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** The author wrote an article originally in English.*

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Literature is Seeking Direct Contact

These days, everyone is talking about AI. The knowledge that a machine is capable of thinking, drawing, and writing like a human is nothing new, but a machine being so skilled at these jobs leads to questions and apprehension. How will it affect the world and us in our humanity? What impact will it have on literature?

In the Estonian literary magazine Looming*, which marks its centenary this year, writer Aare Pilv discussed this recent technological advance: "Digitalization, the internet, and social media as a format for communication has also reshaped our senses on a broader level. Here is precisely where we should look for the reasons why development in the traditional sense no longer works or isn't where we expect to find it. Our sensory space has been transformed."*

The space we occupy has acquired new dimensions; it is denser and more complex. As a result, literature, especially poetry, is striving to draw closer to the reader and the listener; to be in direct contact with its audience. "Literature is no longer an inner dialogue or an area for cutting textual diamonds – it is a manner of seeking ever-more immediate contact."

In this issue of Estonian Literary Magazine*, Indrek Koff also explores seeking contact and probing boundaries in his essay "Now, That's Certainly Not Literature": "One apparent trend in original Estonian literature is the rising frequency of dramatization, and this is in impressively motley and entertaining modes of expression. Here, I don't mean plays that are intended to be staged, but creative writing in a variety of other manifestations."*

Sanna Kartau, the winner of this year's Betti Alver Award for Debut Poetry, brings the energy of Berlin's spoken-word poetry workshops to Estonian literature, complementing it with a social aspect. As Silvia Urgas writes in her review:

"[Kartau's] poems often come to life only when read aloud or in one's mind, their charm hidden in rhythm, not traditional form and style."

Longevity is the measure of a classic, however, and 2023 marks 70 years since Karl Ristikivi's The Night of Souls *was published. It is read and reread time and again by Estonians, staged, and widely translated. In this issue, Maximilian Murmann shares how his 2019 German translation has been received in his home country. Just 2022, Jouko Vanhanen's Finnish translation* Sielujen yö, *was also released. It's a shame the author didn't live to see his work venture out into the world.*

Here in the northernmost Baltic state, we founded a new literary tradition: Estonian Literature Day, which is celebrated on January 30th and is a flag day across the country. This and every year going forward, local writing has its own special occasion to shine in the national spotlight.

It is our desire for quality Estonian literature to always be found and for readers to engage with it as closely as they can.

Enjoy the issue!

Annika Koppel
Editor-in-Chief

ANNIKA KOPPEL /
photo Peeter Langovits

News

FIRST ANNUAL ESTONIAN LITERATURE DAY CELEBRATED

Estonian Literature Day, a new national flag day, was marked for the first time on January 30th 2023. It was established to recognize and pay homage to key works of Estonian literature and to publicly highlight the role of writers in Estonian culture and society.

January 30th is already significant in Estonian cultural history, being the birthday of literary classic Anton Hansen Tammsaare (1878–1940) 145 years ago. His *Truth and Justice* pentalogy is a cornerstone of modern Estonian culture and is widely read to this day. Other major works of his include *Kõrboja peremees* (The Master of Kõrboja, 1922) and *Põrgupõhja uus Vanapagan* (The Misadventures of the New Satan, 1939).

The winner of this year's Tammsaare Award for Fiction, which is sponsored by the City of Tallinn, the Tallinn Literary Center, and the Estonian Writers' Union, was also announced on Estonian Literature Day: Tõnu Õnnepalu.

Õnnepalu received the award for his novel *Palk: talvepäevik* (Salary: A Winter Diary), which was published in 2021. The jury was impressed by the complexity of the author's universe and his deeply analytical, prejudice-free attitude. Õnnepalu's style is personal and fluid, and his use of language is casual while

TÕNU ÕNNEPALU / photo Priit Mürk, ERR/Scanpix

LITERARY DISCO at Tammsaare Park / photo Kris Moor

remaining precise and poetic. The prize has been given every five years since 1998.
The day began in Tallinn with a ceremony at the traditional dawn Estonian flag-raising on Toompea Castle and culminated with a public "literary disco" at Tammsaare Park. Celebrations weren't confined to the capital, of course, but took place in many forms all across Estonia.

MEHIS HEINSAAR RECEIVES 3 AWARDS

Estonian author Mehis Heinsaar's new novel *Kadunud hõim* (The Lost Tribe) received this year's Tammsaare Literary Award, sponsored by Järva Parish. Heinsaar has said the book, which is set in Tartu and a tiny farmstead in the marshes of south-central Estonia, is greatly autobiographical and a kind of adult fairy tale where reality and fantasy meet.
This year, the Estonian Literary Museum issued the Friend of the Museum Award. Heinsaar, whose protagonist in The Lost Tribe is also closely tied to the museum, was its first laureate. Mehis Heinsaar was awarded the Estonian Cultural Endowment's annual prize for literature as well.

MEHIS HEINSAAR / photo Dmitri Kotjuh, Järva Teataja/Scanpix Baltics

LOOMING LITERARY MAGAZINE MARKS CENTENARY

Founded in 1923, *Looming* serves as an outlet for contemporary Estonian literature's sundry explorations. Many literary events will be held across Estonia to mark the magazine's uninterrupted century. In April 2023, Tiit Hennoste's thorough overview of Estonian literature in the magazine over the last hundred years will be published. A literary conference titled "A Century of Looming" will be held, and a play based on the magazine will be televised: *Kolmevalitsus* (The Three Kingdoms; Toomas Kall, directed by Ain Mäeots).

BRITISH PUBLISHER CHRISTOPHER MACLEHOSE RECEIVES ESTONIAN STATE DECORATION

Estonian President Alar Karis gave celebrated UK publisher Christopher MacLehose the Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana, IV Class. MacLehose, who was born in Scotland, has been behind the publishing of the works of classic Estonian author Jaan Kross in English over several decades: *The Czar's Madman* (1992), *Professor Martens' Departure* (1994), *The Conspiracy & Other Stories* (1995), *Treading Air* (2003), and, most recently, the author's tremendous *Between Three Plagues* trilogy (2016–2022). Thanks to MacLehose's efforts, Kross is now perhaps the best-known Estonian author around the world.

Publisher **CHRISTOPHER MACLEHOSE** / photo Archive

KATRIN LAUR / photo Kris Moor

KATRIN LAUR RECEIVES THE JAAN KROSS AWARD FOR LITERATURE

This year's Jaan Kross Award for Literature was given to Katrin Laur for her hefty historical novel *Tunnistaja* (Witness, 2022)

The work immerses in Estonian culture and history from the perspective of an unusual historical figure: beatified Catholic archbishop Eduard Profittlich (1890–1942). The book is about loyalty and staying true to oneself at a time when the world is unraveling at the seams. With a cast of fascinating characters, Laur's novel paints a panorama of the pre-war Republic of Estonia and its zeitgeist.

Laur (b. 1955) graduated from the Moscow Institute of Cinematography and has lived in Germany for much of her life. She is a well-known filmmaker who has written and directed several documentaries and two feature films. Laur has also worked as journalist, and an instructor. Witness is her debut in literary fiction.

The Jaan Kross Award for Literature has been announced on February 19th, the late author's birthday, since 2010.

"Exercises in Style" - **TOOMAS TÄHT, INDREK KOFF, JAN KAUS, EVA KOLDITS** - on a stage of the Estonian Concert Hall celebrating the centenary of the Estonian Writers' Union, October 2022 / photo Kalev Lilleorg

ESTONIAN LITERARY MAGAZINE

Now, That's Certainly Not Literature

by Indrek Koff

*Writer **Indrek Koff** takes a look at literature's borderlands and asks what peculiarities might arise there.*

For some reason, I've always felt that truly interesting things arise where borders meet. Where the cores of two or more areas blur and their differing parts blend to various degrees. Not such that either disappears, but that creates a third entity from the material that forms. Something that preserves, intact, the differentiating characteristics of each individual component.

I don't mean to say, of course, that developed notions should be ground down and swept beneath a rug of oblivion. As for literature, the symphonic quality of the true novel is still thrilling, and true poetry still lifts us to greater heights with its beauty and elusiveness. And it will continue to do so.

With alloys, it appears, the likelihood of creating something new and intriguing is indeed a little greater simply because less effort is spent on the melting. The path hasn't been fully smoothed just yet. True, one can't say that originality or uniqueness in literature is what makes an experiment an experiment, as it's impossible to create anything genuinely unprecedented in the field… That being said, literary experiments also aren't overly common.

Another factor that ups the excitement of experimentality is the great danger of failure. An artist who attempts something "unlubricated" is exceptionally vulnerable, which is precisely what makes it so attractive. The courage to get down on all fours and crawl while testing. And this is, in my opinion, intriguing to both the "consumer" and the creator. If you aren't prepared for a piece that you deem genius, or at least moderately adequate, to result in a certain degree of discomfort when it comes into contact with the audience, eliciting inexplicable reactions of disgust or, in the worst case, mere shrugs, then there's no point in even undertaking the project!

Interestingly, the decision-makers who divvy out grant money have recently gained a greater appreciation for the blending of divergent branches of art. The word "interdisciplinary" slips its way into every official document imaginable, and anyone operating in the project-based cultural universe is essentially obliged to use it. I can't deem this tendency overly meaningful, but there's still something afoot. I suppose even officials think, dream, and hope. No doubt the collective intuition of bureaucrats in the cultural field has suggested that probing borders can sometimes be productive.

