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### IMITATION IN THE POETIC TEXT

#### 1.

Imitation is an old inter-semiotic phenomenon which has connected different cultural periods, different cultures and different works of art, so we may say that imitation is a cultural crossroads in a different sense. Although imitation can convey negative meanings, for example plagiarism, copying or counterfeiting, it is also an active human modelling process which has generated and continues to generate variegated and changing cultural forms [6, 128].

The roots of the treatments of imitation extend to antiquity and are key elements in Plato's and Aristotle's work. As we know, the term 'imitation' is also connected with the term 'mimesis', which was used by both philosophers. There are two types of mimesis according to Plato: the first represents the physical objects artistically, and the second represents the ideas inwardly [see 7, 282–310]. According to Plato's paradoxical opinion the artist who creates imitations of the physical objects seems to be some kind of deceiver: "Imitation, then, is far from the truth, and apparently it manages to make all things just because it attacks only a small part of each, and that an image. The painter, for example, will paint us, we say, a shoemaker, a carpenter, and all other workmen, though he has no knowledge whatever of their crafts. But nevertheless, if he is a good painter, he may paint a carpenter and show the thing at some distance, and so cheat children and stupid men into thinking it is really a carpenter" [ibid., 286]. Plato's idea was that all represented things are already imitations, and consequently art is far from knowledge. Or as Worton and Still have written: "In the case of Platonic imitation, the 'poet' always copies an earlier act of creation, which is itself already a copy" [12, 3]. So, an artist represents only the copy of the idea of the object, i.e. art is a double lie.

Aristotle believes that mimesis is governed by the rules of its form rather than by the accuracy with which it represents the object: he means that the arts differ in the methods through which they create imitations. Three phenomena are very important for Aristotle, when he speaks of imitation: "those of the means, the

object, and the manner" [1, 225] or in other words by which, what and how they imitate. Aristotle stresses: "To *imitate* is instinctive in man from his infancy. (...) All men, likewise, naturally receive pleasure from imitation. This is evident from what we experience in viewing the works of imitative art (...) Imitation, then, being thus natural to us, and, secondly, melody and rhythm being also natural (for as to metre, it is plainly a species of rhythm), those persons in whom originally these propensities were the strongest, were naturally led to rude and extemporaneous attempts, which, gradually improved, gave birth to Poetry" [ibid., 226].

I agree with Mary Orr's opinion that, although Platonic and Aristotelian theories are different, they are "none the less on the same side of culture against nature as prototype. Mimesis in either its Platonic or Aristotelian form thus situates art respectively as either an illusion or an imitation of nature" [6, 96]. Mimetic value is dichotomous: it is both true and false "...because mimesis depends not on innate aesthetic or ethical criteria, but on supplemental systems of qualifying values related to a given cultural moment... (...) All cultural forms are therefore in the thrall of imitation's double act, its *dichotomously* similar heritage harking back to Plato and Aristotle" [ibid.]. Consequently, as different studies [6; 12] have suggested, neither Plato nor Aristotle understood imitation as imitation of nature. It seems both Plato and Aristotle explicate imitation as a cultural phenomenon, and both of their philosophical viewpoints contain possibilities for different theories throughout literary history, including an inter-textual relationship through literary imitation: although the term 'inter-textuality' has existed from the 1960s, the phenomenon is in fact much older, perhaps as old as human society and culture [see also 12, 2]. Worton and Still believe that inter-textual relations are characteristic of all discourses about texts [ibid.]. Concerning imitation, they write that "Every literary imitation is a *supplement* which seeks to complete and supplant the original and which functions at times for later readers as the pre-text of the 'original'. (...) ...each imitation is also necessarily determined by the literary and socio-linguistic codes in force at the time of its writing (and, analogously, of its reading)" [ibid., 7]. Worton and Still speak about tension between two idiolects and two or more sociolects in an imitative text [ibid.]. At the same time, the imitation is not only imitation but also an act of interpretation which depends on the writing and reading process and "implies and depends upon a process of transformation" [ibid., 6].

