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High tension captured in bare palms

An interview with Doris Kareva

by Jürgen Rooste

I've known Doris Kareva for many years. I know her to be a good person, editor, and poet, who works persistently to help and publish other poets, and who has a keen sense of detail. Throughout our friendship, Doris has discreetly shared quite a lot of good advice with me, just as she has with many others, and her poetry has been an accompaniment to innumerable lives.

I look around me and it feels like the late 1990s again: so many people view poetry as the creation of beautiful words, imagery, and linguistic tricks. They believe one should be captivating when conveying philosophical trivialities. Or something like that. Is there anticipation in the air for "poetry to be more like poetry"?

I feel that in literature, just like in everything else, the vogue or trend moves forward in a slight zigzag, like the lines down an adder's back, but all methods and forms generally always exist and are visible in a free society. One person gravitates more towards attractive imagery, another towards heated declarations, a third towards linguistic somersaults, but even so, they're not disconnected. In my opinion, all of these opportunities undulate in poetry endlessly, often interweaving.

But if you ask me, then yes, I yearn constantly for poetry to be more like poetry! Not beautiful or resonant or full of tricks, but revelational. Where everything habitual is nudged out of place – or, on the contrary, into place – with just a few words.

And at the same time, another trend: there's an incredible number of poets everywhere! And I'm not just talking about online: I mean that physically, large and active poetry communities are gathering, although sometimes they're temporary. Is this also a sign of the time?

The way poetry is flourishing in our current era of multiplicity is not exceptional. Everyone can and may publish their writing, and everyone longs for feedback. I'm not at all sure there's enough of the latter to go around. But the fact that such communities are gathering is positive, in and of itself; even if it's only for a short time. Poetry certainly has a uniting force.

Where and how should a poet be visible, if at all? I sometimes think that the "great literary history" is over and

DORIS KAREVA . PHOTO BY KAIDO VAINOMAA

done with: that in one hundred years, people won't commemorate the beginning of the 21st century by way of great authors and their works in the same way that the beginning of the 20th century is commemorated.

In my mind, a poet shouldn't have to be visible. When someone reveals their inner world – their dreams, fears, and yearnings – then for the reader it might actually be better not to know anything about the author apart from their name. It's the same in all forms of art: I suppose that more than anything else in life, I've been inspired by encountering the unknown. It always feels like what's known can wait. And it's not at all impossible that in a hundred years the authors who are relatively unknown right now will have turned out to be very insightful and widely discussed.

You're going to be releasing a poetry collection in English titled *Days of Grace* soon. This isn't a first for you, but even so, what are you feeling? Is being published in a big linguistic space always a special and spectacular occasion for a poet?

It's taken years and years for this collection to be finished, and I believe most of

the poems are from the last century. I can't anticipate the emotions I might have before I'm holding the book physically. But I am, of course, grateful to my talented, very scrupulous and sensitive translator, Miriam McIlfatrick, and to the publisher Neil Astley at Bloodaxe Books, who has patiently and accommodatingly awaited this book for years without losing faith in me.

What kinds of poems were picked for it, and what kind of contact do you have with your poems? Are your earlier pieces also close to body and word, or do you live in your new ones? I sometimes feel like I already have a hard time speaking to the younger me.

I don't feel like I've changed all that much in terms of anything intrinsic; I'd sign my name to my school-era truths even now. So, in other words, I understand the young Doris quite well, and for some reason, I believe it's mutual.

Poems are like pebbles or shells that are collected and taken with you at some point: they're interesting to observe from time to time, without necessarily even knowing what beach they came from. They can also form different patterns. And qualities you might not even have noticed before may surface through those patterns, and by rearranging them over and over again, you start to grasp a notion of the big picture: all the beaches you've ever wandered, the world as it has shown itself to you. I would certainly compose a different collection now, but one would not be more truthful than the other.

The 1970s and the atmosphere back then: you entered the poetry scene at a time that was very difficult for poetry. There'd just been a "gust of freedom" – if it could be called that under the Soviet regime – but then, they started closing off the taps again. Even so, the poetry you wrote then was very bold. Were you foolhardy?

Hardly, more like headstrong. I probably wouldn't have submitted my writing to any competition, but since the Youth Literary Event '76 issued a call simply for poetry, I thought: Why not? If I'd known what it would lead to – the whole public burden – then I'd probably have made a different decision.

Who made up that space and that tension of being for you? What were the era and the atmosphere like? Were there oases of freedom, in bohemian nests or at home with a book?

Feasts for four walls, four eyes. / High tension captured in bare palms[1] was the young Kareva's answer to her own question of what it is that keeps the soul awake. Or what binds one to life, if anything at all.

Communication with friends was very personal and intense; we wrote letters by hand. If you wanted to meet someone, you had to walk around and find them by intuition: there were relatively few telephones, and many were tapped. Letters traveled slowly and there were practically no other forms of communication, aside of an occasional telegram. But intuition worked flawlessly, for the most part.

1 *From Kareva's poem "What Is It That Keeps the Soul Awake?". Translated by Adam Cullen with the author.*

The best cafés – Pegasus, Moskva, Varblane, and Akvaarium in Tallinn; Werner and Ülikooli in Tartu – were highly charged environments where you could sometimes sit the whole night with only a single coffee. You could write or read there alone, and could always find like-minded thinkers if you were seeking company. Or you could come across acquaintances, with whom you didn't necessarily have a reason to talk, though you might exchange smiles of recognition. It was a kind of community you were tied to by an intuitive sense of belonging.

You even had to hide from the KGB after being kicked out of university: I believe you were sleeping somewhere on a couch in *Looming*'s[2] little editorial office? Do you sometimes consider how today's poets don't have that same kind of tension, or fear, or responsibility for every word they write?

Unfortunately, I didn't have the luxury of sleeping on a couch somewhere: it was usually on the floor, for the most part, in any place I could: in the attic of a cultural center, in a basement studio, or in a church manor… There was a coat lying on the floor behind a typewriting desk in the corner of the smallest office at the end of the *Looming* offices' hallway. I was able to curl up on it and fit beneath an open umbrella. I only ventured outside at night, mainly.

The tension was constant, yes; the fear of unintentionally betraying not so much yourself, but someone else. We knew what was happening: some were left to rot in an insane asylum, others were sent to a prison camp… I burned my notes, letters, and papers. A sense of relief came only several years later, when I learned that nothing bad had happened to anyone because of me. Yes, that era taught you responsibility, but no doubt everyone's own lesson was different. I wouldn't wish that kind of teaching upon anyone.

Later, especially after independence was restored, you witnessed the self-destruction of a number of geniuses, of Estonia's true creative motors of that time. Of course, capitalism and the market economy aren't lofty ideals in and of themselves, so when you realize you've been defending them instead of freedom, something might break inside of you, but that's not all. What happened?

Such things aren't so simple: the causes are almost always intertwined, and every individual's choice is deeply personal. Occasionally, a person tries to dampen another seemingly unbearable pain by inflicting harm upon themselves, like how a fox caught in a trap will chew off its own paw. No one can feel the full depth of another person's pain, nor can they do anything about it, more often than not. Even so, simply being there for another person and sympathizing can be of great help. But even that isn't always enough.

Do artists have an ethical obligation or an ethical dogma, i.e. should they have one?

That's a good enduring question. The way I see it, artists don't hold any special status.

2 *The Estonian literary journal* Looming, *published continuously since 1923.*

One person simply feels that they have a moral responsibility, while another doesn't. A third may wish to have one, but is unable to follow their beliefs. It can be described like the title of a Peeter Mudist painting: "Each to his own abilities." You can make demands solely on yourself, or on an individual whose authority requires them to follow a set of ethical standards.

You've translated prolifically. I often have your translation of Rumi[3] within arm's reach or along in my suitcase. Now, over half of the corners are folded to mark places that are especially impactful for me. What else would you like to see translated into Estonian? And can translations even endure these times? It's not uncommon for someone who shows up at a publishing house with talk of translated poetry to be turned away at the door.

Poetry in translation truly is the most thankless genre for publishers, which is all the more reason to marvel at and be grateful for those publishing houses in Estonia and all around the world that release it with continued determination. The translated poetry I read as a child affected me – and Estonian poetry as a whole – very deeply. Translating poetry is a practice that encompasses your entire being, that forces you to bend and stretch mentally, developing muscles of the mind that you never knew you had before; ones that you never use in ordinary thought. You must master an idiosyncratic language with every new author you begin translating: a language within a language. It contains a different rhythm of breath, new intonations, and a vocabulary unlike your own – an entirely different world. I believe that delving into it is immensely enriching.

After I finish some more pressing projects, I hope to return to Emily Dickinson, whose writing deserves a more thorough introduction in Estonian.

Poets sometimes fear their words; they rush in like a torrent and the poets don't actually make them: the words make the poets. You appear to grasp the word very well. Are you consciously present in the word? Or does it all just… happen?

A torrent of words, the likes of which often overcomes a poet, is truly dangerous. The forces that speak through us may affect both ourselves and others. The way I see it, everything you are given is to be received gratefully, but before sharing it with others, you must sift through it carefully to spare the reader what is inconsequential. You must particularly refrain from passing along material that you still haven't processed, and which might possibly be detrimental.

In short, one must remove the spam and viruses from a spontaneous torrent of words.

Writing and editing are two different phases. The flare of creativity is Dionysian, while cleaning up the writing is Apollonian, and the more time that passes, the more the professional, critical editor within me tends to cross out everything the childlike poet in me has scribbled down.

How to outsmart your inner editor is the most nerve-wracking question of all. How

3 Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī

can you surprise him, and how can you surprise yourself?

The answer can only be what happens all on its own. It's how all of my latest books have come about, ever since our collaborative *Life Dance*[4], which Piia Ruber gave an absolutely genius design. What's especially fascinating is that for the most part, readers can't tell the difference between your writing and mine: between two quite different authors.

Another book that was born of pure delight is *Family Album*[5], which likewise has Piia Ruber's surprising and stylish design. The first couple of lines came to mind all on their own, and it was then I realized I'd struck a gold vein: a poetic form comparable to the limerick but that worked with Estonian; one that simply had to be practiced. You don't have to be a poet to compose those quatrains: the playful opportunity to say something about the world succinctly is simply rather enjoyable, and could be even more popular.

My latest work, a scroll titled *The Worrybird*[6], which I made with the artist Jüri Mildeberg, is quite unusual in terms of form. But at the same time, it somehow corresponds to reality: it is difficult to grasp a complete picture of the world all at once. We always progress story by story, just like the text that scrolls down the margin. But when you hang the sheet on a wall and see

PHOTO BY KAIDO VAINOMAA

THE WORRYBIRD. BY DORIS KAREVA AND JÜRI MILDEBERG

the full picture, the story nearly disappears. It dissolves into the enchanting image with its multiple dimensions of meaning, its countless connections and symbols.

Similarly, circling back around to your earlier question: no, poets don't have to be visible; their lives and stories can dissolve in poetry in peace. All that matters is what it manages to say.

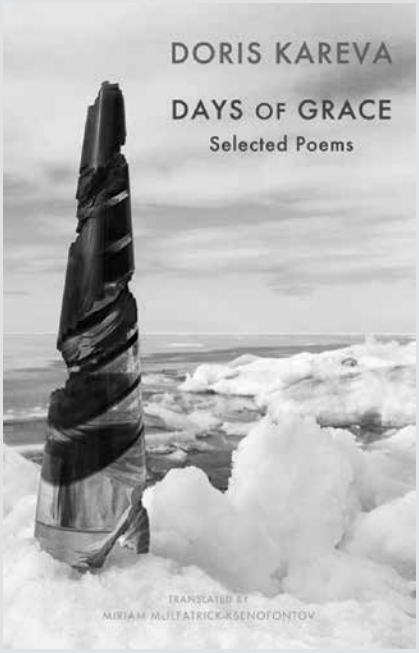
JÜRGEN ROOSTE (1979) is a poet, journalist, and one of the most renowned Estonian writers of his generation. He has published fifteen poetry collections and received the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Poetry on two occasions, among many other literary awards.

4 *Doris Kareva, Jürgen Rooste*. Elutants. *Verb, 2016*.
5 *Doris Kareva*. Perekonnaalbum. *Verb, 2015*.
6 *Doris Kareva*. Linnukese mure. *Verb, 2017*.

Poetry by Doris Kareva

from the collection
Days of Grace

Translated by
Miriam McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov



Days of Grace *by Doris Kareva*
Bloodaxe Books, 2018

I went to visit the world.

How it smelt,

how it moved and hummed!

The blood stirred in my arm – svelte,

vein-blue and sluggish –

the blood stirred and a deluge of darkness

stained all the luminous rooms!

I am alone again now.

My sadness

is angular, guarded and grim.

*

I call you and I sense that you call me.

But I cannot hear if it is so at all.

There are chasms over which no bird

will fly. And silence like a wall.

There are phantasms that petrify the soul.

*

The scalpel and the metronome

on my father's piano

kept silence between them

when I was a child.

Only now, given time,

have I started to hear

and to heed

their strange tales.

They trim time to a sliver.

*

Two.

There are two whom I ask,

to whom I give ear,

whose judgement I fear.

The pendulum swings through silence,

sand trickles through empty space –

ever nearer. Every instant.

I waver wanly between the two

half blindfolded,

now this way

now that way

inclining, declining.

Less and less is the leeway between them,

straighter and straighter is my spine,

shorter and shorter steps,

on and on

rarer and rarer the air –

until in the deep mirror of dream

they meet and meld

in a single gleam –

my heart and death.

Ash into air.

*

I sing in praise of the loser
for the winner is well lauded,
I kneel before the forlorn,
I bow before the beaten.
The world-quitter creates,
discovers selfdom in dreams;
the reality-bearer holds
strength and stature untold.

I sing in praise of the loser
and for the have-not's joy;
I crown the outcast, pressing
my lips to that noble brow –
to the one who labours
lifelong with lack and loss,
both lightly and upright,
I am true to the core.

*

Rain, are you still rain
when you do not fall?
Dream, are you a dream
when no one sees you?

Whose are these steps
on this bare and mute
mist-buried mountain?
muses the listener.

The walker's mind wanders.
Through the listener's dream
seeps a drizzle of steps
like Yggdrasil leaves.

Love doesn't exist in a vacuum

by Maarja Vaino

Published in 1935, *I Loved a German* (*Ma armastasin sakslast*) was the seventh novel written by the Estonian literary classic A. H. Tammsaare (1878–1940). Tammsaare had already risen to the status of living classic after completing his chief work, the five-part *Truth and Justice* (*Tõde ja õigus*, 1926–1933), and his following books aroused increasing public attention. One year earlier, in 1934, the author had shocked readers with his novel *Life and Love* (*Elu ja armastus*): the book's eroticism and its protagonist Rudolf caused such outrage in some circles that there were calls to ban it entirely. *I Loved a German* brought a different kind of surprise.

