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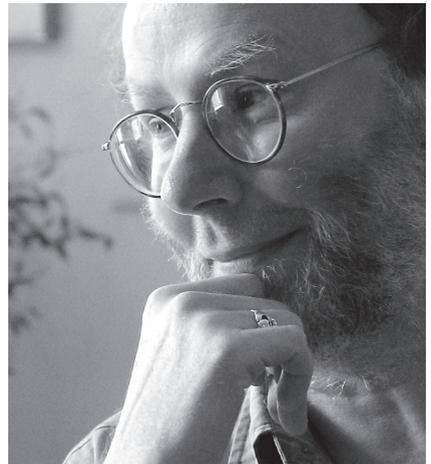
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The good magician

Urmas

b y K a u p o M e i e l

It is very simple to enter the world created in the works of Urmas Vadi (1977). It is a bit more complicated to get your bearings there and it is quite complicated to fully understand it. This is, in fact, a feature of good fiction, and literature produced by Vadi is good. In his case, the word “good” does not just mean good as in a “good book” or “good bread with good cheese”. For Vadi, the word “good” means brightness, wealth of fantasy and cordiality, which are not that common in Estonian literature. The excessively serious and grim aspects in Estonian literature may be due to the Nordic cool temperatures, long autumns and short winters. Urmas Vadi has also experienced all this. How can his intelligent humour, his work, which always seeks the best in man, emerge in the first place? Maybe because Vadi himself is a good person. Bright and blessed with rich fantasy, in whose hands even simple events can become magic.

Once, for example, he kept putting off mowing the lawn. The mere idea became increasingly unpleasant. He was hoping for the rain to come, which it did, and this eased the situation magnificently. Rain, however, has a habit of stopping at some point and the weather usually turns nice again. This is exactly what happened, the sun came out, but Urmas decided instead to read Michel Houellebecq’s novel *The Map and the Territory*. He got to the place where the artist

Jed goes to visit Houellebecq and sees that his garden has not been mown, has become almost overgrown. Vadi immediately decided to mow his own lawn. “Who knows whether I am a better man or writer than Houellebecq, but at least I am a better gardener,” summarised Urmas.

Urmas Vadi appeared on the Estonian literary scene in 1996, when he published the collection of short stories *Kui klosetist kerkib kloaak* (When the cloaca rises from

Vadi

the closet). From then on, he published short stories, novels and plays. Ten excellent books for such a relatively young man is quite an achievement.

Vadi's texts are fluent and seem to have been written down in the easy rhythm of breathing in and out. There is, however, detailed preparation. For plays and longer prose texts, Urmas produces graphs, noting down the main events, plot lines, and how the main characters move and change. This provides a structure and composition to return to if something seems wrong. Nothing flippant then: writing is hard work.

How did it happen that a perfectly nice young man became a writer? Vadi says he began writing in secondary school. The 8th Secondary School in Tartu was rather exceptional: it had a special class of literature that included creative writing. Urmas regarded himself as a writer even back then, although he now finds it idiotic to be a writer if you see yourself as one.

For his readers, it is certainly no longer an issue whether he is a writer or not. Urmas has no need to prove himself, but if he really has to introduce himself to someone he might confess to being a writer.

It can be pretty embarrassing to be introduced as a writer, and a well-known one at that. Urmas once went to a wedding

reception and was introduced to the bride's mother as "the famous writer Urmas Vadi". The poor mother seemed to frantically search her memory, but the name of the "famous writer" clearly did not ring a bell. It happens.

Having started with short stories and published novels, he now mostly writes plays, which have been staged in Estonian theatres since 2001. Some are reflective, and some more humorous. Urmas is still fond of writing short stories and has, in fact, recently given up plays for a while and is planning to write a number of stories. He thus keeps the genres apart, as they really are quite different, starting with the plot structure.

In the past few years he has produced a number of his plays himself. This has nothing to do with being suspicious of other directors; he just assumes that he knows the theatrical language in which his texts can work best.

The good thing about producing your own plays, according to Vadi, is that he writes almost all his plays shortly before directing them, thinking about a specific venue or actors. Some examples: *The Last Kiss of Peeter Volkonski* and *Rein Pakk Is Looking for a Woman*. The lead in the first was naturally played by Peeter Volkonski and in the other by Rein Pakk. Vadi thus



Urmas Vadi (Photo by Scanpix)

creates a situation in which it is not easy to grasp where the actor's own self begins and where his role starts, the border between the documentary and fantasy.

Mixing the documentary with fantasy has become one of Urmas Vadi's trademarks. In his play *Ballettmeister* (Ballet Master), he tackled the first president of the Republic of Estonia, Konstantin Päts (1874-1956), and turned him into a greedy schemer. The script *Kohtumine tundmatuga* (Meeting a Stranger) was made into a film in 2005 by Jaak Kilmi. Among other things, the film showed the relationship between aliens from space and Estonian Television. Really existing people, mainly prominent Estonian cultural people, acquire a new and far more fascinating life in Vadi's imaginative work. Myths emerging from reality are given a new and unexpected dimension.

According to Urmas, he arrived at this method quite naturally. In his very first stories, he dealt with his own dreams and

fears. Then he got fed up with this and he wrote quite a few plays about Estonian celebrities. And not only Estonian: in his play *Elvis oli kapis* (Elvis Was in the Cupboard) he presents an overview of the "real" life of the rock king. In his own singular way.

If we want to find a common denominator for this side of his work, Vadi himself suggests "alternative life stories", where invention meets facts. This all relies on Vadi not being too keen on the documentary, on being faithful to history; instead, he prefers to play around so that everything blends with fantasy.

For the author, this kind of play is liberating: "It is something like an artist drawing a person. What is more true to life – someone drawn in photorealism or a portrait resembling a kind of scrawl? A scrawl may actually tell something significant and precise about the portrayed person. I am in favour of scrawling. I am a small boy who has got a felt-tipped pen and is drawing beards and moustaches on people in

newspaper photos. What I want to say is that people do not just consist of dates and facts, but ideas, images and secret wishes as well.”

Andres Noormets, who directed Vadi's pseudo-historical play *The Ballet Master* at the Endla theatre in Pärnu, believes that history exists somewhere as real time and how anyone sees or interprets it has nothing to do with history. History simply exists, it is a constant, and history writing is largely subjective and often canonised. History writing provides ideological models to secure certain power structures. Considering this, Urmas's historical literature, which changes facts and joyfully plays around with them, is, according to Noormets, very charming. “Questioning generally accepted theories with a grin makes the scoundrels feel insecure and they have to creep out of their lairs. It is funny and healthy at the same time. In that sense, Urmas Vadi is like a good doctor who delivers a precise diagnosis and a precise treatment.”

The play about Elvis aside, most of his texts mixing history with fantasy deal with Estonian heroes who are practically unknown in the wider world. Have you heard of the TV legends Valdo Pant or Mati Talvik? The iconic singer Georg Ots? The writer and psychiatrist Vaino Vahing? I doubt it.

Writing new stories about people who are well known in a particular cultural space is fine, but it is very difficult to sell such work outside the cultural space. Vadi agrees, but is not too frustrated by it. “I cannot imagine trying to produce a highly cosmopolitan text that everybody can easily read and understand. It would be complete nonsense.”

Vadi has offered a great deal of precise diagnosis and treatment, as Andres Noormets so aptly put it. Enough to avoid poking in other people's lives and looking deep into himself. He has recently started writing his prose so that the main character is quite obviously Urmas Vadi. He admits that even in this case it is not totally clear where he is real and where fantasy starts.

Vadi's works are a pleasure to read. His work is fluent, there is background and intelligence, and there is tasteful, occasionally pretentious humour. He does not regard himself as a “joker or jester”, but believes that jokes are essential. We must simply never forget that a joke cannot exist just for the sake of the joke. Vadi himself prefers laughter and jokes that are mixed with something else. For example, when a situation is so embarrassing or frustrating or bad that it becomes funny. Indeed, in similar situations he would much rather laugh than groan under the weight of the entire world and finally pass away, with a quiet sigh. This expresses the Vadi-like world-view perfectly.

Andres Noormets says that Vadi's texts are full of fantasy, have bold punch-lines and are well focused. “His stories also have a kind of mercilessly final intensity. It is not a matter of speed, it can often be quite slow, but slow intensity is in fact quite decisive. Like a straight tree growing in the middle of a field or a sharp-edged cliff in the middle of a desert or an honest politician. A bit pretty, and a bit startling.”

Writer (:)kivisildnik, whose publishing house *Jumalikus Ilmutused* (Divine Revelations) issued Vadi's book of plays *Kohtumine tundmatuga* (2008) and novels *Kirjad tädi Annele* (Letters to Aunt Ann, 2010) and *Tagasi Eestisse* (Back to Estonia, 2013), summarises the Vadi phenomenon succinctly: “The phenomenon of Urmas Vadi is a phenomenon of art, and art is something that is better than entertainment, more profitable than risk investment and more exciting than extreme sport. People who do not devote themselves to art consumption never understand people who fully devote themselves to producing art.”

It is not easy to capture the phenomenon of Urmas Vadi. It is easy not to understand his world, especially if the reader or viewer wants the work to have familiar fixed frames and visible borders. Vadi goes about his own business and if he himself has some frames and borders we do not want to know.

The Poetry of Translation

b y I l m a r L e h t p e r e

When poetry works in translation, when it touches the reader or listener and is truly poetry, then it is a great wonder and a fairy tale come true. – Kristiina Ehin

In the summer of 2012 I had the pleasure of accompanying Kristiina Ehin to the Poetry Parnassus Festival in London as her translator. This was the largest poetry festival ever to take place in the UK and perhaps the world. I wasn't formally invited by the festival organizers, but David and Helen Constantine of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, which was also the festival poetry magazine, expressed their wish for me to be there and so Reet Rimmel, cultural counselor at the Estonian Embassy in London, was able to find funding to make it possible for me to go. It was quite a novel experience for me – I have very seldom been offered the opportunity of joining Kristiina on her many trips abroad to readings and festivals, and never to such an imposing event as Poetry Parnassus. It was indeed a very great pleasure helping Kristiina prepare her readings, sitting up one night to translate a new poem she had written that day for the festival, meeting many fascinating people, a few of whom I had corresponded with for years but had

never had the opportunity to meet until then, and of course discovering a lot of good poetry.

I was, however, dismayed by the attitudes to translation that I encountered at the festival. One poet observed at his reading that his work had been translated by several different translators, “but who cares?” At first I thought he was being ironic in order to make a point, but he then simply went on reading his poems (in translation, of course) without mentioning the translators' names. He evidently really meant “who cares?”. Another poet admitted that he didn't know the name of the translator of the poems he was reading. They weren't his own poems, but not bothering to find out still showed a similar indifference.

Sadly, many of the translations projected onto the screen during the poets' readings seemed to have been done following the principle that any translation is better than no translation. Nothing in the world of poetry could be further from the truth. The poets

often deserved much better. Unfortunately, very few people seem to understand the great weight of responsibility borne by translators – an author's international reputation rises and falls with the quality of the translations of his or her work.

Shortly after returning home to Estonia from London, I received the Poetry Library's monthly newsletter with its list of upcoming competitions. I was pleased to see that the Manchester Poetry Prize accepted translations – very rare indeed for poetry prizes in the English-speaking world – and I suggested to Kristiina that we should enter a few of her poems. I wrote to the organisers to clarify a procedural point in the rules and was informed that the translations had to be done by the author. Now, I know many poets who have an admirable command of English as a second language (Kristiina included), but I have yet to meet one able to translate his or her own work without substantial help. The absurdity of this rule, the utter lack of understanding of the translation process and indeed belittling of the translator's art (for it is an art) by the organizers of such a prestigious poetry prize is quite frankly staggering.

Unfortunately, lack of understanding extends to many translators as well. Some years ago I took part in an event organised for literary translators and was truly disheartened by all the talk of commissions – among my colleagues at the event this was by far the most common motivation for translating an author's work. It seemed I was in a rather small minority who chose to translate a particular writer's work simply because we felt an inner need to do so.

Some fundamental questions were answered on that day. It is often said that literature in translation doesn't sell. We have all at times got dreadfully bogged down trying to read translations that *sound* like translations. But what else can we expect if the translator doesn't share the author's passion, if the motivation for translating a poem, a story or a novel does not differ

significantly from that for translating a business letter, academic paper or technical report? I must admit that I have also been guilty of translating a few poems that I didn't like. Several years ago an editor friend was desperate for a translator and I reluctantly agreed to do the work. I am deeply ashamed of having done so and will never do anything like that again. Every author deserves a translator who is passionate about translating the author's work. A good translation is an expression of love for the original piece. It is the product of a spiritual kinship between author and translator.

There are many different approaches to translation. Ideally, a translation is done by someone who is bilingual, with creative literary abilities and a deep inner desire to introduce the work of a writer to a wider audience. In the real world however, in dealing with the rich and varied literature of a country as small as Estonia, this combination of qualities is extremely rare and very little Estonian literature would be translated if we dogmatically held to that principle.

The renowned English poet Ted Hughes championed translation from literal English versions and in his case this resulted in marvellous poems, but I am not sure that many of them are good translations, for the simple reason that Hughes's own powerful voice resounds throughout. They are therefore not *the author's* poems, and isn't that the point of translation – to recreate the author's poem, story or novel, with its own particular music and nuances, in another language? How can it be the author's work if the translator only has the words to go by and hence can't hear, and therefore can't recreate the author's voice? The result may be a very fine work of literature, but it probably isn't a good translation. This approach to translation has been taken by some translators of Estonian poetry with varying degrees of success as regards fidelity to the original. The increasingly common distinction made

between *translation* and *version* has become necessary as translators continue to take liberties with the original work.

