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A perfect day

by Veronika Kivisilla

A perfect day naturally begins early in the morning. That is my time! I hope I never learn to sleep in! I'd never exchange the promising silence of early mornings for anything else. In winter, I light a fire; on warmer days, I take a stroll around the yard or occasionally, if I've time aplenty, go on a longer walk through the neighborhood.

My mind is sharp, but I don't get right down to work. It's nice to quietly watch the world as it gradually rouses from slumber. Every little movement and sound is meaningful; it speaks worlds. When traveling, I like to observe the way an unfamiliar city wakes up, especially when I haven't any urgent, high-priority obligations planned for the morning, giving me a chance to wander the streets and imagine what kinds of lives are lived by the passersby hurrying past and what they might be up to now. I simply drift aimlessly, maybe getting a little lost as I do (a wonderful thing!), and without any advance knowledge put my faith in serendipity for the café I enter randomly upon that early morning to be COZY and JUST RIGHT.

A perfect day certainly holds a wealth of all kinds of daydreams. Presently, I'm dreaming of the bookshelves that should be wrapped up and delivered to my new home any day now. All I can envision is arranging my books on the shelves and being awash with blissful satisfaction.

Books. All those that are unfinished, and those I plan to read. I'm often partway through several at once unless one has seized me completely. Which does happen. Often. And then there are a few vital books, ones tied to a certain sense of security and well-being, that I must always have on hand. Last summer, temperatures in Estonia were scorching for a long while. For me, it was quite unbearable – I didn't scuttle straight out into the blazing sun and the enervating heat. Instead, I spent my days indoors behind closed curtains, reading for hours on end with a cooling beverage in reach.

The rhythm of my work and personal life can be characterized like this: there are spurts, and then there is idling. Times of idling are necessary in order to frenetically create something in a flash. My writing can also be described and characterized in this way. Over a very long time, I've managed to nearly rid myself of all the Protestant guilt that scolds you for simply being idle; that says one should always be doing something

VERONIKA KIVISILLA · PHOTO BY VILLE KIVISILLA

'useful', ever productive and 'shooting from the hip'.

I love to sit in a garden or a park. And obviously by the sea, if possible. I love to let my mind wander. Observing the tiniest of phenomena and putting them into words is a fantastic activity and exercise. I often set tasks for myself and attempt to phrase a situation, a feeling, or a phenomenon. Something from the micro- and the macro-worlds.

It's especially enchanting to do nothing while everyone else is doing so much around you, even if it's just growing up so plainly!

Sitting in the yard and becoming one with the day, and afterwards writing something such as this:

Sitting in the yard and becoming one with the day.

Becoming one and being that day.

Removing your glasses, closing your eyes. Drifting off for a moment. Still seeing and hearing all.

Being the cloudless sky.

Being the juices of all the trees and the honey and tears of sap.

And especially the cherry tree in her hope of new fruits.

And the bee, like a flying vessel of nectar.

And the robin whose nest is so snug and ready.

To be the mild western breeze meandering over the terrains that have grown too hot or cold because of me – and nearly lifeless.

To be, now, that alleviation and life's return.

And for you, my love, to be that unexpected, refreshing gust just as you pause wearily to wipe sweat from your brow and wonder: where on earth did this gentle relief come from so suddenly?

Actually, I first wrote that poem in Norwegian and only later in my native Estonian. I began studying Norwegian early this year and if I only had the time, I'd dig deeper and deeper into it. A new language! The thrill of being capable of expressing something in a new tongue so soon.

It's an uplifting sense of success and of being completely, helplessly hobbled, all at the same time.

So right now, I feel that one component of a nice, perfect day would definitely be having time to work on my Norwegian, even if just a smidgen: to read, try to put something down on paper, or sing a Norwegian song.

A day wouldn't be perfect (or even a little bit good, for that matter) without singing and music. I sing every day, at every opportunity, and almost everywhere. I can't imagine a day without singing. It's my form of exercise, in a sense – something with which I keep myself in shape; which I allow to pass through my whole being; with which I heal myself. It is the key to different cultures and languages.

Music, my daily rescue. I've mused before about how it's one of the assets that is

always with me and will always endure – it organizes and assembles my molecules even in the most catastrophic of times. As I write this, 16th century Venetian lute music is playing in the background.

It's important to remove yourself from your usual trajectory. By that, I don't mean one should always push further and accomplish something unusual or extraordinary. A slight Renaissance-like diversion enlivens even the most routine day imaginable. By Renaissance, I mean openness. Looking at someone for longer than a glance, immersing in an unexpected conversation, peering into an unanticipated nook, taking a moment to observe what's behind you in order to better see what lies ahead.

I've been spending a lot of time in Helsinki lately, where there are new paths and places to discover. An out-of-the-everyday environment is always refreshing, as are my long strolls through the city and the invigorating dips in the sea on Seurasaari.

However, there are still many more components to perfection! I won't even begin to write about food and drink – topics that would take at least two pieces just as long as this.

Lastly, being with my children. Listening to their stories, playing word-games, being affectionate, being silly, our own little inside jokes and joys.

I feel exceptionally satisfied on the days I'm able to write a longer letter. One to someone who READS.

Since most of the little writing I do is done on, and about, days just like these, a literary day needn't be anything special to be a perfect day for writing. Come to think of it – all that put together *is* incredibly special, after all.

VERONIKA KIVISILLA is a storyteller and bard, who made her poetry debut in 2011 with the collection *Dear Calendar*. She is the kind of poetess who believes that today, literature must be brought to the reader and the author must read their words aloud. In 2018 Kivisilla made her prose debut, and 2019 will bring two new poetry collections by her.

5+5

A conversation between writers Viivi Luik and Tõnu Õnnepalu

V: Have you felt great reverence at least once in your life?

T: I have no idea what *great* reverence is. Whenever anyone talks about the great emotions and events they have encountered, I think with regret and even a hint of jealousy that *I've* never had anything like that. Those never happen to me! Only others have them, if they can be believed. Though I don't always believe them, either. That is, I believe such things have happened, but I don't believe the truth is told about them. People lie and conceal. Oftentimes, their stories must be flipped the opposite way around – then, you have the truth. In short, I don't know whether it's been great, but I suppose I understand what you mean. Yes, I have. And the reverence, if I can try to recall now, has been more towards little things than big ones. Or when little things suddenly become big. They converge, form a pattern, and I can suddenly see that everything truly is connected – I can even seem to sense how, although that "how" is like a water ripple that instantly disappears. Then, it's back to not knowing. I can remember that I almost seemed to know, and that's what matters. It helps you keep on living, that memory – let us say that memory of great reverence. Or, rather, the memory of before what, or in regard to what, that reverence occurred. Even the words "before" and "in regard to" are wrong, because it forms both within and without you simultaneously, and you yourself are always within the thing, not outside of it. Perhaps there are people who are always like that; who know it perpetually. The moments I *know* are only fleeting and I am grateful for them as well, though they naturally can't be summoned. They come out of the blue and often happen in entirely everyday situations. They do occasionally occur in holy moments as well, such as in that tiny Syrian church on the Street of the Carmelites (*Rue des Carmes*) in Paris, listening to Bach cello sonatas that I've heard hundreds of times before, the sweltering evening and the fact that my time in that city was coming to an end – in short, I don't know what happened there, but *something* happened to me. Even so, my ability to remember it so vividly is solely and purely due to the fact that I wrote about it in a book (*Paris: Twenty-Five Years Later*). And yet, I'm unsure of whether I really do remember the "thing" itself (it nearly seems so!) or merely what I wrote.

VIIVI LUIK AND TÕNU ÕNNEPALU · PHOTO BY LY LESTBERG

V: Are trees friends?

T: Trees aren't friends, but they are my comrades. Trees are too different a species living in too different a world to be friends to us, or we to them. Trees' blood is green, ours is red. Trees do not die like humans or animals do. What I mean by that is a tree will one day no longer exist – there will be a stump, and then not even that – but even so, it's something different. Often, several new trees sprout from that stump, which is, in essence, still the very same tree. Trees are older than we are. And more important. And more patient. True, human lives primarily unfold at a distance from trees these days, because most people live in cities. But actually, in cities, especially during a hot summer, man has no comrade more loyal than the poor trees that are planted in the asphalt and spread their leaves regardless, providing shade. Not to mention the trees in parks. People flee to their refuge; people can breathe there. We would not exist without trees, whereas we make no great difference to the trees themselves. I had a dream once that I could remember later (well, I wrote it down again, of course). I was dying and didn't really care – it was neither a good nor bad thing – but suddenly, I remembered that meant I wouldn't see the trees grow anymore. That knowledge disappointed me. So, I didn't die. Everywhere you go, there's that familiar tree you can visit. You can't say "that" anymore, even though I'm not particularly fond of the new trend of using "whom" and humanizing plants. I do understand the good intentions behind it, but in my opinion, it is a forceful invasion into a world to which I do not belong. Yet, it is a world at the mercy of which we exist. By that, I mean the world of plants in general, of which trees are merely the largest and the truest to us.

V: Are Europe's current problems tied to the denial of Christ?

T: Ah! The sneakiest, yet seemingly simple-minded and most obtuse question of all! As if I could know the answer. Or anyone, for that matter. I don't know, but I reckon that yes, definitely. European history as a whole, and by that I mean Europe as *Europe*, which can be recognized from about the time when Europe was already Christian, is not only *tied* to the denial of Christ, but is a direct outcome of it. History! Europe. Jesus said to Pilate: My kingdom is not of this world. However, Europe, states, politics, journalism, universities, the internet, books – all are of this world. History is of this world. The sacred itself has no history; it is always the same. But there does exist the history of how people have understood the sacred, which is to say how they have misunderstood it in one way or another. The denial of Christ began on the very same day (as we all know!) that Jesus was judged by Pilate; or more precisely, it began shortly before – during the previous night. For then, as we've read, the cock crowed, Peter stepped aside, and he wept bitter tears. The history of Christ is the history of the denial of Christ from the very moment it occurred. After that, Peter went to Rome seeking repentance and death. He found the latter, in any case. You, Viivi, have shown me the Appian Way and other old beautiful and frightful sites within that old beautiful and frightful city.

V: Does every individual possess their own exclusive way of living that shows anything is always possible, even in impossible circumstances? Or that nothing is possible, even in the most advantageous conditions?

T: Yes, yes, and yes! You may have known that since childhood, Viivi, because it seems like you were very conscious of yourself and your path. Though come to think of it, I did as well. I only strayed into doubt in the interim, as it all seemed too strange. People were living so differently and appreciated

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU . PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER

such different things than I did. Now, I've come to understand that none of it matters in the very least. Firstly, as I've already said, it's not worth believing what others say about their own lives. They secretly live in other ways and for other things. However, they're not in the habit of discussing these things, and thus, I believe, many are confused. If books and literature are capable of doing anything, then it's encouraging people to live the life that is theirs – that one exclusive, unusual life. Of telling them not to worry. Everything is strange, everyone is strange. I certainly believe that if

people seek anything from books, then it is that courage. As well as from art more broadly. Music, however, perhaps speaks of it in such an abstract language that it's hard to translate into everyday life – music seems to occupy too central a place among the sacred. The written word has one foot in the earthly kingdom and the other in the kingdom of heaven; of dreams; of oddity. But I don't know – people don't read books anymore. I mean they *do*, of course, but it's a perceptibly declining phenomenon. Perhaps Europe's troubles are tied to that? Not only Europe, of course, because there *are* no solely European troubles. Today, all troubles are global and it's been long since Europe has been the center of any world. You can only still think of it that way here in Europe. While in Canada writing *Acre* last fall, I suddenly realized how distant and unimportant Europe is. There, in North America. And yet, America is still somehow European in our fantasies. It's not, though. Which is to say it *is* somehow, of course, but observed from that vantage point, Europe is a tiny place somewhere far away. A place where people go to see old buildings and churches. Where and in what country those things are located, exactly – who can later even remember?... But I was talking about books.

V: Is everyone who inhabits their own era an accessory to whatever occurs?

T: It certainly seems more and more so to me. Or it always has, rather. We cannot escape our era. We ourselves *are* that era. We and nothing else. Which, of course, doesn't mean one must remain silent. You *can* remain silent, naturally, which is certainly more fitting than speaking out on occasion, especially if you don't know what you're talking about. People talk an awful lot. Everyone is talking, but who *knows* anymore? Everyone is divided into camps: you have to either be for or against something, there's no third option. And then, you compete. The other side inherently seems foolish, blinded, duped. You simply have to *make it clear* to them! Then, they'll understand. But they never do. You can't make anything clear to someone by arguing with them. They can only realize. One must be endlessly patient with others. You must go along with them and try to understand the individual, not encouraging their follies but instructing them – it's a delicate art. Patience and love. Fools are right sometimes, too... In short, I believe that one must first of all acknowledge the basic fact: I myself am also an accessory to all of this. To everything. To the forests being cut down, for instance. It's so nice to oppose it. But how will that help if we carry on living the way we live, even if we believe our own lifestyle is frugal and ecologically friendly? Oh, how hypocritical it all is! We would, of course, like it if everything we consumed (although we consume ever more as a society, a city, and a state without noticing it and not so much as individuals – what do *I* really consume, right? A little food and some second-hand clothes...) came from somewhere else. From the Moon. But it won't. We're destroying this world and there's no way out of it, unfortunately. Even so, this doesn't mean that truth and justice should be denied; that they shouldn't be discussed, shouldn't be written about. But you can't do so directly. Things only go wrong if you do. That's why we have literature, as much as there remains. Literature is an opportunity to speak out about the most crucial issues in a way that the reader doesn't immediately figure out someone is trying to make something clear to them again...

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T: You titled one of your essay collections *Ma olen raamat* (I Am a Book). I can surmise what you meant by it, but perhaps I'm wrong. I'd very much like to hear it from you. Is it that a writer's life ultimately turns into a book and in the end, they somehow become one, too? At the same time, a writer doesn't. The person stays the same, do they not?

V: Let's put it this way: if a person happens to be a writer, then their flesh is solely in service of a book. No matter what that writer does, sees, hears, thinks, or feels, it inevitably turns into a book. So, metaphorically: hands and feet, eyes and ears, bones and limbs, blood and marrow, liver and lung – all the tools without which a human could not physically exist are simultaneously their tools for transforming into a book, no matter how antithetical it may seem. That, which seems "lowbrow" is a part of what is "lofty", and vice-versa. I always keep one thought I once had handy: where there are roses, there must have been manure once. Where there is a book, there must have been a person. Manure and people are, in and of themselves, soil from which something entirely different can sprout. It is the transformation of the impossible into the possible; it is a miracle. It is what constantly transpires in full view of everyone, but without anyone ever marveling at it.

You, yourself, have stated that an artist is "an agent of that world in this one, and of this world when in that." I've commented on the same idea with a certain sense of mockery by saying an artist is a kind of front-line correspondent who goes from the Eastern Front to the Western Front and back again. That is why I've also been thrilled by Curzio Malaparte's war stories and his "Cricket in Poland", which is like a graphic illustration of the nature of espionage and being an agent. Writers (or artists overall) have one more quality that you've summed up nicely in the following words:

"An artist should have friends among communists and bankers alike. Of course, it's not very good if the communist knows you're leaving him to visit the banker, or vice versa. Better they not know."

Look at that – you phrased something I'd always thought but had been unable to put into words. So, a writer is someone who translates into the human tongue what other people similarly think and feel but are unable to linguistically express. For the most part, everyone can see but is unaware that they do. Only when someone puts it into words is that which was seen revealed.

All writing, all books that touch or move us in any way, only touch and move us once we encounter our own thoughts, gaze, and secrets within them. We recognize our communion with others through this, as what we deem to be our own secret is actually humankind's secret in general. Our communion with others encourages us to be ourselves and to live in the way that we alone can live – only through this are we capable of imparting the courage of living to others as well. So long as people need and know that communion, the human world will persevere. When that communion is neither known nor needed, then humans will no longer have a place in the world. It's possible that a new world and a new human will then emerge, completely different from

how we envision the future now. It's possible that the new has indeed forgotten the old. It's possible that ancient man will spiral back around to us again!

T: Please speak about your trees. You've certainly had them before and have them now.

V: I'd love to have a big linden, but it's not counted among my trees at the moment. I haven't a single familiar linden of my very own. But I do truly adore them – their scent and the way they stand so quietly, and the way they're constructed. Their architecture. You can see it in winter when they are bare.

I had a young, impenetrable fir in my childhood. It was a little taller than ten-year-old me and grew in the middle of a clearing. Beneath it, I buried a candy tin containing three words written in blood: "I'll get away!" The magic was supposed to have a greater effect if it was in blood. I had to prick the tip of my index finger, dip the pencil in the blood, and then write quickly (or else the blood would run out). That rusted tin is certainly there beneath the fir's roots to this very day.

I have another fir. It's bigger than you'd ever believe a fir could grow. It's in an alpine forest outside Luzern, Switzerland. I spent three months on a grant in the little town of Willisau and would take long walks through the wintery pine forests. That fir gave me courage. I would go to visit it on dark winter evenings, and through its branches I could see a starry sky more majestic than I'd ever seen before. Every now and then, I think about that tree and hope it's doing well.