Consequently there are different modes and purposes for imitation in poetic text at different times. Genette stresses the renewable energy of imitation, and the aspects of invention and imitation in the pre-modern sense of invention [see 4, 73–75], i.e. “the discovery of appropriate material to imitate. Worthy material is then arranged anew, yet in accordance with pre-disposed parameters (*dispositio*)” [6, 108]. It seems the two poles are in contact in imitation: the static and dynamic or the old and the new. The contact between those two poles also creates a tension between old and new. It seems the older aspect has a static and balancing function, although it is changed in the new context. That balancing and static function promotes recognition. I’d like to illustrate this theoretical statement through Estonian poet Kristian Jaak Peterson’s poems.

## 2.

Peterson wrote his poems at the beginning of the 19th century. He was born in Riga in 1801 and he was only 21 years old when he died in 1822 in Riga. He wrote only two collections of poems: *Songs in Riga* (“Kristiani Jago Petersoni laulud. Rialinnas”, 1818) and *Songs in Tartu* (“Kristiani Jago Petersoni laulud. Tartolinnas, 1819”), as well as some poems in German, which were published posthumously.

Imitation is a very important phenomenon in Peterson’s poetic style. Different predecessors influenced him. In fact, it was more than influence, as his verses often imitated the predecessors’ styles. Although imitation and influence are connected and sometimes also similar in some ways, we can still perceive the differences between the two phenomena. Perhaps T.S. Eliot captured the essence of the difference quite precisely: “...poet of the supreme greatness of Shakespeare can hardly influence, he can only be imitated: and the difference between influence and imitation is that influence can fecundate, whereas imitation – especially unconscious imitation – can only sterilize. (...) Besides, imitation of a writer in a foreign language can often be profitable – because we cannot succeed” [2, 18].

Concerning Kristian Jaak Peterson’s poetry, we can see that Eliot’s words are at least partially applicable. Of course, Peterson’s models were the ancient greats, Pindar, Vergil, Anacreon etc. and there is more imitation than influence that connects the ancient poets and Peterson. But at the same time, there is imitation in the foreign languages (antique languages and German), and

the result of Peterson's imitation is something new: Peterson's poetry was discovered and became understandable to Estonian readers only at the beginning of the 20th century. Peterson broke new ground for innovations in national poetry, but those innovations were realized only in the 20th century: during the intermediate years in the 19th century he was forgotten. Although Peterson imitated great and well-known predecessors, his work was not well known to Estonian readers during his life, and although he wrote also in German, his innovations were too strange for Germans. In Peterson's case, a readership which could model itself on the pattern of the poet was absent and the poet did not construct himself according to the pattern of a readership. The tragedy of Peterson was due to the absence of a possible Estonian readership and maybe to the poet's own extreme individualism. However, through imitation of the life style of ancient Greek cynics, he created an original figure of romantic rebellion, for whom rebellion was a normal state, not just the role or the figure of the poet as the Romanticism of the 19th century assumed. Rebellious individualism became the normal human state in the 20th century, but the prelude to that phenomenon occurred in the period of Romanticism. Perhaps this explains why Peterson was discovered only in the 20th century, a discovery which also led to the birth of national myths and other unexpected meanings.

### 3.

There are 14 poems in his first collection of poems, written in Riga: four pastoral poems, two anacreontic poems and eight odes. Peterson imitated the form of Pindar's odes in his poems, as Jaan Undusk has also suggested [10, 13]. Peterson imitated and interpreted previous ancient texts, an imitation which resulted from the influence of poets of who were Peterson's contemporaries (poets who were connected with the *Sturm und Drang* movement). The imitation was clearly not unconscious because Peterson had had a classical European education, which shaped his worldview and understanding of poetry.

