

# Elm

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# Elm

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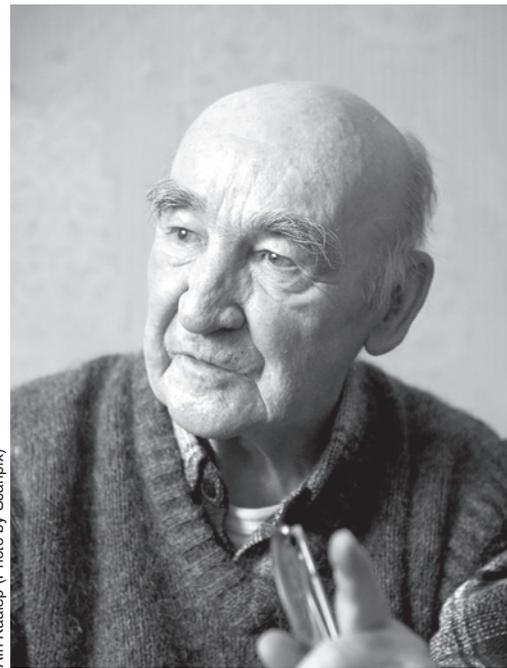
**Eesti Kirjanike Liit**  
Estonian Writers' Union  
Estnischer Schriftstellerverband

Harju 1, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia  
Phone and fax: +372 6 276 410, +372 6 276 411  
e-mail ekl@ekl.ee  
www.ekl.ee

Tartu branch:  
Vanemuise 19, 51014 Tartu  
Phone and fax: 07 341 073  
ekl@kirjandus.ee

**Estonian Literature Centre**  
P. Süda 3-6, 10118 Tallinn  
Tel: + 372 6314 870  
ilvi@eki.ee  
estlit@estlit.ee  
www.estlit.ee

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Ain Kaalep (Photo by Scanpix)

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# Thinking about Women's

b y E l o L i n d s a l u

## **Discussions of whether women's literature exists or not have recently become quite common in Estonia.**

The term itself is rather new in our literary disputes and evokes several questions: are all books of fiction written by women women's literature? Or is this just a more polite expression for 'chick-lit'? What books can actually be regarded as chick-lit – how to draw the line between a serious book of literature and easily absorbed entertainment? And should we now call men's works men's literature? Some Estonian women writers (e.g. Helga Nou, Kart Hellerma and Maarja Kangro) have thus expressed their disagreement with the concept of women's literature as such: in their opinion, the word 'women's' indicates that this is not real literature. However, we should not forget that the concept of women's literature (henceforth abbreviated WL) is in fact conditional: I have used it as a kind of framework at master's seminars at Tallinn University in analysing the prose texts by women authors which deal with women's lives and problems, i.e. works united under 'women's topics'. Treating some books as women's literature at some point does not mean that they cannot be seen as being within the canon of major literature or real literature at some other time. The term WL is therefore operational, necessary not so much for the wider readership, but for literary researchers. This is not meant to diminish the importance

of women writers' work in our literary landscape. Quite the opposite: by discussing the problems raised in their books, the circle of readers expands and more opportunities emerge to promote literature written by women, and thus make these writers more visible and recognise them properly. After all, quite a few of them have seen the problem of the Estonian literary canon as being too masculine and rigid. The truth is, however, that it is women authors who tend to disappear from literary histories, textbooks etc. more quickly, and some never make it there. Our newest Estonian literary history, published in 2001, has ignored some truly well-known women writers, such as Aino Pervik, Eeva Park and Kärt Hellerma, and Maimu Berg gets only two full sentences! The status of women writers in the current literary canon thus seems unfairly low, although in recent years quite a few have received prestigious awards from the Cultural Endowment or even annual state awards (Ene Mihkelson, Mari Saat, Maarja Kangro and Viivi Luik).

## **Coming back to the concept of WL – how then should we define women's literature today?**

The few attempts to define WL in our press have only considered the gender of the writer, leaving the impression that this is the whole meaning of WL. However, gender is just one (the most obvious) criterion in constructing the

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concept of WL. The English-language world traditionally uses *literature by women*, *women's literature* and *women's writing*; it's *Frauenliteratur* in Germany, *littérature féminine* and the more specific *écriture féminine* (or women's writing) in France, and *naiskirjallisuus* in Finland. Oxford has for years published the acclaimed literary magazine *Contemporary Women's Writing*, offering high-standard work by women authors and relevant material. The rest of the world seriously and carefully researches the whole range of topics between the pair of words 'woman' and 'literature', whereas Estonia has barely started. *Women's poetry* seems to be the most derided term; ever since the 1970s this concept, especially for male critics, has seemed to emphasise the mediocre standard or worse of female writers – as if the word 'women's' automatically meant something negative. On the other hand, terms such as nature writing, children's literature, South-Estonian literature, literature for young adults, and others have never had such derogatory connotations. It is thus high time to neutralise this particular pair of words: the concept of women's literature could well describe the book's topics and readership. The writers themselves may well think that the entire society is reading their books, but the truth is that, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, literature has been divided between several types of publics and has consisted of numerous special fields, interests and aims. It is naive to think that Kaur Kender's 'fan club' coincides with Kristiina Ehin's. Relying on personal observations, I can

say that Estonian men mainly read books by male authors (unless they are literary critics or lecturers).

## A glance across the Gulf

Taking a look across the Gulf to the most recent Finnish literary history that has a special chapter on women's literature, we see that WL ('naiskirjallisuus') is a changing and floating concept. In addition we learn that women's literature is literature created by women, which since the 1960s and 1970s has been clearly counter-cultural, with topics ranging from women's gender (sexual) and social marginalisation and rejection, the strengthening of female subjectivity and, later in the 1990s (in connection with postmodernism), its deconstruction. 'Naiskirjallisuus' also includes tackling and re-evaluating women's stereotypes and myths. It therefore seems that in Finnish literature WL largely coincides with feminist literature, as both deal with the same topics. Feminist literary research emerged in Finland in the 1970s, when both the USA and Europe witnessed an ever increasing relevant social movement, which also spread to research institutions and culture. The impact of feminism on women's writing in this period was thus perfectly understandable. We, too, might now ask whether and how much fiction with feminist emphasis has appeared in Estonia? Could we talk here of WL in that sense, although Estonian history

has been somewhat different and it is mostly assumed that the 'Iron Curtain' did not allow ideas to move around as quickly as they did in the West? (At the same time, the problem of the equality of women was solved in the Soviet Union constitutionally and also in practice women participated in all levels of society alongside men as early as the 1950s and 1960s.) In the late 1970s, quite a number of novels were published by Estonian women authors which contemplated the current painful issues of the relations between the sexes. In these novels, an educated and intelligent woman who wished to start a family clashed with her male partner's ignorance. The man's priority was a self-centred hedonistic and bohemian lifestyle, which did not fit with responsible family life. In order not to spend their lives as spinsters, women decided to use men only to conceive children, as the men were not interested in anything else anyway. A woman in one novel prefers a sham married life with an alcoholic man, who becomes a stepfather to her children, whereas another character bravely faces the fate of a single mother. In another novel, the female character must fight for her family and her home, for the beloved man and father to her child. In their time, these books sharply criticised various social problems (especially men's alcoholism and sexual promiscuity), causing lively debates. Having a child was a conscious wish and need for these women, which they saw as an existentially important *woman's right* (also human rights), and thus we can see feminist elements in these novels. Feminist literature in Estonia emerged more confidently beginning in the 1990s, when the discourse was supplemented by quite a few works by Helga Nõu, Maimu Berg, Elo Viiding, Kärt Hellerma, Eeva Park, Maarja Kangro, Kristiina Ehin and others. In the chapter on women's literature, the Finnish literary scholars do not actually analyse only obviously feminist texts, but also include works which depict, for example, being a woman, complicated mother-daughter relations and family life from a psychological perspective, without necessarily trying to

criticise gender roles, society's gender-sex system or women being turned into objects. Interestingly enough, the concept of WL was earlier used by the Finns in a much wider sense. For example, the comprehensive history of Finnish women's literature, *Sain roolin johon en mahdu. Suomalaisen naiskirjallisuuden linjoja* (1989, edited by Maria-Liisa Nevala; pp. 787), considers almost all works written by women that had been left out in previous literary histories as WL. The tome offers a thorough overview, from folk poetry to contemporary literature, and as the editor-in-chief claimed, after this book was published, women's literature could no longer be ignored in Finland.

### **National traumas versus women's feelings in the drawing-room**

There are many interesting women writers in Estonia whose books have never been properly reviewed or analysed in scholarly articles, let alone tackled in monographs. When a writer publishes a book, which has taken her a year or longer to complete, it is then truly sad if the only result is a brief note in one or two dailies. It has become a known fact that our critics can no longer manage to seriously deal with the whole published original literature, and it is WL that gets the least attention. BA and MA theses at universities where the research on women writers has recently become greatly enlivened usually never reach wider audiences and thus do not have much influence on literary process. From Lydia Koidula and Anna Haava onwards, Estonian women poets have been admired and respected, whereas no up-to-date research has been done on the prose of Ellinor Rängel, Aimeé Beekman, Lilli Promet, Asta Willmann, Helga Nõu, Käbi Laretei, Herta Laipaik, Veera Saar, Aino Pervik, Lehte Hainsalu, Heljo Mänd, Maimu Berg, Asta Põldmäe, Mari Saat, Eeva Park, Aita Kivi, Kärt Hellerma, Kerttu Rakke, Elo Viiding, Piret Bristol, Marion Andra or others. Most of the reception has been superficial criticism, and a few good insightful reviews have appeared only in specialised literary magazines. Going back even further: what do today's young

people know about women writers of the previous Republic of Estonia? Only the name of Marie Under was widely introduced last year thanks to Sirje Kiin's monograph. The authors who have delved into our painful recent past and national identity (e.g. Ene Mihkelson and Viivi Luik) have attracted much more attention among the wider literary public than authors writing on specific 'women's' topics or analysing gender-based identity. Typically of Estonian literature, the political aspect puts pressure on other aspects, and we probably will not get rid of the torments of our social history in the near future. Political and other neutral or masculine themes have gained authors more readers and literary prestige, although it is still amazing how little such things have changed in history. After all, it was Virginia Woolf who in her essay *A Room of One's Own* back in 1929 criticised the dominance of masculine values in her contemporary society, a dominance which included literature: 'This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book, because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room.' Woolf stated that out of respect for the opinion of others (especially critics), the British women writers of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century distorted their value criteria in order to ward off criticism. Women distorted their clear vision, and the honesty of their works suffered. The existence of previous women writers to rely on was therefore especially necessary. One hindrance, according to Woolf, in the creative path of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century women writers was the lack of tradition. 'For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately [...] ...for masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice'. Today's women writers cannot complain about a lack of women predecessors, but the concept of women writers as a tradition has not been tackled in Estonian literary histories. There is also no research that relates and compares the books of today's authors with earlier writers, or outlines the work of our women writers as a continuous chain. The current

author tried to start this undertaking with her doctoral thesis *Naisekuju modelleerimine XX sajandi alguskümnendite eesti kirjanduses* (The modelling of the female character in Estonian literature in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 2008), focusing among other things on women writers' working conditions and the reception of their books at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Coming back to WL – it seems that the essence of this concept in Estonia should be *conveying women's experience with artistic means*. This would thus include, besides literature with feminist emphasis or pathos (an average Estonian does not seem to realise that there are in fact several feminisms, e.g. the French philosopher Luce Irigaray criticised the historical and philosophical denial of gender difference), other texts by women authors which centre on *women's experience and voice* (or the point of view of the narrator).