There is a scraggly, slanting pine in the woods along the shoreline in Rälby, on the island of Vormsi. For years, I'd always lean my bike against it while I read and swam at the beach. I often think of it, too.

And then there is the tall red beech growing in the courtyard outside the Literaturhaus-Café in Berlin. Between glances up at that tree, I've read through several books that have moved me and have heard strange stories told to me by a woman named Getrlinde. That beech is standing there to this day. I go to see it whenever I'm in Berlin, and it's as if Gerlinde's stories have been written into it.

Then, there are all the beech woods when their leaves have just unfurled and the sunlight shines through those young leaves. It resembles a hand held up to the light. Blood-glow, just in green.

T: I know that even as a child, Rome was a place you knew you would one day visit. What did you find out there? About yourself, I mean, or about mankind. Is there any other place on Earth you know you'd still like to visit one day?

V: Oddly enough, it was in Rome that I realized this world that we think is changing at an incredible rate of speed actually changes differently than we think. And when it does change, it's in a way we'd never believe right now. While people in urban centers are going back and forth about artificial intelligence, an ancient poet or Jesus Christ himself might show up in some previously unknown backwater town outside the metropolises and change the world. And what will happen then! Rome implanted the idea. The thought might not have come from anywhere else. If anywhere, then perhaps in New York.

VIIVI LUIK · PHOTO BY PIA RUBER

I found out something about myself that I'd never have believed before: that Rome, in all its awfulness and all its beauty, is my home city. Knowing that has some connection to the human secret overall.

I've been to all of the places I knew I would get to someday – to Berlin and Paris and Zurich and Rome. Zurich was even on my mind as a child, somehow, and it later turned out this wasn't without reason, as my faithful friend Heinz Stadler resides in Switzerland. I haven't traveled to the Middle East or North Africa yet, nor to Jerusalem, Damascus or Cairo, though I've constantly looked them up on a map with eyes aflame my whole life. You can't get to such places without life taking you there, just as it's taken me elsewhere. If it won't, then it won't.

T: What are your thoughts on the future of books? Books have been something incredibly important in both your life and mine. They have shaped us, and I can certainly say that your works are among the ones that have shaped me. Are we in the twilight of the Book Age?

V: The demise of books has been proclaimed many times, but they haven't disappeared yet. They even survived the furor around e-books – even in Estonia, not to mention Germany. Books won't disappear as a result of the onslaught of technological gadgets, but only with the disappearance of humans, whose own souls and secrets intrigue and torment. Whether the format is paper or e-book makes no difference if it lacks the human secret or knowledge passed from one person to another. When we speak of the demise of books, then we're actually speaking of the demise of spirit. If we do live in the twilight, then there is hope that the dawn will soon come.

T: What is the reason you write?

V: Because I can say in words that which is impossible to speak. I've spoken before about how, at the age of ten, I longed to express the utter loneliness of a little brown reed – a little brown reed that everyone has seen in every dusky winter twilight, but that no one notices and is of no use. I was unable to express it and have brimmed with it so fully that everything I've ever written since is solely for that one little reed.

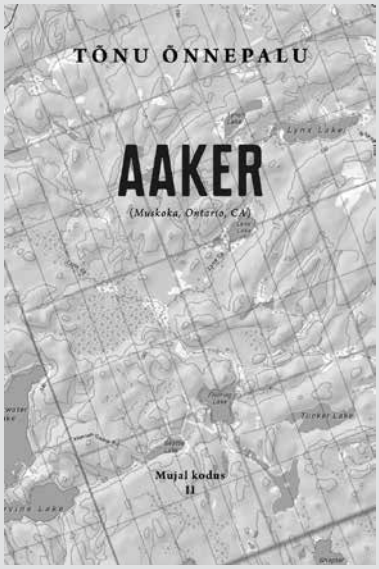
VIIVI LUIK is one of the most treasured writers of contemporary Estonian literature. She has addressed readers from the depths of history, language and culture for decades, through both poetry and prose. Her novels Seitsmes rahukevad (*The Seventh Spring of Peace*) and Ajaloo ilu (*The Beauty of History*) have been published in a number of languages.

Find out more about the authors at: www.estlit.ee

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU is one of the most interesting and internationally known authors of Estonian prose. His literary breakthrough came with the novel Piiririik (*Border State*) in 1993, under the pseudonym Emil Tode. This novel enjoyed explosive success internationally and became the most translated Estonian book of the 1990s. Since then, Õnnepalu has kept enchanting literary audiences with every new book.

Acre

(Muskoka, Ontario, CA)
At Home Elsewhere
Vol. II
by Tõnu Õnnepalu
Excerpt translated by Adam Cullen



Acre *by Tõnu Õnnepalu.*
EKSA, 2019

I realized I was very far from home on the very first morning there, in a suburb of Toronto, when I woke up (which had happened several times already because my internal clock read midday) and heard the birds singing outside. Why they should sing in August, I didn't know, but they were. The birdsong was familiar and yet, it was entirely foreign. As if familiar birds weren't singing right. As if they'd suffered some kind of a stroke and had forgotten how to sing. Or had studied under the wrong masters. Or had studied under some kind of bizarre masters—the type who want to do everything differently, to pursue something *new*. Modernists of some sort. For the birds were singing backwards—that was the first word that came to mind when I heard them. I've grown a little used to it by now. It no longer shocks me, and neither do they really sing much anymore. Now, it's mainly the chittering of red squirrels coming from the forest. At first, I couldn't even figure out whether it was a bird or a beast making the noise. These American red squirrels are chipper little animals. The first time I saw them scurrying after one another, I thought they were babies. Mini-squirrels. Then, there are the darling tiny chipmunks that are like stuffed animals forgotten in

the woods and come to life. Riina mentioned that she's spotted a flying squirrel a few times here, too (which the expatriate Estonians curiously call *lendavad oravad* instead of simply *lendoravad*), and even fed it from the palm of her hand. Riina spent her childhood summers here by the lakes but now lives far away in Tallinn. Tallinn lies at an immeasurable distance from this place, at any rate. In another world.

The one bird in Canada's forests (leaving waterbirds aside) that is the same from here to Iceland—and even to England, Hiiumaa, Moscow, and Irkutsk—is the raven. A pan-boreal species. Its cries echo across the belt of northern forests and tundra circling the entire globe. To the Indians, at least to a few (those in the forest, of course), it was a mythical bird, creator of the world.

Yet on the whole, America is *wrong*. You feel it here with every step and all the time. I'm amazed that visitors to America never mention it. They talk as if what's here is almost something ordinary, even something *European*. But it's not. Not in the very least. Of course, you do encounter European-style people who speak nearly the same language, and the British Queen is the country's formal ruler. The Bible is read in churches and Shakespeare is played in theaters. But it's all false. Just as false and misplaced as expatriate Estonian folk dance and the way they recite the poems of Juhan Liiv. Sincere, absolutely sincere, sincere and cute, but inevitably false. Out of place. America as a whole is set in the wrong place. Modern America, I mean. I know nothing about the ancient America of the Indians. That one was certainly different. Yet this new one—it's still unsettled, to tell the truth. It's settled only temporarily. Not settled but *colonized*. Huge, ugly cities; huge, ugly highways and the malls that line them – it's all incidental, shapeless (for all its angularity), aimless. It all *exists* for some reason, but why, I do not understand. That remains elusive.

I've always been amazed by the dirtiness and disorder of America. Everything is a little grimy and broken-down. That is why Americans are so fond of disinfecting, sterilizing, preserving, heat- and chemical processing, washing the clothes on their backs every single day, and bathing themselves multiple times per day. Because everything is dirty. They are afraid of the land they inhabit. It soils them. They are temporary occupants here and there's not the slightest hope that the land will become their own anytime in the foreseeable future. One comes across this type of penchant for cleanliness in the Third World; in India. I once watched as a man there furiously scrubbed his head with frothy shampoo in a stream of wastewater (in a reeking stream of genuine sewage!). His head had to be washed *clean*, just as Indians' white clothes must be clean as they walk through the unimaginable filth and disarray of their cities. Pretending as if it doesn't concern them. America has something similar, though it doesn't come from poverty. Nevertheless, America oddly comes across as a very poor land. The air-conditioned skyscrapers towering above the cities and the endless rivers of monstrous vehicles on the highways (identically pumped full of air-conditioned air) are a denial, a rejection of this primary poverty. 'Moneymaking' is an obsession of the poor—of the poor who already possess a fortune and *still* cannot stop; for whom stopping is made that much more impossible because as soon as they're no longer accruing massive wealth, their poorness will immediately show. Pills are

one of Americans' greatest loves. Money is also a pill that must be taken daily in increasing doses because poorness is a chronic and untreatable disease (though pills are somehow able to keep it in check). All of America's super-wealthy die of complications from poorness, but later than the poor themselves.

For wealth does extend one's lifespan—that's a fact. You can see physical signs of it. Regularly administered wealth changes the tone and texture of skin. It's fascinating. You can recognize wealthy old men not by their clothing, but by their skin. Wealthy old men's skin has a golden-brown sheen to it and seems tauter. His figure does still transform with age, his body buckling a little and the proportions distorting (it happens to the rich as well), but his skin stays taut over the bones and the muscles, albeit stiff, are discernable even at an elderly age. Wealthy old men are elderliness in a package of youth. I have to say it is endearing, in a way. It's proof that wealth really *does* have an effect—that the pill works; that it isn't merely a placebo.

An evening sauna fire is being stoked in the neighboring cabin. Voices echo, the children's most of all—their bright pitches reverberate the farthest through nature. The children always shout in English, though their father can occasionally be heard yelling out a sentence in expatriate Estonian. If the expatriate Estonians had formed somewhere a community as large as the Québéquois French did, then they would have been speaking an entirely unique language before long—one that would certainly sound like Estonian, though if a member of that community were to come to Estonia and go to the store asking for something in their native language, the seller might apologize and say: Sorry, I don't speak English. Just like I've heard the Québéquois French constantly experience in France. Something that offends them to the core every time.

The full moon will rise soon. I'm expectantly waiting. Currently, I'm reading a book on the local history of Port Sydney. The perseverance and industriousness of the settlers fresh off the boat (1870—everything here began so recently!) always astonishes me. A new land and a new location seemed to brace them with double the stamina. The intensity diminished in the following generations, but perhaps there are some remnants of it here, all the same—preserved in Americans' naiveté, for one. There is always power in naiveté.

I went to the big lake to watch the full moon rise. The expatriate Estonians call the lake Kotkajärv, but what it actually is on Canadian maps remains somewhat indeterminate. It's known as Fleming Lake to some, Montgomery Lake to others. It appears that Canadians aren't too seriously concerned with the topography of their new land. The full moon was reddish as it rose over that nameless lake and reflected on the water. Night here is filled with strange chirring and footfalls in the forest. The chirring and chirping comes from the crickets and is steady and mellow. The cracking of twigs is mainly caused by small animals, though I have no idea what kinds. A mighty splash also rang out from somewhere along the opposite shoreline, maybe from a beaver dam, and maybe it was indeed a beaver. Or a deer, or a moose. It's somewhat unnerving to walk through unfamiliar woods in the dark, though the feeling abated as the moon rose. The moon is like a companion and a fellow traveler.

EWOD: A major new ongoing Estonian literary-cultural project

by Sven Vabar

(https://sisu.ut.ee/ewod)

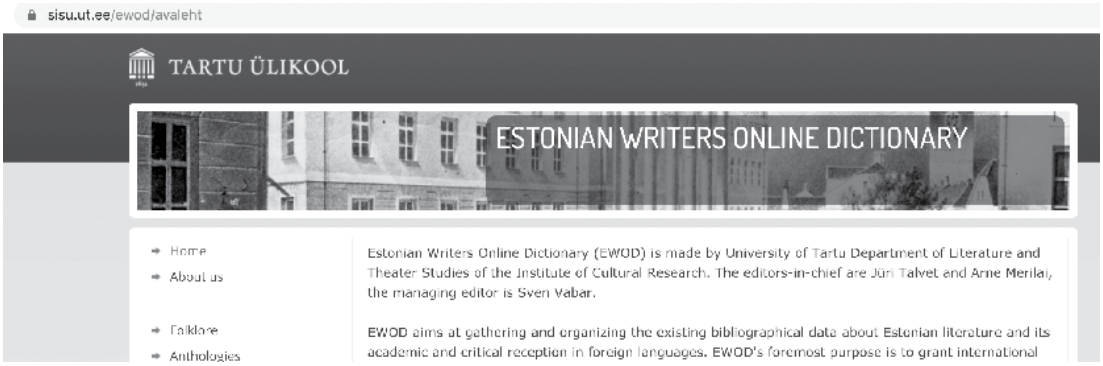
EWOD (the Estonian Writers' Online Dictionary) is a lexicon and database compiled by literary researchers at the University of Tartu, the primary goal of which is to provide information about Estonian literature in foreign languages.

An extensive database and lexicon, EWOD aims to collect exhaustive bibliographical information about Estonian literary works translated into foreign languages, as well as to gather foreign-language reviews of such books from all time periods and sources ranging from academic journals to newspapers. Since this data is, generally, otherwise nearly impossible to access, especially in the case of pre-Internet newspapers, we can luckily (or unfortunately) state that EWOD will never be completely finished, meaning it has the potential to be perpetually updated. As a database for foreign-language reviews of Estonian literature, EWOD is democratic and quantitative: presently, there are 627 authors listed, and the list keeps on growing.

EWOD users will find that some names in the menus are bolded and clicking on them shows not only the sub-menus for foreign-language translations, but an English-language profile covering the author's life and a bibliography of their Estonian-language works. This brings us to EWOD's quantitative aspect: it's not simply a database, it's a literary lexicon. Not all of the current 627-plus alphabetically-listed writers in EWOD's menus may get an English-language profile on the site just yet, even if they have been translated into a foreign language. Alternately, some writers who have no known translations to date may earn a profile, regardless. There are plans to create profiles for all members of the Estonian Writers' Union, for example.

EWOD may also be a potentially useful resource for Estonian speakers, as the most recent *Lexicon of Estonian Authors* (compiled by Oskar Kruus and Heino Puhvel) was published in 2000 and is now outdated. If a new Estonian-language lexicon should ever be drafted, then the materials compiled in EWOD would be a valuable source of information for those putting it together.

It's also important to note that EWOD's editors did not judge an author's popularity when drafting and commissioning the profiles, but rather their relevance in regard to Estonian cultural history. As a result, users might not find profiles for the most well-known or highly-translated Estonian authors, even though they will



come across ones for figures such as Georg Müller, Heinrich Stahl, and B. G. Forselius, who were significant from a standpoint of the formation of Estonian as a written language. Similarly, we've paid special attention to authors who, for one reason or another, have ended up in the peripheries of Estonian literature, but still deserve greater attention – Madis Kõiv and Uku Masing, for example. We have tried to refrain from excessive judgement (which has, at times, emerged in earlier Estonian literary lexicons) and limited ourselves to long-developed historical consensus when characterizing works. And, as always, what one literary researcher sees as a shortcoming may be a defining beacon of ingenuity to another.

Someone attempting to compile an all-encompassing database or lexicon of Estonian literature inevitably comes across the question of: what is Estonian literature, and how do you define its scope? Can Baltic-German or Russian-Estonian literature (i.e. authors like P. I. Filimonov and Andrei Ivanov) be considered Estonian literature? After lengthy discussion, the editors came to the conclusion that EWOD will only include literature written in the Estonian language, though we emphasize that each author will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Behind the idea of creating EWOD is the University of Tartu's long-time Professor of Global Literature, Jüri Talvet, who is likewise its editor-in-chief. EWOD's second chief editor is Arne Merilai, a Professor of Estonian Literature at the University of Tartu. Work began on the project in 2014. Sven Vabar serves as its acting editor and has gathered the vast majority of bibliographical information contained in the database. Author profiles have been written by Arne Merilai, Mart Velsker, Ele Süvalep, Mari Klein, Inga Sapunjan, Agnes Neier, Indrek Ojam, Andrus Org, Sven Vabar, and several other employees and doctoral candidates associated with the University's Department of Estonian Literature. Miriam McIlfatrick-Ksenofontov, Christopher Moseley, Michelle Mueller, and Andra Somelar have done translations for EWOD.

SVEN VABAR graduated from the University of Tartu with a master's degree in semiotics. He has published prose, literature and music reviews, compiled Mitte-Tartu (*Non-Tartu, 2012*) – a collection of short prose, and works as an editor of EWOD at the University of Tartu's Department of Literature and Theater.

The greatness of little things

An interview with Birgita Bonde Hansen

by Eva Velsker

Birgita Bonde Hansen has translated eight books from Estonian and over forty from Finnish into her native Danish. Her dedicated work has not gone unnoticed: Hansen has been nominated three times for the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Translated Literature and has received prestigious awards in both Finland and Denmark. Just this year, she was named laureate of the distinguished Letterstedt Prize for Translation. In an interview with *ELM*, Hansen discussed translating, Estonia, the Nordic countries, and how greatness can lie in the little things.

