

Urban vs Rural in Latvian Fiction of the Early Twentieth Century: Antons Austrīņš

Alina Romanovska

Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University

Vienības iela 13, Daugavpils, LV-5401, Latvia

Email: alina.romanovska@du.lv

Abstract Man and one's space of existence are in interaction with each other. Space influences and determines the peculiarities of one's perception. But man is also looking for a suitable organic place of existence. This peculiarity also applies to literary characters. At the end of the nineteenth century, European culture underwent rapid changes due to industrialization, the development of communication system, and urbanization. Many philosophers point to the spiritual crisis, describing which they make use of such concepts as culture, civilization, and nature. The opposition of the urban and the rural environments is becoming more pronounced, and the urban environment is perceived as contradictory and chaotic, while opportunities to harmonize the personality experiencing crisis are being sought in the rural environment.

The problem of relations between the urban and the rural environments entered also Latvian literature, it was addressed by such well-known authors as Jānis Akuraters, Fricis Bārda, Edvards Virza, Viktors Eglītis, Antons Austrīņš, Andrejs Upītis and others. The aim of the present study is to reveal the peculiarities of the dichotomy of the urban and the rural environments in the Latvian fiction of the first decades of the twentieth century, by using one Latvian author's writings as an example. Such an approach allows not only for considering the peculiarities of the depiction of the urban and the rural environments, but also for analysing the subjective and objective reasons determining the emergence of these peculiarities. It is important that the prose of Antons Austrīņš (1884–1934) features emphasized spatiality: descriptions of the space are detailed and reflect the peculiarities of the characters' personalities. The peculiarities of the spatial structure and the semantics of Austrīņš' prose were determined both by the European cultural context (philosophers' findings, works by other authors) and individual peculiarities, which, in turn, stemmed from life experience and environmental, educational, family, psychological and emotional peculiarities. The depiction of the urban and the rural

environments in Austriņš' prose has a wide semantic spectrum, which develops in the interaction of the spheres of nature, civilization and culture. The most important feature of Austriņš' perception of the world is the ambiguity of the assessment of phenomena. Nature, civilization and culture exist in close interaction, but there is often a contrast between these spheres, which is related to the human concept of Austriņš' prose. The author's characters are torn apart by contradictions, so they cannot find a suitable place to live: in a rural environment, they see opportunities to harmonize their personalities, but they cannot stay there for long and tend to a city where cultural and civilization interact.

Keywords culture; civilization; nature; Latvian literature; modernism

Author **Alina Romanovska**, Dr.philol., is a researcher of the Centre of Cultural Research of the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Daugavpils University, Latvia. Her research interests are comparative literature, Latvian literary history and identity.

Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century Europe, significant changes took place in various spheres of life. Industrialization, the improvement of the transport system and various changes in the society became the main features of modernization. The changes affected also the territory of Latvia, the number of various manufacturing enterprises, especially factories, increased in the largest towns, particularly in Riga. The development of industry and transport changed both the environment and people's everyday life. Forests were being cut down, railway lines were built in the territory of Latvia in the second half of the nineteenth century, and new environs appeared in the towns. New machinery and other factory equipment often were unsafe and endangered workers' health and lives.

Significant changes in the development of the society were brought by new inventions in the circulation of news. In 1852, the Rīga-Bolderāja line of electromagnetic telegraph, and in 1882, the first telephone exchange in Rīga with 53 subscribers started operating. Travel became more accessible, the spread of the printed word expanded, and restrictions and prohibitions related to position in the society and gender decreased.

The development and industrialization of large towns facilitated the growth of urbanization. In the territory of Latvia, urbanization began in the 2nd half of the nineteenth century. It had been influenced by the development of industry and transport, especially that of the rail network and ports, as well as the abolition of serfdom

and greater freedom of movement for the rural population. Rapid urban development began in Latvia. In 1900–1914, the process of urbanization proceeded rapidly and the proportion of town dwellers in that period increased from 7.3% to 40.3% (Krišjāne). The population of Riga, the capital of Latvia, reached nearly a sevenfold increase during that period.

Changes in the life of the society caused a philosophical reflection on them and were reflected in culture. Fiction as part of culture is an indicator and creator of spiritual search and also tends to display and reflect on the current events of its time. According to Malcolm Bradbury and James W. McFarlane, “the literature of experimental Modernism which emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century.. was an art of cities, especially of the polyglot cities which, for various historical reasons, had acquired high activity and great reputation as centres of intellectual and cultural exchange” (96).

