

## Renegotiating Authorship: The Case of Algot Untola

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*Harhama* (*The Chimera*, 1909), the first novel by Irmari Rantamala, is one of the most curious books in the history of Finnish literature, as its critical reception shows. Literary critics have defined *Harhama* as a decidedly ground-breaking novel, as ‘the most peculiar creation of Finnish decadence’,<sup>1</sup> ‘the beginning of modernism in Finland and the first Finnish anti-novel’,<sup>2</sup> and as ‘a maximalist novel’.<sup>3</sup> The title, *Harhama*, already seems to point in ambivalent directions. *Harhama* is the name of the protagonist of the novel, which is set in two very different places – Saint Petersburg, Russia, and a small rural village in the southern part of Finland – at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the ears of contemporary Finnish readers, the title of the novel sounds strange, since the word ‘harhama’ is no longer in use. Dictionaries define ‘harhama’ as ‘a chimera, or a plant, which is composed of two genetically distinct cells’.<sup>4</sup> The beginning of the word, ‘harha’, however, is a common word meaning ‘illusion’ or ‘delusion’. Thus the novel’s title does not simply refer to a monster (the chimera, from Greek mythology), or to plant biology, but also to the illusory nature of life at the beginning of the twentieth century. The novel can be described as the odyssey of its

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Pirjo Lyytikäinen, *Narkissos ja sfinksi: Minä ja Toinen vuosisadanvaihteen kirjallisuudessa* (*Narcissus and The Sphinx: I and the Other in The Literature of the Fin-de-Siècle*) (Helsinki: SKS, 1997), 221. All translations from Finnish are mine.

Markku Eskelinen, *Raukoilla rajoilla: Suomenkielisen proosakirjallisuuden historiaa* (*At the Borders: A History of Prose Fiction in Finnish*) (Helsinki: Siltala, 2016), 358 and 362.

Kaisa Kurikka, ‘Kokeellinen romaani, kokeileva lukija: Jaakko Yli-Juonikkaan *Neuromaani*’ (‘Experimental Novel, Experimenting Reader: *Neuromaani* by Jaakko Yli-Juonikas’), in Jussi Ojajärvi and Nina Työlähti, eds, *Maamme romaani: Esseitä kirjallisuuden vuosikymmenistä* (*The Novels of Our Nation: Essays on Literary Decades*) (Jyväskylä: Nykykulttuuri, 2017), 321.

<sup>4</sup> *Otavan Iso Tietosanakirja* (Helsinki: Otava, 1960), iii. 402.

protagonist, Harhama, a Finnish man, who is trying to cope with various social, political and cultural problems raised by the processes of modernization taking place both in Russia and in Finland, which, at the time in which the novel is set, still belonged to Russia as a grand duchy of the empire.

*Harhama* is a complicated and massive novel, originally published in three volumes, with 1803 pages and 34 chapters covering various plots and themes. All of the chapters, however, begin with a different motto, each of which offers a definition of 'life'. According to the mottos, life is 'a deceptive dream', 'a hardship', 'a hungry rat nagging and biting human beings', 'burning hatred' or 'a self-revising chimera'.<sup>5</sup> The totality of the novel seems to ask the quintessential question 'what is life?', and in the course of the novel this question is answered in several ways. But, since the main character Harhama is an author who is depicted as writing a *magnum opus* during the time-span of the novel's events, the question is also linked to the problematic relationship between art and life, and specifically to the changed meanings, terms and functions of literature and authorship in the midst of the chaotic modern world.

Rantamala's novel is a northern European example of a narrative of modernity. It depicts the Janus-like condition of the artist in early modernity: on the one hand, modernity offers a utopian future with uncounted possibilities; on the other, the modern world is depicted as a place where 'all that is solid melts into the air', as Marshall Berman (quoting Karl Marx) has described the experience of modernity.<sup>6</sup> In *Harhama*, different social transformations, such as the ever-growing capitalist economy or the social effects of

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Irmari Rantamala, *Harhama* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Kustannusosakeyhtiö Kansa, 1909).

Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (10th edn., New York and London: Penguin Books, 1988).

modernity on urban life and factory work are linked to cultural, aesthetic and artistic transformations. The novel is highly critical of the modern condition, but seeks an escape route from modern life through art by describing a utopian vision of the impact of literature on life. In the course of the novel, Harhama begins to collaborate with others with high hopes in order to finish his book, but in the end his artistic ambitions and practice of co-creation collapse into dystopia. In this chapter, I will discuss these aspects and, in addition I will also investigate how the whole novel can be linked to a wider problematic, and a complex web of utopian visions of artistic community and authorship.