How did you become a translator?

It was actually by chance. I'd always had an interest in languages, but wanted to learn one that was less-spoken, more exotic – not English, French, or German like everyone else does. When my mother started teaching 25 students from the Baltic states in January 1991, I was spellbound. So, at the age of 13, I began learning Lithuanian from a textbook at home. When my mother and I traveled to the Baltic states for the first time in the summer of 1991 for her work, I started to cry as I got off the plane in Riga – finally, I was home. Where that feeling came from, I can't say.

I traveled to Estonia as an exchange student in 1993 and lived with an Estonian host family in Tallinn for a year. After that, I didn't want to go back home. Maybe the most significant reason for my fascination was that I found so much warmth in people in Estonia, even though the times were outwardly very tough. In Denmark, it felt like the biggest problem you might face was whether to buy a blue sweater or a green one, and people *still* complained. The world seemed so narrow and I was looking for something broader in Estonia. Although the country is certainly tiny, I still found something greater here…

Why did you start translating literature in particular?

It happened by chance. I was studying Finnish at university because I'm interested in language and culture – I studied linguistics, not literature. In 2005, though, I translated a Finnish play into Danish and Helena Idström, Denmark's leading translator of Finnish literature at that time, heard my translation and told me I had talent. I kept studying, however, imagining that I'd either find work in a private-sector company and travel around the world or become a university researcher.

BIRGITA BONDE HANSEN · PHOTO BY · STUDIO LUMIKUVA

I did work as a "business developer" at Danske Bank in Denmark for three years after graduating, developing a new IT platform in cooperation with Finns and translating documents about IT systems. Yet, when Idström retired, she recommended me to all of Denmark's publishers, so I quit my job at the bank and started translating. It was a great decision and I've never regretted it!

Seven years ago, I visited the Estonian Literature Center to ask whether I could translate anything from Estonian. Back then, my Estonian language skills were still poor, and I thought they'd just laugh in my face. But right away, they said – please do! We haven't had a Danish translator in a long time.

My first translations from Finnish were works by Kari Hotakainen and Sofi Oksanen, and my first from Estonian were Jaan Kross's *Treading Air* and Andrus Kivirähk's *The Man Who Spoke Snakish*. As you can tell, I didn't start with simple works at all – it was Jaan Kross right off the bat. It helped that I chose a work that had already been translated into several other languages: Finnish, English, and Swedish. I kept them all stacked next to me because I thought I wouldn't manage on my own. In truth, the most interesting part of the process was that I didn't really use them. Whenever I came across a section I didn't fully understand, I checked to see what the other translators had done. I saw it was one way in the Estonian, but another in the Finnish and even a third in the Swedish. I myself had a fourth variation, and that's what went into print. I'd already translated hefty works from Finnish by that point and had a clear grasp on my role as a translator. I can get by translating Estonian, even though I can't always manage the language and culture. Who can I ask in those cases? It feels like I have the right people nowadays, but I didn't dare to ask anyone in my first years.

What fascinates you about Estonia and Finland?

I have no idea! I suppose there's something familiar and home-like in both countries, though it's different and exotic all the same. Like an alternative version of my world. In Finland, I enjoy the nature, winter darkness, and summer light – the extremes. Estonia, I simply love – absolutely.

Ever since I was a kid, I traveled a lot in all the Scandinavian countries with my family – that's why Finland has never been as distant and strange for me as it has for some Danes.

You received two important awards in 2018: the Finnish State Award for Foreign Translators and the Translators' Blixen Prize. What do awards mean to you? Why do you think you've been given this recognition?

It's a very great honor to be awarded, of course. When you get more than one in a single year, it feels like you must be doing something right. They help to boost your trust in yourself, no doubt.

In the speech that was given when I received the Danish award, the speaker said they saw thoroughness and linguistic creativity in my translations, as well as a desire to express cultural and historical circumstances. I also facilitate cultural exchange by familiarizing Danes with Estonia and Estonian literature, which have been little-known there before.

The Finnish State Award is highly prestigious – I'm amazed to have received it so early in my translating career, though my first Finnish authors were rather big names, of course: Sofi Oksanen, Kari Hotakainen, and later Rosa Liksom, Katja Kettu, and Tommi Kinnunen. In nine years, I've translated over 40 Finnish books altogether, 16 Finnish plays, and eight Estonian novels.

I believe the word 'conviction' was used in the speech describing the nominees for the 2019 Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Translation: that I translate with conviction. I do, indeed! I love my work and I suppose it shows in my translations, too.

Which translated (Estonian) books would you say are your favorites?

I don't know if I have any favorites as a translator. As a reader, I enjoy Andrus Kivirähk's style and grotesque humor. I like all kinds of jobs as a translator – all that matters is that the book is well-written, because a good translation then comes out more smoothly. It's great to translate a book that poses challenges. In that sense, the greatest challenge is translating something poorly written. So far, I've enjoyed translating all my Estonian-language books.

What has been difficult to translate?

Some people have marveled at how hard it might be to translate Kivirähk's unique world of mythology and folklore. I likewise felt anxious about whether it'd be possible to translate Paavo Matsin's *Gogol's Disco* at all. But in reality, the feeling was the same as with translating Finland's Katja Kettu: the use of language is so masterful and the story so spellbinding that it feels like the book almost translates itself – coming up with the most suitable words and phrases to correspond to the original is a great challenge that takes time, but you don't feel beleaguered; more like inspired.

I have to admit: the fact that my Estonian isn't good enough to be a fluent reader and understand everything immediately remains a problem. Sometimes, it seems like I only truly understand what a book is trying to say once I've finished translating it! That's why I'd like to get more training. Everyone tells me my Estonian is so lovely, but that's not enough when I need to read a book and draw up some kind of a proposal for Danish publishers.

Writing that is complex in essence doesn't necessarily mean it will be difficult to translate. I enjoy having problems to be solved. What's hard is that a translator's reading skills should be higher – otherwise, the process goes slowly. Since I never knew I'd someday become a literary translator, I somewhat lack a literary-theory background. When I'm asked to compare one book to another or if there's a similar author in Denmark – I just don't know.

By now, I've come to understand that my strengths lie elsewhere: in rhythm, linguistic style, and an intuitive approach.

Have you encountered any difficulties in translating a cultural context – anything that is commonplace and self-evident to Estonians but needs to be explained to a Dane?

As a translator, it's crucial that you're able to spot and select places that need some kind of an explanation. Sometimes, something

BIRGITA BONDE HANSEN · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH / ELIC

has to be added: for example, "Toompea" isn't just "Toompea", but "central Tallinn" or something similar. Or Tammsaare, *the writer*. Occasionally, I also work on books that contain a great deal of history. With Jaan Kross's *Treading Air*, for instance, I explained in an afterword who the real-life characters were, and which events truly took place. By doing so, you give the foreign reader an opportunity to better understand the work.

I also believe that it's crucial not to attempt to convey *everything* as the translator. That's impossible. You must simply focus on what you're able to convey; on what aspects of the book are enchanting. And then leave the rest be.

Almost all of the Estonian books you've translated have been released by one small Danish publisher: Jensen & Dalgaard. Why are they interested in Estonian literature? How did you find them or vice versa?

Jensen & Dalgaard is a small publishing house with a focus on fine literature that is a little unusual. They also publish Finnish literature. Speaking about both, they've said

that good cooperation is a deciding factor – when you know in advance that everything will run smoothly between the author, the publisher, and the translator, then it's easier to buy literature from that language.

They've managed to find young, strong female Finnish authors. As for Estonian literature, I suppose they prefer grotesque humor and slightly bizarre peculiarity.

Jensen & Dalgaard found me a long time ago when they were looking for a Finnish-language translator – it was only later that we started collaborating on Estonian projects. Fortunately, they intend to continue publishing Estonian literature in translation.

How have your translations been received? Do you believe Danish readers have understood the books?

Right now, it's very difficult to get reviews in the Danish newspapers and Jensen & Dalgaard is a small publisher. That being said, we have managed to get a few published, and online literary blogs are also an important source of feedback. The reception has been very positive, though it's come more from persons involved in literature themselves. Estonian books in translation haven't been mainstream bestsellers. Readers who are looking for something light and familiar, something easy to understand, don't have a great appreciation for Estonian (or Finnish) literature. However, the reception from those who are looking for something special has been extremely positive. Not everyone liked the modern-day colloquial language I used with Kivirähk because, in their opinion, it didn't fit with an "historical" novel(!). Doubtless the humor was a little over the top for some people, too, though I know there are others in Denmark who found Kivirähk's humor and literary world to be perfect.

My translation of Matsin's *Gogol's Disco* came out in May 2019 and was very warmly received, getting three reviews. One of them called the work a true pearl!

Ilmar Taska has also been very popular – both his *Pobeda 1946* and a collection of short stories have been published in Danish translation. He attended the Copenhagen

Book Fair in 2018 and seven reviews have been published.

I suppose that for Danish readers, Estonian literature is intriguing for its uniqueness, humor, and the country's history.

You also translate Finnish books. How would you compare translating Finnish to translating Estonian? And how would you compare the two countries in terms of their respective literature?

By the time I began translating Estonian literature, I'd already been translating Finnish books for a couple of years. Given that I'm more proficient in Finnish, it's naturally much faster and easier for me to translate from that language. Yet, when translating Estonian, I immediately noticed that the Danish and Estonian languages are much closer, presumably because of their history and Low German influences. It feels like their mental worlds are also closer to each other. Whenever I translate Estonian literature, I feel like I'm returning to Europe again from somewhere in the north. For instance, Estonian literature makes more references to broader European literature, authors, and events. In Finland, authors talk more about the symbolism of nature or nation-uniting athletic events.

How interesting! I've never noticed that before.

I remarked once that it's great I'm still a translator of Finnish. Since I don't have a very strong theoretical background and haven't read the classics or much about literary history, I'd be in real trouble with intertextual references – I simply wouldn't pick up on them. You see them all the time in Estonian literature, but they're used very infrequently in Finnish. Whenever I'm translating Estonian works, I have to go to the library to look up a wide range of sources and research the Greek tragedies, European philosophers, and other such topics.

What are your future plans? What would you like to translate?

I actually don't know what to say because I still haven't even read Tammsaare's *Truth and Justice* yet, though I've bought it and it's high on my reading list. I hope that once I have, I'll very much wish to translate it, too. Then, I'll just have to cross my fingers that I'll find a Danish publisher.

More generally, I want to introduce Danes to Estonian literature as broadly as possible – right now, I see that as my future and my life's work.

Reading other cultures' literature is educational. By doing so, you come to better understand yourself and your own culture – it has a mirror-like effect. If I'm able to make my own contribution to that educational endeavor and cause people to feel and to think, then I'll be satisfied.

You have seen the new *Truth and Justice* film, though. How did you like it?

Watching it, I certainly felt like I was discovering something new about Estonia and Estonians, and about myself, too. I highly enjoyed it. It was a very personal experience seeing the way the main character Andres does everything so justly; how everything is so right and proper; how he strains beyond

his means and ultimately neglects love. By that, I don't mean the love between two people, but a love for everyone and the world itself. Once you lose that focus, you lose everything. I immensely enjoyed the way they took a classic piece of Estonian literature and made the viewer consider it from a different angle. I liked everything about the film: the actors, the set design, the story – every part of it was perfect. I also liked how it spoke to me personally; that I also learned something new. That's exactly why we have art. That's why we read and watch films.

What do you do when you're not reading or translating?

I sing in a choir. It's actually a very good choir with an Estonian conductor, so we were able to participate in the Estonian Song Festival in Tallinn in July 2019. That was hands-down one of the greatest moments of my life.

I like nature and winter and darkness and the cold, so now that I live in Northern Finland, I go skiing in winter and we collect berries in summer to last us all winter long.

It's also important to visit with friends in Denmark, Estonia, and elsewhere.

In some ways, you're a nexus between three cultures: Denmark, Finland, and Estonia. How does it seem to you, is it all a single world somehow? We here in Estonia certainly want to be part of the Nordic countries.

I've always seen myself as Nordic. Not even just Nordic, but Baltic. That is my strongest source of identity. I think of it like common rings: there are bigger and smaller rings that partly overlap at some points. Culturally and socially, Denmark and Estonia are connected in certain ways that Finland isn't. Sometimes, Finland, Estonia, and Sweden are interconnected. Other times, it's Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Of course, you can see things in common between the Baltic states because of the fifty years of Soviet occupation with Russia, and why not?– There are different levels to culture.

I am, of course, a Dane through and through – it's an incredibly important identity to me now that I live in Finland. I miss Denmark and I understand that I have very strong Danish values. For instance, the differences in gender equality – sometimes, it feels like certain things in Estonia are very old-fashioned. But at other times, it's the opposite in terms of other things. It's actually the same in Finland: sometimes if feels like they are fifty years ahead of us in Denmark, and at other times, it feels like they're fifty years behind us. Things are somewhat similar in Estonia, but the layers here are different because Estonia has been subjected to such different regimes and cultures.

Still, I have to say that yes – I see much more in common than I do in differences.

EVA VELSKER is a translator and a linguist. She teaches and researches the Estonian language at the University of Tartu. Velsker also translates Danish, English, and Finnish literature into Estonian.

Jaan Kross: When Prison is the Price of Existence

by Ian Thomson

Jaan Kross first came to prominence in the English-speaking world in 1992 with the publication of *The Czar's Madman* (*Keisri Hull*), translated by Anselm Hollo. A grimly absorbing novel about the folly of political idealism, the novel concerns the alleged insanity of a Baltic-German aristocratic, Timotheus von Bock, who was stationed in 1820s Livonia (present-day Estonia and Latvia). Baron von Bock has the temerity to send Tsar Alexander I of Russia a list of proposals for constitutional reform and moreover upbraids him for his maltreatment of serfs. His criticisms land him in jail for eight years.

Upon its publication in Soviet Tallinn in 1978, *Keisri Hull* sold an impressive 32,000 copies. Kross's paradox – is von Bock mad, or does his truth-telling illuminate the "insane" world in which he lives? – anticipated the Brezhnevian psychiatric asylums and the misuse of medical diagnoses in the USSR to silence dissidents. The émigré Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky (who shot parts of *Stalker* in Tallinn) reportedly wanted to film the novel, but died before the project could materialize. Forty years on, *The Czar's Madman* endures as a European masterwork; it has the pleasurable density of a 19th century novel and moreover radiates a pleasingly old-fashioned gravitas.

Kross's early years unfolded happily in pre-Soviet Tallinn, where genteel standards prevailed. His father was a machine-tool foreman and reasonably well-off. As a boy, Jaan attended the local Jakob Westholm Grammar School and from 1938 he studied law at Tartu University. At Tartu, he met Helga Pedussaar, a philology student and, later, translator, whom he married in 1944. On the eve of World War II, Kross was made an assistant university lecturer in international law, but all was not well. Rumours of Stalin's Great Terror had begun to reach the campus: Estonia, on the edge of the Slavic world, was in imminent danger of Soviet takeover. In June 1940, after two decades of independence, Estonia succumbed to Soviet occupation. Some 9,700 Estonian army officers, clerks and priests were deported to collective farms in eastern Russia, if not executed. Not surprisingly the deportations had a nightmare quality for Kross: the last novel by him to be published in the UK before his death, *Treading Air* (2003; originally issued as *Paigallend* in 1998), was a semi-autobiographical account of Estonia's wartime devastation and humiliation, where Stalin's departure was followed by further brutality under occupying Germans.

Kross was able to avoid conscription into the Waffen-SS Estonian Legion by swallowing pills that produced thyroid gland swelling. On the morning of his medical check-up he chased down the pills with a measure of brandy and became dangerously bold and loquacious. "The German medical officer examining me said I was a drunken idiot not worthy of fighting and struck me off the conscription list", Kross told me in an interview for the *Guardian* in 2002. At 82, Kross was frail and had recently suffered a stroke. He was living, I remember, with the poet, children's writer and translator (from Hungarian) Ellen Niit, his third wife, in an apartment in the Soviet-era Writers House in central Tallinn. In the course of the interview, Kross had the modesty of the true writer, and a sorrowful yet at times slightly mischievous presence. He said he was "itching" to write another novel but was content for the moment to work on his memoirs, which were published as *Kallid kaasteelised* (*Dear Co-Travellers*) in two volumes in 2003 and 2008. Kross continued to teach international law at Tartu University during the second Soviet occupation, only to be arrested in January 1946 by the KGB. He was taken to the KGB headquarters on Tallinn's Pagari Street and placed in a cell there with four other men condemned to death. The 26-year-old Kross had never actively resisted Soviet rule yet suddenly he was a "bourgeois recidivist". (It did not help that his father had been deported in 1945 to the Mordva Autonomous Republic, where he died). Although reprieved from execution, Kross spent the next eight years in the Gulag, a fate shared by some 150,000 of his compatriots. He slaved in a coalmine near the feared Vorkuta camp west of the Urals, and later at a brickworks in the Krasnoyarsk region. Conditions were appalling but Kross had the good fortune, in 1949, to work as a felt-boot dryer, thus avoiding the sub-zero temperatures outside. Bizarrely, two of his co-prisoners were English: one was a Communist accused of anti-Soviet espionage, the other a former Wehrmacht conscript. ("They argued the whole time so I was unable to practice much English with them", Kross told me.) While in the Gulag, Kross met and married his second wife, Helga Roos, an Estonian translator of English and German. With the Khrushchev so-called "thaw", he was allowed to return to Tallinn with Helga in 1954. There he began to translate a selection of the classics, among them Shakespeare, Balzac and Lewis Caroll. ("Soviet patronage of the arts, though it could be repressive, nevertheless ensured that some of the great European works appeared in Estonian", Kross told me.)