INDREK KOFF dangles over the border between literature and theater without tilting towards either side / photo Kalev Lilleorg

One apparent trend in original Estonian literature is the rising frequency of dramatization, and this is in impressively motley and entertaining modes of expression. Here, I don't mean plays that are intended to be staged, but creative writing in a variety of other manifestations. It's important to emphasize the word "frequency" because modern Estonian literature was essentially born on the stage – what literature-loving Estonian hasn't heard of the Siuru literary group's infamous ball? The scandalous fundraising performance made an immediate name for its members and collected the necessary capital for launching their literary project. Siuru texts are certainly enjoyable to read in and of themselves, but one can't underestimate the draw of the stage.

Poetry theater, which lies somewhere in the gray area between drama and literature and is similarly underpinned by music, was practiced later in Estonia. Every budding poetry group has pulled off a more-or-less outrageous performance. Some have become legendary, others not, but each has occurred. In addition to intimate silence and the withdrawn reader, lit-

erature has sought live contact with a human of flesh and blood (such as Artur Alliksaar and his spontaneous performances in city buses during the Soviet occupation). One dazzling example of Estonian stage literature in recent years is *Cabaret Interruptus*, which was an event series that brought together younger poets and musicians in one-time performances that were something much more profound than ordinary readings. A wide range of hybrid literary performances can also be enjoyed on certain dates of the Estonian Writers' Union's long-running Literary Wednesdays series. The works of Ilmar Laaban, a classic of the surreal and undoubtedly the best-known Estonian experimental vocal artist, have been recorded and released. In more recent years, people have come to know and appreciate Estonia's jack of all literary trades Jaan Malin, whose peculiar roars, whines, and growls bring an involuntary grin to one's face while still penetrating the deepest levels of consciousness (or subconsciousness?). Malin often takes the stage with Roomet Jakap, a philosopher, conversing in made-up languages. One could say their improvised sounds and gestures are tied to literature by the most delicate of threads. Nevertheless, it is literature: the performance has the air of poetry and usually tells a story, albeit one that lacks words and may hold a different meaning for every member of the audience.

A much newer genre, which also brings words and the stage together and took hold in Estonia over just the last 15–20 years, is spoken word. Although primarily practiced at poetry slam events, it can also be encountered outside the arena, especially when there are more widely-spoken languages and cultures included. Similarly, it's impossible to say whether the performance or the manner of stringing words together matters more in the unusual poetic form. The two collaborate to create a whole and are most "effective" as such. The audience processes the living literature with eyes, ears, and mind, each of which is of equal importance. This genre's poetry is diluted when printed, confirming my point – yet at the same time, one can't say its quality is substandard in the least. There's also no basis to claim that dense, metaphor-rich philosophical or love poetry is poor if it remains elusive in live performance. Not at all! There's a time and place for everything.

Jaan Malin, alias Luulur, the grand old man of Estonian literary performance, has also embarked on several experiments that conjoin various forms of art. He has led events that bring together dozens or more artists: instrumentalists, singers (including folk musicians), dancers, painters and/or video artists, actors, and writers. It's a delight to state that such performances can't be squeezed into a single genre!

Over the last five or six years, I've had firsthand experience in what it feels like to dangle on the border between literature and theater without tilting towards either side. It all began with our "Exercises in Style" performance, which was set in motion by the Estonian writer Jan Kaus. Kaus has published novels and poems but particularly stands out for his profound essays and unparalleled prose poetry. For years, he has likewise taken all kinds of positions on all kinds of stages and produced every kind of noise imaginable, musical and otherwise.

As one might suspect, "Exercises in Style" is inspired by Raymond Queneau's world-renowned collection *Exercices de style*, which has been translated into dozens of languages and performed

many a time elsewhere. Kaus set out on this adventurous path with stage director Eva Koldits, actor Toomas Täht, and yours truly. From the very start, the four of us were well aware that Queneau's system is entirely unrestricted and offers unlimited possibilities to come up with new exercises. We gave our minds free reign during rehearsals, the result being exercises that stay true to Queneau's basic conditions, but are unique in content and form. By the time of the premiere, only three or four original (translated) texts were still used in our repertoire.

Seeing how well the method adapts to the Estonian language and culture, we composed for the Estonian Writers' Union's centenary gala a completely new repertoire that remains faithful to Queneau but is 100% rooted in Estonian literature and its key works.

Thus, it's a fact that Queneau has now contributed two books (the original *Exercises in Style*, published in Estonian translation in 1997, a selection of our own troupe's versions, published in 2018), and two plays (both quite independent from the original source) to the Estonian cultural space.

But what is the point of this essay? What is oscillating on the line between theater and literature all about? Having half the people on stage be from a drama background and the other half not, for example? The given situation raises a justified question: what the hell are these amateurs doing climbing up on stage if they feel so out of place there? I must admit that vanity plays a significant role, but a sense of responsibility to the written word is no less important. Given how indispensable words are to both plays (and the keen, precisely formulated literary word in particular), we felt that a couple of writers needed to be represented alongside the actors. It appears the risk was justified. Creative words that differ slightly from an ordinary work of drama and a cast that differs slightly from an ordinary theater troupe produce a strange vibration that one can nearly reach out and touch during the performance.

But that isn't theater. Nor is it literature.

Indrek Koff *(b. 1975) is a translator and writer. He has primarily translated Portuguese and French literature into the Estonian language and culture. He has also published children's books and works for adult audiences that are difficult to pigeonhole into a single genre.*

SANNA KARTAU reading her poetry at Crazy Tartu festival April 2022 / photo Heleri Keeman

Berlin's Community Energy Transmuted into Estonian Poetry

by Silvia Urgas

Sanna Kartau (b. 1993) is an Estonian poet and journalist whose debut collection I Vote for This War With My Body won the 2022 Betti Alver Award for Debut Poetry. That same year, she won the Värske Rõhk youth cultural magazine's annual poetry prize.

Kartau, who lived for an extended time in Berlin, writes poetry that is influenced less by earlier Estonian verse than it is by Germany's spoken word scene. Her poems often come to life only when read aloud or in one's mind, their charm hidden in rhythm, not traditional form and style. In sharp contrast with regular Estonian poetry events – traditionally reserved, the authors preferring to tinker with texts in the silence of a study – she has brought with her an energy generated from organizing poetry workshops and returned a social aspect to the local craft that is uncommon in Estonia. Kartau co-edited an anthology based on materials created in her Berlin workshops, titled *The Sundays Book*. Her view that poetry need not be elite or inaccessible is put into practice via @mah22letan on Instagram, where she has made public every poem in her prize-winning debut.

In an interview given to *Värske Rõhk* in 2022, Kartau describes the jarring experience of moving back to Estonia: "My biggest culture shock is the deep loneliness that overwhelms me here sometimes. It's a combination of just having been away for so long and the warmth that is an ethos ingrained in my Berlin community. There's no comparable warmth-based community that's fully established here just yet." Since returning, Kartau has worked as the cultural editor of *Müürileht*, an Estonian newspaper focused on contemporary culture. Judging by her editorial in the December 2022 issue, she still appears to be captivated by that community to this day: "We get addicted to our nightly beers or a joint before work but, in the end, we still need, first and foremost, a sense of security, belonging, and recognition, and when those are guaranteed, then opportunities for self-development as well. We literally depend on one another, and I'm not talking about codependency […]. No, I mean the thousands of connections between people by which we receive confirmation of our own right to exist, both offering and accepting support."

So far, Kartau's writing hasn't included socially critical manifestos or programs, but rather atmospheres and emotions that cannot be expressed in complete sentences. Themes throughout her poetry include childhood and

family ("Mom's heart awaits me in Vana-Antsla / at the wrong bus stop and doesn't recognize me / or my buzz cut"), imposed work obligations ("when feverish me asks to go home sick / my boss tells me to show up for a later shift instead, / recommends I rest for four hours and get better. / – okay"), and searching for and finding community ("we all hugged each other, said thanks / conversations didn't end and we stood in the doorway / too filled with excitement to put a sudden stop to the night / too many stories for sharing to fall silent / I studied my friends' faces to commit that moment to memory"). As the collection's title betrays, physicality also plays a significant role: "YOU who I reach my hands out to YOU / and share secrets with or from whose fingers / I lick cookie batter YOUR / just im- / possibly good black-pepper hair YOU on top of me / penetrating YOU when I'm hungry".

Fortunately, Estonian literary critics' superficial decades-persistent habit of dividing younger female authors into either delicate fairies practicing nature poetry or angry young women is diminishing. Although Kartau wrestles with her own thoughts on the femme/butch scale ("Sometimes it seems silly to love / what women love. Like gnawing / a poisonous bone."), her writing primarily focuses on what it feels like to be human and how humanity is impossible without community.

***Silvia Urgas** (b. 1992) is an Estonian writer and lawyer whose debut poetry collection* Siht/koht *won the 2016 Betti Alver Award.*

SANNA KARTAU
I Vote for This War With My Body
Ma hääletan selle sõja poolt oma kehaga
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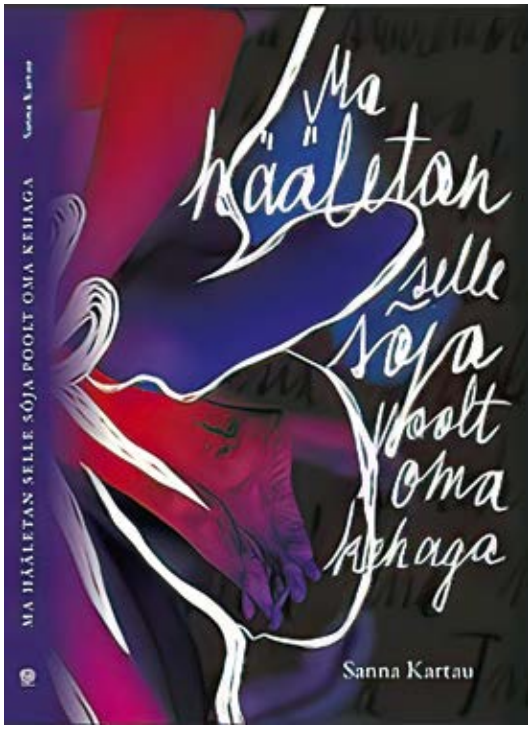


by Sanna Kartau

Winter

To Sandra

To live a winter,
your roots must rest
and the water freeze in your core.
Stay motionless, white, almost imperceptible.
Do not bear fruit; it is not
the season to blossom.

