V, which discusses Liksom’s public image, the article does consider a period that begins in the 1980s with the start of Liksom’s career and ends somewhere after Liksom receives the Finlandia Prize in 2011. Furthermore, article V’s discussion of the critique of Compartment No. 6 clearly speaks for its proximity to article IV.

4.1 Article I: “All That Endures Turns to Dust”: The Melancholy Retrospection of Modern Utopias in Kreisland by Rosa Liksom

Article I focuses on the journey through modern, twentieth century ideologies by Impi Agafiina, one of Kreisland’s protagonists. It argues that a dialectical tension between utopianism and anti-utopianism is discernible in Kreisland’s postmodern satire of twentieth century modernity. While three major modern ideologies of the twentieth century, namely fascism, communism, and capitalism, are critiqued for disrupting the modern project and its emancipatory agenda, the novel ends with a melancholy longing for the dormant utopian potential of modernity. In Kreisland, Liksom partakes in the postmodern critique of the totalizing dangers of modern utopias gone awry, but simultaneously indicates nostalgia for the utopian impulse and the transformative politics it entails. The stance Liksom takes through her ironic portrayal of the modern project is therefore not merely reproachful, but also points out redeeming aspects.
4.2 Article II: Modernity and Hermitage: the Recurrence of Myth in Rosa Liksom's Kreisland

Article II focuses on the dichotomy between Kreisland’s two protagonists, Impi Agafiina and Juho Gabriel. It maintains that Kreisland employs irony to demonstrate how modernity is constructed in a dialectical relationship with its other, premodernity. The interdependence of opposites such as nature and culture, feminine and masculine, as well as myth and enlightenment is shown through the ironic juxtaposition of the opposites. These binary opposites are personified in the novel’s protagonists, who are ironized epic heroes. In Kreisland, the feminine also stands for the modern desire to emancipate oneself from the world of myth and tradition, whereas the masculine represents modernity’s opposite movement, namely the nostalgic yearning for a mythical, isolated premodernity. The dialectical relationship of these gendered counterparts reveals the mythical elements of the modern project’s origin and suggests that the attempt to completely renounce this mythical origin is as unfeasible as the nostalgic attempt to return to it.

4.3 Article III: “Kadonneessa maassa”. Nostalgian ironisointuminen Rosa Liksomin Bamalamassa [“In a lost land.” The ironizing of nostalgia in Rosa Liksom’s Bamalama]

Through the analysis of Bamalama, Article III shows how Liksom’s prose assumes a thoughtful and critical disposition towards the past. Despite its postmodern elements, it does not lack a sense of history. Irony and nostalgia share a “secret hermeneutic affinity” (Hutcheon 1998): the process by which the reader interprets irony resembles the interpretative process of nostalgia. Understanding the nostalgia in Liksom’s prose is crucial to the understanding of the irony, and vice versa. Nostalgia can be ironic and still retain its emotional impact. Liksom ridicules nostalgia that seeks to naively restore the imagined past, but also wistfully reflects upon the lost opportunities of the modern project to fulfill its emancipatory, utopian promises.

4.4 Article IV: Metamodernism in Liksom’s Compartment No. 6

Article IV argues that the modernist features observed by critics in Compartment No. 6 are an attempt to suspend postmodern suspicion and can be explained by the theory of metamodernism. Metamodernist art attempts to surpass postmodernism
by oscillating between modernism and postmodernism, as well as between sincerity and irony. In *Compartment No. 6*, epistemological uncertainty is understood as the universal situation on which to build something more productive, not the conclusion of the postmodern dismantling of truths. Using irony, the shared understanding of the postmodern condition is signaled between the protagonists and even the reader. A metamodernist reading of *Compartment No. 6* demonstrates that the utopian impulse of the modern project can be reawakened with the caveat that utopia as a final destination may never be reached. In other words, the metamodernist direction taken by Liksom in *Compartment No. 6* suggests that postmodern suspicion does not have to paralyze transformative politics, if these politics are understood as an always provisional, ongoing, and future-oriented project.