His first volume of poetry, *Söerikastaja* (*The Coal Enricher*), came out in 1958; the erudite, allegorical-ironical free-verse introduced unusual themes of galaxies, electrons, Milton, Homer (and of course sputniks). Nevertheless it was denounced by the Estonian Soviet cultural monthly *Sirp ja Vasar* ("Sickle and Hammer") as "decadent" and "insufficiently Bolshevik". Though Stalin had been dead for five years, Stalinist strictures still determined Soviet arts and letters. It was Ellen Niit (whom Kross married in 1958) who encouraged Kross to turn his attention to the historical novel: history at least would allow him to write obliquely of the Soviet present. In 1970, Kross published the first in a series of semi-factual historical works which made him famous, first throughout the Soviet Baltics, and later in the West. *Neli monoloogi Püha Jüri asjus* (Four Monologues on St George)

investigated the life of the Estonian artist Michel Sittow (1469-1525), who had worked as court painter to Queen Isabella of Spain. The breakthrough, though, came between 1970 and 1980, when Kross released his three-part novel on the life of 16th century Tallinn city elder Balthasar Russow, *Between Three Plagues*. Written partly to outwit Soviet censorship, and to chart the vagaries of Baltic life under foreign dominations, the trilogy remains a masterpiece of paradox and ambiguity.

The trilogy's first two volumes, *The Ropewalker* and *A People Without a Past,* published in English translation by Merike Lepasaar Beecher in 2017, are brocaded with flavoursome period detail. Russow, born to a drayman in the poor Tallinn district of Kalamaja in 1536, wears a dog-skin cap and drinks quantities of malmsey wine from "juniper-fragrant kegs". Plates of roast goose, salted pork, smoked venison and marzipan puddings are washed down with goblets of white *klarett* and Rhenish red. The smell of Russow's Baltic childhood – paraffin, wet wool – practically lifts off the page. However, only in the loosest sense can Kross be described as an historical novelist. The Russow trilogy explores such contentious issues as nationhood, cultural assimilation and political exile. Russow is celebrated today in the Baltic States for his Low German-language chronicles of Livonia, first printed in Rostock, Mecklenburg in 1578. To Kross's evident approval, Russow was highly critical of Livonia's upper-class German rulers, who looked down on the Baltic peoples as a semi-pagan peasantry, good only for forced labour.

Estonians who managed to escape serfdom, such as Russow, could only do so if they spoke German, or Low German, a language considered at that time second only to ancient Greek. Russow's rise from "peasant stock" to become Estonia's first historian and the pastor of the Holy Spirit Church in Tallinn (a post he held from 1566 until his death in 1600) was extraordinary in the highest degree, though perhaps not without historical parallel. Three centuries later, Kross reminded me, one of Tallinn's military commanders under the Tsars was a freed African slave, Abram Gannibal. The Cameroon-born Gannibal was appointed to the position in 1742 by Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth, Empress of Russia. Gannibal was the maternal grandfather of Alexander Pushkin. Kross had long wanted to write Gannibal's story; but, it seems, he decided instead to chronicle Russow's.

In all sixteen of his novels, Kross used history as a source of inspiration, as well as a way to restore Estonian national memory under dictatorship and confirm the country's place as Europe's ultimate borderland and microcosm of Teuton-Slav antagonisms. In 1991 he was given advanced warning that he would win the Nobel Prize in Literature and told to stay by the telephone. "It was easy to do, as I never really leave my flat, let alone leave Tallinn", Kross told me. Nadine Gordimer won that year. Kross never did. That same year, after the collapse of Soviet communism, Kross returned to politics and took his place in the Estonian parliament, where he helped to draft the new constitution. Kross's one-year stint as a Member of Parliament in 1991, chronicled in Volume Two of his memoirs, was in many ways extraordinary: at 72, Kross was by a long chalk the oldest member on the benches.

JAAN KROSS AS THE HONORARY DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI · PHOTO BY PEETER LANGOVITS

His discovery by English-speaking readers, long overdue, was of course only made possible by the departure of the Soviet censors. His later short stories, collected in English in 1995 under the title *The Conspiracy*, recount attempts by Estonians to flee to Finland during the German occupation and their later deportation by the Soviets. There is surprisingly little bleakness in his prison stories. Kross wrote about his incarceration under the Soviets with a poignancy devoid of anger. He died in Tallinn in 2007, at the age of eighty-seven. The third and final part of the Russow chronicle, *A Book of Falsehoods,* is due out in the UK in October 2019. I shall look forward to reading it.

IAN THOMSON is the author of two prize-winning works of reportage, *Bonjour Blanc: A Journey Through Haiti* and *The Dead Yard: Tales of Modern Jamaica*. His biography of Primo Levi is regarded as a classic, while his book *Dante's Divine Comedy: A Journey Without End* was published in 2018.

Allan Cameron: “There can never be too many books!”

by Lea Kreinin

Allan Cameron is a Scottish writer, translator and publisher who lives in Glasgow. He has already published several books of Estonian literature, by A. Hansen-Tammsaare, A. Ivanov, M. Saat and R. Raud. Anton Hansen-Tammsaare’s most famous novel *Vargamäe*, *Truth and Justice Vol. 1* was also published by him this year – which was a historical event for Estonian literature as well.

L.K: You have had a very exciting and versatile life -- you have lived in…. What interesting and useful things has living in many different countries taught you about people and books?

A.C: My experience of living abroad during school holidays in Nigeria (5-11) and what is now Bangladesh (11-17) obviously made me aware of cultural diversity. When I was thirteen or fourteen, I started to learn Bengali. I was interested in languages, but I had also read that Orwell criticized his father for having lived in Burma for many years without learning Burmese, and my father was no different. I have to admit that I sounded better than I was. There are dialects, and perhaps my text book was a standard form. Most of my friends were from Muslim families who had fled India and their native tongue was Urdu. I liked taking the bus and trying to speak to my fellow travellers, but I was the only European and they must have thought me pretty strange. So mainly I spoke Bengali to my parents’ servants, and this was well received.

Books had always been important to me, and I moved to grown-up literature very early. My sister told me that I read Oscar Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray* at the age of eleven. Later she bought me his complete works, which I read from cover to cover, and I have always been a fan. However, the book that remains deeply ingrained is Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, which I found in an American edition in a second-hand bookshop in Dhaka. This really did change my life. First of all, it made me realize that whatever sufferings I was going through were as nothing compared to what was all around me. It also convinced me that I should never allow anyone to serve me at home. So, when the bearer asked me if I wanted something to drink, I would say that I would get a drink myself if I needed one. He was a little offended and stopped serving my sisters too. My mother complained to me that my sisters were complaining, and I learnt that principles, even seemingly innocuous ones, can cause considerable strife, because human relationships are governed by unwritten rules and habits that most people will instinctively

ALLAN CAMERON · ARCHIVE PHOTO

defend. All this was Tolstoy's fault, and I mentioned the American edition, because until quite recently all British editions have been translations of the version censored by the Tsarist regime, and therefore deprived of all their revolutionary force. Had I read the censored version, as I now have, maybe I would have continued to take the bearer's drinks.

I strongly believe that novels are good for us – an exercise in empathy – but perhaps publishers, writers and translators spend too much time with books and this can lead them to forget that human relationships are still the most important thing.

L.K: Nowadays, there are so many books released every year some people may think: why bother publish even more? What has led you to open your own publishing house?

A.C: There can never be too many books! Just as there can't be too many conversations, because language is what people do. Like many things in my life, I got into publishing by chance. I had already translated

well over twenty books from Italian, and I had had two novels of my own published in Edinburgh. I then wrote a non-fiction work on language, and it had attracted the attention of some leading literary figures, so I was slightly upset when my publisher wanted to make changes to it (he may have been right). I decided to strike out on my own and publish it myself. Strangely it was quite successful and received further plaudits. I then incorrectly assumed that publishing is an easy business. I went into translated novels and initially lost a lot of money, which I have since been trying to pay off. It is difficult to assess whether this was the right thing to do. The upside of publishing is that it's a collaborative exercise, unlike writing and translating which are solitary occupations.

L.K: In recent years, you have also published many Estonian books. How did you "find" Estonian literature, what led you to it?

A.C: The fate of small nations has always been important to me. I have also been fascinated by lesser-spoken languages. This is in part because my mother was a Gaelic-speaker, and I spent some summer holidays on a croft in the Highlands where Gaelic was spoken. My wife is a Gaelic-speaker and my son goes to a Gaelic school. My mother's attitude to her native tongue was strangely conflicted. She was both proud and ashamed of it. She identified it with the peasantry, and felt that she had risen above it. So, I can easily understand the conflicted attitudes of Oskar in Tammsaare's *I Loved a German*, because a people who have been excluded over many centuries rebel mentally against their status but also accept it in their actions and habits, because they have to. Once the dominant power is removed either through conflict or through a collapse of that power (or powers in the case of Estonia, caught as it was between the Teutonic Knights, Sweden and Russia), the psychological damage and uncertainty endures for some time.

On my first visit to the London Book Fair, I gravitated to the Estonian stand and had a long conversation with a woman who had been called in at the last minute, because the volcano that exploded in Iceland had prevented most people from attending. I took a copy of the pamphlet with a number of suggestions for translation, which included Mari Saat's *The Saviour of Lasnamäe* – our first Estonian book.

L.K: You've visited Estonia. What is your impression and opinion of our country?

A.C: I first visited Estonia in 2014, and had a wonderful time. It was very interesting to meet Estonian writers and hear about their work. Like most small countries, Estonians are great linguists and this is something I greatly admire. Citizens of large countries often think of small countries as provincial, but the opposite is true. Provincialism is essentially the tendency to believe that all knowledge and good practice is contained within the entity the provincial person identifies with, but no small nation can believe this. Small nations are outward-looking, and large nations are inward-looking. The English-speaking world or Anglosphere is an extreme example of this "provincialism of the powerful". This is why I am so committed to translated literature. English badly needs translation.

Eastern Europe generally retains some of the virtues destroyed by neoliberal economics elsewhere – a greater sense of community and a proper understanding of fundamental human values. To put it another way, they resemble the societies of my childhood in some ways (it is of course more complicated than that). It is also true that Eastern Europe is understandably quite right-wing in its attitudes, given recent history, but the problem is that when one series of problems is removed, another completely different one takes its place, and these could be just as toxic. Machiavelli argued that the truths that are useful to us in one period are not in another, so we have to adapt constantly to a changing world. This must be truer now than in his day. Having said that, I think that Estonia is dealing better with the new reality than some other countries that have emerged into the post-Soviet world.

L.K: Do you think Estonia and Scotland have something in common? What would it be?

A.C: Undoubtedly. We were more similar in the nineteenth century. The land belonged to large estates often run by people who spoke a different language. The status of smallholders and landless peasants was very similar (this is clear from the first volume of *Truth and Justice*), as were the economic autarky of peasantry and influence of the pastor or minister in those small societies. In fact, Scotland resembled Estonia more closely than it did England in this sense. The reason was in part climatic: large tracts of marshland, long winters with little light and relatively low populations favour a certain kind of landownership (though distance from large markets could be the decisive reason, as similar landownership existed in southern Italy and southern Spain). In Scotland much of the abandonment of the land took place in the nineteenth century and the population has since been concentrated in the more fertile "Central Belt", which became highly industrialized (but is no longer). Our language has almost disappeared, and our culture has been weakened. The reason why Estonia is doing so much better is that it gained independence in 1918 and was able to develop sufficient self-confidence to survive the Soviet period. Scottish nationalism today is not about "land and blood", because Scotland is a social-democratic country that would like to distribute wealth and public services more equitably, something that we'll never achieve as part of the UK. The Scottish National Party is the only government party in Europe that actively supports immigration, acknowledging that immigration, far from being a problem, is actually a way to revitalize a society. This is perhaps the most important thing we have achieved: a new definition for small-country nationalism in the twenty-first century.

LEA KREININ has worked as a lecturer of Estonian language and culture at several institutes of higher education around the world. Currently, she handles projects involving education and the Estonian diaspora at the Estonian Institute.

Juhan Liiv: A Search for the Pure Word

by Mathura

The year 2019 looms large in Estonia's cultural calendar, marking the 150th anniversary of the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration. Its importance, however, does not merely lie in celebrating our song and dance tradition or commemorating our great composers and conductors of the past. It is also an occasion to pay tribute to our great poets whose work has often been the basis of the festival's songs and who have, perhaps more than anyone else, borne witness to the nation's spirit of persistence or been instrumental to it themselves. It might be difficult to grasp, for those devoid of the experience, but the fact is that for many Estonian people, a single line of a poem or song was often that last vital thread of consolation that kept them going in years and decades of hardship.

There is hardly another poet as evocative and influential in Estonian literature as Juhan Liiv. Almost every Estonian knows at least a bit of his poetry by heart and something of his life story. Traces of his ethos and style can be found in countless literary works that followed. And yet his importance is not merely literary. He is precisely one of those authors whose words have been the mentioned as threads of consolation and hope, one of those whose writing has found expression both through choral and popular music and played an important role there. It is in fact fair to say that part of Liiv's work has nearly reached the status of folklore and people might sometimes cite it without even realizing the quotation's origin.

More importantly though, Liiv managed to give a voice to a previously undefined, yet underlying element of the Estonian psyche and it is particularly in that capacity that his poems have steeped themselves into Estonians' perception of their own national self. We recognize ourselves in his words and at the same time identify ourselves through the words that he has given us. There are very few poets in our literary legacy that share that status with him.

And yet Juhan Liiv was not at all an author famous in his lifetime. Born on April 30, 1864, in the village of Alatskivi on the eastern side of Estonia, he showed an early interest in literature, much by the influence of his older brother who was a writer and school teacher. Liiv's own education remained unfinished though, for he had hard time acclimatizing himself to the rules and discipline of educational institutions. He later took up work as a journalist with various local papers and that allowed for the first publications of his own writing. Soon though, at the age of 29, he was diagnosed with mental instability and later with schizophrenia, which resulted in his long withdrawal from the public eye. Due to his seclusion over these years,

JUHAN LIIV · PHOTO BY TARTU CITY MUSEUM

some thought him already dead. However, he kept on writing and it is to that period that many of his best loved poems belong. He lived in poverty and subsisted on the alms of his relatives; Liiv returned to social circles in 1902 and a year later a group of young authors named *Noor-Eesti* (Young Estonia), encompassing several of the later coryphaei of Estonian literature and linguistics – Friedebert Tuglas, Gustav Suits, Johannes Aavik et al – set up a collection of funds with the aim of publishing a book of Liiv's selected poems, released in print a year later. The decade to follow saw two more collections of Liiv's poetry released, as well as a book of his prose miniatures and remarks. In the later years, Liiv succumbed again to his illness and became delusional. He passed away in December 1913, due to tuberculosis.

It was in the spring of 2017 that a long-planned monument to the victims of Communist regime was opened at Maarjamäe in Tallinn, dedicated to the memory of all those who lost their lives or suffered cruelties under the yoke of Soviet occupation. The monument consists of two parts, a long dark corridor of stone plates with the names of the deceased, and at the end of it, a little open field or a valley called "the nest". There, the wall carries a quotation from Juhan Liiv's poem "She Flies To A Beehive", which begins,

Flower to flower she flies,
and she flies to a beehive;
and should a thunder cloud rise,
she flies to a beehive.
And thousands will fall,
but thousands will reach home,
they won't let sorrows abide,
for they fly to a beehive!

Beehive is, naturally, an image of a homeland and it is emblematic of Liiv's deep love for his country which, for him, was identical with love for one's self. At the same time, the image of a beehive corroborates the need of a collective consciousness in order to survive "the thunders", the trials and tribulations of times, and it is also indicative of the idea that survival is possible by collecting the fulfilling essence of land, availing oneself to its gentle gifts thankfully, even prayerfully. A beehive, just like a country of one million, is no doubt a small unit, but it's still a world in itself, and one that needs a number of qualifications to fall in place.

Apart from weaving the nation together with nature – a perception crucial to the Estonian people – the poem, written in 1905, is almost prophetic. For it could well be a description of the fate of Estonians in the 1940s and 50s when thousands did fall – on their way to war and deportation – and thousands still reached back home, so as to keep the "beehive" of the Estonian

nation, culture and language alive. In Miina Härma's, as well as Peep Sarapik's composition, the poem is also a well-known choral song, often a pivot of our song celebrations.