Survive winter, do not
become it.
The weight of snow on your branches
will make them bow
and some to break.
You are not those branches.
You are the growing, severing, and healing,
life itself, shaped as a healing wound.

Make no sudden movements.
A frozen log will burst
if tossed into flames.
It is winter and someone is drawing you.
Nearly invisible, white, blossomless.
Only your body, your closed eyes, frozen water.
They have no love for spring,
but for your life, full of endurance,
still existing, no matter how cold.

Dance

A life is one big
sowing of seeds, or of sandcastles
that crumble into a beach after their
fleeting joy. Not for sale –
our suitcase holds
masks worn until threadbare,
forced upon us by pain long past.
Labor, a sacrificial dance –
our lives are one big
sowing of sacrificial dances;
one big shooting of errors and arrows from the hip.
We anticipate a hint that we're chosen,
but there is no one to decide it.
Nobody invites us to the dance floor,
it's always empty
before we, with awkward uncertainty,
step onto it to the beat
of our own absurd offerings.

Translated by Adam Cullen

SANNA KARTAU / photo Kris Moor

The Book That is a Beast of its Own

by Andrei Liimets

Tõnis Tootsen's Pâté of the Apes *was nominated for the European Union Prize for Literature 2023.*

Pâté of the Apes by Tõnis Tootsen (b. 1988) is the story of Ergo, the first ape who has learned to write. As the title suggests, the story takes its cues from the highly acclaimed *Planet of the Apes*, which might suggest something of a pastiche, but the book is very much a beast of its own.

Pâté of the Apes might be considered both a sequel and a parody, part science fiction, part social satire, and part philosophical allegory. Told through the eyes of Ergo, and annotated by the scholars who study his legacy, *Pâté of the Apes* describes a future society where a great war has taken place between humans and various factions of apes. While a fragile peace has finally been achieved, suspicion looms large between the species. Despite the lofty themes and dystopian setting, this fictional autobiography can be read as an unpretentious coming-of-age story. Ergo reminisces back and forth in his memories, being raised in a family of apes that reveres everything human, getting through a relentless education system, and finding his way in a labyrinth of customs, traditions, myths, half-truths, and full-time-deceptions. While fantastical in parts, the book mostly holds up an absurdist and all-too-familiar mirror to the rituals, quirks, and divisions sewn through the territories of the former Soviet Union as well as the modern world in general.

For author Tõnis Tootsen, working here with various autobiographical details, this is a follow-up to the highly ambitious *First Day* (2016), a dreamlike journey through post-apocalyptic Estonia that garnered attention for being written entirely by hand. Tootsen has also released *Puppet Master* (2012), a collection of short stories, as well as the poetry book *Uttu* (2021), a uniquely illustrated book of poetry.

Born and raised in Tallinn, but now living in rural Southern Estonia, Tootsen's writings often revolve around dreams, psychedelics, dystopian landscapes, the conflicts between nature and civilization, personal freedom, and societal norms. Having been influenced by the works of Andrus Kivirähk and Kurt Vonnegut among others during his formative years as a writer, *Pâté of the Apes* marks a return to a more humorous style for him. Tootsen is also a freelance translator, editor, designer, and musician.

Andrei Liimets *(b. 1989) works as the head of the Estonian Victim Support at the Social Insurance Board. He is also a freelance culture critic and civic activist.*

TÕNIS TOOTSEN
Pâté of the Apes
Ahvide pasteet
Kaarnakivi Selts 2022, 266 pp.
ISBN 9789916966433

pp. 14–18

II

I just wrote about Undo and Redo at considerable length, but barely added a word about Mom and Dad. As someone wrote—I can't remember who: Memory is like a dog that flops down wherever it pleases. It was a human, at any rate; not an ape. Apart from me, are there still any other apes who can read and write? It's possible they've all been tracked down, for if the seeds I sowed had sprouted and flourished, then some would've rowed here by now. And not just to deliver food once every two weeks, but to ferry me back to the capital. Not that I'd go with them, of course. My home is here now. I'm not the same ape I was ten years ago. My strength is petering out. I can barely write these lines and I doubt I'll ever complete the work. But would it even be completion? Right now, it feels like writing is the final hair still holding me to this tiny island. I am endlessly grateful to Herba, who supplies me with the paper. He's not even supposed to speak to me. Regardless, he's helped an old chimpanzee out of a bind, though he's an orangutang himself—not to mention descended from red apes who ended up here during the Big War. We've had rather pleasant conversations, albeit cut quite short—he's not allowed to spend more time on the island than it takes to unload the crates of provisions.

My father, as I mentioned earlier, was a pastor in the Church of Manifestation, so our family strictly adhered to the principles of human proximity. Seeing as chimpanzees are as close to humans as you can get—anthropoid and nearly ape-men—he lathered up his behind every morning (lacking a tail as we do) and

shaved it clean, always "bottom up, bottom up", as he taught me. A proper behind resembled that of a human: warm, smooth, and soft; not cool and hairy. It drew ape and human closer together—every draft and accidental touch reminded you of whom you were meant to become. Anyone who had closer dealings with humans kept their bottom and tail smooth and hairless: not just church apes, but those in the party; economics, education, and so forth. I regarded the silly tradition with the utmost disdain, of course. My father looked upon me and my friends' bristly, matted bottoms and tails with equal contempt. A couple of times, the school director took us into his office one by one and shaved our bottoms himself, sputtering angrily all the while. Usually, he just forbid us from wearing pants. Dad was incredibly embarrassed, of course. Just think: the son of a pastor in the Church of Manifestation having hairy butt cheeks . . .

"We run an elite ape school here," the director hissed when he finished the job. "Ergo, you are an elite ape. If you cannot be one and wish to waddle around with a bottom like yours, then be my guest—go to an ordinary school and be an ordinary ape. But so long as you are attending mine, you represent not only yourselves but your institution as well." It was also more or less the lecture he'd give, albeit without hissing, at the ceremony at the beginning of every school year. Overall, he hadn't much else to say year after year or day after day: "This is an elite school and you are elite apes." Ours, Albert's Gymnasium, even had its own uniform cap, the wearing of which was compulsory. The bare heads of me and my spiritual kin yawned amidst otherwise endless rows of gold-embroidered velvet caps at every school assembly, attracting glares during the pregnant pauses in the director's timeless speech. I remember wanting to ceremoniously burn mine after graduation, but I hung on to it all the same. So who knows—I guess it did mean something to me. Me, who never wore it once.

Although Dad occasionally growled that my friends and I looked like red apes when he saw our disheveled appearances, we didn't know much about politics at the time. We just didn't

like going to school. School was a human invention. Red apes believed that humans were unnecessary. We believed school was unnecessary. Thus, the spiritual kinship. Red apes made everything themselves in their own country: roads, electrical grids, vehicles, you name it. As they broke down exponentially faster than products made in countries where humans were in charge of manufacturing, there were naturally red-ape jokes galore. But we, just as all young chimps believed, showed them what apes are truly capable of doing. There was no doubting their passion and enthusiasm. And on many a school day, the red apes' idea to exterminate all humans did seem to have some merit. Wearing down the wood of your desk for years and years just to learn how to grow food for people, how to build roads for them . . . Human children were taught completely different and much more fascinating things at school—and they, just like the red apes, did everything for themselves! "Apes were created to serve humans!" Dad snapped when I complained. "Just think of how few apes are able to go to school in the first place. You're lucky, you know." If he was too tired to argue, he'd just sigh more conciliatorily: "I suppose whoever isn't a red ape in youth has no heart, and whoever isn't a blue ape in old age has no sense."

In our house (and actually along our whole street), every activity that required proximity to humans was delegated to my father. It was the logical thing to do, as he had so much contact with them through work. First and foremost, it meant humans entrusted him with a lawn mower. Dad was tasked with its safekeeping, fueling, oil changes, and, of course, mowing lawns on our street. Multiple times a week, humans would take him to their neighborhoods to mow their yards as well. "In this world, there is no greater spiritual communion with humanity than mowing grass," he said tenderly. "No other activity unites primate and human more." When he returned, his vestments—a suit, white dress shirt, tie, and dress pants—smelled of sweat and fresh-cut grass, but he never took them off, even when mowing our own yard. Humans were impressed, as "ordinary apes" usu-

ally never wore clothes. Mom had to wash all those green-striped shirts, of course. I remember, when I was just a pipsqueak, I even told her that I never wanted to be reborn a human because it'd mean having to wear clothes all the time. Mom laughed and agreed.

