

Comment to the first Seto verse novel

“Ale”

sung by Setu folksinger Anne Vabarna

Paulopriit Voolaine informed the Estonian cultural public of the completion of Anne Vabarna's next work, “Ale”, in 1928, in the journal “Eesti Kirjandus” (Estonian Literature),² the major portion of the presented material made up of the content summary of the verse novel with just some verse examples. The added short comment reveals that P. Voolaine sent in October 1927 a letter to A. Vabarna where he observes the attention the epic “Peko” received and urges the singer to undertake a new work, to celebrate her 50th anniversary. P. Voolaine presented Anne with a new topic – in his own scant wording: “Yours truly also noted what Anne could sing about.”

This letter has also, unfortunately, not been maintained, and there are no other sources to throw light on this request from P. Voolaine. Based on the result, the text of the verse novel (considering the propaganda against drinking, the uniqueness of the main character's life course, the details hinting at sentimentalist influences in events uncharacteristic for Setu folk tradition and not found among the singer's other epic works), it is fairly plausible that in actual fact P. Voolaine offered the singer for wording the complete storyline of the verse novel, complete from the beginning to the tragic end, and including the names of the characters. It is also safe to believe that the singer did not deviate from the schemata offered for the main character's life, but followed it quite precisely.

The review also tells us about the wording process of the verse novel - when the singer's son Ivo came home in November, he started to write down text dictated by the mother. “Ale” was finished in 6 weeks and posted for P. Voolaine in Tartu on December 17, 1927. The manuscript was later acquired by the Society of Estonian Literature, and its two notebooks are currently maintained at the manuscript department of the Estonian Literary Museum (KM KO, f.117 nr.10:6).

The content summary of “Ale”

After the lyric introduction of the circumstances leading the singer to starting a new song (a dove brought Anne the bid to start a new song, *Essu* (Jesus) has gifted the singer with a talent that should not stay unused [1-164]) she starts narrating the story of a young Setu man, Ale. Mother lullabies the smart son to become a student, but jokingly (religious background!) also offers the only son to Death. The angered husband pulls the mother's hair, but after the wife's explanation apologises [165-306]. In addition to descriptions of everyday life [307-435] there is an episode where the wife urges the lazy and tobacco-loving husband to plough without the pipe. Agreeing after several arguments, the husband's work indeed does proceed better. [336-735].

Ale grows to become a diligent herder [736-786], who banishes rain with singing [787-870] and feels for the orphan herders, though dismisses their hopes that he could become their future suitor: if he can not marry a rich wife, he would rather stay a bachelor [871-948]. After several episodes describing the life of herders [949-1489], Ale wants to attend school in the autumn. Ale is allowed to attend school, for trial. Though he wears birch bark shoes and clothes shabbier than the rest, he proves to be more diligent and smart than the rest [1490-1913]. In the summer, Ale earns schooling money in a rich Estonian farm and in the winter goes to school, wearing boots and a black coat [1914-2318]. The next summer he earns money (thought there are many offers for herding) at home, picking mushrooms [2319-2509].

After graduating the village school, the teachers recommend him to continue his studies. To earn money for this, Ale goes to work in a rich Estonian's farm, where he works diligent and dutiful [2510-2978]. Ale is so valued by the family that the lady of the house would wish him to marry her relative, the single daughter of a family living near town [2979-3018]. Ale continues working as a farm-hand, and even visits home at sowing time to ask mother for weather omens and secret wisdom [3019-3910].