In his book *Legitimizing the Artist*, Luca Somigli has studied how European modernist authors, belonging to such different movements as Decadence, Symbolism, Imagism, and Futurism, had attempted to renegotiate and re-legitimize their roles during the era of between 1885 and 1915, which was characterized by profound cultural and social changes.<sup>7</sup> The place and status of the artist had changed radically due to the emergence of a split between modernity and its aesthetic category, modernism: a triumph of capitalist economy and positivist science on the one hand, and a resistance to utilitarian logic and bourgeois values on the other.<sup>8</sup> According to Somigli, artists in particular expressed their experience of alienation in the modern world, and their position and role within it. Rantamala's novel manifests this need to renegotiate the status of the artist by elaborating on the theme of finding a specific place for literature in society.

But Irmari Rantamala can also be linked to another aspect of this struggle to re-legitimize the changed relationship between artist and society, art and life. I am referring here to the name Irmari Rantamala, which appears on the cover of *Harhama* and on other texts

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Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885–1915* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7.

written by Rantamala. Rantamala is, in fact, a pen name of Algot Untola (1868–1918). Untola was born in the eastern part of Finland, but he also lived in Saint Petersburg – indeed, *Harhama* has been interpreted as an autobiographical novel depicting Untola’s life.<sup>9</sup> During his lifetime, Untola worked as a schoolteacher in Finland and as a private teacher in Russia; he agitated for a conservative political party, but also acted as the last editor of a left-wing newspaper, *Työmies (The Worker)*, during the Finnish Civil War in 1918. He published his first piece of fiction in 1909, and his last novel came out in 1917. Due to the lack of translations of his works, Untola is not known to international readers or literary critics, despite the intriguing facets of his authorship.

Irmari Rantamala is not the only pen name of Algot Untola; he might even hold a sort of record for authorial signatures, at least in Finland. Untola never published anything under his ‘real’ name – a paradox in itself, since he was first baptized as Algoth Tietäväinen, and changed his name to Algot Untola as an adult. Instead of using his legal name, he published fiction under the female name Maiju Lassila, the combined male/female name Irmari Rantamala, and the gender-neutral J. I. Vatanen. In addition to these author-names, Untola wrote newspaper articles, editorials and political columns using more than forty initials and pen- or nicknames. In the archives of the National Library of Finland there are thousands of Untola’s unpublished manuscripts, which he signed with yet other author-names – some female, some male, others gender-neutral. Untola also corresponded and collaborated on a daily basis with his publishers and editors, never signing the letters with his legal name. The polyonymous authorship of Algot Untola problematizes the convention of authorial names, and also questions prevailing notions of authorship and of literary creativity. In a peculiar sense, polyonymous authorship forms an artistic community of its own, an authorial

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Elsa Erho, *Maiju Lassila: Kirjallishistoriallinen tutkimus (Maiju Lassila: A Study in Literary History)* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 1957), 11–20.

collective, whose members have much more in common with each other than merely the idea of collaboration; polyonymous authorship deviates from typical artistic communities and can be regarded rather as a disturbing intervention. Polyonymity itself becomes a site for creating utopian visions and for telling stories of authors and authorships, as Untola's case shows.

Michel Foucault dedicates a significant part of his widely read essay 'What Is an Author?' to a discussion of the various functions of the name of the author. Foucault differentiates the author's name from other proper names; he comments on the taxonomic role that the author's name plays in grouping texts according to various fashions; he also emphasizes how the name of the author marks the appearance of a special discursive set and indicates its status within a culture and a society.<sup>10</sup> According to Foucault, the author's name '[...] is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being'.<sup>11</sup> In Foucault's essay the name of the author is an indication of, and in some ways even synonymous with, the author-function, which Foucault regards as an impediment to the free circulation, manipulation, composition, re- and decomposition of fiction.<sup>12</sup>

Taking a further look at the functions and the workings of the author's name seems particularly important when studying the case of Irmari Rantamala and/or Algot Untola. The Foucauldian questions 'what is an author?' and 'what are the functions of the author's name?' seem pertinent indeed when the number of author-names is so excessive, as is the case for Untola. In trying to answer these questions, my chapter also poses other ones. Why did Algot Untola use so many author-names? Where is the author? And how does polyonymous authorship relate to the modern condition of being an artist?

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Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in Josué V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1979), 141–60.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 159.

The problematic of Untola's authorship is deepened by the fact that he did not merely change his authorial names; the literary styles and conventions of his writings also change according to the specific name he attaches to them. The novels of Irmari Rantamala are a confusing combination of modernist aesthetics and decadent and symbolist features; the novels and plays by Maiju Lassila can be categorized as humorous realism; and the single novel by J. I. Vatanen can be characterized as naturalist fiction.