If the translator has no command of the author's mother tongue, then a far more reliable method of re-creating the author's work is translating from a good, existing translation in a language that the translator does happen to know well. If a good translation is used, the translator can hear the author's voice and convey it into a third language as well. Estonian literature made its first significant mark on the English-speaking world nearly twenty years ago with Jaan Kross's novel *The Czar's Madman* in Anselm Hollo's brilliant translation. This success had as much to do with the quality of the translation as with the quality of the book itself. Hollo had little, if any, command of Estonian and therefore translated from the Finnish and, to some extent, German translations of the work. Yet Jaan Kross's idiosyncratic voice resonates clearly throughout the English translation. The translations Hollo worked from were obviously very good and, with his poet's ear, he was able to hear and therefore convey Kross's voice. In the field of prose translation from the Estonian, Hollo's work remains unsurpassed.

A translator has many other responsibilities in addition to translating, all of them demanding dedication to seeing the author's work get into the hands of as many readers as possible. The entire process begins with offering work for publication, first to literary magazines, then, when one has established a "track record", to book publishers. When a publisher has been found and a book published, the translator should really continue acting as intermediary between author and publisher and generally do everything possible to further the author's work by actively promoting the book, helping to organise reading tours if sufficient interest can be aroused and finding new publication opportunities, all of which demands far

more time than the actual translation itself. A translator's work does not end with the publication of a book – that is only the first step on a very long and fulfilling journey.

In any case, good translators aren't in it for the money or the glory – there is relatively little of either to be had. But the rewards are ultimately far more deeply satisfying, though the only real lasting acknowledgement a translator can expect to receive for all this is the author's gratitude, and sometimes the publisher's. Translators (unless they are well-known writers themselves) are generally marginalised by the cultural establishment. They are regarded as linguistic handymen, not as creative literary artists in their own right. Though David and Helen Constantine maintain in their introduction to *MPT's Parnassus* issue that good poetry translators are indeed poets, theirs still remains an unfortunately rare voice in the literary landscape.

Nevertheless, I can think of no other work that is more rewarding. I have been concentrating on Kristiina Ehin's poetry and prose for quite a few years now, though I have translated the work of other poets as well from time to time. Kristiina's tenth book in my translation has just been published, the eleventh and twelfth will be appearing soon, and our collaboration is ongoing. Kristiina has become truly well-known for her poetry and prose in the English-speaking world and beyond, and I am indeed very happy and proud to have played a part in making this particular fairy tale come true.

Ilmar Lehtpere (Photo by Kaido Vainomaa)



of Snakes and Men

b y J e a n - P i e r r e M i n a u d i e r

How does one become a translator of Estonian literature into French? It is not a common vocation (over the last ten years only six of us have published at least one book in its entirety). The financial rewards are fickle; even though the translations themselves are well paid, as is normal for a language deemed 'rare', one cannot count on a regular flow of texts that will be of interest to French publishers. Before I found a publisher for *L'homme qui savait la langue des serpent*, (*Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu* translated into English as *The Man Who Spoke Snakish*), I had approached about 15 without success; an unknown author from a virtually unknown country does not inspire confidence amongst publishers. Most French translators of Estonian make their living from another occupation (I am a history professor). All of them have in their filing cabinets texts which no-one wants to publish. (In my case, this is a full translation of *Mõrsja linik* by Karl Ristikivi. My answer to the question posed at the start is that one does not become a translator of Estonian for the money, but because of a passion for Estonia, exotic languages, and literature.

My passion for literature and my fascination by languages are of long standing but my passion for Estonia is quite recent. It can be traced back to a tourist trip in 1996, which made me want to learn the language; this I began at INALCO, in 1997. A year later I bought a house in the Karula National Park. My affection for Estonia took me by surprise; in the past, by family habit and personal preference, whenever I left France I headed for Latin countries and hot climes, to Spain and Latin America. Perhaps it is primarily because of the contrast with these countries that I was attracted to Estonia in the first place; now I love everything about it.

Against this background why did I not become a translator of Spanish? I still speak much better Spanish than Estonian, because I lived for two years in Colombia, but have never lived or worked in Estonia.

Nevertheless, to be a translator, speaking fluently the language being translated is not the most important; rare are the authors who write as they speak. More necessary is the habit of reading in that language, and having available good

dictionaries as well as friends who can help resolve any uncertainties. It is much more important to be highly proficient in the language of translation because at least three quarters of a translator's work relate to the final text: it must be elegant and apparently unlaboured, free from any traces of the original language, be this in the syntax or the idioms; ways of matching the different language levels employed in the original text must be found; metaphors and word plays must somehow be dealt with.

Translating from Spanish is a much more competitive field and the huge majority of interesting books have already been translated, often from their initial publication. Spanish is very similar to French, so it has no mystery for me. In contrast, many Estonian expressions do not have a French equivalent and certain words (such as *kõle*) are frankly untranslatable. Such factors present a real challenge that makes translating from Estonian much more interesting intellectually. Lastly and paradoxically, in view of what has just been said, and the close similarity of Spanish and French, it may be more difficult to translate from Spanish than from Estonian; in a Spanish phrase half the words might well be identical to French words. As a result, it is very difficult to eliminate the influence of the original text, whilst finding a precisely equivalent word, expression or grammatical construction in French which does not misinterpret the original text. Translating from Estonian requires one to distance oneself much more from the linguistic structure of the original text; this provides more freedom for the translator.

So here I am: a translator. It provides a pleasant change from my day job as a teacher, helps me keep fit intellectually, and holds Alzheimer's at bay. Other than two historical articles and contributions to collective works, *L'homme qui savait la langue des serpents*, is my third published work, following the third part of "Truth and Justice" by Tammsaare and an anthology by Tuglas *Shadow of a Man*. But why did I

choose this novel? Most of all because I enjoyed it so much when I read it in Estonian, but also because translating it provided me with the ideal pretext for reading it again (in fact, I have reread it seven times, from start to finish). But I had no clear plan for its publication; I took the risk that my translation might end up in the same filing cabinet as that which holds the Ristikivi work; of course, one can only allow such behaviour when there is a regular salary coming in from other sources. I was in a very privileged position that allowed me the luxury of that which translators always cruelly lack: time. I had no deadline! I was able to rework my translation as much as I judged to be necessary, without rushing; it took me three years, and I needed them. (French editors are very wary and would not have taken any chances with an imperfect text.) Perhaps these factors have contributed to the work's success in the bookshops.

Of course, the text had to be sufficiently engaging and well enough written for me not to have become bored with it. Any Estonian who has read Kivirähk will understand that I had no problems on either count; one neither tires of reading about the adventures of Leemet and the snakes, nor fails to laugh at the pranks of the bears. Above all, Kivirähk writes in a language which is both simple and refined, but very precise; it is a delight for a translator. Over the entire 381 pages, there were just two places where I pondered over what he was trying to say. Never was it necessary for me to call upon the 'benevolence of Christian charity', which translators are sometimes forced to indulge in, as a last resort, when discreetly disguising a contradiction, explaining something very abstruse, simplifying a phrase or eliminating repetitious and dull language. The fact that Kivirähk's humour does not rely on wordplay helped me. Indeed, the only words that gave me a real translation problem were *Põhja Konn*: for the French, the frog is a comical animal and it is not possible to convey in French the two meanings of *põhi*, ('North', and 'base' or 'bottom'). I changed the frog into a salaman-



very similar. How is this possible? How could a book, so specifically Estonian make such an impact on the French public? It would seem that Estonians lack confidence in their ability to interest the rest of the world. Perhaps the 15 publishers who turned down my translation, before Attila accepted it, may have had similar fears. (It is difficult to be sure: most of the refusal letters were so vaguely worded that they could not be challenged.)

The success does not reflect a particular fascination for Estonia in France;

der as, in French legends, it is an amphibian that spits fire. Kivirähk, who places absolute trust in his translators, (another reassuring factor), gave his full agreement.

And it worked! I ended up finding a publisher, a real professional, who did an excellent job, particularly on the cover design and on the book's promotion. (This was not one of those small publishing companies which, though brave and passionate about their work, are rarely very professional and are always little known. Sadly, it is often the sad fate of Estonian authors that these are the ones to which they are condemned.)

And the book is a success, undoubtedly the greatest success for Estonian literature since *Le fou du tzar*, (Keisri Hull, known in English as *The Czar's Madman*), was published in 1978. It sold 7,000 copies in six months, a wholly unexpected result for an author whose work had never before been translated into a West European language. The press and booksellers have reviewed it very positively, and word-of-mouth publicity by readers has been excellent.

Ever since, reactions to this success have flooded in from Estonia, and are all

interest in Estonia and the Baltic states peaked at the time of their accession to the EU, since when it has significantly declined. The romanticism of the singing revolutions was consigned to history long ago. Nonetheless, Estonian authors seem to bask under a broader, Scandinavian aura. Publishers regularly call to ask me if, by chance in Estonia, there might be someone who writes about misogynists, petrol cans, matches and draughts of air. Some readers think along similar lines.

In truth, the success is attributable to the text itself. The vast majority of readers are not concerned whether the author is Estonian, Mongolian or Papuan. (In fact, the publisher has exercised great discretion on this matter: Kivirähk's unpronounceable name appears on the cover in barely legible, small font, and the Estonian title is nowhere to be found). The novel is not read as a testimony to Estonia, as might have been the case with *The Czar's Madman* and *The Seventh Spring of Peace* by Viivi Luik or, more recently, with *Purge*, but as a broader, universal story.

And that is just what it is. Contrary to the belief of certain Estonians, and with few

exceptions, the cultural elements that Kivirähk draws upon are not specifically Estonian. As far as the legendary elements are concerned, the Salamander reminds one of Fafnir, the Nordic dragon, well known in France through one of Wagner's operas, and Gaul was full of *hiied*: sacred groves! On another level, the villages described in the book, are very similar to those which existed in France during the Middle Ages. Conflict between Paganism and Christianity also took place in France, and the hatred of snakes by religious bigots is equally familiar. The depiction of bears as comic characters, could have been taken directly from *Roman de Renart*, one of the medieval texts best known to the general public. Even the conflict between common people and a nobility, created from warriors and the religious orders, is familiar to us. Of course, our nobility spoke the same language as the people but it also claimed to have come from Germany, at the time of great invasions; and there have been three more invasions by Germany since 1870. Kivirähk's anticlericalism is regarded as rather banal in France, probably more so than in Estonia.

Only in a few, specific places within Kivirähk's text were explanatory notes required, (for example, to explain what a *kiik* is). Many more would have been required had the original text been from a Mexican or Arabic author. But that is to be expected; Estonia is part of Europe! Estonians are not a band of prehistoric people miraculously preserved on a reservation, nor are they a tribe isolated on an island; their culture is entirely European and, over millennia, has evolved by contact with other European cultures. That their language is not Indo-European is mere detail, which is lost in translation, anyway.

In fact, Kivirähk addresses omnipresent issues with a blend of deftness and gravity which is characteristic of the age we live in: how do we adapt to the passage of time, to the modern world, without becoming bigots trapped in an idealised past? How do we accept that what we take for granted is disappearing? How might we live in the

midst of stupidity? How might we confront loneliness? That these problems are being addressed by a society, some distance away, does not put off a well-read, French reader who is in the habit of enjoying works by Japanese, Hindu or other authors. In any case, Leemet lives in a country of fairy tales and science fiction which is much more familiar than is Estonia. The only aspect of the book that may be a little curious for a French reader is the way in which Kivirähk places emphasis on the problem of languages. (In France there is little mention of linguistic conflicts; some French people are even quite happy to see lesser-spoken languages disappear). But the book is so magnificent that it is possible to ignore this issue whilst deriving so much pleasure from reading the book as a whole.

Kivirähk's humour relies very little on word-play; it is a mix of burlesque, situation comedy and, in particular, a sense of anachronism, familiar to those who grew up with *Kamelot* and *Monty Python*. It is, quite simply, an absorbing read! There is never a dull moment.

For me, the adventure is over. Will there be a follow-up? Not immediately. Kivirähk's next book to appear in France, *Rehepapp*, will be translated by Antoine Chalvin (with publication planned for the Autumn of 2014). Furthermore, other intellectual challenges have arisen in addition to translating from Estonian. For several years I have been struggling to learn the Basque language, the only European language, other than the Finno-Ugric languages, which differs so much from French, and which also excites my interest. So, what about a comparative study of the prospects for the Basque and Estonian languages, and for the Basque region and Estonia? They demonstrate many similarities but also many differences? What about a translation from Basque into Estonian or the promotion in the Basque Country of one of Kivirähk's books translated into Basque?

Let us dream...

Translated from French by Gwyn Davies

A. H.

16

Tammsaare

by Maarja Vaino *

forever

When talking about contemporary literary life, we usually have in mind living authors, their new work, meetings with readers etc. Nobody thinks of literary classics, which definitely seem lost in the past. However, a literary work becomes a classic because of its timelessness and eternally topical content. Shakespeare is endlessly discovered and performed, and Dostoyevsky is never out of fashion. The “great authors” affect contemporary literary life much more than it might seem. For example, by constantly offering a chance for comparison, a standard of quality.

In Estonian literature, one great author is Anton Hansen-Tammsaare (1878–1940). This year we celebrated the 135th anniversary of the classic, and there is reason to ask: is Tammsaare endlessly discovered and performed?