In a way, the issuing of a state commission can be seen as Tammsaare's motivation for writing the novel: Estonian authors were encouraged to create a "positive university-student character" as part of the Estonian Book Year celebrations (1935 marked 400 years since the publication of the very first Estonian-language piece). Tammsaare flipped the call on end, writing a novel about an identity crisis and love's possibility or impossibility instead.

The novel's protagonist is a student corporation member[1] named Oskar, who has quit his studies. He is boarding at a house where the matron, in addition to showing fondness for her husband and children, is highly fond of meddling in her tenants' lives. A down-on-her-luck Baltic-German girl named Erika works as a nanny and teacher for the children. Oskar asks Erika out on a date, and the relationship, which is intended just for fun at first, quickly transforms into an intense love for both.

Thus, on the one hand, *I Loved a German* is a love novel in which Tammsaare handles a theme that is recurrent in his works: the possibility of love and the complexity of male-female relationships.

On the other hand, the novel deals foremost with Oskar's identity as an Estonian. When the young lovers' relationship has developed to a certain stage, Oskar pays a visit to Erika's grandfather, the old baron. All of the instincts a descendant of peasants might be expected to possess surge forth

1 *Corporations are European student organizations similar to US fraternities. Estonian corporations continue the Baltic-German tradition and closely resemble their historical German counterparts.*

A SCENE FROM THE TALLINN CITY THEATER PRODUCTION OF *I LOVED A GERMAN* · PHOTO BY SIIM VAHUR / TALLINN CITY THEATER

when Oskar meets the former manor lord: he calls Erika's grandfather "Sir Baron" and speaks in German, even though the man also speaks Estonian. At one point, Oskar becomes troubled by the thought that he doesn't truly love Erika for who she is, but rather as a German; as an aristocrat; as the master who has ruled Estonia for centuries. Thus, figuratively speaking, he fears that he loves Erika's grandfather more than he does the girl herself. When the old baron asks Oskar what he has to offer his granddaughter, who can at least claim a long and noble heritage, the boy is at a loss for words. He starts debating his own nature and that of Estonians, and just cannot seem to put his finger on where his own worth might lie.

The novel climaxes with a scene in which Erika proposes that Oskar run away with her, thereby compromising her reputation, all in the hopes that afterward, her grandfather might consent to their marriage. Oskar refuses because he doesn't want the old baron to think he, Oskar, is a scoundrel. Yet, to Erika, this signals the weakness of the boy's feelings for her. Critics have traditionally regarded the scene as proof of Oskar's spinelessness: he is afraid to take a decisive step, and loses his beloved as a consequence. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, the author praises Oskar for this very act through the baron's words: "I should have known all along that you truly are a proper Estonian man, with the heart of a proper Estonian man, the likes of which I've seen scores of in my lifetime."

In any case, the situation is inescapable from Oskar's point of view: no matter what course of action he takes, running off with Erika or not, he will still be making a mistake. For by compromising her reputation, he truly would be acting like a scoundrel. He is only able to prove his love by not proving it. Paradoxical situations such as these are common among Tammsaare's works, conveying the author's distinctive understanding of the complexity of human relationships, which was expressed earlier as "failing to escape fate". Conscious choices often seem to have no impact on what ultimately transpires.

Alternately, if Oskar had found an opportunity to marry Erika, then would their love have lasted? One question that Tammsaare puts forth in his novel indeed concerns the "sociality" of love: specifically, he believes that love does not exist in a vacuum, but in a society filled with different customs and prejudices. Tammsaare demonstrates that a great and pure love can certainly exist, just not in the ordinary way. Love always clashes with societal relationships and expectations in everyday life. Given how many marriages there are between partners of different ethnic backgrounds these days, the novel is inarguably still a topical one. It explores, among other things, how much dissimilar cultural backgrounds may affect love, as well as what it means for a partner to feel him- or herself to be of lesser worth. Tammsaare's male characters tend to fall in love with women on higher rungs of the social ladder. On the one hand, the author takes note of women's inspiring and often redeeming influence on men; on the other, he never allows these societally unequal affections to develop any further than the platonic phase. Tammsaare's characters frequently fall short of true love, never to be achieved fully.

Another central issue in the novel is Oskar's sense of uncertainty as an Estonian.

Tammsaare used Oskar to voice strong criticism of the Baltic-German-influenced student corporations, which he believed cultivated intellectual vapidity. Read parallel with Tammsaare's opinion pieces published in the 1930s, it is clear that the author also used the protagonist to criticize the upstart mentality and the loss of oneself in endless entertainment. The novel presents questions of principle: do Estonians possess the inner fortitude to be independent? Are Estonians a unique and self-confident civilized nation, or do they wish to be imitators, out of convenience? Tammsaare believed this was a critical question from the standpoint of national perpetuation, and the criticism he aims at Estonians' weakness of identity in fact reflects his deep worry about the continuity of his ancient people. As a result, *I Loved a German* can also be seen as an existential novel, because Tammsaare explicitly addresses questions of national existence.

Oskar represents a typical first-generation urban scholar who has roots in the countryside. He no longer feels that he is a peasant, but neither is he a city dweller yet. Situated between two worlds, Oskar is thus a symbol of man tending to lose himself in the modernizing world, regardless of nationality. Both Oskar and Erika are characters who have lost the world once inhabited by their parents and grandparents: one where everything felt safe and certain. Rather, everything in Erika and Oskar's world is uncertain and incomprehensible. The young couple's inability to find their place is manifested metaphorically in the fact that they don't even have a sheltered place to meet each other: the two rendezvous in a city park, where they must huddle beneath a pine tree when it rains. Oskar and Erika are like excess individuals whose love lacks its own place in the world.

The novel's modernist undercurrent is reinforced by its format: Tammsaare presents the events in diary form, which, according to his introduction, has merely been "edited for print". (I might mention that the original manuscript, in Tammsaare's own handwriting, has been preserved in archive.) This literary trick bred confusion when the novel was published, and continues to cast doubts today. There are still some who believe Tammsaare did not personally write the work, but did indeed find a manuscript penned by an unknown university student.

At the time it was published, *I Loved a German* stirred very conflicting views among its readers and critics, and does so to this very day. Doubtless, this is the firmest proof that the work has not lost its topicality. Rather, it has perhaps become even more meaningful over time, and not only for Estonians.

Even today, we continue to face the painful questions that Tammsaare raises in the novel. How can one orient him- or herself in our all-too-rapidly-changing world? How can one maintain his or her identity? How can love be preserved? Has anyone really found the answers yet?

MAARJA VAINO (1976) is a literary scholar and the director of the Tallinn Literary Centre. Her doctoral dissertation *Poetics of Irrationality*, which scrutinizes the works of A. H. Tammsaare, is an outstanding study of the Estonian classic's writing.

Rein Raud – A cosmopolitan with roots

An interview by Joonas Hellerma

The Estonian public knows Rein Raud foremost as an intellectual and a scholar of the humanities who doesn't balk at speaking up in discussions that shape society. His latest releases include a textbook on global literature and an academic monograph and introductory guide to the very diverse field of cultural theory, Meaning in Action, which presents a vision of culture's main operational mechanics. Even so, Raud sees himself foremost as a prose writer. He entered the world of literature through poetry, publishing the debut collection *Barefoot* (*Paljajalu*, 1981) before his twentieth birthday. Since then, he has been a prolific prose author (eight novels and three short-story collections, in addition to poetry) and has received many awards. Raud's latest novel *Bell and Hammer* (*Kell ja haamer*) was published in late 2017.

How do you most readily classify yourself among your various fields of activity? Does everything begin with literature, all the same?

Yes, that's right. All of my activities are just various types of writing: only the attributes of what is written differ. Sometimes, precision and clarity are key; other times, it is imagery and the force of expression. Still, language is at its absolute purest in poetry, where it tests its own limits. Poetry is what prevents language from turning into jargon and the insipid blathering of advertising texts, even though those forms of language dominate most people's linguistic reality. That is why I believe there is a grain of poetry hidden in any kind of literary text, even when the author has never written any poetry personally. And to go further, writing in different genres simply signifies a need to tune one's relationship with language according to what is being said, nothing more.

Surprisingly, Rein Raud the poet is quite a different author than Rein Raud the prose writer. Very personal, thoughtful, and impressionist shades stand out in your poetics. Your novels are mainly story-centric, which is conveyed through a wide range of genre methods. When you began by writing poetry, did you primarily imagine your future life as that of a poet, and did other literary activities grow out of it only later?

Actually, I began with prose. My first pieces were short stories that were published in young-author collections in the 1970s, a genre I sometimes still use today. I arrived at poetry shortly after that, when I was still in high school. But like I said, poetry

REIN RAUD · PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER

is the purest form of articulating thought in language. All the same, I mainly write long prose today. If I had to figuratively characterize the difference between how I regard poetry and prose, I'd say that both are my music, but poetry is singing and prose is like playing an instrument. You can only sing with your own voice. However, while an instrument does submit to you, its own voice still lies within it. And while some authors primarily write their prose in one style, only playing piano, so to speak, I have enjoyed trying out different instruments. The story you wish to tell also dictates the genre and the style. But like some players of early music, for instance, I also often craft my own instruments, blending the conventions of different genres and occasionally following or breaking their rules in the interests of the story.

You studied English and Russian in school, started reading in German early on, and by the end of high school, you were already at the point with languages where you began studying Japanese philology in St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time). You navigate the world's cultural force lines very well. Who has been an example and an inspiration to you in your self-development?

My main influences during my impressionable years came from outside the Estonian cultural space. Friends of my parents brought us good books to read from Finland, and we still had my father's stepfather's large, mainly German-language library at home. He had had an interest in Asian philosophy and our bookshelves were well stocked with it: with translations and treatises about China and Japan. Still, Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading* had the greatest impact on me at the time. I didn't know anything about Pound's poetry, nor about his foul political views, but back then the book seemed like a mixture of astonishing erudition and courage, because in it Pound allowed himself to use rather impudent expressions about a number of literary classics whom he regarded as mediocre, at the same time as a few names that were unfamiliar to both me and our school's literary history teachers embodied his literary ideal. I subsequently tried to find and research those names. I suppose it was also a bit of teenage rebellion, too: wanting something other than what the regime saw fit for us.

Another very important moment for me was when Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* was published and Finnish television showed an interview with him. Here was a man who quoted all kinds of fascinating philosophers by heart, one after another; who was involved in researching the deep inner workings of culture; and who similarly wrote literary prose that was both interesting and of high quality. The widespread belief that one must inevitably walk only a single path lost all meaning in an instant. Once again, I'd underline how fascinating it was: back then, there was also a widespread belief that a work of even the slightest literary value had to be unbearably boring, like it or not. Eco's manner of uniting his erudition and philosophy with the crime genre, which at a certain level is also enjoyable even without uncovering its depths, was rather revelational for me.

You say you developed an extremely antipathetic relationship with institutions of power. What kind of bullheadedness is necessary to remain yourself in different societies, not going along with the pressure of the era?

Growing up in a totalitarian society, you hadn't even the notion that power was executed in the people's interests. For many, this likewise meant that one was allowed to steal from the state openly, because the state itself wasn't ethical. That was wrong, in my opinion, which meant one had to find the balancing point between right and wrong on his own, and that allowing someone or something external of yourself to make decisions was always risky and possible only to a certain extent. Then again, after the restoration of independence, several of the new politicians came from the writers and artists' community. One launching point for this process was

when the leaderships of the creative unions gathered in what is now the parliamentary building in April 1988 and told the regime what we honestly thought of it. I also had the honor to speak there, which could naturally only be done without trembling before the regime.

So, the new government that took power after the restoration of independence was largely composed of good friends and colleagues. I also received repeated offers to go into politics (and still do to this day), but I didn't want to. Even so, my attitude towards those who wield power understandably hasn't been with the belief that they represent something lofty, distant, and powerful, but rather that they are a group of people whom I myself could have joined if I'd wished. They're simply in the position of making decisions that affect the lives of others, as well or as poorly as they can manage. I'm known to have a problem with making decisions for others.

Several of your novels deal with memory and the past in one way or another. The weaving of historical layers also forms the central structural method of your latest novel *Bell and Hammer* (*Kell ja haamer*, 2017). You grew up in a time when a single ideological treatment of history was firmly in place. Today, it's the opposite: historical narratives are criticized and history often tends to break up into little, conflicting shards. What can literature do with history in conditions like these?

History is important because it hasn't disappeared in the past, but is contained within everything we are and in everything that we

IN THE KITCHEN · PHOTO BY JAAK TOMBERG

THE PLEASURES OF HOSTING. A MEAL WITH FELLOW WRITERS · PHOTO BY PEETER LAURITS

ON HOLIDAY IN SURINAME · PHOTO BY ROSITA RAUD

REIN AND ROSITA RAUD AT THEIR KÄSMU SUMMER HOME, ALSO A VENUE FOR MANY LOCAL LITERARY EVENTS · PHOTO BY PEETER LAURITS

do. History truly is the total sum of all those chains of cause and effect that have shaped us in our current form. The more that is muddled and conflicting in our past, the more tensions we have within ourselves here and now.

What I've now realized about the relationship between history and literature is that it is the writer's duty to ensure historical narratives are not simple, that they aren't made overly important. In my novel *The Death of the Perfect Sentence*[1], for instance, we encounter many nice and honest people whose fates are sealed by events that historically led Estonia to liberation. Naturally, I don't want to reevaluate the events themselves in any way, and no matter what path history might take, someone always ends up caught in its gears undeservedly. But by going along with the simple black-and-white version, we seemingly assent to "write off" those chance victims of history, until one day we ourselves are those victims.

We also must not forget that we are groping in the dark. Right now, when we observe people of another era, the direction the world they lived in was moving is clear to us, but it wasn't to them. They can never be entirely freed of the prejudices of their era, and that is true for us too, here and now. That's precisely why in one of the eras *Bell and Hammer* is set in, I focus on a naïve communist who is a good person overall, even though we now know that the system she held such a steadfast belief in was wrong and criminal.

The novel also includes a theoretician's argument that the games of an era reflect the social structure of the time.

1 *Published in Matthew Hyde's English translation by Vagabond Voices, 2017.*

By researching games, we also find out about the era and its people. As the author, you don't happen to know anything more about this, do you?

Games are a central device in *Bell and Hammer*, although I believe the experts would probably lay waste to the secondary character's theories. The novel matured for decades and in its early phase, late in the 1980s, I was highly intrigued by Johan Huizinga's idea of the game as a form that characterizes all kinds of directed human activity. My game-theory character Johan is named after Huizinga, although their views don't coincide at all. I would like my Johan to be able to surpass ordinary thought through his research of games, and to arrive at a broader understanding; to realize that opposite and conflicting elements always exist together in human nature. I also needed his help a little to depict the supernatural forces that play an important part in the novel: specters that try to interfere in the characters' lives in different ways in every era.