The excess of Untola's author-names clearly points to the fact that the printed record of the author's name on book covers and title pages is never merely an act of convention – it is a matter of choice, since authors decide whether to sign their works with their legal proper name, to use a fictional name or *nom de plume*, or to maintain full anonymity. Any such choice is always regulated by the norms, rules and prevailing practices of publishing and commerce, as well as by aesthetic considerations. The name of the author thus appears as the site of a constant oscillation between social, institutional and aesthetic conventions and demands. To begin with, Untola's polyonymous authorship can be connected to the changing ways of 'authorial self-construction' common among European authors during the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Lawrence Rainey, authorial construction was a strategy to accommodate the rapidly changing configurations of cultural institutions.<sup>13</sup> Both modernist and avant-garde authors were faced with the problem of how to address different audiences, ranging from members of 'high' culture (the literary elite) to 'low' culture (mass audiences), at the time when publicity, the growth of the early mass media and advertising began to play a major role in the realm of literature.<sup>14</sup> I will elaborate on the multiplicity of author-names as a site of authorial self-construction by discussing how Untola treats his

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Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 3–4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

various author-names as commodities in order to address different reading publics; Untola's polyonymous authorship can also be linked to the formation of distinctive reading communities, based (for example) on social class and gender, which was taking place in Finland in the early twentieth century. To meet the wishes and needs of various groups of readers, Untola changed the styles and tones of writing practised by his different author-names.

I will also show how the multiplicity of names appears as a utopian effort to subvert, or at least to complicate, the separation of art from life: thus, Untola's polyonymous authorship can be linked to the crucial questions of the reaffirmation, in European modernism, of traditional boundaries between art, life and avant-garde, and the converse attempt to reunite these realms through artistic and aesthetic practices. These different attitudes and their implications can be understood by contrasting Rantamala's *Harhama* and the totality of Untola's authorship: in their complicated inter-relatedness, they offer distinct views on the relations between life and literature, and on literature as a site for utopian thought. Although they both underline the importance of utopian notions in the realm of literature and the role of collaboration in aesthetic practices, they take different stands on these issues.

### **From utopian authorship to dystopia**

Given its length, *Harhama* relies on several plot-lines and narrative levels. One of them depicts the life of Harhama in Saint Petersburg and Finland. While living in the modern Russian metropolis, Harhama is faced with various urban problems caused by modernization. He wanders in the outskirts of the city, where poor people live in impossible conditions,

suffering from starvation, and young girls work as prostitutes, waiting for customers in the dark alleys of the city in order to earn a little money so as to be able at least to feed their family members. In contrast to scenes of this kind, we also see Harhama in the wealthy apartments of the Russian aristocracy where, by contrast, young girls of the upper class dance at luxurious parties. Harhama also visits a huge factory, a monster-like mechanical structure, which torments and kills factory workers with an overload of work in unbearable surroundings. Harhama witnesses the crush of the Russian stock market, where he himself has invested a fortune, and which he loses. Filled with contempt at the present modern situation, Harhama contemplates alternative solutions to capitalism, problems of urbanization, hierarchical class structures and the oppression of the working class. Neither the Christian God, nor the underground revolutionary group Harhama joins in order to perform violent attacks on city officials, can solve the problems of the modern metropolis. Harhama, as the etymological background of his name already suggests, is haunted by doubt concerning various ideologies, which draw him in opposite directions: religious doubt keeps him undecided between believing in God and denying him; between getting accustomed to petit-bourgeois marriage and supporting free love; between propagating socialism and its ideals of collective ownership and practising the management strategies of conservative private ownership.

In decadent fashion, *Harhama* depicts a sick society in need of a remedy. One of the plot lines of the novel suggests that salvation may come through art. As Harhama faces the city around him, he is simultaneously processing his book: all the people he meets and every single event he experiences become parts of his book. Life affects literature and vice versa, since Harhama also sees the world in a different way after writing these scenes into his book. Rantamala's novel also contains parts of Harhama's work-in-progress, which is another



narrative level in the composition of *Harhama*. Harhama experiences amazing visions, which he wants to include in his book, and these visions and parts of Harhama's book are sometimes inseparable from each other: life and art are also united in a very literal way. The actual genre of Harhama's book is never revealed, but the novel describes various alternative ideas Harhama develops in order to compensate for prevailing ideologies, and it can therefore be classified as a book of utopian thinking. He also depicts the birth of the earth, the history of the world, and of Finland. His book additionally consists of the mythology of the Devil, which is told in verse, unlike the rest of the novel. The main goal of his book is to give birth to a new deity, an everyman freed from the constraints of religion, conservative morals and the rules of society.