What should we thus take into account in reading and interpreting WL? In addition to women's experience (or topics, often connected with the society of its time), various other aspects are essential as well, e.g. the style of the works (e.g. symbols used in a book, or whether there is a special feminine style), women's difference: female psyche and corporeality, women's subjectivity and constructing their self-identity, intertextual connections with the work of previous and current writers, working conditions of women writers, the reception of works, etc.

Besides works of high literary standard, we should also examine the more entertaining variety: 'chick-lit' and romantic novels. This type of literature certainly has quite a bit in common with more interesting and valuable women's literature. Chick-lit novels are naturally written in an easily understandable style and do not require any intellectual effort from the readers; and sweet romantic novels are full of romantic clichés. Their task, after all, is to entertain readers and comfort them. The Harlequin Enterprises Limited in Canada, for example, the leading publisher of romantic novels in the world, issues 114 different books every

month in 25 languages. This kind of 'industry' of romantic novels will of course fortunately never happen in Estonia, although the publishers have been complaining for years about the excess of low-quality translated books in our shops. Unfortunately, the Estonian chick-lit books of recent years constitute a step backwards from those in the late 1970s. This is because, as far as ideas are concerned, they seem to be trapped in a dead end: the protagonists cannot really cope with their lives, but fail to see the solution in changing themselves; instead, they reinforce and deepen the same norms and behavioural patterns that have caused their misfortunes. The main futile fixed idea is defining oneself through men, as the literary historian and critic Johanna Ross has pointed out.

## Women and wolves

One frequent topic in WL is having or not having a child, which I examine through some examples. Helga Nõu, for example, has tackled the issue repeatedly in several of her novels. Her debut novel *Kass sööb rohtu* (The Cat Eats Grass, 1965) ends with the protagonist suddenly finding she is pregnant and thus facing the fate of becoming an unmarried mother. The author, however, keeps the ending open: readers must enter the protagonist's role and choose the 'correct' solution themselves. The novel *Paha pois* (The Bad Boy) focuses on issues related to abortion, and the question of whether it is murder or not is tackled from several different angles. In Helga Nõu's short story *Paradiisis* (In Paradise), the aborted child reappears to the lovers who decided years ago not to have it – in the name of their future happiness. Their summer house, initially depicted as a paradise, becomes a place of anxiety for the couple. One night three mute guests move in as if they owned the place: a man, a woman and a small girl who are exact copies of the residents.

In the short story *Nõid* (Witch), a mentally disturbed Jewish woman (who lost her mind in a Nazi concentration camp) kills a worker in a children's home in order to get back her

'kidnapped' baby. Helga Nõu has herself claimed that a woman's natural desire is to have a child, and that her own three children are the most important people in her life. Having a child as a woman's existentially most significant task, where even breaking her marriage vows is not a crime, has inspired Nõu in her novel *Ood lastud rebasele* (An Ode to the Shot Fox, 2006). Nõu's female characters are often accompanied by animals. Interestingly enough, it is women authors who have in recent years again picked up the wolf motif, which first appeared in Estonian literature in August Kitzberg's short story *Libahunt* (Werewolf, 1891) and in his play of the same title in 1912. Helga Nõu, as she has said, has always been fascinated by wolves; even her paintings frequently depict motifs of wolves. In the novel *Hundi silmas* (In the Wolf's Eye, 1999), the narrator follows the fate of an exiled Estonian woman who, like a wolf, tries to find her pack in a strange country, without success. The main character Tiina is at a double disadvantage: as an Estonian, a stranger in exile, and as a woman in a man-centred society, where trampling on a woman's feelings is a common occurrence. Tiina does not find happiness. Abandoned as a young girl by a Swedish man named Roland, she terminates her pregnancy and obeys her parents' wishes by reluctantly marrying a man with whom she can have no children. Later, when she divorces her husband, Tiina seems to fit the idea of a 'crazy' woman: she lives as a recluse, wears an old-fashioned coat and her eyes glow in the dark like a wolf's. Roland, as the father of Tiina's unborn child, is also connected with her bitterness, desire and madness. The pain and regret caused by being abandoned never leave her and finally culminate in an imaginary act of revenge on the man: the wolf-woman kills the man during a snowstorm.

In Aino Pervik's short story *Impulss* (Impulse), Karmen's husband kills a wolf, which causes her to see the abortion of years ago in a new light – as playing with death. Karmen, a chemist by profession, is not able to have children later, so she feels powerless and useless. Staying at the farm she unexpectedly inherits from her great-aunt, she sees the killing of the

wolf as a fertility ritual, where the animal sacrifice gave people the power to conceive: 'This wild beast, killed in its prime, had something revoltingly appealing about it, its power was surely still around somewhere, in an unattainable form, like its body here, dangling on a rope.' Strangely, it is the dead wolf who becomes a kind of support or source of impulse for the woman, encouraging her to think positively and find a new beginning. The situations of Tiina and Karmen both demonstrate that abortion as a forced halving of a woman, cutting off a natural part of her, produces, besides the physical, also a permanent psychological trauma. And as a child is someone through whom a woman can determine herself, childlessness can easily rock her self-confidence, her awareness of being a woman. Having a child in these stories is not important only from the point of view of procreation; a child is connected to a woman's body and is an expression of her primal nature. Estonian women writers have certainly tackled the issues related to abortion from the woman's point of view much more widely and deeply than our public debates have managed.

Kärt Hellerma's short story *Hunt* (Wolf) constitutes a wolf-woman monologue. During the day she lies under her bed in a high-rise block of flats and criticises her own failed life and society, whereas at night she roams about freely. As a wolf she can do what is really in her nature and what is forbidden to her as a human being – being an ageing mediocre actress. She raises her muzzle to the moon and howls as long and loud as she fancies, then races around in the forest, without any qualms or pain, which are so common in her human life. In the morning, however, the wolf returns home to her two sons.

In Maarja Kangro's short story *Jaanihunt* (*Midsummer Wolf*) the protagonist is transformed into a wolf, but on Midsummer Night her uncouth relatives unexpectedly arrive and upset all her plans, starting to wash their dirty laundry at her summer cottage. The wild, untamed wolf symbolises the woman's suppressed fury and urge to revolt, the missing force and courage needed to break the norms

of polite behaviour, which the woman desperately needs to manage tricky situations. When one's fellow human beings lose their humanity and become merciless and evil, it is better to be a wolf amongst wolves and enjoy freedom and the animal nature to the full – this is the message we seem to get from these texts. We can only guess whether these authors have also found inspiration in Clarissa Pinkola Estes's famous work *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*.

Various situations connected with educated women having children can be followed in Maarja Kangro's short stories *48 tundi* (48 Hours) and *Päikesereis*. (*Repriis*) (Sunshine Trip. (Reprise)). These stories show that the situation of over 30-year-old unmarried intellectual women who want to start a family is no better than it was back in the 1970s. They seem to have done everything right: they have become adults before becoming parents, acquired interesting professions and are financially more or less secure, but after all these work-filled years the society they live in leaves them with nothing. This is because the number of educated men and women in Estonia differs vastly – there are not enough men around. These women hardly have a choice, except to turn into werewolves and run around in a forest, although the forest should not be too close to home, but much further off, across the border, where there are still men who are willing to give them children.

We can say, in summary, that the examined texts mainly express specific women's experience conveyed by women's voice; some of them also focus on the marginalisation of women's sexuality and the strengthening of women's subjectivism, or the identity of women, which allows us to see them as women's literature (relying on the above-mentioned definition of Finnish literary historians). There are still Estonian women writers who do not offer cheap entertainment and pink fairy-tales, but tackle the serious questions which most women readers may have to face at some point in their lives.

# Ain Kaalep

## and the Golden Aphrodite

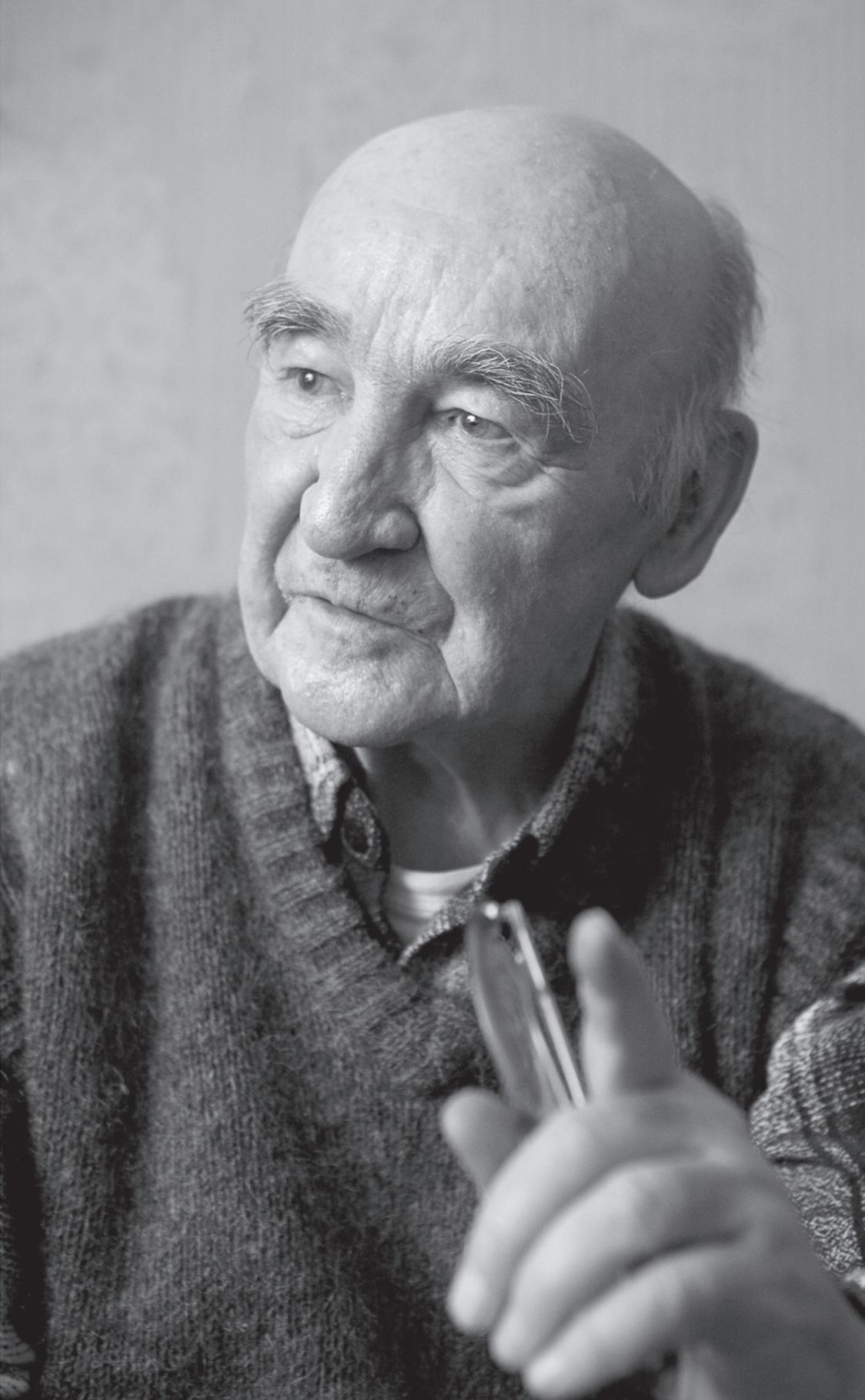
b y S i r j e O l e s k

On 4 June 2011, the Estonian writer, literary critic and translator Ain Kaalep celebrated his 85th birthday.