So, what is the deal with the specters who are apparently capable of traveling through space-time in *Bell and Hammer*: can people expect anything from them, or does one have to help the ghosts? In any case, during such moments, the narrator subliminally implies that the limits placed on all humans in time-space are not entirely locked down at all.

There's a term coined by Jacques Derrida that has gained traction in newer cultural theory: "hauntology", which uses the specter as a figure for the presence of the past, and especially of earlier future visions, in the present. Mark Fisher has gone on to say that this is also a subconscious rejection of the view that things went the way they were supposed to go. My specters are likewise opposing forces that attempt to push and pull the course of events in different directions, although the most important decisions that the courses of various fates hinge upon are always made by people themselves.

In *Bell and Hammer*, you created different linguistic registers to convey different eras. You speak several foreign languages fluently in addition to your native Estonian, not to mention your spoken and written comprehension of a number of others. Barely a million people around the world speak Estonian, which could tempt an Estonian author to use a large global language to reach readers. Why haven't you done so as a writer?

I do write academic works in English. However, there's not a single other language with which I have the relationship that I do with Estonian. And to ensure that a language doesn't disappear, it should be used as much as possible for writing about what is important to people. I've sometimes said I'm a cosmopolitan with roots: openness to the world is just as important to me as my cultural home, which has actually also adopted very wide-ranging influences over the centuries. I did indeed implement linguistic multi-dimensionality in *Bell and Hammer*. Just as eras are mixed up in the book, so are the five different linguistic registers: the 19th-century language has long sentences and intermittent, slightly flowery metaphors, just as people wrote at the time, whereas the language of the 1950s has

Soviet bravado, the 1979 language brings us close to the register of realistic literature of that time, and today's language is more or less today's. The fifth register is that of the author as the witness: I took on the role of a guide who walks around the manor and shows the reader that world in its different periods, or who sometimes conceals parts of it.

You've said that as a writer you don't keep telling the same story, but create a completely new world in every one of your works. Nevertheless, where does your continuity lie as a writer of novels? And what do you enjoy about writing? Is it above all enjoyment from playing with the limits of genre and structural techniques?

Far from it. Those are only tools. Every story dictates its own structure, for the most part. Of course, I do like to weave plots and to play out possible story developments in my mind. This is also primarily to achieve accuracy, but the enjoyment is almost just as great as it is for the reader: you don't know what's going to happen yet and you turn off on every fork in the road. Once you've started telling the story, it grips you. When I have occasionally gone and resisted the conditions a story sets in some respects, then I've always regretted it later. As for continuity… My Danish publisher once told me that I'm the kind of rare author who writes quality literature, but the kind in which something actually happens. I certainly always try to do so.

As someone involved in so many different areas, I have to ask: How can you live in a way that there are enough interesting experiences to use in literature? How does your subject matter take shape: do you dream, fantasize, lean upon what you've read, or must you experience everything personally?

I strive to be attentive. Sometimes styles, characters, or solutions arise out of something that happened on a completely different life plane. Sometimes they simply come out of nowhere: someone just knocks on the inside of your head and says: "Now, talk about me." I generally have a pretty long incubation period: the initial idea that a story starts to collect around is like a grain of sand that grows into a pearl over time. And once this process is set off, the whole world goes to work for it. A random phrase you hear someone say may set off a chain reaction, which may become characters' dialogue in a completely different context. The demeanor of someone you see sitting in public transport or at an adjacent table in a café may mature into a character's disposition. And so forth. Sometimes, I have my characters undergo something that I myself am afraid of. And then I acquire that experience through him to find out how well I'd personally be able to handle such a situation.

In literature, what do you appreciate above all? You're very familiar with world literature. How much time do you dedicate to reading, and what kind of literature surprises and intrigues you?

I read almost every day. If time allows, I read poetry or philosophy for a few hours right after waking up in the morning. In the evening, after I've finished working, I read prose for a few hours. I read quite a

wide range of literature: I also read a lot of authors whose writing doesn't resemble my own at all. But I always need to find a connection with the author to understand why they do what they do. It all begins with the language, for the most part. I don't last very long with an author who is careless with language: good ideas or a story that speaks to me aren't enough on their own. If I should name a few favorites who have withstood the years, they'd be Faulkner, Mishima, and Dostoyevsky. But not absolutely all the works of any one of them are to my liking.

But what does literature possess for which there isn't room in, say, philosophy or cultural theory?

The academic world of today has actually given up posing great questions. Most of the books that are published in the field of cultural studies, for example, handle problems that are quite minuscule, and even in philosophy, most authors prefer to dissect particular aspects of an earlier thinker's works. There are exceptions, of course, but they are exceptions. In any case, an academic claim must be clearly placed in the context of arguments both for and against, and must be based on the best knowledge available. That isn't necessarily the case in literature: there, I'm free to think as big as I wish and sometimes also present ideas and views that I'd be unable to argue according to academic rules.

A few years ago, you published a book together with Zygmunt Bauman titled *Practices of Selfhood*. Bauman's latest book *Retrotopia* ends with a memorable discussion about the future of mankind. He says that since people are unable to move beyond the contrast between "we" and "they" that pervades cultures and eras, humanity has no future. We stand before a choice: whether to take one another by the hand or crumble to dust together. How do you interpret your kindred thinker's words? Are you ready to grab hands?

Not everyone's, unfortunately. The last few years have shown that the most unpleasant political situation of all is taking shape: one, in which we are being ground into that dust by populist confrontation and a refusal to bear global responsibility, all while a small group of the super-rich is favored by governments. In this type of situation, you can really only take the hands of those who agree to oppose it.

What role could literature play in this?

Literature has always had the ability to conceptually act out scenarios, modes of behavior, and choices that people might face. If literature helps them to find clarity and to not shoot themselves in the foot, then all is well. If it enables people to foresee the possible consequences of their choices more clearly, then even better.

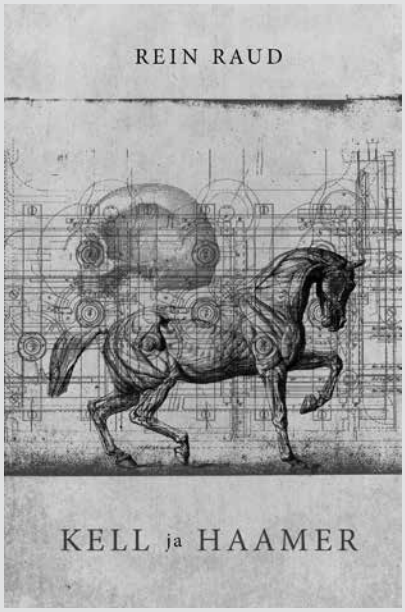
JOONAS HELLERMA (1984) studied television- and film direction at Tallinn University, where he also graduated with a master's degree in philosophy. He is an editor of Estonian Public Broadcasting cultural programs and anchors the weekly TV interview program *Plekktrumm*.

Bell and Hammer

Rein Raud
Mustvalge Kirjastus, 2017

pp. 241–245

Excerpt translated by Adam Cullen



***BELL AND HAMMER* BY REIN RAUD** · PUBLISHED BY MUSTVALGE KIRJASTUS

Undivere Manor, North-Central Estonia. 1979.

Arno was left alone in the lounge of the sauna house. *I suppose I should clean up a little*, he reckoned. *The cleaner will be here in just a few hours, of course, but it's embarrassing: there are so many bottles. And I should at least stack the dishes in the sink, even if I don't start washing them right away.*

All of a sudden, he heard the loud hiss of a sizeable dose of water splashing over the red-hot rocks inside the sauna.

Now who could that be? he puzzled. He went into the shower room, knocked softly on the sauna door, and coughed discreetly.

"Mm-hmm, come right in," a husky but musical woman's voice drawled from inside.

Regardless, Arno didn't open the door so as not to let out the steam.

"I thought everyone had left," he said. "Or was asleep."

"No, I'm still here," the woman replied, as if it wasn't already obvious. *I guess she's one of the chicks who came out here from Rakvere.*

"Well, your crowd headed out already," Arno said.

"Not a problem, I'll make it somehow," she called from inside. "Just a moment's patience, I'm coming right out."

She took her time. Arno sat down on a bench meanwhile and poured himself another little glass of vodka.

The woman then appeared in the doorway to the shower room, a large white terry towel wrapped tightly around her

slender, damp body. The red hair that spilled over her shoulders was feathery and dry—she'd apparently had her head covered. The woman's green eyes flashed vivaciously. But she appeared fairly older than those chicks: not quite Arno's age just yet, but at least thirty, unlikely more: the lines hadn't begun creeping onto her face just yet.

"Quite the modern-day sauna you have here," the unexpected guest remarked, sitting down next to Arno.

"Thank you," he nodded. "Can I pour you something?"

"I didn't mean it as a compliment, I might add," the woman continued, ignoring his offer. "At least not entirely. I approve of the endeavor, but the execution leaves quite a lot to be desired."

"What do you mean?" Arno huffed. "It's all tip-top, in my opinion."

"Well, if it suits you, then all right," the woman acquiesced. "Let's talk about something else."

She stared at Arno in a manner that made him feel uncomfortable.

"Er, well, I'm a married man, to tell the truth," he said.

The woman laughed brightly.

"Oh, I don't have that sort of interest in you at all, I want to discuss an entirely different matter."

Arno was relieved, but a little injured, too.

"Well, truth be told, I was thinking we should probably wrap things up here," he said. "Tomorrow's another day and all. Should clean up a bit, on top of that."

"Just a minute, I'll help," the woman promised. "I'm just going to catch my breath a bit here. I haven't enjoyed a sauna like that in quite a long time."

"I told you it's tip-top," Arno grinned.

"No, it certainly is in that respect." She locked her piercing gaze on Arno again, as if weighing what he was worth. Her next words were much slower and slightly accented. "Actually… Actually, I'm interested in the manor house, rather. When are you going to get around to it?"

"What do you mean?" Arno asked.

"You *are* the boss here now," the woman replied. "You do sit at that one large, cocoa-brown wooden desk with the curved legs, do you not?"

"I do," Arno nodded, frowning. "How'd you know that?"

"But the roof is leaking into the attic in two places, and the windows have been boarded up in the wings."

"Those are for storage," Arno explained. "Some village kids kept throwing rocks at the windows and using 'em for target practice all the time."

"Storage," the woman repeated, imitating Arno's voice. "You really aren't much of a visionary, I see. I do know that you care for this house. Very much so, even."

"Well, yeah, 's true. So what?"

"Imagine what it would be like if it was renovated! Perhaps not exactly to the way it was back when von Dodecker built it, but to something along those lines? Say you haul all this useless junk away and let air and light in once again? Just like cleansing toxins from the blood—restored youth!"

"And what'm I to do with it then? A kolkhoz office is just a kolkhoz office: what we've got now's fit for it, too."

"No one is saying it has to remain a kolkhoz office forever," the woman pointed out. "It would, for instance, be *much* better suited for a wedding venue. That, ah, what's it called—office for domestic status contracts could be moved here, you know, and then it'd be possible to install a lovely

kitchen and arrange nice celebrations for young couples. There would be a dance hall in the parlor, and the rooms could be fixed up, too, so the guests might be able to stay the night afterward. I reckon the entire district would want to start getting hitched here! And there'd be new life breathed into the house, people's romances and hopes and yearnings would collect here; not numbers and guidelines and the rest of that red crap… Excuse me."

Arno grunted. "But I've still got to put all that, as you say, red crap *somewhere*, you know."

"It won't take up all that much space, I assure you. Most of the building is standing completely empty, as it is. There's that, ah, executive committee headquarters being built in the village right now: it's enormously bigger than what they really need, you know. You'll talk things through with the chairman of the village soviet; no doubt they'll find space for your kolkhoz office as well. And things will be much easier that way, in general: people will be able to take care of all their official business in one place. It's quite a ways to get out here, especially for some of the more elderly folk."

To be fair, what she proposed did sound quite reasonable. But what it all had to do with that woman: that, he couldn't figure out.

"What's more, you're not the only one around here who's capable of thinking big, you know," the woman continued. "Just look at what your colleagues are up to. What Erilt has undertaken in Rägavere. Or Nõmm in Sagadi. Miller in Kardse. Epner in Palmse. You're no less of a man than any of them, now are you?"

Her green eyes bored straight through him. In truth, the woman had hit a soft spot: quite often, he'd walked around that manor house as it silently and sadly looked on his daily activities, and had tried to imagine how life might have looked there before. He would touch an old but dutiful doorknob, and wondered about the people whose hands had held it, likewise. He'd attempted to reach behind the heavy veil that had settled over his surroundings with the passing of time. He wasn't here as the heir of its former glory—he was well aware of that—but neither was he here as a guest.

Even so, up until now, the thought of pulling up his bootstraps and sweeping the veil away hadn't crossed his mind.

On the other hand, he did have a sense of enterprise.

"Of course you do," the woman encouraged. "I wouldn't be speaking if you didn't."

"I won't be able to manage it all by my lonesome," Arno said. "I'll need specialists here who know about all that old stuff: it is much easier to ruin something than to make it whole."

"Well, and why do you think *I'm* here?" The woman appeared almost offended, although she hadn't actually told Arno anything about who she was or where she'd come from. "Why'd I even show up in the first place?" Her eyes blazed. "So, what's it going to be: are we going to do it?"

"Fine, fine," Arno agreed, since not one other idea could seem more natural to him at that moment. "Let's do it."

"But it'll be hard work. And once you start, you mustn't go back on your word. You have to promise me that."

"I promise."

"Good." The woman nodded and stood. "We'll meet again. Regularly." She walked over to the front door, waved over her shoulder, then suddenly flung the towel in Arno's direction, stepped outside naked, and pulled the door shut behind her.