The novel thus gives expression to an author-figure, who is represented as a visionary man, a creator of an alternative religion and a whole new history of the planet. Harhama is almost a god-like figure, echoing romantic notions of authorship. The life of the author and the creation of an artwork are here presented as inseparable from each other. The book Harhama writes is also destined to change the contemporary world, and he himself appears as an author, who writes for the people as a kind of a spokesperson for the poor and oppressed members of modern society. Not only is the life of the author identified with literature, but the lives of the readers to come will also be changed by Harhama's book. The utopian force of literature is stressed throughout the novel.

The utopian notion of the power of literature to change people's lives presents itself in a complicated way. Harhama is not in fact the sole creator of his book, since he has signed a contract with the Devil, with whom he collaborates, and who is manifested as one of the main characters in Rantamala's novel. Harhama is a Faustian figure who sells his soul to the Devil in the hope of becoming a great author and gaining reputation and fame. The Devil promises

to help Harhama to finish his novel, and Harhama promises to kill the Christian God – his story here takes on Nietzschean tones – and assist the Devil in becoming the most powerful deity. By signing the contract, Harhama commits himself to ‘diabolic’ literature and to a withdrawal from the Christian God. With this pact, Harhama becomes a vehicle of the Devil, a passive recipient of diabolical commands. Whenever Harhama has difficulties in writing, he turns to the Devil for help. The Devil answers his prayers and helps Harhama continue his writing process, enabling creation to proceed smoothly and passionately. His pact with the Devil does not merely help Harhama continue writing at times when he is experiencing writer’s block; the Devil also sends his angels down to earth to reassure Harhama of the need to finish his book. The angels whisper devilish thoughts into Harhama’s ears and make the actual events which Harhama experiences over the course of the novel seem even worse. Harhama tries to live according to the ideas he presents in his book, but gradually he becomes aware that the new religion and world-view he has created cannot be applied to the modern world. He ends up burning his book – an act which also symbolizes the termination of his contract with the Devil. The utopian the power of literature, which Harhama believed to be true from the very beginning of his writing process, has been mixed with dystopian elements of which Harhama himself was initially not aware.

Marshall Berman sees Goethe’s Faust as one of the central figures of the modern world.<sup>15</sup> According to Berman, ‘[t]he only way for a modern man to transform himself, Faust and we will find out, is by radically transforming the whole physical and social and moral world he lives in.’<sup>16</sup> Faust liberates repressed human energies in the society around him, but at great human loss: human powers can be achieved only through dark forces that may exceed

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<sup>15</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

human control.<sup>17</sup> By making Harhama a Faustian figure, Irmari Rantamala brings otherworldly dimensions into the picture of an author – and in this way real, material, actual life is separated from literature. When Harhama burns his *magnum opus*, he also sets fire to this over-ambitious notion of authorship, which aspires to grow greater than real life through the supposed effects of literature on life. Rantamala's novel seems to suggest that Faustian authorship is untimely at the beginning of the twentieth century – his nostalgic return to an old myth is an attempt to renegotiate the status of the author, but, as the novel shows, it ends up in failure.

### **Fabulations of authorship**

Harhama is not the only author-figure who appears in the several novels written by the author-names of Algot Untola. Liisa Vatanen, the female author-name on the unpublished manuscript *Veden haussa* (*Fetching Water*; written before 1910), writes about a young female author with the name of Maiju Laurila. Unlike other authors of her time, Maiju Laurila expresses a wish to describe human beings and their surroundings with the utmost honesty and realism. Maiju says, '[o]thers depict humans as angels, I depict them as themselves. Others can turn a dung beetle into a lion, I describe it as a dung beetle'.<sup>18</sup> Maiju moves to the countryside to live with poor people and to observe them from the perspective of a naturalistic author in the manner of Zola.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Liisa Vatanen, *Veden haussa: Maiju Lassilan käsikirjoitukset* (*Fetching Water: The Manuscripts of Maiju Lassila*), Helsinki, Suomen Kansalliskirjasto (The National Library of Finland, n. d.), 92.

These fictional author-figures are one of Untola's instruments for discussing the contours of authorship, and for providing several different models of being an author. But in his practice of creating authors as characters, Untola goes to extreme levels, since he also uses his different authorial names for characters in many of his novels. In other words, Untola creates fictional lives, and fictional biographical information, for his many authorial names. The lives of these fictional authors are treated as *biographemes*; that is, in Roland Barthes's terminology, as compilations of some significant details.<sup>19</sup> The connection between the problematic relation of life and literature, which preoccupied European authors at the turn of the twentieth century, and Untola's peculiar practice of providing fictional lives for fictional authors, who were nevertheless part of the 'real' world (because of the books that carried their names), is intriguing. My claim is that Untola's polyonymous authorship attempts to renegotiate the relationship between life and art by asking 'whose life?' and 'what is the life of an author?'