Ale attends and graduates all schools in town and finally enters the university [3911-3956]. Now he meets Taadsi (the maiden he was wished to marry). Mutual liking develops, so that Ale seeks to ask her hand with his former employer as the wooing marshal [3957-4063]. This wooing (the only kind the singer knew of, the traditional Setu wooing complete with omens and traditions) ends with betrothal [4064-4266]. But the Evil sends gossipers to reprove Ale's poverty. Taadsi's attitude towards the suitor cools, her mother changes her mind and only the father is in favour of Ale [4167-4395]. Still, Ale manages to make the bride change her mind and together they ride into the town to buy jewellery [4396-4420]. But there, the rich Kaadsi (Taadsi's former suitor) starts to flatter the maiden, buying her gifts and taking her to the restaurant. Kaadsi takes ample vodka with him, and together with Taadsi they drive to her home and new wooing proceeds. Taadsi's father has doubts about Kaadsi, but gives in to the wishes of his wife and daughter

² P.Voolaine, Lauuema Vabarna Anne romaan “Ale”. – “Eesti Kirjandus” 1928, lk, 275-283.

[4421-4722]. Ale tries to revoke his status as a suitor, inviting the former employer with him, but he fails [4723-4813]. Taadsi's mother with some close relatives goes to review the suitor's home, while the father refuses to go and again warns the daughter about marrying Kaadsi [4814-5243]. Kaadsi pleads his father to write everything to his name to allow him completely beat his competitor Ale [5244-5351]. The wedding is accompanied by several bad omens [5352-5622]. Follows the description of a grandiose (traditional Setu!) wedding feast, again intercepted with warning omens [5623-7651].

After the wedding, Kaadsi coaxes his wife to write all her inheritance to his name. Not letting her discuss it over with her parents, Kaadsi achieves that Taadsi signs – thought with shaking hands – the agreement [7652-7811]. Having become the owner of his wife's wealth, Kaadsi proceeds to the inn and starts drinking with old friends. Getting angry at his wife pleading him to stop, he tells her to go looking for Ale. Taadsi does meet Ale, but forbids him to visit her. Only late at night does she succeed in persuading the husband to come home [7812-8111].

When Taadsi's father comes to invite her to come visiting, the daughter praises her good life through tears, so as not to grieve her parents [8112-8165]. Visiting at home, she admits to her mother her thoughtless deed and the father asks the in-laws to restrain the husband [8166-8314].

One day, Kaadsi goes to pay land taxes. With the rest of the money, he goes to an inn and, urged by his drinking companions, sells also the horse and wagon. Since Taadsi is ashamed to go looking for her husband, he is brought home by his father [8315-8598]. A couple of days later, Kaadsi brings home only one bag of fine flour from the miller's: the bags were filled with sawdust in place of the sold grain. Referring to lack of a queue at the miller, he sets out with the next wagonload, but sells the grain in town, instead, and during drinking also the horses and wagon [8599-8927]. The wife goes to take the husband food to the miller; hearing the truth of matters from the miller, she faints. Waking, she returns home, weeping [8928-9031]. Taadsi goes to his parents' home where he admits to the father that she gave up her inheritance for her husband. When the farm-hand comes to take Taadsi home, she says a final goodbye to her childhood home [9032-9209].

At home the husband beats her, keeps drinks and visits prostitutes. Kaadsi spends on drinking both his parent's home and the wife's farm [9210-9531].

Kaadsi asks Taadsi to come live in town, where he promises to open a shop. On the way, Kaadsi steps into an illegal inn and being drunk starts beating her wife in the middle of the forest. Ale happens to be coming from town and saves her former bride from Kaadsi. The latter runs away towards the town, bawling that Ale is taking his wife from him. Taadsi thanks Ale for saving her, expresses regret that she did not marry him, and drowns herself [9532-9685].

Ale becomes insane from loss of Taadsi and is placed into a mental hospital. People's reproval makes Kaadsi ashamed of his deed. Going to his wife's place of drowning, he reaches the spot in the forest where he started to beat his wife. There the Devil comes to him and gives Kaadsi so much vodka that he drinks himself to death. Devil is glad, because all people dying of alcoholism become his horses [9686-9825].

Taadsi's parents die of grief. Kaadsi's parents find shelter with the son they left without inheritance and who lives in town. When Ale's parents hear of their son's sad fate, the husband derides the wife. He disapproves of the wife's intention to go visit the son in the city. If the son will not come home healthy, he will leave everything to his godchildren, but as long as he can he will remain the master of the house. [9826-10042].