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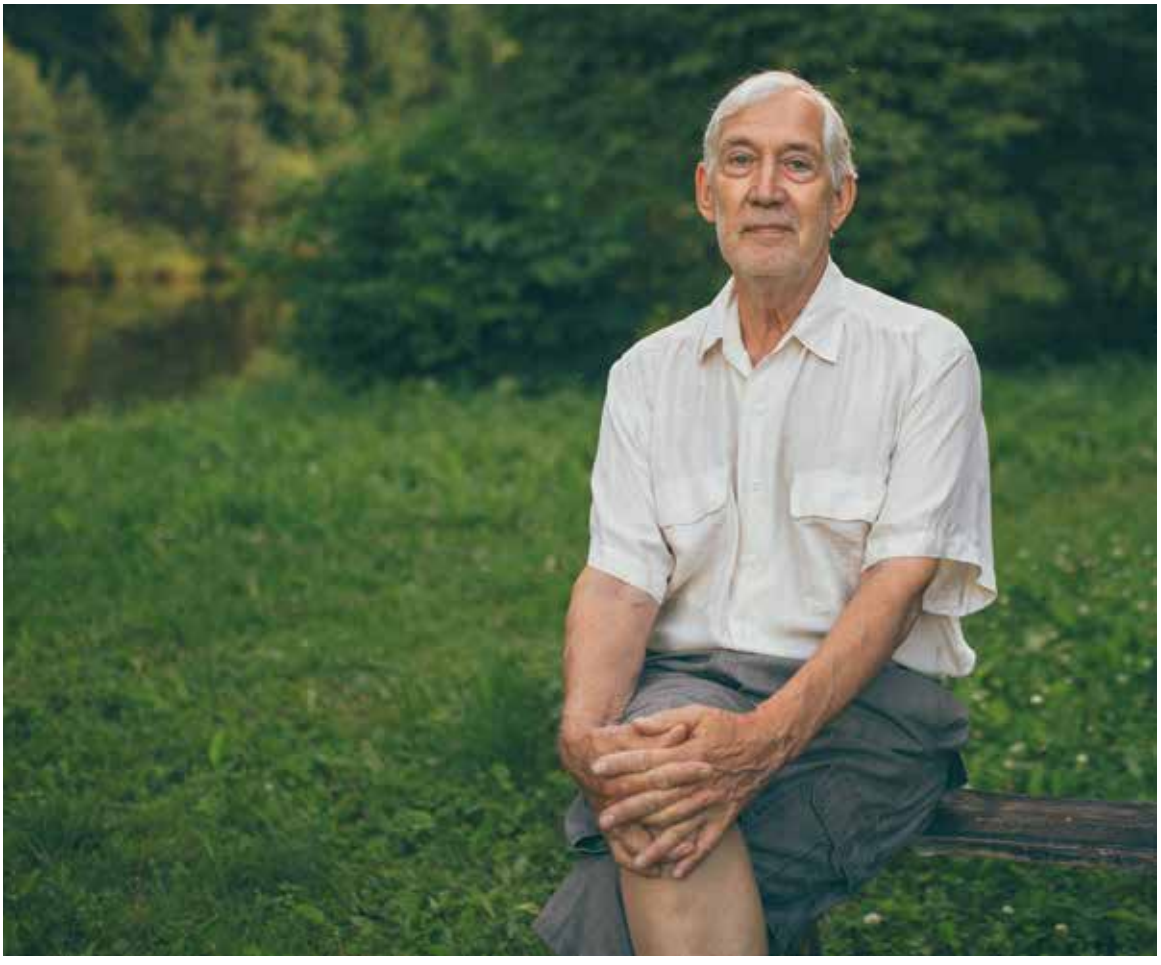

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On Life and Love, Continuously

An essay

by Jan Kaus

In Estonia, an interesting cultural discussion is underway, prompted by a call to celebrate Estonian Literature Day. The proposed date is January 30th, the birthday of classic writer Anton Hansen Tammsaare (1878–1940); his *Truth and Justice* pentalogy (published 1926–1933) has become a mainspring of Estonian literature and an archetypal description of the nature of Estonianness.

Tammsaare's monumental achievement also contains strong philosophical undercurrents that are given away by the title. The question that his characters so often face can be said to be: Can convictions be used to resolve situations, or must convictions be adjusted to the situations themselves?

Truth and Justice is not the only broad-reaching title in Tammsaare's catalog. In 1934, he published the novel *Life and Love*, which was soon followed by *I Loved a German*. The former word pair is just as important and extensive in the author's writing as is "truth and justice". The fourth volume of the pentalogy can, incidentally, be classified as a romance, and thus aligns with the greater motif.

Tammsaare frequently juxtaposed the concepts of life and love. In his perspective, love is not only incongruous with marriage, it also cannot be forced into social conventions on the whole. True love is something so all-encompassing and irrational that its power is difficult to adapt to the rules and contracts of everyday life. Love lacks a social dimension. Writer and literary scholar Jaan Undusk has written a fantastic essay on Tammsaare's themes of life and love, titled "Love and Sociology". In it, he remarks: "Love's origins [...] are strict and uncompromising and do not tolerate institutional obstacles, even marriage itself. [...] As Tammsaare understands it, there is nothing dear, pleasant, or enjoyable to love. Love is dangerous and sublime; it is fatal Eros."

If we follow Undusk's line of reasoning, then love is matched, not so much to life as it is, to death; for the greatest love is an unhappy one, and the greatest unhappy love ends in the death of one or both lovers. At the same time, we mustn't forget that the very existence of Tammsaare's star-crossed characters would be rather insignificant without that emotion. Love's power simultaneously destroys and redeems a lover's life.

But what is the point of my writing all this?

Recently, I noticed Tammsaare's leitmotif vividly manifest in poet and prosaist Kai Aareleid's (1972) third novel, *Vaikne Ookean* (Pacific Ocean, 2021).

To begin somewhat simplistically, *Pacific Ocean* explores the relationships between three generations of men and women. Aareleid likewise contrasts the concepts of marriage and love, the latter of which often fails to find space within the former. "You might experience more than one great love in your lifetime," says one of her characters. The statement teeters on the edge of generally accepted societal norms. It doubts marriage's singular dimension, if not the entire institution: the idea that a person may marry only once, or that marriage is the sole contract of expressed intimacy. Several of Aareleid's main characters are involved in passionate extramarital affairs, drawing a direct line to Volume IV of *Truth and Justice*, which, according to Undusk, highlights the institution of marriage as one impediment to love. *Pacific Ocean* is thus a gentle song of praise to love's complexity; to the fact that it's hard to place love in the framework of the ordinary conventions meant to regulate it.

The Tammsaarean theme of life and love is especially palpable in the chapter "The Seamstress' Story", in which a woman named Helene tells her lover Mihkel that she must end their affair and focus on her marriage to Johannes. "You used to believe this was everything you needed," Mihkel says, to which Helene replies: "It was, for what we were doing here. Not for life!" In *Life and Love*, Tammsaare wrote: "They wanted to be happy once more, no matter the cost. They wanted to forget once more that it was life, and to believe there was

JAN KAUS . PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER

only love." Helene is conveying a similar sentiment. Love can pass, transforming into life, and "what you have left then is the mundane, which buries us beneath it. I'll be unsatisfied and then you'll start hating me and nothing will be the way we want it to be." Mihkel and Helene's love is ultimately unfulfilled. Life stakes its claim and forces love to retreat. However, Johannes – who realizes that Helene's heart doesn't belong to him – is later killed in a train wreck. We can imagine Tammsaare's conclusion: if there is no love, then neither is there life.

But perhaps love's true meaning is only revealed when it is unfulfilled; when it is incomplete; when it isn't exhausted. Love is a task that lacks a true, satisfying solution. To put it in universal terms, true love belongs to no one. One who is in love does not possess it, but neither does love possess the person. Both Tammsaare's and Aareleid's love-struck characters grapple with its strong, unpredictable, inevitable force. The dilemma of life and love is timeless.

JAN KAUS is a poet, prose writer, translator and essayist.

Jaan Kaplinski: Questions, Answers, and Other Thought-Rhymes

by Märt Väljataga

Jaan Kaplinski (1941 - 2021) was an Estonian prose writer, poet, translator, cultural critic and philosopher. Jaan Kaplinski wrote nearly 2,000 poems in several styles and languages over eighty years. The first in his official canon is a ballad titled "The Stranger" (1956), which he penned at the age of 15; while his final poems have not yet been published. Kaplinski's poetics underwent several transformations throughout his career. As a young man, he wrote melodic, melancholy texts alongside ecstatic free-verse incantations. He endeavored to cast a poetic spell that would separate the ego from the fetters of civilization and achieve broad awareness in space and time.

Kaplinski's writing expressed interest in Asian thought and ancient history, sympathized with annihilated species and subjugated indigenous peoples living in nature, promoted harmony with the natural world, and cursed Western civilization. His imagery became more austere and exact in the 1970s, his poems frequently being slim pillars of only a word or two per line. Kaplinski's poetry evolved in the 1980s to capture mundane moments and mediations that wind in unusual spirals from the precise to the universal and back again.

Yet across his wide-ranging catalog, several images and motifs recur. Describing one foundational experience that happened in 1945, he wrote:

> I remember it well: I was four years old, sitting on the sofa in our living room on Ülikooli Street, and this strange thought suddenly came to me; one I couldn't articulate then and still cannot now. It was something roughly to the effect of: 'How is it that I am me, that I am here, that I am J. K., and I am four years old?' I knew that I was J. K., but realized that I cannot fathom being J. K. and being me.

From then on, Kaplinski was haunted by an astonishing revelation: how could he, one of innumerable living beings, call himself "I"? Recognizing that the ego or self is separate from everything else is an experience that many metaphysically minded individuals have before adolescence. For some, it fosters self-involvement, for others, self-hatred. Some turn to drugs to try to forget it; in many societies, it is a subject of professional philosophical research. There are

JAAN KAPLINSKI · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH

ample ways to express and act upon the astonishment and quandary that exist in religion and in art.

In both life and poetry, Kaplinski perceived the being of self as a burden or hobble that limits one's cognition of the world. He detested anyone's attempt to classify, define, or judge him by his past works and deeds. To foil such bids to box him in, motivated by an inner need for change, Kaplinski constantly switched genres, interests, and manners of observation. Nevertheless, there was something lasting within this change. He maintained awareness of his own alienness; of being an involuntary guest in this country, climate, and world, yearning to return to his true home.

Like other existentialists, Kaplinski believed that wrestling with great unanswerable questions is a defining element of the human condition:

> *To a child, questions of life and death, the meaning of life, ego, time, and eternity are real and daunting. Sometimes, I think that the accumulation of these challenging and unanswerable questions is one of the reasons why a child grows to become an adult. […] Man is born as a question, metaphysical and existential. A question, meaning the search for an answer; the quest for a solution to things we all encounter: problems, concerns, contradictions. An answer to why life can only lead to death; to how someone must be precisely the person they are and bear a single fate.*

These questions arise from the clash of the self with reality and do not dissolve into final answers. Rather, they inflicted almost physical pain upon Kaplinski. As he wrote in a poem:

> *Some of my poems are answerless*
> *questions*
> *Others are questionless answers.*

In a later Russian-language prose poem, he even questioned the point of questioning itself (at least in art):

> *I realize that if we are honest, then we always have more questions than answers. Occasionally, I'd still like to ask: what good is a question? Perhaps we don't need them at all. And I regret that many of today's artists are concerned more with questions (particularly those that do not and cannot have answers) than they are with beauty.*

Splitting original experience into question and answer generates a thirst for reconciliation; for comprehending the world and fostering mutual understanding between people. The first can be achieved through self-dismissive ecstasy, such as in Kaplinski's (in)famous invective of Western civilization titled "I GOT IT I GOT IT". Connecting to another person is much more complicated. Among the plethora of great metaphysical questions is doubt over whether people are actually soulless automatons or zombies:

> *two young female corpses stand*
> *beneath a birch*
> *chatting and understanding nothing*

Longing for understanding and knowing that this action is futile fascinated Kaplinski in his younger years:

> *for the answer is not a bridge*
> *but rather burning bridges*

He used the question/answer dialectic to portray the relationship between man and nature:

the color red is a question the
color green is an answer

(Here, the colors represent a blood-soaked battlefield.)