As I stated above, Untola never published anything as Algot Untola. In a sense, he wanted to remain unknown, anonymous, as 'himself'. So we can say that he wanted to separate his own life as Algot Untola entirely from literature and publicity. As Algot Untola, he wished to remain absent from all the writings he signed with several other names. This fact can be related to Foucault's notion of authorship in writing. Foucault writes that 'the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the *singularity of his absence*; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing'.<sup>20</sup> I argue that, in the case of polyonymous authorship, the fictional authorial name is precisely the site of the singularity of the absent author – the authorial signature paradoxically points to the absence of the 'real' author, but

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Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', 143; emphasis added.

simultaneously, this absence becomes singular through the act of naming, and of giving birth to a particular fictional author(-name). Referring to Foucault's statement quoted above, Giorgio Agamben comments that 'the author is present in the text only as a gesture that makes expression possible precisely by establishing a central emptiness within this expression.'<sup>21</sup> Instead of giving the real author the 'role of the dead man', I insist that the real author is alive in his/her authorial signature, *as* a gesture, as a mark of his/her creative impulses and aesthetic choices. Untola's complex authorial practice is a case in point.

I also want to suggest that the dialectical tension between absence and presence of the author can be connected to the concept of utopia. If the author is absent, he/she is situated nowhere, he/she is located in a no-place. The etymological roots of 'utopia' refer both to *ouí-topos* – 'no-place' – but also to *eú-topos* – 'the place of happiness' – as Louis Marin has observed.<sup>22</sup> The presence of the real author in the authorial signature can be named as a happy place, a place of creation. In the case of Untola's authorship, I emphasize the importance of joy: authorship is a place of happiness, since Untola creates a collective authorship through his polyonymity. By creating a multiplicity of authorial names, Untola also enhances his own situatedness in no-place, since his own identity can be hidden in the midst of the collective. The joy of creating authors becomes a comical gesture in the real world too, as one biographemic incident of the life of Algot Untola reveals: as Irmari Rantamala, Untola was a member of the Finnish Workers' Association, while, as Maiju Lassila, he was a member of the Laundry-Workers' Union.

This collective nature of Untola's authorial names and the creation of fictional lives can be linked to the concept of *fabulation*, as theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; in

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Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 66.

Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (New York: Humanity Books, 1984), 22.

Deleuze and Guattari's theory, the concept of utopia can be substituted with that of fabulation, since fabulation emphasizes imagination and the creation of something new that does not stem from reminiscence or fantasy.<sup>23</sup> The concept of fabulation also presents itself as deeply political, since Deleuze connects fabulation with the invention and creation of a social collective.<sup>24</sup> Deleuze and Guattari call this collective, which authors and other artists fabulate in their works, 'people to come' ('peuple à venir').<sup>25</sup> In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze writes about 'a people who are missing': it is therefore the task of the artist to invent a people.<sup>26</sup> The force of fabulation lies in its affirmation of a people and a politics to come, as Gregory Flaxman writes.<sup>27</sup> The polyonymous authorship of Algot Untola, the creation of the multiplicity of authorial names and the fabulations of fictional lives of these authors can be regarded as a version of 'inventing a people', namely a collective of authors-to-come.

Algot Untola himself wished to stay (as it were) in no-place, but that did not prevent him from creating a biographeme of the life of Irmari Rantamala. In an unpublished, undated, and untitled manuscript, which was later named *Ville Sorsan romaani* (*The Novel of Ville Sorsa*) by a Finnish literary critic,<sup>28</sup> Irmari Rantamala, a minor character in the novel, appears as an unpleasant man, who visits a brothel. Another scene depicts Irmari Rantamala giving a

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Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (New York and London: Verso, 1994), 171.

Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 18–20; Gregory Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze and the Fabulation of Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 226–31.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g., Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 218.

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 216.

<sup>27</sup> Flaxman, *Gilles Deleuze*, 227.

Rafael Koskimies, 'Maiju Lassilan kirjallinen jäämistö' ('The Literary Estate of Maiju Lassila'), in *Juhlakirja J. V. Lehtosen täyttäessä 60 vuotta 8.XII.1943 (In Celebration of the 60th Birthday of J. V. Lehtonen on 8 December 1943)* (Helsinki: SKS, 1943), 120–34.

speech filled with declamatory words, dealing with the importance of good morals and high education. The manuscript also mentions ‘harhama-jumala-ihminen’,<sup>29</sup> ‘harhama-god-man’, which is a direct intertextual link to Rantamala’s *Harhama*; this link makes it clear that this man, who visits prostitutes at night and gives high-flown speeches during the day, is actually Irmari Rantamala, the author of *Harhama* – a pretentious man.