A. H. Tammsaare’s masterpiece *Truth and Justice I–V* (1926–1933) is known to the majority of Estonians, even if they have never read the books. The main characters of *Truth and Justice*, the forever toiling Andres and the artful Pearu, are familiar to everyone. Both characters embody Estonian archetypes, and Estonian literature has produced few equally significant and consequential characters. Tammsaare’s works have a deep philosophical aspect, blended with local life and dramatic events.

After *Truth and Justice* was published, Tammsaare became a “living classic”, about whom several monographs and numerous research papers were published during his lifetime. He even had a monument erected to him in 1936 when he was still alive.

Tammsaare was among the first freelance novelists in Estonia who managed to earn a living on his writing alone. His wife Käthe (1896–1979) and two children, daughter Riita (1921–2004) and son Eerik (1928–1981), were able to enjoy a good life in a large four-room

flat with a veranda, where they always employed a servant as well. He published nine novels, two plays, quite a few short stories and over 300 articles. Tammsaare was also a prolific translator, knowing six foreign languages (English, German, Russian, French, Finnish and Swedish). Among his translations were significant literary works, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Knut Hamsun's *Victoria* and T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

The writer's unexpected death on 1 March 1940 was a national day of mourning, and thousands of people turned out for his funeral. A few months later, the Soviet army marched into Estonia and thus Tammsaare's funeral also constituted the funeral of the entire free Estonian republic.

After Estonia was forced into the Soviet Union, Tammsaare's work was temporarily included on the list of suspicious books. The writer's critical attitude towards proletarian revolution and his multi-layered life philosophy caused many headaches for the censors. In 1950, a solution was found: the Marxist interpretation allowed people to continue reading and researching Tammsaare, although only in line with official ideology. Nevertheless, his works were like a fresh breeze from pre-war Estonia, and people found great consolation in them.

As Tammsaare's life and work offer a wealth of material, he finally became one of the most researched Estonian writers during the Soviet era. This was essential in terms of both Tammsaare studies and maintaining our cultural traditions. Quite a few of the acclaimed pre-war novelists – for example August Gailit – were largely ignored. Some of the works of Gailit, who escaped abroad, were in fact banned in Estonia and disappeared from the consciousness of many readers.

The Soviet-era interpretation of Tammsaare created, for several generations, an understanding of the writer as a great critical realist. This was almost the only possible way to talk about him. This "correct reading model" had to be vigorously rectified after Estonia

became independent again in 1992. Tammsaare's work was taken up by a new wave of researchers at the turn of the millennium, when various myths were overturned, e.g. about Tammsaare as an atheist writer (see research by Toomas Liiv and others about the writer and the Bible/theology).

When I started work in 2002 at the A. H. Tammsaare Museum in Tallinn, I encountered the attitude (and still do) that Tammsaare was boring, because he was mainly seen as a critical realist. This attitude encouraged me to compile collections of articles about the writer's essays in 2010 and 2011, and write my doctoral thesis, *Poetics of irrationality in A.H. Tammsaare's work* (2011), in order to point out other levels in the writer's work. In 2011, another doctoral thesis was defended: Mirjam Hinrikus's *The experience of decadent modernity in the texts of A. H. Tammsaare and Young-Estonia*. In the spring of this year a number of acclaimed literary scholars published a collection of articles on Tammsaare's novel *I Loved a German*; Tammsaare's work continues to inspire BA and MA papers.

There is thus no reason to complain about a lack of research on Tammsaare. There are not many writers in Estonia who are analysed in doctoral theses, in collections of articles devoted to one particular work, or even in individual articles and references. Scholarly discussion of Tammsaare's work shows no signs of abating. In November the Museum will organise yet another autumn conference, this time focusing on characters in the writer's work in comparison with characters created by other authors. Besides Estonians, papers will be presented by researchers from Finland and France.

Why France? In the rather impressive body of Tammsaare translations (his works have been translated into about 30 languages), French translations have a special place. In the 1930s, the five-volume *Truth and Justice* was quickly translated into German and in the 1940s, via German, into French. Surprisingly, the reception amongst readers was more enthusiastic in France than it was in Germany. The French writer Jean Gino wrote an intro-

duction to the first part, where he expressed his utter fascination with the novel. In 2009 the publishing house Gaia started the project of retranslating and reissuing all five parts. Three translators devoted themselves to the task and all five novels appeared within two years. A delegation of French journalists has visited Estonia twice. They followed Tammsaare's footsteps through Tallinn and the writer's birthplace Järvamaa, and later published articles about their visits. A project is underway in French universities, where literary scholars are analysing Tammsaare's work. It is certainly strange to think that a writer of a small distant land has attracted attention in the immense French cultural space. French is the only language among the big European languages, including English, German and Russian, where *Truth and Justice* has been published twice in two different translations. Surprisingly enough, *Truth and Justice* has not yet appeared in English. The story of translating these five novels into English is a tale of a sequence of unfortunate coincidences. On the other hand, the writer's last novel, *Põrgupõhja uus Vanapagan* (1939) – according to some scholars his best – has been published in English twice, in 1978 and in 2009. So English-language readers can at least get an idea of Tammsaare's work on the basis of one of his best works. It just might happen that by the autumn of this year the first part of *Truth and Justice*, in a fine design and small print run, will be available in English. The translation is completed and the publishing house Haute Culture is busy with this ambitious project.

Another event worthy of celebration was the publication in Finnish of the entire *Truth and Justice*. The last volume appeared in May. This was the end of an over ten-year effort by the acclaimed Estophile, writer, literary historian and translator Juhani Salokannel. Previously, only the first and fifth parts of the work had been available in Finnish, translated in the 1930s. In the course of this huge undertaking, Salokannel also became a significant interpreter of Tammsaare. His afterword to each novel constitutes a valuable source for all Tammsaare researchers and has added new angles and accents for understanding the whole work.

In 2009, the first part of *Truth and Justice* was for the first time published in Lithuanian, and in spring we were in for another pleasant surprise when the novel *Kõrboja peremees* (The Master of Kõrboja, 1922) appeared in Serbian. It would be fascinating to know how it was received in Serbia. Can the novel's general human touch cross distant cultural borders? Hopefully we will know in due course.

Translating is certainly one of the most efficient ways that a literary classic can enter contemporary literary life. New translations inevitably bring about new interpretations and raise topical issues, and it is crucial, especially for smaller nations, that their essential texts are known abroad. Tammsaare belongs among other great European literary classics. However, it is sadly obvious that the best time to secure a place there has passed. Translation of his works, which started so promisingly in the 1930s, stopped after Estonia was occupied, which means that we lost nearly half a century. In today's Europe, Tammsaare seems "behind the times". Each new translation is nevertheless a "test": is his work, even at this late stage, still able to attract interest? Interestingly enough, being late is a frequent motif in Tammsaare's work. His characters are forever late, sometimes with their entire lives. If nothing else, this is a charming poetic coincidence between real life and literature!

Estonians themselves should certainly reread their own classics. And I mean ordinary readers, because no writer can stay alive without readers, even if an army of scholars toil away in the silence of their offices.

My ten-year experience in museum work has enabled me to observe the attitudes of readers who do not approach Tammsaare with the eye of a professional researcher. There is an increasing number of people who have decided to reacquaint themselves with Tammsaare's books, because they last read him at school or "a long time ago". One reason for this rebirth is certainly the effort of the theatre director Elmo Nüganen, who has produced *Truth and Justice. Part Two* (2005),



Indrek. Karin. Truth and Justice. IV (2006) and *I Loved a German* (2009) at the Tallinn City Theatre. I am convinced that Tammsaare's renaissance – although he has never totally disappeared from the literary scene – has largely happened thanks to Nüganen's productions, which could be called total and conceptual theatre. Despite the fact that each of the *Truth and Justice* productions lasted for five hours, the audience was spellbound. This is even more remarkable because Nüganen kept to the original text as much as possible and his approach was on the whole quite conservative. However, the focus on the characters was innovative and invited people to think. The acting, too, was exceptional. All productions received some type of Estonian theatre award. Probably the most beloved among them – *Karin. Indrek. Truth and Justice. Part Four* – was staged last year at the Latvian National Theatre, again directed by Elmo Nüganen. It certainly seemed that the Latvian audiences were just as taken with the Estonian marriage drama as Estonian audiences.

Truth and Justice. Part Two was again produced in 2012 with a new cast, with actors just graduated from the Drama School. It turned out to be yet another success. We keep hearing the following from our museum visitors: "I could not believe that

this was Tammsaare's text, so I went home and picked up a book – and it turned out that he indeed is a superb writer!"

It is also next to impossible to get tickets to VAT-Theatre productions of *Karin and Pearu*. The author is the popular writer Andrus Kivirähk, who skilfully plays around with Tammsaare's text and characters. The Theatre Varius production *This is not Tammsaare!*, meant to be performed in the museum, has also been successful with the public.

Estonians continue to be fascinated with the writer himself. The reprint of Elem Treier's monograph *Tammsaare's Life as Mr Hansen* (the writer's real name was Hansen) sold out quickly, as did the book *Tammsaare's Letters to his Daughter* (2008) – a father's messages to his daughter during her summer holidays.

In 2013 Tammsaare continues to play an active role in Estonian literary and theatrical life.

A frequently asked question is: "Who/where is our new Tammsaare?" The classic's standard of quality certainly continues to measure contemporary Estonian literature.

* Director of the A.H. Tammsaare Museum
<http://linnamuseum.ee/tammsaare/en/>

Estonian Writers' Valev Uibopuu

In October 2012 the Estonian Writers' Union celebrated its 90th anniversary. The history of the professional association of writers did not proceed without obstacles and gaps: it was founded in 1922 in the independent Republic of Estonia and closed down by the Soviet authorities in 1940. The Soviets replaced it with a state-controlled union established in Moscow during the war, and all the members automatically belonged to the Writers' Union of the Soviet Union. The writers' association in Estonia managed to survive throughout the Soviet period, becoming an increasingly confident stronghold of intellectual freedom in occupied Estonia. The archive material on the history of the Union is scattered across Estonia and Moscow, and is still waiting for proper research.

Quite a few prominent Estonian writers had fled to the West by autumn 1944 to avoid the invading Red Army and, at least until the end of the 1950s, Estonian literature abroad was unquestionably on a much higher level, both in quality and quantity, than at home. Estonian writers at home had to deal with censorship until the end of the Soviet period: in order to escape the net of the ruling power, they had to use the language of Aesop.

The first stopovers of the refugees were in Finland, Sweden and Germany, followed by the USA, Canada, Britain and Australia. Soon, in all of these countries, Estonians began publishing Estonian books and newspapers, schools and publishing houses were set up, and new writers emerged. The

mother tongue and books in Estonian were often the only treasures remaining for the exiles, who had lost their homeland.

Estonian cultural life abroad also needed to be organised, but this organization was inherent and did not take the shape of external directives and orders, as in Moscow and Tallinn. On 6 December 1945 the Estonian Writers' Union Abroad was founded in Stockholm, and operated as an independent organisation until 2000. The Union mainly functioned in Sweden, as the largest number of Estonian writers resided there. Besides the above-mentioned countries, members of the Union also lived in France, Brazil and Spain. During its existence, the Union had 78 members, and three writers acted as chairmen: the longest-

Union 100 90

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serving was the prose writer August Mälk (1945–1982), who was followed by the poet Kalju Lepik (1982–1999). After his death, the prose writer Enn Nõu, acting as chairman, successfully united the Estonian Writers' Union Abroad with the Writers' Union at home.

To mark the 90th anniversary of the Estonian Writers' Union, Valev Uibopuu's monograph *The Estonian Writers' Union Abroad* was published. The book contains abundant photographic material, a list of members with dates of joining the Union, compiled by Sirje Olesk, and a chronology of important events. There is also an overview of the last two decades of the Union, as Uibopuu's text was written in 1991. The book is also a kind of continuation of Katrin Raid's book *Loomise lugu* (The Story of Creation, 2002) about the early years of the Union, issued on the occasion of its 80th anniversary.

Uibopuu's book offers the reader a sensible and balanced overview of the Union's members and activities in Sweden. The most fascinating parts are probably those describing the foundation of the Union and relations with the Swedish writers' organisation. Publishing this kind of book is a wonderful opportunity to present the members of the Union, through a chapter of history about them.

People are the key ingredients of all organisations. On 19 October, one hundred years will have passed since the birth of Valev Uibopuu (1913–1997). Uibopuu once wrote that he was inspired to write the history of the Writers' Union Abroad by the fact that he discovered he was the only surviving founding member of the Union. It should therefore be emphasised that the book presents the recollections and observations of someone who witnessed the activities of the Union from the inside. We should also add that most of the minutes of the Union's meetings were recorded by Uibopuu. The archive is located at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu.

Now a bit more about the man himself. Valev Uibopuu was a remarkably purposeful, diverse and hard-working man. While still in Estonia he worked in journalism and published his first literary work. His incentive to become a writer perhaps partly came from the fact that in his younger years he had for some time acted as private secretary to his uncle, the writer Richard Roht. In 1943 he became a refugee, first in Finland, and then in Stockholm. From the mid-1950s on, Uibopuu lived in Lund, where, on the initiative of Bernard Kangro, the biggest exile Estonian publishing house, *Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv* (Estonian Writers' Cooperative), was founded. Uibopuu saw to the administrative side of the publishing house, while still managing to work a day job and write novels and short stories. More of Uibopuu's works have been translated into Finnish and Swedish than those of any other exile writer.