4.5 *Article V: Työtä vai leikkiä? Rosa Liksomin ambivalentti taiteilijakuva* [Work or play? Rosa Liksom’s ambivalent image]

Since receiving the Finlandia Prize for *Compartment No. 6* in 2011, Liksom’s public image has become more open and earnest: she no longer hides behind sunglasses and strange costumes in pictures and reflects on her writing in a less ironic manner than before. Article V maintains that the means by which Liksom defines herself as an author in interviews indicates an ongoing negotiation between modern and postmodern authorial and artistic ideals. Modern ideals include the desire to increase human and intercultural understanding and to express identity authentically, whereas postmodern ideals include the eradication of art as a domain beyond economic concerns, the ability to reinvent oneself and adapt to changing projects and goals, and versatile engagement with the fields of art and entertainment (Jokinen 2010, 152, 165–167). The alternation between these ideals is a form of artistic and professional self-reflection and retrospection, where Liksom seeks to establish a commitment to modern artistic ideals while admitting her complicity in a system that holds art and literature subject to the constraints of the market economy.
5 Conclusion

Before a final recapitulation and assessment of the findings of this thesis, an explication of the hermeneutic process behind this research project is in order. My initial research plan was predominantly focused on the postmodern politics in Liksom’s works. My approach was tied in with theories of postmodernism and concentrated on the 1990s, the period during which Liksom wrote her most postmodernist works. Specifically, my focus was on irony, a rhetorical form the ambivalent politics of which had been extensively discussed by Hutcheon. However, my plan also contained a historizing aspect: in the introduction of my research plan I speculated on the constructive political notions and social agenda of Liksom’s works.

Now, after some five years of research, it is evident that my approach has changed along the way. My interest in irony as a vehicle of politics has transformed into a more specific focus on irony as a conveyer of sentiments and ethical judgments about the past, that is, as a rhetorical component of historical attitudes. My theoretical emphasis shifted towards historical contextualization, with less emphasis of the formal nuances of irony. The stronger emphasis I put on contextualization also entailed a broadening of historical perspectives. I understood that I could not focus on the 1990s alone, but needed to consider the history of the twentieth century, which was, after all the temporal setting of Kreisland. An important influence here was Adorno and Horkeimer’s Dialectic of Enlightenment, which philosophically tackles many of the issues that are satirically explored in Kreisland. I gradually understood that the politics of Liksom’s works manifested itself in a retrospection of the modern project and its twentieth century developments. Following this realization, I could no longer exclude Compartment No. 6 from the objects of this research, as it engages in dialogue with Kreisland on many aspects of the modern project.

The theoretical apparatus delineated in chapter 3 is a result of my research, not a set of tools I had at my disposal from the very beginning of my thesis project. That is to say, the articles included in this essay feature some of the elements of the theory presented, but none of them make use of its final form. Had this theoretical apparatus been available to me from the beginning of this project, my articles and their findings would no doubt form a more elegant whole that would employ a more consistent set of concepts. However, I maintain that all of these articles played a part in the formation of my theoretical framework, which would have surely
remained unassembled without the detours traversed and dead ends arrived at during the research process.

The theoretical evolution of my dissertation is exemplified by my use of the concept of nostalgia. In the two articles written first, Article V and Article I, nostalgia is hardly mentioned (once in Article V). At the time when I wrote these articles, nostalgia in my mind meant a naïve belief in the possibility of restoring the past. In other words, my conception of nostalgia was limited to what I later understood to be restorative nostalgia. This form of nostalgia did not seem to fit Liksom’s ironic and critical attitude towards the past. Initially, nostalgia thus did not seem to describe Liksom’s fiction (other than, perhaps, as an object of ironic ridicule). However, in Article I, I describe Impi Agafina’s disposition towards the past in Kreisland as “melancholy retrospection” only to soon find out that this type of sensibility had already been defined by Boym (2001) as reflective nostalgia. By Article III, I had already familiarized myself with Boym’s theory and could differentiate between restorative and reflective nostalgia. This is not to say that the concept of melancholy retrospection is wrong, though. There is a definite undercurrent of melancholy in Kreisland’s rambunctious narration – but using established terminology when it is justified and appropriate saves the unnecessary trouble of coining new concepts were old ones would do just as well, or better. In my latest Article (IV), in which I focused on utopia instead of nostalgia, the complex relationships and overlaps between the concepts nostalgia, melancholy, and utopianism begun to intrigue me. A sense of bewildered interest prompted me to considerer the three concepts as manifestations of a similar mental process and subsume them under the rubric historical attitudes.