REIN RAUD . PHOTO BY PIA RUBER

Estonian-Russian literature: Estonian literature written in Russian

by Aija Sakova

In the late 1990s, Sergei Issakov (1931–2013), who was born in the border town of Narva and taught Slavic studies in Tartu his entire career, proposed in the Russian-language Estonian cultural magazine *Raduga* the concept of "Estonian-Russians" (Estonian *eestivenelased*, Russian *эстонские русские*) as a way to describe the multicultural, hybrid identity of native Russian-speakers living in Estonia. The Russian-language poet, teacher, and translator of Estonian literature into Russian Boris Baljasnõi (b. 1957) issued a call in 1999 for Russian-language writers residing in Estonia to cooperate more closely with Estonian-language authors, to pay closer attention to current affairs in Estonia, and to address local readers (whether Estonian- or Russian-speaking) in their works more often.[1]

1 *Kotjuh, Igor. "Eesti venekeelse kirjanduse nullindate põlvkond: vastuvõtt ja tõrked omaks tunnistamisel". Methis 2013, p. 66.*

These appeals made by Estonia's Russian-speaking cultural elite fell upon fertile soil, for after the turn of the century several new noteworthy Estonian-based authors writing in Russian surfaced. Over time, the new generation of Russian-speaking authors living in Estonia comprised not merely Russian-language writers with Estonian residency or citizenship, but an entire unique genre of Estonian-Russian writers. This type of literature, which proceeding from linguistic logic is akin to the concept of Baltic-German literature (i.e. German-language literature written in the Baltic states), fuses the Estonian and the Russian components and implies that although the literature in question is penned in Russian, it is, in essence, still a part of Estonian literature.

One can assuredly claim that the concept of Estonian-Russian literature has been actively used in Estonia for at least a decade, although the notion of Russian-language Estonian literature has not disappeared as a

IGOR KOTJUH PERFORMING AT THE TALLINN HEADREAD LITERARY FESTIVAL IN 2016 · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH

descriptor. Regardless of the fact that I am unable to base my claim on any empirical study, it is logical that the Estonian-Russian identity, which emphasizes multi-ethnicity and hybridity, is most suitable for the "newer" generation of Russian-speaking Estonians born in the 1970s, who can speak and work fluently in both languages but have decided to stick with Russian as their literary language. The names of three major authors of Estonian-Russian literature come to mind: Andrei Ivanov (b. 1971), P. I. Filimonov (b. 1975), and Igor Kotjuh (b. 1978). It appears that adopting the concept of Estonian-Russian literature (and, naturally, outstanding translations into Estonian) has helped to nudge these authors and their works into the realm of Estonian literature "proper". As a result, one may confidently also regard Ivanov, Filimonov, and Kotjuh simply as Estonian writers, especially from an international standpoint. All three are listed among several other Russian-language Estonian members of the Estonian Writers' Union, and the author profiles of both Ivanov and Kotjuh are included on the Estonian Literary Center's web page.[2]

Nevertheless, these authors' reception in the field of Estonian literature has not gone

2 *Ivanov: http://www.estlit.ee/elis/?cmd=writer&id=55407*
Kotjuh: http://www.estlit.ee/elis/?cmd=writer&id=18235

without a hitch, as Kotjuh has also written about in an academic study.[3] This is foremost because Estonian literature has traditionally been defined by language, although it is also due to the fact that Russian-language literature needs to first be translated into Estonian in order for it to disseminate in and be adopted by the Estonian cultural space (the younger generations of native Estonian-speakers are generally not proficient in the Russian language). In 2012, a heated debate broke out over Andrei Ivanov's novel *A Handful of Dust* (*Peotäis põrmu*, 2011) not being nominated for the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's annual award for literature. In retrospect, the disagreement can be regarded as noteworthy, since it turned out that the majority of the Estonian cultural public perceives Estonian-Russian literature as a clear part of Estonian literature as a whole, despite the fact that the formal government structures didn't support the idea at the time. *A Handful of Dust* addressed topical Estonian issues and was published in the Estonian language, though it was translated from a Russian-language manuscript. This meant that the novel didn't fall into any existing award category: it was not a Russian-language work published in Estonia, but neither could the book compete in the category of translated literature, because the Russian-language original hadn't been released. To complicate matters further, it couldn't be categorized as Estonian literature, because it hadn't been written in Estonian originally. Quite rightly, several disgruntled critics questioned whether language has any importance if a particular work clearly belongs to the Estonian cultural space.

Still, Ivanov himself holds a slightly different personal opinion of whether or not he is a part of Estonian literature. A member of the Estonian Writers' Union since 2013, the author has somewhat resisted classifying his novels by nationality, favoring neither Russian nor Estonian. Rather, he prefers broader frameworks, such as "European literature".[4]

In their 2017 scholarly article "Pain and promise of non-belonging: Andrei Ivanov's exception in Estonian literature"[5], Eneken Laanes and Daniele Monticelli, professors and researchers of Estonian (and Estonian-Italian) literature and culture, treat Ivanov's prose as supranational literature and claim that the identity of the author himself, but also of the characters he creates, is one founded on non-belonging and based on exception. Indeed, the characters and plots of Ivanov's novels possess a broader international base because they often deal with migrants and globetrotters. One of Ivanov's books, *Hanuman's Journey to Lolland* (*Hanumani teekond Lollandile*, 2012), has been published in a German translation (*Hanumans Reise nach Lolland*, 2012) and was even staged in Hamburg.

3 *Kotjuh, Igor. "The Generation of the 2000s in the Russian Literature of Estonia: Acceptance and Obstacles to Acknowledgement".* Methis *2013.*

4 *Afanasjev, Vahur. "Rahvusvahelise kirjanduse kodanik Andrei Ivanov".* Eesti Ekspress*, 1 December 2012.*

5 *Laanes, Eneken; Monticelli, Daniele. "Mittekuulumise valu ja võimalus: Andrei Ivanovi erand eesti kirjanduses."* Keel ja Kirjandus*, 1/2017. pp. 41–57. An English-language extract is included at the end of the article.*

Whereas Ivanov has striven to avoid national classifications, the poet Igor Kotjuh has always attempted to find compromise between the linguistic and the cultural spaces.[6] In 2008, he wrote – progressively and almost as a manifesto – that Estonian-Russian literature is a bridge between two national cultures and it certainly belongs to Estonia as a country, but people are still unable to implement it effectively. He noted that Estonia should show greater discernible appreciation for Estonian-Russian writers' contributions to mediating the two cultural spaces, and encouraged authors themselves to translate (just as Baljasnõi did a decade earlier). Additionally, Kotjuh floated the idea of establishing some kind of Estonian-Russian literary center to serve as a mediating body.[7]

Since not much more can be done on the state level besides providing financial support for translations, not forgetting to include Estonian-Russian authors when introducing Estonian literature internationally, and giving formal recognition to authors in the genre (for example, in 2011 Igor Kotjuh received the Young Cultural Figure Award, which is given out by the Estonian president), a great deal depends on people themselves. One can state with assurance that Kotjuh has become a leading figure of and spokesperson for Estonian-Russian literature. He has become the sensitive and empathetic bridge between the two cultural spaces, of which he wrote. In addition to all of his other cultural-mediation activities – being on the board of the Estonian P.E.N. Club, co-organizing the Head Read literary festival, etc. – Kotjuh created in 2012 the bilingual Facebook profile "Est Lit Locus", which actively communicates information about Estonian literature in Russian, and about Russian and Russian-language Estonian literature in Estonian. On 12 January 2018, for instance, Kotjuh posted through Est Lit Locus an overview of the Russian-language books and the Estonian translations of Russian-language books published in Estonia the previous year.

In summary, Estonian-Russian literature is definitely not a homogeneous phenomenon, just as the Estonian-Russian identity is impossible to comprehensively define. Likewise, there is a large volume of Russian-language literature published in Estonia that cannot be classified as either Estonian-Russian or Estonian literature. Such books may, perhaps, not even endeavor to fit into the category, but it is a fact that Estonian-Russian literature has a secure place within the genre of Estonian literature as a whole.

The following is an excerpt from Igor Kotjuh's poem "100 lines about love for my homeland":

6 *I have discussed at greater length the different senses of belonging (non-belonging vs. multiculturalism) of the creative egos of Andrei Ivanov and Igor Kotjuh in a German-language article written together with Olga Bazilev: "Die Frage nach dem ›Anderen‹. Literatur als Spiegel und Gegenbild nationaler Identitäten am Beispiel der estnischen und lettischen Gegenwartsliteratur", which was published in the collection* Zum Beispiel Estland: das eine Lande und die vielen Sprachen *(Göttingen 2017, composed by Silke Pasewalck, Anna Bers, Reet Bender).*

7 *Kotjuh, Igor. "Eestivene kirjanduse homne kasu".* Eesti Päevaleht*, 26 January 2008. http://epl.delfi.ee/news/kultuur/eestivene-kirjanduse-homne-kasu?id=51116971*

что интересно
моя родина – эстония
а родина моего языка – россия
я живу здесь
он живет там
я читаю эстонские книги
мне близка их ментальность
я читаю русские книги
чтобы развивать свой язык[8]

huvitav
minu kodumaa on eesti
kuid mu keele kodumaa on venemaa
mina elan siin
tema elab seal
ma loen eesti raamatuid
nende mõtteviis on mulle lähedane
ma loen vene raamatuid
et arendada oma keelt[9]

strange
my homeland is estonia
but my language's homeland is russia
i live here
it lives there
i read estonian books
their way of thinking is familiar
i read russian books
to advance my proficiency[10]

8 *Published in Russian as: Kotjuh, Igor.* Estonskiy dizain: stikhi 2009–2013. *КИТЕ MTÜ. Tallinn 2013. pp. 37–38*

9 *Published in Estonian as: Kotjuh, Igor.* Kuidas kujutada päeva?. *KITE MTÜ. Tallinn 2015. pp. 58–59.*

10 *English translation from the Estonian by Adam Cullen.*

AIJA SAKOVA (1980) is an Estonian literary scholar and critic. Since 2017, she has been a senior researcher at the Estonian Literary Museum's Estonian Cultural History Archives. Her most recent book, *Pain, Memory, Literature. Literary Critique and Conversations 2004–2017* (*Valu, mälu, kirjandus. Kirjanduskriitikat ja vestlusi aastatest 2004–2017*), was published in 2017.

A tightrope-walker inspired by the abyss

An interview with Mehis Heinsaar

by Piret Põldver

Mehis Heinsaar, who is one of the most esteemed Estonian prose writers of the last decade, is likewise one of the chosen few to receive a state writer's salary. His works have been translated into seven languages – mostly into French – and this year a collection of three of his short stories will be published in English (*The Butterfly Man and Other Stories*, translated by Adam Cullen and Tiina Randviir, Momentum Books 2018). The author, who has been making a living as a freelance writer his whole adult life, talked about the trials and tribulations of becoming a full-time writer, as well as about how the choice to dedicate oneself to creative pursuits affects relationships and everyday life.

First of all, let's talk about writing. What type of writer are you?

I'm more the poet-type of writer. I have sudden bouts of inspiration, and then crank out maybe twenty or thirty pages in an hour or two, relying on that inspiration, but then refine it very slowly later on. I rewrite what I've written several times to arrive at my envisioned outcome.

Could that also be the reason why you tend to write short prose?

Definitely, yes. My process for writing a novel is very slow and relatively strenuous, all the same. Currently, I've been writing one for three years, and there's no end in sight. I'm working on a "gothic horror novel", but it's all kinds of other things, too: it's a fairy tale, and it has Estonian nature and existentialism – Tartu existentialism. It has very many layers, but I don't want it to come off as being a certain genre. I'd like it to have a variety of levels and dimensions.

My belief is that if it's something good or important that's tied to your personal biography, then you really should spend six or seven years writing that single novel. Even if that comes at the price of not accomplishing several other good ideas. We don't need the next averagely-good book. We're already up to our throats in books like that. And anyone who harbors a love for literature actually hates those averagely-good things. As a professional, you can tell immediately where a few pages have been written in, rushed and as filler, just so the novel can

move on more quickly – meaning you the reader are actually being deceived. In my opinion, all that is is a waste of a book and a good story. Someone who regards himself as a professional writer and maybe even receives a stipend for writing could, all in all, write much more slowly so that a good story comes out.

Your stories are always very fantastical. How often do you have good ideas that are novel?

Luckily, I've been having relatively fewer good ideas than I used to, because it'd be awful to have maybe fifty really good book ideas and, at the same time, know that you'd have to live for three hundred years just to write all of them. At the moment, I have ideas for seven longer stories and four novels, as well as about three hundred draft manuscripts, and I very much hope I won't get a single great idea in the near future, because I'll never get around to writing it. But I truly would like to finish writing out the ideas I do have. Alas, I keep coming up with more good short-story ideas constantly.

You've written yourself into your works, also. But what do you think: could it just as well be the opposite? Could literature start dictating your life, i.e. could you live your life more haphazardly, and then have more material to write about?

Yes, I've certainly found myself having those kinds of moods. But it's also a dangerous path, living a haphazard life; it might also lead to creative incapacity. There have been periods where I've been very disciplined, living ascetically and completely content with simplicity somewhere out in the country. I realize that if I'm good at something, then I should serve that something, and that's the way I've advanced my writing. When I haven't served it, just putting drafts down on paper and not developing them any further, then my life has quickly gone off in a bohemian direction, and there've been periods where I've been unable to write anything. As if it were a final stage. There are a ton of examples of writers who have resigned themselves to fate, such as Jack Kerouac, Richard Brautigan, Edgar Allan Poe, Dylan Thomas – alcoholism broke them all. In their youth, writing was the main substance from which they derived pleasure, but in their 40s, for instance, they no longer got such great inspiration. To use the words of Jaan Kaplinski hyperbolically: "How can I go and speak with people when I've spoken with gods?"

Are you talking about yourself now, too?

Definitely, in some sense. I've inherited a genetic weakness for alcohol from my father, too. I'm not very strong-natured; I often melt into my surroundings, and lose my identity more easily than many others. I lack the spine that some people have grown for themselves or have developed with strict discipline, while others simply have it to begin with. In his routine or everyday life, his gray or even happy quotidian life, a writer can still feel like he's in the Sahara Desert; he can plod through it, but isn't happy and content there. His ego might already be so ruined by bursts of inspiration that without them, he's no longer able to achieve the kind of contact with the mundane and ordinary world that he'd actually like to have.

MEHIS HEINSAAR · PHOTO BY MARIS MÄGI

Inspiration *is* ease. In a moment of inspiration, you're walking a tightrope strung across an abyss, and you feel it's all so easy, that there's no problem at all. You can even write about difficult times when you outdid yourself, or about someone who's had a hard life, but you do so driven by inspiration all the same, with some part of your brain which isn't actual flesh that has to *live* every second. And when you start living it yourself then, like the protagonist of a rough story, it's harder, because you haven't actually gotten your body accustomed to that sort of reality day in, day out. You might find yourself in a mood to resign yourself to fate very suddenly. And if you don't, then you still endure very difficult hours or days of just tolerating life.

So, you're saying your struggles take place foremost within and with yourself.

There have been "times of the abyss" of sorts which are so intense in their presence that every passing minute is equal to a day in the desert. They might last for only two or three hours, but they're so terrible in their intensity that it's just extremely hard to bear. You don't know whether you should sit, lie down, or go for a walk. They're followed by normal hours in turn, which fly past as if you're sleeping. The relativity of time comes into play here, too. For some people, time is ordinary: the person has such a natural body that they're on friendly terms with time; time doesn't bring any surprises. There are no abyss hours and no mountain hours, but also no euphoric God-knows-what hours of ecstasy. That person walks in tempo with time.