Untola created another text in which Irmari Rantamala is described as having a real life: an advertisement promoting Rantamala’s first novel. The ad tells the reader that Rantamala has lived in the United States for five years, that he had previously worked for the Russian railway network, and that he has written columns and articles for several Finnish and Russian newspapers.<sup>30</sup> When compared to Algot Untola’s biography, nothing in this ad is true. The publishers of Rantamala’s novel also issued a rumour, printed in many Finnish newspapers, according to which Rantamala was supposed to write the first sequel to his novel in French and the second sequel in Chinese!

A whole novel is dedicated to the fabrication of the life of Maiju Lassila, Untola’s female author-name for several published novels and plays. The correspondence between the author’s life and her writing is discussed with irony and humour in Maiju Lassila’s novel *Rakkautta (Love)* (1912), a quasi-autobiographical novel that tells the ‘tragic love stories’ of Maiju Lassila, a seventeen-year-old woman. Maiju wants to be loved by as many young men as possible; the novel, however, makes clear that this silly teenage girl is, in reality, the author of several realist novels and plays depicting rural folk, which can be read by real readers in the real world.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ville Sorsan romaani: Maiju Lassilan käsikirjoitukset (The Novel of Ville Sorsa: The Manuscripts of Maiju Lassila)*, Helsinki, Suomen Kansalliskirjasto (The National Library of Finland, n. d.), 1380.

<sup>30</sup> ‘*Harhaman mainos*’ (‘Advertisement for *Harhama*’), *Uusi Suometar* (May 19 1909).

These fictional lives and anecdotes of Untola's authorial names can be compared to the heteronyms created by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935). Among these, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Alvaro de Campos are perhaps the best known; Pessoa's heteronyms even wrote reviews of each others' writings. Pessoa himself differentiated between a pseudonym and a heteronym, claiming that a pseudonym refers to the personality of the historical writer, whereas heteronymic writing is external to the person of the historical author.<sup>31</sup> Like Pessoa's author-characters, Untola's authorial names function as heteronyms rather than as pseudonyms. In both cases, the creators of the heteronyms wish to question the significance of the practice of signing artworks as a way of indicating a genuine and authentic creator. Simultaneously, the logic of heteronymity takes the power of the signature to extreme levels: the creator of the heteronyms is so powerful that he or she is capable of creating more and more new authors. But perhaps the main force of heteronymity is its ability to point elsewhere; that is, to the separation of the work of fiction from its 'real' creator, and to its potential for stressing the force of fabulation in the creation of new authorial personas.

The impulse for fabulation is not restricted to the creation of biographemes. Algot Untola also developed different styles of writing for his authorial names. Irmari Rantamala's mixture of decadent, symbolic, and modernist conventions, and the extremely serious and deep thematics of his novels, stand in contrast to the humorous and realistic tones of Maiju Lassila's depictions of rural people. J. I. Vatanen, Liisa Vatanen and some other authors of the unpublished manuscripts can be linked to the conventions of naturalism. Polyonymous authorship thus allows Algot Untola to give expression to several different themes and topics, and also enables him to make use of various literary conventions. In a sense, polyonymous

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Darlene J. Sadlier, *An Introduction to Fernando Pessoa: Modernism and the Paradoxes of Authorship* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998); K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110–12.



authorship appears as a variation on the idea of poetry as ‘an escape from personality’<sup>32</sup> which T.S. Eliot would formulate a decade later.<sup>33</sup> In the polyonymous authorship of Untola, his own personality becomes less important than the fabrication of new authors with varying styles and personalities.

### **Polyonymity as resistance**

The novels and plays of Maiju Lassila and the massive novels written by Irmari Rantamala may well be labeled and categorized as belonging to modern realism, or fin-de-siècle literature, or even early modernism. Yet in terms of authorship, Algot Untola and his network of author-names also represent the ethos of the avant-garde. The utopian impulse of the avant-garde lies in the fact that avant-garde authors sought to act in the present moment to effect change, with the probability that they would be understood in the distant future.<sup>34</sup> During his lifetime, and for some decades after his death in 1918, Algot Untola’s polyonymous authorship was not well received or understood – at the worst, his detractors suggested he was suffering from schizophrenia.<sup>35</sup> According to Charles Russell, ‘[a]t the heart of avant-garde aesthetic activity is the dynamic tension between the poles of negation and creation, between the assault on the given world and its aesthetic tradition and the search for the basis of new

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<sup>32</sup> Eliot, T.S., *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 53.