Depicting the pace of their characters’ lives in a peculiar historical period, writers reproduced not only their own subjective but also the nation’s collective understanding of the time portrayed from a contemporary perspective, subordinating narrative to certain artistic conceptions (Romanovska 2020). Fictional text provides a subjective worldview and is subject to a certain artistic task; however, the images and events reflect the author’s perception of the world and the collective perception and the ideas formed in it (Romanovska 2021). The issue of the relationship between the urban and the rural environments (civilization and nature / urban and rural) became an important object of reflection in the late nineteenth—early twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, Oswald Spengler’s work *The Decline of the West* gained great popularity, in which the philosopher points to the emerging crisis situation. Spengler considers that when a Culture enters its late stage it becomes a “Civilization” [Zivilisation], a petrified body characterized in the modern age by technology, imperialism, and mass society, which he expected to fossilize and decline from the 2000s onward (Engels 3–21). According to the philosopher, the world of culture is characterized by spirituality, but the civilization does not know it, because thinking in monetary terms can generate only money (Spengler 10–15), but not spirituality. Spengler believes that the world is degrading, the triumph of civilization is inevitable, the world of culture will be destroyed, therefore human existence in such a doomed world is tragic, but this tragedy is felt only by special, chosen people—creative personalities—poets, musicians, artists, etc. The essence of any civilization lies in atheism: when myth dies and the unity of art disintegrates, incredulity is introduced, and culture dies. Thus, the urbanization of the modern world and the technological nature of the urban environment, according to the representatives of

the twentieth century humanities, caused the crisis of spirituality. The perception of the nineteenth century as the era of crisis, i.e. of civilization, is supported also in the works of Auguste Comte, Rudolf Christoph Eucken, Georg Simmel, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Vyacheslav Solovyov, Leo Tolstoy, Andrei Bely, and others. These authors' ideas contradict the positivist views of civilization as the highest degree and most complete stage of cultural development. Looking for a way-out of the situation, nature is mentioned as a peculiar harmonizing sphere, as opposed to the urban environment of civilization.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the problematic issues of the relations between civilization, culture and nature started to be addressed also in Latvian literature. Jānis Akuraters, Fricis Bārda, Edvards Virza, Viktors Eglītis, Antons Austrīņš, Andrejs Upītis, and others developed the oppositions of nature—civilization, culture—civilization, nature—culture. The aim of the present study is to reveal the peculiarities of the dichotomy of the urban and the rural environments in the Latvian fiction of the first decades of the twentieth century, by using one Latvian author's writings as an example. Such an approach allows for considering not only the peculiarities of the depiction of the urban and the rural environments, but also analysing the subjective and objective reasons for the emergence of these peculiarities.

Peculiarities of the Description of Space in Antons Austrīņš' Writings

Antons Austrīņš' literary oeuvre is versatile, rich, and demands a second thought as to its evaluation; he has produced poetry, short prose fiction, plays, feuilletons, and a novel-chronicle. Besides significant works that possess constant value in the history of Latvian literature, there are works that seem to be doomed to oblivion. The response of the writer's contemporaries testifies to the fact that Austrīņš' oeuvre was a significant part of the culture process of his time. The present study will focus mainly on prose fiction, as it is characterized by particular poetics of the description of space. He describes any event not in the abstract, focusing only on the sphere of emotions and feelings, but makes it spatially precise. Austrīņš perceives any place to be described as a carrier of a certain sense, the place of events often signals events that are expected in the near future, and forms a unified whole with the character's perception of the world. Objects, indoor decoration, furniture are closely related to man, one's inner energy, emotional experiences, etc. In this regard the story *Ēnu dzīras* [Feast of Shadows] is significant. Its main character Anita N. has lost touch with her home, she has arrived in Riga and perceives it as a dead city (Austrīņš 88), Anita's own perception of life is similar to that of a dead person—life is meaningless, lonely and grey. Describing the space of Anita's home and her perception of

space, Austrīņš reveals the main character's personality (89).