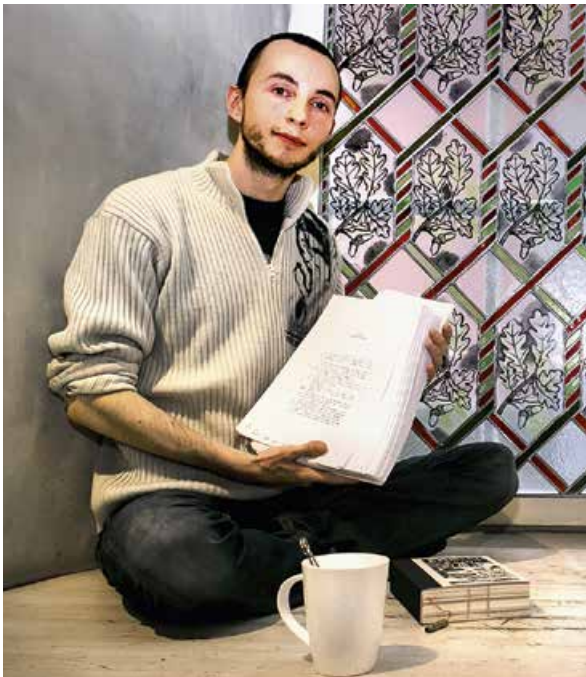
Dad only undressed between the four walls of our home. I remember a recurring scene where, after a long day spent among people, he sat slumped in the armchair, snoring and hugging a big bottle of fermented juice, his clothes lying in a heap next to him. I saw it repeat frequently later, to be honest, and it seriously undermined my faith. I felt that to live like a human was too great a burden for an ape. Was there any hope of us becoming human? Was there even any point? Dad's faith was never shaken, of course.

Several times, Undo and Redo said right to my face that my father was just after a medal: the Order of the Fellow Human, the highest honor that could be bestowed upon an ape back then, and perhaps still by the time you read this. Yet, I know that Dad had no such ambitions. True, he was awarded the Cross of Hominidae, Third Class, for his contributions to furthering cooperation between the human and ape churches, but he merely kept it in a drawer and never wore it in the company of other apes. And if so, then only at a formal human-organized reception. The fact remained that he was motivated solely by faith and duty. And he truly enjoyed being around humans, getting along with them wonderfully. It wasn't uncommon for a human to pay us a visit—hairless and warm, surrounded by an intriguing scent. As a young chimp, I had the opportunity to sit on many a human lap. Such gatherings typically wound on till the early morning hours. The human would invite their acquaintances to join, Dad would call his own in turn and, in the end, everyone in that merry assemblage would do and say things that furthered our hopes that humans and apes might someday even inter-exist. Times were different, disorderly, and free: the red-ape regime had just been toppled and to be a human-friendly blue-ape was a novel and fascinating way of life.

My most vivid memories from that period revolve around Anders Metssalu1, a brilliant young scientist renowned among humans and a frequent visitor during the restoration of the human state. My mother had granted him a brief interview and later, at our home, in an even more liberal environment, he showed an interest in her that was perhaps somewhat too animated for a person. I don't know what she did or did not show the man, but in any case, he gradually became a good friend of my father as well. I remember them conversing in the kitchen while sipping mandarin-orange liqueur till late at night. I crouched behind the door and eavesdropped for a very, very long time, but only one breathtaking, outstandingly generous remark from that evening was seared into my memory: "A chimpanzee is 99% human." I can't say if Dad had any idea what the concept of percentage means, but no doubt Anders's tone and expression at that moment conveyed everything a buzzed pastor of the Church of Manifestation needed to hear.

Translated by Adam Cullen

TÕNIS TOOTSEN /
photo Erik Prozes, Postimees/Scanpix



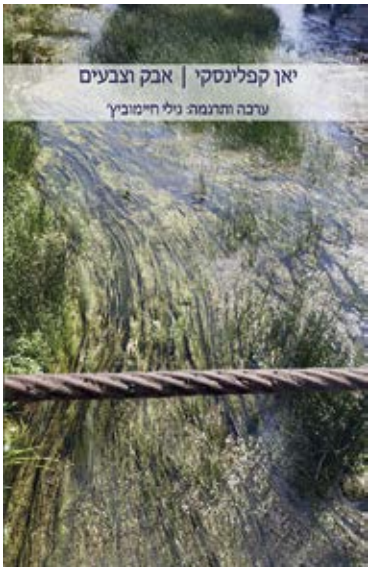
1 Anders Metssalu's grandchild Andres Metssalu denies any association between his grandfather and apes.

3+3

A Conversation between Gili Haimovich and Mathura

Gili Haimovich and Mathura first met at a poetry festival in Romania seven years ago and have since enjoyed a long-standing collaboration. In 2018, a collection of Mathura's poems was translated by Gili Haimovich into Hebrew and published. More recently, Avak Vetzvaem (Dust and colors – collection of Jaan Kaplinski's poetry) *was also published in Hebrew, translated and edited by Haimovich, with Mathura acting as advisor on poem selection and linguistic nuance. Now, a collection of Haimovich's poetry is being prepared for publication in Estonian. The following conversation took place in Tartu this January, after a conference on Jaan Kaplinski.*

AVAK VETZVAEM, collection of Jaan Kaplinski's poetry in Hebrew published by liton77.



Mathura: What is the value of being a poetry translator?
Gili Haimovich: The value is extending my consciousness. The translated work can be very different from my work but, in the process, it becomes part of my psyche in a way – in the way I internalize it. Translation allows for greater intimacy with the work than when just reading it. And I think there is a quality of finding and being found to it as well, especially when the origin seems very remote from me at first glance. Translation is an opportunity to ask myself, how much of a vessel can I be? Where is it that I begin and where do I end? Are there even any clear boundaries between the two? Sometimes, I think of translation as an act of carrying water – water will always take the shape of its container, but in its essence, it remains the same.

GH: Can I ask you the same?
M: I think for me, it is the chance to look at the world through someone else's eyes; not only in the sense of what I see but also in the sense of creating associations, finding new forms of expression, and placing oneself in the world. Translating makes me acutely aware of the mul-

MATHURA and **GILI HAIMOVICH** read Kaplinski's poetry at the book launch in Tel Aviv in December 2022 / photo Estonian Embassy in Tel Aviv

tiple possibilities for looking at the world and rendering it a meaning, or leaving it bereft of one. And of course, I agree, translation is a form of close reading, too. You engage with the work rather differently than you do by just reading it, even if diligently.

GH: You write a lot about places while still being connected to where you come from. Does being engaged with different places help you explore yourself in different ways?

M: My main interest in writing about different places and different landscapes is to explore the ways that people are connected to the land and landscapes in general. Meaning, first of all, materially, i.e. what is their connection to the soil, the nature. When I write about a landscape that is not native to me, I am often adopting a certain persona to explore what it would mean to be rooted in that landscape. It is as if I'm asking myself who I would be if this was my landscape, my land. And I guess my

whole engagement with the topic ultimately relates to the sense of one's roots being important. I believe that, in these times of growingly diluted identities, it is ever more important to have at least some sense of where we come from, and where our roots are. For he who has no roots, will soon be blown away by the wind.

M: If we were to consider poetry as an act of communication, then what do you perceive to be its main means?
GH: I'm a bit conflicted as to how communicative I would even want to be. My initial way to recognize myself is by objecting to what is around me. I used to think that writing is more about communicating with myself, but I guess if it were only that, I wouldn't publish. Thinking back to the very beginning though – there is maybe almost an awful truth that – there was once something unspoken. Something that had no other way of being referred to except for in writing. This was my chance to look for ways to express myself, even if I didn't always find them. I started to write as a child when it was even harder to stand my ground. In general, I would like to communicate through my writing, but maybe if I were too exposed to that need, I would feel too vulnerable to write altogether.

GH: Do you think of the end when you write? In terms of communication?
M: Not at the moment of writing, no. But I do approach writing as communication. I believe that, as people, we require communication with each other, and writing offers a way to express things that might otherwise stay unexpressed. However, I agree that even if we were to regard poetry as an act of communication, it can take two directions – it can also mean communicating with oneself, understanding yourself better, making better sense of something, or being relieved of something. I think more of the recipient when I'm editing a book. Nevertheless, if the work happens to resonate with anyone, I believe this is mostly a result of something beyond the words or semantics, related more to the intent of the writing. And even if I have written something on a piece of paper that I will never show to anyone, it is still an act of communication, for I had the option of saying nothing. Of leaving the page blank.

M: What is the success of poetry or translation for you? Or is success instead a notion that doesn't come into the picture at all if we're talking of poetry?
GH: Poetry is, in the end, the only thing I engage myself with, either as an author or translator. Of course, I would want to succeed in it, feeling almost as if I'm no good for anything besides it. The success of writing can, however, also mean something very immediate for me – like when I have insomnia and writing helps me fall asleep.

In general, it is the process itself that is more gratifying than the end result. Of course, I'm very happy when people read my poems or when they get translated, but maybe poetry is also about the gap between our feelings, thoughts, or perceptions of things and what they truly come to be. So, in this way, there's always disappointment waiting down the line along with the success for a writer.

On a more positive note, however, I never had the intention of being a poet, I never knowingly asked for it. Therefore, sometimes almost everything is a success. I've fulfilled many dreams I didn't have to begin with. I believe that wanting leaves one very vulnerable, it is better to arrive free of anticipation.

GH: When you write, do you look for a certain core of a landscape to explore? Or do you look for what is beneath the visible? Is that what writing enables you to do?
M: Yes. The roots are beneath the visible, so if you're going to deal with them, you need to dig below the surface of things. Of course, sometimes the roots can grow through the pavement, as in one of your poems, which is also a metaphor for something that has been out of sight, but now becomes impossible to ignore. I believe everything tangible rests on something more subtle and this is what I'm looking for, or at, in all my writing.