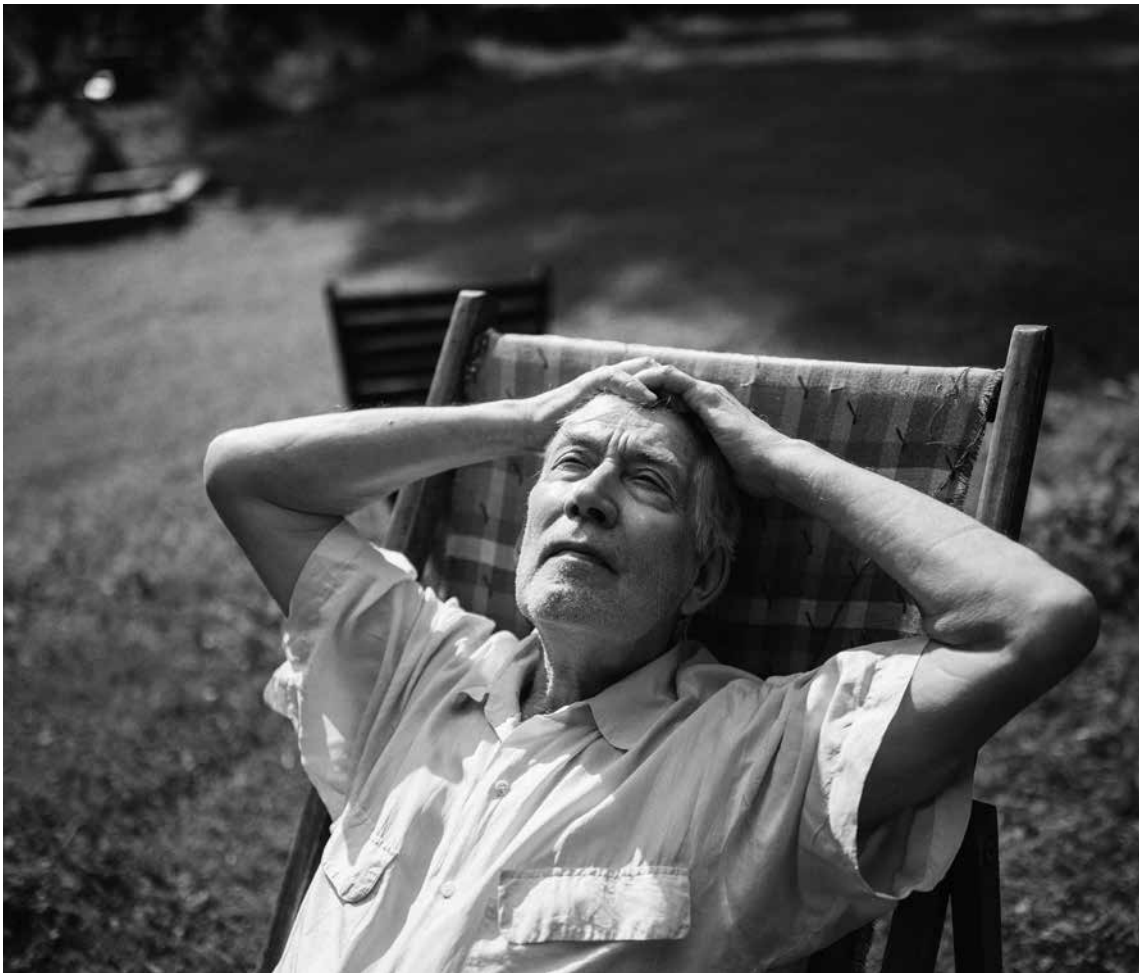
Question and answer are like a conceptual rhyming pair that permeated Kaplinski's poetry from the beginning to the very end. But not only: many other conceptual echoes and contrasts resonate throughout his catalog. They function as "mute rhymes", though in some cases, their Estonian counterparts also rhyme acoustically. One example is *veri* and *meri,* blood and sea. Kaplinski used them to emphasize the horizontal belonging of all living beings; how the souls of humans and every other creature will one day break down into fundamental elements; how every living being is made up of atoms that once comprised other bodies that were animated by another soul. The idea of cyclical dissolution and formation is expressed in his recurrent contrasting of dust and butterfly wings; of fire, coal, and ash; and of phoenix, wings, and feathers. It evokes lines from Vladimir Nabokov's "An Evening of Russian Poetry":

The rhyme is the line's birthday,
as you know,
and there are certain customary twins
in Russian as in other tongues. For
instance,
love automatically rhymes with blood,
nature with liberty, sadness with
distance,
humane with everlasting, prince with
mud,
moon with a multitude of words, but
sun
and song and wind and life and death
with none.

Kaplinski's poem "The Same Sea in Us All" was inspired by maritime researcher Hans Hass's book *We Come from the Sea*. In it, Hass describes how blood originates from the waters of primordial oceans and shares with them, to this very day, a similar chemical composition. Kaplinski was likewise intrigued by Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi's theory about a human desire to return to the waters of the womb, which in turn reveals a desire to spill back into the primordial oceans. For human beings, the process of birth possesses the same ontogenetic trauma as life's phylogenetic transition from water to land. Even sexual pleasure is tied to "thalassic regression": a longing for the sea we left behind millennia ago. One question that hangs suspended over Kaplinski's poems comes from François Villon: "*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan*?" Where are the snows of yesteryear?

His entire catalog is pervaded by a yearning to go *back* somewhere; a desire to call something *back*; sadness over the impossibility of turning things *back*; and noticing something that perpetually comes *back*, or at least a hope that it will. The word, or a version of it, even appears in many of his collections' titles. Commenting on the poem "The Soul's Return", he remarked:

> *It is like one great return, one great flow back to the beginning. Our culture is obviously dominated by forward progress. But in Taoism, there is also the reverse: there are strong trends of*



JAAN KAPLINSKI · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH

anti- or counterculture within culture itself, an attempt to socialize asocial behavior. This exists even at the physiological level, such as exercises that seemingly aim to return one to the embryonic state.

It is true, however, that Kaplinski never yearned to return to the recent past. On the contrary:

Neither am I fond of returning
to a lived life, to an extinguished flame,
to a considered thought, to a written
poem.

This yearned-for beginning is sometimes embodied by the Tertiary: a (since obsolete) geological period after the dinosaurs and before the last ice age, during which Eurasia was covered by lush flora, saber-toothed tigers roamed the continent, and the ancient pines that produced today's Baltic amber flourished. Amber's glow indeed reflects that bygone time, preserving primeval light for us to marvel.

As such, another conceptual rhyme in Kaplinski's poems is *algus* and *valgus*, beginning and light. Light is what guides the soul back to the genesis of all things.

And vice-versa: we yearn for the beginning because that is the place of light, peace, and joy (as in Baudelaire's country of Cockaigne: *luxe, calme*, and *volupté*). The vertical axis of beginning and light intersects the vertical axis of blood and sea. In some of Kaplinski's poems, yearning for the former is associated with the gnostic conception of the human soul as a seed of light imprisoned in the material world, and its potential to grow back towards that light. These themes intensify in his later Russian-language poetry, along with concern for the soul's posthumous fate.

Kaplinski was a trained linguist and ruminated extensively on language. A third conceptual rhyme in his poetry is thus *keel* and *meel*, language and mind. It indicates an understanding that the tendency of language and words to divide the perceptible world into discrete units cannot keep up with the flow of experience, and distorts our true, boundless reality. This goes hand in hand with a fourth rhyme: *silm* and *maailm*, eye and world, which stresses that the latter concept exists only as it is perceived – a world that is for someone or viewed in someone's eyes.

A fifth oblique, metaphorical conceptual rhyme is *uni* and *muna*, dream and egg. Kaplinski used it to convey an expectation of radical rebirth: an image (like that of a dream before waking) of human existence in this world as unhatched chicks pecking impatiently at the inside of their shells, waiting for true birth. A sixth conceptual rhyme that holds his poems together is *hing* and *ring*: soul and circle, which expresses the soul's longing to escape the wheel of earthly things, as well as an understanding of the soul's cyclical outward journey and return through reincarnations. And as one final conceptual rhyme for this essay: *luule* and *tuul*, poetry and wind – an understanding of inspiration that nourishes both as divine breath.

These conjectures about Kaplinski's conceptual and sometimes acoustic rhymes are admittedly speculative but might help identify the secret threads that hold together his complete oeuvre: both the sublime, ecstatic poems as well as the more mundane and quotidian examples.

Zbigniew Herbert, one of the great postwar poets (who had quite a contrasting temperament), began an epistle to his colleague Ryszard Krynicki as such:

Not much will remain Ryszard in truth
not much
of the poetry of our mad century Rilke
Eliot sure
a few other worthy shamans who knew
the secret
of word spells time-resistant forms
without which
no phrase deserves memory and speech
is like sand

We may certainly count Kaplinski among the worthy shamans who knew the secret of spellcasting, and whose invented phrases help to keep our language vibrant and intact.

MÄRT VÄLJATAGA is an Estonian literary critic, translator and poet , editor in chief of cultural magazine Vikerkaar.

How are we to Survive?

With Jaan Kaplinski in the Anthropocene

by Marek Tamm

Ecological thinking lies at the core of Jaan Kaplinski's (1941–2021) diverse catalog. His poetry, prose, essays, and general outlook on life were grounded in the quest to achieve a dynamic balance between humans and nature. Life was Kaplinski's primary focus: how it can be understood, how to ensure its continuity, and how to attain a meaningful existence. "What can I do – I'm an ecologist by heart," he remarked in what was his last book, In and With Nature (2020).

Kaplinski's ecological thinking was noticed early on. After the writer received the Juhan Liiv Prize for Poetry in 1968, Estonian environmentalist and biogeographer Jaan Eilart wrote: "An understanding of nature's naturalness and an endeavor to preserve all conceivable forms of life are central themes in the laureate's poetry. They spring from seeing nature through eyes unclouded by the allures of urbanization, as well as from generally picking apart the relationships between humanity, culture, and the environment in an original and philosophical way. […] In today's world, individual species are no longer in danger, but life *itself*. Destroying the ties that bind life together inevitably leads to catastrophe. Life needs protection!"

Today, Kaplinski's ecological writing has acquired new relevancy. An ever-keener awareness of human responsibility for the environmental crisis (climate change, epidemics, etc.), the declaration of a new geological era (the Anthropocene), and a reevaluation of the relationship between nature and culture give us an opportunity to read Kaplinski with a fresh perspective and seek solutions to today's problems in his works.

What Kaplinski has to say to us now, as we find ourselves amidst an intensifying environmental crisis, is intriguing; what can we take from his writing for life in the Anthropocene? His ecological essays were published over the course of half a century: the first significant pieces in the early 1970s (e.g. "Ecology and Economics" and "Thoughts on Ecosystems and Human Culture") and the last, by that time with an autobiographical air, in the last decade (e.g. *In and With Nature*).

JAAN KAPLINSKI · PHOTO BY JAAN TOOTSEN

How does one become an ecological thinker?

Before we become acquainted with Kaplinski's views on nature, it is pertinent to address the sources of his ecological thinking. As the author himself acknowledged, his interest in ecology extended into early childhood. There were memorable long walks through nature with his maternal grandfather, who taught him the names of flora and fauna, and childhood summers spent in the forests and bogs of South Estonia, which quickly became his dearest home. Books soon complemented Kaplinski's direct communication with the natural world: initially nonfiction come across at the summer cottage and elsewhere (Kaplinski has specifically mentioned Bernhard Grzimek's nature books, excerpts of which he later translated into Estonian), but later branching out into foreign-language literature on ecology, biology, ethnography, and anthropology, which found its way to him by a variety of means. It is important to note that Kaplinski's deep fascination with indigenous cultures and religious rituals was closely tied to his ecological interests – often, he searched for solutions to the western world's ecological crisis in the experiences of traditional cultures.

Albert Schweitzer became an important philosophical role model for Kaplinski, especially his teachings on *Reverence for Life*. Of no less importance, however, were Kaplinski's contemporaries in America – particularly Gary Snyder, with whom he became a long-time pen pal. Significant impulses also came from Beatniks' hippie-like kinship with nature and Native American beliefs. Kaplinski fostered close

communication with Estonian naturalists at an early age and emphasized the role of biologist Viktor Masing in shaping his views. He additionally worked at the Tallinn Botanical Garden from 1974–1980, during which time he was surrounded by biologists, botanists, and ecologists.

The Bases of Kaplinski's Ecological Thinking

Kaplinski's ecological worldview can essentially be boiled down to three principles.

The first is holism. As Kaplinski saw it, life forms a complete network in which everything is interconnected and interdependent. "Life is like a dance or music dominated not by a causal, but a holistic relationship; where everything is united and connected." ("Ice and the Titanic", 1995). In a 1972 article titled "The Axe and the Tree", he stated, "For us, the world is not merely a dance floor filled with couples of Causes and Effects, but a chess match in which the movement of any one piece changes the state of the entire game." The clearest expression of Kaplinski's belief that life is a network appeared in his 2000 travelogue *Spring on Two Coasts, or A Sentimental Journey to America*: "In fact, Life on Earth is not a chain, but a web, a network. If a knot or an eyelet breaks then it is still a web, albeit broken. Earth's biosphere is currently a broken web, one so vital to us all. It is broken but still working."

Secondly is the principle of anti-economism. Life cannot be subjected to economic thinking, which tends to view people as value-creators and thus believe that more work equals more value. Economic thinking leads to environmental destruction and devastation. Ecology is uneconomic. Kaplinski wrote his first programmatic essay on this in 1972, titled: "Ecology and Economy". In it, he juxtaposes the two manners of thought: "The enemy of ecological thinking is therefore not economics, but the ideology and economic thinking that are associated with it – a mindset that presently holds the world in its clutches." A few years later, he wrote in a portentous essay titled "Insects and People" (1976): "We will undoubtedly face catastrophe if we do not learn to want less and limit our consumption, which inherently entails increased exploitation of the biosphere."

Thirdly, the principle of pluralism. In much of his writing, Kaplinski emphasized that reducing nature's diversity weakens its self-regulating mechanisms. As a member of a tiny nation, he expressed equal appreciation for natural and cultural diversity, writing in 1972: "The biosphere is very strange and our cautious existence in it can be summarized with the slogan 'reverence for information'. For not one genotype, community, language, or culture can be restored if they should disappear." Pluralism is even more apparent in his 2004 philosophical short story "Ornithophilosophy, or The Notes of Nestor the Raven": "Diversity is unavoidably vital to life and cognition alike. The sooner that humans understand it, the better."

Diagnosis: The Ecological Situation

Kaplinski's perception of today's global ecological situation was highly pessimistic. The preservation of natural diversity was one of his greatest concerns, as he was convinced that humankind is taking more from the environment than can be restored through

JAAN KAPLINSKI · PHOTO BY PEETER LAURITS

its renewal. Humanity has become a force of natural destruction, which simultaneously means self-destruction. Our most pressing problem is that we have thrown ecosystems out of balance – the preservation of more and more ecosystems and their unique elements has become dependent on humans. We are actively contributing to the simplification of ecosystems, which inevitably results in sudden, negative changes.