For Austrīņš, space has a very important symbolic, metaphorical meaning. Any movement in space is important for the character, first of all, because it implies the access to another space and it is related to a completely different, possibly opposite perception of the world. Secondly, since travel is also significant as an independent category, it gives the character the opportunity to feel like a searcher, a person who will never reach perfection. The character's desire to be on the move, dissatisfaction with the space of permanent dwelling characterizes a contradictory character with divided consciousness, who aspires to find inner harmony. Ideally, the human nature, personality should be in harmony with home. Austrīņš presents the metaphor of such existence in the story *Klēts priekšā* [In Front of the Granary]. The main character of the story, when remembering his happy childhood, considers the harmony of his personality and his place of birth to be one of the most important features of such a childhood. Being a child, the character felt that "each building attracts its own man" (Austrīņš 166), the mother's personality in his consciousness was associated with the granary, Zane—with the kettle-shed, the grandfather—with the threshing barn. This connection of a particular building with a certain personality in the main character's perception grows into the metaphor of the native place and personality's harmony.

The spatial system of Austrīņš' prose is heterogeneous, it consists of separate spatial elements, which are of different emotional and conceptual loads. In the writer's prose fiction, one can distinguish spatial units that are essential to his artistic consciousness and that have acquired a certain emphasis and metaphorical meaning in the context of all his creative work. These are spaces related to border consciousness—road, prison, station, etc. spaces whose conceptual load is perceived by the writer as particularly acute. These are spaces where different, often contradictory topoi with their respective ethical, aesthetic and cultural systems are juxtaposed and compared. Complete understanding of the metaphorical meaning of these spaces is possible only by taking into account the work as a whole and bearing in mind the facts of Austrīņš' biography. The most essential metaphors that reflect human existence in the modern world are the road and the prison. These two spaces are related to the category of personality's freedom. In the spatial sense, they are mutually exclusive, as the road provides for relative freedom of movement and openness of space, and thus a sense of spiritual freedom, but the prison restricts personal freedom and is associated with seclusion. However, in the metaphorical meaning, which is much more emphasized in Austrīņš' prose, the road and the prison complement each other and interact to show the human situation in the modern world. The se-

motifs of the road and the prison in Austriņš' prose is influenced by the general metaphorical meaning of these chronotopes, which has developed in the European literary tradition. Mikhail Bakhtin points out that the significance of the chronotope of the road in literature is immense: rarely are there works that do not have any variation of the motif of the road, but many works are built directly on the chronotope of the road, meetings and adventures (Bahtin 248). In the chronotope of the road, time merges with space, they become united, which is why the metaphorization of the road is so rich. The metaphor of the prison is just as rich as that of the road.

In Austriņš' prose, the relation of road to the idea of the flow of time is relatively minimal, as is often found in world literature. Austriņš' characters are people without home who, once having left their native homes, very rarely return there, but if it happens, then this visit is associated with the end of the life path, their inability to find a way-out of the existing tragic situation. Native homes remain an abstract idyll of the past without any possibility to return there. The characters have preserved their roots that are related to their belonging to a certain place of origin and a sense of national identity; although, by their way of life, they are to be considered the types of wanderers prevalent in modernism. The road is their element: "On the way all minds are sharpened, perception revives, vision multiplies and taste develops" (Austriņš 389). The author's overall spatial system consists of the descriptions of countries travelled by various characters. It is noteworthy that the writer has depicted only those countries that he has travelled himself; for that time, the geography of his prose is relatively wide: Latvia, Russia, Finland, Italy, Spain.

Austriņš' descriptions of spaces are not only emotionally very saturated and conceptually loaded, but also very concrete and precise. The cities he describes are very finely structured—the descriptions enable one to create an accurate map of the city that corresponds to reality. Sometimes such factuality—accurate street signs, descriptions of the place of the event—seems unjustified in the text and is not essential, because it does not bring additional connotative information. Actual street and house names are neutral, over time they have developed the only function—to indicate the exact location of the event. However, the desire to accurately describe the place of the event testifies to the shrewd spatial perception of the writer's consciousness—he tries to assign meaning to any place, any movement in space. This is one of the most essential features in Austriņš' artistic consciousness. He tries to understand the essence of any space described—be it a city or an insignificant village, to reveal its secret. The names of streets, houses and city districts are closely related to the spirit of the city itself, its secret. Nikolay Anciferov points out that "each city has its own style of these names, which is determined by the genius of the city"

(Anciferov 40). The names of the city streets tell about its topography, history, mythology, and people's habits. These names are the language of the city. The names are also important as a documentary source.