M: What is the one poem you would recommend to someone who is not familiar with Jaan Kaplinski's poetry?
GH: I think it would be unfair to name just one poem, or even just a few poems. His work is more about the overall texture and how the poems correlate with each other, than the value of any singular standalone poem. That is one thing I find particularly unique in his work. My favorite poems are: "It was a spiking cold winter night when the boys brought them from Tallinn" ("Oli kärekülm talveõhtu") and "My aunt knew them well" ("Mu tädi tundis neid hästi"). As well as "In every dying man" ("Iga surija"), "One day you will do everything for the last time: breath, make love" ("Kõike teed kord viimast korda: hingad, seksid"), and "The wind sways the lilac branches and shadows" ("Tuul õõtsutab sirelioksi"), and even more. But if I were to think about your poems, I would say the poem "Separation" ("Lahusolek, I"), strikes a very particular chord in Israel and Hebrew.

GILI HAIMOVICH *(b. 1974) is an international prize-winning poet in Hebrew and English, as well as a poetry translator and visual artist. She is also the author of six books in Hebrew and three in English, and an Israeli with Canadian citizenship.*

MATHURA*, aka Margus Lattik, (b. 1973), is an Estonian writer, artist, and translator who has received several awards in Estonia for his poetry and novels. He has translated both contemporary and classical literature and has a long-standing interest in the cultures of the East. He lives in the Estonian countryside.*

GILI HAIMOVICH received the recognition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for translating and introducing Estonian poetry in Hebrew / photo Alar Madisson.

KARL RISTIKIVI in Uppsala, Sweden in the 1950s. / photo Estonian Literary Museum

A Night to Remember

by Maximilian Murmann

***KARL RISTIKIVI**'s groundbreaking novel Hingede öö (The Night of Souls) was originally published in 1953, exactly 70 years ago. Maximilian Murmann, the German translator of the novel, explains why the book hasn't lost any of its relevance to this day and how it was received by German critics.*

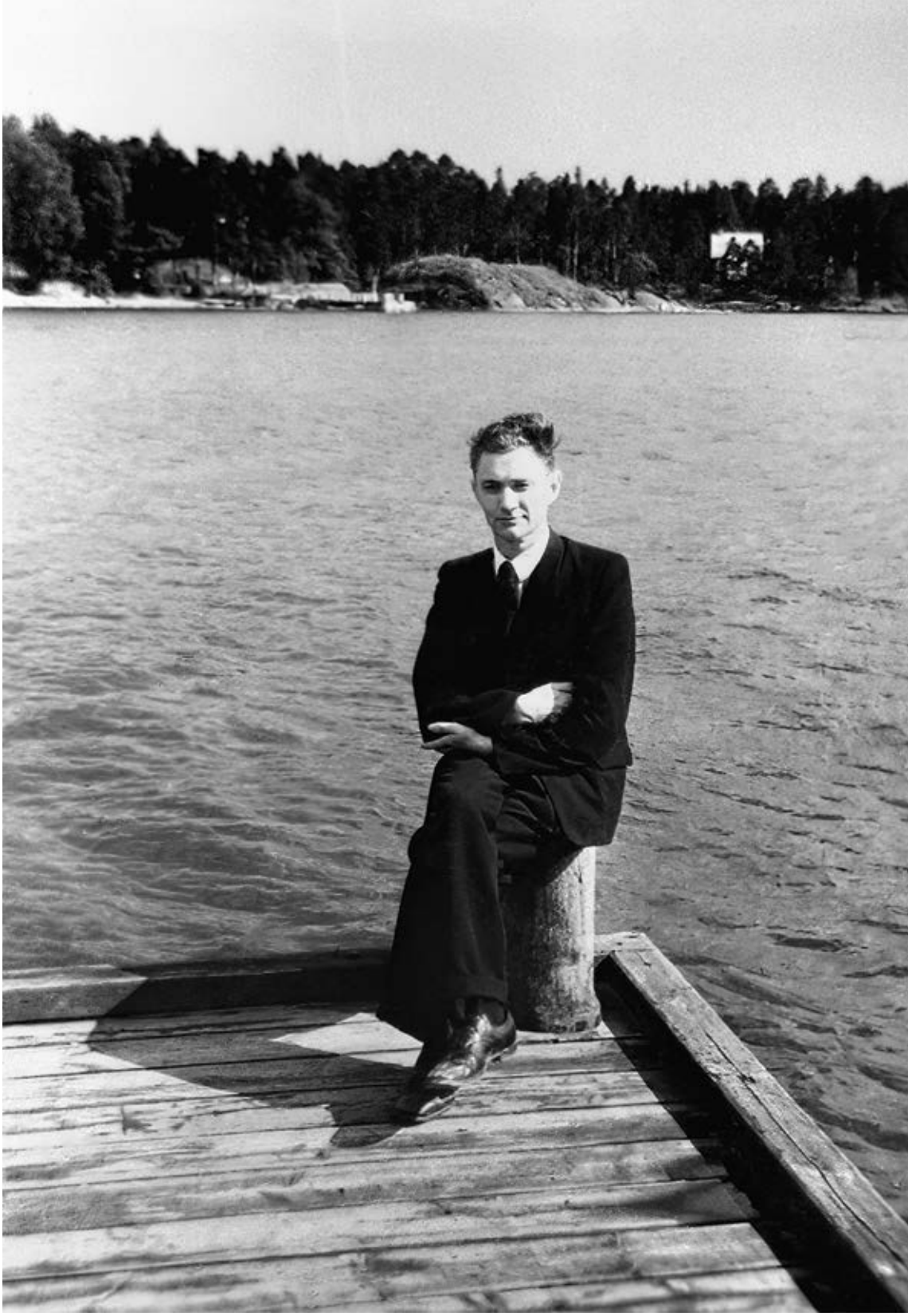
On New Year's Eve a man straggles his way through Stockholm. Although he has been living in the city for quite some time, the narrator feels like a complete stranger. Everything and everyone seems hostile to him. He hears people screaming and sees them flashing their teeth, as he eventually spots a light coming out of a house. He enters the house at about a quarter to midnight, in hope of warmth and company, not knowing that time and space follow their very own rules in there. The man is the alter ego of Karl Ristikivi, author of the novel Hingede öö or The Night of Souls, one of Estonian Literature's most enigmatic classics.

"With a few clear, almost harsh sentences, Ristikivi not only sketches the exact picture of an inhospitable city in which an irritable mood can turn violent at any time, but also of the complicated and contradictory inner life of a lonely, deeply insecure person", wrote the German critic Nicole Henneberg, who was particularly impressed by the magnificent opening of the novel.[1]

Born in 1912 to an unmarried maid in western Estonia, Karl Ristikivi began writing after moving to Tallinn, where he studied and later worked as a clerk. He debuted in the 1930s with a series of children's books and rose to fame with his "Tallinn Trilogy", which depicts the urbanization process of Estonia from three different perspectives. Then, however, came the occupation of Estonia, first by Nazi Germany and later by the Soviet Union, which forced Ristikivi to leave his homeland and flee to Sweden via Finland. Exile threw the writer into a crisis and years of literary silence, which ended in 1953 with the publication of his most famous work, *The Night of Souls*. This surrealist novel, which was strongly influenced by existentialist philosophy, stands out in the oeuvre of the multifaceted author Ristikivi and in Estonian literature in general.

After entering "The House of the Dead Man", as the first of the three parts of the novel is named, Ristikivi's narrator finds himself in what appears to be a concert. To his great surprise, the singer, a young woman named Bella,

1 https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/orpheus-in-stockholm-4063213.html



KARL RISTIKIVI sitting on the boat bridge,
in the beginning of 1950s, around the time of writing
The Night of Souls. / photo Estonian Literary Museum

comes up to him and leads him to a small, windowless room. There he is introduced to a young, apparently terminally ill man named Olle, who shares his intimate memories and dreams with the narrator. But this is only the beginning of a myriad of absurd situations. Later, the narrator takes part in a banquet, gets a tour through an art exhibition consisting of exactly one picture, and listens to the argumentative pirouettes of a diabolic pastor, just to name a few examples. What all of these slightly uncanny situations have in common, is that everybody in the house seems to know the narrator.

Although the narrator gladly plays along and most people have a benevolent attitude toward him, his extraordinary solitude is tangible throughout the entire novel. As the German critic Paul Stoop noted in his review of the German translation of the book, *Die Nacht der Seelen* (published in 2019), the foreignness of the exilé is a core theme of the novel, but in contrast to other literature written in exile, "it is not about the coldness of mainstream society and hard-hearted bureaucracy. The feeling of strangeness is self-generated."[2] Due to its radical modernity, *The Night of Souls* drew a wide range of comparisons, from Kafka and Lewis Carroll to Hermann Hesse. Alluding to the novel's characteristic mixture of luxury, anxiety, and foreignness, Jan Brachmann, another German critic who was likewise mesmerized by the novel, even saw similarities to Alain Resnais's avant-garde movie *Last Year at Marien-*

2 https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/karl-ristikivi-nacht-der-seelen-der-franz-kafka-aus-estland-100.html

KARL RISTIKIVI in Uppsala, Sweden in the 1950s. / photo Estonian Literary Museum

KARL RISTIKIVI (on the left in direct view) playing a game with a friend and his children in the 1950s. / photo Estonian Literary Museum

bad, which came out approximately ten years later, 1961.[3]

Similar to Dorothy L. Sayers, Ristikivi heads each chapter of the first section of the book with epigraphs by T.S. Eliot, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, John Bunyan, A.E. Housman, Walt Whitman, and Edgar Allan Poe. What's more, just like his favorite writer of detective novels, Ristikivi was also strongly drawn towards darkness. As the narrator stands in the art exhibition, the light suddenly goes out. After the light returns, he tries to leave the room and finds himself in the very picture he was looking at, one of the most impressive scenes

3 https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/estnische-romane-von-viivi-luik-und-karl-ristikivi-16344674.html

of the entire book. Eventually, he leaves the room and moves on into a theater auditorium, where he witnesses a play that he himself had written (but never published) a long time ago and which culminates in a praise of darkness.