The tough character of Uibopuu is evident in the way he overcame adversity. A leg injury



Valev Uibopuu

in his youth developed into bone tuberculosis and forced him to leave school. He graduated from secondary school in Stockholm when he was 40, was then accepted at Lund University, made up for all the lost years caused by his illness and was granted a doctoral degree in Finno-Ugrian studies. In the 1970s he was even the director of the Finno-Ugrian Institute at Lund University! He achieved all this while simultaneously working in journalism and in the publishing house, plus creating highly original works of literature. The ability to handle this kind of workload so successfully is clear evidence of incredibly strong self-discipline. Although Uibopuu managed all of his responsibilities so well, in his own words the result was the “rather fragmented life of a scholar, journalist and writer.” As for his literary output, his aim was never to repeat himself. Perhaps he was successful in this precisely because he took on so many different roles.

All of Uibopuu’s novels published in exile are indeed highly diverse. The novel *Keegi ei kuule meid* (Nobody Hears Us, 1948) deals with the occupation period in a small Estonian

town and the impact of dramatic events on human destinies. It was quickly translated into Latvian. Indeed, nobody heard us: the book appeared in Swedish and German only in the 1990s, although this also proves that the novel was “time-proof”. His next novel, with elements of modernism, *Neli tuld* (Four Fires, 1951), describes a ship sailing under a flag of convenience from the viewpoints of different crew members, until it perishes in a mine explosion. The novel relies on true-life events: after World War II there were plenty of ships with Estonian crew members sailing the seas; one of them was deliberately sunk in order for the insurance money. *Janu* (Thirst, 1957) is a novel with extremely fine psychological texture about a young girl suffering from bone tuberculosis, about her visual range, drastically limited because of her immobility, and her hopes for a cure. The writer relies here on his own experience, but what is especially significant and extends to his entire work is that he shows how immobility-caused restricted visual range actually makes people see more deeply, and develops their sense of nuance to perfection. Psychological reliability, paying attention to essential details, excellent style and showing the greatness of an ordinary person all characterise Uibopuu’s short stories and his other novels. The generally rather serious writer made an unexpected turn towards the ironic distorting mirror in his last work, the dilogy *Kaks inimelu ajapöördelis* (Two Human Lives in the Turmoil of Time, 1990–1991). In a sense, this work settles the score with exile and the relevant trauma, while pointing out the limits of literature as a field of art, the existence of different opportunities and choices, and the rich potential of fiction. A character in the book feels that he has been recruited into the service of a world-wide anti-communist league and must obey its orders and work for his homeland. In an interview, the writer once mentioned that perhaps he, too, had been recruited into the league. He added that some people get carried away with this kind of thing and tend to cross the border into abnormality. Uibopuu’s work confirms his own sober sense of analysis throughout, and the last book also displays his skills in talking about traumatic events with a healthy dose of irony.



Perhaps something personal about him as well. Thanks to a grant from Lund University, I had an opportunity in 1994 to study Estonian exile literature for four months at the very same Finno-Ugrian Institute previously headed by Valev Uibopuu. On several occasions I visited the writer's home at Tunnbindaregatan, where Valev, his wife Malle and I had long chats about literature, life in exile and life in general. In warm weather we sometimes sat on the veranda facing the garden and admired the blooming apple trees grafted by Valev Uibopuu himself. In the southern Estonian dialect area where he grew up, his name means apple tree. Uibopuu's same trees are still going strong today.

These chats confirmed Valev's deep humanity, and a keen interest in the world and everything going on at home. Political refugees often live a very introverted life, with their eyes always turned to the past. Uibopuu tried to understand the motives behind human action, but never hastened to condemn anyone. This perfectly harmonised with his whole work. He warned against too much ideology in literature, of which there

were examples in works published both at home and abroad. He kept to his principles and never once visited his homeland before the independent Republic of Estonia had been re-established and the Soviet army had left. As a linguist, Valev Uibopuu considered the Estonian language to be the foundation of Estonian independence and this conviction unites his entire legacy. During one of my later visits to Lund, we managed a longer interview, published in the literary journal *Looming* (1997, nr 1). This was not an easy task, because for Uibopuu what mattered in creative work was mankind, and not the writer, who was supposed to stay in the background.

"The Creator has given him his living breath", wrote Uibopuu's friend and colleague in Sweden, the writer Karl Ristikivi, about Uibopuu's books. It is a worthy acknowledgement, the more significant as it was written when Uibopuu was still alive. We can safely repeat the sentence now that we are celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the writer's birth.



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K r i s z t i n a
L e n g y e l
T ó t h



Fish and water

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Ristisõja määratlemise probleemid: nimetamine

Keskajal puudub omaette kindlapiiriline ristisõja-termin, kogu ristisõda puudutav ladina terminoloogia viitab reisisõjale, liikumisele: *peregrinatio*, *iter*, *via*, *expeditio*, *passagium* (enamasti koos täiendiga – Pühale Maale, risti-). Teinekord kasutati ka muid tegevusele viitavaid mõisteid (*negotium*, *causa*, *labor*, *opus* jms), koos täienditega: hiljem ka lihtsalt mõistet *cruz*. Mõnikord sünonüümselt: *peregrinatio* sive *expeditio*. Ka *peregrinatio in armis*.

Sõna „ristisõda“ pärineb rahvakeelest ja esimest korda kohtame seda oksitaani keeles – *crozada* – 13. sajandi alguse Lõuna-Prantsusmaal, ent see jäi kaunis erandlikuks, nagu prantsuskeelsecki väsed (*croiserie*, *croisade*). Inglise keeles levib mõiste *crusade* seevastu alles 18. sajandil.

Terminoloogiline kirevus valitses ka „ristisõdija“ nimetamisel, kuigi alates 12. sajandist muutus üha populaarsemaks sõna *crucisignatus*. Teisi variante: *milites Dei* või *milites Christi*, samuti *Hierosolymitani* (Püha Maa ristisõdijate kohta). Laialt levinud oli samuti palveränduriga mõistega sünonüümne *peregrinus*. Kollektiivselt nimetati ristisõdijaid enamasti kui *populus*, *plebs*, *gens*, *milicia* või *exercitus Dei*.



The seminar for translators
of historical novels
by Tiit Aleksejev
and Indrek Hargla
9–12 June 2013, Käsmu

The Lord be merciful to the chronicler who dares to write down what has happened, although she knows only what she has experienced herself, if indeed that.

On 9 June in the year of Our Lord 2013, nine brothers and sisters involved in translating historical novels started their journey at the Tallinn airport, guided by Ilvi Liive and Kerti Tergem, from the Estonian Literature Centre.

Fish and water are typical of our destination, the village of Käsmu. Thanks to our excellent coachmen, we soon arrived (even the bag lost in the inferno of airports arrived next day).

After we had settled in hostel Rannamännid and the Captain's House, which belongs to the Estonian Writers' Union, and walked around the village for a while, even managed some lunch, we sat on the terrace of the Captain's House, at two oval tables, and got acquainted. We were all in it together: we were translating or had already translated Tiit Aleksejev's novel *The Pilgrimage* or Indrek Hargla's *Apothecary Melchior and the Mystery of St Olaf's Church*. Melchior's translators were Maima Grinberga (Latvian), Jouko Vanhanen (Finnish), Jean Pascal Ollivry (French), Adam Cullen (English) and Uta Kührt (German); the "pilgrims" were Maima Grinberga, Hannu Oittinen (Finnish), Daniele Monticelli (Italian), Jonatan Tomes (Czech) and Krisztina Tóth (Hungarian).

We finally managed to remember one another's names (although this was a major effort for some), and proceeded with discussions about our life and work in general, the world of books in Estonia and elsewhere, whether the end of the Gutenberg galaxy was near or whether there was no reason to moan and groan, as the world was doing something it had always done – changing. We talked about how the Literature Centre could help the translators, and the other way round. We also established that the patron saint of publishers is St. John Bosco, in case publishers involved in our translations should need some heavenly assistance.

Rein Raud invited everyone to his Oriental-style house in the evening, and the crowds of people going to a seaside concert were baffled to see our little group moving in the opposite direction. We spent a lovely evening conversing intelligently on the terrace, while the host demonstrated his skills in cooking and the hostess in the art of gardening. Besides the regal meal, we sampled Rein Raud's novel *Reconstruction*, published last year. We learned how quickly an idea for a new novel may emerge and acquire textual form, pushing everything else into the background. As a representative of the older generation of the novel tried to understand the ideas and motivations of the younger generation, we discussed the world-view of today's young people, the relations between faith and religion, and the results of constantly pushing back boundaries. We even saw a rainbow in the sky. Later while the mosquitoes were enjoying the wine in our blood, the topics expanded, e.g. how to legally get some boulders to decorate your house and garden, and why it is comfortable to sleep in a hammock. To those of us who are lazy by nature and always enjoy a long lie-in in bed, it was interesting to hear Rein Raud explaining how wonderful it actually was to get up at dawn, grab a cup of coffee and plunge into work so that by lunchtime everything is done and the rest of the time can be devoted to people instead of work.

When we walked home that evening, we saw a rare sight in Käsnu: a cat. The poor creature had many hairless patches, it was either wearing its summer clothes or had some kind of a disease, but it was definitely a cat. Its big brother the lion is an attribute of the patron saint of translators (and cats), St Jerome. If the attribute is present, so must in some way be the saint, as medieval people thought... Looking back now, we have no doubt whatsoever that the seminar was watched over by heavenly forces.

On Monday morning, we woke early (including the above-mentioned lazybones), as we did not want to miss out on the glorious day. The guests of the day, Marek Tamm and Tiit Aleksejev, were already there, and the lectures began. The day was naturally dedicated to the topic of pilgrimages and crusades.

Marek Tamm's talk was entitled "What is a crusade? (Generally, and not forgetting Tiit Aleksejev's novels in connection with the First Crusade)". Marek explained how science sees the concept of crusades and pilgrimages. The interpretation of crusades has changed, e.g. their definition (and reflections in language, i.e. names), spatial and temporal boundaries, causes, motivations, even propaganda and the logistics of the time. The legal, social and even religious status of the crusaders was rather vague even in the Middle Ages. The concept of truth is no help either: it is something useful for society. All this means that there is no clarity about what a crusade in fact was. It is better to ask: what was a crusade like? It was certainly a 'holy war', a pilgrimage and was supported by the Pope. In any case, the crusades were sufficiently vague to enable medieval chroniclers and modern historians great latitude.

Tiit Aleksejev arrived with a bagful of books. Not for the sake of sport, but he recommended and showed us books that he deemed important as background material for translating the novels. About medieval sources, he mentioned that later materials could be more truthful than contemporary chronicles, considering the

religious fervour accompanying the pilgrimages. However, most of what we know comes from various narratives, and the chroniclers always had their own attitudes and points of view. Chronicles must be deciphered if the interests of the chroniclers and those who commissioned them differ. Every line written about the crusades is thus reconstruction and fiction. History prefers to describe great deeds by great men, whereas some writers are fascinated by small deeds of great men or the great deeds of little men. Tiit also mentioned his own pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He introduced the art of medieval warfare, describing in detail military equipment, strategy and how every battle increased the self-confidence and professionalism of the surviving soldiers of all ranks.

In the afternoon, we continued discussing translation issues of *The Pilgrimage*, such as transcription; especially in personal and place names, we were not sure whether to use Latin, Greek or some other language. Some cultures traditionally use their own versions of great European characters and names of the cities.

We discussed the problems of intertextuality, the most interesting of which was the emergence of "the culture of preachers" in the novel: using Biblical texts and Catholic liturgy in the form of oral tradition, not quoted word for word, but relying on memory. Quotations were largely used when they served the user's purpose. The mere fact that a quotation came from the Bible afforded it definite authority, although only few knew its precise meaning. The translators had found interesting solutions in different languages for the author's "linguistic inventions", i.e. creative swear words, onomatopoeic expressions or characters' peculiar language usage. We learned a great deal about style as well, how to keep it as close to the original Estonian as possible. We finally tortured the author with minutely detailed questions, which came from too much pondering the text, and together we achieved some sort of balance between reality and fiction, keeping in mind the interests of the average

reader. We even learned a new word from contemporary Estonian military slang – jörbel.

Dinner awaited us a short walk away through the rain in the Käsma Maritime Museum, where Aarne Vaik had prepared delicious fish. At the table, we continued a bit more general conversation about literature and culture, and afterwards we returned to the Captain's House and focused on the novel once again. When night fell, the range of topics expanded and, encouraged by wine, we tried to have a little song festival, but somehow it did not work out, so we went to bed.

Tuesday was devoted to 15th century Tallinn and Melchior, and more generally to Estonian historical novels. The guests were Inna Põltsam-Jürjo, Indrek Hargla and Eneken Laanes.

Inna's lecture, "Tallinn at the time of the apothecary Melchior" took us back to the medieval city, and was bursting with a variety of information, e.g. the daily life of medieval citizens, and how they celebrated various events. It was a significant century for the Hansa towns, and trading determined the whole life of a town. Theft and making counterfeit money were strictly punished; for example, one goldsmith had his head chopped off because he had cut foreign gold coins smaller. The lecture offered an overview of the development of Tallinn, as each year brought more ships to the harbour. Trade flourished, although almost every ten years an economic crisis, famine, plague or fire struck. The fire regulations prohibited brewing beer without a chimney and other dangerous activities, but in 1433 the whole town still burned down. Inna talked about the urban population, relations between Germans and non-Germans, about the fact that the town's topography did not develop ethnically, but instead according to the needs of professions and guilds, relations between Toompea Hill and the lower town, schools, health care etc. It was especially interesting to hear about the medieval patriarchal family life. The town council set limits on weddings, e.g. the size of the party and the number of guests depended on the size of the bride's dowry. The

medieval menus showed how lavish some meals were. There were also strange regulations about clothes: married women were allowed to wear gold and furs only when their husbands owned a full armour, while women of ill repute were not allowed to wear gold or furs. When a woman's clothes had pearl buttons, she was not supposed to wear any other jewellery. We heard interesting tales from the gutter press as well: how a monk was caught in a "red monastery", or brothel; about three apprentices who were arrested because they "moved around at night with unusual weapons and miracle-making letters that were supposed to turn them invisible", and perhaps the most absurd documented fact – if you called someone a whore you had to be able to prove it, otherwise you had to carry the punishment yourself.