We encounter Kaplinski's critical opinion of human behavior in his earliest essays. In 1972, he complained: "Mankind has acted like a poorly-adjusted parasitic population that expends available resources faster than they are capable of regenerating, thereby drifting towards ruin." His outlook was equally critical in a 2001 speech he gave in Paris, titled "Globalization: For or Against Nature?": "At present, mankind is drastically changing nature itself due to demographic explosion and the increasing exploitation of natural resources. As a result, nature, both animate and inanimate, is becoming more unstable, prone to bigger vacillations. As we humans are always a part of nature and cannot escape these vacillations; we are more exposed to droughts, storms, famines, and epidemics."

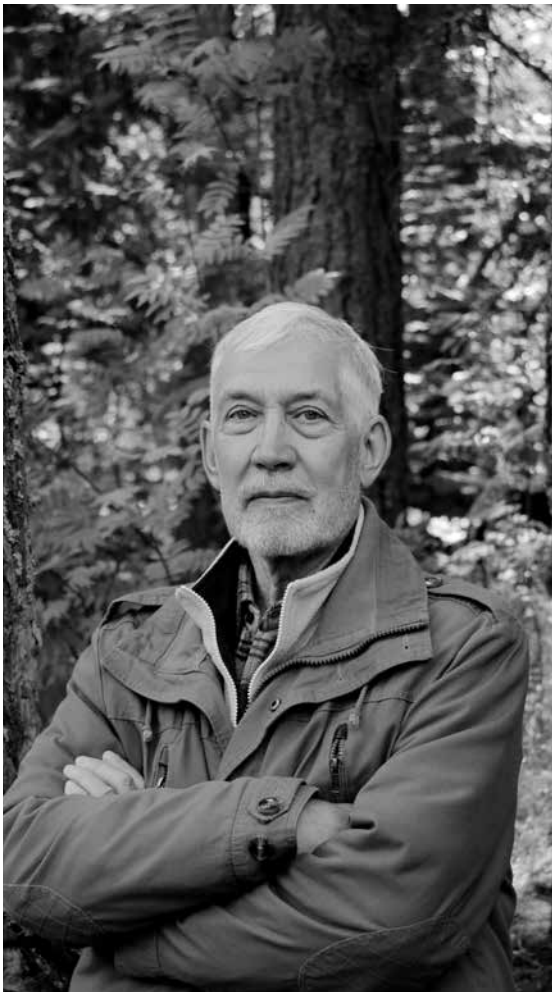
Habitat destruction is suicidal from a holistic view because by laying waste to nature, we are only laying waste to ourselves. Kaplinski detailed this with striking imagery in his prose poem "Ice and Heather" (1989): "In fact, trees and shrubs are a part of us – they are simply at a greater distance from our body than hands or feet, so it is possible to assume that they don't feel pain; that chopping away our branches and trunks doesn't cause us serious injury. But we cannot live without trees. The fewer trees there are, the less we live. In reality, we are chopping up and cutting down parts from our own body; we are burning and poisoning ourselves."

Solutions: Ecological Thinking

Pessimistic diagnoses of the state of the world are abundant, to say the least. However, the value of Kaplinski's writing for the contemporary reader lies foremost in his proposals for how to emerge from the crisis. In the interests of symmetry, I will select three from his extensive catalog.

First, a shift in thinking and in imagination. According to Kaplinski, improving the ecological situation starts with a change in thought; by replacing economic thinking with ecological thinking. Life-endangering dreams must be replaced with ones that cause no harm. In the essay "Ecology and Economy", he advises: "While man's own 'sensible' activity constitutes the greatest threat to the ecosystem today, the goal of ecological thinking is to critique this 'sense of sensibility'. It is evolutionary criticism of our worldview to date." He makes not only an appeal to reason, but to imagination: "There are two possible courses of action: either we slow the economic engine, refrain from accelerating, and leave most of our dreams unfulfilled, or we change the dreams themselves and dream only of what isn't dangerous to achieve."

Secondly, the new self-regulation of mankind. Kaplinski believes it is possible to alter the relationships between humans and nature by consciously adjusting our behavior. In his 1973 essay "Thoughts on Ecosystems and Human Culture", he found that the history of human development seems to prove that we once possessed an



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ability to self-regulate, similar to other species: "If the stability of the ecosystem hinges greatly upon human activity, then man has, in principle, the opportunity to preserve or even restore stability by steering that ecosystem via his own actions. Man can govern nature by governing himself."

Thirdly, and most importantly, humankind as a whole can learn how to think ecologically and consciously regulate our behavior based on the experiences of peoples that exist within nature (i.e. from ethnographical and anthropological literature). Kaplinski's ecological worldview has strong roots in anthropology and one of his primary long-term interests was searching for ties between religious and ecological thinking. In 1972, he stated: "For peoples living in nature [...], the very best strategy is no doubt to believe in their spirits and myths; to abide by their taboos. That will guarantee the stability of life and habitat." A year later, he suggested that the environmental behavior of traditional societies is culturally regulated: "Although most nature-peoples had the means to extract much more from the environment than was safe for it, they refrained from taking such measures and thus preserved the ecosystem's stability. This mechanism limiting environmental exploitation is not genetic, but cultural, forming over millennia of cultural revolution."

In short, Kaplinski's message to today's world is this: humanity's sole chance to survive in the Anthropocene is to learn to consider all living beings as an interconnected web, to exist in a way that disturbs as few other living beings as possible, and to seek an optimal balance between our needs and the environment's possibilities. This will require a tremendous revolution of human thought; a cultural shift that places our attitude towards nature on new foundations that lie beyond simplistic oppositions such as culture vs. nature and humans vs. animals.

MAREK TAMM is an Estonian historian, and cultural theorist, professor of cultural history in Tallinn University.

Anja Salokannel's 30,000 Grains of Barley

An Interview with Anja Salokannel

By Veronika Kivisilla

Anja Esteri Salokannel (b. 1947) is a celebrated Finnish publisher, author, and translator who has received the Order of the White Rose of Finland (gold cross with medal) and Estonia's Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana (fourth class). She has translated most of Jaan Kaplinski's works, as well as books by Ülo Tuulik, Viivi Luik, A. H. Tammsaare, Leelo Tungal, and many others, into Finnish.

On October 29th, 2021, the release of a nearly 600-page collection of Jaan Kaplinski's writing was celebrated at the Estonian Embassy in Helsinki, entitled: *Ilta tuo takaisin kaiken*. Runoja kuudelta vuosikymmeneltä. Salokannel is responsible for most of the book's translations from Estonian; Pauli Tapio worked on several of the Russian-language texts. Unfortunately, Kaplinski himself did not live to see the monumental book's release.

Publishing a lifetime achievement is more than enough reason for an interview, so I meet Anja at the home she has shared for over forty years with fellow translator and Estophile Juhani Salokannel on Kulosaari Island in Helsinki, not long after Finnish Independence Day. Our conversation was in Finnish.

Their living room window looks out over the frozen bay, where skiers occasionally glide past; the coffee table is set with Christmas sweets made by the couple's children and grandchildren. Next to the plates is the hefty Kaplinski collection and a book of Paavo Haavikko's poems published in an Estonian translation at about the same time – both in stylish, greenish covers.

How did you first find your way to literature?

I was born in Kangasniemi Parish, South Savo, Finland. My interest in language and literature developed in school. This was greatly thanks to our grammar teacher, who was able to truly inspire and foster a love for the subject. I read a lot, my particular favorites being works by Helvi Juvonen, Eino Leino, and Aaro Hellaakoski.

I gradually started writing, too. When I submitted a story to a youth writing contest and won, the prize was a toy telescope

ANJA SALOKANNEL SHOWS A SPECIAL RUBBER STAMP MADE FOR THE INVITATIONS SENT TO ESTONIANS, WHICH WAS GIVEN HER BY HANNU MÄKELÄ IN 1986. • PHOTO BY KERTI TERGEM

that showed images from incredible places around the world, such as Niagara Falls. Back then, it was like a magical object. It's strange to think of now. I suppose such a toy would mean nothing to a child of today's "glowing rectangle" generation.

So, was enrolling in the Finnish language and literature program at the University of Helsinki a logical next step?

I suppose it was. I met Juhani at university and we became companions in both life and work. Estonian entered my life at that time as well. I was inspired by the legendary Eeva Niinivaara (1900–2000), who worked as a tireless bridge between the Estonian and Finnish languages and was certainly one of the most colorful and influential people I've ever known. Certainly, none of Eeva's former students will ever forget her presence, and I'm glad to have been able to interview her in around 1983/1984: the recording is preserved in the Finnish Literary Society's archives, and it even resulted in a work titled *Yhä paistaa sama aurinko*. She and I became close friends when she was a pensioner and I had just finished my studies at university. Eeva was a rare specimen: a charismatic instructor; a greatly talented actress and musician; and so, so vibrant.

Eeva was your original connection to Estonia. And from there?

My very first visit was in 1970. A whole group of us went over on the *Vanemuine* ferry (a whole four hours at sea!) for a conference on Finno-Ugric nations. I remember staying at the Kungla Hotel on Kreutzwaldi Street, which had just been built the year before and has since been demolished. I quickly met many people in the Estonian cultural sphere at the time: Viivi Luik, Jaak Jõerüüt, Lennart Meri, Paul-Eerik Rummo, Viiu Härm, Piret Saluri, Sirje and Rein Ruutsoo, Kalle Kurg, the Kross family, the Vetemaas, and others. It wasn't long before I was translating Estonian literature into Finnish: mainly short stories and radio dramas at first, such as those by Ülo Tuulik and Teet Kallas, but also plays like A. H. Tammsaare's *The King is Cold* and a dramatization of his novel *The New Devil of Hellsbottom*.

Although you graduated from the University of Helsinki with a master's in philosophy and were certified as a Finnish language teacher, your path led to the theater – is that correct?

Yes, it is. We were living in Jyväskylä, where I worked as the secretary of public relations at the Jyväskylä City Theater from 1973–1979. My job was primarily to draft playbills and see that the plays made it into smaller rural communities as well.

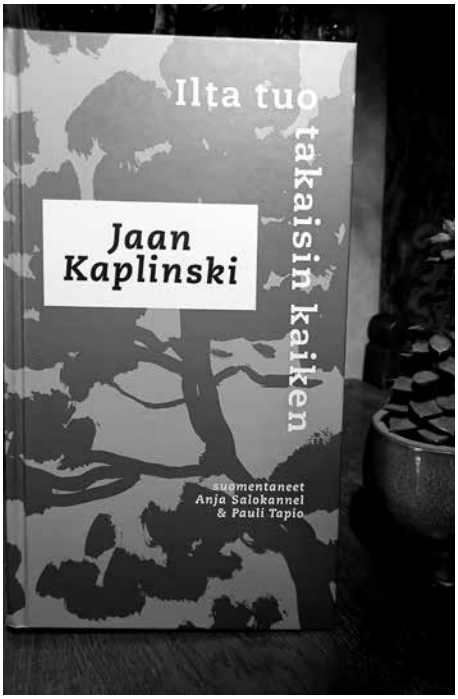
Translating was still just a hobby at the time. Juhani and I worked together on Ülo Tuulik's novel *Trampled By War*, which was published by Gummerus in 1976. The Tuulik family visited us in Jyväskylä on a very cold winter's day, Lennart Meri once drove up to the house in his red car, and many other Estonian writers stopped by at one point or another. Juhani and I attended several plays in Estonia during that decade as well, leaving me with unforgettable memories of Juhan Viiding and Mati Unt.

We can't overlook your own writing in addition to all your editing and translating.

Anja smiles and fetches her poetry collection Metsän jälki.

My poetry debut was published by Otava in 1982 and received the L. Onervo Award. Even though people constantly asked when I'd publish another, that first collection remained my last. I no longer felt like publishing my original poetry, so I stuck to translating while also editing and compiling books.

I worked for a short period as the Acting Director of the Finnish Literature Information Center and was hired by Otava in 1984. There, I started out as an editor in the literature department, later became a senior editor, and remained there until 2010. Otava is a highly respected Finnish publishing house that has managed to maintain its good name since 1890.



"ILTA TUO TAKAISIN KAIKEN" IS NEARLY 600-PAGE COLLECTION OF JAAN KAPLINSKI'S WRITING. . PHOTO BY VERONIKA KIVISILLA

The early 1980s was a turbulent time. I was present for the founding of the Tuglas Society; and Otava itself was also somewhat of an Estonian cultural center, which was greatly thanks to the work of Hannu Mäkelä. They put out translations of Kaplinski and Tõnu Õnnepalu, and released a collection of Lennart Meri's speeches titled *Tulen maasta, jonka nimi on Viro* – Piret Saluri and I edited it. We also translated documents and speeches on Estonian heritage that were brought to Finland for safekeeping from the Soviet authorities. The "Letter of 40 Intellectuals" was published in Finland for the first time and read by very many people here, even those in the Foreign Ministry! Hannu Mäkelä had a special rubber stamp made for the invitations sent to Estonians. He gave it to me when he left Otava in 1986.

Correspondence from Estonian exiles in Sweden also passed through Finland: letters were sent to the Otava office and were then taken by Piret Saluri to Estonia. We had a special room at the publishing house where Estonians and exiles living in Finland could gather. Many even sat at my desk and had long, important phone calls with people back home.

I edited all kinds of books, from non-fiction to poetry (including Jenni Haukio's extremely popular *Katso pohjoista taivasta*).

You kept so busy and hard-working for decades. What else would you highlight?

Otava published Jaan Kaplinski's *The Same Sea In Us All* in 1984, which was

MÄRT VÄLJATAGA, ANJA SALOKANNEL AND TOMMI PARKKO. · PHOTO BY TOOMAS DETTENBORN

essentially the moment this latest anthology was inspired. Kaplinski and Tiia Toomet became close family friends that we could always count on.

I was always immersed in Estonian poetry back then: Viivi Luik, Juhan Viiding, Lydia Koidula, Ellen Niit, and so many others. Nowadays, I can't keep up with all the new authors.

WSOY commissioned my translation of Ellen Niit's incredible *Continuity of the World* in 1994. The acclaimed late

translator and poet Kirsi Kunnas offered me invaluable advice while working on it. After that, I translated several more of Kaplinski's poetry and essay collections.