Two other seminal poems of Liiv have found an expression in popular music. "Our Room Has A Black Ceiling" was made into a song in the 1980s by the rock group Vitamiin. Its release was accompanied by a very avant-garde music video where the band members were so heavily covered in make-up that they almost appeared to be wearing masks. The recitative style in which the words of the poem were rendered gave something of an inhuman feel to the piece. The song caused quite an uproar in its time, particularly for the inclusion of the lines,

Our room has a black ceiling,
and our time does as well:

it writhes as if in chains 'twas bound —
if only it could tell!

These were then seen by many as hidden criticism of Soviet rule, as well as a suggestion that not much had changed in people's lives since the time that Liiv had written this poem.

It should be noted though that the black ceiling in the poem is both a metaphor and description. Ceilings of many of the old Estonian farm houses were black from smoke and soot; the oldest and poorest had no chimneys and were called smoke houses, they might have also been saunas inhabited by farm hands who could not afford, or were not allowed to possess their own dwellings. Smoke had a practical function, for it protected the wood from decay and vermins, yet in Liiv's poem the black ceiling becomes an epitome of Estonian history, viewing the country as a place of dark past and bereft of any welcoming future. After centuries of foreign rule and oppression, forever living as a nation serving others, there was a sense of blackness hanging over people's daily toil. Liiv expresses the resulting sense of hopelessness, but the poem is also a tribute to the people who kept their integrity despite hardship and little outlook for an improvement.

Curiously enough, the poem is also the reason why the ceiling of the main reading hall of the Estonian Writers Union is colored black – as an act of homage to our great national poet. It also relates though to Liiv's poem "My Party", where Liiv claims that the only party he is willing to belong to is that of the Estonian language – an idea which has been something of a credo for the Writers Union here.

The poem "Yesterday I Saw Estonia" was turned into a protest song by the rock band Ruja – in the same period of the 1980s. Written originally by Liiv while travelling by rail across wintry Estonia, it is possibly the most quoted poem in the whole of Estonian literature. Its references can be found in the poetic works of a number of authors, including Triin Soomets, Kivisildnik and Jüri Talvet, the last referring to it in the form of negation, i.e. "yesterday I did not see Estonia". In all cases, the line is used for describing the uncovering of some unpleasant truth, and usually a truth preferably ignored. Liiv mentions farm houses in disrepair, the poverty of households, the puny fields, the fields overgrown with thickets and eventually, the moral and spiritual downfall of the country. Unlike some of Liiv's other poems, this one lacks an

elevating finale, but succumbs to the feeling that something is irretrievably lost. Though carried by concern, as much of Liiv's writing about his homeland is, the heart is taken over by despair and grief.

Looking back at Liiv's oeuvre in general, it is striking to see how timeless his pieces are – for apart from their somewhat archaic language and stylistics, these poems could well have been written by some present-day author. The reason behind is this probably that Liiv has no socio-political agenda to represent and his poetics were carried by a very personal as well as universal concern for the well-being of one's home and country.

Admittedly, much of Liiv's poetic world is rather dark and melancholy, his landscapes are dominated by swathes of cold, and winds, and emptiness. Life, as described here, is hard and its toll relentless. And yet Liiv celebrates that very life and the sorrowful, dusky landscapes with an equal relentlessness. Hardship makes one pure and in purity, there is always beauty. Perhaps this is why Liiv's writing holds the great quality of redemption, as he himself emerges almost like an unwilling martyr – a perception only heightened by his factual lunacy. Liiv's work is often shown to describe the depressiveness of Northern lands, and yet it is love that lies at the core of his credo. Liiv is, no doubt, a poet of the land, it is in the fields and forests and villages that he sees the heart of his country throb and develop. It is there that he truly finds himself, as evident, for example, in the poem "The Forest",

Stop and stay here,
thought-laden head,
heart sick with sorrows,
here the soul is at ease!

Liiv gave the Estonian language an example of simplicity and conciseness, as well as one of sympathetic honesty – "where deceit is, flee from there," he exclaims in one of his poems. There is something very informal to his poetry, even though most of his poems follow meter and rhyme; they feel natural, almost casual and in that, unpretentious and truthful. The poet does not hide himself behind his words, he rather finds himself there, more naked than before. The outward simplicity of his poems isn't merely a simplicity of form, but also that of content, it is a way of enacting the poem to reveal the inevitable. Even if Liiv's overwhelming modesty about himself led him to believe and claim that he is not a poet at all.

In some way, Liiv's language also reflects the asceticism of his landscape; one needs simplicity and truthfulness in such demanding settings in order to survive. He feels the suffering and joy of the land as his own, suggests being wedded to the land in the poem "The Autumn Sun", or exclaims "unhappy I am with you, still unhappier without you" elsewhere. The strong connection to the land allows him to be, on one hand, a very earthy writer and yet by the tint of his witnessing the deeper quality of that connection, a poet of the spiritual. And more than that, via media his words Liiv induces us to live up to that same standard; it is thereby that his work has become almost like a measuring rod for the rest of the poetry that has followed.

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You'll never tire of boring things

An interview with Meelis Friedenthal

by Mihkel Kunnus

Meelis, the plot of one of your most memorable works, your novel *The Bees*, is set during the Little Ice Age when local population numbers plummeted. Now, something similar is unfolding before our very eyes and this time on a global scale: although the temperature is moving in the opposite direction, human vulnerability and the frailty of existence are becoming apparent once again. It's been said that it was impossible to write poems after Auschwitz. What's it like in literature in the run-up to ecological collapse – in the early days of the sixth mass extinction?

Your question already holds a partial answer with its many references to the past. Literature does inevitably lean upon the past and temporality has been worked into both the writing and reading processes. Of course, you can say that leaning upon the past and interpreting it in that way is often done in order to find solutions to the problems of today. As such, literature is, to a certain extent, capable of shaping one's understanding of the past and thereby influencing the future. Perhaps that is literature's utopic opportunity: to create some kind of a new, chimeric world on the basis of what exists, not so much to prophetically foretell the world itself. I feel that right now, living in a premonition of gradual catastrophe, we can try to peer back into the past and see if we're able to learn anything from it. Utopia arose as a genre in the early modern period, just when fears of apocalypse were spreading and the collapse of the existing world order was palpable. And indeed, both the political and religious structures that had shaped Europe throughout the Middle Ages did collapse and the modern world sprang up in their place. Utopias were a part of the process by which thinkers tried to articulate the program for the new world. Without having gathered any formal statistics on the subject, I feel like there exist very few utopic views presently – more or less moralistic dystopian/apocalyptic apprehension has proliferated instead. This is, of course, unavoidable and even necessary. We can't

MEELIS FRIEDENTHAL · PHOTO BY ALAR MADISSON / ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM

get around diagnosing the situation and even caricaturizing it, but we seem to be missing the articulation of a credible and acceptable deliverance. Alas, if this deliverance isn't put into words, then neither will it come about.

I admit that my question was less formal than I would have liked. On the one hand, I do understand the attitude that cries out that the building is on fire and there's no time to focus on literature or other forms of entertainment, or that artists of all persuasions should be reassigned to productive labor. On the other hand, I'd like to yell back that currently there is no greater depravity than productive labor, which has led to our home planet being "produced" to the point of a coma. It'd be wonderful if people would make music, read, and write more instead of performing unchecked and ever-more-mechanized manufacturing; if they would fly through their mental worlds instead of consuming – not soar in a plane through an atmosphere that is already so fragile. What's your view on this conflicting state of affairs?

I'm afraid it's not exactly a direct answer to your question, but for a while now, I've been considering the importance of feeling bored and the necessity of (seemingly) doing nothing. In other words, I feel that both entertainment and productive labor are, in a way, still a type of activity – a way of keeping yourself active. Especially nowadays, you can entertain yourself constantly by watching a TV series or reading about politics online. Life just isn't boring, unfortunately! Of course, one can say that having the opportunity to feel bored means someone else is doing the work necessary for you to stay alive, and in fact it's impossible to experience true boredom for very long, because a person will go crazy if they're kept in sensory deprivation at length. Yet at the same time, this endless running around a mental amusement park or frenzied work to meet pressing deadlines only feeds stress and anxiety. People grow cautious in an environment of constant general anxiety, but at the same time, they also become receptive to rapid and poorly-thought-out decisions; to swift hatred; to scattered concentration. The political anxiety prevalent in Estonia right now is, in some regard, a consequence of that same blend of fear and excitement – the way in which people are divided into heroic and dissident patriotic warriors; into radical protectors of what is good. It's exhausting because of the monotonous feeling of unease – you simply cannot take any more. I do realize, of course, that if you don't interfere in the world, then the world itself will interfere in your life, and it goes without saying that I'm personally not neutral, nor do I want to be. Still, it's all just so tiresome, like a headache. You can't feel bored, can't do anything except think about the throbbing in your skull. I suppose literature has a certain preferential status in terms of this, as it's slower and even a little bit boring in its meandering debates.

Interesting. I've always thought, though perhaps it's too bold of a generalization, that one's ability to feel boredom is lost at a certain stage of inner development. At least when we classify boredom as a hunger for external influences; as a state that we experience often in (pre-smart-device) childhood, for instance.

Nowadays, I'm tormented instead by the overabundance of external influences. When was the last time you felt genuine boredom, anyway?

I occasionally make a conscious effort to feel bored, meaning I don't explicitly do anything and just stare out the window, trying not to make any mental plans or figure anything out. Thoughts come and go of their own accord, of course, and you can't stay that way for very long, but a state of doing nothing – not even meditating or striving towards a goal – seems to suit me, somehow. Multiple recent studies have found that feeling bored is entirely beneficial in a creative sense. I can neither confirm nor deny their conclusions, but I suppose the sensation of boredom is something increasingly uncommon in and of itself. It is, for example, impossible to feel bored when you're in a state of pain, fear, or jealousy. Boredom is very different from irritation in this sense, because you won't get fed up with boring things. I find myself reading a boring book from time to time, but it's such a particular sensation that I'm not bothered – I don't resist, even though the writing doesn't excite me. As you read, you're at just the right distance from everything else. Of course, I'm not sure it's always a style the author chose on purpose. At the same time, there are books that aim specifically to achieve excitement or emotion – it's just that shocking a reader or startling them with shamelessness doesn't seem much better than populist politics.

Sometimes, I think (though I don't always tend to say it out loud) that if literature were capable of cultivating people, then Russia would be one of the most highly developed societies on Earth. Alas, here we are. Still, I am convinced it's good that it's a given for universities to maintain a literature department but not a computer gaming department, for instance. A certain type of writer or a novelist, akin to how Milan Kundera defines it, has been the pinnacle of modern human understanding. How vigorous do you think this tradition is?

Perhaps not vigorous in every respect, but extremely necessary all the same. Literature not only analyzes people, but it creates them, giving the reader a notion of what a person can possibly be. I certainly believe Dostoyevsky has had a great role in shaping Russians. His agenda was, mind you, to balance out "Western thinking", and in many ways this has now been accomplished. If you look at educational programs in Estonia, you find that literature is one of the few subjects through which one comes to know humans. Neither human studies nor biology provides such knowledge and our schools generally lack lessons on ethics, philosophy, religion, or other such topics. It's only in history and literature that the human spirit is addressed at all. Until the end of the Enlightenment, most of Western education relied primarily on classical literature and the Bible. Nowadays as well, reading literature is essentially one of the few ways to access such topics – entire nations assemble around a handful of works through which they self-identify. Books that everyone has read for some reason (as required school reading, for instance) can define entire generations: they find a common language through that writing, thus creating a shared thought-platform. Nowadays, of course, it's become a problem that the works "everyone" has read are dwindling. This inevitably

leads to cultural ghettoization and eliminates a chance to have references and cues that are shared among larger groups – a conspiratorial form of denser, abbreviated communication. We're in danger of communication becoming stripped of irony and references altogether; of it becoming nothing but a straightforward exchange of information. I'm not sure how well memes and Netflix series will be able to replace it.

It's hard not to agree with you there. People constantly bellyache about the 'required' part of required reading, and you namely hear it coming from contemporary authors who face overpowering competition on the institutionalized list. Even so, I feel there's a danger of fragmentation that lies in the incredible plurality surrounding us today, and we must therefore place extra emphasis on the importance of classics. That way, we'll establish a firm, common intellectual base that might enable us to have even a slightly deeper interaction. What's your opinion on required literature? Did you tackle it with pleasure? Did Tammsaare's *Truth and Justice* or Luts's *Spring* strike the right chords?

Not especially. I certainly read through all our required reading with diligence, but didn't form any connection with Tammsaare or Luts in my school years. I very happily devoured *Faust* back then, though. Still, it's not always necessary for a connection to form – you just need to drag yourself through those pages if you have to. Now, I have a much greater appreciation for those required works. I've reread Tammsaare a couple of times and am impressed by his ambition and scope. What school is meant to do, however, isn't to teach kids what they already know or like, but what's seen as necessary. We all study mathematics regardless of whether or not it piques our interest because society and teachers alike believe it's essential for children to learn. That belief helps us to overcome any doubts we have over whether we really need to learn quadratic equations. Since we don't have a similar belief in literature, there's a lot of uncertain squirming. Just like how uncertainty will pass from an owner to a dog, so is society's uncertainty of literature transferred onward. There has indeed been a lot of talk lately about how these social transformations with all their alternative facts, populism, and whatnot are something that can only be countered by knowledge of people, society, and history (i.e. the humanities). Alas, this hasn't been stipulated all that clearly in official terms. One recent study found that philosophy is a better tool for identifying certain pseudo-scientific arguments than school-level mathematics or physics.

It might seem embarrassingly cliché, but I'd be very interested to know: what have your greatest reading thrills been lately? What would you recommend, and why?

I try to read a moderately wide range of literature, meaning books meant purely for amusement in addition to works of nonfiction. Lately, I've tended to be disappointed by films and TV series, but I'm usually not disappointed by literature – even though I suppose powerful and dazzling experiences have been more seldom than before. I suspect it has something to do with an inability to enjoy literature "just the way it is" – I keep catching myself analyzing the way a

book was written and why the author made certain choices. Even so, some works do manage to bridge the gap. The last book I finished was Susanna Clarke's *The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories*: a collection of short stories in which she experiments nicely with various styles. As for other short stories I've read recently, I enjoyed those by David Foster Wallace that were published in the Estonian-language collection *Teatavate piiride poorsusest* (*On the Porousness of Certain Borders*). Novels I've recently read and would like (for various reasons) to recommend are Lukas Bärfuss's *Koala* and Daniel Galera's *Blood-Drenched Beard*. Turning back to Estonian authors, I'd mention Nikolai Baturin's *Mongolite unenäoline invasion Euroopasse* (*The Mongols' Dreamlike Invasion of Europe*) from a couple years back – I believe it's one of the best Estonian-language works published in recent years.

A question for you as a writer. In what direction is your (sub)conscious currently drifting? Is there anything baking at the back of your mind?

There is, or rather I don't really know how to describe it at the moment – I thought I'd gotten pretty far with my next book, but once I started to reread it, I came to the conclusion it's not up to snuff in its current form. I'm not quite sure what to do with it now; maybe I'll have to start all over again. I'm relatively confused, this being my first experience looking at my writing and deciding it won't work, but it's an instructive one, too.

Long live instructiveness! I'll finish up with a question regarding the Estonian literary scene more broadly: have you noticed any current universal tendencies? Do you think the off-the-cuff statements made by acting politicians has taken work away from authors of satire and the absurd? Has social media revived the author and an author's biography become a significant part of creative writing?

It's a fact that by the time post-modernism has made its way into politics, literature should already have moved on. That's how I'd like to see the new modernity – a fresh attempt to make sense of the world. Behind those biographies might lie a quest for authenticity that is, of course, a very modern longing – it's the very point at which an author begins rising from the dead, you know. I feel that authors are one opportunity for achieving some type of confidence, honesty, and credibility in today's jungle of all kinds of made-up news and misleading lies; that behind writing stands someone who is truly taking responsibility and whose responsibility isn't a mere construction.

Standing behind those words, at any rate, was Meelis Friedenthal's e-mail address. Thank you and Godspeed!

Meelis Friedenthal will represent Estonia at the 2019 Gothenburg Book Fair.

MIHKEL KUNNUS is a literary critic and a lecturer of environmental ethics.

Anti Saar's recipe for a great children's book

by Jaanika Palm

Anti Saar (1980) is one of the most interesting and distinctive members of the younger generation of Estonian children's writers. After graduating with a degree in semiotics from the University of Tartu, he began writing poetic prose for adults and translating both fiction and non-fiction from French into Estonian. All these tightly-bound contributing factors – a polished style, a light and free French spirit, and deeply-embedded philosophical content – are fascinatingly wound into Saar's children's literature.