In some works, a factually accurate description is one of Austrīņš' aims. Literary scholars Vera Vāvere and Ludmila Sproģe hold that, based on Austrīņš' documentary descriptions, some real events of the author's own biography can be restored (182).

Nature—Culture—Civilization

In Austrīņš' creative work, there appears the third component in the dichotomy of the urban and the rural environments—culture, which is indispensable for the successful existence of any personality. The theme of the relationship between nature, culture and civilization is very important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernists' works. Authors, who are aware of the spiritual crisis and try to depict and understand its causes in their works, address also the issue of the relationship between nature, culture and civilization, respectively, the dichotomies nature—civilization, culture—civilization come to the fore. Depending on the ethical and aesthetic priorities of a particular author, one of these oppositions is emphasized. The view of the opposition nature—civilization has older roots in the history of culture than the opposition culture—civilization. The relationship between nature and civilization is one of the most common themes in European culture, it is represented in the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, but it becomes especially relevant in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. In each culture, the treatment of the relationship between nature and civilization has its own peculiarities and nuances, dominant positions are different. The opposition of culture and civilization was raised by German philosophers in the nineteenth century, however, it did not resonate as widely as the opposition of nature and civilization. However, apart from German philosophers and men of letters, the relationship between culture and civilization was also addressed by the Russian creative intelligentsia—this issue is raised in the theoretical views and works of Vladimir Solovyov, Andrei Bely, Aleksandr Blok and other authors who have significantly influenced Latvian literature. The opposition of nature and civilization more often than the opposition of culture and civilization finds a specific spatial representation, because nature is related to rural space, civilization—to urban space. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the dichotomy nature—culture also appeared as a variant of the dichotomy nature—civilization. Both, the sphere of culture and that of civilization are related to the urban world. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the opposition

between urban and rural areas, which mainly emphasizes the differences in social life, acquires a new quality. It gets expanded, generalized, and is treated as the opposition of nature and civilization. The opposition of culture and civilization is more abstract, these spheres may not always be related to a particular space, more often they are associated with the different, contradictory features of one space, thus, for instance, St. Petersburg often has both distinctive peculiarities of civilization and specific features of a cultural space.

Austriņš, acutely feeling the tragedy of the turn of the century and the loss of spirituality, emphasizes the world of nature, in which he sees opportunities for the renewal of spirituality, but for the harmonious construction of the world the cultural sphere is also necessary. By combining the spheres of nature and culture, it is possible to create a harmonious world. Civilization, on the other hand, is opposed to both culture and nature. In the early twentieth century, civilization is dominant as the basis for structuring the world, it is associated with the dominance of technicalization and the loss of spirituality. By distinguishing the segments of nature, culture and civilization in the spatial structure of Austriņš' prose, the characters' views on ethical, aesthetic and cultural values are disclosed. Thus, taking into account the typological parallels, literary genetic relations, autobiographical conditions and the general context of the writer's prose, the concept of Austriņš' man can be deduced.

When depicting a specific space—Riga, St. Petersburg, Latgale (one of Latvia's regions), etc., Austriņš emphasizes the dominance of some particular sphere, for example, Latgale is treated as a space of nature, Riga and St. Petersburg are mostly treated as spaces of civilization, where culture is sometimes given bright depiction. The issue of the relationship between nature, culture and civilization in Austriņš' prose is addressed also in terms of time, i.e. the past is treated as the time of nature, the present—as the time of civilization, but the perspective of time appears minimally. This is probably related to the peculiarity of Austriņš' consciousness, namely, the dominance of spatial perception, which clearly appears in his prose fiction.

In Austriņš' prose, the relations between nature and civilization and culture and civilization are depicted, in some works, for example, in the collection of stories *Māras zemē* [In the Land of Māra], *Puiškāns* [Boy], the solution of the relations between nature and civilization comes to the fore, in others, for example, in the novelle *Kaspars Glūns* and the collection of stories *Vērpētē* [In Whirlpool] the dominant is the problem of relations between culture and civilization. Thus, Austriņš in his creative work employs the most topical ideas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western European and Russian thinkers and writers. He analyses how nature, culture and civilization affect the human personality and strives to answer

the question of how it is possible to harmonize man and the world.