Juhani worked as director of the Finnish Institute in Tallinn for a few years in the late 1990s. While walking around the city, I was so often amazed by how much had changed since my first visit in 1970.

I translated Viivi Luik's *Shadow Theater* in 2010, after which I started focusing more on the Kaplinski anthology. Lately, I've mostly been working on Leelo Tungal's books. My translation of *Comrade Kid* was published in 2019 and the next two parts of the trilogy will be released as audiobooks in 2022.

I'd like to keep translating for as long as I possibly can – children's literature and perhaps other genres as well. Tungal's wonderful children's poetry is something I've always wanted to publish in a Finnish translation, though her rhymes are certainly a challenge. I always look forward to Viivi Luik's new books and have much more of Kaplinski's writing to translate, such as his fascinating memoirs of childhood and youth.

Whenever you translate, you always have to settle for some degree of loss. All kinds of complications will crop up. For example, even a seemingly straightforward line of a Kaplinski poem might make me stop to wonder what he really intended by a word that could have several meanings. Both technically work, but I'm forced to decide between them when translating it into Finnish.

I was delighted to see Harri Nordell's recent full-page review of the Kaplinski anthology in *Helsingin Sanomat*, titled "These Poems Can Only Be Loved". I suspect that a work of such impressive volume will only continue to receive praise. And it's already received an award!

Yes, it has! Every year, the Finnish poet Heli Laaksonen awards a prize for literature named after her home village of Kodiksami: 30,000 grains of barley! This was the eleventh occasion and, as always, there were six nominees. I suppose that means there will be a little field of barley sprouting somewhere next summer!

VERONIKA KIVISILLA is a poet, storyteller and bard.

Real Writing is Disturbing

An Interview with Andrei Ivanov

by Ilona Martson

Russian-Estonian writer Andrei Ivanov lives with his wife and son in a Soviet-era apartment block on the outskirts of Estonia's capital. He grew up in Tallinn, studied literature at Tallinn University, immigrated to Scandinavia for an extended period, and returned in the early aughts.

Ivanov's first novels and short stories were published a dozen years ago. Since then, he has become one of the most outstanding Russian-language authors in Estonia and has had his works translated into English, French, German, Finnish, and Estonian.

Andrei, you live in Estonia but write in Russian. Where are your readers?

To be honest, I do not think of readers a lot. It is much easier to imagine an editor as your perfect reader or a person that you respect very much. But even then, I'm afraid there is no use. It's too stressful. I remember how I started off with *Hanuman's Travels*. It was a cold Danish spring in 1998. I lived in a dirty refugee camp. I ate trash and wrote in English. I was lost, confused, plugged by all kinds of fear, I got drunk or high almost every day. My writing... it was a mess; it was totally *de profundis*! I could not imagine my readers, I did not think of anyone, I did not hope there would be any, it did not matter, the process itself mattered, it was like clutching the last straw. Now living in Tallinn, being published here and in Russia, I simply don't care. What I care for is to be correct and exact, in regard to my writing, the images and the characters, the topic, idea, plot, everything – that's what I care for. I know how to make it smooth and comfortable but, the point is, I believe the real stuff should be disturbing. And readers have to choose whether they want to be entertained or to be disturbed.

If I imagine my reader, then it›s definitely not the Russian reader, and on numerous occasions when I received my manuscripts back I have been told by Russian publishers that my books are definitely not for a Central Russia reader, whatever that means. And yet, to their surprise, I have found my circle of devoted readers in Russia. By no accident at all, one of my last book presentations happened in the Moscow Memorial office, so you may imagine who my readers mostly are in this country. Of course, I flatter myself that my books could be understood

ANDREI IVANOV · PHOTO BY JACQUES-ALAIN FINKELTROC

anywhere in the world, but one should be realistic, I can't imagine my books in North Korea, for instance. The easiest of all, is to imagine my readers in Europe. Almost everything that happens in my books happens in Europe. Denmark, Estonia, France... It happens between the world wars, the Soviet or modern times, it is still Europe in general.

Your books are available in several languages. Do you think the nationality of your reader makes a difference in the way they receive your writing?

There must be. I was surprised to know that Scandinavia is more or less an exotic country for French readers. And in meeting with French readers I had to speak at length

about stuff I would not normally dwell upon. Everywhere they asked me about the 'alien's passport' and were curious to see it, which was a bit annoying and then became quite the reason to finally pass the exams and obtain my citizenship, however, I still believe that I was supposed to be given it at once without any examinations. *Hanuman* made a splash but, as it transpired, it made a splash in small circles everywhere. It was positively reviewed in France, with many reviews, more than a dozen, which is fantastic, but not a big number of readers. Next to none in the UK, which is a shame. *A Handful of Dust* was very well accepted by Estonian readers, but went unnoticed by Russian readers in Estonia and Russia.

How often do you get reactions in the first place, be they positive or negative?

I make more and more friends; it shows that my books steadily find their readers. I meet people, we talk and drink. Some of them are strange. There was one hitchhiker from Russia, he came from a small town in Central Russia, actually. He sounded weird on a phone, and since I'm very fond of the bizarre, I decided to meet him. He said he has a story exactly like mine. I was intrigued but when we met he said something that had nothing in similarity with my stories, except that he was in love with a Lithuanian woman. There was one young lady in Moscow who came mysteriously to my presentation, she was sitting with a big purse, which made me worry. I thought she had a Bull Dog revolver in her purse, but she had my book and asked for an autograph. The book was touchingly worn down.

What's the role of a translator for you as a writer?

It is huge, of course. Especially in Estonia. I'm very grateful to all of them, and exceptionally grateful to Veronika Einberg who took the majority of my heavy stuff upon

"I FIND UGLY THINGS BEAUTIFUL," SAYS IVANOV. PHOTO BY JACQUES-ALAIN FINKELTROC

herself. Translating *The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery* is unthinkable because, now looking back, I consider it to be unthinkable to write such a book in the first place.

As I see it, your position as an author is that of an individualist observer who stands outside of all ideologies, societal transformations, and even certain literary circles. Why is this the case? Have you ever felt like exiting the role, if only temporarily? I.e., "joining", "speaking your mind", etc.?

As one wise man said: the cost of sanity is a certain level of alienation. I don't know, it's in my veins, I prefer solitude. I meditate a lot. I wish I could visit retreats, but the lack of funds and the situation of the virus made me seclude myself in my home office. I think my protagonist speaks out enough. Sometimes he says what I think, in a whisper. I take my reader on a private trip. In my last novel *Theatre of Horror* I let my characters speak their minds quite often, they give vent to rage and anger, strong feelings and indignation, their worldviews and political stuff, and it is quite obvious that the author supports them. I speak of intimate stuff too in my short novel *Untermensch*.

A dozen years have passed since your debut works were published – first in the Russian and Estonian languages in Estonia, and soon afterward by the giant Moscow publisher AST. Since then, you've released new novels in original Russian and Estonian translation almost every year. Looking back, which book – or overall achievement – mattered most?

It was important to write every book. It's a kind of a ladder, I could not jump over one of them. I had to write *Hanuman's Travels* and I had to have done it in this rough and earnest way. I could not start with any other one. I started it in 1998, that was a big deal, it helped me get through a difficult time. I could not shift to a third-person narrative, I had to write a long short story "Crisis", about those days of the recession. After that story, I could move on and start *The Harbin Moths*, with my hands untied. I believe my best work so far is *The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery*, I realized that I'm old and tired, and writing this book I lost touch with people and I missed many things being away from home, this is how difficult it was, it could be a book written about how this book was written.

You said in an interview that you realized you had to keep on writing after reading *The Blonde Beasts* by the non-conformist, St. Petersburg-based author Marusya Klimova. What other writers have you learned from?

Yes, her novel shifted ground inside me, and I felt sort of undone. But I do not consider her a teacher, her novel gave me a boost, that's all it was. The same happened when I read James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Joyce, Nabokov, Sterne, Dickens, Rousseau. I reread three times. *War and Peace*. But I do not consider these authors my teachers. I feel comfortable in their company. If I get tired of one, I turn to the other. Kafka, for instance. For a few years, I reread Rousseau's *Confessions*, it's like reading the gospels for some people. Long repetitive reading provides me with a feeling of a long novel, a feeling that I am actually in the novel, although I may not be writing one. It's hard for me being between novels, it's like no man's land, I feel very vulnerable. Therefore, I read some well-known, to me, authors, it's soothing. It's like going on a trip with a best friend.

In *Untermensch*, you write that you're incapable of finishing the book; that the characters live on in your imagination. Could you expand upon that?

I would not finish novels at all. *Tristram Shandy* was not really finished. I received a Ph.D. thesis from a researcher at the

University of Lyon who wrote on deaths in literature, my novels included. And it made me think: there are a lot of deaths in my novels! I think, on the other hand, my longing not to finish a novel, the desire to serialize it, giving the characters more than one life – it is a counterpoint to death maybe.

What is important to me is the relationship with the characters that are based on people I know. It is sometimes intimate to the point of uneasiness. It brings about confusion sometimes, people get angry with me, they cannot understand it is not them. There is always a line between the character and the real person. For instance, 'my uncle'. The character is based on my uncle indeed, he has appeared in my writing for about 15 years. Not just because I want it, out of my whimsicality, which is also good reason enough. But he's definitely a significant recurring character, a portrait. I made a portrait of an immigrant, who had known the Soviet time, used to hate USSR, then moved from Estonia to Denmark, lived in a Red Cross camp, tried to get employed, became disenchanted in capitalism, and now he says that Putin is right, the Soviet Union was great, and other stuff that makes me shudder. Of course, this transformation is important to contemplate and reflect upon. Especially now, when I bump into these kinds of Russian immigrants, Putin and Trump supporters, furious anti-vaccinators.

Two space-times exist in your writing: the present day and the historical 20th century. What, for you, is the main difference in creating these dual worlds? You possess the real experience of living in one but have only read documents and memoirs about the other. Which is harder or easier?

I write a novel to question the boundaries of reality. Nothing is quite real, that's what disturbs me. I do not want to take our reality as granted. It does not matter which novel it is. I look into myself, I always study myself, I am always a material that is close at hand. I have other people, I contemplate. People are people, it does not really matter when they live, at the core we are the same creations, we have the same desires and passions, same weaknesses and struggles, doubts, fears, et cetera. You can easily go wrong with details in a historical novel, but it is pardonable. I keep in mind the famous Shakespearean anachronisms. But my novels cannot be called historical novels in the common sense. I put 'historical' in quotes, because I don't believe in history being straightforward "truth". It's an interesting illusion, whether it's a personal history or of a nation, it is still an illusion, something that we personally or collectively assume.

Rereading your earlier prose, I'm struck by the idea that I'm already face-to-face with history; that it's a living document of the way people thought in the 21st century. Would you agree?

It is not a very distant past for us, but everything was different. It was the pre-smartphone time! We did not have iPads, nobody swiped yet! There were no Facebooked people taking the bus! How hilarious it was! I can't say how much I documented during that time. I had a curious journal. I'd put down everything curious I came across into that journal.

I was not only putting down the facts, I let myself write, attempting something, I sketched, spur of the moment, improvised, and mixed my personal impressions with the impressions of my unfledged imaginary characters, I wrote down the dialogues I heard in transport and the stories my wife told me, I wrote a lot of stuff, it was my laboratory where I experimented. The reality and my imaginary heroes, their life's events and the facts of real life, newspaper clippings, poems, news – everything was melting there into one substance. The most curious and most poetical results of those experiments are *A Night in Saint-Cloud's* and *Untermensch*.

When I translated your story "My Danish Uncle" into Estonian in 2010, the refugee crisis was just beginning to unfold in Europe. Your debut novel *Hanuman's Journey to Lolland*, which explores the attitudes of people who left their homelands towards a bloated and self-centric Europe, was published at around the same time. What feelings do you have now when seeing what's happening on the EU's borders – i.e., Poland and Lithuania?

"May the gods save me from becoming a stateless refugee! This is the most pitiful of all pains, death is better." *Medea*, Euripides. When I attended the Writers Reunion in Lahti (LIWRE) – I guess, it was in 2017 – I compared the refugee crisis with the famous painting *The Raft of Medusa* by Theodore Gericault, and I believe I said everything, my opinion has not changed since, it's just become even more pessimistic.

Tell me a little about your latest novel, *Theater of Horrors*.

I wrote about people of my age, or a bit older, unemployed, and estranged, lost, divorced, embittered, despaired. They enter into all sorts of humiliation for money, they participate in a freak show. They wear the masks of a zombie; they move like zombies and the other people (customers) pay for the show and hunt them with paintball rifles. And some of the visitors step over the line and do some evil harm to the miserable in masks, but it does not stop most of my characters from going out into the fields in masks.

It's a personal novel too. I reflect on what art is for me, does it really have to be entertainment? What is art, what is beauty? For instance, I find ugly things beautiful. I like abandoned places, ruined houses, old cars, I take pictures of cracks in the ceilings, old paint peeling off the walls – I see pure impressionism in some of those. I like the artists like Francis Bacon and Zdzisław Beksiński. I wrote a screenplay for Yevgeny Yufit, who was a necrorealism artist and filmmaker from Saint Petersburg.

Theater of Horrors is a chivalric romance of our time; although 'chivalric' in the spirit of Cervantes. We need heroes, we need artists, we need those who are out of the ordinary. One of my characters makes a theater of horrors in an old, abandoned factory, and he makes those horrible sculptures of the Soviet past, the bureaucrats, the military man, the miserable soviet people, the killed, the martyrs, the murders, etc., the grand exhibition, a sort of encyclopedia of Soviet horrors. We need to get those demons out, and he does, he exhibits them. And it has to be done. +

You turned 50 on Christmas Eve, 2021 – my heartfelt congratulations!