Spiritual landscapes are tied to that, too. I do live in Estonia, where everything is flat and there are no earthquakes, but because I possess that kind of poet-like metamorphic and transforming organism, in my spiritual landscape I actually inhabit a volcanic region where earthquakes are pretty common. The landscape that existed yesterday might have undergone an earthquake by tomorrow, and then I've got to start working on my garden from square one, all over again; I have to start re-erecting what it may have taken me a month to build. Then, it's all demolished, because some sort of spiritual earthquake messed it all up. A lot of people put an incredible amount of effort into fitting their internal landscapes to their external ones; effort that someone next to them might not even realize is going on. It's something a psychiatrist might, of course, simply say is their nerves interacting.

We've been discussing mental states, the intellectual, thinking, and cognitions for the most part, but there's very little here about real life, about your everyday comings and goings. Maybe part of the reason for this is that you live alone and spend a lot of your time alone: you're *able* to live within your own mental world more than someone with a family does, for instance. How important to you are your everyday chores, i.e. a regular little trip to the grocery store, and things like that?

I've felt that I'm tired of solitude, too. It's tiring.

But would you like to have kids someday?

That question's problematic, in turn. I'm someone with weak vitality. I'd spend a ton of energy on a kid, and, I don't know,

maybe a proper paternal feeling would awaken or spawn in me then. There's no way of knowing before it happens. Quite a lot of dads have said "oh, I had no idea I'd be reborn as a total altruist with the birth of my child." I can't know that beforehand. But at the moment, I *am* that egoist who's afraid I'll direct energy towards that and won't be capable of creative work anymore. So, I guess I'm like a kid myself, a big kid who is jealous of the future kid. And that kid inside of me is fighting the other kid and won't let him be born. That kid inside of me is afraid I'll die or will have to turn into that kid's servant.

If I have a family, then I'll be giving up the highest level of creative work: that "something" which a good literary work must possess. There'd simply be too little cosmic time left over for perceiving and conveying that "something".

So, what is that "something", exactly?

When you read Gogol, Kafka, Baudelaire, Bulgakov, Marques, Calvino, Pessoa, Borghes, you *know* and *perceive* what that "something" is.

Are you yourself capable of that "something"?

Yes, I am. I've experienced that great wonder while writing, and want to experience the spectacular, cosmic feeling over and over again. And when a writer knows he's capable of that something, of that literary wonder, then it's really something to think about... in the sense of whether to prefer "personal" happiness in life, or to dedicate myself to serving that "something". If I compromise, meaning I am or try to be a writer and am also a hard-working family man all at once, but at the same time can't manage to perform either duty to the fullest, then the feeling that I've failed to live a true life, that I'm an existential invalid, might be much greater. That "something" will remain unachieved in my writing, and that "something" – a sense of true living – will remain unachieved in my family life as well.

Kafka, for instance, strongly acknowledged all of this. And what at first glance might seem like cowardice in his case – all those countless letters of flight, and refusal, and delaying meetings with people, with friends, with girlfriends, those countless flights of his to the bosom of human solitude – all that was actually his courage, his incredible courage to truly be himself as a writer. To go all the way to the limits of himself, down there, and simultaneously up, where not a sound can reach you from the outside anymore, and to be present in that brilliant awfulness, experiencing the best hours of your life amid the deep space of human existence, and only then dedicating yourself to creative pursuits: only the very bravest are capable of that.

PIRET PÕLDVER (1985) currently studies Estonian literature at the University of Tartu. She has been a literary critic since 2006, and works as a language editor at a publisher specializing in educational materials.

The role of history in Estonian prose

by Peeter Helme

Standing at the very genesis of Estonian literature and historical writing is a relatively problematic work, at least from the standpoint of identity: **Henry of Latvia's** *Livonian Chronicle*. The chronicle, which was written in Latin in the mid-13th century and contains only a handful of Estonian words, tells of the conquering and evangelization of territories that include present-day Estonia. It took three more centuries for the first actual Estonian-language texts to appear, and they were of a religious nature. Thus, the very earliest Estonian-language literature comprises catechisms, songbooks, passages from the Bible, and finally – in 1739 – the Bible in its entirety. Still, there was very little sign of written Estonian prose or poetry, not counting the religious and educational snippets published in the backs of almanacs.

The Estonian nation, primarily locked in the peasant class, was asleep. History was being made by others. Yet, conditions changed in the 19th century, with rising literacy among Estonians, creating a growing need for history recorded in the nation's own tongue and from its own viewpoint.

The schoolmaster **Jaak Järv**'s work *The Maiden of Vallimäe* (*Vallimäe neitsi*, 1885), the plot of which unfolds in Tallinn during the Great Northern War, is regarded as the first Estonian-language novel. The country experienced a boom in historical literature during the 19th century, overall. Doubtless, this delay can be partly explained by the lack of Estonian-language academic study, but even more important were Estonians' quest for their identity and the development into a civilized nation. Since identity is not something that can be finished and forgotten in a corner, historical writing – and especially the historical novel – has held a persistent, crucial role in Estonian literature.

One can distinguish several different waves of the Estonian historical novel. The first of these swelled at the turn of the 20th century, shortly before the founding of the independent Estonian state. The second followed in the 1930s when the already-confident nation demanded accounts of its own worthy history, yielding several works that were of admittedly dubious historical accuracy but possessed that much grander

MEDIEVAL TALLINN IN THE FILM *BETWEEN THREE PLAGUES* (1970), BASED ON THE NOVEL BY JAAN KROSS · PHOTO BY ANTON MUTT

pathos. The third wave came about later in the period of Soviet occupation when **Jaan Kross** wrote Estonians into the greater fabric of history while simultaneously highlighting new layers of significance in the nation's historical narratives. The fourth wave of the Estonian historical novel has crested now, in the third decade of restored independence.

It's worth noting that these waves of historical writing have been closely tied to two historical processes. The first of these was a boom in memoirs, which began with the abolition of censorship in the late 1980s[1] and continued in spurts until the new millennium. The cause was obvious: in the freer conditions, people were able to speak about all that had been forbidden, and voices that had been forced to remain silent during the Soviet era could finally speak out. A large number of memoirs dealt with World War II, the first and second Soviet occupations, and the German occupation, but they also revived memories of the Gulag camps, the first period of Estonian independence, the guerilla Forest Brothers, and so forth.

Another circumstance favoring the latest wave of historical literature is the fact that the generation which remembers pre-war Estonia and was present for or participated in World War II is dwindling away. Thus, shaping historical content into a literary form provides an opportunity to save disappearing memories. Similarly, it is an outlet to more boldly express notions that might

1 *Censorship was officially abolished in Estonia on October 1, 1990.*

not have been to the liking of the generation which dominated Estonian society just a few decades ago.

In the foreword to his novel *Drowsy Land* (*Uinuv maa*), which observes life in Estonia before, during, and after World War II, **Holger Kaints**[2] remarks that the book's materialization was greatly due to the work of Estonian historians and the memories of his now-deceased mother and grandmother. **Kai Aareleid** likewise mentioned using oral family histories that were recorded in interviews as a source for her 2016 novel *Burning Cities*[3] (*Linnade põletamine*), which begins in the city of Tartu shortly after the war. Printed on the back cover of **Katrin Johanson**'s 2015 novel *Shared Spaces* (*Läbikäidavad toad*), which is based on a true family story, is the statement: "Stories heard during childhood – stories that burned brightly into [Johanson's] memory – inspired her to write this debut work." Similarly, the film director and author **Ilmar Taska**'s 2016 novel *Pobeda 1946* has a very personal background.

This being the case, it appears that World War II and its accompanying traumas are reluctant to release their grip on Estonians, but the fact that the topics are surfacing in literature does signify the end of a process: one that began with the twilight of the Soviet era, during which World War II and both German and Soviet occupations were a part of everyday public dialogue, and was followed by a wave of memoir writing. These periods have now become the realms of historians and prose writers.

However, far from all Estonian historical authors write about the twists of modern history: surfing the wave of popular historical crime fiction are **Indrek Hargla**'s widely-translated detective novels about an apothecary named Melchior, who solves crimes in medieval Tallinn.

Also set during the medieval period is **Aarne Ruben**'s 2013 work *The Heirs of Karl the Bald* (*Karl Kiilaspea pärijad*), which is an attempt to revive the genre of "knighthood novel" and thus demands greater-than-average reader interest. Ruben's earlier work *Stories of Anvelt and Kingissepp* (*Lugusid Anveltist ja Kingissepast*) portrays the communists who carried out the (failed) October Revolution in Estonia in a style that varies between true-to-history, bizarre, and comical.

Tiit Aleksejev, a medievalist and currently the head of the Estonian Writers' Union, writes with historical expertise and in an entirely modern style. Aleksejev has penned a play about the difficult decisions people faced in World War II titled *Leegionärid* (*Legionnaires*), as well as a developing series of novels about the First Crusade, so far including *Palveränd* (*The Pilgrimage*, 2008) and *Kindel linn* (*The Stronghold*, 2011).

The journalist **Mehis Tulk**'s hefty novel *The Vogt. The Bride of Heaven and Earth* (*Foogt. Maa ja taeva mõrsja*, 2017) portrays life in Estonia during the

2 *For more about the works of Holger Kaints, Kai Aareleid, and Ilmar Taska, see: Peeter Helme, "Memories and History – Friends or Enemies?",* Estonian Literary Magazine *2/2016*

3 *To be released in English translation by Peter Owen Publishers, 2018.*

late medieval period. The nearly 500-page opening novel of a developing series whisks the reader back to the island of Saaremaa (Ösel) in the 14th century, where serious strife is flaring up between Estonians and their foreign oppressors in a series of events that will lead to the St. George's Night Uprising: a conflict which reverberated through Estonian history and folklore. Comparable to Tulk's novel, but peskily fastidious in terms of facts, is the military officer **Tamur Kusnets**' 600-page novel *Trees Grow for All* (*Puud kasvavad kõigile*), which takes the reader to the court of the infamous voivoide of Wallachia, Vlad Tepes: the prototype for Count Dracula. Kustnets utilizes extraordinary bloodiness and naturalism to portray conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, and dedicates his book to everyone who has ever fought for the Occident in the past and present. *Trees Grow for All* received special recognition in the 2015 Estonian Writers' Union's novel competition.

Third place in the 2016 Tänapäev Publishers novel competition went to *The Witch's Dance* (*Nõiatants*) by the journalist **Margus Sanglepp**. Set in the late 17th century, the novel delves into the numerous witch trials that were held in Estonia during the period. Above all, Sanglepp strives to explore the psychological and socioeconomic causes behind the witch-hunting phenomenon.

Estonia holds a rich trove of historical literature. There are authors who attempt to make sense of Estonians' own history, but at least just as many who don't shy away from tackling issues faced by foreign lands in the past. With the exception of the Estonian authors who wrote in exile during the Soviet occupation (such as **Karl Ristikivi**), this tendency hasn't stood out much in the past. The reason might lie partly in the closed-off nature of the Soviet Union, but it may simply be a result of the fragile nature of a small nation that has always looked to literature to shape its own identity. Today, Estonian authors act with a much greater degree of freedom in this respect: literature's creative role remains strong and resists sloganeering. Estonian writers generally recognize their place in the broader landscape of European literature. They wish to have their own say in the discussions of Europe's past – and through this, inevitably, its future.

PEETER HELME (1978) is an Estonian writer and journalist, and anchors Estonian Public Broadcasting's literary radio programs. Helme has published five novels. The latest, *Deep in the West* (*Sügaval läänes*, 2015), is a drama set in the industrial Ruhr Valley.

The sensuous and social Eeva Park

by Johanna Ross

A woman furtively squeezes the rounded surfaces of hard, unripe pears in her purse: she must somehow change the mind of a man who is threatening to rape her. Stepping out of the bathtub, the protagonist feels such unexpected relief that her legs appear at odds with her weight and that her freshly-washed head is seemingly enveloped in emptiness: she is bathing for the first time after lying low in an abandoned house for weeks. The dense reek of a fart spreads across an entire bus, causing the riders to look up and wrinkle their noses: suddenly, the narrator is convinced that she is the one responsible for the inhuman stench, so she gathers up her bags and quickly makes an exit.

For me, Eeva Park (b. 1950) is above all an author of the senses: one who records keenly noticed sensations with convincing brevity. She has remarked that when writing she finds it important to stir the undercurrents of the reader's memories, and it is as a result of these succinct but sensation-rich descriptions that her books are often so successful.

Maybe that is also why Park has only written infrequently for the theater: in drama, the sensations come from elsewhere and are already in abundance – the task of the text is different in playwriting. In other genres, however (in shorter and longer prose, as well as in poetry), by beginning with these sensations, the author is able to arrive at an impressive variety of places.

Park's earlier prose can be classified as more traditional psychological realism, in which she blends and reinforces meaningful everyday moments and the flickering of the human psyche with bodily sensations. Her pair of family novels *Dust and Wind* (*Tolm ja tuul*, 1992) and *A Student of Laughter* (*Naeru* õpilane, 1998) are about the disintegration of a multi-child family, telling of its members' relationships with one another mainly through the perspective of the daughter Mirjam. Most Estonian readers are well aware that Park's subject matter is greatly taken from her own personal life. Her parents were renowned Estonian authors whose divorce is carved into local cultural history. As a result, Park's

EEVA PARK · PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER

family novels have also been consumed out of a greedy hunger for gossip. Yet, this fact doesn't diminish the books' artistic value or how sensitively their mundane scenes are described. Her earlier short stories also often convey little everyday instances, in which readers can vividly imagine the palms perspiring in an uncomfortable situation, the mind dazed from bright sunlight, and the cracked lips on a hot summer day.

Neither this dense sensual quality nor the realism it achieves diminish to any degree in Park's later prose, although the works stand out more as thrillers with social stress or social critiques with thriller stress, whichever way you take it. Her best-known work is probably the novel *A Trap in Infinity* (*Lõks lõpmatuses*, 2003; winner of the 2004 Eduard Vilde Award), from which the bathtub scene at the beginning of this article was taken. The book is about an Estonian girl whose boyfriend traffics her to Germany for prostitution: a plot somewhat similar to the acclaimed Lukas Moodysson film *Lilya 4-ever* (2002), which was released at about the same time and was also partly filmed in Estonia. Yet, significant differences between the two (at least for the Estonian audience) are

the facts that Moodysson showed Eastern European exoticism through an external gaze, and the main character of the film is a member of the local Russian minority. Park, on the other hand, wrote about an ordinary Estonian girl, and in doing so emphasized that this is not merely an issue prevalent on society's periphery.