Saar rose onto the Estonian literary scene like a dazzling comet with his debut children's storybook *Kuidas meil asjad käivad* (The Way Things Are with Us, 2013). It's rather uncommon for a debutant to receive not just one, but two major awards in what is otherwise a very stable literary field. Nevertheless, the book won both the Raisin of the Year Award and the more prestigious Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Children's Literature – Saar stood out among his peers for his exceptionally fresh and novel style. At the center of the plot is a fun little family whose everyday adventures are told by the preschool-boy, Vassel. The boy explains how they cook and eat, drive and forget things, get ready for Christmas and tell scary stories. Saar creates a literary world that is warm and heartfelt, and while it has its share of problems, difficulties, flubs, and failures, the supportive ties of the family within establish a safety net that every one of us so dearly longs to have.

Warmth and a sense of sticking together are also vividly expressed in Saar's illustrated children's book *Külaskäik* (The Visit, 2017), which tells of a boy who goes to visit his grandfather in the countryside for the first time since his grandmother's death. Deep sorrow leads him on a journey into an apple, during which various memories of his late grandmother surface. Having taken comfort from these fond recollections, the boy finds the courage to carry on.

We meet Saar's favorite character in his five-book Pärt Series: starring a tyke who encounters a whole range of dilemmas both big and small. Pärt could conceptually be Vassel's little brother, likewise living in a quaint little town with his wonderful mother and supportive father. In addition to his parents, however, Pärt has an older brother named Joosep and a little sister named Leenu. The boys share similar personalities:

ANTI SAAR · PHOTO BY ALAR MADISSON / ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM

they are attentive observers, curious, and have a strong sense of right and wrong. Both are fairly selfish and self-centered, but what matters most is their determination and resourcefulness at finding ways out of tough situations. As such, Pärt isn't daunted whenever he must face the fiery and motor-mouthed neighbor-girl Kaisa, who criticizes him for his poor trampoline skills (*Pärt Can't Do a Backflip*, 2017). Even a trip to the grocery store with his father can pose challenges. Once the pair finish shopping and get in the check-out line, Pärt's dad realizes he forgot to get yeast. He leaves Pärt holding their cornucopian shopping basket and their place in line, and disappears amidst the aisles (*Stand Here, Pärt!,* 2018). When a ripe plum falls before Pärt's feet as he's walking home from school, the boy is faced with a dilemma – he sunk

his teeth into the fruit without a second thought, but now he's hungry for more. Pärt would gladly stuff his cheeks with more, but none of the rest show any signs they might fall from their branches anytime soon. The boy wonders whom the plums belong to when they're hanging from a branch over the sidewalk that's attached to a tree in a stranger's yard, as well as what he might be able to do to make another plump fruit drop all on its own so he can munch on it guilt-free (*Pärt and the Plums,* 2019). The boy's patience is seriously put to the test when there's one left-over slice of a cake his aunt brought them (*Pärt and the Last Piece of Cake,* 2018), as well as when he misses his stop when taking the bus home from school (*Pärt Goes Full Circle,* 2019).

There isn't much external activity in Saar's Pärt books, but the fact is compensated by strong inner dynamics, i.e. the boy's buzzing thought process. The writing resembles the boy's stream of consciousness, free-flowing and unimpeded. Very few authors are capable of applying such a style successfully and in a way that captivates readers – only writers who possess a sufficient degree of emotional intelligence and self-confidence; who are articulate and perceptive in their word usage.

Since his very first work, Saar has stood out as possessing a keen understanding of child's psychology and being adept at putting it into words. For him, a little boy's world is as limitless as the cosmos and is packed with surprises, puzzles, and mystery. At the same time, this world also contains rationality and practical aspects that match the boy's level of experience. When reading Saar's works, one never doubts who is describing the events as they unfold – without exception, it's preschooler Vassel or just-turned-seven Pärt; never an adroit author weighing what might sound better or have more of an impact.

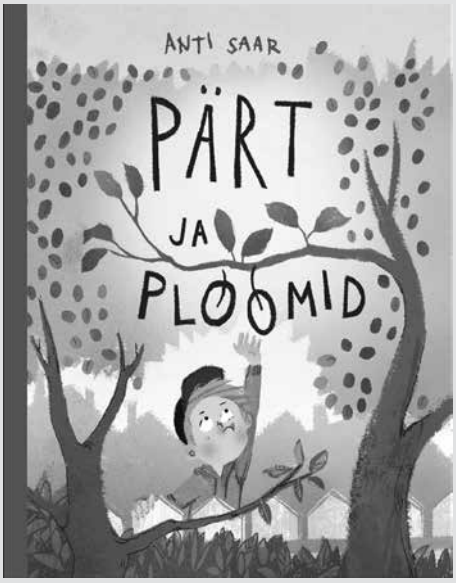
Saar's stories are easy for young readers to follow and be swept along with, but at the same time they are intriguing and inspire them to think, brimming with dilemmas faced by completely ordinary children. As many people have no doubt found themselves in Vassel's and Pärt's positions at some time or another, readers can smoothly slip into the boy's shoes, accompanying him through the tremulous emotions, and drawing comparisons to their own lives. Saar has a sharp eye for what is special in a regular kid's mundane life: simply jumping on a trampoline on a summer morning, taking an everyday trip to the grocery store to pick up the essentials, or coming across a plum on the sidewalk can be a true adventure for the protagonist – something even akin to discovering unknown lands or taming savage lions. As he describes life through the eyes of a child, the author is able to put aside his own personal experience and start with a blank page every time. Consequently, his storytelling is genuine, refreshing, and engaging from start to finish. Saar knows the recipe for a great children's book.

JAANIKA PALM is a researcher at the Estonian Children's Literature Center. She heads a children's literature research group, which has been responsible for several publications including *The Dictionary of Children's Literature* (2006), the *Estonian Children's Literature from 1991–2012 review* (2014), and *The Gold Reserve of Estonian Children's Literature* (2018).

Pärt and the Plums

by Anti Saar

An excerpt translated by Adam Cullen



Pärt and the Plums by Anti Saar. Päike ja Pilv, 2018. Illustrations by Anna Ring

It's incredible, but true: walking home from the bus stop today, a ripe plum struck me right on the noggin. I felt a soft thump on my baseball cap, looked down at my feet, and there it was: a nice big purple plum. Good thing I didn't step on it! I brushed the fruit off with my sleeve, then stuck it in my mouth. It was delicious! Right after I spat out the pit, I regretted not thinking sooner to chew on it a little longer.

If I still had a plum like that now, I'd carefully place it in my pocket and munch on it later tonight before brushing my teeth. Or even *after* brushing my teeth – secretly, in bed! Then I'd stick the pit under my pillow till morning.

I craned my neck to look up and spotted a branch with dark-colored leaves above me. The plum tree itself was growing in someone else's yard – not right next to the sidewalk where I stood. There were countless purple plums hanging from the tree itself, but none on the branch stretching over the sidewalk. But wait! If I squinted my eyes, I could spot one more plum hidden behind a

leaf right above me, just as big as the last one and probably just as ripe.

I'd never go into a stranger's yard to swipe plums, because swiping is almost the same as stealing and I've heard that a hand will stick up out of a thief's grave. That's what Kaisa's grandma told me after I picked a yellow tulip from her flowerbed on Mother's Day.

The plum tree's owner would probably tell me the very same thing, but the branch stretching out over my head didn't belong to whomever that might be, *did* it? Or was I wrong? I squatted down by the fence and began to think. Last year, my grandpa grew a whopper of a pumpkin. Or, well, the pumpkin grew *itself*, but it was on the end of a vine that had wound its way through the chain-link fence and into the neighbor's gooseberry bushes. Grandpa watered the pumpkin plant from his side of the fence and the neighbor protected the pumpkin from frost by covering it with an old coat in fall. In the end, they agreed to split the pumpkin evenly. From that half-a-pumpkin alone, Grandpa made so much jarred pumpkin preserves that we were still eating it the next spring. True, though, a plum *isn't* the same as a pumpkin – I'd gobbled up the one that fell onto my head in a single bite, and was in my right to do so! It would be pretty silly to go up to the owner of the plum tree and say: look, there's a plum that grew on a branch outside of your yard – let's go ahead and split it. On top of that, I started to wonder: who said *I* was the one who should get that second half?

Whom did plums hanging over a sidewalk belong to, anyway? And whom does the sidewalk itself belong to? What about the street? The parks? The river that flows through our city? Maybe they all belong to the mayor? Then, I started wondering that if all that was true, what if the mayor came looking for his plum? Would he walk by here tomorrow and say, "Uh-oh, there was a nice purple plum here that I wanted to take home to my kids once it was ripe, but now it's nowhere to be seen! I'll have to figure out which sweet-toothed little rascal ate it and issue his parents a fine."

No way, I reckoned – none of that could be true. The mayor doesn't go around shoveling snow from everyone's yards or raking leaves in all the parks. Why should he get all the plums growing outside everyone's yards, then? That wouldn't be fair!

What's more, I decided that if a second plum were to fall from the tree all on its own right now and the owner of the tree didn't hurry straight over to get it, then I could munch away without feeling a shred of guilt… or stick it in my pocket and walk away. That wouldn't be any sort of stealing. All I needed to do was keep squatting by the fence and hope the plum would fall down before six-thirty rolled around and the kid's show I wouldn't miss for the world came on TV.

But then, I remembered I wouldn't be allowed to hang around under the tree for that long, because Mom and Dad might start to worry and think I was told to stay after class again. And then Dad might call my teacher, who might forget that I *had* all my homework finished today, and might say to him that yes, Pärt should still be here at school but he isn't for some reason and no doubt he wandered off again or is taking a joyride on the bus. And then… and then

AN ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA RING FROM THE BOOK *PÄRT AND THE PLUMS* BY ANTI SAAR

they'll all get mad at me and start yelling before I get a chance to explain anything, just like they always do. And that was the *last* thing I wanted.

I stood up and stared at the plum hanging so nicely from its branch. Where had I gotten the idea that it might fall at any second?! Maybe it won't happen for another week. Or even worse – what if it happened the exact moment after I'd been waiting for several hours but then finally gave up and went home? No, something had to be done to get ahold of that plum, and fast!

Turning my gaze back up to the plum, I glared at it, clenched my fists, and thought with all my might: *Fall down!* Kaisa's grandma told us one time about people who are able to move things, and even break them, using nothing but their mind. Apparently, I'm not one of those kinds of people, because my mind didn't make the plum swing a single hair's-worth. Even the leaves on the tree were motionless, as the weather was completely still. I couldn't reach the tree trunk to shake it and wasn't bold enough to climb up the fence to do so.

"Fall down already, dang it!" I shouted, stamping my foot. The plum didn't budge an inch. My patience was coming to an end, even though my appetite for the plum kept on growing. Just as I started looking around to see if I could find a stick to knock it down, I remembered my flute.

The Mystery of Andres Allan Ellmann

by Lauri Sommer

Andres Allan Ellmann (1964-1988) was one of the very few mystical poets in post-war Estonian poetry. I think it was in his blood – his mother Leili, a lover of poetry and a good nurse, is a mystic herself and his daughter Joanna, who was born early – two weeks before her father's death and whom Allan only saw as a distant living spot held out in her mother's hands from the window of the sixth floor through an ambulance, is now a poetess and seer herself. As a child, Allan and his elder brother, nowadays Estonian pop artist Raoul Kurvitz, had year-long fantastic "movie" series of a sort of kids' live performance school. He was always a good watcher and had an inner way of understanding. Allan was among the first wave of Estonian punks, when the movement was in its early free-form and improvisational stage, and took part in the youth rebellion that started after the prohibition of the concert of the Estonian proto-punk band Propeller (1980), "punk marching" was invented there, and he also protested in the other youth riots that followed the communist program of Russification. The KGB had their eye on him. Later, his worldview moved closer to hippies, but remained independent nevertheless. After finishing high school he chose to learn theology, and his interests were faith healing, beliefs of indigenous people, early Christianity, unitas fratrum (herrnhuters), Dionysos Areopagita, and Buddhism. He worked as a church assistant in Tallinn's Toomkirik (Dome Church), spending many a nightly hour there and made one religious happening with his friends. His faith was immediate and uncompromising and every manifestation of religious hypocrisy devastated him so. He is said to have attacked hypocrite priests. As many a Soviet vagabond, he made distant train rides as a cow herder and made eccentric pilgrimages in the territory of the former USSR. In their teenage years, he and his friend bought an old Käända country manor with some small help from their parents. This special, solitary place far away from any nearby farms, with no electricity and some astral occurrences reportedly still present, somehow developed his style and became his door to the inner world of poetry. Many times he would go there by himself, take the evening train, walk a long way, light candles, heat the ovens, go for long walks in the forests

ANDRES ALLAN · ARCHIVE PHOTO

and marshes, pray in the empty ruin of the mill, play the flute, sit on the branch of an oak, listen to the animals passing and flying, learn, read, and so much more. The most intense trips were made at night, when familiar orientation fades and unknown and ancient mental territories open up their borders to seekers. He would write his visions down with a typewriter. That's why I called the larger collection of his poetry *Öötrykid* (*Night prints*) (2009) using his own word. A close relationship with nature is one component of his style, as is a primitive way of perceiving the world. No one knows for sure what happened in the end. His experimental way of living might have pushed him too far. After spending two solitary weeks in the manor in the spring of 1988 (the time of national awakening and hope in Estonia) he returned changed, claimed to have met God, said he had to give the last offering and remained in enigmatic silence most of the time. He and his wife sought help from healers and sorcerers, but to no avail. One summer's day he fell from the attic next to his family's flat. Some claim that someone from the KGB pushed him, others say it was some kind of health problem, still others guess it might have been religious psychosis or suicide. Every witness has a different theory and the KGB archives have been taken away to Moscow. So the mystery remains and poetry is still pretty much the only way to understand the man. His poems were published during his lifetime but the collection, which featured his self-compiled manuscript called *Urila manu* (*Toward the Offering Land*) plus

ARCHIVE PHOTO

some poems collected from the manuscripts eventually called *Urjamised* (Offerings) were published four years after his death, in 1992. His life and poetry have been a great help and inspiration for me for two decades now. I felt as though this love needed to be fulfilled, and this lost prophet helped. So I contacted his widow and had access to manuscripts, pictures, and informants. First, I published a long essay and a small bunch of his "new" poems, then came an hour-long radio broadcast about him, and after meeting his daughter, we decided to create a book of photos with a long essay at the end. When Joanna went to his grave and communicated our idea to her father, she heard a slow and contented flute melody in her mind. We had agreement from the Other Side. So came the book and now there are a few translations. I hope that seekers of different nations all recognize each other. if someone would publish an anthology of the world's short-lived and idiosyncratic young poets, this would be the best Estonian entry.

LAURI SOMMER is an author, musician, and man of the country. He is currently working on a collection of short stories and occasionally translates Native American songs.

Poetry by Andres Allan

Translated by Adam Cullen

* * *

morning forces thoughts and people low

habits overpower sensations

an exact definition for every hour every weekday every season

yet if you light a candle in morning when it's still dark

and let the mind wander or just stare at the flame

you can pretend to be away for a while longer

and then head to the depot or wherever

or else while dashing to catch the train

imagine a dash through the forest

the chances to change sensations are many

you've simply got to realize what's routine

and rethink it

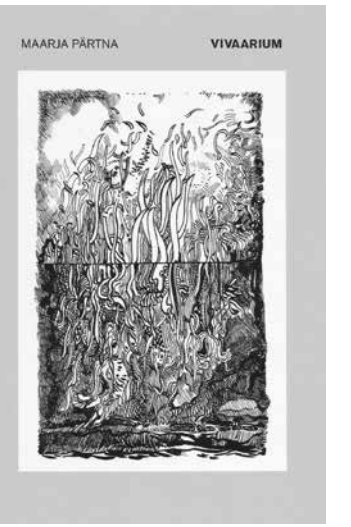
what a wonderful morning I've never had the likes of it before

a new day is like a blank page no one has written upon yet

Book reviews

by Taavi Hallimäe, Krista Kumberg, Siim Lill, Maarja Helena Meriste, Mari Niitra, Aare Pilv, Aro Velmet and Piret Viires

MAARJA PÄRTNA · PHOTO BY RIHO KALL



MAARJA PÄRTNA
VIVAARIUM
(VIVARIUM)
Elusamus 2019, 72 pp.
ISBN 9789949735013

The role of nature in poetry has, foremost, traditionally been ornamental, atmospheric, or metaphorical. Lately, however – in the winds of climate crisis – the environment has adopted an unshakable position in societal discussion and has thus acquired a different appearance in artistic representations as well. Environmental issues are no longer a secondary reality towards which one can – if they have the time and desire – turn their attention. On the contrary: it's becoming impossible to refuse to recognize them. As a result, "apocalyptic exhaustion" has become an item of discussion. The incessant flow of information proclaiming imminent catastrophe has caused people to feel passive and unsure of what, if anything, they can do about it.

