

# **Estonian Literature**

## **I**

### **Estonian Language, Prosody, and Runic Verse**

### **Etnofuturism, Dialect Literature**



# Topographic Map of Estonia



# Administrative Map of Estonia



## Estonians and Their Language

- The ancestors of Estonians arrived from Central Europe at the Baltic Sea after the last Ice Age, about 10-13 000 years ago.
- *Tharaconta* was mentioned in the *Cosmographia* by Aethius Ister in 8th century AD; *Aestii* in the *Germania* by Tacitus (55-120 AD).
- The Estonian language belongs to the Finnic branch of Finno-Ugric group of languages; Finnish, Hungarian and Estonian are the best known.
- Smaller languages of the language group are: South Estonian, Votian, Livonian, Izhorian, Vepsian, Karelian, Sami, Erzya, Moksha, Mari, Udmurt and Komi, spoken from Scandinavia to Siberia.
- About 1 100 000 people speaks Estonian, 950 000 live in homeland, 150 000 in Sweden, Canada, USA, Russia, Australia, Finland, Germany and elsewhere.

The crusades against the Estonians are described in the early 13th century in the Latin chronicle *Henrici Chronicon Livoniae* (~1124-1127) .



## The first continuous Estonian texts date from the 16th century.

- The first book from 1525 has not survived.
- The Lutheran catechism was published in 1535.
- The first Estonian literary pieces were compiled in the 17th century by pastors Georg Müller, Heinrich Stahl, etc.
- The New Testament was published in the Southern dialect in 1686.
- In 1739, the complete Estonian Bible was published in the Northern dialect.
- Standard Estonian has been formed from the Northern and Southern dialects in the mid-19th century.

# Sound

- The Estonian language is rich in vowels: the vowel-consonant rate is 45:55.
- The 26 Estonian phonemes include 9 vowels, 36 diphthongs can be formed.
- Vowels can carry a meaning: *öö* ‘night’, *õue* ‘to the yard’, *ei* ‘no’.
- Combinations like *jääär* ‘edge of the ice’, *töööö* ‘work-night’, *kuuurija* ‘moon researcher’ are possible.
- The language does not like consonant clusters, especially the initial ones.
- The main stress falls on the first syllable, the secondary stress on odd syllables.
- Stressed syllables are either long or short.
- A short stressed syllable ends in a short monophthong.
- A long stressed syllable has either a short monophthong followed by consonant(s) or a long monophthong or a diphthong.
- All this contributes to a sonorous prosody which is basically trochaic or dactylic.

# Vocabulary

- The ratio of Finno-Ugric and the loan stems is about 50:50.
- Without words with Greek and Latin origin, the share of Estonian stems reaches 2/3.
- ~150 Early Baltic loan stems (2nd millennium BC onwards).
- ~300-400 Early Germanic loan stems (up to the 13th century).
- ~800 Low German loan stems (13th century onwards): *kool* 'school', *tiik* 'pool'.
- ~150 Swedish loan stems (13th century onwards: *juust* 'cheese', *plika* 'girl', *tont* 'ghost', *Taara* 'Thor').
- ~350 Slavic loan stems (14th century onwards: *raamat* 'book', *aken* 'window', *kapsas* 'cabbage', *lusikas* 'spoon').
- ~500 High Germanic loan stems (16th century onwards: *lihvima* 'to polish', *sink* 'ham').
- Estonia has also been influenced by Dutch, French and English.
- The majority of Russian loans are old; only few Soviet words have survived: *kolhoos*, *sovhoos*, *komsomol*, *parteisekretär*.



# Characteristic features

- 14 productive cases.
- No gender either of nouns or personal pronouns.
- 3rd person pronoun *ta/tema* refers to both male and female or even to a thing.
- No articles, either definite or indefinite.
- 3 quantities both in vowels and consonants (the meaning and the pronunciation of the 2nd and 3rd quantities are not distinguished in writing).
- 1st quantity: *koli* ‘trash’.
- 2nd quantity: *kooli* ‘of school’, *kolli* ‘bogey’s’.
- 3rd quantity: *kooli* ‘to school’, *kolli* ‘to bogey’.