Park's approach to writing thrillers is to reveal a large part of the facts only as the story progresses: something criminal is afoot, and tension is ratcheted up until it reaches a climax. A thick, psychologically-charged membrane grows over a dramatic and venturesome skeleton, predominantly by way of the author's sensory descriptions. The first sentence in this article, with its unripe pears, was taken from Park's short story "Chance Encounter" (winner of the 1994 Tuglas Award for Short Stories): the reader waits with bated breath to find out if a woman hurrying home to her child will arrive safely or be raped and killed by a truck driver. In addition to Saul Bellow and Sherwood Anderson, Park has named authors of American detective novels as her international literary influences. Her psychological thrillers perhaps share an element of Scandinavian noir, although it wasn't yet a phenomenon at the time she wrote them. Park's *A Trap in Infinity* has been translated into Norwegian and Swedish, as well as into German. Park's works sometimes tend to slip into the crack between "literary fiction" and "thriller": a crack that many literary scholars certainly try to itch, but which nevertheless endures, at least in many readers' subconscious. On the other hand, her more widely-read works were still included on school reading lists even when contemporary literature was merely skimmed over in mandatory curricula.

The dimension of social criticism is also prominent in Park's short-story collection *An Absolute Master* (*Absoluutne meister*, 2006), which ventures into the murky world of fishing in freshly independent 1990s Estonia. It includes, for example, the short story "Vilnius Alibi", in which a shadow of intrigue is cast over the 1994 *Estonia* ferry disaster at a time when the young state's anarchic economic situation was dominated by fake names and shell companies. The collection's title story tells of a woman who becomes impoverished after being returned ownership of her grandmother's house, which the Soviet regime had seized (the story is the source of the bus scene at the beginning of this article). Park cynically depicts fraudulent real-estate agents and construction companies, as well as the protagonist's daughters, who dream only of moving abroad and completely disregard their mother's dream of a cozy life. The youngest daughter's snide accusation gives the collection its title: "Honestly, Mom, you're an absolute master of getting yourself into all kinds of problems."

A character's close but tense relationship with her mother is a motif that permeates Park's works. Whereas "An Absolute Master" reveals the mother's point of view, we more often encounter a mother who, seen through her daughter's eyes, is neurotic, usually unfair and self-centered, but still loving and caring in her own way. This may be regarded as a typical "women's literature topic" and, to be fair, Park's social critiques predominantly lie in the sphere of women's rights: trafficking and the forcing of girls and young women into prostitution, threats of sexual violence, and asymmetrical relationships in terms of age and status. Critics have frequently remarked on the

strength displayed by Park's female characters. For example, unlike the protagonist of the film *Lilya 4-ever*, the main character of *A Trap in Infinity* finds strength in deciding to take revenge upon her trafficker. Yet one still must recognize that Park is, in a sense, a pre-feminist writer. She is kindred to the Soviet and post-Soviet female Russian writers who have strongly rejected calling themselves feminists. Even in slightly more everyday situations, she tends not to thematize male–female relationships from an equal rights standpoint: she isn't concerned with the sharing of domestic chores and doesn't perceive women as being systematically subjugated. Rather, she characterizes relations between the genders as a *force majeure*.

Park is indeed a romantic author by nature, which is demonstrated by how resolutely she refuses to tear away the veil of romance completely, even when describing a (psychologically) violent relationship, and by how she does not empty the cup of glittering enchantment. Her latest novel, *Pet Paradise* (*Lemmikloomade paradiis*, 2016), describes a young woman's escape from an exhausting, addictive relationship. It's clear that a temperamental and alluring man has behaved very poorly with the protagonist, but she refuses to adopt the role of victim and can't bring herself to cease cherishing memories of passionate moments, exotic trips, and "the good times". It's no secret that addictive relationships often tend to go this route, but in Park's case the cause appears to lie primarily in a basic manner of understanding love. The author has jokingly confessed her own fear that the novel might be too romantic, with which her colleagues disagree. Whether Park's female characters happen to be trustworthy, complex, and multi-layered in spite of her romantic tendencies or precisely because of them is probably a question of worldview. In any case, this stands out noticeably on the Estonian literary scene, where authors' voices commonly prefer to maintain a safe, thoroughly considered, and even smirking distance from the subjects they address.

Park, on the other hand, cracks relatively few jokes, and when she does, it is in a concise poetic form. It appears the immense weight resting upon every word compels her to, if not engage in wordplay outright, at least equip the writing with linguistic twists. The poetry samples selected for this edition of *Estonian Literary Magazine* demonstrate this facet. By exercising the nuances of language Park deals not only with the world, but also with linguistic perception. Nevertheless, even her poems are often prompted by the sensual description of a fleeting scene or an earlier episode that reminds the lyrical ego of a certain sensation. Thus, the feeling and the idea are juxtaposed basically in the same way as in Park's thrillers. Once again, it is clear that Park can talk about big topics through little things.

JOHANNA ROSS (1985) is an editor of the Estonian philology journal *Keel ja Kirjandus* (*Language and Literature*). As a scholar, her main fields of interest include female and Soviet literature.

Poetry by Eeva Park

Translated by Adam Cullen

*

It wasn't I who made you this way

said Darwin,

the divine intuitive care of genetics opted

to give you light hair and a dark laugh,

everything else,

the short-sightedness,

unstable blood pressure and cancerous growth,

those you managed to get all on your own.

*

Why do you forge the shield, Hephaistos, why do you waste the time

when I've been bestowed with near invulnerability,

nothing can destroy me in any battle,

apart from blisters on my heel

I fear nothing.

Fear of Loss

I'm afraid I'll lose

a glove.

One I left behind in Toronto,

leaving a hand bare,

the other gloved,

I shoved the bare hand into my pocket,

pretending I still had both,

that all was as it should be –

I had a pair, leather and skin, but

at the Moscow station my bare hand met a pickpocket's,

the two were there together,

deep within my coat pocket,

my left and the pickpocket's right,

ten fingers

as if my very own,

I squeezed

but couldn't tell who grabbed whom,

what five got on the train to Tallinn,

what five went with the pickpocket

and now lurk Red Square,

ever searching strangers' purses

for what they once lost.

A regular writer's salary: Really?

by Piret Põldver

Estonia is a small country where people generally can't make a living purely on art and literature: the market simply isn't large enough. That's why several years ago, a discussion sprang up over whether the state could start paying writers and artists salaries. The idea finally came to fruition in 2015, when the Estonian Ministry of Culture launched a unique pilot project: three-year salaries for artists and writers via an additional amount of government funding earmarked for creative unions. The funding is distributed through the unions' open competitions: selected salary recipients sign three-year employment contracts and are paid the average Estonian monthly gross salary for the year before last (€1,146 in 2016). At the same time, the salary does not apply any creative limitations or place obligations on its recipients, and all copyrights to works created during the salary period still belong to the authors. Although there are basically no restrictions, the salary does entail providing an annual overview of the recipient's creative activities. Thus, while not especially encumbering the recipient, the regular salary, along with the social benefits it includes, provides an opportunity to write or create more freely. So far there have been three separate opportunities to apply for the Estonian writer's salary, with 12 authors total: Maarja Kangro, Indrek Koff, Mihkel Mutt, Jürgen Rooste, Triin Soomets, Jan Kaus, Mehis Heinsaar, Eeva Park, Hasso Krull, Maimu Berg, Kätlin Kaldmaa, and Piret Raud.

Naturally, a relatively unusual undertaking such as this has been dealt a fair amount of criticism. Commentators have focused on the extraordinary details of the contract, but even more talk has revolved around the difficulty of evaluating outcomes. Discussions have likewise sparked over whether or not the desire to make a living off of literature is an extravagant and luxurious life choice in and of itself, for which the writer is personally responsible.

Still, the fact remains that the current salary recipients have already published a wealth of new works, and public opinion of the writers' and artists' salaries leans towards the positive. But how do those getting writer's salaries feel? Seven of them shared whether the honor has changed anything in their lives, as well as whether their original expectations matched the reality of the situation.

Indrek Koff

Materially speaking, one extremely important change is that I don't have to work myself to the bone for a chance to go to the doctor. And overall, it's good to know that you won't starve even if you only busy yourself with literature for three years. Another side of it is specifically the involvement in literature: I'd probably still have done more or less the same things, but the idea of being a "state writer" haunting my brain motivates me to better structure my activities and to undertake and finish things that otherwise might have simply remained ideas.

I had no expectations at first, only that for three years I could do what appears (at least in my mind) to be my calling: writing and translating at full speed and with full dedication. I suppose there were some little worries about public opinion, too, since the idea received heavy criticism at first. And occasionally, a question nagged at my subconscious: what if I develop an obligation block? The criticism died down and no block came. I've been able to dedicate myself to writing. In short, I'm grateful, and I believe that the salaried writer's spots should definitely remain. It's an unbelievably great opportunity for literature, in a country with such a small readership.

Mihkel Mutt

The writer's salary has provided me with peace, freedom, and certainty. The money doesn't allow for any luxury, of course, but neither is there a gnawing worry about how to pay the bills. There are many different kinds of creative people and, for some, living under pressure so much as favors their writing, but that's certainly not true in my case. My creativity is at its peak and my productivity at its greatest when I "don't have to do anything, but can do everything". I've published three books in the last two years.

In particular, the writer's salary has relieved me of the need to do side work, i.e. to constantly write for the media. That's something that writers have been forced to do at least since Dickens's time, and something which all have cursed. When I write a column now, I do it out of free will, and not to patch a hole in my budget.

Did the initial expectation and reality match? Yes, entirely. The writer's salary hasn't come with any strings attached, and nothing has limited my freedom. I've slept better, and it's possible that I'm more tolerant of my fellow citizens and the whole world!

Eeva Park

The writer's salary basically hasn't changed anything, but it has yielded an important answer. I started writing when I was a little over the age of thirty, meaning relatively late. I'd decisively incinerated all of my first attempts at the age of 16, and never intended to do what was excessively ordinary in our family: write. I kept my promise for longer than the age I was at the time, but at some point (and not at all when I had too little work to do daily, but the exact opposite), surprising even myself, I started writing at night instead of sleeping. My brother Ats, with whom I was very close, asked me what I was doing, and when I told him I'd started writing, he was incredibly shocked. He looked me straight in the eye and said: "Don't! Quit right this instant; I don't want

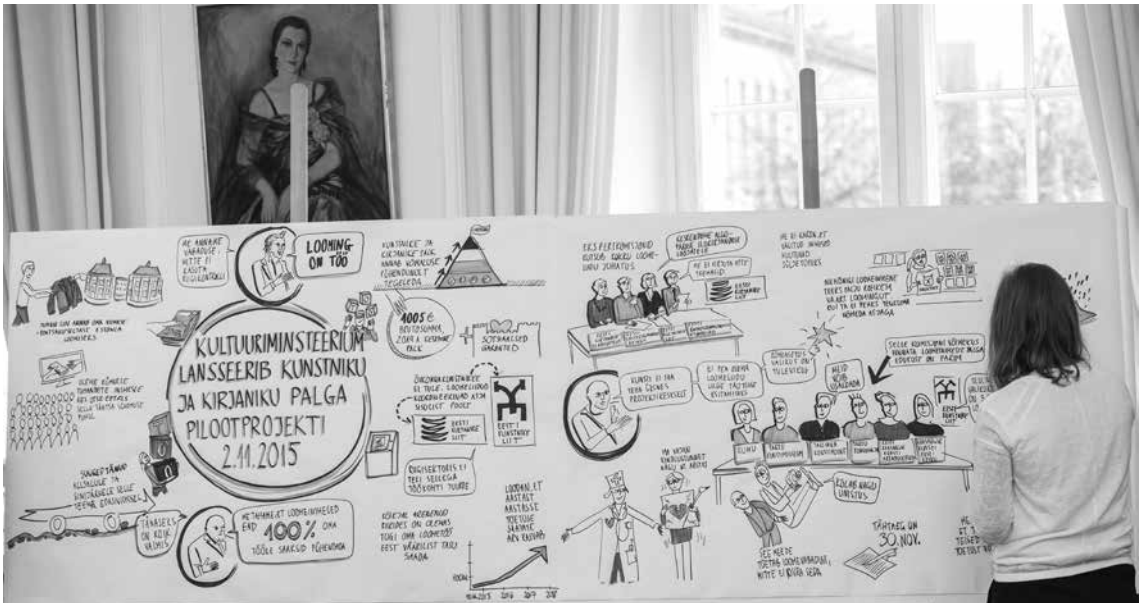


PHOTO BY MADIS VELTMAN / SCANPIX

THE ESTONIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE INTRODUCES THE IDEA OF SALARIES FOR WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN 2015

things to go badly for you." My brother was a big materialist, so perhaps the writer's salary would have convinced him now that things didn't go as badly as he feared when I ignored his advice.

Triin Soomets

I had no expectations for the writer's salary. I applied without any great hopes of being chosen: I simply wanted to support the undertaking, so to say, so that there'd be applicants and those making the decisions would have people to choose from. Being selected came as such a great surprise that I had to sit down on the floor when I got the call. The reality is that I'm receiving a regular salary for my persistent work. What has it changed in my life? I'd really like to ask what would change in *your* life if you suddenly started receiving wages for your work. It would feel normal, wouldn't it? At the same time, it certainly hasn't changed anything, because you can't write on command, or at least I can't… Well, I *can*, but straight into the wastebasket. A writer will work no matter what, in almost any kinds of conditions. But I find it entirely normal and proper for it to be accepted just like any other job. Those in other professions would hardly do anything without pay, nor should they.

Hasso Krull

The salary most definitely meets my expectations. One can only dedicate himself to writing literature in two cases: if he is receiving a regular income from somewhere, no matter what stage of writing it is at the moment (James Joyce being a good example), or if he accepts conscious poverty and an asocial and bohemian lifestyle (Charles Bukowski being a good example). I've tried both, and I believe only the first option is suitable for someone with a family. As such, the writer's salary is normal and as I'd expected. There are only a couple of small problems: the salary isn't all that big, and it doesn't last until the end of your life. So, it's still just a milder type of uncertainty: you can't make very long-term plans. These little problems could certainly be fixed in the future, which could lead to surprising results.

Maarja Kangro

What's changed is that I don't translate as much anymore. Or I almost don't translate at all, compared to before. Translating and grants to write abroad were my earlier back-up; now, I don't have to hassle with them. But I suppose it's also tied to other income like book sales, etc. What's more convenient is that I don't have to pay social tax separately every quarter anymore. The writer's salary is like a safety net for freelancers so they can work on projects that might not turn out to be commercially successful, but which they feel are still necessary, both for the literary scene and for society overall.