The Estonian novelist Jaan Kross once called Ain Kaalep *Praeceptor Estoniae* – the teacher of Estonia. “What should a teacher do? Evoke interest, make others aware of things and connect them. Even better if he manages to evoke interest in his own person as well, as this will considerably enhance his undertaking, but first of all he must get the student interested in the relevant object. He then has to introduce the object via its chosen features. And finally connect the more distant with the near, and the new with what was known before. Kaalep does all this /—/ *par excellence*.” Jaan Kross wrote this after the publication of Kaalep’s first collection of essays in 1984.

Another selection of Kaalep’s impressive essays, mainly on prosody, and introductions to his numerous translation books can be found in his book *Kolm Lydiat*, (*Three Lydias*, 1997).

Ain Kaalep (Photo by Scanpix)



The Soviet occupation deprived Ain Kaalep of his academic career, although he was perfectly suited to the role of teacher and lecturer. His ability in this field was, however, so obvious that he occasionally managed to work as a teacher throughout his life. In 1949 Kaalep was expelled from the Tartu State University for ideological reasons. He got a job at a home for disabled children, and later worked as a teacher of literature at a secondary school and then lectured in world literature on an hourly fee basis at the Drama School of the Tallinn Conservatoire. The Tartu State University dared to invite him to chair the Translation Centre only in the 1980s. In free Estonia, Kaalep became a professor of liberal arts in the 1990s at the University of Tartu. These are the only occasions when Ain Kaalep was able to find an outlet for his inner academic essence. He was among the people who re-established the academic journal *Academy* (*Akadeemia*; the original journal appeared between 1937 and 1940) in 1988 in Tartu, and he was the first editor-in-chief in 1989. At that time, the editorial office was one of the sites in Tartu where foreign guests came for a visit. Kaalep talked to most of them in their mother tongue (German, French, Spanish, Finnish, Turkish, Russian, English or Swedish), often produced a pun or two, and certainly seemed far more academic than most Tartu university professors. Maybe that was one reason the professors took their visitors to meet him.

In addition, Ain Kaalep has been one of the most original poets in Estonia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, simultaneously modern and classical, one of the last academic poets who regards the history of world poetry as cultural continuity and views Estonian-language poetry as part of it. Kaalep is without doubt one of the leading and most prolific poetry translators. He has always regarded himself first of all as a philologist, i.e. someone who loves languages.

Poetry in all its diversity, in different eras and in many languages, has been Ain

Kaalep's interest, work and love. He also wants to see diversity in Estonian literature, where he knows the finesses and tiniest details better than anyone else. He has always appreciated the art of poetry writing, poetry as art, an artistic and intellectual activity, and not just an expression of emotions. The multiplicity of poetic forms shapes its richness; haikus and ghazals, sonnets and rubais have been written in many languages, and it is silly, in Kaalep's view, to determine "suitable" or "unsuitable" forms for any language. For him, literature has fashionable or forgotten, exotic or normal forms. "After all, literature is a special case of language," he once stated in an interview, and added: "With my poems, I am trying to serve the genius of the Estonian language."

Ain Kaalep is part of the generation that, from Jaan Kross to the writer and president Lennart Meri, has accomplished great deeds in Estonian history and literature, overcoming wars, occupations, deportations to Siberian prison camps and forced exile. Many writers died early, started late or lost their best creative years in trenches and prison camps. Kaalep was among the youngest who fled to Finland in 1943, joined the army there and returned in August 1944 to fight for his homeland. He was lucky to survive and he was not deported, although he had to suffer the mistrust and suspicions of the Soviet authorities.

Numerous Estonian intellectuals, such as Kalju Lepik, Ivar Grünthal, Ivar Ivask, Hellar Grabbi, Enn Nõu and others, fled their homeland and formed the younger generation of writers and poets in exile. These people were born in the free Republic of Estonia, and went to school before the war, although their childhood was dominated by bombing raids, attempts to escape, uncertainty and direct danger. War at their age might have seemed an adventure, but this impression did not last. For those staying at home, the post-war years did not bring much relief: daily hardship and an enforced alien ideology.

Ain Kaalep was born on 4 June in 1926 in Tartu. His father was a forester who left Estonia in 1944 and is buried in New Zealand. His family – wife, son and daughter – were left behind. Ain Kaalep graduated from secondary school in 1943, served in the Home Guard and was admitted to Tartu University. Kaalep began writing poems during the war years, and some of them have miraculously survived at the Estonian Literary Museum.

In February 1945 Ain Kaalep was arrested and imprisoned without being charged for over a year, but was then released, because one of his mother's relatives was an old communist who was prepared to vouch for him. In 1947 he re-entered the university, but was expelled in 1949, accused of being a cosmopolitan! (A special article appeared in the papers: "Kaalep as a Cosmopolitan in pocketbook edition"). In hindsight, he has said that being forced into a "working-class life" was actually a relief, as he escaped the whole ideological nonsense at the university, which was especially intrusive and paranoid during the years before Stalin's death. Instead, he abandoned all contemporary literature, got a job at a centre that collected scrap paper and second-hand clothes, and read Goethe.

Thus Ain Kaalep (just like Jaan Kross and some other contemporaries) debuted late as a writer in Soviet literature. In cooperation with the Estonian State Publishers, he began his translation career. Kaalep's first published translated authors had to please the Soviet authorities. There was no way around this. Kaalep took part in translating bulky tomes of poems by Taras Ševčenko (1961), Johannes R. Becher (1962) and Heinrich Heine (1956).

The period in Ain Kaalep's life between Stalin's death and the restoration of the Republic of Estonia was not exactly full of exciting events. In 1956 he was allowed, through distance learning, to graduate from Tartu University in Finno-Ugric languages. After graduation and after his first poetry

translations earned him some income, he and his wife settled in the small town of Elva, near Tartu. Whole generations have visited the couple's home there, in an old crumbling wooden house by Lake Verevi. Ain Kaalep was especially keen on aspiring writers about 20 years younger than himself, such as Mati Unt, Jaan Kaplinski, Paul-Eerik Rummo, Ly Seppel, Andres Ehin and Jaak Põldmäe. They were followed by the numerous friends of Kaalep's daughter, who have always been welcomed at his home.

In the newly independent Estonia, Ain Kaalep became a delegate of the Congress of Estonia and a member of the Constitutional Assembly. The Republic of Estonia has awarded him the Order of the National Coat of Arms, and he has received various decorations from France, Spain and Finland.

At the end of the 1950s, Kaalep put together his first collection of poetry, but its publication was delayed. At that time, an amazingly extensive "free-verse war" erupted in Estonian literature. It focused on the strange question of whether free verse was suitable in Soviet poetry or not. One side consisted of the writers who had debuted late, such as Jaan Kross, Ain Kaalep and Ellen Niit, and the other side was made up of established "red" socialist poets and critics, who subconsciously (or consciously) tried to protect the highly paid Parnassus from newcomers. This was the time when Soviet and Communist Party-supervised Estonian literature was gradually returning to normal and the trio Kross-Niit-Kaalep played a decisive role in that. There was another poet in this group, the sublime Artur Alliksaar, but his work and his personality were too much for the Soviet public and he was never published in Soviet Estonia during his lifetime. Ain Kaalep finally managed to get his work printed; in 1962, there were even two collections: the actual first collection *Dawn Landscapes (Aomaastikud)*, which had been sitting at the publishing house for quite some time, and *A Booklet of Samarkand (Samarkandi vihik)*, based on his trip to Uzbekistan. The latter

was especially topical, full of hopeful motifs of the political “thaw” of the 1960s, although still carefully steering between obstacles posed by the vigilant censors.

The late 1960s was a productive time for Kaalep: in 1966 another poetry collection appeared, *Lake Landscapes (Järvemaastikud)*, and in 1971 *Glass Landscapes (Klaasmaastikud)* was published. After free verse was established in Estonian poetry, despite tremendous opposition, Ain Kaalep turned to a different type of poetry, exotic and elaborate strophe and verse forms. More than any other Estonian poet, he wrote original poetry in other verse systems as well, e.g. quantitative and syllabic verse.

In 1976, when Ain Kaalep celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, he published the collection *The Death of Pan and Other Poems (Paani surm and teisi luuletusi)*. Kaalep managed to surprise readers yet again, as his poems were totally different from what was being published at that time. *The Death of Pan* is epic and tragic, with long narrative poems, and thus offers something fresh. In 1986 he continued the same poetic approach in *Golden Aphrodite and Other Poems (Kuldne Aphrodite and teisi luuletusi)*. I mentioned earlier that Kaalep’s poetry is often timeless and classical in the most general sense, and this is especially true of the title poems in both collections.

Ain Kaalep published his so far the last collection of poetry in 1999 in Võro language spoken in south Estonia.

In 1976 Ain Kaalep published the selected poetry translations *Mirror Landscapes (Peegelmaastikud I): Antiqua, Gallica, Germanica, Ucrainiensia*, and in 1980 the second part: *Iberica, Iberoamericana, Africana, Turcica*.