T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 53.

Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud Through Postmodernism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26.

Mikko Saarenheimo, *Kirjailija Algot Untola Porissa sanomalehtimiehenä ‘Harhama’ – romaanin syntymävaiheessa in ‘Eripainos Satakunta XIV:sta 1948’ (The Author Algot Untola Working in Pori as a Journalist at the Time of Birth of the Novel Harhama in ‘Offprint of Satakunta XIV, 1948’)* (sine loco, 1948), 164.

culture and its art.<sup>36</sup> If we understand avant-garde aesthetics in this way, the polyonymous authorship of Untola can be included in it. He only did not appear as a vanguard of a new kind of authorship in Finland, but he also resisted and negated the prevailing notions and practices of authorship.

The early twentieth-century literary field in Finland acknowledged two kinds of authors: authors of ‘high art’, whether realist, modernist or decadent authors, and ‘vernacular writers’. High-art authors were those who usually gained positive critical acclaim, prizes, attention, and appreciation from literary circles and middlebrow readers. Vernacular writers were associated with the lower strata of society, lacking higher education, and were thought to possess a poor knowledge of literary and narrative technique. The authorship of Untola therefore effectively distances itself from the traditional Finnish conception of authorship, as it moves away from both the notion of high art and the category of vernacular literature.

Algot Untola’s resistance to literary culture manifested itself in many ways. In 1911, Maiju Lassila was granted a state award for the best novel. However, she refused to accept this honour. In a letter published in the major Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (*Helsinki News*), she explained her refusal as follows: ‘I never try to write a masterpiece in order to win an award [...] If I should ever succeed in publishing anything in the future, I want to be excluded from all kinds of nominations’.<sup>37</sup> In 1915, Irmari Rantamala, whose first novel *Harhama* had been published six years earlier, wrote a letter to his editor, who had suggested some minor changes to his forthcoming novel. Anticipating a furious reaction, similar to the one that *Harhama* had raised among Finnish readers, the editor proposed

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<sup>36</sup> Russell, *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries*, 34.

Maiju Lassila, ‘Valtion kirjallisuuspalkintolautakunnalle’ (‘To the Board of the State Award of Literature’), *Helsingin Sanomat* (May 21 1911).

changes in style and, tellingly, substantial cuts. Rantamala retorted to his editor: ‘That might be right from your point of view, but, anyway – my writing is faulty: I do not write right.’<sup>38</sup>

The citations above can be read as examples of Untola’s rejection of the pressure put on authors and on the notion of authorship from the publishing industry and the literary establishment. Maiju Lassila did not want to be included in the group of authors acknowledged by the literary elite, and this makes for a useful comparison with the author-figure Harhama in Rantamala’s novel of the same name: in the novel, Harhama wanted to become precisely the type of author that Maiju Lassila denounced, an author of ‘high art’. By refusing to accept the most important official Finnish literary prize, Maiju Lassila publicly dissociated herself from the literary elite. In the letter to the editor quoted above, Irmari Rantamala made it clear that he wanted to follow aesthetic values that were based on his own personal criteria, and which were not defined by the wishes and demands of publishers. Irmari Rantamala did not want to adjust his writing to conform to the aesthetic criteria of his editor.

The authorial signatures of Algot Untola explicitly resisted prevailing notions of authorship in their correspondence with publishers. They collaborated with publishers and editors on a daily basis – their editors would receive several ten-page letters every day. The collective nature of Untola’s polyonymous authorship is characterized by the fact that his different authorial signatures constantly provided comments on the texts written by the other author-names. The letters deal with the texts that Untola has sent to his editors, but they also offer wider thoughts on literature, aesthetics, and other Finnish and international authors.

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<sup>38</sup> Rantamala, Irmari, Kirje kustantajalle January 8, 1915 (‘A Letter to the Publisher’) (Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Kirjallisuusarkisto, Kirjekokoelma) (The Archives of The Finnish Literature Society, Collection of Letters), 137.

A further aspect of Untola's peculiar literary output seems to contradict the resistance to the literary establishment that the multiple author-names consistently practise: while the letters also discuss financial issues concerning payments, the author-names submit themselves to the capitalist rules of the publishing industry. In their letters to the publishers, the author-names constantly worry about advertisements, or about the number of forthcoming publications signed by each one of them: although the authorial signatures wished to publish as many books as possible, they suggest that perhaps propriety dictates an upper limit. When the issue was a financial one, all of Untola's authorial personas were more than willing to follow the rules set by the publishers. But throughout the correspondence, Untola's personas wrote commentaries on the nature of their own authorship and of others. Untola's personas ironically identified as 'proper authors', those who dwelled on artistic and aesthetic dimensions: they wrote masterpieces valued highly by the literary elite, to which the author-names themselves did not want to belong. Instead, they wished to remain, and to be perceived as, faulty and 'incorrect scribblers'.