# Morphology

- About 100 derivative **affixes**, mainly **suffixes**.
- **Agglutinative** language: the morphemes are joined to word stems.
- **Inflexional** language: the morphemes have several meanings.
- **Stem alternations** (like *man:men* in English; *Hand:Hände* in German).
- **Quantity alternation** of long stressed syllables: 3rd quantity, the strong grade, alternates with the 2nd quantity, the weak grade.
- **Quality alternation**: the loss of the consonants.
- **Weakening gradation**: *laat* (Nom.):*laada* (Gen.):*laata* (Part.) ‘market’;  
*härg:härja:härga* ‘ox’; *saag:sae:saagi* ‘saw’; *üks:ühe:üht* ‘one’; *sada:saja:sada* ‘hundred’; *lõug:lõua:lõuga* ‘jaw’; *uba:oa:uba* ‘bean’;  
*uus:uue:uut* ‘new’.
- **Strengthening gradation**: *hüpe:hüppe:hüpet* ‘jump’; *tahe:tahte:tahet* ‘will’; *võti:võtme:võtit* ‘key’; *vanne:vande:vannet* ‘oath’; *pale:palge:palet* ‘cheek’; *sammal:sambla:sammalt* ‘moss’.

# Cases

## Grammatical cases

- |               |             |  |
|---------------|-------------|--|
| 1. Nominative | ilus maja   | (a) beautiful house                      |
| 2. Genitive   | ilusa maja  | of a beautiful house; a house as a whole |
| 3. Partitive  | ilusat maja | a house as a partial object              |

# Semantic cases

## Interior local cases

- |             |                    |                        |
|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 4. Illative | ilusa-sse maja-sse | into a beautiful house |
| 5. Inessive | ilusa-s maja-s     | in a beautiful house   |
| 6. Elative  | ilusa-st maja-st   | from a beautiful house |

## Exterior local cases

- |             |                  |                           |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 7. Allative | ilusa-le maja-le | onto a beautiful house    |
| 8. Adessive | ilusa-l maja-l   | on a beautiful house      |
| 9. Ablative | ilusa-lt maja-lt | from on a beautiful house |

## Other cases

- |                 |                  |                                  |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 10. Translative | ilusa-ks maja-ks | (to turn) into a beautiful house |
| 11. Terminative | ilusa maja-ni    | up to a beautiful house          |
| 12. Essive      | ilusa maja-na    | as a beautiful house             |
| 13. Abessive    | ilusa maja-ta    | without a beautiful house        |
| 14. Comitative  | ilusa maja-ga    | with a beautiful house           |

# Verb

- The *present*, *past simple*, *present perfect* and *past perfect* are distinguished.
- The analytical *future* also occurs on the model of *werden*-future: the inflected verb *saama* ‘to get’, ‘to become’ + the supine of other verb: *saab olema* ‘will be’, *saab tulema* ‘will come’, etc.
- Verbs are conjugated in the *active* and *passive voice*, and *indicative*, *imperative*, *conditional* and *indirect mood*, in the *affirmative* and *negative form*.

# Syntax

- Finno-Ugric languages use mainly postpositions: *laua all* ‘the table under’, *teed mööda* ‘the way along’; sometimes prepositions: *mööda teed* ‘along the way’.
- Word order is relatively free: the grammatical relations between words are signalled by the case endings, not only by the syntactical positions.
- The principal structure of a sentence is subject–predicate–object.
- Word order can still be quite flexible: the 4-word sentence *Taevas nähti tihti tähti* ‘stars were often seen in the sky’ can be meaningfully modified in 24 different ways.

- *Taevas nähti tihti tähti*
- *Taevas nähti tähti tihti*
- *Taevas tihti tähti nähti*
- *Taevas tihti nähti tähti*
- *Taevas tähti nähti tihti*
- *Taevas tähti tihti nähti*
- *Nähti taevas tihti tähti*
- *Nähti taevas tähti tihti*
- *Nähti tihti taevas tähti*
- *Nähti tihti tähti taevas*
- *Nähti tähti tihti taevas*
- *Nähti tähti taevas tihti*