Poetry translation is indeed the area where Ain Kaalep has been most prolific. This has also mainly been his way of

making a living. This kind of work, however, cannot be done without love. Kaalep’s love is above all for Spanish poetry – the works of Garcia Lorca, Cesar Vallejo and Octavio Paz. He has, of course, translated the works of many German writers, Bertolt Brecht, Günter Eich, Georg Maurer, Goethe and Schiller, and of the French poets Jacques Prevert, Charles Baudelaire and Victor Hugo. He has also participated, as translator and editor, in translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and in anthologies of Greek and Roman literature.

According to Kaalep, a poet must serve the genius of language; he as a poet wishes to be primarily a linguist, and poetry indeed must be intellectual. This is all true in his own work, which has never aspired to (or achieved) wide popularity. Kaalep’s poetry is quite cerebral, often technical and knowingly virtuoso. The themes he has tackled are both extensive and restricted. Many works rely on “secondary inspiration”, constructed on the principle of a piece of music or an artwork. The two constant centres in his work are a desire for the antique and a fascination with Oriental (Arabic and Persian) forms and motifs of poetry.

Ain Kaalep’s poetry is quite singular in the Estonian context, although easily placed in world poetry alongside similar poets. Terms such as realist, romantic, modernist and, of course, postmodernist do not really apply in his case. He is a poet whose timeless poems are works of art with a deep cultural background.

**This text first appeared as an afterword to Ain Kaalep’s selected poetry *Muses and Landscapes (Muusad ja maastikud, 2008)*.**

# Kalevipoeg

## New English translation of the Estonian national epic

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The 150th anniversary of the first publication of the Estonian national epic, F. R. Kreutzwald's Kalevipoeg (Son of Kalev), is marked in 2011 by the publication of a new full text in English. The new translation is an excellent addition to the only previous English translation by Prof. Jüri Kurman (Moorestown–New Jersey, 1982). The current one is thus the second translation into English since 1861, when Kalevipoeg appeared with German parallel text and commentaries, on the initiative of the Learned Estonian Society of the Baltic Estophiles.

The new edition has parallel texts and is richly illustrated. The introduction was written by the President of the Republic, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, professor of comparative folkloristics Ülo Valk and Jüri Talvet, professor of world literature at the University of Tartu. Commentaries are from the editors, Dr. Harri Mürk from Canada and Dr. David Elton Gay from the US.



**“Kalevipoeg” Gunnar Neeme, Australia 1980/1994**  
**“Lend to me your psalt’ry, Ancient Old One!”**

The story of the new translation is remarkable. The manuscript of the translation and the design with illustrations arrived at the Estonian Literary Museum from exile Estonians in Australia. The author of the translation is the Australian-Estonian poet and textile artist Triinu Kartus (1932–2003). She was inspired by her acutely perceived mission in exile to convey Estonian traditions through the text of the epic that had become the symbol of people’s beliefs and hopes. Triinu Kartus also deeply felt the poetic force of Kreutzwald’s text. The translation precisely follows the metre of Estonian runo songs. Triinu Kartus started translating in 1997. Her intense and dedicated work quickly resulted in the translation of ten songs out of twenty, and continued until 2002. Editing her work was the last job of Harri William Mürk (1949–2009), a man of great experience in translating Finno-Ugric runo songs.

Triinu Kartus’s translation was a creative process that took place in close cooperation with Gunnar Neeme, an Australian-Estonian artist and poet. Gunnar Neeme (formerly



**“Kalevipoeg” Gunnar Neeme 1984/1995 Australia**  
**“In the north there stood a house...”**

Johannes Näkk, 1918–2003) was born and raised in Tartu. Before escaping from Estonia in 1944, he had studied at the Pallas Art School and in Germany. In Australia, he worked as an applied graphic artist and art teacher. His oil paintings, watercolours, graphic art and sculptures are well known, and are included in collections in the Nordic countries, Holland, France, Great Britain, Canada, the USA, Peru, Japan, Israel and all over Australia. He created over 200 black-and-white graphic sheets based on the epic.

The jubilee edition of Kalevipoeg will serve as a business card for Estonia for a long time, and will also serve as a symbol of the return home of the Son of Kalev on the 20th anniversary of Estonia regaining its independence:

*But one day there comes a time,  
 When all spills at both their ends will  
 Start outright to flare up bright;  
 Flames of fire will cut outright  
 His hand from stone fetters loose –  
 Surely Kalev will then come home to  
 Bring his people fortune true,  
 Build Estonia anew.*

On the basis of Gunnar Neeme’s model, the book was designed by Mart Anderson and Andres Rõhu; the book will be published jointly by the Estonian Literary Museum and the publishing house Kunst, supported by the Estonian Cultural Endowment and the Ministry of Culture.

# Kristiina Ehin

## Two Stories



Kristiina Ehin (Photo by Scampix)

Kristiina Ehin needs no introduction as a poet – she already has a high reputation in Britain and Ireland based on several books in translation. Her prose is less well-known abroad, but a book of stories in English entitled *A Priceless Nest* (reviewed in the Spring 2010 issue of *ELM*) is published by Oleander Press in England. Five stories from *Viimane Monogaamlane*, her new collection of poetry and prose, will appear in the esteemed American literary magazine *The Bitter Oleander*, where Kristiina will be featured poet in the Spring 2012 issue with thirty pages devoted to her poetry and prose as well as an in-depth interview.

Ilmar Lehtpere

# Dragon's diary

I've already seen one thing and another, even a third and a fourth in this world, but wherever I've searched, wherever I've crept, I haven't found sex.

What sort of thing is this sex that everyone talks about and falls silent about? I don't understand.

Now I'm married to this Giant here. Every evening he puts his heavy hands around me. He cuddles me and caresses me.

Tenderly kisses my three mouths and three necks. I become more and more heated from this until I start spouting flames and then gradually cool down, like lava that has flowed into a cold spring. Our bed is full of smoke and in the hiss of cooling down I feel the beating of his big heart under my claws. Thump-thump-thump-thump...

But what part of all this – the beginning, the end, the middle, or all of it together – is sex, that I don't know.

This morning I asked my husband and he answered with a laugh that sex is when I once lost my tail under our blanket and he helped me to find it.

Depressing. How is that supposed to happen again? You can't consciously lose your tail under the blanket. That can only happen by chance. And what might also happen by chance is that I will never chance upon it again.

Best to forget it altogether. The word is already getting on my nerves. Sex. Sounds like a trap being sprung. Who invented this mysterious trap anyway? Clack. And all at once it captures your most beautiful moments. It's aggravating and intrusive. It's a third party when you want to be alone, just the two of you. I hope I manage to forget it.

I said that to my husband's face. He started laughing again and said he'd been joking and that losing your tail certainly isn't sex. „But what is it then?“ I asked angrily.

My husband thought about it and said, „Sex is closing your mouth nicely now, not thinking about anything and simply being beautiful.“

I was desperate again. Is sex something that you do for others?

That seems boring and courteous. Something like a curtsy.

I decided not to turn to my husband any more in this matter. He only makes light of it when I'm being serious.

Yet I sense that I will soon have to take up this subject again.

Because lately he seems to be... somehow annoyingly patronising.

There isn't the clear, bright closeness of before between us any more. Between us there is now that curtsy, the trap springing... and... clack!... nothing is as it was before.

# Wedded to Myself

## 1.

By morning my husband's black beard had gone bluish-grey. I had tormented him all night long. I don't really know what to say other than – pity. I'd only told him that I was inviting him to a wedding – a wedding where I was getting married to myself. I showed him my wedding dress as well. It was sun-yellow and, using dye on the skirt, I had drawn the most beautiful moments of my life.

„Please, please, put it away!“ my husband said. „It's blinding me! There's a strange feeling coming over me and... I feel sick.“

„No, look at it, take a good, close look!“ I demanded.

„Put it away, I beg you!“ he whined.

„But why?“ I slipped into the dress and stood before him.

He cried out. Covered his eyes with his hands and... seemed to break. I went on standing there in all my beauty, my many-coloured gaiety and complexity.

Every time my husband opened his eyes, he was struck by a fresh attack. It was as if he wanted to ask something, but wasn't able and just moved his mouth.

„Go on, ask, ask away,“ I encouraged, and continued standing there.

## 2.

My wedding was the most joyous get together any of my friends and acquaintances had ever been to. And all that joy suddenly came together in me. I had never felt that smiling could be so easy. Only my husband was gloomy. He sat by himself in the corner and every time he looked at me he groaned out loud. I went over to him and stroked his hair and grey beard.

„Why did you...“ His voice broke off. „Why, after all our beautiful years together, did you suddenly need to marry yourself?“

„Why, why! Who needs to ask such questions?“ I reproached him and danced off.

„I don't... I don't want to live with you any more if you're going to be like that,“ he called after me.

I thought then that he was only having me on. Why should my husband be disturbed by my marriage to myself? But he was deadly serious. He saw things in a totally different way. We got a divorce.

## 3.

Five years later we met again. It turned out that my former husband had a candidate of sciences degree in the study of cannibalism. His beard had in the mean time turned quite blue. We sat there – he sombre blue, I still golden yellow.

„Have you married again?“ I asked.

Oh yes, several times. And you? Still married to yourself?“

„Yes, still,“ I said, uneasily for some reason.

Suddenly I understood that I still felt an inexplicably strong attraction to my former husband.

„I have to carry out some... practical work. Would you help me with it?“ he asked.

„Ahh – no!“ I heard myself answer. My voice sounded tantalising.

„At least come to my exhibition!“ he appealed persuasively. „The opening is in the tower room of the Academy of Sciences tonight at one o' clock.“

„Ehhh... very well,“ I heard myself answer again.

## 4.

I already knew what would be in the exhibition. Dresses. The wedding dresses of his former wives. All of them as beautiful and colourfully gay as my own. In a strange way I was attracted, oh, how I was attracted to that exhibition.

„Put on your yellow wedding dress!“ he had said. „It doesn't blind me any more.“

As if in a trance I climbed up the spiral staircase towards the tower room. What on earth am I doing?

At the very last moment I decided I'd rather jump out of the window than step into that exhibition room and straight in between the sharpened teeth of my former husband.

I stood on the broad windowsill beside the room. I pushed the window open and jumped into the dark autumn night. The flight was long. I was beginning to think it would never end. Suddenly I found myself amid a soft, rustling pile of leaves. A gardener was bending over me. We kissed and drove away from there. If we haven't died, we've lived quite tolerably ever after. My former husband defended his doctoral dissertation quite nicely without me and by all accounts is working on his twelfth marriage. We women feel so easily that we need to feed our men with ourselves and leave all the gaily coloured dresses, which we had taken such great pains to acquire, to adorn their collections.

I'm still married to myself, but now I have a gardener and lover who isn't troubled in the slightest by my unquenchable devotion to myself.

# Journey towards

b y R e i n V e i d e m a n n

Viivi Luik. *Varjuteater (Shadow Theatre)*. Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, Tallinn, 2010, 307 p.  
Viivi Luik and Hedi Rosma. *Ma olen raamat (I Am a Book)*. SE&JS, 2010, 159 p.  
Jaak Jõerüüt. *Armastuse laiad, kõrged hooned (The Wide, Tall Buildings of Love)*. Tuum, 2010, 69 p.  
Jaak Jõerüüt. *Muutlik (The Mutable)*. Tuum, 2010, 336 p.