The stylistic proximity to detective novels becomes quite evident at the point the narrator is included in a police investigation. It seems a crime occurred while the light was off, but the true events in that brief moment of darkness remain unclear. The narrator continues his journey, descending into the very heart of the house, where he is confronted with death, both in an abstract and in a concrete sense. Significantly enough, the first section of the book ends in front of a door bearing the words: NO ENTRY FOR FOREIGNERS!

The second part of the book consists of a letter to an imaginary reader named Agnes Rohumaa. The letter is an alienation device, reminding the audience that the novel is pure fiction. But the letter, which is a response to a critical letter by the same imaginary reader, can also be understood as an artistic manifesto. Through the letter, Ristikivi gives certain clues as to how he himself interprets the book, which he is in the process of writing, and that he dubs a travelogue or realistic tale. A confused world that has become meaningless can no longer be described in linear terms, the letter says, and literary figures now also go their own way.

Although the novel is full of arcane symbols and fairly complex in terms of its structure, it reads rather swiftly. This is partly due to the straightforward and timeless language Ristikivi uses in the text, but it is also due to the superb subversive humor that has particularly enthralled German critics. The absurdity of the narrator's encounters with other people in the house is pushed to an extreme, they suddenly disappear, get new names, play different roles, and even change their appearance, but through this extreme absurdity, Ristikivi exposes much hypocrisy in human interaction. Or as Nicole Henneberg remarks: "It could be a depressing scenario. But Ristikivi has written an elegant, fun novel, full of magic tricks and obstinacy. An exile novel whose literary hero is far too clever to give up."

The autobiographical background becomes evident in the chapters following the author's letter-manifesto, in which he essentially relives the flight from his home country. Tired and numb, the narrator enters a small room divided into two pieces by a counter and a wire fence. The signs on the wall are written in German, French, Polish, and Latvian. A man sitting on the other side of the counter wants to see the narrator's documents, but he has none and there is no way back for him. The narrator thus gets chased off by a man wearing the field-gray uniform of the Wehrmacht and ends up in a waiting room, before he is examined by a doctor. After telling the doctor about his dreams, the doctor tells him that he doesn't like his dreams and that he shouldn't be sleeping at all.

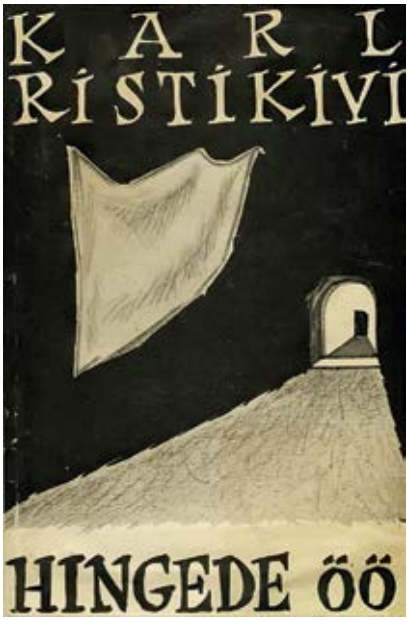
The third part of the book, called "The Seven Witnesses" culminates in a trial that has a certain reminiscence of Kafka, but Ristikivi professed that he wasn't aware of Kafka's work while writing his novel. One after another, seven witnesses are questioned about the seven deadly sins, but the manipulative judge, who is further incited by the audience, treats them as if they were accused themselves. The trial and the narrator's journey end shortly after midnight, but the journey of the author continued on.

In the 1950s and 60s, the writer and bachelor Karl Ristikivi, whose bread-and-butter job guaranteed a steady income, started to travel around Europe, partly to do research for his historical novels. Ristikivi had a vast knowledge of European history, and his works span many centuries. But after arriving in Sweden, Ristikivi never again wrote about Estonia. Perhaps, it was too painful for him. Karl Ristikivi died in 1977 and never returned to his homeland alive. His ashes were originally buried in Stockholm, but his urn was transferred to Estonia in 2017. It was only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that Ristikivi would gain the status in his homeland that he had always deserved.

The Night of Souls was translated into Danish in 1993, and into Russian in 2009. More recent were the translations into German and Finnish, in 2019 and 2022 respectively, which both garnered considerable critical acclaim. Needless to say, Ristikivi's writing and *The Night of Souls* in particular deserve a much wider distribution. Karl Ristikivi has written a unique and mesmerizing book, arguably the best exile novel in Estonian literature, and par excellence in world literature. But it is more than that: Ristikivi offers a very personal take on the human condition. Through him, we learn that exile is perhaps the most extreme form of solitude.

Karl Ristikivi *(1912-1977) was one of Estonia's most prominent exile writers. He has published numerous historical novels, short prose, poetry, essays and children's books. The surrealistic novel* The Night of Souls *is his most famous work.*

Maximilian Murmann *(b. 1987) is a translator of Estonian and Finnish literature.*



KARL RISTIKIVI, The Night of Souls. Published by Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv, 1953, pp. 307

KARL RISTIKIVI, Die Nacht der Seelen. In German, translated by Maximilian Murmann. Published by Guggolz, 2019, pp. 373.

Book reviews

JAAK JÕERÜÜT
Seven Odysseys
Seitse odüsseiat
EKSA, 2022, 200 pp.
ISBN 9789916677124

Review by Siim Lill

The full extent of Jaak Jõerüüt's writing is outstanding. Over just a handful of years, he has published short stories, a novel, an incredible body of essays, and now a full seven odysseys that are challenging to define: though the texts spring from the works of renowned authors, they tread between separate paths of fiction, essay, and dialogue. Thus, "odysseys" is indeed correct, as they elucidate the human connection to the world, touch on remembering, memories, and language, scrutinize truth, and elegantly probe the limits of chance and destiny in life and literature.

Though written before Russia's war against Ukraine, the book asks questions that are posed ever more acutely in contemporary literature. "True literature is anti-war. True literature addresses the human need for love, not hatred," wrote Mikhail

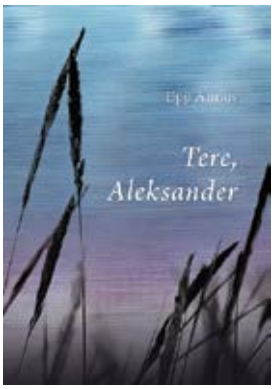
JAAK JÕERÜÜT / photo Kris Moor

Shishkin in his foreword to the Estonian translation of *My Russia: War or Peace?* The same idea resonates in Jõerüüt's stories. War indeed lies at the center of the collection's first two tales, which are partnered in dialogue with Curzio Malaparte and Peter Handke. The former's accounts of war are suffocating in their brutality. Jõerüüt asks: why read war literature at all? Is it to find support for pacifism, or to seek molten gold from its words? To find an understanding of different types of people? This is followed by a university lecture on the perverse relationship between politics and war, which fluidly transitions into a dream encounter with Theodor Adorno. All this meets the standard of an odyssey: various authors and eras standing next to one another to create new layers and realizations.

In the foreword to a recent play about the legendary Estonian president Lennart Meri, Jõerüüt wrote: "[...] every war is a failure of humankind. Like students failing an exam, albeit one at a time. And no matter how disagreeable it may be, each and every person must look themselves in the eye and ask: have you, someone alive in wartime, also failed? If you have, then at what, and if you haven't, then to what extent?" These questions radiate throughout the work. Jõerüüt's parents' generation, broken by war, stands alongside Ingmar Bergman's life in exile and the author's own diplomatic misadventures. The book's final chord is a story about his great-uncle Otto Grant, who was "[a] lieutenant in the British Navy, a wealthy bachelor, a prisoner in a Soviet Gulag, but also a polished Estonian diplomat within and without."

Jõerüüt's stories can also be read in an entirely different way: as commentary on, and ponderings of, odysseys in reading – for instance, the works of Karen Blixen and Jörn Donner weave into the author's life and are so gripping that the reader can only inevitably make them part of their own reality. As Jõerüüt describes Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* as, "Just a slim book, but a long journey like a waking dream", the observation could equally apply to *Seven Odysseys*.

***Siim Lill** (b. 1987) is an Estonian poet.*



EPP ANNUS
Tere, Aleksander
Greetings, Aleksander
EKSA, 2021, 230 pp.
ISBN 9789949684953

Review by Ene-Reet Soovik

Epp Annus's *Greetings, Aleksander* is a tale told in an old farmhouse in the middle of a hayfield, among the dull yellow loneliness of grasses that the narrator compares to an inland sea. The storyteller, who alternately occupies a rocking chair or sits in the corner of a sofa, is Old Mama Iia, telling the story to Young Baby Aleksander, her great-grandson.

The narration involves hardly any immediate human interaction beyond Iia's awareness of the young baby's tiny body and mind, which has yet to experience everything that the wide world has to offer. The setting is spatially confined to the dim interior of the house, obliquely expanded by the views seen through the window or reflected in a mirror. In contrast, the years across which Iia weaves her tale stretch to cover events from multiple decades, making the overall temporal perspective significantly broader than the immediate duration of the narration. After all, Iia is 95 years old. To reach that age, she has had to live to the year 2066, which renders the reader's present and future as her past.