His first collection begins with an epigraph from Horatius' first ode, from his first book of odes, where the poet's poetic 'ego' is on the same level as the ancient gods and it is important that the poet gives prominence to himself: in the ancient poem the gods and mankind are equal:

*Me doctarum hederæ præmia frontium  
 Dis miscent superis: me gelidum nemus  
 Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori  
 Secernunt populo (..)*

*Quod si me Lyricis vatibus inseris  
 Sublimi feriam sidera vertice.*

Horat. Od. I, I [5, 33]

The epigraph perfectly suits not only K.J. Peterson's ideas and individualism but the *Sturm und Drang* movement as a whole. It is a sign of romantic rebellion too, because the poet as a man has been placed on the same level as God. At the same time, it is an allusion to ancient culture as a paragon and, it is my hypothesis, it may be an allusion to pagan culture or in the sense of the early 19th century, an allusion to the extra-cultural sphere, from which Peterson and other rebels took new signs. I think that the emphasis is on essential values, not on formal perfection as in traditional classicism and here lies the main difference from earlier poetry.

It seems there are different reasons why Estonian poet Peterson used imitation of antiquity. Through the imitations which Peterson used we can see that, at the beginning of the 19th century, different signs of culture were crossing. It was a time when European culture looked in different directions.

The 19th century was a time when J.G. Herder's ideas became widely disseminated. According to J.G. Herder, every culture and every age has its own unique character and distinctive way of thinking. For Herder, language is a living organism and he considers it also inseparable from a particular culture. These thoughts of Herder's express the idea of dialogism with the 'other' or 'foreign', which means, as Jüri Talvet describes it, that European culture transgresses its own boundaries; European culture discovered the 'other' in the period of Romanticism in the 19th century and the boundary line between the 'native' and 'foreign' is the place where dialogue and dynamic processes occur. Those processes are also unexpected and surprising [9, 380–381].

At the same time a cultural hierarchy existed which, in the Estonian (and also in the Baltic) context, ranked German literature as high culture; Estonian literature was not seen as culture at all because it did not yet exist. Likewise, the

German language was a cultural language and Estonian was not a written or cultural language. This hierarchy of oppositions could be further elaborated.

The German literary movement *Sturm und Drang*, of the late 18th century, brought into high culture new signs from the extra-cultural sphere – exalted nature, feeling, German folk songs, Shakespeare, human individualism – and sought to overthrow the Enlightenment culture of Rationalism. Herder's ideas inspired Goethe and other members of the movement. Although the Estonian poet Kristian Jaak Peterson was not a member of *Sturm und Drang*, he was familiar with Herder's ideas and he knew German poets, who served as examples for him. But as Jaan Undusk has mentioned, Peterson was egocentric and can be compared to Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz [see also 8, 820].

In my opinion, he should rather be likened to the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), because both of them were rebels, out of the mainstream, and in their separation they were naturally egocentric as well. Perhaps their Romantic individualism was more natural or innate than the figure of the poet created by Byron ever was. It is interesting that the direct influence of Byron on Peterson and Hölderlin has not previously been noted. Their rebellion was, first of all, poetic and poetic rebellion was valued in the 20th century: Hölderlin's in German poetry and Peterson's in Estonian poetry [10, 19]. The German literary movement *Sturm und Drang* and the lone rebels K.J. Peterson and F. Hölderlin were among the first predecessors of Romanticism. The rebellions of *Sturm und Drang* gave prominence to poets as human beings on a high level, but works of literature were meant for the rest of mankind. Enlightening was the mission of poets [3, 101].