In his programmatic essay *Existentialism is Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre formulated the first principle of existentialism: “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.” Man is thus primarily ‘a sketch of himself’ and exists only in his self-realisation, which may take his whole life. “Man makes himself,” wrote Sartre, “he is not found ready-made, he makes himself by his choice of morality, and he cannot but choose a morality, such is the pressure of circumstances upon him.” To choose, however, means to engage. What man actually is becomes clear only when one looks at the journey towards becoming man. Still, even this may not be final.

It is apt to mention Sartre and existentialism here, as Viivi Luik (1946) and Jaak Jõerüüt (1947) are a part of the generation of Estonian writers (the generation of the 1960s, as it is known) who were in touch with the existentialist way of thinking. Their childhood sand-boxes could still reveal shards of bombs. Grandparents or parents of this generation were deported to Siberian prison camps, and quite a few of these children had to go with them. Their school years were ‘enlightened’ by Lenin and Stalin. One war was barely over when the next one, the Cold War, started. They were born and grew up in the shadow of war traumas and fear. The post-war Soviet totalitarian regime operated as a double system of frightening people, on the one hand and, on the other, demanding that they devote themselves to the communist, paradisaical future. For the generation of Estonians born during or shortly after the war, the central concepts of existentialism, such as ‘authenticity’, ‘freedom of thought, will and choice’, ‘the absurd’ and ‘anxiety’, existed in everyday practice, and were not just problems encountered while facing an abstract system (e.g. Kafka’s work).

As for Luik, Jõerüüt and their contemporaries, it is, however, possible to talk only about the *i n d i r e c t* influences of existential philosophy. The key texts of

Kafka (*A Report to an Academy*, 1962, and *The Trial*, 1966) Sartre (*Words*, 1965) and Camus (*The Stranger*, 1966) were translated and arrived in the Estonian language during the first half and middle of the 1960s. This 'arrival' culminated with Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1972). This was certainly not a conscious borrowing of a popular Western trend of thought or a mechanical 'planting' in the Estonian literary space. Rather, we can describe it as 'self-emerging existentialism', as expressed in a poem by Paul-Eerik Rummo written in the late 1960s. According to the poem, Estonia was a country where existentialism has for decades / helped many to keep existing and somehow manage.

What's more, this 'self-emergence' lacked the ambition of creating a philosophical system, and hence Estonian literary existentialism can only be regarded as an expression of a perception of life (existentialism), and not as another manifestation or illustration of an '-ism'.

An example of this kind of existential perception, i.e. mostly relying on the borders of one's own existence and focusing on relations with others and the whole world, can clearly be found in Viivi Luik's confessional interview book, *I Am a Book*:

I must be able to express verbally that I, too, carry the burden of life as YOU, as THEY, as WE, and what I feel when I carry it. No-one but me can express this. If I do not express it, it will stay unexpressed. Searching for words and having skill at writing is not enough; we must become words, and

nobody knows how to do this.

/---/ Despite my will, everything that happens to me, what I feel and what I see gets recorded in me. This demands to be put into a human language. This is the only way to know what people feel living in this world. How alone they are and how their little hearts beat at night, and how they fear, protest, long and keep waiting throughout life, for something vague, unknown" (*I Am a Book*, pp. 56-57).

It is interesting to note how important it is to Viivi Luik that what is most significant in life should find expression. If even one excellent poem has been written in a language, it has actually been written in all languages. When Jaak Jõerüüt published his collection of poetry *The Wide, Tall Buildings of Love*, Luik especially liked the poem titled *Diptych*, and said that she would have been happy to be the author herself. Jõerüüt's two-part poem describes reaching knowledge that is brief and eternal, and how these two perceptions of time meet up in love. (Incidentally, the last page of Jõerüüt's novel also reveals an epiphany, an understanding that "in front of love, all people are immortal". He is, of course, paraphrasing another saying, which says that in the face of death, all people are equal.)

Viivi Luik found that, before this particular poem of Jõerüüt's existed, the relevant poetical event had not reached her either. "Now, however, it exists in the world and in a mysterious way influences our languages and our worlds," Luik said in an interview. This clearly reveals her attitude towards the word as revelation.



Jaak Jõerüüt (Photo by Kaido Vainomaa)

There is a parallel to Luik's concept of being a writer in Sartre's *The Words*. To Sartre, writing meant a kind of labour of Sisyphus. A writer, according to Sartre, was unable to change anything, because "culture does not save anything or anyone, it doesn't justify". Nevertheless, culture itself is the product of man: "he projects himself into it, he recognizes himself in it, that critical mirror alone offers him his image (J.-P. Sartre *The Words*, p.196).

However, all the possible parallels do not mean that Estonian literature was derived from world literature or was an 'Estonian version' of world trends of thought. Instead, life and human destinies can be perceived here in the same categories which are elsewhere generalised and systematised into philosophical trends.

This also includes the 'journey', which forms an axis in Viivi Luik's essay-novel *Shadow Theatre*, and Jaak Jõerüüt's diary-novel *The Mutable*. One background factor that has influenced the lives of the authors and shaped these books is that the married couple Luik and Jõerüüt have been away from Estonia for the last 18 years, with only brief stays in Estonia. In 1993 Jaak Jõerüüt became a diplomat. As Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia, his first posting was to Finland, in 1998–2002 he was Ambassador to Italy, in 2004 briefly UN Ambassador in America, in 2006–2011 Ambassador to Latvia and, beginning in 2011, Ambassador to Sweden. Viivi Luik has naturally accompanied her husband on these missions. The realities of diplomatic life (e.g. trying to find a flat, creating networks of communication, and getting used to local people and customs) add a wonderful touch to *Shadow Theatre*. The book is dedicated to her husband as an embodiment of home: "To JJ, who has been my home in the world". One of the destinations and stopping places in Luik's novel is Rome. The time of writing *The Mutable* was their last year in Riga. However, it is clear that Jõerüüt also has a destination to which a mysterious camino must take him. "This camino has

its summits from where you can see far away,” he noted in his diary in December 2009 (Jaak Jõerüüt, *Muutlik*, p. 21). At some point, he contemplated a journey to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. In Spanish, *camino* means a journey, progress; in connection with Santiago de Compostela, it designates a pilgrimage which allows you to find out your own limits and boundaries, as well as find purification. Jõerüüt’s earlier diary notes indeed indicated that this was an image, because as he confesses in the novel (‘confesses’ because the novel is simultaneously a self-reflection and a search for a spiritual bridge to the Other): “The most important journey, however, runs through words. Through written, silenced, forgotten truths.”

Viivi Luik’s novel has had a strange reception: it has been taken as a travelogue. Go Travel, the publisher of the travel magazine Go, even named Viivi Luik the best travel writer of the year. Luik herself was quite surprised by this interpretation, and by all this attention, because Estonian publishers issue at least one travelogue each week. In her interview in *Eesti Päevaleht*, Luik said: “This book has hardly anything to do with travelogues or memoirs. *Shadow Theatre* is a novel.”

The award jury did admit that it was not a classic travelogue, although Luik’s book (and Jõerüüt’s *The Mutable* too) contains plenty of historical, topical and ‘communal’ observations and emotional comments about various places and people. Nevertheless, subsequent reviews still largely regarded *Shadow Theatre* as a kind of report on their years spent abroad, or recollections of them. The poet, prose writer and critic Maarja Kangro defined Luik’s work as “travelogue with a hint of fiction”. She reviewed it as an essay as, in her opinion, the author’s voice coincided with the narrator’s. The critic was annoyed by Luik’s prejudiced attitude towards Italians and Rome, and by numerous errors in Italian quotations, which the editor somehow missed. Kangro also admitted that “the umbrella motif or the

writer’s life as a journey to Rome seems contrived in its meaningfulness.” Tõnu Õnnepalu, one of the most prominent contemporary Estonian writers, read Viivi Luik’s novel in parallel with Jaak Jõerüüt’s *The Mutable*, and he claimed that these books were certainly not novels (in his opinion, Luik’s book was a “travelogue in short stories”). However, both can be defined as fiction, because the authors are writers who have written their books as if they were the last – as if they were summaries of their lives.

The reason Luik’s text cannot be regarded as a novel, according to Tõnu Õnnepalu – and this was also mentioned by Maarja Kangro – is that it lacks a character, a hero, who forms the centre of the story. The focus is thus instead on secondary characters. Õnnepalu, however, was happy to praise Viivi Luik as the author of her *Seventh Spring of Peace* and *The Beauty of History* (translated into English in 2007), who could simultaneously entertain the reader and dare to speak of big and serious issues with pathos.

I mentioned these two opinions in order to refer to two facts characterising today’s Estonian literary scene. First, the change of generations is clearly perceived in the reception of literature, not just the generation of writers, but also of readers. The generation of writers of the 1960s is characterised by a focus on the problem of the uniformity of identity and existence. This is also the “horizon of expectation” for Estonian readers who have now reached the threshold of old age. This was once formulated by the Estonian writer, and later president, Lennart Meri in three questions: “Where are we coming from?”, “Who are we?” and “Where are we heading to?” These questions and seeking an answer to them are evident in the poetry and prose of other Estonian writers. Viivi Luik and Jaak Jõerüüt as writers have remained true to their generation and thus the circle of readers whom their books address. Their work, too, focuses on a search for identity, authentic existence and truth. Briefly, their

work is carried by an existential attitude to life.

Another factor is perhaps not linked so much with the changing generations as with a general change of mentality. I would like to illustrate this point with the help of Jürgen Habermas's work. In his study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he wrote that under conditions in which mass culture and the public sphere become increasingly media-focused, truth is replaced by whether something can be consumed or not. Accordingly, relations with literature acquire the same form as in relating to the popular press, where people's private lives, their stories and destinies are 'shaped' by means of clichés and stereotypes into objects of public consumption. Habermas refers to this as 'the public sphere becoming private'.

Literature is no longer a place in which to seek an image of truth (and even less, for example, a place to seek nature descriptions or examinations of various layers of consciousness); it no longer enables us to see an individual human life in a general picture, nor does it lead us into a sphere of symbols or into transcendental indeterminacy. Instead, it is something that is included in the general carousel of life, in the same way as in other media (e.g. television and the Internet) and texts. In such a context, 'authenticity' and 'identity' no longer have any sacral meaning. Either you have to pretend everywhere, or life itself is pretence. Viivi Luik describes this colourfully in her novel, through pastor Atspol. The good pastor explains that it is pointless to expect Magda, a girl he found in the street and took under his wing, to understand what a rose bush in a churchyard really means. For Magda, flowers are associated with the brand names of famous perfumes. "Magda notices the rose of our Lord only if some factory or other has bothered to produce a rose scent," says Atspol.