In the next talk, Indrek Hargla told us about the world of his apothecary Melchior. First of all, he specified that the main character of his novel series is not the apothecary but the town of Tallinn. He also talked about the fascinating etymology of its various names. We learned that about half of the personal names came from German sources and that using family names in the 15th century was highly unusual. According to normal medieval family models, a young man of modest means often married a middle-aged widow and of course her previous husband's property, and then waited for her death, after which he married a younger woman who bore him children and sooner or later became a widow. Various church and town council rules and regulations determined the sexual life of the inhabitants. Indrek emphasised that Melchior's universe was a literary universe, inspired by reality. This offered a free usage of sources and an understanding that everything that did not contradict the laws of nature was possible in a novel, whether or not it was found in sources. A novel could thus depict events that had not actually happened if the plot needed them. There are apparently some "mistakes" in the novels, but these are for the readers to discover.

The last lecture of the seminar took place in the afternoon. Eneken Laanes talked about Estonian historical novels and memory literature, and how historical fiction had shaped Estonians' views of history. The genre began with Bornhöhe's work; the events of St George's Uprising could have been largely invented by the author, but people accepted everything as real. A great contribution to the awakening-era historical memory was made by Kreutzwald's epic *Kalevipoeg* and by Jakobson. The topics of interest at the end of the 19th century were the crusades, the arrival of the Lutheran church in Estonia, serfdom and the awakening era. This was the first era of the historical novel as a "portable monument"; the genre was essential in encouraging the emerging sense of nationality and national identity. The second era of the Estonian historical novel arrived during the years of Estonian independence, in the 1920s and 1930s, when a need emerged for masculine, successful, militant figures; the topic of Baltic Germans and Vikings was in fashion, and this was a time when historical novels were first illustrated. Still, like elsewhere in Europe, the historical novel was not the strongest genre in Estonian modernism. The historical novel in exile literature during the Soviet era centred on European topics, and recent history was treated through different approaches. The 1970s witnessed another era, where documentary novels appeared on the literary scene, along with Jaan Kross's novels. It was possible to discuss the complicated (recent) past only at the end of the 1980s. New historical prose arrived in the 1990s: historical fiction and alternative voices in literature. World War II was mostly tackled by memory literature.

After the lecture, the programme became quite free. Some tormented Indrek with various translation problems, while some continued to talk about *The Pilgrimage*. A few brave people decided to have a swim in the sea, and some preferred a walk in the forest, where swarms of mosquitoes were happy to see that dinner was served. Some worked at their laptops, some braved the sauna, and some, i.e. definitely one, enjoyed a stretch of solitary seaside,

sharing it with a fairly large fox who had captured a bird. Another cat appeared in the village, properly dressed but too shy, so photographs only captured a blurred image.

On Wednesday we said farewell to Käsmu, and took the bus to Tallinn. On the way, we picked up Ott Sandrak, who guided us through the town, along "the path of Melchior". Ott Sandrak's knowledge of Tallinn, medieval and otherwise, is astonishing. He probably knows more about each brick than the rest of us know about the entire town. The trip was like a three-hour fairy tale about medieval Tallinn, although we only walked in the lower town. We saw St Olaf's Church, observed the different stages of construction of the town wall and saw the oldest house in Tallinn. In Rataskaevu (wheel well) Street, close to "Melchior's house", we learned why the well was no longer used there: a dead cat was found in it. Heaven knows whether the little creature was suicidal or whether someone helped it to carry out the project, but its death was enough to cover up the well. At the Town Hall, we were told how courts operated in the Middle Ages and what clothes the officials wore. We were lucky to see the rest of St Catherine's Church and the Dominican monastery. Finally we ended up in Kloostri Ait, the former armoury of the town, and tucked into our lunch of duck whose days had ended unhappily.

We also visited the Estonian Literature Centre's premises on Brokusmägi. Our little group scattered in the afternoon: catching a flight, a bus or a train, but we all had experienced a very successful seminar. The days in Käsmu were full of useful talks and encouraging discussions for future work. We are all grateful to the Estonian Literature Centre for a fascinating programme.

Nothing of this has found its way into historical records, as records are no longer kept. In one way or another, man's life blends into the past like fish into water. Even if it is recorded in the chronicles. Only the fish remains. Only water.

2012

Estonian Literary Awards

b y P i r e t V i i r e s

In 2012, literature did not receive a Cultural Award from the Republic of Estonia, but the literary critic and historian **Maie Kalda** received the National Science Award for her long-time prolific work.

The annual award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment was received by **Aino Pervik** for her books *Proua O imekspanemised* (Mrs O is surprised), *Kirjatähtede keerukas elu* (The complicated life of letters), *Klabautermanni mure* (Klabautermann's concern) and *Rändav kassiemme* (The travelling mummy-cat), and her productive literary activity.

The genre awards of the Estonian Cultural Endowment's Literature Foundation in 2012 were distributed as follows.

The best achievement in prose was awarded to **Rein Raud** for his novel *Rekonstruktsioon* (Reconstruction).

The poetry award went to **Jürgen Rooste** for the collection of poetry *Laul jääkarudest* (Song of polar bears) and *Higgsi boson* (Higg's boson).

The best essay award went to **Marek Tamm** and the collection *Monumentaalne ajalugu* (Monumental history).

The drama award was given to **Martin Algus** for his *Kontakt* (Contact).

Jaanus Vaiksoo's *Supipotikarneval* (Soup pot carnival) received the award in children's literature.

The award for translating from a foreign language into Estonian was given to **Märt Välja-**

taga for his rendering of Wystan Hugh Auden's *39 luuletust ja 5 esseed* (39 poems and five essays) from English.

Jouko Vanhanen received the award for translating Estonian literature into a foreign language: Indrek Hargla's crime novel *Apteeker Melchior ja Rataskaevu kummitus* (Apothecary Melchior and the Ghost from Rataskaevu Street) and Jaan Kross's novel *Tahtamaa*.

The jury also gave an award outside the genre specification, and this went to **Lauri Sommer's** *Räestu raamat* (Book of Räestu).

The award for best article was given to **Tiit Hennoste's** *Elu ja kirjanduse piiril. Suhtlemine Oskar Lutsu "Kevades"* (On the border of life and literature. Communication in Oskar Luts's *Spring*, published in the magazine *Looming* no 11, 2012).

The awards for literature in Russian were received by **Gohar Markosjan-Käsper** for her novel *Memento mori* and the magazine **PLUG** (editors and publishers Olesja Bökova and Dan Rotar).

The 2012 Betti Alver award, given every year for a remarkable debut, was received by the young poet **Eda Ahi** for the collection *Maskiball* (Masked ball).

The 2012 Friedebert Tuglas short story award was given to **Kai Aareleid** for the short story *Tango* (*Looming* no 4, 2012) and **Rein Raud's** *Ja tuleb kord* (Once it comes, *Looming* no 12, 2012). The short story award was established by Friedebert Tuglas in 1970. There are two awards every year.

The Valga city government and Central Library started the August Gailit short story award in 2009. The award goes to a story that has the atmosphere of Gailit's famous novel *Toomas Nipernaadi* (rich imagination, adventurous romantic characters, picturesque manner of depiction or a lyrical undertone). In 2012 this award was given to **Kärt Hellerma's** *Mängumeri* (A sea for play).

Since 2003, the city of Tallinn and the Estonian Writers' Union have issued a novel award named after A. H. Tammsaare every five years, with the aim of honouring the work of the famous writer and supporting the development of contemporary Estonian literature. The award is given on Tammsaare's birthday. This year, it went to **Kalle Käsper's** series of novels *Buridanid* (Buridans).

Olev Remsu's autobiographical memoirs *Su-pilinna poisid* (Boys from Soup Town) received the A. H. Tammsaare Albu Parish literary award. This award goes to a work about today's world or a work tackling the life and work of A. H. Tammsaare.

The Eduard Vilde Award of Vinni Parish for the best literary work that follows Eduard Vilde's traditions went to **Livia Viitol** for her monograph *Eduard Vilde*.

The Virumaa literary award is given for the best artistic interpretation of the history of the Estonian people in poetry, prose or drama, or for monographic research related to Virumaa. In 2012 this was given to **Mihkel Mutt's** novel *Kooparahvas läheb ajalukku* (Cave people go down in history).

The Võru County government issues the Bernard Kangro award for authors from Võrumaa, connected with it or for a work dealing with Võrumaa-related topics. This time the winner was **Lauri Sommer** and his *Räestu raamat* (Book of Räestu).

The Jaan Kross literary award is issued by the Jaan Kross Foundation with the aim of recognising remarkable literary achievement, in areas associated with the writer's diverse creative work, by displaying ethical and aesthetic

standards typical of Kross's own work. The award went to **Enn Nõu** for his three-part documentary novel *Vabariigi pojad ja tütreid* (Sons and daughters of the republic).

The Juhan Liiv Award goes to the best Estonian-language poem published for the first time during the last year, and is awarded by Alatskivi Parish, together with the Alatskivi Secondary School and Liiv Museum. The winner was **Maarja Pärtna's** poem *Sees* (In).

Another poetry award, named after Gustav Suits, has been granted since 2004 by the Tartu city government and the Cultural Endowment of Tartu and is given to a poet who, during the past year, published at least one excellent, philosophically profound collection of poetry. In 2012 the winner was **Hasso Krull** and the collection *Veel ju vist* (Still perhaps).

A special annual award, named after Karl Eduard Sööt, and issued by the Luunja local government and school, is given for children's poetry. In 2012 it went to **Ilmar Trull's** *Tuvi jalutab* (The walking pigeon).

The Estonian science fiction Stalker Award is given by the Estonian Science Fiction Association for the best science fiction novel or collection and the best short stories or translations. In 2012 the winners were *Saladuslik tsaar* (Mysterious tsar, authors **Maniakkide Tānav, J. J. Metsavana** and **Jaagup Mahkra**), **Tiit Tarlap's** novel *Lõhestusjoon* (Line of separation), **Veoko Belials's** short story *Seal, kus voolab valgus* (Where light flows), and a story by **Maniakkide Tānav** and **J. J. Metsavana**, *Kaelani vaakumis* (In a vacuum up to the neck).

The Tallinn University Literary Award was established in 2007 with the aim of acknowledging and introducing Estonian authors who study or teach at Tallinn University or have graduated from it. The 2012 winner in fiction was **Urmas Vadi** and his novel *Tagasi Eestisse* (Back to Estonia), and **Rein Raud** produced the best translation, Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nova*. In the category of publications in periodicals, the award went to **Svetlana Grigorjeva** for poems in the magazine *Vikerkaar* in September 2012.

Short Outlines of Books by

Estonian

by Brita Melts, Ruttt H

Maarja Pärtna

Läved ja tüved

(Thresholds and Pillars)

Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2013. 84 pp
ISBN 9789985795347

This year's 35th jubilee Juhan Liiv Prize for Poetry was awarded to the young poet Maarja Pärtna (b. 1986), who is a master's student in world literature at the University of Tartu and the editor of the literature section of the free periodical *Müürileht*, which discusses issues of modern Estonian culture. Pärtna is the second youngest winner of the Juhan Liiv Prize: only the winner of the prize in 1966, the then 24-year-old Paul-Eerik Rummo, has been younger than her. The Juhan Liiv Prize is given to the poem published during a calendar year which best displays ideas and characteristics similar to Juhan Liiv's poetry. Linking Pärtna with Juhan Liiv, one of the most unique Estonian writers and the greatest Estonian poet of the turn of the 20th century, is not coincidental. In her first interview in 2010, when naming the authors who had influenced her most, Pärtna admitted that the pain that can be felt in Liiv's poetry meant a great deal to her, and we can say that the intertextual planes found in her poetry show

direct references to Liiv. What's more, critics have pointed out her skill in transforming the essential values of "old-fashioned" poetry into modern poetic language. Pärtna's poems are characterised by pictorialness, sensitivity to detail and masterful use of words: the values of traditional poetry. The poet Jaan Kaplinski has said that Maarja Pärtna is able to see something new in common aspects of everyday life, such as a shirt on a clothesline or a simple smile, and "in the vision that reaches deep into the



Maarja Pärtna (Photo by Scampix)

Authors

i n r i k u s , M a i r e l r o a n d M a r e t V a h e r

essence of things she reveals something surprising and escapes the difference between the big and the small". Pärtna writes about the small, simple and ordinary, but she does it in a well-refined way so that the results are harmonious and refreshing against the background of modern poetry.

Pärtna has been publishing her poems in magazines since 2005; her début collection *At the Grassroots* appeared in 2010. This first collection contains plenty of "cosmic romanticism", which hints at her orientation towards the future and yearning for something better, and at a search for ways to achieve this better future. On the other hand, it is the poetry of solitude, where solitude is something much more than simple loneliness. It embodies the relations between a voice, present here and now, and absent others, and speaks to readers through a common everyday milieu.