ANDREI IVANOV · PHOTO BY JACQUES-ALAIN FINKELTROC

For whom are you writing now, in these difficult and convoluted times?

It is always hard to write. It is not easier to write when everything is hunky-dory. I write for no particular audience, which makes it all simple. I have stuff on my mind, I live with it, I put it into my journal, the material accumulates, I think of it and decide whether or not it is worthy of being used in a novel or a story. I do not know who is going to read it.

ILONA MARTSON is an Estonian journalist and translator.

Love in a Hopeless Place

by Andrei Hvostov

Loone Ots's debut novel *Love* won first place in the Estonian Writers' Union's 2021 Fiction Contest.

Reviewing Loone Ots's novel, I must take her educational background into account. Ots studied Estonian philology and folklore at the University of Tartu and co-authored the secondary-school textbook *Myth and Literature*, which draws lines between ancient tales and modern fiction. That covers *Love*'s theoretical side: the author knows what she is doing.

As "myth" sounds too monumental, I'd prefer to apply a less dramatic classification: *Love* is a modern fairy tale that is perhaps comparable to Tolkien's *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*.

On the surface, it is a historical novel in which a young woman, Salme, embarks on a journey from rural South Estonia to the university town of Tartu on a frigid winter's day in 1942. The distance as the crow flies is about 70 kilometers, which may not seem like much until one considers the journey takes place during the Nazi occupation of Estonia, which entails countless obstacles and restrictions. Special permits were required to leave a local community at the time, and even if one was acquired, there were practically no transportation options in the countryside. Meaning that Salme's only hope is to hitch a ride in a vehicle commandeered by the occupying German forces – hitchhiking in sub-zero temperatures without knowing whether anyone was driving on that particular road, in that particular direction.

Fortune smiles upon fairy-tale characters, and the same is true for Salme. Those she meets along the way are practically mystical in nature, such as a high-level SS officer who offers her unexpected generosity. The officer is heading to Tartu, not for mass bloodshed but, to remove copies of Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels's doctoral thesis from the university library, because its content is no longer deemed appropriate.

A masterful ratio of fiction and truth is one of the novel's strongest features. Taking turns in the narrative are three historical protagonists: Salme (Niilend) who intends to save the life of Isidor (Levin), who is a student of Uku (Masing). All share ties to the University of Tartu. Any reader who is familiar with Estonian history can quickly surmise the Professor of Theology's

surname, and after mere moments may also identify his folklorist protégé and secondary characters like Rein Sepp (a German specialist) and Karl Ristikivi (a writer). In addition to using copious historical sources, Ots gathered details from letters written by the real-life Salme Niilend.

At the time of the novel's events, Martin Sandberger – the Chief of the Nazi Security Police and SD for Estonia – was positioned to report to Berlin: *Estland ist judenfrei*. Estonia was cleansed. The phrase, which left Estonia with an extremely lamentable and uncomfortable historical mark, also crosses Salme's mind as she hastens to find a ride from her family's farm to Tartu at six in the morning. The fact that she's hiding a young Jewish man, Isidor, at her childhood home doesn't fit with the SD chief's triumphant declaration of "victory". In the eyes of the occupying Germans, Isidor is as good as dead. There's just one technical issue: he still has to be located, arrested, and exterminated.

Salme makes it her mission to stop this injustice from happening. She and Isidor met and became friends before the war and, although he has deep romantic feelings for her, she wishes to keep the relationship strictly platonic. Being the apple of her family's eye, Salme's father and older brothers agree to help her hide Isidor – an unspeakably risky decision while Nazi troops were occupying the country. Nevertheless, Salme manages to overcome all opposition to her plan thanks to her incredible determination and ability to woo anyone in her way. Any man, at least. Even the SS officer who scoops the young woman up from the roadside offers her protection in the form of an all-powerful letter, which allows her to return home after completing her Tartu mission: acquiring a crucial document that might save her admirer's life.

LOONE OTS · PHOTO BY LOREEN PULK / ÕHTULEHT / SCANPIX BALTICS

All good fairy tales have happy endings, and *Love* is no exception. It is a tried-and-true theme, not unlike a Brothers Grimm story about a clever young maiden who ventures out into the world, flouting every danger to save a friend, brother, or lover.

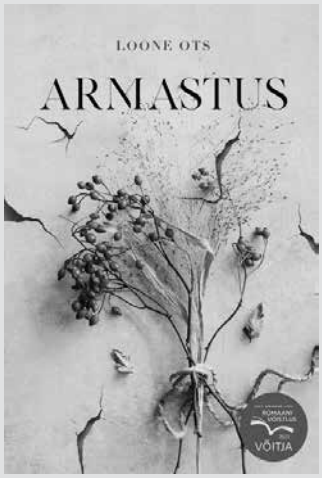
Ots's novel does just what the title promises, delving into a myriad of types of love while neatly avoiding verbosity. She studies the love between two people (although this is steadily one-sided in the novel, such emotions can still move mountains and change the world). The love between a man and a woman, the love between a father and his daughter, and the love between brothers and sisters. Going even further, Ots explores the love for one's homeland, wisdom, and neighbors. The novel considers love as an idea, applied practice, liberating force, and suffocating pain. Love in spite of harrowing circumstances.

ANDREI HVOSTOV is a journalist, essayist and writer.

5:07 a.m. SALME

Love
From the novel by Loone Ots

Translated by Adam Cullen



LOONE OTS
ARMASTUS
(LOVE)
Rahva Raamat, 2021, 272 pp.
ISBN 9789916661802

The snow has compacted into dense drifts. I have to lift my short legs high with every step and bring them down with full force into the depthlessly dark whiteness bathed in starlight. It is a new moon. A time of darkness, opportune for all sorts of *mardused*. "*Mardus*: an apparition foreboding misfortune or death; a banshee." The *mardus* of Estonian folklore shrieks just like the snow beneath my heels. *Shree, shrah, shree, shrah*.

I glance over my shoulder. The buildings slide down the hillside like the sun setting into a vast swamp. A hedge of fir trees pecks the sky like an army of ravens. How is my mind constantly filled with such poetic thoughts?

I barged right into the shed – something told me Isi wasn't asleep. My intuition was correct. He stood before me, cloaked in sheep musk. A true Estonian. German shepherds wouldn't pick up his Jewish scent. Neither would Estonian mongrels. A dog has instincts, which is their impediment. A human has a brain, quick reasoning, and the ability to draft and demand papers. A human doesn't care what a man without papers smells like. He just reaches out his hand and barks *"Ausweiss!"* Back when

we played Bismarck, in Kratt's[1] childhood bedroom (I was given strict instructions to stifle any outbursts of laughter so as not, Lord forbid, to bother her famous papa, our grand Estonian professor and poet. Kratt's mother wore heelless slippers at home and appeared to walk around on tiptoe, even though it was somewhat of an impossible feat given her rotund figure), I'd always declare "Pass!" and show my empty hands. I could pass because I had no cards. Now, I'm so often required to extend a hand containing my passport, my pretty little fingerprint-stained *Ausweiss*, because otherwise I'm without a pass and that's it for me.

I could easily be deemed suspicious without one! A six-pointed star would be stamped on my forehead, just like that. *Komplett*. It wouldn't matter that my family has lived in Kuustle for generations: one hundred and fifty years, according to the church records. It wouldn't matter that we've never intermarried with a single Gypsy or Jew. My petite frame, curly black hair, darker-than-average eyes, and delicate bone structure would give me away. I'd be hooked up to measuring devices and have a ring like a medieval instrument of torture put around my head. They used it to torment the noble artist Cavaradossi, even though he was Italian. Aryan.

Shree! Shree! Shree! Shrr . . .

My leg shoots through a gap beneath the snow. The landscape of South Estonia is bumpy, with hills and hollows chasing one another. But the soil in these parts has been the blackest since time immemorial. Now, I've got snow in my boot. I'm forced to tug it off and empty it of the white powder in the middle of this terrible cold that knocks the breath out of you. Some of the snow has already frozen to my wool sock – I rub my mitten against it furiously.

But the path is visible. The ruts are clearly defined, hollowed by my father and brothers' trips back and forth with the hay wagon. I will not get lost. In one kilometer, it will intersect with the main road, which stretches for several more kilometers before reaching the county highway that leads straight to the courthouse. We Estonians are tireless walkers, even if our hair is black.

Isi stood in the shed, smelling like sheep. He raised his arms as if intending to embrace me, but then froze. A kaleidoscope whirled in his eyes (though how could I see them with the space so dark and the stars so distant outside the tiny window?) and I realized his happy surprise had turned first into a question, then fear. Fear has no scent, at least not in sheep sheds. But it does have a stance—as rigid as that of a peasant whose master turns to him with a raised whip.

"Isi! I know what we're going to do!"

My tone was much louder than it needed to be. I wanted to laugh in his presence. I wanted my laughter to warm the shed where the ewes' bodies were unable to keep away the frost. I wanted it to transform his expression; for it to bring sparks of joy to his eyes.

I clasped his extended hand.

"Sit! Let's sit down!"

I had no need to sit. I didn't want to. I had no patience for sitting; I was in a hurry. But he'd be pleased to share my presence, if even fleetingly.

"I'm going to Tartu! I'm going to the university! Right now!"

Isi was baffled, naturally. I'd gone too fast for him once again. I was too hasty for Uku, too, but he just shook his head, cleaned up my latest opus, and remarked without

1 *In Estonian folklore, a kratt is an enchanted treasure-bearer. Here, it is used as a nickname.*

glancing up from his desk: "Can't you type a little more slowly on that contraption of yours? There is an unbelievable number of typos here!"

And to refrain from further scolding, he blew a smoke ring from his thyme-stuffed pipe. I, however, felt proud to have typed up the paper on a typewriter. On my *personal* typewriter.

Many families shed their possessions during that fresh Red summer. Not for rubles, but for gold. My confirmation bracelet changed hands. It was too big for my wrist, anyway, though Mother and Father tried to convince me to take it to a jeweler. I was too lazy, so the piece collected dust in a drawer until Bernard and Maria mentioned that the owner of a portable Hermes Baby typewriter wanted to sell it quietly.

I'd taken an elective course in shorthand and typewriting in secondary school. The moment I heard the offer, I whooped like an Apache. I showed off my prized new possession at the student club, where several fellows reacted to my gushing excitement with a startled look and pretended not to hear.

Fear comes in many shades.

I am overly hasty; I often get ahead of myself. In school, I was always the first to finish my mathematics exams. The teacher would occasionally hand it back and tell me to try again with patience.

Alas, reengaging focus was never my forte. She would delight to see me scrutinize the grid paper and, as payment for her generosity, I'd feign adding a couple extra dashes to the assignment before handing it back in and accepting my C. "Careless mistakes," clucked the teacher, who was smart and well-intentioned, and deported during the year of Red occupation. But enough about that.

"I'm going to go see Selma, Isi! She works at the archive. They have loads of forgotten documents, all kinds of birth certificates. Isn't that wonderful?"

Isi didn't respond. The slightest movement would betray his nervousness. For centuries, two millennia and longer, the Jewish people have learned to control themselves, to keep themselves in check, to not give away an act or emotion with even the tiniest blink. Isidor regarded me as if I were an ancient prophetess. Questioningly.

"We'll find you a birth certificate. I can't promise an Aryan one, but at least half-Aryan. A regular Estonian yokel, at any rate. So long as you, a son of Moses, have no qualms about becoming the son of an enslaved people."

Isi understood. He squeezed my hand. In his quiet, restrained manner, he thanked me for my willingness to undertake such a dangerous task to help him.

Him, truly?

"How will you get to Tartu."

It wasn't a question. It was a statement. I can't get to Tartu. At least not today. I'll need an *Ausweiss*. I'll need a travel permit. I'll need a horse or a car or a truck.

And the sand is trickling in the hourglass.

"I'll go by foot," I remarked as if it were the most natural thing in the world. As if *der Weltberühmte Universit't Dorpat* were just an hour-and-a-half *Spatziergang* away. Noticing him twitch, I added:

"I'll walk to the courthouse. There, I'll acquire a travel permit. And then I'll continue by car. I'll say I heard something on the radio about the University of Dorpat being back in session and I wish to continue my studies. In the doctoral program. And to do that, I need to show up in person and discuss the topic of my thesis with my advisor, Uku Masing, Doctor of Theology."

Isi leaned in closer. In addition to musk, his hair radiated the smell of cold. It is a good smell. My father smelled that way when I was just a tot and he returned from a far-away city, the name of which I still couldn't pronounce: *Talltu*. Tartu.

Then, at barely a whisper, delicate as summer mist:

"Salme! Why?"

I flinched away. Why? I knew I shouldn't make a single promise; shouldn't allow him to kindle any hope. Only friendship. Or, well, the conviction that I'd defend *anyone*, be they Isi or an itinerant old woman or an elderly Jewish man who dodged a bullet.

But would I protect a communist, too? Even a commissar?

There is no answer to that question. Men from our village were killed in the summer war, too. Mrs. Kooreste was executed without committing a single offense against the Reds. Her children are now orphans. Should we take revenge?

The Hour of Retribution Is at Hand! declared the new regime's first propaganda posters, this time in German. Nearly a dozen Reds who failed to hide in the woods or hightail it towards Russia were taken to the courthouse and lined up against the wall. Afterward, the men of our village were ordered to bury them. The Aryans could dirty their hands with blood, but not with a tool so mundane as a shovel. My brother Kusti was one of the gravediggers. He came home, cleansed himself in the sauna, drank himself drunk, and didn't speak for several days.

Yes, why?

Was it merely a selfless wish to help?

Or was it . . . ?

"I'm leaving at once, Isi. Maybe there'll be a car driving somewhere close to Viljandi. The trains aren't reliable. Everything will work out. I'll be back soon."

A headshake, barely perceptible. I might have just imagined it in the darkness.

"What will happen if they find you rummaging through the archive? There are informers everywhere. You know that."