This little scene is perhaps one among many that caused Viivi Luik to call her novel *Shadow Theatre*, where life has become or turned into a shadow play. The same kind of seemingness of existence is examined in the last chapter of the novel, entitled *Shadow Theatre*. Atspol invites the author to the Jiddisches Liedtheater in Berlin, but her father's death intervenes and she goes to the funeral instead. She is led to the chapel, the coffin is opened and she sees her dead father. She is now facing reality. "I did not see my father, but a model of man, the primordial clay of which you are made. This was not meant to be looked at. I saw the forbidden and felt embarrassed at having seen it."

Later, at the Jewish theatre, she sees the same thing in shadows projected on a white screen: how everyone bears the burden of his life, until death obliterates that as well.

In the interview mentioned above, Viivi Luik admitted that she had spent her entire life becoming herself. In the final pages of the novel (at the end of the journey!), the author says: "I saw in the Shadow Theatre what Rome, the Eternal City, later confirmed with a seal." But what exactly is this 'herself'; it might be just as startling, surrounded with embarrassment, taboos and pain, as the last encounter with her father.

'Journey towards yourself' (Jöerüüt's diary calls it 'researching your own thing', with himself as the researcher, the 'self-scientist') therefore means entering a labyrinth rather than arriving at clarity and enlightenment. The novels of Luik and Jöerüüt describe what Milan Kundera summarised in the title of his most famous novel – the unbearable lightness of being.



# Short Outlines of Books by Estonian

by L e e n a K u r v e t - K ä o s a a r , B r i t a M e l t s ,

Siim Nurklik

## **Kas ma olen nüüd elus**

(Am I Alive Now)

Tallinn: S. Nurklik, 2010. 141 pp

ISBN 9789949210299

The first book by Siim Nurklik (1983), *Am I Alive Now*, was awarded Second Prize at the 2009 play competition held by the Estonian Theatre Agency, and the text has reached the theatre stage. Thus we can conclude that we are dealing with a play. However, such a specification is not so easy because, first, the book lacks the usual book-like appearance (as a design trick, all information about the contents has been crossed out on the covers of the book, there is no title page, etc.) and, second, the text is far from the customary text of a play. When leafing through the book, we can see slogan-like and catchy short sentences or phrases put in large letters on black, grey or white backgrounds in between the fragmentary text of the play. The appearance of the book is artistically accentuated and this evokes even more interest than the content of the

book, which lacks everything habitually related to fiction: there is no narrative or characters, let alone well-developed characters. We can even say that there is no central idea. This is, rather, a kind of burst of text which, for the most part, demonstrates the spontaneity and chaotic nature of fiction. Despite lacking customary book characteristics, it still contains something like social structures, psychological mechanisms and numerous cultural codes.

As an author, Nurklik is, foremost, an experimenter with form. For example, in the literary magazine for young authors *Värske Rõhk*, he has published a wide range of texts, from an essay, a travelogue, a fragment similar to the flow of consciousness, a properly formulated play, and prose pieces to “non-thoughts”. Even in this book, he mixes together the essay form, imitations of MSN conversations, dialogues and lengthy (inner) monologues, a blog-like appearance, an imitation of a short story, aphoristic sentences, arbitrary thought fragments etc. This can be seen as an attempt to try out all kinds of means of expression, interpretation and analysis – the

# Authors

R u t t H i n r i k u s a n d J a n i k a K r o n b e r g

text does not offer any singular proper way of reading or interpretation, but it simply rocks the reader, who gets a special reading experience which cannot even be put into words and which may, therefore, remain somewhat hazy, but the author's approach is, due to its novelty, still thrilling.

We cannot specify any subjects of the book, but we can say that the range of Nurklik's thought fragments extends from the modern system of economics and brands of consumer culture to the analysis of pseudo-existence, hypothetical games and electronic relationships. Nurklik is an author whose texts show continuous interpretation and analysis of a single generation – his own generation, which he defines as a generation of marginalised youth, born in the 1980s and raised in the first years of the newly re-independent Estonia. The marginalisation of this generation is not so much social as emotional and intellectual, and they have sharp senses, strong self-consciousness and critical thinking. *Am I Alive Now* presents a similar fragmentary image of a modern young person

with his modern problems, his questioning of identities and analysing of life – accompanied by cynicism and irony, because in order to experience truth, this generation truly “need irony, and need sarcasm, and need the pseudo and absurd and surrealism and camp and meta-whatnot and hyperbole and clichés and incorrectness and provocations and experiments”. The shadows of characters or different types of people, marked by numbers or letters in the few dialogues of the text, are primarily the means for channelling the flows of thoughts, impulses and emotions of the author, whose self-consciousness constantly analyses his surroundings, and for shouting out loud the author's image of the world. Nurklik has called himself simply a “writing person”. *Am I Alive Now* addresses and catches its readers and inspires thinking along or thinking further, not so much as a work of fiction but as “simply a writing”, containing its fair share of refreshing differences, wilfulness and self-confidence. **BM**

Aado Lintrop  
**Annapurna**

Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2010. 128 pp  
ISBN 9789985773635

**Õhtud sõidavad õue**

(Nights Ride into My Yard)  
Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2011. 136 pp  
ISBN 9789985773871

Although Aado Lintrop (1956) has been writing poetry for more than thirty years, based on the number of his publications he has not been too active an author – his first collection of poems, *Asuja* (1985), was followed by the second one, *Sõnaristi* (2000), only fifteen years later, and the third one, *Annapurna*, was published only last year. So it was a great surprise when his fourth collection, entitled *Nights Ride into My Yard*, came out this year. The poet had suddenly become very productive, as his latest collection of a substantial volume was written in only one year.

*Annapurna* is an area in the Himalayas where Lintrop went on a hiking trip. The title cycle of the book represents a kind of travel poetry that provides insight into the author's observations, the state of his soul and his meditations during this journey into high places, but also into the surroundings and the unfamiliar culture and the poet's feelings when "in front of your eyes there are clear/ painfully white peaks" and the air gets thinner and thinner. This does not reflect only physical moving from place to place but also a special spiritual, somewhat self-discovering journey – the poet's physical steps are unavoidably accompanied by contemplations on the meaning of existence and life. The soul of the poet has experienced distances and heights and has, with their help, arrived at some essential clarity and understanding of the world. Sometimes it alters his consciousness: "Walking straightens up consciousness/ you breathe in and out/ put one foot in front of the other/

think a thought after a thought/ about simple things [—] the world is a fragrant and resounding unity/ now and here". It is interesting to note that, perhaps because of this, Lintrop's poetry has grown much more spiritual in the course of time.

*Annapurna* does not contain only travel poetry; it is multilevel and aims at a mental plane as well. To a large extent, Lintrop continues here what he started in his earlier collections. Dreaming and weaving the shadowy threads of life are still important to him – he reflects both shadowy worlds and some mediated moments of everyday life, as well as philosophical visions, manifestations of the mind of an inquisitive wanderer, noticed earlier in his poetry, and even folkloristic motifs. Similar ideas and repeated feelings circulate throughout all his work, because the words are not unique, and when formulated in words, even different experiences acquire a similar appearance, which does not necessarily shade the emotions, but complements them and joins different themes into an interesting unity.

Lintrop's fourth collection of poetry, *Nights Ride into My Yard*, follows the yearly cycle: the first stage is the snowstorm-filled winter moving towards spring and the book closes with the coming of a new winter, with



Aado Lintrop (Photo by Scampix)

spring, summer, autumn and the poet's soul in between. In several ways, this collection resembles a diary in poetic form. In this book, the meditations and spiritual states of the poet are, more than in his previous books, connected with nature. Set against the background of changing nature, his thoughts deepen and the poems start to reflect his personal life philosophy and different sentimental moments that contain more or less cryptic meanings based on mythological subjects woven into the texture of the book, based on personal memories, and based on impressions of different seasons and empirical experiences. Importantly, the recording of the yearly circle is often expressed in self-observations, in giving meanings to the personal world and filling it with words. The power of words also gives meaning to continuity.

For Lintrop, one of the motives for writing poetry seems to be the probing of the limits of the power of words: what phrasings are capable of doing, whether they can adequately influence and represent impressions, whether they can (re)vivify moments caught in words. Verbal existence is important – as well as the not-always-personal message that is embedded in the experience of existence. Lintrop's philosophical and visionary poetry is sometimes trivially direct and simple, sometimes lyrically dreamy, certainly full of images and sometimes quite difficult to understand, but poetically rich and high-reaching. It contains an extraordinary sense of rhythm, a richness of epithets and metaphors, clean rhymes and strict forms, and it is impressive free verse. Everything is in good poetic balance. Aado Lintrop is a poet for whom deep existential meditations and lyrical description of those meditations, and a search for continuity and understanding in himself and in the world are all important. He writes sincerely and personally about what is in his soul and what encounters his soul – these poems truly reflect the writer's soul. This soul has been enriched by writing poetry and this is what is important. **BM**

Anti Saar

## Tekste siledast ruumist

(Texts from a Smooth Room)

Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2009. 104 pp  
ISBN 978-9985-79-291-9

*Texts from a Smooth Room* greatly resembles the work of George Perec, a member of the Oulipo group, whose books Anti Saar (1980) has translated into Estonian and whose influence can, whether he wishes or not, be felt in his own work. Saar is a semiotician by education; so far, he has published three quite extraordinary books of fiction which all contain elements of meta-text, and play with the limits of literature. Readers are fascinated by his experimenting with the possibilities of the text. His first book, *Kuidas sa ära läksid ja mina maha jäin* (*How You Went Away and I Was Left Behind*) (2006), containing three interconnected stories, deals primarily with two issues: love and spatial poetics. Metafictionality, which is the most remarkable characteristic of Saar's work, holds an important position in this book. Both his first book and second, the novel *Nemad kaks* (*Those Two*) (2008), contain features of language ecstasy common in Jaan Undusk's novel *Kuum* (*Hot*) (1990), which Saar has called one of the most influential books for him. *Texts from a Smooth Room* is, however, a step in another direction. The language ecstasy remains and the joy of metaplay has increased, but the ten texts of the book, which cannot be called stories, are not engaged in developing a narrative; they mainly focus on straightforward and neutral descriptions of people, phenomena and objects that surround the author and all of us. The texts pass on a world that consists of words and observations of quite ordinary moments but, through these, they also define important spatial experiences. For example, the author is lying on the Pärnu beach or riding on the metro in Paris, and captures the people he has seen and the

thoughts that have arisen in writing, as if he were recording sociological observations – with extreme spontaneity, but also with a certain elegance.