Family chronicles often tend to look back at earlier generations in an attempt to allow the main characters to connect with their roots. Literary visions of the future frequently tend to evoke scenes of ecological or humanitarian disasters and conjure forth disconsolate dystopian landscapes. *Greetings, Alexander* has opted for an alternative path. A major part of Iia's story concerns not her ancestors, but her children and their descendants, their hopes for the future, and their growing pains filtered through the lens of her empathetic attention as she conveys the family lore to an audience for whom it is relevant, although he is much too young to take it in.

Iia's personal reminiscences intermingle with scholarly cultural references and are occasionally interrupted by an AI personal assistant that manifests on a screen to dispense nuggets of information or advice. Alongside this marker of the genre of speculative fiction are sketches of developments that have been leading to the predominance of a sustainable eco-friendly lifestyle, community-based social relations, and a mutually supportive economy led by environmental attitudes.

EPP ANNUS / photo Krõõt Tarkmeel

Thus, *Greetings, Aleksander* unfolds as an unexpectedly serene depiction of a not-yet-manifested future, the possible seeds of which the author has managed to detect in our own uneasy and troubled times despite the competing scenarios of doom.

Ene-Reet Soovik *(b. 1968) is a literary scholar and translator, she works as editor of the academic semiotics journal,* Sign Systems Studies*, published by the University of Tartu.*

CAROLINA PIHELGAS
Watching the Night
Vaadates ööd
Kaksikhammas, 2022, 294 pp.
ISBN 9789916954737

Review by Kärt Hellerma

Carolina Pihelgas's debut novel can be labeled as a "kinship book". Composed with confidence, its plot extends from the recent- to the somewhat-more-distant past in Estonia and Russia. Each of the three equal sections focuses on interrelated characters: a daughter, a grandmother, and a mother. The first is narrated by a woman who starts digging into the family history of her mother, who was adopted. This is followed by a journey into the past, which culminates in the woman's grandmother, Mariya, giving birth in prison to a daughter named Tatyana, whom she is forced to give up. The third section focuses on Leida (originally Tatyana) as she grows up in an adopted family.

Merciless jaunts of memory are taken into every character's background, never leaving out the grimmest chapters. One could say the main subject of Pihelgas's book is the relationship between remembering and forgetting, along with acknowledging one's origins and their part in defining personal identity. Finding out may be painful, but there's no avoiding it. "My bones have grown from yours," the woman says to her grandmother. This naturally applies to her own mother as well.

The first part of the book is primarily an inner monologue about the woman's mother: that elderly-person smell, heaps of junk, dust on aging possessions, and failed dreams. She is extremely fond of her mother, but also very critical. Page after page describes the inertia and tension in their relationship. When the woman discovers that her mother never knew her own parents, she starts to investigate.

Suffering the hardest fate of any of the characters is Mariya, who comes from a Russian background, has seen her fair share of violence, and was even imprisoned during the Soviet occupation. "Pain is deeper than happiness, greater than love, and we carry it with us along the brink of existence until it finally disintegrates and crumbles," reflects Mariya (p. 177).

The novel is written in an uncommonly poetic style – in form, though not in substance, it is certainly a poet's

CAROLINA PIHELGAS / photo Kris Moor

work. Suggestive metaphors construct a highly expressive and richly nuanced landscape of symbolism. It is a great, stylistically elegant tapestry made from an array of yarns and patterns that unravel the many layers of darkness. Although some descriptions may seem excessively cryptic at first, every outstandingly detailed and sensory chapter is important in the story's development.

"...still, sometimes, I feel as if there are old knots somewhere within me," says Elli (p. 287), who adopted Leida and burned the papers afterward. Nevertheless, Leida managed to find and read them before the flames ate them up, learning her true past. Other keywords for the book are lost time, violence, and the transition between darkness and light. The author obviously equates peering into family secrets with peering into the night and, just as the title promises, nights are observed very meticulously throughout the work.

***Kärt Hellerma** (b. 1956) is an Estonian writer, journalist, and literary critic.*

TAUNO VAHTER / photo Kris Moor

TAUNO VAHTER
A Good Russian
Hea venelane
Tänapäev 2022, 243 pp.
ISBN 9789916172667

Review by Annika Koppel

Tauno Vahter is a publisher, translator, and writer. *A Good Russian* is his second novel, following *The 11 Escapes of Madis Jefferson* (2021), and a short-story collection titled *A Long-Term Meeting* (2022).

The story takes place in 1993 as the Republic of Estonia, after recently regaining its independence, tries to rebuild while simultaneously wrestling with old Soviet baggage and an inundation of new baggage from the West. There hasn't been much time to enact new laws and gangs of criminals are pouring over the eastern border, sensing fertile ground. A motley mix of holy men, seers, and healers are also endeavoring to make a quick kroon in the dizzying multiplicity of opportunities. The latter particularly whipped people up into a frenzy. One of the more famous was Anatoly Kashpirovsky, who made millions in Russia by even "healing" through the TV screen. In 1993, he visited Estonia.

For 15-year-old Artur, the protagonist of *A Good Russian*, the story starts in the barbershop where, encouraged by his mother, he takes part in a test. Based on the outcome, the barber believes that Artur has talent, and his third eye could open. This all seems comical at first, but as soon as the clever young man realizes it could be a way to earn some cash, he doesn't put up much resistance. The book then follows his tragicomic escapades in the field of "alternative medicine". Vahter has, with restrained fury, earlier addressed the field's widespread popularity in articles on Estonian culture. *A Good Russian* adds a dose of irony and jaunty self-analysis.

Still, the author focuses primarily on the situation in Estonia at that time: one where the Russian colonizer imported during the Soviet occupation had to adapt to the laws of the Estonian state. Artur's mother is Estonian and his father ethnically Russian. The boy himself is thus a mixture of several compromises, but he attends an Estonian-language school and identifies as Estonian. His father is also fluent in Estonian and works as a teacher, but his paternal grandparents have no grasp of the language. Using Artur's family, Vahter gives an overview of the complex issues surrounding citizenship and language, but also the danger posed at the time by pro-Russian referendums to create breakaway zones in urban areas near the border. The story's historical background is based in fact. *A Good Russian* paints a true picture of the era down to the most mundane detail while staying clear of the rosy cosmetic nostalgia that tends to blur similar works. Vahter's style is light, fluid, and humorous – in a way, as carefree as blossoming youth. Overall, the novel is an upbeat, enjoyable read.

But who is a "good Russian", anyway? Right now, as Russia's war in Ukraine still rages, the question is extremely thought-provoking, though the context three decades ago was dissimilar. After reading the book, I'd say that Artur is a good Russian. That being said, he's Estonian.

***Annika Koppel** (b. 1964) is the editor-in-chief of Estonian Literary Magazine.*

MEHIS HEINSAAR
The Lost Tribe
Kadunud hõim
Menu Kirjastus, 2022, 320 pp.
ISBN 9789949686711

Review by Jaan Sudak

Mehis Heinsaare's second full-length novel *The Lost Tribe* whisks readers to a deserted bog island, where the author muses in his signature magic-realistic style on topics of self-exploration and freeing oneself from the tethers of mundane life. Known for

his novellas and short stories, Heinsaar has described writing as an opportunity to seek solutions to real-life problems and find spiritual peace.

By melding the mundane and the fantastical, Heinsaar creates worlds that are, on the one hand, typically similar to our everyday lives but are also unusually and enchantingly literary. A masterful storyteller, he binds the autobiographical to the folkloric, conjuring a bizarre mystical reality with familiar yet strange and incredible brushstrokes. *The Lost Tribe* continues the author's earlier ambitions and stems from similar creative impulses, gently beckoning the reader into a literary retreat.

Bogs are, to Estonians, a mysterious and threatening borderland; a breathtakingly beautiful wilderness filled with unbridled forces. Will-o'-the-wisps bewitch wanderers, causing them to stray from their chosen path. For millennia, Estonians have sought sanctuary in bogs from great plagues and wars. The protagonist, an artsy 30-something-year-old named Agu Oidjärv, also flees his troubles and starts probing a dark legend in the marshy area of Soomaa. He hopes to find escape and turn a new page; to no longer be shy, obedient, and unnoticed. Agu hasn't lost his inner yearning for freedom and strives to break free from a set path despite weaknesses and emotional dependency.

The literary magic works and in the mystical silence of the bog, ample twists and turns unfold. *The Lost Tribe* can be read as an ethno-horror novel in which eerie tension builds from the very first page. More important, however, is the protagonist's development and the author's musings over the choices people

MEHIS HEINSAAR / photo Dmitri Kotjuh, Järva Teataja/Scanpix Baltics

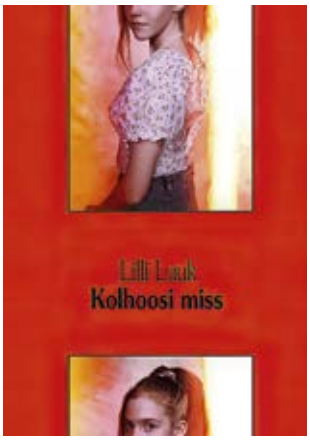
face, the inevitability of one's fate, and questions of dependence and independence. Agu isn't prepared for what he encounters; he tries to lift the veil of secrecy, but secrets demand sacrifices. As the plot lines branch out, the chilling natural environment becomes a meaningful symbol of being in a psychological rut and foul rotting inertia.