Maarja Pärtna's fourth poetry collection *Vivarium* deals with this sense of numbness. She attempts to utilize the language of poetry to locate our lost sensitivity. Although *Vivarium*'s environmentally-themed aims are explicit they, luckily, don't evolve into an "agenda" that makes the poems too predictable. On the contrary: Pärtna's talent lies in her sensitivity for detail and for conjuring unusual imagery, the metaphorical function of which is not immediately apparent. Thanks to this hint of mystery, comparisons become especially powerful. Take for example "a lilac branch in a vase – or its shadow / like a memory left bodiless" (p. 23), or her acknowledgement that history is a storytelling of graves "that are likewise akin to walls / meant to hold the dead / right where they belong." (p. 30)

The more shadowed side of sensitivity is a vulnerability that characterizes the emotional tone throughout *Vivarium*. Humans no longer stand at the center point of power and usual self-centrism is disrupted on several levels. People are not always the narrating subject in Pärtna's poems, for instance: first-person experiences may also be described by a dead kingfisher (pp. 46–47) or a gutted animal hanging from a hook (p. 49). The author repeatedly notes how human attempts to act independently of nature have failed time and again, such as in the form of man-made structures that nature overtakes and overgrows without asking our permission (pp. 18–19, 22–23, 28). One is forced to admit: even that which is regarded as an intrinsic element of culture (such as the art of formulating words) is guided by something other than self-governing human will: "and gradually I begin to perceive / it is impossible to direct / the path of words through the world." (p. 16)

It's also worth noting the recurrence of certain imagery and lines throughout the poems, evoking the sense that there is no topic that can be easily "framed" or resolved by a single poem. Rather, these subjects require greater scrutiny, responses, and responsibility.

The narrator's voice in *Vivarium* is that of someone who has been startled into a state of caution – a person who, having become conscious of the shift in the relationship between man and the forces of nature (as well as the impossibility of contrasting the two), is seeking a new manner of relating to the world. What matters most is to not grow numb or disengage. **MHM**

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU

PARIIS (KAKSKÜMMEND VIIS AASTAT HILJEM)
PARIS: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

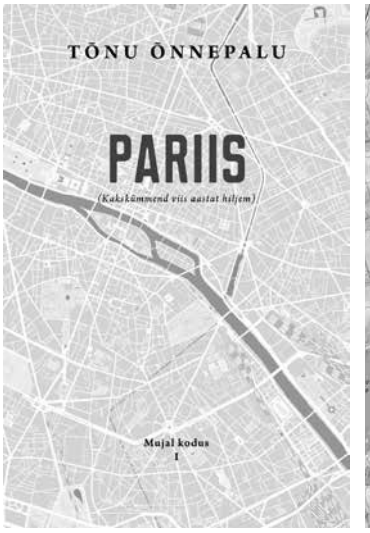
EKSA, 2019, 176 pp.
ISBN 9789949684007

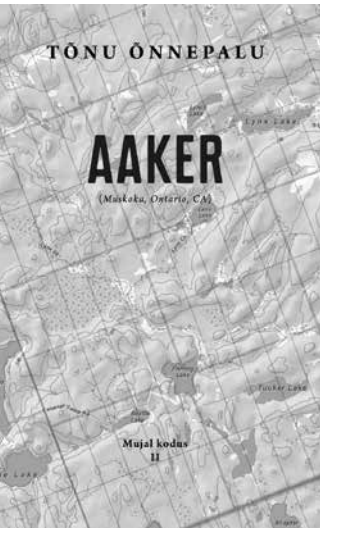
AAKER
ACRE

EKSA 2019, 389 pp,
ISBN 9789949684007

Tõnu Õnnepalu's *Paris: Twenty-Five Years Later* and *Acre: Muskoka, Ontario, CA* are the first novels in a trilogy titled *At Home Elsewhere* – the third book, set on an island in the sea, is still to come. The release of a new Õnnepalu work is always an occasion in and of itself. For some reason, the feelings they stir up gravitate towards one extreme or another: love or disdain. Some writers simply do not leave their readers in the mediocrity of the mundane.

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU · PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER





Paris is a diary-format novel in which the author returns to the city he lived in 25 years ago, writing a chapter every day as he cat-sits for a friend. Indeed, 25 years have passed since Õnnepalu's timeless, defining work *Border State*! "To be honest, it's only worth buying books published this year, this *half*-year, or ones that are *at least* twenty-five years old. For that was just about the time when the age of futility burst into full bloom – time began to sprint ahead, leaving everything behind and ideas to expire at an unprecedented rate." Much has changed. Õnnepalu is no longer an Eastern European stranger – Paris has now become a home, albeit the kind he must flee again. It is a City with a capital C. And a City is independent of a nation or fatherland: "For every fatherland has committed numerous failures, which is to say the failures were committed in the name of the fatherland. […] In some sense, [cities] are indifferent to whomever they may currently belong to, because they belong to no one. […] Countrysides are all so jealous! The City is generous – or, well, easygoing. Better that than ill-tempered, wary, or snarling. Just like all those old fatherlands." Yet as for Õnnepalu's writing, merging with the City means the gaze is no longer as concentrated and sharp as the one readers found on the pages of *Border State*. The City is filled with disjointed memories, familiar places, impermanence, and recurring thoughts. "All I am able to write are mere margin notes, anyway, and more like margin notes upon margin notes in very tiny text that may as well be illegible."

Paris lies upon a border. On the one hand, it is like an epilogue to *Border State* (while indeed too long to be an epilogue), but on the other, it is a prologue to *Acre*. It appears one must warm up to really begin writing.

Acre holds an entirely different Õnnepalu – one who, after spending late summer in Paris, travels on to an area of expatriate Estonians' summer homes and scout camps in Canada. The diary-format novel continues, though it is more relaxed. Temporal border discussions are no longer as necessary. Whereas the City causes one to repeat themselves and stray outwardly, solitude in the Canadian forest leads to critique. Here, Õnnepalu tackles topics that have previously been somewhat taboo: the nature of Estonian expatriation, the mistreatment of native-born individuals when the Republic

of Estonia was restored, and topics of Estonianness and homeland more generally. "Land, not language, unites people into a nation. […] A nation sprouts from the land and consolidates upon it. Estonians and Russian Estonians have, in fact, an easier time understanding each other than Estonians and expatriate Estonians do." Comparing Americanism and Estonianism, he writes: "We do live in an American world." All this is written amid nature – as always, Õnnepalu is unsurpassable in his descriptions of the environment, plants, and animals (for the entire summer after reading *Acre*, lindens seem somehow unusual and more intimate to me). Even in the City, Õnnepalu notices much that others likely overlook. Altogether, the brief notes scribbled in a Canadian "forest shanty" on scraps of local life and history, his Estonian ancestors' memories, wandering through the woods ("Today, people here fear the forest that lies one hundred meters from their summer cottage"), Humboldt, and much more form a gripping whole – a scout's guide of sorts.

Typical of Õnnepalu's writing, both books contain a mournfulness ("I can't really complain about my health. I have no illnesses. Not apart from inborn melancholy.") and a certain anxiety about catastrophe; about a world that is no longer what it once was. "I do not know if Europe has a future," Rémi Brague writes in his *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, which Õnnepalu has translated into Estonian. Every one of Õnnepalu's books radiates this very uncertainty – an inevitable sorrow that is nevertheless not restricted or foolish. Yet, unlike many other Estonian authors who write on this topic, Õnnepalu is captivating. He possesses a natural greatness that can sometimes be tiring and repetitive in its sadness, but at its high points is entirely convincing, honest, and transfixing.

In summary, the trilogy should certainly be read through as a whole. As Leo Luks wrote in his review of *Paris*: "[This] is the first part of a trilogy of novels. Naturally, I can't have any inkling of what will happen in the other works, but I have a strange sense as if I've already read them as well." It appears this isn't quite the case. There will certainly be reason to reread the trilogy 25 years from now, and the books themselves exceed expectations as a unified whole – a claim that can be made even before the final part has been published. Õnnepalu's endless pilgrimage is a compelling one! **SL**

PIRET RAUD

KÕIK MINU SUGULASED

(ALL MY RELATIVES)

Illustrated by the author

Tänapäev 2017, 116 pp.
ISBN 9789949852314

The narrator of Raud's *All My Relatives*, a boy named Adam, is far from being the first and only representative of mankind or of his own kinsfolk. Quite the opposite: when Adam's teacher instructs the students to draw their family trees, the boy finds he can list off so many relatives they just won't all fit on one. So, he draws a centipede instead. Each leg is unique and goes at its own pace, different in terms of how far it can step, but all still moving in one direction determined by the spirit of their common heritage.

Here, we find the book's first grain of knowledge worth pocketing. A child knows their

PIRET RAUD · PHOTO BY TIINA KÕRTSINI / ÕHTULEHT

kin. Stories have been told, heritage passed down from generation to generation, and family members communicate. Family can be known and recognized even without seeing one another or shaking hands. How many kids can boast that they know *all* their "kith and kin"? Another useful tidbit is the fact that all people are unique – even relatives. Some are nice, some are funny, while others may be strange, beastly, or vile. It's not out of the question for there to even be an ex-con in their midst. Some of Adam's relatives are new to the family (his little brother, for one), while others are so old that to keep things clear and organized, he draws a sword clutched between the toes of their centipede leg.

Raud views family ties through a child's gaze and talks about them in just as childlike of a tone. Youngsters are often told they have the exact same nose as their father (grandfather, great-uncle, etc.). Or their eyes. Or their jaw. How does this work in reality? Is Great-Grandpa Eduard, who passed his nose down to Adam, now lying noseless in his coffin? People also say that dogs resemble their masters. What if it's the other way around? And what happens when pet and master blur together to such an extent? Absurd tales like these provide food for thought after you finish laughing.

Readers who immediately make up their mind that the book is a realistic and childlike work that details the affairs of a particular family and kin are in for a surprise. *All My Relatives* holds an underlying connection to Raud's 2014 book of children's stories titled *Me, Mum, and Our Friends of All Sorts*, in which a little boy named David recounts the rather bizarre encounters had by the people around him. By writing about the extraordinary as if it were ordinary, the author crafts well-functioning imagery that, despite its slight quirk, is as on-target as Robin Hood's arrows. For example, while visiting his Great-Aunt Aime, Adam meets an uncle who is a bona-fide pig and behaves that way as well – the man is filthy and domineering. The uncle won't leave until Great-Aunt Aime dumps all the coins in her purse into the slot on his back. No surprise there – these days, there's no shortage of relatively young, unemployed men who happen to come along right when their older relatives receive their pension payments.

No matter how wild and mischievous every subsequent story might appear, it always arrives at a clear message that Adam or an adult uses to sum up the situation. Following the incident with the pig-like uncle, Dad remarks that you don't pick your relatives. All you can do is try to remain human yourself. Discussing their bland Aunt Blaine who melted into a couch, Dad remarks that modesty is certainly a virtue, but you still have to stand up for yourself – otherwise, people will do whatever they wish with you.

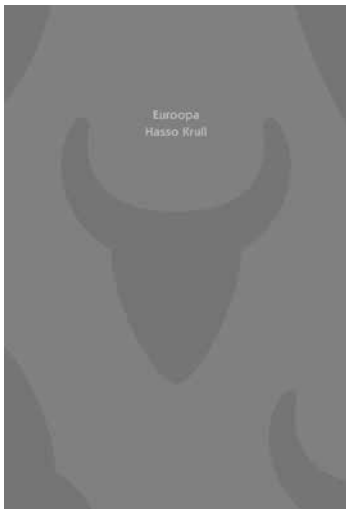
Raud wouldn't be a writer if she didn't also appreciate reading – something she conveys in several stories. Adam's sister Mia is drowning in stuffed animals because they bring her wonderful dreams. The Moon recommends instead that Mia read: "You can take a book to bed with you, too. Books also make you brave, and you'll definitely have lovely dreams after a nice little read. Most important of all: you can never have too many good books." Instead of balancing books on her head to acquire a ladylike posture like one relative did, one character decides to read them. "Grandma once said, by the way, that Aunt Angel had gotten it all wrong. True ladies aren't those who can walk with a book balanced on her head, but those who *read* the books and are friendly and kind to boot."

Fun is also poked at goal-oriented sports on several occasions: a talented football player loses his hard head, but there's nothing wrong with that – he's still got his legs! A girl who goes on a healthy carrot diet to be better at sports turns into a bunny, then a chocolate bunny, then a mug of hot cocoa, and finally a girl again. "It's unlikely that Lena will become an Olympic champion anymore, but after all, the Olympics aren't what matters most in the world." What truly matters is family and being loved just the way you are. KK

HASSO KRULL
EUROOPA
(EUROPE)
2018, 92 pp.
ISBN 9789949999125

Hasso Krull's poetry collection *Euroopa* (*Europe*) becomes steadily denser, more bottomless, and intricate with every reading – as if recalling something one can no longer remember, but is also impossible to fully forget. *Europe* weaves classical Ancient Greek mythology with post-colonial

HASSO KRULL. PHOTO BY MIHKEL MARIPUU / EESTI MEEDIA / SCANPIX



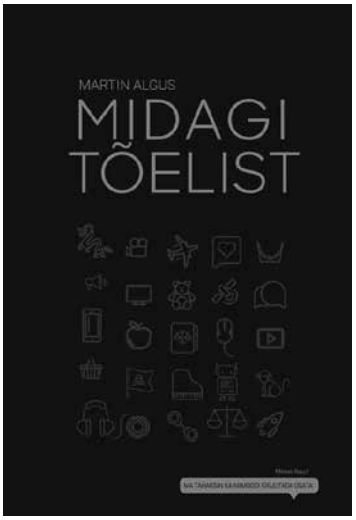
European angst, the steady decline of Christian culture, European progressiveness, the neoliberal cult of money, and modern-day ecological catastrophe. All of this is accompanied by well-structured metaphors, the seeming simplicity and frankness of Krull's poetry, as well as the fluid presentation of motifs and their interconnectedness. The scope of Krull's perspective that emerges in *Europe* appears dizzying to our ever-narrowing modern-day mindset, but also seems that much more relevant.

The fact that Krull turns occasionally to ancient mythology and other times to folklore when addressing the contemporary era points to his belief that we live not in a time of changes, but of repetition. Everything we encounter is composed of certain variations of the past; of recurring patterns that even encompass progressivism and the will to break free of that repetition. This resurfacing of patterns is based not in a linear historical continuity which is manifested in perpetually penning new stories based on the ones that came before, but rather in mythological circularity: retelling the very same story over and over again, but always in a strikingly different way. Mythological thinking is not, one might add, a thing of the past, but belongs right here to our most mundane of present affairs, thus allowing us to observe such events in a greater and more meaningful scope – one that nevertheless remains direct and individual. Mythologizing the present requires making painstaking efforts towards recollecting – tracing repetitive patterns despite impeding historical traumas, self-serving tendencies that may lead one astray, and dystopian impressions of the imminent future that foster a sense of powerlessness. "Is this indeed the pattern / of change? Is that where fortune awaits?" (p. 77) Krull suggests, with a note of hope in the last quarter of his collection, addressing the belief that Estonia has removed itself from the troubles Europe is currently facing. A response is given only a few pages later as Krull returns to the start; to what has once already been: "This terrain is somehow familiar, / as if I've been here before, though / I haven't – perhaps only in dreams? But in what / dream was that?" (p. 81)

In Krull's view, Europe is akin to a riddle that will ultimately never be solved because its solution would mean casting the riddle itself aside. It would mean uprooting Europe, and ourselves along with it, for good. "Every question is already old," he writes, guiding us closer to Europe's essence. "We heard it just yesterday, the day before; / we knew the answer but have forgotten it," (p. 12) after which we are tasked with remembering – and, why not, interpreting – Europe once again. The dream itself is introduced shortly after, because like the riddle, the dream also lacks a final solution or an interpretation that elucidates all: "What a dream – it cannot be / watched, only told patiently and / at length; told until / the storyteller recognizes them self." (p. 17)

The Europe Krull describes may indeed be taken as a dream, the telling and recollection of which is ever more pertinent and necessary with each passing day. It tells us something about ourselves – something that has long been impossible to avoid. This is also the case with Krull's collection, the impetus for writing, which did not derive from an urge to portray Europe and its mythological origins, but rather the challenges the continent faces today. **TH**

MARTIN ALGUS · PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER



MARTIN ALGUS
MIDAGI TÕELIST
(SOMETHING REAL)
Varrak 2018. 179 pp
ISBN 9789985344507

Martin Algus's novel *Something Real*, which received the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's 2019 Award for Prose, may indeed be the author's debut in the genre, but he is anything but a newcomer to writing. Algus is a trained actor and has worked professionally in theater for eight years (in addition to acting in films and TV series), but has long been known throughout Estonia as a dramaturge. His writing career indeed began with translating plays into Estonian (such as works by Mark Ravenhill, Sarah Kane, and Brian Friel from the English, as well as by the Presnyakov brothers from the Russian) and he received his first prize – the 2004 Aleksander Kurtna Translation Award – for his translation of contemporary drama. Thereafter, he began penning his own plays and has since won several playwriting competitions as well as becoming a recognized film and television screenwriter in high demand. Algus has a very broad repertoire and at the moment is one of Estonia's most insightful playwrights: his drama targets the most tender points of society with a British "in-yer-face"-type style.