I expected to have an increase in discipline, which unfortunately hasn't turned out to be the case: I write with the same spurts and spells of procrastination, just like I used to. The measure itself is wonderful, especially the idea of it. I'm glad that the number of salary recipients has increased every year, otherwise I might have felt guilty to be so lucky. There are far more productive writers than me.

Jan Kaus

There are two ways I can answer the question "What has the writer's salary changed in my life?". Structurally, very little has changed. I've been a freelancer since 2010, and I'll continue that lifestyle even after having received the writer's salary. I've always enjoyed the opportunity freelancing gives to boost my personal freedom, remove routine from life, and do all kinds of things: to write in all kinds of genres, from novels to librettos, and to address all kinds of topics; basically, to maintain a wide horizon. Between writing different pieces, I translate, play music, or draw and paint.

But in essence, the writer's salary has changed a lot. To tell the truth, I regard the writer's salary as recognition equatable to literary awards, or even more important than them. It's a way in which the Estonian state acknowledges my work and its importance. Even more than that: through my own writer's salary and that of others, the state emphasizes the necessity of literature. The initiative was a step with broader importance that impacts not only those receiving the support, but all Estonian writers and local literature as a whole.

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The writer's salary is recognition for the writer: it gives a clear signal that the person's job is just as important as anyone else's. On the one hand, the salary guarantees better conditions for creative work, and on the other, it helps authors to better deal with life's little details by providing social benefits, including health insurance, which has always been a persistent problem for those who dedicate themselves to creative ambitions. Estonia's cultural repository will undoubtedly be enriched with many more important works as a direct result of the state-sponsored writer's salary.

PIRET PÕLDVER (1985) currently studies Estonian literature at the University of Tartu. She has been a literary critic since 2006, and works as a language editor at a publisher specializing in educational materials.

Book reviews

by Erik Aru, Oliver Berg, Peeter Helme and Maarja Helena Meriste

EVA KOFF · PHOTO BY JÜRI J. DUBOV

EVA KOFF
SININE MÄGI
(BLUE MOUNTAIN)

Tallinn, Varrak, 2017. 440 pp
ISBN 9789985342213

Eva Koff's *Blue Mountain,* which shared 2nd and 3rd places in the Estonian Writers' Union's 2017 novel competition, is a part of a wave of historical fiction that has swept the Estonian literary landscape during the last few years. Whereas describing the Estonian female experience in the mid-20th century has been greatly monopolized by Sofi Oksanen's formidable body of work, Koff takes a different approach, focusing mostly on the first and last two decades of the century and mentioning the intervening period only in passing.

While the book features a large cast of characters, it focuses primarily on three of them. The protagonist at the beginning and end of the novel is Liis, a high-school student in 1980s Tallinn who later goes on to study medicine at the University of Tartu. The middle section of the book shifts to her great-aunt Adele and her grandmother Elfi at the beginning of the 20th century.

While the novel's foreground is occupied by the labyrinthine nature of life and love – a fleeting and always imperfect phenomenon – as well as the reasons why people make the decisions they make, the societal particularities of the era play out in the background. Large portions of the book deal with the nature of war and all its horrors, to which there does exist a flip-side of perverse benefits. "Nowhere else in the world would a surgeon learn more; nowhere else in the world is training that bears such a high price organized."

Koff, who works as a French teacher and has written children's books and plays, cites many authors and literary works in her novel, including those by Fernando Pessoa, Marcel Proust, and Marie Under. Her portrayal of life's labyrinth, where every dead-end has a door that leads to the next path, is clearly Borgesian. Koff's treatment of closeness and otherness borders on the phenomenological: is it possible to really know another person at all?

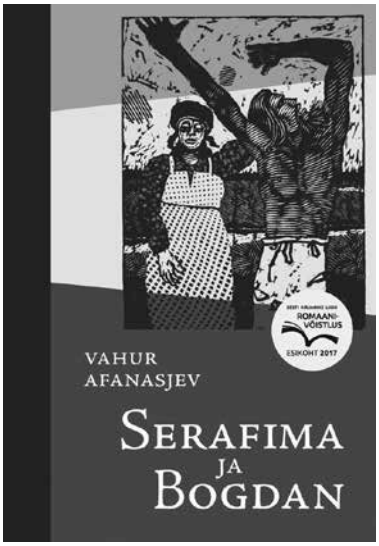
The narrative is non-linear, jumping back and forth in time with every chapter (and occasionally within the chapter itself), and passing events are used as titles. This makes the novel puzzle-like, with the causes behind certain courses of action becoming clear only several pages later. **EA**

VAHUR AFANASJEV

SERAFIMA JA BOGDAN
(SERAFIMA AND BOGDAN)

Tartu, Vemsa, 2017. 560 pp
ISBN 9789949880355

The plot of Vahur Afanasjev's opus magnum unfolds in the fall of 1944, but actually the roots of the story stretch back much further: to the late 17th century, when the first Russian Orthodox believers fleeing the extensive reforms of Patriarch Nikon arrived at the shores of Lake Peipus. An entire chain of "Old Believer'" settlements sprang up along the narrow, close to 50-kilometer-long shore, with its poor soil but waters teeming with fish. It was an isolated microcosm that lived and worked according to its own rules, with relatively little outside disturbance until the end of World War II, when the area fell under Soviet occupation.



VAHUR AFANASJEV · PHOTO BY KARL ERIK PIIRIMEES

Cue the moment at which the story of Serafima and Bogdan commences, one that tells of the decline of Lake Peipus' unique Russian Old Believer culture. Although the title refers to two protagonists, these characters are in no way the book's sole heroes, if they can even be called heroes, that is, because although surviving difficult conditions can sometimes be regarded as heroic, it seems to be more of a curse in the case of the siblings Serafima and Bogdan. Afanasjev has said that his impulse for writing the work came while reading the Norse sagas, which produced the demonic idea of writing about an act of revenge that runs its course over decades; one coddled and fattened over several years and generations in such a way that, by the time the plan is executed, it's no longer clear who is the criminal, who is the victim, who is taking revenge on whom for what, or whether the deed even results in any liberating, cathartic instance that puts an end to the matter. Nevertheless, Afanasjev has managed to neatly balance out the work's grim central theme. No matter whether his tools are humor, sex, or diverting ethnographic details (such as mouthwatering descriptions of heaping feasts of the large array of fish native to the region), the author manages to conjure up a vibrant, tactile world for the reader. In doing so, his language and style are predominately rather old-fashioned, comparable perhaps to Knut Hamsun or even the Old Testament. The result is an equal mitigation of abominable violence and naturalistic descriptions of carnal love lining the pages. It was likely this knack for making the various characters' dissimilar outlooks and experiences complement one another that earned Vahur Afanasjev first place in the Estonian Writers' Union's latest novel competition. **PH**

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU

VALEDE KATALOOG / INGLISE AED

(*CATALOGUE OF LIES / ENGLISH GARDEN*)

Tallinn, Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2017. 392 pp
ISBN 9789949604289

When Tõnu Õnnepalu's 1993 novel *Border State* (*Piiririik*) was published under the pen name Emil Tode, bringing gay sensibility to Estonian mainstream literature, it would have seemed quite a leap that its author would be considered one of Estonia's foremost conservative thinkers a quarter century later. It shows the long way Estonian society has progressed in this short time. So, it only seems right that two of the reoccurring topics of Õnnepalu's works, many of which are reassuringly similar and sparkle in a subdued way, are changing times and reluctance to change.

The first part of Õnnepalu's latest work *Catalogue of Lies / English Garden* (*Valede kataloog / Inglise aed,* 2017), a collection of musings from spring and summer 2017, was seemingly inspired by life in Õnnepalu's home on the island of Hiiumaa, while the second took shape during his three weeks' stay in a village for the super-rich near England's Windsor Castle. In addition to the author's two traditional topics, the book ponders God, love, depression, the roots and future of capitalism, and outdoor work, mostly of a horticultural nature. The latter of these starts with planting season in *Catalogue of Lies*, and ends with the harvesting of cucumbers, potatoes, and tomatoes in the book's afterword, "August".

Catalogue of Lies derives its name from the author's belief that "To live is to lie. Death

ends lies and reveals the truth." Thus, Õnnepalu's intention is to record a catalogue of lies in his life, something akin to "dear faces in a photo album".

While *Catalogue of Lies* focuses mainly on personal issues and on life in Estonia, with world events receding to the background, *English Garden* takes a more global approach. The author's conclusions are grim in both cases. People are tired of liberal capitalism and the establishment has nothing to offer, but neither does the far-right or communism: both can provide only temporary hope, making the inevitable reckoning that much worse.

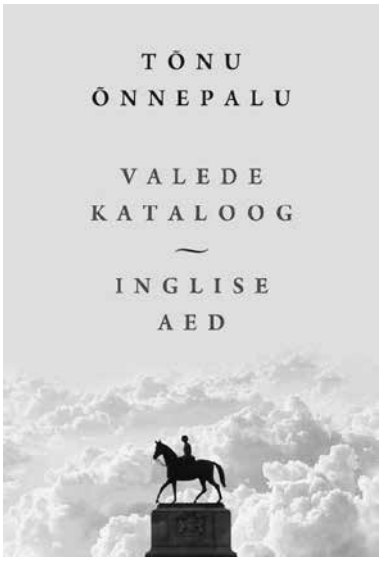
As always, Õnnepalu's sentences are clear, his thoughts poetic and sometimes mischievous. Forbidden love is the only kind of love, in his words, because "unforbidden love is just marriage." "If there really were a government that wanted peace, not war, it should first prohibit all ideas, i.e. everything human." **EA**

CAROLINA PIHELGAS
PIMEDUSE PISIASJAD
(*DETAILS OF DARKNESS*)

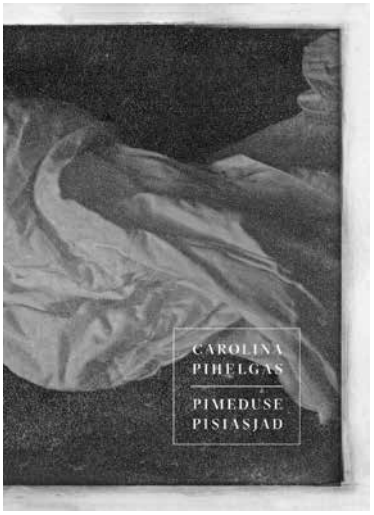
Tartu, Kaksikhammas, 2017. 84 pp
ISBN 9789949999101

Carolina Pihelgas's fifth poetry collection *Details of Darkness* (*Pimeduse pisiasjad*) is, to use the poet's own words: "*Color that bleeds, across borders, unexpectedly*" (p. 74). Her thoughts bleed across the borders of verse (or have been shaped into prose poems) by way of transitions, at the same time as a device or subject developed in one poem continues to seek a way forward in another.

On the one hand, *Details of Darkness*'s lyrical voice is angst-ridden and powerless against the unpredictable whims of inner gloom: "*Night is dark like intestines carefully concealed / by clothes and skin, asking permission for nothing, one can only guess / what it's capable of. How many square meters of darkness / it hides*." (p. 47). A person is defenseless



TÕNU ÕNNEPALU · PHOTO BY ILMAR SAABAS / SCANPIX



CAROLINA PIHELGAS · PHOTO BY RAUNO VOLMAR / SCANPIX

against shards of memory and emotion that may reveal themselves at any moment. On the other hand, the limits of the mundane world are a strain, one in which a person's name, flesh, and identity are a drill that unjustly forces our perpetually changing and flowing being into a mold ("*Is it more important to know name than being?*" p. 24).

The field lines of *Details of Darkness* are clearly rooted in Pihelgas's earlier poetry collections, which possess a clear wish to be liberated of name, memory, and identity, as well as a marveling and awed gaze upon nature. Yet, this wish has swelled into strain in her latest collection, while nature has become more shadowy and even threatening.

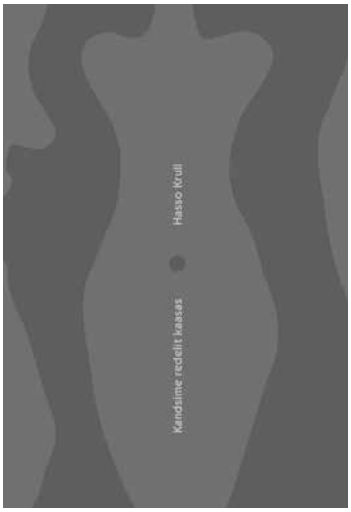
Pihelgas's collection shares traits with Joanna Ellmann's post-apocalyptic poetry in terms of atmosphere and aesthetics. Dominant here is gothic, dusky, and damp nature that slowly but surely consumes the individual: moss envelops the bodies and birds nest in their eye sockets. The setting for almost all of the poems is night, and often a state of insomnia. Pictures of a home environment viewed through a blackish-gray, blurred gaze are used in the book design. At the same time, Pihelgas does not adhere to this style with dogmatic persistence, because it appears more important to capture in emotionally precise words its deeply intimate and dream-like inner world. It's worth noting that Pihelgas's poetry enters into a dialogue with Hasso Krull's latest collection *We Carried the Ladder with Us* (*Kandsime redelit kaasas*) through common devices, although the devices live a completely different life in Krull's poems.

HASSO KRULL

KANDSIME REDELIT KAASAS (WE CARRIED THE LADDER WITH US)

Tartu, Kaksikhammas, 2017. 64 pp
ISBN 9789949880188

Carolina Pihelgas, whose latest work was released and presented together with Hasso Krull's, writes in one of her poems "*You sit*



HASSO KRULL · PHOTO BY CAROLINA PIHELGAS

at a table, switch the fork and knife, and already you rise / up into lofty heights" (p. 30): almost an accompanying line to the latter poet's collection *We Carried the Ladder with Us* (*Kandsime redelit kaasas*). Every one of Krull's poems sets the reader spinning upside down, unusual because of the motivation for the method. Krull doesn't play tricks just for fun and games, nor does he do it to assert a contrary worldview. He proceeds from the conviction that the world's amazing pluralism can reveal itself only to those who flicker incessantly between different viewpoints and don't allow themselves to be misled by the assumption that anything familiar or commonplace can exist in the first place: "*an ordinary night no longer exists / nor will one come / so soon* [...]" Krull writes, quoting the Finnish poet Pentti Saarikoski.

Of course, this requires a rather playful attitude towards the self-observing or self-perceiving position. One might say that, for Krull, positions are like robes in a closet: "*I also / have nothing to wear, and where / did that skin go? The beautiful hide I cast off every night, / and those feathers I hung in the closet / in the morning* [...]" (p. 12). It's interesting that whereas the human skin is depicted as an encapsulating body in Pihelgas's collection, it is, in Krull's poetic world, a delicate and sensitive membrane that relays vibrations: "*Skin is diaphanous like a surface of water. / You touch it once, and the whole body / begins to ripple, set entirely in motion*" (p. 40).