These texts also reveal the limits and possibilities of writing as a process. Saar directly reveals to the readers how his thoughts twirl into words; the author is visible in the text, commenting on his writing, but he is also in the field of influence of his writing. These playful texts seem to act on their own, and the text grasps and carries everything. Thus the writer of the text is a type of mediator, a registrar who imitates the documentary approach, not a creator, because by demonstrating and revealing metafictional games the author distances himself from his own work, which gives the impression of a text as something living. In this way, the reader is prevented from interpreting the text, as the text has no finite and fixed meaning, but is a flow, a dynamic openness of words that the reader encounters primarily as a reading experience.

There is always a kind of surprise or disruption present in these texts because, unavoidably, there is a continuous play between the arising of expectations and their sudden fall into the void, or between the development of meaning and the loss of meaning. Saar writes an intensive entanglement of words that also displays playful lightness, intellectual solemnity, moving seriousness and irritating (self-)irony, parading across the fields of influence of oppositions, and initiating disturbing emotions and paradoxical trains of thought, all of which together offer a pure enjoyment of the text.

The book *How You Went Away and I Was Left Behind* describes “writing at zero degrees”, and the author specifies that “zero degrees is a situation where a literary text acquires the quality of science: it is dispassionate, neutral, straightforward and honest to the end, a text that follows and

imitates the world with an innocent eye. In this text, there are no traces of the writer’s private ambitions or attitudes, life experience or inherent compulsions. [—] a text that talks about itself, for itself and regarding itself.” Although having admitted that the zero degree text is impossible, Saar has clearly enjoyed writing his third book in a style that much resembles attempts at reaching this zero degrees. **BM**

### Andrei Hvostov **Sillamäe passioon**

(Sillamäe Passion)  
[Tartu], Petrone Print, 2011. 303 pp  
ISBN 9789949907687

Andrei Hvostov (1963), a writer and journalist with an historian’s training, stands out for his sharp and straightforward opinions on many issues, including the coexistence of Estonians and Russians in Estonia.

People often think that Hvostov is a Russian who is also engaged in “Estonian issues”. Hvostov’s new book announces to all who did not know that Hvostov is an Estonia who also understands “Russian issues”, meaning national and cultural orientations. In *Sillamäe Passion*, Hvostov explains that he is the son of an Estonian mother and Russian father. In the case of parents of different nationalities, it is common that the son’s nationality is specified according to his mother’s language and nationality. We should also consider the place of residence. The initial impulse of this book is its very environment – the town of Sillamäe. Sillamäe was one of the “closed”, secret Soviet towns involved in the nuclear industry, where the uranium concentrate plant was established in 1946. The plant was active until perestroika. The workers were mostly imported from the “large homeland”, they spoke Russian and some of them did

not even know that they lived and worked in the territory of the Soviet Estonia. People could enter this closed area, the zone or the town, only by getting an invitation from a resident and permission from the militia. Thus, Sillamäe was the most Soviet-like town in Estonia, a pure example of colonisation.

*Sillamäe Passion* is the story of Hvostov's childhood and his opinions and impressions of growing up. In presenting images from his childhood, Hvostov is primarily interested in finding out the meaning of being a young man in the Soviet Union. History in this book is not a general past, but a time that has been experienced, a Soviet childhood that stands in sharp contrast with the present, and the future that came after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

There are many ways of facing one's past. "Sometimes I have this urge to take my child with me into a time machine and take him to see the time of my own childhood and youth," is the way the author starts the book, with the wish to explain where he is coming from. The Soviet period, or in the colloquial language "Russian time", is mystical and not understandable to the young generation. In describing the year 1980, Hvostov starts with small details: clothing and the symbolic capital it offers, the opportunities for acquiring fashionable clothing items, strange reasons for and meanings of things, such as teeth and their treatment, how Soviet people travelled, the meaning of borders, etc.

Hvostov recalls and analyses things through different subjects, explaining and commenting on his memories and searching for parallels or opposites. The subject of a whole chapter, almost a study or at least an essay, is the dream of every Soviet youth – blue jeans – the unprecedented trousers and why nobody was able to understand why they fit so well. "My everyday trousers were sewed together of the lowest representatives of all possible types of fabric", recalls the

author, who tells us that when he later was offered the chance to buy Lee Coopers for 150 roubles – the average monthly salary or the school stipend for five months – he did not hesitate even for a second!

Hvostov recalls other kinds of dreams as well – the enthusiasm over the conquest of outer space, hopes for a brighter future, the first TV serials, etc.

Hvostov studied at the Sillamäe bilingual school – the only school where the few Estonian-language children of the town were taught. Having a Russian and Estonian school under the same roof was no guarantee of integration. Having Estonian children in a Russian school did not fulfil the expectations of the authorities. The children of different nationalities did not mix and were constantly at war with each other due to their different perspectives. Hvostov tries to clarify why Estonians and Russians remained strangers. What is difficult in being an Estonian?

One answer can be found in his summary of the book: the Soviet regime was an unending humiliation. He recalls how all through his childhood he dreamed of running away from home, from school and from

Andrei Hvostov (Photo by Teet Malsroos / Õhtuleht)



Sillamäe. A humiliated person is not a good citizen. Looking for reasons for being “the other”, Hvostov says, “In the world that lives in the ‘we-they’ opposition, a fascist (as Russians used to call Estonians) and a tibla (a not so polite colloquialism for a migrant Russian) both represent ‘the other’”. He concludes the book with a story of his own family, telling how his father, who had come to Estonia from Siberia, did not adapt to Estonian life and, ultimately, did not feel at home anywhere. Hvostov almost reaches an understanding with his father, but the chance to talk slips away. The last sentence of the book states: “This is the way in which the state of our own was built – the Estonian Republic of Unspoken Things.”

*Sillamäe Passion* is a sharp analysis of the Soviet everyday life. Its style is somewhat uneven and the author enjoys vulgarisms, which he adds now and then to make the story more colourful. The text becomes especially Baroque when the author recalls his first contacts with sex, pornography and the development of his masculinity. Hvostov’s book is occasionally too wordy, and more a form of journalism than a literary work, but this story of a childhood in Sillamäe is one of the liveliest analytical memoirs of the Soviet period. **RH**

Helga Nõu  
**Valetaja**

(Liar)

Tallinn: Eesti Ajalehed, 2011. 280 pp  
ISBN 9789949478521

Estonian literature, which was divided into two parts after WWII, and lived on at home and abroad, has been joined together again and it has almost ceased existing abroad. New Estonian-language books are published

in Estonia, and new authors of Estonian origin in other countries do not write in Estonian. There is an exception in one genre – memoirs – which offers the memoir-loving Estonian readers stories and pictures of the lives of their compatriots in other countries and/or in other times. Exiled Estonians have published numerous memoirs since 1945; memoirs were even the most productive genre of exile Estonian literature, and have also proved to be the most resistant to the trials of time. However, many recently published memoirs are no longer written in Estonian, probably due to them being published by the offspring of the writers but, when possible, an Estonian-language translation has followed the original book. Helle Ajango Martin’s *Our Journeys toward Freedom* (Milford, Ohio, 2009) will, according to the author’s wishes, soon be published in Estonian as well. Ann Mihkelson, living in Australia, published her memoirs, entitled *Three Suitcases and a Three-Year-Old* (Kangaroo Press), in 1999. Its new sequel *The View from Here* (2011) follows the author’s past in parallel with the events of Estonian history in order “to put those lives in a sociological, political and cultural context.” Ann Mihkelson asserts, “I had always been aware that I was bicultural and bilingual, and I thought in two languages.”

Many of the exiles who try to interpret their two languages and two homelands are still searching for their identities: whether they are still mostly Estonian or have become more connected to some other nation.

Helga Nõu (1934) is an Estonian writer living in Uppsala, Sweden. As a child, she fled, together with her parents, driven by the fear of the violence of the Soviet regime that gripped almost all Estonians. When Nõu moved to Sweden, she was ten years old. She recalls the trip to Sweden as a journey from the dark to the light. In her book, she summarises the child’s first impressions of

her new homeland: “We got plenty of food... the Swedish food was, in our opinion, sweetish and tasteless.”

The life stories of the Estonians who were born in the first three decades of the 20th century have, in the most convenient way, been divided by the turns their lives took: the refugees, those who managed to remain at home and the deportees. People used to call them rich aunts and uncles in the free world, poor people under surveillance at home and victims of repression or people who had been deported to Siberia and died there.

Helga Nõu has written her memoirs primarily for the group of readers who are at least fifty or more years old. Such readers can understand the discord between temporal closeness and spatial distance, or, vice versa, they know the opposition which, after WWII, separated the West and the exiles who had reached there from the restrictions that had become the lot of the Estonians who remained at home. At any rate, the contemporaries of the author will read the book with a different mindset than the younger generations, who have no personal memories of the era.

Nõu's memoirs move through time and space, proceeding from chronology and

geography. She starts with childhood memories, moves on to school days and to the entering of the world of adults. She spent the years most important for developing her personality on an island of 300 inhabitants – a lonely child on a lonely island, although she had two brothers and many school-mates. She remembers her parents as unbelievably exemplary Estonians – industrious, energetic and frugal: “Both of my parents were hard-working, diligent and economical beyond reason.” For their daughter, such an ideal existence was restricting; she did not want to be like them, but she was no rebel by nature. In 1955, she finished school and by that time it was clear that the door of her homeland was closed, maybe forever. She had to choose a profession and it was mostly determined by which would have the shortest duration of studies. She became a school teacher. The most influential event in her life, besides having been born an Estonian, was her meeting Enn Nõu, a student of medicine, who later also became a writer.

Somehow it seems that the title of the book, *Liar*, will mislead the reader who has never read Nõu's books before. At least, it does not give the true sense of the book, but only points out that the author is aware of the traps set by the essence of the genre of autobiography. We can find no embarrassing pseudo-sincerity or bravado here; there are no conscious lies. The author lists her sources – memory, diaries and engagement books, and Enn, meaning Enn Nõu's memory and enormous archive.

A large part of the book can be treated as a personal history, where the author and the narrator are identical. The memoirs deal with the stories behind Nõu's other books, her distinctive views of Estonian literary life in Sweden and of the exiles' relations between and attitudes towards Estonians from the homeland when a few of them had the opportunity to visit Sweden.

Helga Nõu (Photo by Scampix)



Nõu touches upon many problems of the exiles, although she has already discussed many of them in her works of fiction; she does not mourn the same loss over and over: she has made peace with her life and her life story. She divides herself between Estonia and Sweden, between literature, art and her family, and she has kept them in good balance. However, we cannot find out whether she calls herself a liar in the title of her memoirs simply for the beauty of the game, or because she also hears, now and then, a voice whispering a verse of a familiar song: “this is not it, this is not it ...” **RH**

Jaan Malin

## **Alati vahe.**

### **Sahitud luulet 1978-2010**

(Always Sharp / Always a Difference / Always an Interval.

Selected poetry 1978-2010)

Tallinn: Tuum, 2010. 192 pp.