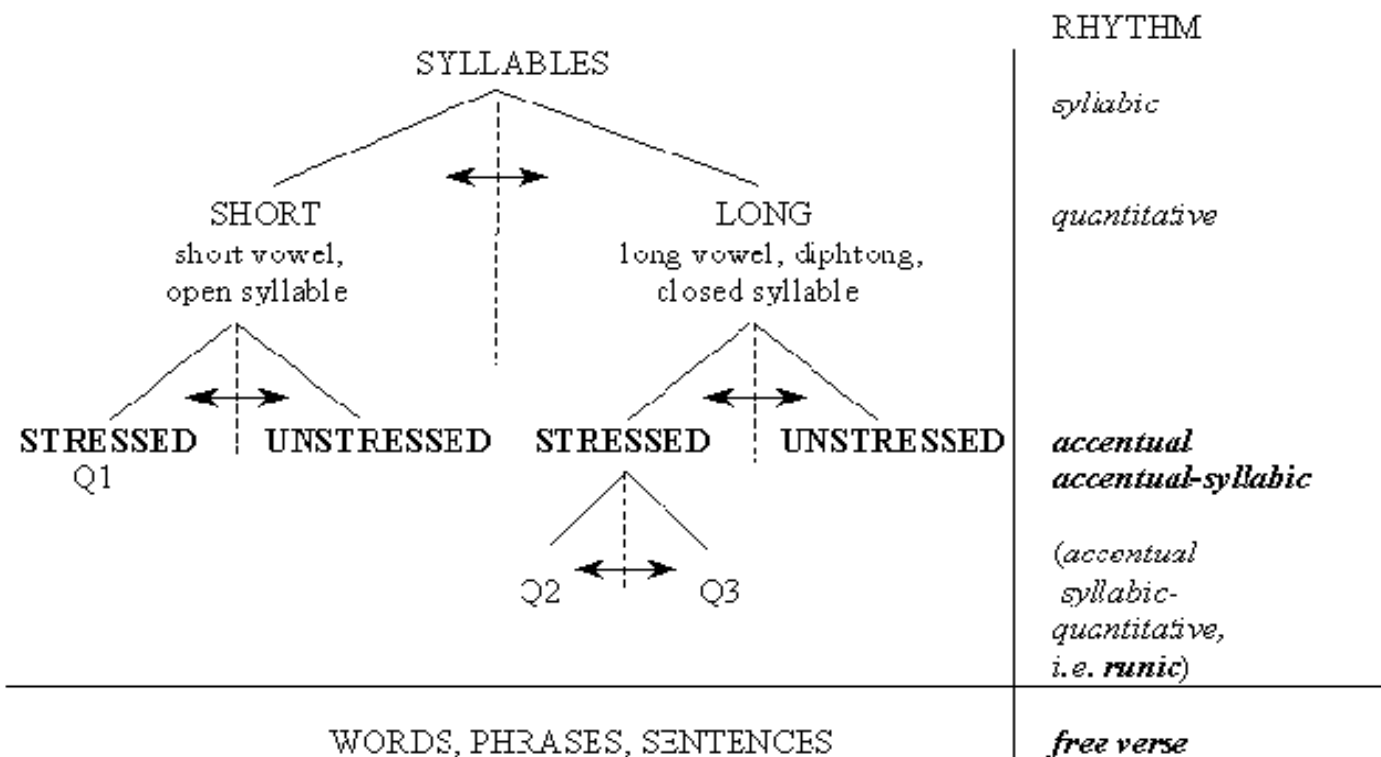
- *Tihti taevas nähti tähti*
- *Tihti taevas tähti nähti*
- *Tihti tähti taevas nähti*
- *Tihti tähti nähti taevas*
- *Tihti nähti tähti taevas*
- *Tihti nähti taevas tähti*
- *Tähti nähti taevas tihti*
- *Tähti nähti tihti taevas*
- *Tähti taevas tihti nähti*
- *Tähti taevas nähti tihti*
- *Tähti tihti taevas nähti*
- *Tähti tihti nähti taevas*

# Estonian Prosody and Folk Song

- Estonian prosody enables 5 main metrical systems with their combinations: the *syllabic*, the *accentual*, the *accentual-syllabic*, the *quantitative* (the accentual-quantitative in Greek or Latin translations, the *accentual-syllabic-quantitative* in the case of runic verse), and the *free verse*.
- Still pure *syllabic* or *quantitative* systems are rare while the majority of poems is created on the basis of the oppositions between stressed and unstressed syllables, i.e. they are *accentual*, or in the *free verse*.