Thresholds and Pillars is Pärtna's second collection; devoid of cosmic romanticism, it digs deeper into something else. Pärtna's poetry has become more pictorial in the sense that she is verbally mapping her surrounding environment and her own, sensually experienced places, and her poems form a kind of verbal-mental geography. Generally, her poetry centres on

nature, but natural objects and temporal moments are compacted into her personal experience, backed up by her solitude in the city. The "rain has grown into silence, tree branches are heavy / and the sun has set. under the blades of grass / and among old fir needles somebody's steps are shuffling. / something is rustling on a tree trunk, somebody's wings / are brushing against sleepy tree tops. somebody's feet are making a path // through a perfect city: across the yet unbuilt bridges / and nameless streets, past / small empty shops and cafés / on the thick foggy riverbank." Such snapshots depict Pärtna's home town Tartu, but also her memory of other places and moments. Landscape and space are the central themes and forms of existence in Pärtna's poetry. "how can one remember something that remains behind / a personal experience? some clues can be found / in the space; the space is the very one that gives life to stories." Spatiality and moving between different places give rise to the question of temporality: "time simply happens, there is / nowhere to hide from it. or even if there were, you can perhaps only / fail in your attempts to overcome its happening - / to fail, and to keep waiting for the whole winter."

Intertextuality has become deeper and its role as a poetic means has broadened in Pärtna's poetry: the new collection contains translations of William Carlos Williams' poems. We can again notice how Pärtna has consciously searched for a style similar to her own. The poetry of Williams, one of the most influential modernists and imagists of the previous century, was also centred on everyday issues and the lives of common people. Pärtna has studied English philology and she has been interested in Beat literature, (in her first collection, she addresses Allen Ginsberg). She unites the Estonian poetic tradition with American modernism, forming a new niche in Estonian modern literature. She synthesises the personal and the general, and the outdated and the modern, in such a way that their different sides become a memory, and a time-sensitive completeness of visions, reflections, observations and contemplations poured into a detailed language of images. BM

Peeter Sauter

Ära jäta mind rahule. a love story

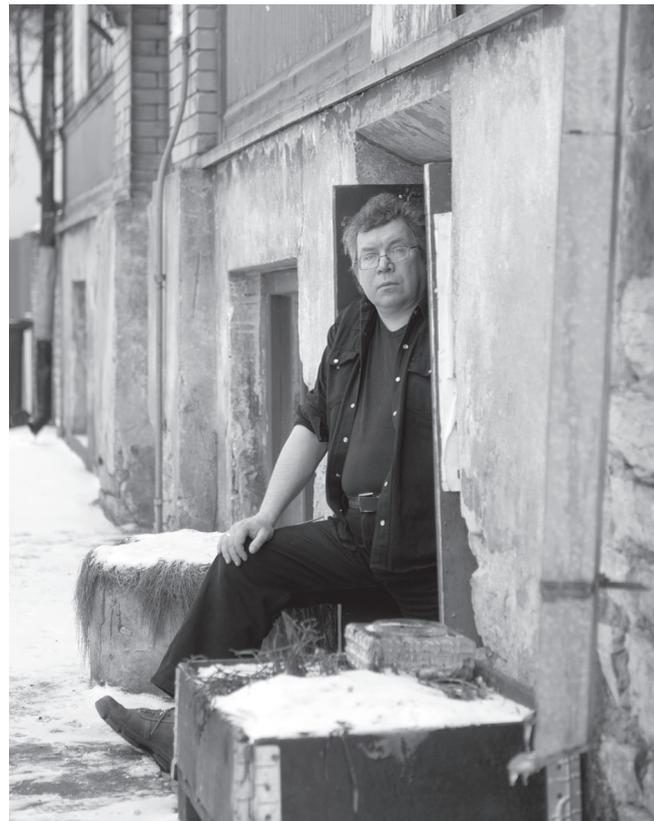
(Don't Leave me Alone. a love story)

Tallinn: P. Sauter, 2012. 396 pp
ISBN 9789949308392

For more than two decades, Peeter Sauter (b. 1962) has been the main representative of neo-naturalism in Estonian literature. Sauter studied to be an actor, worked as a journalist and copywriter, and now is a freelance writer in a "house of poor writers" in Tallinn (he has written a poem about this house and he also is one of the central figures in a documentary of the same title). Sauter's first book, *Indigo* (1990), which became a cult sensation, hit a very important nerve with the bohemian generation of its time, who lacked the passion for change and did not strive for truth and elation. Sauter, who has always been known as an author of

extreme texts, introduced the "low style", full of vulgarisms, obscene details and slang into Estonian literature. All Sauter's books are written in this style: he is an Estonian mixture of Kerouac and Bukowski. He has also translated books by both of these authors and he admits having been influenced by their works. Critics have characterised Sauter's texts as "pieces of a life", and his narrative avoids completeness and plot development. "His text is self-centred, but this self is an observer not an active participant in his own life, and his attention is focussed on small things: toes, socks, making a sandwich, repetitive routine life", as well as navel-gazing.

Sauter, who has so far been known only as a prose author, has recently become a poet as well (his first collection of poetry appeared in 2011), and his new novel *Don't Leave me Alone* is, actually, his most poetic and emotional work of prose. It is, as with his earlier works, full of free-flowing existence in as close-to-life form as possible, but the vulgarism-filled informal speech and extremely naturalistic scenes of drinking and



Peeter Sauter (Photo by Scanpix)

sex are much more moderate than those in his earlier books. Sauter has turned into a lyricist, confessor and a gentle meditator, his slang-packed dialogues have become milder and there are even some hints of existential inner monologues (“Is the routine world only a masked room in a large loony-bin, or is the loony-bin still one room in the large world?”) The new book is frankly autobiographical: the characters carry the same names as in real life, and all the described events have happened to Sauter in his real life. The book opens with a post-divorce situation, and a search for escape from the resulting loneliness. “I hit on women directly, like hoping that they will all at once send me packing, and that’s what they do. This is the post-divorce brittleness. I don’t want to talk about love. I don’t need any romanticism, but I also don’t want to be alone.”

Sauter depicts in his immediate, descriptive and plain style the bohemians’ communal life in an old wooden house, the death of the protagonist’s (i.e. the writer Sauter’s) son and his close relations with his daughter. The story ends at the moment when Peeter is again wearing a ring with the inscription “Don’t leave me alone”, and Laura is wearing another one with a similar inscription.

This is “a love story” in a direct sense, a story of finding and cherishing love until there is somebody “together with whom I’d want to be silent when lying together in our grave. It’d be good to live with somebody with whom you’d want to be dead together.” This is a story of sadness, tiredness of life, approaching old age, and love. As surprising for Sauter as it may seem, it is a complete narrative. A middle-aged writer, “pot-bellied, with a beer glass in his hand, grey hair a mess, like any half-crazy middle-aged Estonian writer”, he wants to show and prove that he is not alone and sad but striving for happiness and well-being, for “quiet joyful peace”. But, now and then, he deliberately steps into embarrassing situations to find some absurdity in life and to avoid excessive seriousness and matter-of-factness. The protagonist writer writes

because writing can offer company and chase away loneliness. It offers you a mirror and a silent conversation partner with your own face – in literature you can meet your *alter ego*.

This book gives us a summary that is characteristic of the writer’s life, and of the work itself: “Life is an empty, clueless existence, without great connections, obligations and even without any will. But this is the best. Like a nobody nowhere. I could say that I have fulfilled my dream of becoming a loser.” BM

Elo Viiding

Teised

(The Others)

Tallinn: Tuum, 2012. 174 pp

ISBN 9789949918683

Elo Viiding (b. 1974) was not even an adult when she debuted as a mature and original poet in 1990. The “star children”, described in one of her short stories, who have “sharp minds and quick wits and establish their own rules everywhere they go” and who “could, despite the surrounding rigidity, create a world where it was possible to talk about everything, where there was no place for stupidity and obedience, caution and prejudice” were, obviously, not a motif found in an empty space. In all of Viiding’s nine collections of poetry and three collections of short stories, her subject matter includes the being of woman, dissatisfaction with woman’s place and opportunities in society, as well as corporeality, psychoanalytical puzzles, and intellectual sharp irony and social criticism. Viiding’s relations with the world are brittle and full of anxiety; there is not much space for empathy because Viiding’s stakes are high, but they meet a dead end: she protests against the bourgeoisie, against superficiality and mental weakness, against soullessness and the lack of individuality. This is the protest of a



Elo Viiding (Photo by Scanpix)

personality that craves independence, beauty and naturalness against the environment that suppresses singularity, a protest led by vague identity-related perplexities and expectations. Viiding is neither loud nor desperate, but presents this protest as a taciturn but proud observer. Thus we can say that, although all of Viiding's works are full of similar, familiar themes, dark images and stylistically refined compositions, in each one we can still find new twists and aspects.

The psychoanalytical foundation of Viiding's work has grown firmer in recent years. This is also a dominant factor in her

third collection of short stories, *The Others*, containing six stories which focus on human and especially on female anxieties, uneasiness, feelings of guilt and struggles, all presented in an icy, arrogant, even callous way. The book mainly explores body-related anxieties; almost all of the stories discuss problems related to a woman's body (sexuality, desire, "vicious arousal", procreation and motherhood). The central motif is endurance, which embodies woman's role of continuation through her offspring. The same motif, the problem of enduring, its motivation and possibilities, carried Viiding's previous collection of poetry (*Enduring*, 2011).

In a painful and ironic way, Viiding discusses the situation in which a woman cannot or does not wish to fulfil the role assigned to her by society: motherhood and a woman's supposedly natural state. "Women feel the obligation and oppressing indebtedness to Endurance. And, naturally, the feeling of guilt when they have not submitted to Endurance." And what will happen to a woman who has not submitted to endurance, who has chosen a path that does not submit to social demands (of procreation)? When a woman represents a biological or mental shift from the norm and, shielded by her creativity, enjoys destructiveness? When a woman simply wants to love, not to endure? In this case, the woman is a "blank woman"; "in the eyes of society, I was at each step a woman who could be cancelled, because I was not a real woman." Reconciliation can be found by admitting that the spirit and the body are not two different aspects but, in order to find harmony within oneself, a person's body and spirit need to be in harmony.

Viiding is able to draw out people who feel some oppressing heaviness, who live in hiding with their anxieties. Her form of expression is tense, intriguing and exact. She has maintained her cold and ironical alienation from the formal world and everyday routine; all her stories are complete in their compositional and thematic balance and intellectual charge. BM

Mathura

Kumalasepäev

(The Day of the Bumble Bee)

Lelle: Allikaäärne 2012. 96 pp

ISBN 9789949918546

The Day of the Bumble Bee is Mathura's (aka Margus Lattik, b. 1973) seventh collection of poems. Besides poetry, he has also published numerous translations (from English, Hindi and Sanskrit), essays, critical reviews, song lyrics and even a travelogue. Besides writing, Mathura is also an artist and, besides working on book designs and on his Internet homepage, he has shown his paintings at several one-man exhibitions. He has travelled a lot in exotic countries and his works have the flavours of Oriental religion and philosophy. His alias, which is also a name of a city in northern India, originates from his teacher and mentor, who lives in India.

Earlier, Mathura's poetry was full of his perceptions and feelings connected with foreign places, and his collection *Kohalolu (Presence)* (2006) contained many travel poems. His latest, *The Day of the Bumble Bee*, is dedicated to his daughter and is based on feelings originating from life in a small northern Estonian fishing village. Talking about the birth of this poetry collection, Mathura has said that the experience of living remains full and vivid in all places and it is always a complex, equally formed by ourselves and by the landscapes surrounding us. At a very small place like a fishing village, or even when standing on a boulder in the sea, "surrounded by the world / I live in", one can fully and wholesomely experience the world, and search for and find the universal in small things or common simplicity.

The Day of the Bumble Bee strives for the universal and the feeling of harmonious unity in everyday life, and expresses simple things: "Suddenly everything stops, thickens / into the one and only word that I cannot / say out loud. Each morning, when I wake up

/ the world is missing or has acquired one more dimension; / I am searching for a focal point in this truth that creates and perishes, creates and perishes." Wandering in the surrounding landscapes, finding the *genus loci* of the line between the land and the sea, and becoming familiar with it form the means for reaching into one's own inner depths: "... when / you are at one and the same place for too long, it is / ultimately, hard to say whether you love this place / or you have simply got used to it. You are / this place, its hidden voice / and its call."

In any place, whether strange or familiar, something wells forth that gives identity to the poet's spiritual landscapes. Mathura's life in this lonely fishing village is not depicted in a clear-cut form – and the book contains well-defined poems and ruminations of an unclear genre that spring forth from philosophy, which are all spun together into a

Mathura (Photo by Scanpix)



poetic integrity, reaching into the past and the present. Besides the reflections of personal feelings and sensual experiences of different landscapes, the book contains tales of the past of the village and of its inhabitants. Now and then, the poet describes his own imaginary participation in situations and conditions in the past, wanting to “experience them from a safe distance”.