As the articles included in this dissertation were written in a theoretical framework which was just as much a work in progress as the articles themselves, it benefits to concisely re-examine their findings in light of the theory that was the result of their writing process. To better point out the connections and developments between the articles, I will follow the order in which I have presented my theory. In other words, I will proceed theoretical domain by domain, not article by article.

In light of the first theoretical domain (historical contextualization and periodization), changes in the cultural dominants pertaining to Liksom and her works can be divided into two categories: 1) changes in the diegetic cultural dominant and 2) changes in the cultural dominant of the historical context of the writing process (and reception) of Liksom’s works. In other words, we can distinguish between the change in the dominant which is narrated in a given work and the change in the dominant which occurs during the time of publication of that
work. *Kreisland* depicts the final transition from a premodern to a modern dominant and, in the end, the first glimpses of the postmodern era. It is written during a postmodern dominant period. To an extent, *Bamalama* too moves between three dominants: it describes the modern longing for premodern existence, but is also an account of the emergence of postmodern sensibilities, and like *Kreisland*, it is written during the postmodern cultural dominant. *Compartment No. 6* describes the death throes of the modern period. Interestingly, however, its protagonists do not adopt a postmodern position of absolute skepticism, but something one could describe as mature postmodernism, where uncertainty is not the end of historical agency but its starting point. Theorists such as Jameson (2015), Nealon (2012), as well as Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) have suggested we have entered a period of intensified postmodernity, or even embraced a new cultural dominant, whether it is called post-postmodernity or metamodernity. The latest change in the cultural dominant coincides with a change of Liksom’s writing signaled by *Compartment No 6*: the re-emergence of modernist aesthetics and political commitment alongside postmodern irony and incredulity. This change seems to be reflected in the newfound openness of Liksom’s public image, though neither should be taken as a deterministic result of emergent metamodernism.

The second theoretical domain, historical attitudes, allows us to articulate Liksom’s attitude towards history and transformative politics in a more systematic fashion. Generally speaking, Liksom seems quite wary of restorative nostalgia. When she does include restorative nostalgia in her works, it is most often as an object of irony. Prime examples of such ironized nostalgia are the fascist longing for an idealized homeland and Juho Gabriel’s residual enclave depicted in *Kreisland*, and the urban longing for a pastoral countryside featured in *Bamalama*. Perhaps *Compartment No. 6*’s indulgence in the niceties of Soviet culture might be read as instances of restorative nostalgia, but on a broader scale the Soviet system is hardly presented as something to be restored or emulated. Liksom’s public image has both made use of and ironized restorative nostalgia, fluctuating between authenticity and artificiality. In the interviews mentioned in Article V, however, she seems more thoughtful and earnest about her past and her artistic ethos.

Reflective nostalgia plays an important part in *Kreisland*. This is evident towards the end, where Impi Agafiina’s account of her past can, despite its rowdy exterior, be read as part of a reflective process of bittersweet remembrance: Impi Agafiina retrospectively describes her actions as crazy, but simultaneously longs for the utopianism that was the driving force of her youth. This longing is closely
associated with the longing the protagonists of what I have called the Leningrad-stories of Bamalama feel for the utopian potentialities of history.

The ending of Kreisland could also be described as melancholy: Impi Agafiina no longer seems to think she can contribute to social change. However, we are not shown how Impi Agafiina, an embodiment of modernity, fares in the future: perhaps she undergoes a process of mourning and eventually regains her spirits. Of Compartment No. 6’s protagonists, the girl goes through a process of mourning the loss of her relationship with Mitka, whereas Vadim is a more melancholy character: he frequently laments the state of things (often making use of irony), but does not think that a change for the better is possible.