## Estonian Prosody



- The **primary stress** is on the first, the **secondary stress** on the odd syllable:

*päev* 'day', *i-sa* 'father', *maa-ilm* 'world', *va-na-e-ma* 'grandmother', *ko-du-ne* 'homy', *pü-ha-lik-kus* 'solemnity', **vas-tan-da-ta-va-te-le-gi** 'even to ones being confronted'

But: *pa-ra-ne-mi-se* 'of recovery', *en-näe i-ni-mest!* 'ecce homo!', *ai-täh* 'thanks'

- Many newer borrowings have still the **primary stress** on a non-first syllable:

*so-nett*, *de-mok-raa-ti-a*, *me-ta-mor-foos*, *im-pe-ri-a-lism*.

•Short syllables consist of a **short vowel**

and are **open** (i.e. do not end with a consonant):

*sa* 'you', *va-na-i-sa* 'grandfather', *ta-lu* 'farm',

*i-lu-sas-ti* 'beautifully', *hü(p)-pa(t)-ta* 'to jump'

•Long syllables consist of a **long vowel**, a **diphthong**

or are **closed** (i.e. end with a consonant):

*kes* 'who', *tæ-vas* 'sky', *öö-bi(k)-kud* 'nightingales',

*i-mes-ta-ma* 'to wonder', *bal-laad*, *su-re-lik-kus* 'mortality'

- In **accentual** verses, the **stressed** syllables are *juxtaposed* to **unstressed** ones
- In **quantitative** verses (ancient Finno-Ugric, Greek, Latin, Sanskrit) the **relatively longer** (and usually stressed) syllables are *juxtaposed* to **relatively shorter** ones
- In **syllabic** verse (alexandrine, romance, haiku), the syllables are *not juxtaposed*, only *counted*
- In **free verse**, the syllables are prosodically *not juxtaposed*

## Singing Estonians

- The Novgorod Chronicle (1071): *In these years and times a Novgorodian had to come to the land of the Chud and he came to visit a wizard, wishing to get prophecies from him; this man however started to call devils into his adobe according to his customs.*
- Saxo Grammaticus (1172): *After that they sharpened spiked pickets for stabbing, took care to collect rocks suitable for throwing, and that it might not seem that their morale had been affected in any way, they in a bacchanal way with song and dance feigned joy, while the Danes spent a sad night in silence.*

•The Livonian Chronicle (1208): *The Estonians... for many days collected and cremated the pitiful bodies... and held funerals, according to their custom, with much wailing and much drinking.*

•(1227): *The Christian army rejoices, cries out, and implores God. The enemy also cries out, rejoicing in Tarapitha. The Christians call upon Jesus, the enemy upon the sacred grove.*

•Balthasar Russow (1584): *Thereafter, as they left church just as knowledgeable and wise as before, they again went to boozing, dancing, singing, and jumping, thus that for all their shrieking, and the singing of women and maidens, and also the hooting of the many bagpipes, one could lose sight and hearing.*

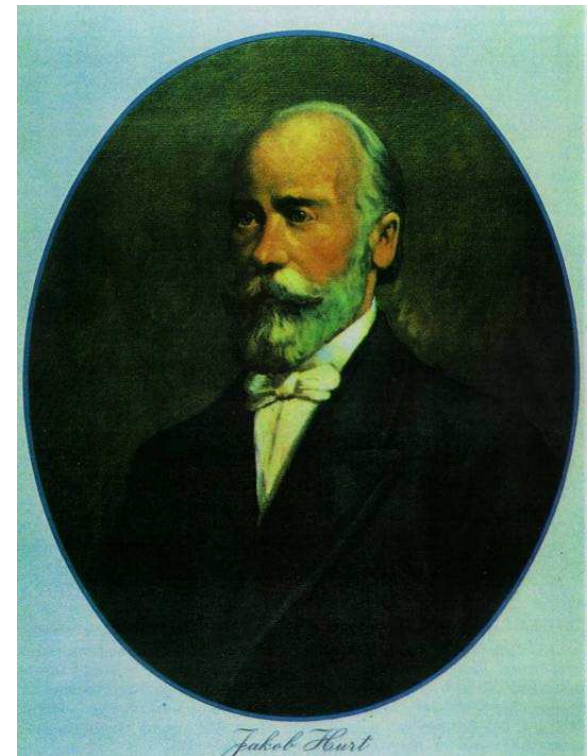
# Wedding party in a Livonian inn



•A traveling diplomat (1721): *On the road during harvesttime, as I met the reapers on the field... I heard wild singing everywhere, which they engage in during their work, and gathered from a preacher that these were still old heathen songs without rhyme, which they cannot be dissuaded from, although there have been exertions to bring even the Estonian language in rhymed art, and already many evangelical songs had been set into Estonian verses.*

•About 3300 basic song types, 80 000 variants, and over one million items of the runic songs have been recorded.