ISBN 9789949901470

The poet Jaan Malin (1960) has for decades been interested in sound poetry and he has studied the work of the first Estonian surrealist poet, Ilmar Laaban. He has found his own niche in sound poetry and has achieved international success. In 2009, he won the Estonian *poetry slam* and, the same year, he was successful at the European Poetry Slam Days, where he won Third Prize. After that, he appeared before the public under a somewhat provocative and untranslatable alias, Luulur, which is associated, due to the polysemy of Estonian word stems, with the words *luule* (poetry) and *luul* (delusion), and the suffix -ur gives this derivative word the meaning of the agent noun. Last year, Luulur released a CD of his poems and sound poetry, titled *On*, and his international renown has now found affirmation at international poetry reading competitions. Malin's original and unique form of presentation has almost become more important than his written poetry: he

transforms the meaning of poetry as a written genre into oral and sound-based poetry. His performances of sound poetry show the influence of Ilmar Laaban and they differ greatly from his “ordinary” poetry, which is partly surrealist, but does not rely much on sound. We must not forget that Malin is, foremost, a creator in writing. In an interview, the author explained the publication of his volume of selected poetry as follows: “With this collection, I hope to restore my reputation as a poet. I want to show that I am not only a performer of sound poetry, but that I also know how to write.”

Malin's role as a writing poet is essentially and believably confirmed in this collection. *Always Sharp / Always a Difference / Always an Interval* – the title is also polysemic (in Estonian, *vahe* can mean “distance”, “sharp” and “difference”) – maps Malin's road as a poet and gives a good idea of all the turns in his style. We can see here

Jaan Malin (Photo by Scanpix)



the earlier, primarily personal, thoughtful and sensitive poet who reflects: "The essence of all is held in the existence./ To be somewhere, far away from today,/ in the time of yesterday or of the future.// To dream in such a timeless way,/ to hope for something in a pointless way./ The sea is like an endless morning./ Time gets levelled in its murmur."

At the same time, we can see how his developing surrealism and abstractionism intersect with dim privacy, and how his quiet seriousness warms up, sometimes even in a funny way, while at other times it flows into sad half-tones, and how the essential clarity of thought grows into a language game, based on the nuances of pronunciations and meanings. *Always Sharp...* not only summarises Malin's poetry up to the present day but, to some extent, it also brings nearer to each other the two halves of the poet – the writing and the sound-making halves. Actually, the number of aspects is even larger, because besides "ordinary" reflective or sentimental poetry based on the meaning of its content, Malin experiments and tries out possibilities of different forms. Last year, Malin actually published two books of poetry: his volume of selected poems was preceded by the collection *Veljesto 90 (100)*, devoted to the 90th anniversary of the Student Society *Veljesto* and containing double acrostics (the first letters of the lines from top to bottom spell out the first name, and the last letters of the lines from top to bottom spell out the surnames) and acro-chiasms (acrostic + chiasm: the first letters of the lines from top to bottom spell out the first name and from bottom to top the surname, and the last letters of the lines from top to bottom spell out the surname and from bottom to top the first name) of the members and alumni of the society. This is Malin's second collection of dedication poems.

Malin's poetry is emotionally rich, reflecting human love, trust and nostalgia, a feeling of freedom etc. But the poet is most attracted to the thirst for life, to the excitement of the pure feeling of living and the serious passion of creation: "The whole life

here is vastly futile./ If the loudness of creation is not bubbling inside." In Malin, this passion for creation is constantly bubbling, sometimes even in the form of the child-like joy of playing. His poetry is a true example of how his way of generally using language, in which words are put together in accord, and how he plays with different meanings, as well as how he uses speech sounds, are important for the content of his poetry. In Malin's poetry, the form, meaning and sound of words are all equally important and achieve a unity in their unique and singular interaction. **BM**

Jaak Jõerüüt

## **Muutlik**

(The Mutable)

Tallinn: Tuum, 2010. 336 pp.

ISBN 978-9949-9014-6-3

Jaak Jõerüüt (b. 1947), the current Estonian ambassador in Sweden, debuted as a poet and prose writer in the 1970s. After Estonia regained its independence he held an ambassador's post in Finland, at the UN in New York, in Italy and in Latvia, and was briefly the Estonian Minister of Defence. Besides his diplomatic work, he has managed to enrich Estonian literature with several remarkable collections of poetry, prose books, essays and memoirs. In 2010 he published a poetry collection and the autobiographical essay-novel *Muutlik* (The Mutable), both of which were well received by critics.

On the one hand, *The Mutable* constitutes notes in the form of a diary, which does not always follow the precise progress of time through 2009, when the book was written. On the other, the author wrote: "This is not a diary. I write letters to myself and reply to myself. There are several me's, more than I initially thought. I am different on different days. But I have nothing against that, nothing at all." The obviously self-centred book therefore tackles the author's self when he changes and when

he remains himself, his origin, past and present in everyday existence and on holidays. The background to all this is his experience as a diplomat and the economic crisis that was deeper in Latvia than in Estonia. He draws comparisons with his homeland, which he could visit quite frequently because of the closeness of the two countries. In addition, there is the author's other world experience from the diplomatic perspective, rather unusual at times: besides neat trouser creases and white shirts, much attention is paid to the books he has read (primarily by Mika Waltari, Pentti Saarikoski and J. D. Salinger: classical authors of Weltschmerz and resignation). Along with armchair reflections, the book contains observations on bicycling in Riga and in Manhattan. Jõerüüt smoothly joins the creative, free artistic sphere with diplomacy, which is restricted by etiquette, not bothering too much with political correctness, and remaining a moderately ironic or distanced intellectual in every situation. He says that the city where he has lived is a city of texts, and calls it "Words". He also quotes Saarikoski's sentence about a hapless jester who does not know the name of the king or country he is serving.

Normally, an intellectual's long-term involvement in politics and diplomacy makes him blasé and bored, and curtails the wings of his creativity. In Jõerüüt's case, the opposite is true: *The Mutable* contains a lot of intensity, mystery and youthful curiosity. The author seems to go through a rejuvenation treatment, looking deep into his inner landscapes, which contain traces of teenage anxiety, as well as a mature man's perception of eternity. After all, what really matters in the book is not the description of external situations and events, but a journey into the author's own multi-layered self. The reader finds the key to the book in the motif of the pilgrimage that runs through the entire book: "At some point, for several years running, I planned to go on a *camino*, the old road of pilgrims, which leads to the WESTERN EDGE, Santiago de Compostela. /—/ One day it struck me. I do not have to go on a *camino*. I can turn my everyday life into a *camino*."

*The Mutable* shows man as temporal and at the same time timeless. This is a journey, simultaneously a coming and a going, an arrival and a departure, in the knowledge that everything inside and around us is in constant change, and that only by being mutable can we hope to be unchanged. **JK**

Viivi Luik  
**Varjuteater**  
(Shadow Theatre)

Viivi Luik's *Varjuteater* (*Shadow Theatre*, 2011) is an enigmatic book. This is true of the material entity of the book itself, with its formal velvety cover and golden tassel for a bookmark that puzzles the reader, as if demanding him/her to figure something out before proceeding with the reading itself. Yet the formality instantly disappears when one touches the cover: the material seems to dissolve and one finds him/herself lured into the book before even reading the first lines. Genre-wise, *Varjuteater* could be classified as travel writing or autobiography, and the latter in particular seems to harbor a promise of an (intimate) insight into the author's life. As the reader will soon discover, the lure of the soft velvety cover is not the lure of the intimate and the personal. On the contrary, *Varjuteater* explores the actual patterns and principles of the human condition, graspable for an individual only to a limited extent, yet determining his/her life in full.

*Varjuteater* starts off as a travelogue of Luik's stay in Rome as the wife of the Estonian Ambassador to Italy in the late 1990's. She arrives in Rome in late stormy October 1998 and sees the city in "gloomy reddish light", exactly as she has imagined the Eternal City to be. Her journey to Rome, however, really starts on another gloomy autumn afternoon in her childhood when she sees a photo of The Colosseum on the floor of a nearby farmstead, empty and deserted because the people who lived there have been deported or joined the Forest Brethren. This moment

also marks for Luik the beginning of her future-awareness, a mode of perceiving time characteristic of both her iconic *Seitsmes rahukevad* (*Seventh Spring of Peace*, 1984) and *Varjuteater*. For Luik, a person's life is marked by and made meaningful by an instinctive awareness of future encounters, experiences and trajectories, an awareness of the task of including futures in the present and of recognizing and connecting the right moments in the past, present and future.

This is also the most important task Luik assigns herself in writing *Varjuteater* but, unlike in *Seitsmes rahukevad*, this process here proceeds with less certainty, despite many years of life experience that separate the two works in time.

With the bright intensity and force of a child's imagination and willpower, in *Seitsmes rahukevad*, the little protagonist manages to create a life world that often exceeds the narrow confines of "wet postwar Estonia". Yet that same limited space has a strong presence in the novel and the protagonist's existence is intertwined with it in her very flesh, blood and bone. In *Varjuteater*, these confines are long gone, (polished) bones have taken over flesh and blood, and home is not a place or a country, but a compilation of feelings among which homesickness plays a significant role. Futures have taken Luik to Rome, to Berlin and to other places in Europe, and this has changed her sense of belonging, of being at home. The realization that most likely any place is never what it seems to be is prevalent in *Seitsmes rahukevad*, where a haystack can hide a gun and a brand new kettle can be found under a spruce tree. Unreliable as it is, the space around the little protagonist still has substance. In *Varjuteater*, the title itself provides a clue to how place functions here: it is a stage

for the play of shadows; it is schematic, conditional and fluid. Rome as the Eternal City is the most important stage for perception of the depth of shadows that, together with (symbols of) light, form the work's leitmotif, present in *Varjuteater* in countless descriptions, episodes, reflections and contemplations.

Shadows embody most strongly the unknown and the enigmatic in life. Not being able to see the full picture or the plan is an essential feature of human existence. Life is a constant process of trying to solve a puzzle, figuring out and reacting to fate's tricks, and the ways in which they will be played upon a human being. The Christian essence of such a view of the world is highlighted throughout the text via the somewhat eccentric wisdom of a Lutheran minister of Estonian descent, Mr. Atspol. From different angles, this is also supported, for instance, by the mention of Rome as the seat of the Pope, and references to Calderon's *La vida es sueño* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. What is the relationship between fate and free will? To what extent (if at all) can one grasp one's place in the world? In order to do so with even the faintest degree of success, one needs to be attentive and insightful, to retain in one's memory an image that may materialize many decades in the future or recognize a certain face with a certain look and trace its mission and purpose from one place, context and affiliation to others. In a wider perspective, however, this is not necessary: "In Rome you will learn that you do not know what this all is and that you don't need to know. Just live" (*Varjuteater*, 307). **LKK**

Vivi Luik (Photo by Arno Saar / Öhtuleht)



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