The Day of the Bumble Bee puts everyday moods and fragile happiness into words against the background of simple and familiar landscapes. This intertextual poetry expresses something that artists consider important: “the ability to sense something that is below the surface of things”. Mathura senses it, and the meditative light of his poetry shows us what is most important: life. “Life is a river / under an old railway bridge; the fields that surround it / are full of the fragmentary echo of memories.” BM

Mart Kadastik (Photo by Scanpix)



Mart Kadastik

Kevad saabub sügisel

Spring Arrives in Autumn

Tallinn: Varrak, 2013. p. 222

ISBN 9789985327364

This is a provocative and intriguing debut novel, which through four protagonists tackles relations between older men and younger women, a topic that, in the author's opinion, should matter to people and evoke reflection. *Spring Arrives in Autumn*, with its colourful style and twists of Freud-flavoured life, indeed encourages the reader to think. The book tells the stories of successful men who have reached the autumn of their lives: a journalist, a baritone, a millionaire businessman and a doctor. The marriages of all these men, who are all experiencing mid-life crises, have failed, for one reason or another, and they are linked with each other, either by direct acquaintance or chance events. The journalist Henn has known his cousin Erik – a well-known womaniser and successful opera singer – since childhood; the millionaire Tambet, who seeks solace with prostitutes, offers both Erik and Henn financial aid in difficult times and confesses his private life to Toivo, a doctor; the latter starts correspondence with the Christian daughter of the journalist Henn. However, the epistolary relationship, seeking human closeness and evoking desire, leads the doctor into a tragic car crash. All these intertwining stories and twists are examined at the end of the book on the meta-level when the journalist publishes a book about a young girl's relationship with an older man, based on personal experience and on the darker side of journalism. At the book launch, he discovers that, despite distorting fact, his mostly fictional novel has inadvertently acquired the form of a real life.

The book, with its new start in the autumn of life, focuses on men's thoughts and deeds. Thus it has a somewhat one-sided orientation and lacks diversity in the way it tackles issues. The psychoanalytical

element, wishes and fantasies deposited in the subconscious in childhood, feeds the men's complexes and eats away at their respectable and conscious image of self. This is therefore clearly a novel of men: clinging to young women and intoxicated with new experiences, the analyses of emotional reflections from the partners' points of view are modest, except for the epistolary romance, which introduces the woman's side as well. This relationship is the most clearly and compactly described.

The author of the book, Mart Kadastik (born in 1955), has worked in journalism for a long time and is the head of one of the largest media corporations in Estonia. Kadastik's style is occasionally highly baroque, and the novel has been accused of waffling. Still, the verbal vibrancy is captivating and is balanced by the journalistic neutrality, almost tepidness, with which the author describes the intimate reflections, erotic images and adventures of respectable men. The style reveals conscious swings between closeness to life and a literary touch: convincing sincerity is blended with prickling irony, which can even veer into the grotesque. In sum, *Spring Arrives in Autumn* is a mature, pretentious, intellectual debut novel. BM

Mihkel Mutt

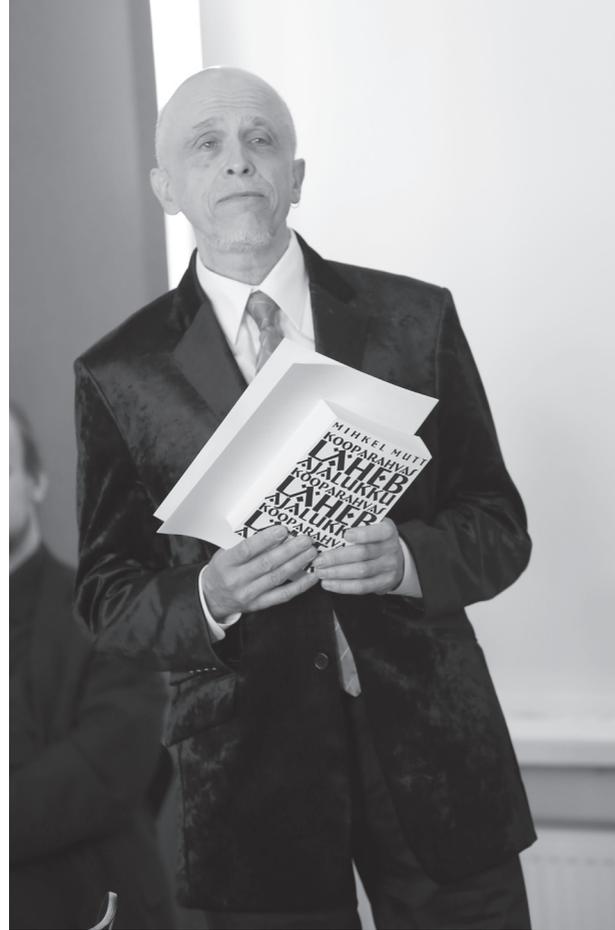
Kooparahvas läheb ajalukku

(The Cavemen Go Down in History)

Tallinn, Fabian, 2012. pp. 462

ISBN: 9789949933600

Mihkel Mutt's (b. 1953) latest novel, *Kooparahvas läheb ajalukku* (*The Cavemen Go Down in History*), reflects the life of the Estonian cultural elite from 1960 to 2010. It describes how the position of Estonian culture changed with the restoration of Estonian independence and what exactly happened to our society during that process. The creative intelligentsia – writers, artists,



Mihkel Mutt (Photo by Scanpix)

musicians, theatre people and humanitarians – played a vital role in resisting Soviet rule. After the change of power, it soon became clear that the desired freedom had brought with it a great deal of uncertainty for cultural figures. Most of them failed to adapt to the new situation, and that led to scepticism and disappointment. How did those who managed to fit into the new system find a balance between the values they used to live by and the values they now had to follow? Why did everything end up the way it did?

As the pages fly by we meet dozens of colorful characters, all members of the Estonian cultural elite. The central meeting point of these characters is a pub located in the heart of Tallinn. The pub is called The Cave, and readers will recognize this as the famous Kuku Club. Fictionalising prominent people always creates a desire to recognize

the prototypes. This time, as the book concerns the recent past and most of the people involved are still public figures, readers are particularly eager to find out the names. However, the patterns that lie behind these individual stories are more important than knowing the exact proportion of facts and fiction in this novel. While portraying all these individual characters and their different ways of coping with the changes, Mutt contemplates ideals and actuality, expectations and disappointment, and comes to the realisation that there is no perfection in this world.

Mihkel Mutt as a writer and columnist is known for his sharp sense of humor. His texts are arrogant and full of sarcasm and irony. This book is no exception: Mutt's style is still sharp and witty, so his readers won't be disappointed. *Kooparahvas läheb ajalukku* is undoubtedly a literary masterpiece and a great monument to the Estonian cultural elite of that time. It combines the personal memories of the author with his experience of the wider political and cultural changes. Mutt received the Virumaa Literary Award for this book. MI

Indrek Hargla

Apteeker Melchior ja Pirita kägistaja

(Apothecary Melchior and the Strangler of Pirita)
Tallinn, Varrak, 2013. 404 pp.
ISBN: 9789985327357

Indrek Hargla (b. 1970) is unquestionably the best-known author of Estonian science fiction, fantasy and horror. He has written many fantasy short stories, novellas and novels, the majority of which are considered to be high-level literature. During the last twelve years, Hargla has repeatedly received the Estonian science fiction award *Stalker* in various categories. The works of

this author have had a great influence on developing and popularising the aforementioned genres in Estonian literature. And yet his contribution to contemporary Estonian science fiction is not what Hargla is mostly known for. He has gained his popularity mainly with his historical crime novels of medieval Tallinn. These are stories of mysterious murders and ancient secrets.

So far Hargla has written four detective novels. The protagonist of these novels is the educated apothecary Melchior Wakenstede, who has what it takes to solve unsolvable crimes and expose crafty criminals. In addition to these four books, Melchior appears in two short stories by Hargla.

The first book of the Melchior series was *Apothecary Melchior and the Mystery of St Olaf's Church*, published in 2010. It became an instant bestseller and was followed by the second book, *Apothecary Melchior and the Ghost of Sternsod*, the same year. The third book, *Apothecary Melchior and the Hangman's Daughter*, came out in 2011. The whole series has been a success. It is very popular among Estonian readers, who love the cheerful protagonist and admire his cleverness, as well as enjoying the depictions of



Indrek Hargla (Photo by Scanpix)



Rein Raud (Photo by Scanpix)

medieval Tallinn. After publishing the third book, Hargla received the annual award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2011 for this series of historical crime novels, for his continuing high standard of creative work and for his genre diversity.

Apothecary Melchior and the Strangler of Pirita is the long-awaited fourth book of the Melchior series, and it is as fascinating as all the previous books featuring Melchior. With well-developed characters and skillful building of tension, Hargla keeps his readers reading late into the night. His detailed depiction of the medieval environment carries readers back to the beginning of the 15th century. This time Melchior is asked to come to the Pirita convent and join an extraordinarily convened council of wise men. On his way to the convent, Melchior finds a dead body in a snowdrift. As it turns out, the first victim of the strangler of Pirita is not the last one. After finding the next victim, Melchior swears to Abbess Kandis, in the name of Saint Birgitta, that he will reveal the murderer and solve these crimes. This investigation leads Melchior to astounding secrets about the distant past. At the same time, difficulties arise at home in Tallinn. MI

Rein Raud

Rekonstruksioon

(The Reconstruction)

Tallinn, Mustvalge Kirjastus, 2012. 264 pp
ISBN: 9789949927715

This is a story about seeking security and longing for certainty, a story about searching for truth and universal answers, about searching but not finding. Having doubts, while also yearning for absolute truth, can lead us to estrangement from reality. It slowly cuts us off from our everyday life and from the people who love us. Where does dedication end and obsession begin?

Five years after losing his daughter Anni, Enn Padrik finds out that he has cancer. As he doesn't have much time left in this world, he decides to finally do something he should have done a long ago. Finding out the whole story behind his daughter's suicide becomes Enn's last mission. All he knows is that it was a collective suicide in a community of intellectuals, probably committed for religious reasons. He travels around Estonia and even goes to France to meet people who had known Anni. The process of patching different memories and stories into one whole turns out to be more complicated than Enn thought. But little by little the start starts to emerge. At the end of his quest, Enn comes to understand that it doesn't matter whether what we believe in is actually true or not. What matters is how these beliefs change us, and what kind of people we become by believing what we believe.

The story is very thought-provoking but, despite the heaviness of the theme, it's not moralizing or otherwise patronizing to its readers. It's a deeply psychological novel, written in a gripping way. Realistic and accurately described characters make the story plausible, even though problems with religious sects are not common in Estonian society.

Rein Raud (b. 1961) received the literary prose award of the Estonian Cultural

Endowment's Literature Foundation in 2012 for *The Reconstruction*. But this is not his first award-winning book. In 2005 he was honored with the same award for his novel *Hector and Bernard*. His novel *Vend (The Brother)* gained him wide acclaim as well, and in 2009 he was recognized with the Eduard Vilde Literary Award for the novel. Besides his novels, Rein Raud has also published poetry collections, short stories and plays. He is commonly known as the author of numerous academic publications. In his academic career, Raud has particularly focused on cultural theory. His special research interests are Japanese literature and philosophy. This is also reflected in his wide range of activities as a translator of poetry from Japanese into Estonian. MI

Elin Toona

Into Exile: a Life Story of War and Peace

Lakeshore Press, 2013. 361 pp

Since the re-establishment of Estonia's independence, a number of Estonian exiles in other countries have published their memoirs. Many of them were born already in the new countries where their parents had relocated after the war, but they have still inherited their parents' trauma of fleeing and escape with which they have their own complicated relationship (e.g. Helle Ajango Martin, Anu Mihkelson and others).

Seventy years have passed from the war and the escape. How should the story be told, in order to touch the hearts of the following generations? Elin Toona has been telling this story throughout all of her books.

Elin Toona (b. 1937) is an Estonian writer who grew up in England and is now living in the USA. She was seven when she fled Estonia with her mother and grandmother in September 1944, before the re-invasion of Soviet troops and re-occupation of Estonia. The only reason for their escape was fear.

They ended up in a displaced persons camp in Germany and moved on to England in 1947.

Elin Toona has published five novels and the biography of her grandfather, the poet Ernst Enno. Four of her five novels discuss the trauma of exile. The first of the four, *Lotukata* (1969), tells us about the life in a DP camp as seen from the height of the eyes of the child called Lotukata. This book has been printed twice in English. Toona's latest but one novel *Ella* (2008) talks about her grandmother as seen through a child's eyes and through the tales of the women of three generations. This book was written in both the Estonian and English languages. Now her latest, *Into Exile*, was written solely in English.

All Toona's books, but especially the latest one, are biographical. *Into Exile* repeats, to an extent, the things written in her earlier novels, mostly in *Ella*, but it is more open and straightforward and reaches deeper into the overgrown well of memories in search of closed-and-set-aside sources. The book is well-composed; it consists of 19 chapters together with a prologue and epilogue. '*Yesterday was history*' is the title of the first chapter, but also the carrying idea of the whole book. The temporal axis with events in Estonia and in the wider world forms a part of the author's and her first person hero's life story. Titles of the chapters mark the events in the 'greater' history or in the 'smaller' life story of an individual. '*Yesterday was history; history happens today*'. On the front page of the book there is the dedication '*I dedicate this book to my mother and grandmother, Liki Toona and Ella Enno and to all the World War II refugees who were unable to return home after the war and became lifelong exiles.*'

Elin, who was only seven at the time of escape, also feels like a 'lifelong exile'. Being so young, she should have been able to adapt well, and at first, this seems to be the fact. However, life went differently, and perhaps she would have adapted really well in different conditions.

The three women were among the several millions of refugees in the defeated Germany, and Elin's mother Liki signed a five-year contract with a hospital in England. This was an unfortunate choice that closed the door to schooling for Elin. She arrived in England a few months before her eleventh birthday and was, naturally, unable to take the 11+ examination that would determine her future. Her grandmother was also hired by the hospital as a seamstress, but there was no place for a child. The hospital regime was very strict, regulating even whether a charwoman or a seamstress was allowed to talk to the nurses. The child lived like a cat, hidden in a cupboard or under the blankets in a bed, until she was discovered and placed into an orphanage. She did not know a word of English, and speaking of Estonian was not allowed in the orphanage. Nobody knew about Estonia, it was not on anybody's maps. She forgot that once, life had been different and there had been no need for constant fear.