Overall, *We Carried the Ladder with Us* delivers a wealth of corporeality and eroticism to Krull's body of poetry. It appears that the author's abstractions, which in his earlier works often swelled into a surface of folklore and mythology or contemporary intersections, have here adopted personal memories and direct experience as their subject matter. Through this, Krull's poetry has become less hermetic and more readable, without losing its soaring intellectualism. On the contrary: Krull is one of the few contemporary Estonian writers who is able to show what mystical variegation may lie in every ordinary moment if we only sharpen our gazes and senses well enough.

MADLI LIPPUR · PHOTO BY MADE LUIGA

MADLI LIPPUR
JUNE/JULIEN

Tallinn, Tänapäev, 2016. 328 pp
ISBN 9789949850280

Madli Lippur's highly praised debut *June/Julien* is a novel about a clearly unorthodox love story: the protagonist is 12 and the man 37 when the events commence. What's more, they are half-siblings who haven't seen each other for twelve years, as the man has been raising his own family abroad. It should be obvious from the start that all cannot end well. Or can it?

June/Julien won the publishing house Tänapäev's 2016 novel competition, and was later awarded the 2017 Betti Alver Award for best debut novel. Lippur took two of the last remaining taboos, pedophilia and incest, and turned them into a tender love story told in clear, simple language. In doing so, she created two very distinct and credible voices: one of a precocious adolescent girl, and the other of a man nearing middle age.

Even if the lovers were conventional, the novel itself would still be quite atypical for Estonian literature, which has very few pure love stories of note, let alone such passionate ones. It's also relatively uncommon for a piece of Estonian literature to have almost no association with Estonia or Estonians, the only connection being a piece by the composer Lepo Sumera that the protagonists hear at a concert. The characters are mainly French, and most of the story unfolds in Bayeux (the famous tapestry is basically a no-show, mentioned only once in a derogatory swipe at tourists).

Lastly, the novel primarily consists of purportedly handwritten love letters. Since the author once mentioned in an interview that she prefers to write with pen and paper, this comes as no surprise.

In the end, what we have is a story about the greatest love of all; almost a modern fairy tale, but obviously one intended for adults. Fairy tales were originally bloody and perverted, and this makes them all the more beautiful. **EA**

JAN KAUS
KOMPASS. MINIATUURROMAAN (*COMPASS. A SHORT PROSE NOVEL*)

Tallinn, Hea Lugu, 2017. 111 pp
ISBN 9789949589647

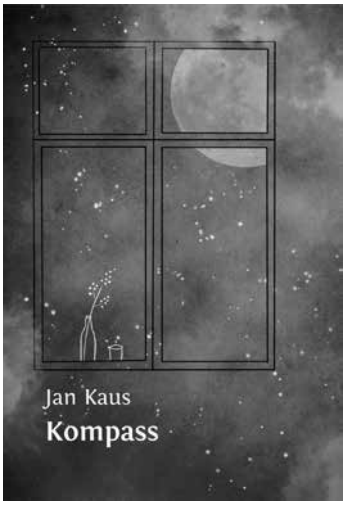
Although Jan Kaus has penned several strong novels (not to mention poetry), his true love appears to lie in the genre of short prose. *Compass*'s subtitle (or classification) is "a short-prose novel", and on the back cover one can read that it is "the author's first attempt to combine the novel's and short prose's modes of expression; to tell a story in prose poetry."

This isn't the first time Kaus has written in a style that combines the narration and descriptiveness of prose with the density of poetry: his prose-poetry collections *Miniatures* (*Miniatuurid*) and *Map of Tallinn* (*Tallinna kaart*) were published in 2009 and 2014, respectively.

Just as in *Map of Tallinn*, the Estonian capital's streets, squares, parks, and buildings are prominent in *Compass*: their descriptions are almost topographically exact. At the same time, this newest work additionally features multiple continuous characters and plot lines. Everything is minimalist, but taken as a whole, the short, striking pieces (primarily consisting of just a few lines) form a chain in which one polished, stylistically pure pearl of storytelling comes after another, ultimately forming a single story: a short-prose novel.

In any case, it feels like Kaus has achieved something with *Compass*. The book is not merely a collection of short prose pieces, nor is it simply a short novel. And to say the work is a poem or a prose poem would likewise be underrating its worth. It is a hybrid genre that operates on several planes, containing the density and tension of poetry, the continuity of a narrative, and also a moral and philosophical dimension. All in all, it is a story about a failed romance and the ensuing, burgeoning chaos in a person's life.

Doubtless every reader is personally aware of how frail, vulnerable, and disturbingly self-centered such a mental state can make a person; of how thoughts can spin in endless circles, constantly seeking guilt and the guilty party, redemption and freedom, and how instead of finding these things, life can careen into an ever-worsening dead-end from which it can be extremely hard to



JAN KAUS · PHOTO BY EVE SEPP

TRIIN SOOMETS · PHOTO BY KAIRIT LEIBOLD

emerge on one's own. Kaus conveys these emotions with alarming exactness, all while maintaining a sense of sympathy. The result is something that, for lack of a better word, might be called a song. All the same, it is a psychologically convincing song. Maybe there really is no better way to describe this type of writing than with Kaus' own preferred term: "prose poetry". **PH**

TRIIN SOOMETS

VABA RAHA
(*FREE MONEY*)

Tallinn, Nynorden 2017. 64 pp
ISBN 9789949960071

Triin Soomets is known foremost as an author of scathing and concentrated poetry. The key of her new collection *Free Money* (*Vaba raha*) could be called "mild revolt", because the sharpness in both the poetry itself and in the collection's design are levelled out by the author's occasional philosophical ambivalence and her continued oblique (social-)critique. Nevertheless, readers must remain cautious, as the inner strength of Soomets's words is not immediately obvious.

Judging by the book's title and design, one might suspect that it is a social critique aimed at money. The covers depict the inner and outer sides of bank security envelopes. Its pages feature various shapes (such as birds) cut out of the same envelope's gray inner pattern, as well as out of magnetic swipe cards. Even though a fair number of references to money are found in the poems themselves (what else is there to do / gather fame / or money / in the wasteland of the universe / everything can be bought and sold (p. 36)), they do not dominate. The poems in *Free Money* are more closely tied to a kind of startled openness in terms of a temporal and social context. Soomets handles weighty concepts, such as truth, humanity, and love, without hesitation or playing hide-and-seek, although she does so in a language that conspicuously references the world of buying and selling. Her slim, specific poetic form, dense in rhyme and rhythm, helps to tame these heavy subjects, as do her playful puns based upon linguistic associations and contrasts, causing her writing to greatly resemble that of the classic Estonian poet Artur Alliksaar. Even so, her wordplay is not as self-forgetting

or self-pleasing, but sufficiently concerned and critical. Thus, for example, the reader encounters meta-poetic self-annulment and overall questioning of the nature of wording: "You can talk about it at length, let it take shape / in the rhythm and sound of words, of sentences, let it / surface over time / in tone and measured pauses, / [...] / it's still there, still the same, you / don't say, don't touch, don't share it anymore" (p. 19), or "I've sold / my feelings / asked a fair price / for every line" (p. 30). This is not the poet's boasting jab, but a calm and severe question about the values that shine through our acts. **MHM**

ANDREI IVANOV
BATÜSKAAF
(*BATHYSCAPHE*)

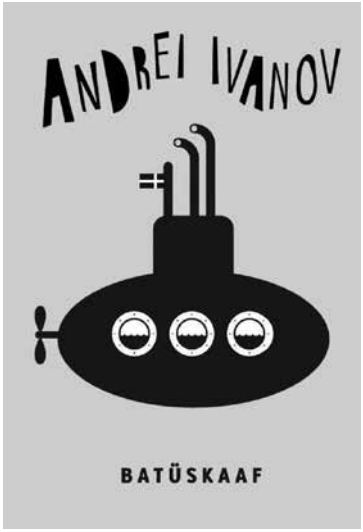
Tallinn, Tänapäev, 2017. 335 pp.
ISBN 9789949851713

Andrei Ivanov's world cannot simply be read – it must be lived.

The author lives it himself. *Bathyscaphe*, which is a prequel to Ivanov's acclaimed Scandinavian trilogy, is a vivid example of his life-centric aesthetic principles, with their endless gaze into the dark corners of Europe, all based on the author's own experiences. It is an autopsychographical approach, to use Pessoa's term.

Ivanov is a European writer above all. He doesn't identify as an Estonian or a Russian, even though he lives in Estonia and writes in Russian. Having been legally stateless for decades, Ivanov maintains a very critical approach towards the absurdity of flawed integration policies. His works are clearly borne by the spirit of the European novel: Dostoyevsky-like desperation mingles with the uncompromising nature of Céline, traversed by an undercurrent of Cervantes. In terms of living Estonian authors, perhaps only Maarja Kangro writes as powerfully today; the closest literary link in the Russian Federation might be Marusya Klimova.

Ivanov's characters are typically people whose decay in the urban alleyways of the West is more readily ignored by the mainstream: asylum seekers, former construction workers, and car mechanics, who become smugglers and drug dealers. Human traffickers and prostitutes, small-time document forgers and professional con artists, with a sprinkling of humanitarian



ANDREI IVANOV · PHOTO BY MIHKEL MARIPUU / SCANPIX

intellectuals and promising engineers. They hail from forgotten backwater villages in Eastern Europe and somewhere in the dark corners of Africa and Asia, all seeking a life worth living and struggling to survive in any way they can meanwhile.

Bathyscaphe is set in Denmark in the 1990s: dark, low-hanging clouds and gusting winds, barren strips of peninsula and tiny islands where people are shuffled from one refugee camp to the next, scraping to make ends meet between government support payments, and anxiously awaiting replies to asylum applications. In the best-case scenario, they might come across a mindless odd job offered by someone's uncle or the friend of a friend. They travel from Copenhagen to Frederikshavn in search of a chemical fix to ease their strain, irrespective of the substances or the means. It is an attestation to contemporary Europe's schizophrenic spirit: universal homelessness is not only a reality, but an endeavor.

Ivanov's works constitute an incredibly feverish whole. They are suspended somewhere in the heights between hallucinations and everyday delirium: a journey into the dark abysses of consciousness and the unconscious, the shadows of which echo back every person's failures. The author's storyteller's gaze is prophetically intense: with his soft irony and agile use of language, he is a true stylistic master.

Bathyscaphe is a wonderful door into the world of Ivanov's writing. All of the author's distinguishing characteristics are in full supply: his glowing, tragicomic core, and its sensuous sense of presence. **OB**

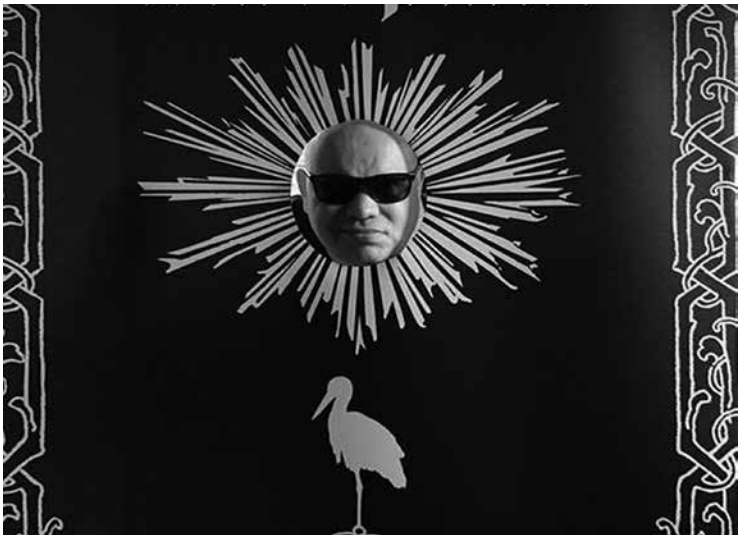
FRIEDRICH REINHOLD KREUTZMATSIN (PAAVO MATSIN)

MUST PÄIKE
(*THE BLACK SUN*)

Viljandi, Lepp ja Nagel. 2017. 192 pp
EAN 9789789949885

Paavo Matsin's latest novel is set in the small Southern Estonian town of Võru in the mid-19th century. Its cast of characters includes Fr. R. Kreutzwald, the beloved author of the Estonian national epic, known to Estonians as their "Song Father"; his friend, the Baltic-German doctor and humorist Georg-Julius von Schultz-Bertram; and also the Swedish Queen Christina, who in reality lived long before the two aforementioned men. Furthermore, some of Matsin's writing is in a bizarre "Jamaican-Estonian" fusion. Why? To liven up the reading experience, no doubt. Without giving away too much of *The Black Sun*'s content, I can confidently state that out of all the author's books, this is the most reader-friendly and narrative-centric; still, he employs a large array of cryptic and alchemic symbols that may confuse someone unfamiliar with his previous works. Why is the Russian poet Pushkin's great-grandfather Abram Petrovich Hannibal represented as a black stork? Why is it necessary to perform a sex change on Queen Christina, and why must the town of Võru be heated to tropical temperatures to do so? And what on Earth is this Jamaican slang all about?

I don't know the answers, but neither is knowing necessary. Matsin himself makes no secret of the fact that *The Black Sun* is meant to be an associative novel that the reader can simply enjoy for its kaleidoscope of symbols, its allegorical nature, and pure absurdity. Moreover, Matsin possesses a



PAAVO MATSIN · ARCHIVE PHOTO

special ability to wrap the reader around his little finger. He scatters little signs and remarks almost in passing, mentions the possibility of some lesser topics, details characters' backstories in a handful of words, and before the reader even knows it, he is in the author's clutches, awaiting great revelations, exciting turns of events, and earth-shaking truths. Yes, these elements do come, and in that sense, Matsin is no con artist pranking the reader. But it's the same here as it is with all of the profuse symbolism and semantics: the reader can either get bogged down in them or take them as a pleasant garnish. These are the elements that steep *The Black Sun* and Matsin's other books in a magical atmosphere that one should refrain from sinking into too deeply, for even in the shadows of all that gold and tinsel, the author has a message to convey. The art is simply to find it. **PH**

OLIVER BERG (1990) graduated from the University of Tartu in literary studies. He has contributed literary reviews, short stories, and poetry to several Estonian magazines. His debut novel *Brother's Love* (*"Venna arm"*) was published in 2017 and was nominated for the Betti Alver Award for Best Debut.

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Estonian culture and literature

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WELCOME TO ESTONIAN EVENTS

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What is it that keeps the soul awake?

What is it that binds one to life?

Feasts for four walls, four eyes.

High tension captured in bare palms.

DORIS KAREVA
TRANSLATED BY ADAM CULLEN

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