But as polyonymous authorship moves away from 'proper' authorship, it simultaneously approaches something improper. This 'becoming-improper-author' is already evident in the excessive accumulation of author-names. The sheer amount of names disturbs the conventional region of singular authorship with its multiplicity, but Untola was not the only one to have used multiple names: in the early twentieth century, some Finnish authors used different authorial signatures when they wished to publish works belonging to different literary genres from the ones which defined their authorship: Arvid Järnefelt, for example (who became famous as the author of philosophical and religious novels), used a female pen name to publish romance novels during the 1910s.<sup>39</sup> But Algot Untola was unique in Finland

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Juhani Niemi, *Arvid Järnefelt: Kirjailija ajassa ja ikuisuudessa (Arvid Järnefelt: The Author of Time and Eternity)* (Helsinki: SKS, 2005), 199–200.

for the sheer quantity of author-names that he created and used. One or perhaps two author-names was the accepted norm. By publishing under multiple names, Algot Untola willingly presented himself as a literary forger, a con artist and improper author who was making fun of the serious business of literature. This attitude can be compared to the practice of some European avant-garde groups, such as Dada. According to Luca Somigli, avant-garde authors, especially within Dada, happily abandoned the ‘artistic halo’ and the special position of the author as master which was so important to modernist authors. This quasi-mystical halo was equated with the notion of literature as an institution, with its norms and regulations, all of which the avant-gardists wished to overturn.<sup>40</sup>

### **In the name of the author**

The polyonymous authorship of Algot Untola seems to resist various practices connected to authorial names and the constitution of authorship. According to John Frow, much of twentieth-century art was concerned with a struggle to displace or contest the logic of an aesthetics based on the original signature of the artist.<sup>41</sup> Algot Untola’s authorship clearly takes part in this struggle. Acts of resistance and protest can be categorized as *reactive* gestures, since they compile a series of actions aimed against something already existing. But polyonymous authorship marks also the beginning of something new and active, a striving urge to outline new dimensions into the regime of authorship and to argue for the potentialities of becoming-author.

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<sup>40</sup> Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist*, 13.

John Frow, ‘The Signature: Three Arguments about the Commodity Form’, in Helen Grace, ed., *Aesthesia and the Economy of the Senses* (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 1996), 151–200 at 179.

Each one of Algot Untola's author-names becomes singular because of the ways his names and writings differ from one another. This means that they can all be treated as individualized authors with various distinctive features, styles and attitudes. But at the same time they clearly form a *collective*. In the correspondence, all the authorial signatures make constant cross-references to the writings of other author-names. Sometimes the authorial signatures make confusing statements; for example, when a letter signed by J. I. Vatanen explains the artistic choices of Maiju Lassila by using the first-person-pronoun or vice versa. This splitting and intermingling of the author-names inaugurates processes of becoming-other, of becoming-collective.

Although the system of authorial names is regulated by various norms and rules, much can be done in the name of the author, as the case of the polynomous authorship of Algot Untola shows. This type of authorship does not follow the tenets of self-expressing subjectivity maintained by the notions of authorship up until the beginning of the twentieth century. On the contrary, polyonymous authorship paradoxically functions as an escape from subjective personality and, as such, constantly deterritorializes the informative and rigid functions of authors' names. This operation of polyonymous authorship works as a critique of the status of authorship in early twentieth-century Finnish literature, where author-names are taken for granted as signs of genuine, authentic representations of personality and as a sign of ownership. The politics of polyonymous authorship wishes to reside in the margins of literary life. It also denies the power of one name to act as a signal of the possession of creative actions and products. Polyonymity becomes also a political and social tool for inventing new ways of becoming-authors. Polyonymity means fabulating a whole collective of authors, an author-people-to-come.

At the beginning of my chapter, I referred to Michel Foucault's essay and especially to Foucault's idea that the author takes 'the role of the dead man in the game of writing': as I said, I disagree with Foucault here, since the author is present in his signature as a gesture, which is the mark of his creativity. However, towards the end of the Finnish Civil War in 1918, Algot Untola became literally a 'dead man'. He was imprisoned and sentenced to death because of his writings as Irmari Rantamala, the editor of the left-wing newspaper *The Worker*. The principle of law linked to the authorial name became materialized when he was shot dead. There is a deep but sad irony in the fact that Algot Untola was convicted and made accountable for what Irmari Rantamala had written. It does matter who is authoring – it is not always evident, however, who that who is.

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