And before I could come up with a witty and carefree response:

"Selma has a tiny baby. Just an infant. If she loses her job or . . ."

Yes. It's true. Isi, who is in love with me, who loves me more than anyone in the entire world, wasn't just thinking about me. He was also thinking about Selma, whose husband died while attempting to put out the fire that engulfed the chemistry building during the bombings, as it also contained their apartment and the talented twenty-four-year-old intellectual's recently finished translation of the *Livonian Chronicle of Henry*. Only the translation met its end in the fire, though: Rudolf was struck by shrapnel on the roof. Heavy and eight months pregnant at the time, Selma had to identify the body. The day of his senseless, needless death was July 14th— *Fête nationale*. They'd been married for barely a year.

That is why Isi is precious to me. Regardless that the kind of love he wishes for there to exist between us simply cannot be.

I stood and patted my mittened hand on his slender fingers.

"We won't get caught, I promise! And even if I do, then I'd like to see the man who refuses to release me immediately and with apologies to boot!"

I burst into laughter, just a little feigned, and allowed the door to slam shut behind me. I didn't look back until the thick firs hid the window of the shed.

Translation Competition Winner

VEMU (the Museum of Estonians Abroad), the Estonian Literature Centre, and the Estonian Writers' Union organized a translation competition in 2021. There were participants from all over the world and the winner was Tiina Otema from Canada. ELM is publishing her translation of Jürgen Rooste's *Astrid Lindgreni surm*.

TIINA OTEMA FROM CANADA, THE WINNER OF THE TRANSLATION COMPETITION. · PHOTO FROM HER ALBUM

The Death of Astrid Lindgren

Translated by Tiina Otema

I light a cigarette in front of the hotel on King's Street, Königsgatan, I believe. Marlborough Red, I'm a social outcast. Smoking can be harmful to those close to you, declares the writing on the package.

This morning I had breakfast in the hotel dining room, herring and bread, washed down with milk. Beer was not served. The walls are all red. I joked with the waiter that perhaps Strindberg wrote his *The Red Room* right here, as it is really red, this room. The waiter leads me to the wall where a framed plaque declares that it was here in this very dining room that August Strindberg was inspired to write his legendary novel *The Red Room*. Yes indeed.

I'm here on assignment. As it appears, Astrid Lindgren is on her deathbed right here in one of the hotel rooms, and I'm a vulturous reporter. I get paid for this, information on how, when, and where she dies. This assignment has me feeling lazy and disinterested. What could possibly be interesting in Lindgren's death? In her last breath? She has already written all that is interesting. And she wasn't even awarded the Nobel Prize. To whom if not to her? Who is more worthy? Nincompoops!

Nothing much seems to be happening. I go for a walk around the block. I find a record shop and buy a discounted old Metallica record. The sun glares on my face, it's a beautiful day and I feel good, really good. I've never found the death of old people to be tragic, especially if they have lived well; when their stories have been told. I think with dread about my grandfather, and

grandmother, and great aunt; they never entrusted me with anything. They raised me and cared for me when my parents weren't able. They made me the person I am today, but they never entrusted anything to me, ever. They never confided their innermost secrets to me. Astrid Lindgren has. I think of the Bullerby kids. I'm a Bullerby kid, not an Indigo kid. Indigo kids can go to hell!

I arrive back at the hotel, the air is full of nervous energy, restless people, worry etched on their faces. I go to my room and have a shower, the perk of having a hotel room – to have a shower in the middle of the afternoon and feel like a new man. I buy three beers from the corner store. Watery and overpriced. But still cheaper than from the minibar. Right, eh? I step into the corridor; Astrid's room is at the far end. The carpeted corridor is dim and depressing, the carpeting Spartan. It doesn't feel like the 19th century. Instead, it has the dusty reek of discretionary socialism. So be it. A couple of nurses stand outside Astrid's room, I try to catch a glimpse from behind their backs. Astrid Lindgren lies on the bed, spittle dripping from the corners of her mouth. She is like a tiny, ancient corpse. A somber-faced young doctor looks for her pulse and sadly shakes his head.

I walk to the end of the corridor and take the elevator down to the bar. I order a beer. It's overpriced, more expensive than in downtown Helsinki. Less expensive than in Oslo or the Copenhagen airport. My boss calls, he's agitated. Where have I been? Why haven't I reported anything? Is Lindgren still alive?

I ask if we are on the air, he says just a moment, and when he gives the signal I begin:

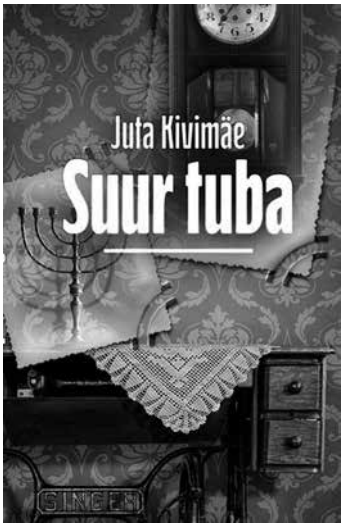
"Hello, Jürgen Rooste reporting from the hotel on Königsgatan where August Strindberg was inspired to write his legendary novel *The Red Room*. Journalists are tracking the story of Astrid Lindgren's death as if there is something intriguing in that. Yes, sex and death always sell. But I tell you, here it's all about the former. We sit in the hotel bar, Lindgren and I. We drink wine from huge goblets, a fabulous Chardonnay. A very good year! And I can affirm that I have not seen a more vivacious, sexy older woman than Astrid Lindgren. I'm kissing her hand as I speak." (I kiss the counter with a loud smooch) "I don't believe that this enchanting, grand old lady can ever die. There's more sparkle in her eyes than in a hoard of pirates' treasures! This has been Jürgen Rooste reporting from Stockholm, this depressing, desolate Nordic seaport. Thank you for your patience and I'm sorry that I was not able to indulge you."

I hang up and take a sip of beer. A car drives up to the entrance of the hotel and men carrying a stretcher get out. The portrait of Strindberg on the wall follows me dolefully. Why so blue, I say to myself. Soon Astrid, the world's most gifted woman will be carried right past you. I hesitate momentarily and order another beer. Wish-washy overpriced Swedish shit. Piss. I think to myself. I'm no journalist. Astrid Lindgren's death has really affected me. I drink to her memory. I wonder, how can I cover this story so that it becomes a colossal disillusionment to all? I want to be the author of disillusions. Yes. I step out to the front of the hotel for a smoke. They carry her past me, the tiny corpse of an old woman. I turn away and shed a tear, I am not a particularly emotional guy. Inside, behind the window, the beer on the bar goes flat.

Book Reviews

by Taavi Kangur, Helena Läks, Kärt Hellerma, Silvia Urgas, Siim Lill

JUTA KIVIMÄE · PHOTO BY PIIA RUBER



JUTA KIVIMÄE
SUUR TUBA
(THE DRAWING ROOM)
Varrak, 2021, 264 pp.
ISBN 9789985353004

Juta Kivimäe's debut novel *The Drawing Room* shared first place in the 2021 novel-writing competition organized by the Estonian Writers' Union. Its very first sentences catapult the reader into the story.

Kivimäe's scenes and characters are detailed so vividly that one is essentially enabled to live the story from within. Forgetting the hour, the year, and the fact that one is even reading, we dive into a drawing room in Tartu in 1957, where we meet Bobe and Zeide. Our eyes suddenly open amidst the bustle of a communal apartment, observing and participating simultaneously. We see into the occupants' enigmatic world and witness Jewish customs, but do not stop there: we also learn about their hobbies and peculiarities in a historically accurate picture of occupied postwar Estonia.

Gradually, the author reveals rich details without burdening the text with excessively long descriptions. Narrating the story is a

preadolescent girl named Mintsi, who has been sent to live with her grandmother after sudden developments in her family's life. Still, we aren't limited to a child's perspective: some of the explanations and details are penned by an all-seeing narrator who neatly conveys the entire world with a precision that goes beyond a child's gaze and understanding.

The Drawing Room is like a fine painting, which comes as no surprise: the author's extensive background in art research enables her to give compelling, lucid details. Her ability to breathe life into characters with just a handful of sentences that conjure clear images and make the reader realize: yes, I *do* know someone just like that. The subjects are ordinary persons we find around and among us. The era is different, and the customs are too, but in a way, it is all unchanging.

Why is *The Drawing Room* so good? Everyone has their own parlor, their sitting room, their living room – whatever they might call it. It is a particular location in time and space where we once felt safe, secure, and happy. Deep in every soul is a world that we gaze back upon with fondness; from which we gather strength in hard times. Kivimäe's book emanates this wonderful sensation. The work does not merely give an accurate picture of life in Estonia in the wake of the Second World War, but also acquaints the reader with the Jewish lives and traditions within our communities.

"Yes, life is just like strolling across a room."
TK

An initial version of the text was published in the Estonian cultural weekly Sirp on 06.08.2021.

KIWA
KUMMILIIMIALLIKAD
(SOURCES OF RUBBER GLUE)
Tänapäev, 2021, 164 pp.
ISBN 9789916171110

Kiwa (Jaanus Kivaste) dabbles in an array of creative fields: he is perhaps best known as an artist but is also a composer, curator, publisher, and writer. In a recent interview, Kiwa classified himself as an "experimentalist"; someone who does not wish to be repetitive or stick to a single medium, and

KIWA · PHOTO BY KEN MÜRK / ERR / SCANPIX BALTICS

therefore must reinvent themselves time and again. He doesn't appear to be fond of anything linear, which is demonstrated with particular flair in his musical compositions that dazzle listeners with kaleidoscopic electronic landscapes.

Sources of Rubber Glue is probably the most approachable of Kiwa's literary works, which of course does not mean it's *particularly* so. The story, at least at first, takes place at the end of the Soviet occupation. It is a time when "the whole empire was rotting at full tilt" and "the Chernobyl hedgehogs' sad *Stalker*-heads of were already reflecting on the first shiny surfaces of the objects behind the curtain". The empire is populated by "norm-core peeps", i.e., those whose boringly normal lives are of no interest to the regime, and "bent circles", which earn the authorities' heightened attention due to their opposition or extreme indifference towards the system. One of the protagonists (or possibly "experienced agents") is Alissa, who appears to lie somewhere between the two classifications.

As the USSR made a point of preventing anti-regime-ists from physically exiting the empire, yet the lackluster surface of everyday life was concurrently bothersome and oppressing, people like Alissa had to be creative to experience a state of absence. Some turned to drink, but alcohol was still a little earthly and grounding, and wasn't always easy to acquire. Household chemicals extended an unexpected helping hand to separate one from reality, and rubber glue rose to the top of their ranks.

Quite early in the book, readers might identify Alissa as a behind-the-Iron-Curtain (or simply the glue-sniffing) twin of Lewis Carroll's well-known heroine, but the similarities fade as the writing transitions from narrative to total experience. All linearity is terminated and, after a series of leaps, time loses its former meaning and importance. This, however, sharpens the senses towards the details and the structures created; pulling descriptions closer to existence without becoming a mere account of a mental state. Kiwa's writing strides in step with the state, not trotting briskly behind it.

Sources of Rubber Glue earned a special mention in the Estonian Writers' Union's 2021 Fiction Contest for its unique application of language and style. It is a truly fascinating "text-machine" that tickles the unfamiliar depths of the reader's brain with an abundance of invented and forgotten words that blend various layers of time. Kiwa's writing haunts and stimulates to an outstanding degree for such a slim book. **HL**

KAI AARELEID
VAIKNE OOKEAN
(PACIFIC OCEAN)

Varrak, 2021, 288 pp.
ISBN 9789985352434

It's easy to summarize Kai Aareleid's novel *Pacific Ocean* in just a few words: Stella, the protagonist, is cheated on by her husband Anders. Her mother, Emma, had a lover alongside Stella's father, who in turn had an affair and another child with a second woman. The simple setup is enough for the author to weave a whole universe of relationships and stage scenes that are electric with tension; encounters where something is seemingly conveyed, but most things go unspoken.

KAI AARELEID · PHOTO BY SIIM LÕVI / ERR / SCANPIX BALTICS

Aareleid's work opens portals to various eras: years when Stella's mother was young, and flashes of the present in which Stella and her husband reside in St. Petersburg. Straying from the mess of human connections is Anders's storyline, a writer who binds the underlying themes into a metaphorical whole.

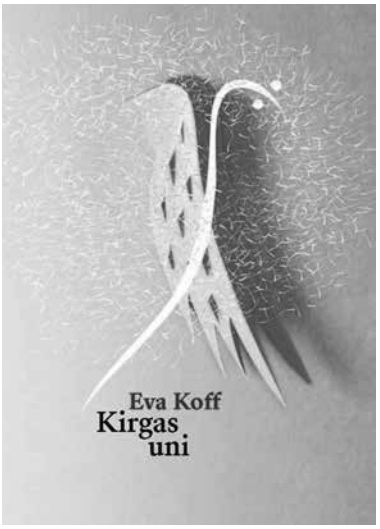
The book opens with a scene from St. Petersburg in March: Stella is standing upon a bridge, chunks of river ice are knocking against the supports, and she wonders if they'll melt by spring. "Frozen" is a word that can also be used to describe her marriage. She and Anders always seem to avoid the thoughts that fill their minds whenever they converse. Everything that truly matters is hidden, veiled in secrecy. Secrecy is also conceptual: the heart of another dimension seems to beat throughout the novel – not necessarily loftier than what is seen and heard, but parallel to the characters' existence.