•Jakob Hurt (1839–1907): *If we cannot be great in number, then we must be great in spirit.*



Märt Pukits. “Jakon Hurt”



## Quantity Rules

- Estonian folksongs are composed in single lines.
- No stanzas and end rhymes in runic songs.
- The songs rely on parallelism, gradation, alliteration and assonance.
- The metre consists of 4 trochaic feet (8 syllables): SW/SW/SW/SW.
- A short word-initial syllable is hardly used in the ictus position.
- A long word-initial syllable is hardly used in the non-ictus position.
- All other syllables can be used freely.
- In scansion, the metrical stress and the word stress do not co-incide.

*Nõn-nap hüü-dis ven-na kan-nel,  
kui need nu(t)-tid nei-ud noo-red  
min-nes-sa i-sa ko-dun-ta,  
min-nes-sa me-he ko-ju-je,  
saa-des kaa-sa kam-be-ri-je.*

—U/—U/—U/—U  
—U/—U/—U/—U  
—U/—U/—U/—U  
—U/—U/—U/—U  
—U/—U/—U/—U

So it called my brothers lyre  
as the young pretty maidens  
leaving from their father's home  
going to their husband's home  
getting to the spouse's chamber.

# Setu female choir in front of a manor



Jaan Kaplinski (1997):

*We don't find closeness anymore with tree and forest, stone and river. We don't have the courage anymore to seek that closeness /---/ And yet the memory of this closeness and the desire for it is still very much alive in us. A large proportion of Estonians is not yet capable of relating to nature the way Europeans do; for us nature is still something of a wonder, something of our own and, at times, regardless of everything, even close. Our people go into the forest, when they have a difficult time; they seek solace and help from nature.*

# Peko the Idol and St. Martin's Day masks



# Ethnofuturism

- Estonian Kostabi-Society (1980s): **Karl Martin Sinijärv**, **Kivisildnik**, **Kauksi Ülle**, **Valeria Ränik** (Poprjanik), **Jüri Ehlvest**.
- *Ethnofuturism is a joining of the archaic, prehistorical, ethnic substance peculiar to our nation with the modern, sometimes even futuristic form. Or the other way round — the archaic form (e.g. runic-song) with a contemporary vision of the world. Ethnofuturism can also be related to surrealism, but it is more nationalistic in its manifestations, strongly stressing national diversities. No doubt one of the reasons for the rise of ethnofuturism was an elevated interest in the history of the nation, its folklore (especially folk songs and ancient beliefs) and everything else that stresses the diversity of the nation.*

Kauksi Ülle and Setu boys singing



Karl-Martin Sinijärv



Contra and Kauksi Ülle



Jüri Ehlvest



Kivisildnik

# Literature in dialect

- **Northern dialect:** Estonian Bible by Anton Thor Helle
- **Northeastern dialect:** Aleksander Suuman, Madis Kõiv
- **Dialect of the islands:** Elmar Vrager, Asta Willmann
- **South-Estonian dialect:** “Oh my poor town of Tartu” (1708) by Käsü Hans, etc; Kristian Jaak Peterson, Gustav Suits, Mats Traat, Mari Vallisoo
- **Mulgi dialect:** Hendrik Adamson, Nikolai Baturin
- **Võru and Seto dialect:** Gustav Adolph Oldekop, Anne Vabarna, Artur Adson, Juhan Jaik, Raimond Kolk, Jaan Lattik, Madis Kõiv, Aivo Lõhmus, Ain Kaalep, Jaan Kaplinski, Kauksi Ülle, Hando Runnel, Jan Rahman, Merca, Contra, Jaan Pulk, Olavi Ruitlane, Veiko Märka, Aapo Ilves, Andreas Kalkun



# Hyperboreality



**Kaljo Põllu.**

"Kaks pükkosepõtra",

1978, metsotinta,

42 x 43 cm