Something Real actually comprises a hybrid of genres – a play of same name was staged in tandem with the book's release. The novel is, of course, slightly denser and more detailed than the play, but their substance is identical: both consist of the alternating monologues of two men. Each version leaves a different impression: whereas the play features rather little action and the retelling of events, the book places the reader directly in the heart of the plot thanks to the two rotating narrators. Dissimilarities in the characters' personalities emerge from their respective dictions: one's is more animated and educated, the other's plainer and more colloquial. Thus, the two respectively represent a prosaic play and a dramatic novel. The thrilling work is nevertheless quite simple in content. Leo has lost the sense of reality in his marriage and life in general, which ultimately leads to online forums where minors offer sex. He

arranges a meeting but ends up victim to blackmail: Karl, an ex-convict, has put his own daughter out as bait, snaps a few compromising photos of Leo, and then extorts him for money. The rest of the plot unfolds from there.

Algus traces, with exceptional psychological credibility, how both men arrive at the decisions that cross their own personal boundaries: one seeking an unprecedented emotional experience, the other a life of greater material ease. Worth noting is how the author's own position doesn't step in with any moral judgements, allowing the characters to unfold in all their human ambiguity as well as their limitations and unpredictability. Algus's writing is simultaneously bold and delicate, fascinatingly constructed from a purely narrative point of view. Although the topics he addresses – addiction to online porn, pedophilia, and slavery by blackmail – might provide a tempting opportunity to appall one's readers, the work remains finely and pleasantly realistic. The characters do not render their vices in sharp relief, but are complex lifelike individuals. The reader may indeed be shocked by the two men and might rightfully condemn them, but he or she may also feel sympathetic.

The author himself has said that while writing *Something Real*, he was intrigued by the compounding sense of loneliness that is caused by today's barrage of virtual opportunities, which only exacerbates a wide range of addictions. *Something Real* is, in a sense, a "danger novel", as it's easy to manipulate a mass of people distanced from reality and plagued by addictions; however, Algus does not explicitly develop that aspect of the novel. The work also received the Eduard Vilde Award, which recognizes new Estonian works that address contemporary social problems.

With its array of grim topics and brisk, riveting monologues, *Something Real* touches upon several classic human issues: What are the criteria for good and evil? What does it mean to live an authentic life? And how is one's personality tied to their core, as well as to those of others? **AP**

KERTU SILLASTE

MINA OLEN KUNSTNIK

(I AM AN ARTIST)

Koolibri 2018, 32 pp.
ISBN 9789985041383

Whether or not something is art can be debated ad infinitum. Oftentimes, you hear people loudly declaring what they believe art is not. Nevertheless, making art doesn't simply mean drawing well and as true to life as one can, even though that does remain an indication of artwork for many to this day. That being said, Kertu Sillaste's children's book *Mina olen kunstnik* (*I Am an Artist*) is a fitting guide for readers of all ages who ask what art really is.

The main character is a little boy named Jaan, who states: "I am an artist." In fact, there is an artist in every child, and a little bit of a child in every artist as well. Art springs from an unexpected idea or seeing accustomed things from a new angle. Sillaste outlines this to the reader, step-by-step.

I Am an Artist emphasizes the importance of imagination. Art can be made in all kinds of different ways: it can be a game, a riddle,

KERTU SILLASTE. PHOTO BY PRIIT GREPP

or even recognition. An artist can come up with a wide spectrum of ideas and even say: "I'm going to collect dust bunnies in a box and when it's full, I'll make a big, soft, gray sculpture." At the same time: "Not all ideas can be made real. But so what!? It's still fun to think them up."

In addition to drawings and paintings, Jaan crafts installations (a couch, fabric, and shoes can become a dinosaur!) and sculptures (such as a memorial to Grandpa using a hammer and logs). Although, even artists may occasionally be overcome by dark despair: for instance, you might make a hundred different tiger drawings and still not be satisfied with any of the results.

It was nearly a decade ago that Sillaste, who has a degree in textile arts, first arrived at illustrating and later at creating her own children's picture books. Her visual signature includes a vivid palette of colors, a childlike style of drawing, collage, and the mixing of pencil and India ink. The author's illustrations speak worlds using minimal tools. As a very specific genre, the picture book requires an author to be skilled at self-expression in both word and image. Each and every tiniest detail in Sillaste's books is exquisitely constructed and invigorating. She has repeatedly attracted recognition in children's book competitions, and was the winner of the 2015 Knee-High Book Competition.

In *I Am an Artist*, the author sets out to inspire children's creativity, and it seems she did so successfully. Sillaste steadily guides children's aptitude for experimentation towards artistic expression, while simultaneously introducing the benefits and opportunities provided by artistic creativity. Though the book is intended for a young audience, it can inspire readers of all ages to better understand art and try one's own hand at it. **MN**

URMAS VADI
BALLETTMEISTER
(THE BALLET MASTER)

Loomingu Raamatukogu 2019, nr 6-9
EAN 3220000004467

Urmas Vadi's *The Ballet Master* is an absurdist satire of nationalist politics written by a cultural omnivore. The book, which itself has gone through several

URMAS VADI · PHOTO BY SILLE ANNUK / PM / SCANPIX BALTICS

transformations, first as a film script, then as a play, carries the fingerprints of Ken Kesey and Daniil Kharms. It's a work where the possible consequences of an Axis victory of the Soviet Union are considered through the perspective of a moose loose on Moscow, and where the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev may well turn out to be Czar Nikolai II in disguise.

The main plot revolves around a fireman, Jüri, who is tasked with escorting a motley crew of potters on a secret mission to rescue the Estonian President Konstantin Päts from a Soviet asylum after the country is occupied during World War II. Did I mention they are all disguised as celebrity ballet dancers – an occupation they know nothing about – and charm their way through dangerous situations by jumping around like frogs?

The tale moves at the speed of a Hollywood caper, and reads like one, too. The ballet master and his crew quickly veer off course of their original mission, and end up in Moscow, where they have to face the NKVD, engage in a battle of wits with a *femme fatale,* and dance their way out of a complicated situation. Meanwhile, two men, claiming to be Estonian President Päts and Russian Czar Nikolai II plot their escape and return to power from an asylum in Kazan. But then, don't all men in asylums harbor delusions of grandeur?

At the heart of the matter, however, is an opposition between hardened state nationalism, and the playful, irreverent and tolerant notion of community. Jüri and his buddies are called upon to rescue Päts as the figurehead of the Estonian nation, but the old man (or his insane impersonator – the point is precisely that it's impossible to tell the difference) is simply a smaller, more pathetic version of an actual emperor: authoritarian, power hungry, and cynical about the use of national sentiments for personal gain.

Meanwhile, Jüri's antics – turning his traveling ballet show into a demonstration of "local folk dances" – may seem silly at first, but four men doing frog leaps generates camaraderie, turns violence into communion, and gets the boys out of all kinds of trouble. This is community at its best – constantly changing, improvising, not taking itself too seriously, and genuinely working to bring people together, not to reinforce

political battle lines, where ordinary people on either side only end up as casualties.

The Ballet Master cements Vadi as one of the most original and important voices in Estonian literature. Like in his previous works – the Forrest Gump-esque satire of Estonian nationalism in exile titled *Back to Estonia* and *Crash*-meets-the-Great-Estonian-Novel-like *Neverland* – he speaks to the tensions in Estonian culture in the voice of a zany citizen of world literature. Vadi does not discriminate, he can allude to current Estonian affairs in one sentence, to an American film in the next, and to classic Russian literature in the one after. His sense of humor is one-of-a-kind, and in spite of the absurd plot, you feel for the characters and hope they succeed. His works are good candidates for translation, since the abundance of allusions and the fast-moving pace appeals even if you don't get some of the more "Estonian" references.

The tale of kind-hearted tricksters on the road, charming people through dance is, of course, as old as time. The hardened nationalist Päts – he can stay in the asylum. **AV**

EEVA PARK

MINU KUNGINGLIKUD KAELKIRJAKUD
(MY MAJESTIC GIRAFFES)

From the "Writers with Writers" series
Tallinn; Hea Lugu, 2018. 158 pp.
ISBN 9789949634538

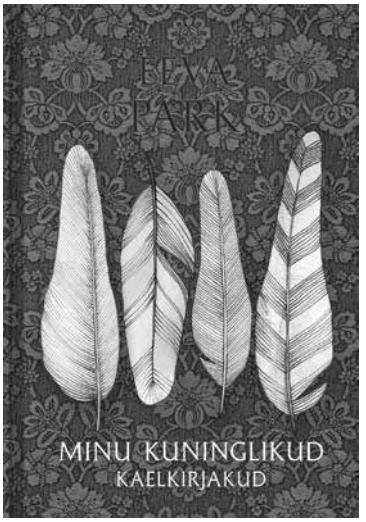
In 2018, the Hea Lugu publishing house launched its "Writers with Writers" book series, in which ten Estonian authors paint a picture of the country's literary scene through their relationships with one another. The series included many of Estonia's literary elite: Arvo Valton, Jaak Urmet, Veiko Märka, Hando Runnel, Maimu Berg, Peeter Sauter, Sirje Kiin, Jaan Kaplinski, Jan Kaus, and Eeva Park. Since the authors represent both the older and younger generation of Estonian authors, the stories span a period that covers the pre-WWII Republic of Estonia to today.

Hea Lugu presented these authors with an intriguing task: to weave their memories of other writers with a snapshot of the era and Estonian cultural life in general. The authors took different approaches, some writing about their own reading experiences and others about personal encounters. What the ten books ultimately produced, however, are short and subjective literary histories that are a must-read for anyone with an interest in Estonia's literature, authors, and literary scene.

Eeva Park's *My Majestic Giraffes* stands out strikingly among the ten works – her writing is sensitive, but brisk, and not lacking a light shade of humor. One can tell that Park is a mature author who possesses brilliant linguistic skills but is also capable of writing on very intimate and personal topics. The work received great acclaim as well as one of the country's most prestigious literary awards – the 2018 Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Prize for Literature in the free category. What was it that so delighted the readers, reviewers, and jury members?

Park executed the task before her perfectly. Her book contains chapters on fellow authors and cultural figures, as well as briefer accounts of the Estonian

EEVA PARK · PHOTO BY LIINA LUHATS-ULMAN



poet Debora Vaarandi and Mia Berner – wife of the legendary Finnish poet Pentti Saarikoski. A large cast of other important figures from Estonian literature and culture are also discussed, ranging from Betti Alver, Mart Lepik, and Friedebert and Elo Tuglas to younger contemporaries such as Teet Kallas.

At the center of the work, however, is Eeva Park's own mother: the celebrated poet and translator Minni Nurme. Park writes on a very personal level but simultaneously observes her subject from a distance – her memories have aged into superb writing. The author's own family history serves as a departure point – a complex ball of knotted relationships that crystalizes into Minni Nurme's selfless acts amidst the hardships of the Soviet occupation to ensure that she and her children would get by. Yet, Park does not heroize her mother, occasionally even employing light sarcasm in her observations. At the same time, the reality of life in the Soviet Union is depicted frankly, accurately, and without embellishment through the history of one family and one person's fate.

Thus, the work's strength is precisely what the project aimed to accomplish: the utmost degree of intimacy is intertwined with historical analysis and rises to achieve historical generalization. We are given a chance to see the life of an Estonian creative intellectual through the example of Minni Nurme while also becoming aware of both the oddities and the hardships of the time.

Park herself stressed this in an interview given to Estonian Public Broadcasting on March 14, 2019: "Our perception of history always shines the clearest through people – something that history itself never really conveys with all its facts, time periods, et cetera. History is actually revealed wonderfully through a person's life – through all its twists and all its problems, because life approaches it on this ordinary level that we all understand," Park added that this is likely the reason her book has touched so many people on a personal level.

The popularity of *My Majestic Giraffes* among readers, reviewers, and jury members alike is due to the fact that by skillfully telling the fate of the Estonian poet Minni

Nurme, Park has managed to convey the difficulty and absurdity of a complex historical period – as well as the determination and joys of those who lived in it. **PV**

TAAVI HALLIMÄE is a critic, an editor of the culture.ee bilingual event calendar, and a lecturer of cultural theory at the Estonian Academy of Arts. He has done comparative research on the works of Nikolai Gogol and Jüri Ehlvest.

KRISTA KUMBERG is a librarian and researcher of children's literature. She has written for several collections of essays on children's literature. Additionally, she has authored five books for toddlers, and a drama collection.

SIIM LILL is an award-winning artist, writer, philosopher, psychologist, and scientist.

MAARJA HELENA MERISTE is a literary critic, editor, and is pursuing a master's in literature at the University of Tartu.

MARI NIITRA is the director of the Liivi Museum and an assistant professor of children's literature at the University of Tartu. She has published a wealth of articles, academic and otherwise, on Estonian children's literature, and is a co-author of the books *A Dictionary of Children's Literature*, *Estonian Children's and Young-Adult Literature 1991–2012*, and *The Gold Reserve of Estonian Children's Literature*.

AARE PILV is a critic, writer, and researcher at the Under and Tuglas Literature Center. He has written six collections of poetry and one travelogue.

ARO VELMET teaches history at the University of Southern California. He is also an editor of the Estonian cultural monthly Vikerkaar.

PIRET VIIRES is a professor of Estonian literature at Tallinn University. Her research focuses on contemporary Estonian literature, post-modernism, post-postmodernism, and the interaction between literature and technology.

Selected translations 2018

Chinese

Title	Tantsisklevail lehtedel ta keerleb
Title *	喚發舞動之樹葉
Author	Mathura
Genre	Poetry
Language	Chinese
Translators	William Lau
Publisher	Allikaäärne, 2019
Pages	152

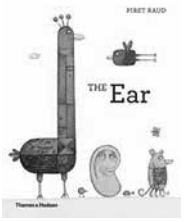
Danish

Title	Eesti ümberlõikaja
Title *	Vi der skal dø hilser dig
Author	Mihkel Mutt
Genre	Novels
Language	Danish
Translators	Birgita Bonde Hansen
Publisher	Jensen & Dalgaard, 2019
Pages	232

Title	Gogoli disko
Title *	Gogol disko
Author	Paavo Matsin
Genre	Novels
Language	Danish
Translators	Birgita Bonde Hansen
Publisher	Jensen & Dalgaard, 2019
Pages	154

English

Title	Kõrv
Title *	The Ear
Author	Piret Raud
Genre	Children's
Language	English
Publisher	Thames & Hudson, 2019
Pages	32



Title	Kilplased
Title *	The Gothamites
Author	Eno Raud
Genre	Children's
Language	English
Translators	Adam Cullen
Publisher	Elsewhere Editions, 2019
Pages	42

Title	Tõde ja õigus I
Title *	Vargamäe. Truth and Justice I
Author	A. H. Tammsaare
Genre	Novels
Language	English
Translators	Inna Feldbach, Alan Peter Trei
Publisher	Vagabond Voices, 2019

French

Title	Lennujaama lutikad ei anna alla
Title *	Les punaises de l'aéroport font de la résistance
Author	Kairi Look
Genre	Children's
Language	French
Translators	Vincent Dautancourt
Publisher	Le Verger des Hespérides, 2019
Pages	340

German

Title	Hingede öö
Title *	Die Nacht der Seelen
Author	Karl Ristikivi
Genre	Novels
Language	German
Translators	Maximilian Murmann
Publisher	Guggolz, 2019
Pages	373

Italian

Title	Lotte reis lõunamaale
Title *	Lotte. L'avventuroso viaggio al sud
Authors	Heiki Ernits,
Genre	Children's
Language	Italian
Translators	Daniele Monticelli
Publisher	De Bastiani, 2019
Pages	149

Latvian

Title	Halb tüdruk on jumala hea olla
Title *	Būt sliktai meitenei ir dievīgi
Author	Kätlin Kaldmaa
Genre	Children's
Language	Latvian
Translators	Maima Grīnberga
Publisher	Liels un mazs, 2019
Pages	123

Korean

Title	Lugu Sandrist, Murist, tillukesest emmest ja nähtamatust Akslist
Title *	엄마가
Author	Piret Raud
Genre	Children's
Language	Korean
Translators	이정주
Publisher	Better Books, 2019
Pages	130

Russian

Title	Maa ja rahvas. Valgusepühad
Title *	Земля и народ = Land and people (Estonian: Russian: English)
Author	Jaan Kaplinski
Genre	Poetry
Language	Russian
Translators	Jaan Kaplinski
Publisher	Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2019
Pages	63

Title	Naisekäe puudutus ehk Seltsimees laps ja isa
Title *	Товарищ ребенок и папа
Author	Leelo Tungal
Genre	Novels
Language	Russian
Translators	Gennadi Muravin
Publisher	KPD, 2019
Pages	206

Slovenian

Title	Natuke napakad lood
Title *	Prismuknjene zgodbe
Author	Piret Raud
Genre	Children's
Language	Slovenian
Translators	Julija Potrč Šavli
Publisher	KUD Sodobnost International, 2019
Pages	90