Austrīņš' characters are torn by contradictions, they travel, search for spiritual harmony and define in their consciousness certain places they have seen as spaces of nature, culture or civilization. Examples of spaces of nature are Latgale and Vecpiebalga, the synthesis of spaces of culture and civilization is presented in the depiction of Riga, St. Petersburg, Spain, and Italy. The oppositions of nature and civilization, culture and civilization in Austrīņš' prose are not valued unequivocally. Thus, for instance, Latgale as a distinct space of nature is interpreted positively, but it is not the best place of dwelling for the main character, therefore it does not give him a sense of absolute spiritual harmony.

Austrīņš' characters can experience absolute harmony in a space dominated by attributes and features of culture. The space of culture in Austrīņš' model of the world is incompatible with the space of nature, geographically it is located in the city, but the city is also a space of civilization, the main character feels the influence of both culture and civilization, therefore no city can be perceived as a harmonious space. Among all the spaces depicted by Austrīņš, the exceptions are Italy and Spain, which are treated as lands of high culture, but the characters' lives there cannot be harmonious, because these countries are not their homeland. But in Latvia, in the homeland, no space can be perceived as appropriate for the character, that is, absolutely harmonious.

The sphere of nature in Austrīņš' prose is represented by two spaces—Vecpiebalga and Latgale. Nature is opposed to civilization as the positive to the negative. The idealization of the space of nature is topical in almost all of Austrīņš' works, in which some natural phenomena are depicted. However, the space of nature—Vecpiebalga, Latgale or any other place cannot become the character's space of permanent dwelling, because it does not comply with all the character's wishes. Since Austrīņš has explicitly projected his worldview to the characters, extracts of his two letters to Jānis Priedis can serve as an explanation of the perception of the space of nature in the writer's texts:

I like rural life with its peace. You don't have to hurry anywhere. In the morning, after having coffee, you go for a walk for half an hour or so, then come back to the room, sit at the table and write or read, listening to the wind rattling the shutters behind the window and whistling around the corner of the house. Thus the day passes. In the dusk you can sit at the burning woodstove. The moon appears on the horizon—the Gypsy sun. The world gets wrapped in the moonlight. Dream with your eyes half-open. (*Austrīņa vēstule Priedim* 28 Jan-

uary 1913).

You see, living in the countryside, a person falls very much behind that “spirit of time”, arriving in the city, he hurries to the theatre, concerts and an exhibition of paintings, which has just been opened so that he can more or less catch up. Of course, I also met my fellows and friends... (*Austriņa vēstule Priedim* 19 March 913)

These two extracts reveal the specifics of Austriņš' perception of the space of nature, which determines the concept of his works.

The particularity of the image of Latgale in Austriņš' prose was largely determined by the tradition of depicting the countryside in Latvian literature. In Latvian culture, the countryside and natural landscape are perceived as the basis of national identity, therefore it has been so widely represented in literature. The specifics of the depiction of the natural landscape in fiction are rooted in the folklore tradition and are an integral part of the model of the world in any work of art until the beginning of the twentieth century. Particular attention to depictions of the national natural landscape was paid by Romantics of the 1860s—1880s.

“The description of the landscape, as well as the interest in it can be found most in poetry (lyric or epic). Andrejs Pumpurs and Auseklis are especially concerned with this issue” (Kursīte 359). They described both the nature of the mythical antiquity of the Latvian people and the landscape of their time. Biruta Gudriķe holds that “the focus of Young Latvians on the interests of peasants with the emphasized human self-esteem of the farmer promoted the development of Latvian literature towards the realm of realism” (141). In addition to the tradition of depicting the countryside, Austriņš' perception of Latgale was also influenced by his personal life experience, as, being a refugee, he found an opportunity to hide in the region and Latgale became his second home. Austriņš links the origin of the Latvian people and the idea of spiritual rebirth exactly with Latgale.