Aareleid's style is that of a sculptor working with words as material. The protagonist's mind operates in an unusual way when she observes her mother meet a familiar stranger in the northern metropolis; "Stella knows that, later, she will remember the scenes in which all logical explanations run out as sculptures. They are like a flurry of freeze-frames shown in rapid progression, giving the impression of motion, but too brief to allow for interpretation or give meaning." (p. 47)

Pacific Ocean is about the intrinsically human yearning for love and its painful collision with the mundanity of life. An overarching air of sadness inevitably makes the story melodramatic. This is not a disadvantage to the story, however, as Aareleid keeps a steady hand as she sculpts a reality that impedes romance. Significant details can come in the form of a crow landing on a branch or a gust tugging at the hem of a passerby's hood. In one of the most poignant episodes, Emma, who works as a doctor, works to perform a caesarian section on her husband's mistress, thus aiding in the delivery of the pair's daughter, Mari.

Aareleid's writing is meticulously well-structured and has the "accomplished arc» of an artist completing a drawing. Abstaining from excessive detail, she demonstrates

EVA KOFF · PHOTO BY LIISE MAGDALENE LOORIS



how relationships can crumble to dust and shadows. These are sorrowful dissolutions, but the sorrow is clothed in dignity and celebration. She seems to say that even hidden love can be precious, even when cruelly crushed by circumstance. *Pacific Ocean* is saturated with layers of meaning that shine a light not only upon human relationships, but on the commonalities that surround them. **KH**

EVA KOFF
KIRGAS UNI
(LUCID DREAMS)

Härra Tee & Proua Kohvi, 2021, 264 pp.
ISBN 9789949986187

Eva Koff's second novel *Lucid Dreams* is true to its title, exploring a state of lucid dreaming that is so powerful it cannot be separated from reality. The book itself follows the logic of dreaming – one based on a lack of logic and order. True-to-life details (a stranger's haunting gaze, popular new nightlife venues, biblical stories heard long ago, news read just before going to bed) meld into a whole while one is asleep. All we can do when we awake is ask ourselves: Why? And what does that flurry of fragmented images say about me?

Lucid Dreams opens with a compelling scene: seven employees of the giant corporation Alethia are found frozen in place in their office. It's a condition just like that of a frozen computer – operating, but entirely incapable to respond. The corporation's CEO, legendary businessman Meelis Luik, has suddenly and mysteriously skipped town. An opening that makes one want to fly through the pages to uncover what the climax will be: what happened and how will it all be resolved? Yet the deeper in the story you get, the more you suspect that the author may never provide clear answers to these questions.

Four protagonists share the role of narrator: Guido, an uncompromising director of modern theater; Anastassia, a believer in crystal healing who is recovering from an affair with her boss; Jaan, her insomniac son; and Hele, a sleep scientist who is also critically sleepless.

The storylines are tightly interwoven despite the fact that not all the characters meet. Koff stacks their parallel lives carefully, layer by layer, unafraid to make minor jumps through time. The four struggle with sleep (or a lack of it) in individual ways, though they aren't always capable of differentiating between their dreaming and waking states.

Koff's writing is steeped so heavily in references and symbolism that the author alone might be able to interpret it fully. Some examples: the ancient Greek *aletheia* means truth or reality, the charismatic actor Immanuel's name is an obvious nod to Jesus Christ, and it can be no coincidence that Guido is producing Dostoyevsky's fantastical play *The Idiot*. Other details are less transparent. Why does every character travel around the city exclusively in Bolt rideshare taxis? Did the startup's founders invest in product placement? The Usain Bolt Bar, which pops up repeatedly, must be an inside joke among the Koff family. Or perhaps the author's intention *is* to perplex the reader; to blindfold and spin them around and around until the lines between dream and reality are utterly blurred. **SU**

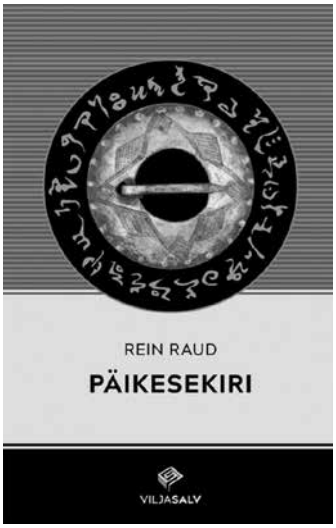
REIN RAUD
PÄIKESEKIRI
(THE SUN SCRIPT)
SALV, 2021, 404 PP.
ISBN 9789949734160

Rein Raud is an author, philosopher, and Asian Studies scholar whose works never go unnoticed. Raud's numerous novels serve as a literary stage for him to act out academic and philosophical topics. I've personally had conflicting thoughts regarding this, as it has generally resulted in books that are overloaded with erudition like an Umberto Eco title.

Nevertheless, Raud struck a masterful balance in *The Sun Script*. I have to agree with the writer Karl-Martin Sinijärv, who wrote: "I believe that *The Sun Script* is Rein Raud's best book to date. The style of writing is casual and pleasant, and that's just the way it reads."

The story takes place in the tumult of early-20th-century Russia, as well as in China, Japan, and Estonia. Two protagonists embark on journeys in opposite directions: one from the thick forests of the west, the other from the misty mountains of the

REIN RAUD. PHOTO BY KAIRI LEIBOLD / ERR / SCANPIX



east. Strongwoman Lily Ojamaa starts as a member of a traveling circus and, after ample adventures, ends up becoming a sumō wrestler. Her prototype is the historical figure Anette Busch (1882–1969), who became the first foreign female *rikishi* in Imperial Japan. As Raud acknowledges in the afterword, however, the scant details we know about Anette's biography merely provided inspiration for the greater story.

Trekking westward with the unforeseen final destination of Tallinn is Nitta Tsuneo, a young man with inner struggles, who descends from a long line of bearers of Japanese tradition. "All in all, the singular, local form alone may exist. Eternity can speak to us, but only in the time that we ourselves experience and in which we are encompassed." (p. 223) Other peculiarities of history such as the divine "sun script" and Jakob Linzbach, a linguistic philosopher who alternated between St. Petersburg and Tallinn, also play significant roles.

In addition to the dual odysseys, Raud paints a fascinating picture of the pains of the Russian Revolution. And he reminds us that the people and coincidences that surface among the fray of major historical events should not be forgotten.

One could extract a motto for the book from Raud's recently published introduction to the history of Asian thinking: "The practical manifestations of worldviews may be [...] evaluated [...] on the basis of the positive developments they give rise to and support. [...] No one side of Eurasia is undeniably superior to the other at anything. Therefore, one might reason that the future global outlook could, in the very best case, see roots in both and combine the finest traits of each."

That is precisely what *The Sun Script* does: it brings together the best features of East and West amidst complex historical events, and sprinkles them with revenge, intrigue, friendship, and romance. I hope that translators will find an opportunity to undertake this work soon, as it would be a shame to limit such fine literature to only a local audience. **SL**

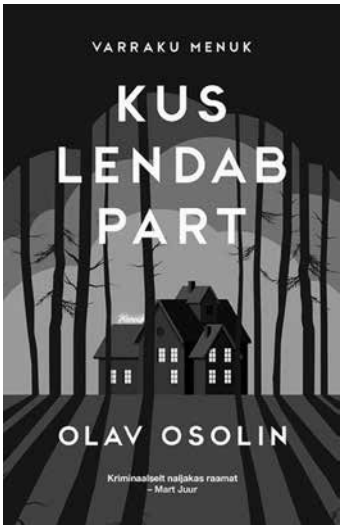
OLAV OSOLIN
KUS LENDAB PART
(WHERE THE DUCK FLIES)

Varrak, 2021, 224 pp.
ISBN 9789985352700

Olav Osolin has garnered a number of titles, ranging from TV star to journalist to advertising guru. However, "writer" is a new designator that he has adopted with astonishing grace and ease. Following the release of his popular autobiography, he published an unexpected crime novel that has stoked rampant interest; book sales and library check-outs have been impressive, and the work was even nominated for the Betti Alver Award for Debut Literature. As Triin Ploom-Niitra remarked: "The jury, quite unanimously, found it to be a very witty book, and the author a fantastic storyteller."

Where the Duck Flies isn't your typical crime novel. As Osolin himself commented in a recent interview: "I'm somewhat embarrassed to admit that I've only read a couple of crime novels over the course of my long life, and that was back when I was in school. [...] Still, it was the very fact that I have no interest in crime stories that made me interested in writing one in the first place. It allowed me to start from a clean

OLAV OSOLIN · PHOTO BY TEET MALSROOS / ÕHTULEHT / SCANPIX BALTICS



slate without being fettered by the rules of the genre."

Crime writing is certainly filled with stereotypes, which makes Osolin's take on the genre refreshing. Junior Inspector Samuel Part (which means 'duck' in Estonian) and his charismatic boss Mart Sapiste are tasked with solving a murder committed in a South Estonian holiday house. The corpse, genuine Estonian crime writer Katrin Pauts, goes missing and the guests are all acting strangely. Lurking on the fringes is another mysterious vacationer whom no one wants to talk about. The story is fast-paced with a surprising ending that leaves the door open for a sequel. Even so, Osolin seems to have written the novel purely for personal pleasure, not intending to launch a new crime dynasty.

Humor is the author's obvious trump card – brief, sketch-like chapters filled with clever banter. This comes off as him possibly trying too hard at first, but as the story unfolds, the playful jabs made at society and human blunder become smoother and more effortless.

Osolin constructs the book layer by layer, dropping hints that reveal the true identities and events behind the story. The thrilling plot balances deftly on a razor's edge between mystery and crime-story parody. Political correctness is brushed off and the protagonists' homespun philosophies allow the author to lampoon worldviews at every point on the compass.

Where the Duck Flies is an enjoyable, casual read with realistic scenes that will certainly bring a grin to one's lips. **SL**

TAAVI KANGUR is a writer.

HELENA LÄKS is a poet, editor, and publisher.

KÄRT HELLERMA is a writer and critic.

SILVIA URGAS is a writer and critic.

SIIM LILL is an autonomous expert.

Juhani Püttsepp: A Storyteller for the Defenseless

by Jaanika Palm

When Juhani Püttsepp published his first children's book in 1994, Johannes the Artist's Strange Stories, critics didn't quite know what to make of it. The work, made in the symbiosis between writer and illustrator, was somewhat ahead of its time for Estonian literature and is more akin to the picture books on shelves nowadays. Even though Püttsepp, who is a trained and practicing biologist, has written over two dozen books since then, each new title seems to baffle the public at first.

It helps to keep in mind that he belongs to the old school of writers, who don't worry about selling or marketing their books, but simply focus on what they do best. Regardless of his outward lack of ambition, Püttsepp has achieved a strong position in Estonian children's literature. In addition to writing for children, he spends his time working at the Tartu Children's Theater, penning nature articles, and creating documentary films and books for adult audiences. Every young person who delves into his books should probably have an adult nearby to answer questions that might arise.

Püttsepp's storytelling is so direct and sincere that it feels like he's sitting right next to you and narrating. This might be because he knows his audience well and is greatly experienced, being the father of five children. Many of his books are semi-autobiographical, such as *Anni on a Journey* (2005), in which an adventure is recounted through the eyes of a doll, and *Sliding Stories* (2014), which contains stories about the author's true encounters with wild animals. Indeed, he has a particular flair for nature writing. In *Stories of a Small Wolf*, he attempts to rehabilitate wolves' reputations from being greedy, evil fairy tale villains. By inventively placing a wolf side by side with a human child, he explains how they survive in the wild and shows that they're simply trying to make do with the circumstances of their habitat. *The Black Birds* (2016) is a storybook that helps readers get to know the ways of jackdaws, crows, rooks, and ravens.

Many of Püttsepp's human characters also need special care and protection: an asthmatic ghost in *Niglas the Mill Ghost* (2001), a feeble old woman in *The Grandma Who Turned into a Puppy* (2016), and a victim of domestic violence in *The Story of the Little Oak, Anger, and the Crow* (2015). The latter is the first Estonian book about this difficult and far-too-prevalent issue

aimed at school-aged and younger children. Narrated by a little girl, it emphasizes that kids aren't to blame for their parents' quarrels and that everyone has the right to a peaceful environment that fosters growth – be they an oak or a little person. *I Am My Own* (2017) is based on true stories gathered from psychiatrists, and helps children to avoid situations that might be dangerous or put them into harm's way. The book raises questions that might cross a child's mind, such as what to do when someone hugs you against your will and how to behave when a stranger on the street invites you to look at puppies.

The Society of Gibraltar Ship Dogs (2015), which won the My First Book writing contest, whisks readers away to the streets of a little wooden slum town filled with people who are down on their luck. Anton lives with his grandmother and is one day joined by a reddish mutt named Saku. Püttsepp's book helps young readers understand that it doesn't pay to draw conclusions about others based on where they live, how well-off they are, or the things they've done in the past.

The author's latest award-winning work is *The Moon's a Golden Ship*, which is likewise based on historical events. Having gathered several accounts of Estonians who fled Soviet occupation in the 1940s, Püttsepp gives a voice to the children who were forced to abandon their homes. Although most Estonian books set in that harrowing period have focused more on deportation and repression, *The Moon's a Golden Ship* explores refugees' irrevocably lost sense of home despite living in prosperous new countries with little financial hardship. Püttsepp believes that a childhood can contain bright and heartwarming moments even if it coincides with tumultuous times. Growing up in peacetime is, however, a blessing.

JUHANI PÜTTSEPP · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH

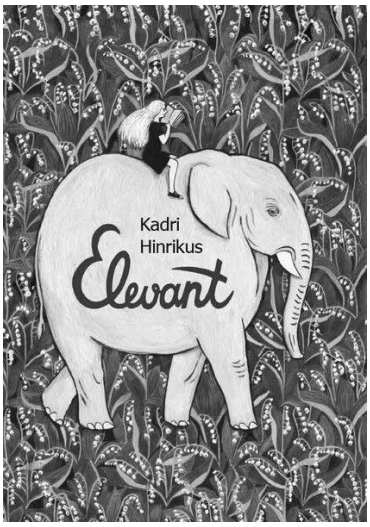
Juhani Püttsepp is an empathetic author with a sharp eye for those who are in need and are powerless to defend themselves or use their voice. By using children's literature to draw attention to such individuals, he is working to shape a more caring and unified society where everyone has a place, dignity, and a say in their own lives.