One of the characteristic features of exile is the loss of one's previous status. In England, where society was highly hierarchical, the 'fall' of the exiles was the most drastic. The exiles had menial jobs, they were pushed into the lower classes, and nobody believed that had been well-educated.

Toona talks about different stages of her life, more thoroughly about her life in England. She also contemplates about the flow of history and the limits and possibilities open for people who have inconsiderately been dropped into this flow. *Into Exile* is framed by the escape from Estonia and the later return to Estonia. For Toona and many other exiles, the question is whether return is even possible. The Estonia and the space-time that were left behind do not exist anymore.

Toona's emphatic book expresses the common experience of all exiles, "*I was wondering whether I would ever come back. And then it hit me – I had never left.*" This book skilfully binds together history, a life

story and literature in a way that we cannot wish for better. The author's own life has been a constant crossing of borders and limits and a great adventure that she still has not told us all about. We are looking forward to her next book. RH

Maimu Berg
Moemaja

(The Fashion House)
Petrona Print. 2012. 197 pp

Maimu Berg's book *The Fashion House* was issued in the Petrona Print publishers' series Aja Lugu (Story of Time/History). This series was powerfully launched with Andrei Hvostov's story of his youth, *Sillamäe passioon* (*Sillamäe Passion*). However, it is possible to achieve an impressive result even if the observer of the time does not have the passion and power of Hvostov: Loone Ots's *Mustamäe valss* (*Mustamäe Waltz*), Viktoria Ladõnskaja's *Lasnamäe valge laev* (*The White Ship of Lasnamäe*) and Kristiina Ehin's *Paleontoloogi päevaraamat* (*Paleontologist's Diary*) reach back in time and arrive, sooner or later, at a strange and odd stratum: real life in the Soviet Union.

Maimu Berg (b. 1945) experienced this strange Soviet reality for much longer than the other, younger authors listed above. Her book *The Fashion House* adds a kind of distorting mirror to the others' reflections on the Soviet era.

"History is like a mire, where you sink like an animal", Berg quotes a witticism from somebody's school essay. To avoid sinking, Berg first tunes her instrument, discussing in a rather traditional way the possibilities of remembering. "What's the importance of the truth? Who could be interested in the truths of bygone times? Legends are much more interesting." The honesty of memories is a trap for gullible people. Berg's narrator hides herself in the tailored costume of a fictional

intermediary, naming her Betti Parklai. Betty tries to describe mainly the time, without hurting people through disregard or malice. Berg herself is a minor character. Thus, Betti is the author's mouthpiece and a protective shield, making her voice indistinct because we do not know who is actually talking: is it Berg herself or her character or both?

Time cannot be described without space. Betti Parklai's space is the world of Soviet Estonian fashion, mainly the Tallinn Fashion House and the quarterly fashion magazine *Siluet*, where Berg worked as a member of the editorial staff for a decade and a half, as well as the "socialist fashion culture", described through meetings of designers and editors in Moscow. The topic of fashion in the Soviet Union provides grotesque illustrations for the state-supported absurd, with its long-term discussions of the essence of Soviet fashion and of the ways it differs from capitalist fashion. The main goal was to keep on disguising the fact that Soviet fashion was simply social realist fashion, which was simply realism, regardless of the decorations that were used embellish it. Even the stupidest people had to notice that the king was naked.

The Fashion House is more focussed, and its text is more fictional and playful than the other works published in the Story of Time series. The book contains witty reminiscences of anecdotal events, many of which could provide material for separate short stories. Readers who do not recall such colourful, nostalgic fragments from the time of their youth and for whom the book is pure exoticism may find many details of the book confusing. And more pedantic contemporaries of the described time may think that the mixing of fictional and real characters is disturbing. However, that is not important in the longer perspective. Some readers have said that this interesting and captivating book should have been shorter and ended in a similar vein to its beginning. But should the narrator really make her excuses and explain the reasons why she told her tale in the way she did, especially when the tale is interesting? RH

Doris Kareva. Jürgen Rooste

Elutants

(The Dance of Life)

Tallinn, Verb 2013. 112 pp

ISBN: 9789949928194

This small collection of poetry was a pleasant summer surprise, with its charming covers and intriguing content, arousing readers' curiosity and drawing them into its swirling dance. *The Dance of Life* consists of twenty-four dances, or twenty-four dialogues, where one of the speakers is always Life itself, and the other speakers are people representing certain professions, periods of life or even human weaknesses. Life initiates the dialogues and invites people to dance: *To this dance, I invite all who have been given a human soul to bear.* The first dialogue partner is a child, followed by a banker, a doctor, a mayor, an informer, a teacher, an elderly person, a suicide and others, concluding with a seller of air and a midwife. The circle is complete: the midwife stands at the beginning of a new life, and the next partner could again be a child, perhaps in some other book.

The Dance of Death was a recurrent theme in the art and literature of the late Middle Ages. For the people of that time, Death was a personified figure, the Grim Reaper, who acted with democratic persistence and in front of whom both a pauper and a king were similarly helpless. But naturally people did not think only about death. Life was short and its pleasures had to be enjoyed as much and as quickly as possible (to be assured of this, read the verses of *Carmina burana*).

Kareva's and Rooste's dance of life was, undoubtedly, inspired by Bernt Notke's "Dance of Death" (painted in the late 15th century). The authors do not try to slip into the mental world of the people of the past; the time of their Life embodies a different knowledge: *However, they all are humans, and each of them has got their own slice of a pie to eat.*

Compared with the Death of the Dance of Death, the Life of the Dance of Life is tolerant, but also didactic and even moralising: having seen it all, it knows that there is no happy ending. The authors of *Carmina burana* knew this too. Their texts did not try to deny fear, but balanced it with some healthy moralising and satire.

The dancers of the Kareva-Rooste Dance of Life are chaste and moderate people whose brains never lose control and whose dance never gets frantic. The teachings uttered by Life are witty and contain practical life philosophy. However, considering the fact that both of the authors are leading figures of their generation, whose forms of expression have never been particularly reserved, we would have expected that this vessel of exquisite form would have been filled with some stronger beverage, producing in readers a whirling after-effect.

The contributions of each author are mysteriously unspecified. Sometimes it feels like Kareva is fulfilling the role of Life, but at other moments she is totally unrecognisable. Rooste's seems to be the polite and more restricted voice.

The book is made unique by its illustrations, showing fragments of a needlepoint blanket. The story of the embroiderer can be read on the last page of the book.

The blanket was given to a shivering young girl in a refugee camp in post-war Germany by an American soldier. The blanket was ugly and the girl started to embroider it with patterns from Estonian folk costumes. Working sporadically, it took her about 20 years and a move to the other side of the world to finish the work and cover all of the blanket with embroidery. The blanket now resides in the Estonian National Museum. Isn't this story also a fragment of the Dance of Life? RH

Kristiina Ehin

Paleontoloogi päevaraamat

(Paleontologist's Diary)

OÜ Petrone Print 2013, 270 pp

ISBN: 9789949511280

Starting in 2000, Kristiina Ehin (b. 1977) has published several prose books and collections of poetry. *Paleontologist's Diary*, which appeared this year and has already become popular, is special among them: it is not easy to determine whether it is a book of prose or poetry, and its unclear character can be seen in its other aspects as well. This book is a prose text that is tightly interwoven with poems, written by the author as well as other people, from members of her family to Marie Under and Alexander Pushkin. In addition, the book contains many photos from private collections of different people. The photos have an illustrative role, but together with the book's prose and poetry they form a unity, where prose fills the foreground, but by no means dominates the other components. This thrilling new book could be called a collage, carried by the voice of the first person narrator, who resembles Kristiina Ehin (the photos are mostly of Ehin). At the same time, it is not a simple life story. It focuses on the life of a young Estonian woman, but embraces so much other material that it is truly difficult to find the temporal and spatial frames of the text. The unrolling tale includes the narrator's childhood and the stories of her parents and grandparents, and sends its roots even further into the past, finally reaching prehistory. Ehin puts together the history of her family and the country of Estonia and adds to it the whole of human existence: the narrator's trains of thought link her with her genetic ancestor from 200 000 years ago, who may be the Ur-ancestor of all mankind.

Life stories are much appreciated by contemporary readers and it isn't surprising that a relatively young person would want to write her life story, although such a wish is more common among people at least a

generation older. However, this book probably wasn't planned as a true life story and it cannot be treated as Ehin's official biography. The first couple of pages make us realise that the life of the author as a real person is not its main point, although the book seems to be about only one character.

The book impresses us with its disarming sincerity, confessionality and almost painful sincerity. In the mostly plotless narrative, the experiences of the narrator and other characters are equally important, no matter how painful the memories may be. It is not important whether all of the smaller stories within the larger narrative really took place as described. The text overwhelms the reader/spectator with personal details, at the same time still having the effect of a great generalisation: this is not the story of a concrete person or a fictional character but the story of a generation. This generation was born in the 1970s, spent their childhood in the Soviet time and experienced the hardships of growing up and adapting to the adult world in the first years of independent statehood.

The author finds the recent past to be as straightforwardly fascinating as the more distant past. All moments of the past look different when they are observed against later experiences. Her own past, her grandfather's memories and the Ice Age are all fused together into the same research material, where the narrator is tirelessly searching for her roots; she continuously analyses the past and calls her problem "a gap in history", "the syndrome of a rootless and historyless child of a small town", and the whole book seems to be written to fill this gap. Estonia's recent past has been a large gap for the author's generation, because they are lacking personal memories of this time and the stories heard from their parents or grandparents could not be told at school.

The narrator's wish to get rid of her "syndrome" can be seen in almost every scene: by including the Ice Age in Estonian history, in embroidering the names of 35 foremothers onto her dress, in the furious scraping off of the enamel paint on the corridor walls, put there in the Soviet time, or in visiting the ruins that were all that remained of her grandparents' farm in Läänemaa. Something has to be removed and replaced by something else, and some memories have to be recreated.

Despite the inclusion or exclusion of history, the whole book is still a story of one woman, a story about how she grew up to be a woman and lived her woman's life. The story of roots cannot be extracted from the story of the woman. The narrator asks herself, "Could this searching for roots, perhaps, be taken as a run-up ... a run-up starting in the past to give you strength and firmness to speed up ... towards your own life and love?"

Thus we can state that besides the gap of history, the narrator is also experiencing a gap in her life and love, but she can move forward to fill this gap and even speed towards it, having found strength from the near and distant past. A woman's heart, in this text, is compared to an anvil that is beaten with a blacksmith's hammer, and it is necessary to find the right blacksmith. Although this motif can be seen as a hint of a hard life, the narrator is still able to find her blacksmith. The latest memories described in the book seem to be happy ones, although we do not get the feeling that the book is a simple success story presented as fiction. Many questions still need answers and the woman's journey of self-discovery is not yet complete. At the end of the book, the narrator admits that new empty pages have appeared in the old and previously filled diary: a life story cannot end with the closing of the book. MV

Maria Lee

Stereomeetria

Stereometry

Tallinn: Verb, 2012. P. 80

ISBN 9789949928118

This book, with its mathematical title, has nothing to do with geometry: it is a collection of poetry, the second book of a young poet. The poems examine solitude, fears, love and emptiness in the human soul and in the whole surrounding time and space, where stereometry is something existential: "We live an eternal stereometric life [---] / When we die, it is only for others, / as they, when they die, are only for us. / We / and everyone we love, / live forever / in this stereometry."

In 2007, Maria Lee published her debut collection *Äramõte*, and something extraordinary happened: it vanished from the bookshops in no time; the print run of a young girl's first ever book had sold out! The strength of the debut lay in the cuttingly dark expressiveness of the poetic language and in the declarative force of the choice of words, where traumas and emotions are transformed into another manner of expression, which is strange and alien because of a kind of shift. The beautiful poetic name Maria Lee Liivak (born in 1984) belongs to Doris Kareva's daughter, who studied drama at the Drama School and worked for some time at the Tallinn City Theatre, besides hosting cultural programmes on television and radio. In her job, as well as in her poetry, Maria Lee displays precision in the art of words, which is realised in image creation offering impressive effects. Her poetry is carried by theatrical poetic language that interweaves opposites into a rough unity and can be sublime until it swells dramatically. In this language, tense metaphors almost totally dissolve the borders between reality and fantasy, or between imaginary pictures, sleep and imagination.

Maria Lee's poetic space is internally dynamic and full of ambivalent vibes: "Listen, all good comes with gentle rustle: / snow and spring and people; / all bad perhaps comes with gentle rustle too, / so that you do not know, / which one it is." In touching the extremes, the knots of haunts and tragedies ravel and unravel, expressing nameless disappearances, mistakes, anxieties, helplessness, fragility, existential frustration, permanence and disruptions. However, this poetry does not rebel or roar with anger: a soothing aspect, besides balanced decadent poesy and dark and even tragic world perception, is its abundance of enriching joy of discovery in life and in the world. This poetry is full of inner wisdom of the lyrical self, where the dichotomous tensions and anxieties of "earthly loneliness" rise to metaphysical aspirations and are connected with how to relate to the other or search for a philosophy of life, how to reach another person, how to achieve harmony. All this produces a "cacophony of symphonies": poetry where something sublime always expresses a grandiose shift. This kind of dense poetry of ideas and moods requires time: slow reading, pauses and silence, so that images can form a whole, achieve the desired effect, and ideas can become stereometrical. BM

Maria Lee (Photo by Scampix)





A . H . T a m m s a a r e w i t h h i s d a u g h t e r