The sentences in Peterson's odes are very long and complicated. As Ene Vainik has pointed out, only superior beings could understand what Peterson wanted to say; for common people, the poems were difficult to comprehend [11]. Long sentences and complicated expressions in Estonian demonstrated the potential of the language. For example, the most rebellious ode from the Riga cycle is "The Moon", or "Der Mond" in German. In this poem the poet poses questions about the Estonian language and the spirit of the nation. I think it is a prediction of national romanticism later in the 19th century:

Kuu	Der Mond
Kas siis selle maa keel	Kann dieses Landes Sprache da
Laulo tules ei voi	Nicht im Wind der Lieder
Taevani toustes üles	Zum Himmel sich erhöh'n,
Iggavust ommale otsida?	Für sich die Ewigkeit zu suchen?
[5, 43]	[5, 115, trans. by Gisbert Jänicke]

On the one hand, Peterson's imitation of antiquity in Estonian was an attempt to raise Estonian language and culture to the same level as the high culture of antiquity, but on the other hand his imitative poetry related to the German literature of his time. The last kind of imitation is like a feature of a genre in Gérard Genette's sense because it demonstrates that imitation exists in every literary work and we create the systems in our mind if we recognize the similar features of different literary works. Thus we create literary histories.

In pastoral poems, Peterson imitates the language of folk songs and represents local landscapes and people, but the landscapes in his poetry are idealized and Peterson uses heightened style in his descriptions. This is the representation of extra-cultural signs – Peterson transforms the descriptions of local landscapes and the signs of folk song language into high cultural versification, and for that reason these signs attain a new meaning. For example, local landscapes and nature may be beautiful and lovely, not comfortless. When Peterson wrote in Estonian, he used classical forms of versification and, in his poetry, there are many influences from the German language and German poetry, as Ene Vainik has argued. For example, he used the future tense and diminutives [11], i.e. he imitated somewhat the German language. This demonstrates that Peterson wanted to lift the Estonian language and poetry to the same level as the German language; in other words, he wanted to destroy the cultural hierarchy. Peterson's transformations of ancient culture demonstrate the potential for play with the values of canonized culture. This would serve as a pattern for modern poetry.

Peterson transforms the high cultural poetic forms into the extra-cultural sphere, and, consequently he composes quite complicated poems in the Estonian language, in which he wrote most of his poetry. That fact is very important for Estonian culture because at that time the Estonian language was not canonised as a written or cultural language. It was located in the extra-cultural

sphere as the 'other', the 'foreign' or was even seen as exotic from the perspective of European high culture.

### Conclusion

Kristian Jaak Peterson's imitative poetry demonstrates how imitation or, more precisely, the imitative aspect can be an innovative phenomenon. Although Peterson was a great imitator, he was also a great innovator because his poetry connects very different high cultural and, if we think within the context of the time, even extra-cultural, signs. And thanks to his originality, those signs, which were extra-cultural at the beginning of the 19th century, are cultural in the 20th and 21st century. At the same time it seems that imitation can be innovative if the imitation is not total, but rather exists in the text as a fragmentary aspect.

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## Anneli Miheleva Imitācija poētiskā tekstā

### Kopsavilkums

Imitācija jeb atdarināšana ir ļoti sena intersemiotiska parādība, kas vieno dažādus kultūras periodus, dažādas kultūras un dažādus mākslas darbus. Autore aplūko imitācijas (mimēzes) problemātiku Platona un Aristoteļa mācībā un tās interpretācijas mūsdienu semiotikā un literatūrzinātnē. Imitācija nav vienkārša atdarināšana, tā saistīta arī ar interpretācijas aktu, kas savukārt sakņojas rakstīšanas un lasīšanas procesos.

Dažādos laikos poētiskajos tekstos bijuši sastopami dažādi imitācijas veidi un nolūki. Imitācijā var izšķirt divas galējības, divus polus: statisko un dinamisko, veco un jauno. Imitācijas procesā starp šiem poliem allaž pastāv zināms spriegums. Šos teorētiskos apgalvojumus autore ilustrē, balstoties uz Rīgā dzīvojušā igauņu dzejnieka Kristjana Jāka Petersona (1801–1822) literāro mantojumu – imitācijai bija nozīmīga vieta viņa daiļradē. Autore parāda K.J. Petersona imitāciju inovatīvos aspektus igauņu kultūras kontekstā.