Jaanika Palm is a researcher at the Estonian Children's Literature Center.

Children's Book Reviews

by Jaanika Palm, Kairi Look

KADRI HINRIKUS · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH



KADRI HINRIKUS,
ELEVANT
(THE ELEPHANT)

Tammeraamat, 2022, 72 pp.
ISBN 9789949690749

Kadri Hinrikus's books let the brighter side of life shine through, and are ideal for when dark clouds of worry crowd one's thoughts or unforeseen difficulties crop up.

Since Hinrikus began writing children's books in 2008, she has steadfastly maintained a certain principle: no matter how difficult a societal issue may be, a solution can always be found somewhere in the text. She infuses young readers with the belief that there are no hopeless situations – one must simply believe in a solution and work to achieve it. *The Elephant* is a fine example of that.

Kärt feels like a total outsider. She has a hard time making friends at school and things at home aren't exactly rosy, either. Her favorite hobbies are reading and writing, but her father, a successful businessman, doesn't like his already short-sighted daughter sitting around with her nose in a book. He believes that Kärt should be engaged in more financially beneficial activities. There really is nowhere she fits in. But right after the worst day at school ever, Kärt meets a spunky Croatian girl named Lucija who helps her realize that the world really does need girls like Kärt.

The Elephant focuses on feeling like you belong as well as noticing, nourishing, and expressing it. Hinrikus emphasizes how important it is to know that you're part of a group where people accept you just the way you are. Being accepted boosts one's self-confidence and lets you feel that you'll make it in the world, no matter what.

The author strikingly demonstrates that it's possible to change nearly any situation. Much depends on your relationships with friends and family, not to mention the way you yourself behave. Readers who feel troubled by one thing or another will no doubt find solace in *The Elephant*: if Kärt can get a fresh chance in life, then why can't anyone?! All one must do is be brave enough to open themselves up, find their voice, and share it with others. **JP**

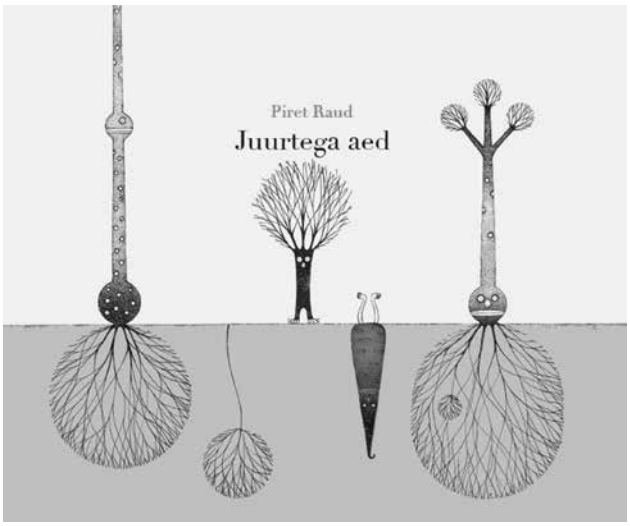
PIRET RAUD
JUURTEGA AED
(THE ROOTED GARDEN)
Tänapäev, 2020, 48 pp.
ISBN 9789949857098

Although *The Rooted Garden* is a small book in a soft pink color palette, its message is tremendous and provides a feast of food for thought.

Through words and illustrations, Piret Raud tells the story of a seemingly plain little tree who is forced to set off in search of a new home after a chainsaw arrives in their precious woods. After several days and nights, the tree finally arrives at a breathtaking garden populated by plants that value having roots above everything else. Alas, the refugee has no roots and is told they may stay in the garden only if they make themselves useful. So, the little tree promises to sweep away anything rootless it comes across, though this manner of settling in certainly doesn't make it happy. When a bird alights in the garden and offers an incredible new perspective, the little tree's world is transformed. Soon, the other plants also realize that there are things in life more important than simply having roots.

Adult readers can certainly divine Raud's allegory of the global migration crisis and the issues it has led to. How can one strike a balance without losing their identity and culture after moving to a new country? How can we welcome newcomers in a way that

PIRET RAUD · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH



KERTU SILLASTE · PHOTO BY TMV PROMOTION

makes them feel more at home? Is it better to point out differences, or to focus instead on what connects and unites us?

The book speaks to readers on an individual level in addition to highlighting universal perspectives. Each of us has been the little tree at one time or another, whether it was going into the first grade, trying to fit in at a new job, or joining an exercise group at a gym. The experience of standing in a doorway, your heart pounding in your chest and your eyes searching for a friendly gaze is no doubt familiar to many. Hopefully, every garden will someday be visited by a bird who helps new and old, rooted and rootless, to come together.

Like many of her earlier children's books, Raud presents profound topics in a way that they can be easily understood without coddling the reader or watering down the substance. She has an exceptional sense for detail and a faculty for approaching problems from a variety of perspectives, thus accomplishing a polished and well-crafted whole in both illustration and text. **JP**

KERTU SILLASTE
APPI! HELP!
Koolibri, 2021, 24 pp.
ISBN 9789985046425

Kertu Sillaste has already been a familiar name to fans of Estonian children's literature for more than a decade. After initially illustrating other authors' works, she wrote her own original title in 2012: *It's Pancake Time!* It didn't take long for the book to gain popularity and to be published in English (Ginger Books, 2015). Her next work was *No, It Isn't So!* (2015), which tells the story of a bunny who practices self-reassurance to overcome his fears. Next came *Everyone Makes Art Their Own Way* (2016) and *I Am An Artist* (2018; Adam Cullen's English translation published by Graffeg Books, 2021), which educates children about creativity. *The Animals Went to Town* and *The Prettiest Skirt* were both published in 2019, the first exploring magic, and the second inspired by flower motifs in local Estonian embroidery.

Help! is a wordless book that Sillaste was inspired to make while visiting a refugee

camp and library in Lampedusa, Italy. Since the camp's children often come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and may be illiterate, its library offers books that have minimal text or tell a story through universally understandable pictures.

This latest work by Sillaste tells of a girl who hears a cry for help and sets off to find whoever made it. As she does, she crosses a tangled forest filled with creatures that need her love and care. Wanting to help each and every one, the girl scoops them up into her arms and pockets, and even balances some on her shoulders and head. Carrying this precious burden, she finally makes it back home and collapses onto the grass in exhaustion. Luckily, others come to support her in turn and bring a smile to the girl's face.

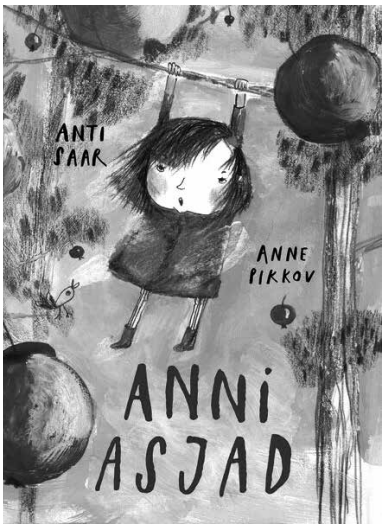
The book is illustrated with child-like drawings – bold, emotional, and impactful. Colors and figures, as well as their particular positioning and placement, are used to tell the story. Contrasting the cheerful, calm pale yellows and pinks is a black-and-gray color scale that expresses more turbulent emotions. As the situation grows more intense, Sillaste's pencil strokes become bellicose and the figures she depicts wilder.

Every book offers individual readers unique experiences and interpretations, no matter whether it is composed of words or exclusively illustrations. To a child, Sillaste's story might be about finding long-lost toys, a nightmare, or a journey through a land of terrors. To an adult, it might address the migration crisis, climate catastrophe, or overpopulation. Nevertheless, one common theme resonates for all: noticing those who ask for help and finding the courage and will to act. **JP**

ANTI SAAR
ANNI ASJAD
(ANNI'S THINGS)
Kolm Elu, 2020, 80 pp.
ISBN 9789949019953

Every new book Anti Saar writes holds a surprise in terms of both topic and style. He has published close to a dozen works; including young-adult novels, short-story collections, picture books, and children's poetry. His finely tuned sense for language produces writing that is elegant, deep, and

KERTU SILLASTE · PHOTO BY DMITRI KOTJUH



brimming with warmth. Saar also writes for older audiences and is a productive, esteemed translator of French literature and philosophical essays.

Anni's Things is a heartfelt collection of stories for preschool and primary school children. Anni is a three-year-old girl who lives with her parents and two older brothers in Tartu. She is a fun, energetic, curious pipsqueak who attentively observes the world around her.

The book revolves around things that Anni finds precious and important: a hair clip, her aunt's dog, favorite foods, and broader concepts like secrets and role models. Every object is used to relay an ordinary event that is meaningful to Anni and explores themes like friendship, family solidarity, showing care, and exploring the world. Humor and childlike inventiveness are tools for whenever she ends up in a pickle and faces problems familiar to most young people. Anni must figure out how to get gum off the bottom of her backpack (pull it over your head and start licking!), how to keep her hair from falling into her oatmeal (put on a purple hair clip!), what to do with a leftover pancake (slide it under your bedsheet for later!), and how to get ahold of her aunt's cool wide-brimmed hat of invisibility (ask to borrow it and return it later!). Every aspect of her exciting life is cozy and safe, even when troubles arise.

Saar's work is touching through and through, and its enchanting wordplay adds a magical sheen to children's everyday lives. Often, it is the littlest things that give us the greatest joy. Young readers will delight in recognizing familiar dilemmas, and their parents will chuckle as they read aloud the episodes they've witnessed at home. The author has a wonderful grasp of the thoughts that run through a kid's head and the worries that gnaw at them. He is on the same level as his reader and, if necessary, will hold their hand, offer support, and encourage them to look deeper into the world.

Anni's Things is illustrated by acclaimed Estonian artist Anne Pikkov. Her pictures include puckish details and warm tones that highlight the girl's youthful energy and make her whole world glisten. Anyone of any age would long to exist in Anni's fascinating world filled with so much goodness. **KL**

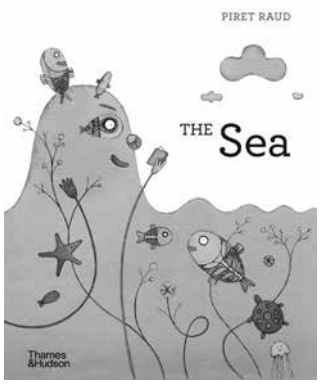
JAANIKA PALM is a researcher at the Estonian Children´s Literature Center.

KAIRI LOOK is an Estonian writer.

Selected Translations

Arabic

ILMAR TASKA
Pobeda 1946
رصن اهسا ةرايس
Translated by
Mohamed Abdulaziz
Al Arabi, 2021
رصن اهسا ةرايس



English

PIRET RAUD
Meri
The Sea
Thames & Hudson, 2021

Finnish

JAAN KAPLINSKI
Õhtu toob tagasi kõik
Ilta tuo takaisin kaiken
Translated by Anja Salokannel
and Pauli Tapio
Kustannusliike Parkko, 2021

VALDUR MIKITA
Lingivstiline mets
Lingvistinen metsä
Translated by Anniina
Ljokkoi
Sammakko, 2021

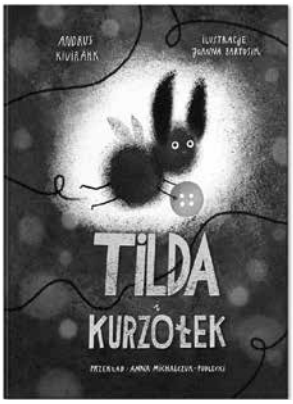
German

JAAN KROSS
Vastutuulelaev: **Bernhard Schmidti romaan**
Gegenwindschiff
Translated by Cornelius Hasselblatt and Maximilian Murmann
Osburg Verlag, 2021

LEELO TUNGAL
Seltsimees laps
Genossin Kind: Eine Kindheit im Estland der 50er Jahre
Translated by Cornelius Hasselblatt
Plaggenhauer, 2021

Hungarian

JOONAS SILDRE
Kahe heli vahel. Graafiline romaan Arvo Pärdist
Két hang között
Translated by Mónika Segesdi
Polar Könyvek



ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK
Tilda ja tolmuingel
Tilda i kurzołek
Translated by Anna Michalczuk-Podlecki
Wydawnictwo Widnokrąg, 2021

Japanese

ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK
Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu
蛇の言葉を話した男
Translated by Ryoko Sekiguchi
Kawade Shobo Sinsha, 2021

Latvian

KRISTIINA EHIN
Kuu on mul veres
Mēness man asinīs
Translated by Guntars Godiņš
and Daila Ozola
Zvaigzne ABC, 2021

Korean

OSKAR LUTS
Kevade. Pildikesi
koolipõlvest
말썽꾸러기 토츠와 그의 친구들
Translated by Seo Jin-seok
문화의힘, 2021

Norwegian

JÜRI KOLK
Naistepäev
Kvinnedagen
Translated by Øyvind Rangøy
Solum Bokvennen, 2021

Spanish

PAAVO MATSIN
Gogoli disko
La discoteca de Gógol
Translated by Consuelo Rubio Alcover
Ático de los Libros, 2021

Turkish

KERTU SILLASTE
Igaüks teeb isemoodi kunsti
Herkesin Tarzı Başka İşte Sanat Burada
Arden, 2021

To wake
in the dead of night
from sleep
from myself
as I am
as I was
before I was born
no light no darkness
only astonishment
that I am here
and inability
to tell
how it all
really is

before and beyond
the sword-blow
of the great oblivion
that gave you
this time
and space
and name

JAAN KAPLINSKI

FROM *THE SAME SEA IN US ALL* (1985)
TRANSLATED BY JAAN KAPLINSKI WITH SAM HAMILL