A peculiar synthesis of culture and civilization in Austriņš' prose can be observed in the depiction of cities (Riga, St. Petersburg). Austriņš ideas about the city have been influenced by the general cultural situation both in Europe, i.e. the emphasis on the antinomy of culture and civilization at the turn of the twentieth century, and the literary, cultural and economic-political situation in Latvia, namely, the growing role of cities, the development of technologies, urbanization, etc. In the first half of the twentieth century, depictions of various cities began to occupy an increasingly important place in Latvian literature; there appeared urban motifs, thus

the opposition rural—urban becomes topical both in literature as a whole and in the works by individual authors. Researchers point out that “though city life had been reflected in the works of many Latvian writers already at the end of the nineteenth century, one can speak about real urban poetry only beginning with the 1910s, when, influenced by modern poetry in the world, also Latvian poets addressed urban motifs” (Sproģe and Vāvere 174). The contradictory nature of the city, its internal struggle between culture and civilization characterize the divided consciousness of an individual living in it and thus becomes the organic space of existence of this individual.

The city in Austrīņš’ prose is an object of characters’ aspiration, it attracts people, despite the fact that it is contradictory, incomplete, and chaotic. None of Austrīņš’ characters stay for life in some ideal place, they stay there only for a short period, slightly harmonizing themselves, but then they make their move again and return to the city.

The most important feature of all the cities depicted by Austrīņš is their contradicting nature. By destroying nature, the city is unable to survive as a phenomenon of culture, it is taken over by technicalization processes that turn “culture into civilization”. “Nature parks, so popular back in the eighteenth century, gradually acquire the features of a museum or botanic garden, and “green spaces” mostly play a solely functional role. The city is no longer adjusted to the surroundings and adapted to the waters” (Šuvajevs 28). Most evidently the contradiction between nature and the city is manifested in the image of St. Petersburg, the brightest symbol of this contradiction is the Neva with its banks in granite.

The contradiction has become the internal regularity of the conditions necessary for the existence of the city. A harmonious city is unimaginable, it would be contrary to its specifics. Urban space serves as an indicator of the state of the world culture. Šuvajevs points out that “today’s problems are manifested most” in the city. (Šuvajevs 24) In Austrīņš’ prose, there are no characters—city dwellers whose consciousness and spirit would be in harmony. Harmony should be sought in nature, ideally there must be a balance between culture and nature, which Austrīņš’ characters feel only for a short time. The urban space depicted by Austrīņš is much more diverse than the rural space. The city is changing, it is developing and one can feel the rhythm of life in it. The countryside is static and unchanging, therefore there are many similarities in the representation of different spaces of nature (Latgale, Vecpiebalga, Russian countryside), the space of nature is treated as an embodiment of the idyll of the past. Austrīņš’ cities are contradictory, it is the only peculiarity of the description of the urban space that is characteristic of all cities and also determines their difference, each

city has its own face, its own particularity, its own individuality.

Conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, industrialization, the development of the transport and communication system and urbanization marked the emergence of a new type of cultural modernism. People's everyday life and the environment were undergoing changes. Those changes brought about a philosophical reflection of the situation, when many creative personalities pointed to the emergence of a crisis situation of the era and personality. In search of its causes, philosophers turned to the analysis of the development of human history and the awareness of various stages and cycles, as a result of which the concept of civilization became topical. The nineteenth century idea of cultural decline was emphasized, indicating that culture has passed into the stage of development of civilization. The juxtaposition of the urban and the rural environments in the works of the authors of that time became one of the possibilities to reflect the situation of the spiritual crisis. In the rural environment (nature), on the other hand, opportunities were sought to harmonize the personality experiencing the crisis.

Austriņš' creative work in miniature reflects the processes taking place in Latvian literature in the early twentieth century. An important feature of his prose is the emphasis on spatiality: the descriptions of the space are detailed and reflect the peculiarities of the characters' personalities.

The peculiarities of the spatial structure and semantics of Austriņš' prose were determined both by the European cultural context (philosophers' findings, works by other authors) and by the peculiarities of his individual perception, which, in turn, stemmed from life experience and environmental, educational, family, psychological and emotional peculiarities. The depiction of the urban and the rural environments in Austriņš' prose has a wide semantic spectrum, which develops in the contact of the spheres of nature, civilization, and culture. The most essential feature of Austriņš' perception of the world is the ambiguity of the assessment of phenomena.

Nature, civilization and culture exist in close interaction, though the opposition of these spheres also often appears, which is represented in different variants: nature—civilization, nature—culture, culture—civilization. Austriņš' characters are torn apart by contradictions, therefore they cannot find a suitable place to live: they see opportunities to harmonize their personalities in the rural environment, but they cannot stay there for long and tend to a city where there is the interaction of peculiarities of culture and civilization.

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