Clearly, none of Liksom’s works belong to the genre of utopian literature. They do not present us with detailed plans for perfect societies, or even visions of improbable paradises. Kumar (2010, 560) warns against the bundling of “all forms of resistance or wish fulfillment” as utopian lest the concept become inflated by its inclusiveness (Kumar 2010, 562). I agree, with the caveat that there is something to be said for the concept of utopian desire (or, utopianism, as I have here called it) as the impetus behind transformative politics, because it allows us to consider utopian aspects in cultural products and practices that are not formally speaking utopias. What should be taken as a mark of transformative utopianism, then, is the aspiration for large-scale societal betterment, not just any private craving of happiness or scheme for self-improvement.

The critique Kreisland aims at the twentieth century utopian projects is patently anti-utopian, but towards the end of the novel, a longing for the utopian impulse (not the specific utopian projects) is discernible. In Bamalama utopianism is manifested in both its compensatory and transformative forms. The misguided daydreams of the idealized countryside are figments of compensatory imagination that offer no real solutions to the problems the dreamers are facing. Transformative utopianism is again, as it is in Kreisland, represented in the mournful remembrances of lost opportunities for societal improvement. Compartment No. 6 portrays the end times of the Soviet Union, a modern endeavor that perhaps initially had utopian goals, but very quickly mutated into totalitarianism. Yet the real crux of the novel’s utopianism is not the assessment of the Communist system’s downfall, but the attempt to overcome postmodern uncertainty and find some common ground to build on. That ground is paradoxically the shared understanding of the very uncertainty we face as postmoderns: there are no final answers to be found, but that does not mean we ought to stop searching. Perhaps the realization that this situatedness in an ambiguous world is the universal human condition which allows
us to both understand each other’s situations and to see our common humanity beyond them (and, it must be added in these times of mass-extinction, the shared biological existence that goes beyond humanity).

To sum up, the modern project is discussed critically, but not altogether reproachfully, in the works and public image of Rosa Liksom. This research project elucidates the complexity of Liksom’s engagement with the modern project and bestows new importance on the positive, constructive elements of Liksom’s works that have hitherto gained less attention than the parodic, carnevalesque, and satirical features. By constructive I mean that Liksom’s texts try to salvage something from the history of the modern project instead of merely lingering in the negative attempt to deconstruct historical truths and dismantle the very possibility of such truths. To be sure, Liksom approaches historiographical epistemology very critically and is constantly questioning official truths. Yet this does not prevent her works from committing to certain ideals represented by the modern project, of which the central is the utopian desire of transformative politics.

Liksom deploys irony to criticize the derailed utopian projects of the twentieth century, as well as the modern idealization of the past. Her fiction reminds us that the past cannot and should not be restored, nor should it be forgotten. Alongside the irony and criticism of utopianism runs a mournful undercurrent that broods over the lack of agency and political choices we seem to face in our present historical condition, and a nostalgia that reflects upon the lost utopian potentialities of the past. Liksom’s latest novel *Compartment No. 6* presents a tentative possibility to reach a communion between people and cultures based on their shared situatedness in a postmodern, uncertain world. This communion could perhaps provide common ground toward recuperating some of the ideals of the modern project: increasing political and economic equality, social betterment, and the progress and appreciation of knowledge – ideals our time of reanimated ignorance, xenophobia, nationalism, and geopolitical power plays seems to thirst for.

Habermas’s question regarding the fate of the modern project is as crucial as ever. Yes, “we screw up all the time,” as Vadim points out. Yet he continues: “We spend half our lives messing things up, half realizing the stupid mistakes we’ve made, and the rest of the time trying to fix whatever we can” (Liksom 2014a, 174–175). Sometimes the mistakes we make are spectacular, and it occasionally takes regrettably long to realize them. When the modern project comes crashing off its rails, do we give up and scatter into the wilderness in a sudden panic? Or do we try to fix whatever we can, look for common ground, and continue our journey towards the forever receding horizon of utopia?
Works cited


List of original publications


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