The Lost Tribe fascinates with its grim atmosphere and reflections on existential topics. It is inspired by the author's interest in human nature, pushing one's boundaries, the quest for truth, and individualism. The message that resonates is how crucial it is to listen to your inner voice and have the courage to overcome fears and dependencies. One should give it their all when seeking truths, diving to the very bottom instead of harboring doubts and dreads, because, by doing so, one will emerge from the mental swamp and keep life from crumbling away.

The Lost Tribe has won the Anton Hansen Tammsaare Literary Award. Mehis Heinsaar was awarded the Estonian Cultural Endowment's annual prize for literature.

***Jaan Sudak** (b. 1988) is a traditional culture researcher, Estonian language teacher and documentarian.*

LILLI LUUK
My Brother's Body
Minu venna keha
Hea Lugu, 2022, 183 pp.
ISBN 9789916702246



LILLI LUUK
Miss Kolkhoz
Kolhoosi miss
Saadjärve Kunstikeskus, 2022, 167 pp.
ISBN 9789916414699

Review by Vilja Kiisler

Lilli Luuk appeared on the Estonian literary scene like a glimmering comet from a faraway galaxy – coming out of nowhere but taking her rightful place among the best authors in the métier.

Luuk won the prestigious Tuglas Award with her very first published short story and nabbed the prize again three years later. In 2022, she made an impressive debut with two books: *Miss Kolkhoz*, which is composed of short stories that appeared in literary journals alongside several new texts, and *My Brother's Body*, a novel that hit shelves even before the collection.

The author's true existence was only verified once the books were released, albeit under a pen name. Just a few years earlier, even persons well versed in contemporary Estonian literature had their doubts, reckoning one well-known writer or another had decided to make a new beginning under a different name. Luuk has given interviews since the release of her books, but the mysteriousness remains tenacious. It turns out she is an art historian and former teacher who is now fully dedicated to writing and spending her weekends crawling through forests and trenches as a voluntary defense fighter, prepared to defend Estonia if such a day should come.

Luuk submitted the manuscript of *My Brother's Body*, set during the Second World War, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Had she waited a little longer, then the book might not have been published as is, as she discusses events that still lay at enough of a historical distance to be shaped into fiction. Events that should have been left behind the world for good. At least that's what we all wished to believe. All illusions were shattered on February 24, 2022.

The story extends across several generations of Estonians whose lives were obliterated by the Second World War and the following occupation. A degree in history and a sharp eye for detail enable the author to bring long-ago events and circumstances into clear focus. Even more impressive is her ability to convey, highly magni-

fied, the nightmarishly difficult psychological choices people face during times of upheaval. What use did the Soviet regime have for our brothers' bodies – both the ones dumped carelessly into arbitrary graves and others that life abandoned at the moment of birth? Why couldn't a woman have a grave at which to mourn her beloved, father, or brother? Why was it necessary to wipe out memory? Why was one forced to bear the weight of a fear so terrible that it was as good as impossible to ask even their own reflection what became of their father, brother, or beloved? How many generations are destined to seek the truth behind walls of silence?

These questions have regained relevancy and become much more acute in our everyday lives than we'd like to admit since war broke out anew in Europe. A person possesses nothing more precious than life. How can one live without feeling guilt for surviving? How can one tell which is the right side of history while still standing amidst the maelstrom and at a time when that which is obvious under later scrutiny might not be so apparent? *My Brother's Body* inevitably reads differently now than it would have before Russia's war in Ukraine. This isn't to the novel's detriment – quite the opposite.

Like Thomas Mann, Luuk could demand that her works be read twice over because only after the characters and plotlines are familiar can attention be channeled toward the books' aesthetic qualities. *My Brother's Body* is an exceptionally poetic novel and, despite the characters' terrible trials, a delight to read. With poetic phrasing and details that are carefully picked to leave ample room for imagination, Luuk fosters sympathy that leaves anxious perspiration trickling down the reader's back, the smell of death invading their nostrils, and a silence that haunts the awful events and cuts deep into flesh and bone. Only after the journey is complete does the reader fully understand the opening sentence: "Their future is seized by force, shredded right in front of them, their opportunities, newly budding potential, abilities, desires are cast aside, it all rots before their eyes, rapidly disintegrating at an already unattainable distance over days, over months, the talents granted at birth left neglected and less vital as years go by, their joy losing validity." It is precisely what criminal regimes' wars and occupations inflict upon the lives and fates of entire generations.

LILLI LUUK / photo Kris Moor

Luuk's short stories are also layered and intricately woven: one must repeatedly reopen the pages to understand everything embedded within them. With particular poignancy, she depicts the Soviet occupation and the transitionary period when Estonia regained its independence. Yet, states

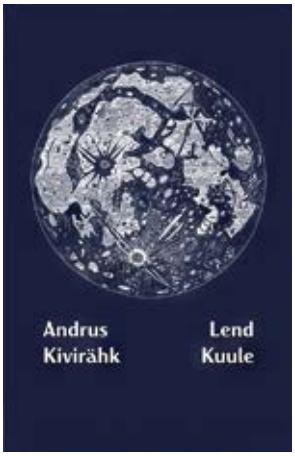
are not born in an instant and the human psyche cannot transform in a day. Quotidian conditions are extremely slow to follow tremendous changes, and it takes generations to shed the mental symptoms of living under a dictatorship. There exist terrible events, the memories of which will never extinguish and will continue to plague the victims' relatives and offspring who have no personal experience with war or occupation.

Some of Luuk's stories, such as "Miss Kolkhoz" itself, can be read as a belletristic lesson on Estonian history. The first and plainest layer is a horrifying account of domestic violence: a girl whose mother beats her so badly that she sometimes must skip school and lie in bed to recover runs away – but where and with whom? Telling clues are given, faithful to the era in question. Why shouldn't a rural farmgirl want to win a beauty pageant? It's nothing out of the realm of possibility, is it? They showed how wonderful that life is for five straight hours on TV! Why not send in nudes when asked? It's obvious that the bikini round is the most important part of the pageant.

Readers familiar with Estonian history can easily place the constellation of recognizable details in time: 1988. The Singing Revolution had already begun, and the restoration of independence would come just three years later. The first beauty pageants since the Second World War were held, Estonian track cyclist Erika Salumäe won an Olympic gold medal, and the Estonian Sovereignty Declaration was issued. One can only admire the psychological agility with which the author takes the reader by the hand and envelops them in a thrilling web. Excitement and captivating psychological tension are also the primary forces that keep one from putting down either book until the very last page.

Lilli Luuk entered the Estonian literary scene to stay. She is brimming with creative plans and there's no doubt her next work will be an immediate hit.

***Vilja Kiisler** (b. 1970) is a journalist who has worked for several Estonian outlets, and currently writes for Eesti Päevaleht and Delfi. She is a winner of the Ants Oras Award for literary criticism.*



ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK
Flight to the Moon
Lend Kuule
EKSA, 2022, 220 pp.
ISBN 9789916677292

Review by Karl-Martin Sinijärv

Andrus Kivirähk is one of the most popular and fascinating Estonian authors of the last quarter century (and no doubt of all time). His newest novel, *Flight to the Moon*, is based on an old fairy tale about a flying ship

ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK / photo Priit Mürk, ERR/Scanpix Baltics

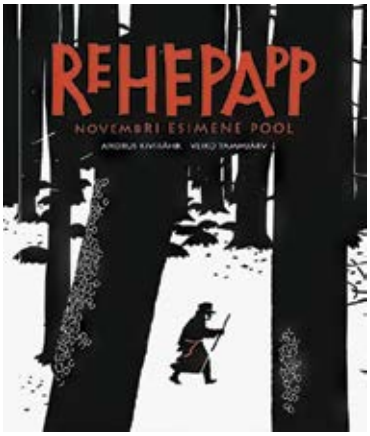
and its magical crew. The myth itself is only present in the background, of course, and the reader need not have read it personally – the tale will either come to mind over time or become clear on its own. A plethora of other modern and 20th-century myths, preconceived notions, and boilerplate representations are traversed parallel to the framework myth. There are even more universal narratives in the text and some that involuntarily make you wonder whether, to what extent, and in what way, a reader who has zero knowledge of intrinsically Estonian (or occupation-era) mental landscapes will be able to interpret the book. I suppose that understanding will be inherently different, albeit enjoyable. Earlier knowledge of a subject is nice, but a truly fine work of literature conjures the necessary degree of background itself, even having an impact on those who begin with a blank slate. Thereby, Kivirähk blends an assortment of eras with the present, sci-fi, environmental issues, magic, social porn, and many other ingredients to make a cocktail that is strong but won't knock you off your feet. And yes, there's even mention of cocktails themselves.

The subtexts in *Flight to the Moon* are doubtless revealed in greater splendor to a better-read person, but the book is also pleasantly palatable simply as a strange and somewhat absurd tale of adventure. Those familiar with Kivirähk's earlier works, especially his novels, will find several connecting threads, and it nestles into his greater catalog with the utmost ease. *Flight to the Moon* is caustically sarcastic and deeply compassionate; warmly old-fashioned and extremely modern simultaneously. True to Kivirähk's style, the Moon is naturally never reached, though it is always present overhead. The characters do, however, find themselves in many other places, then back again, and once more elsewhere.

Perhaps Kivirähk's writing should be classified as unique magical surrealism. Or mythical irrealism. Realism must be included, at any rate, because it sometimes feels as if the story doesn't merely spring from reality and life itself, but also from other literature that is deemed realistic. As if the author skillfully works to employ the most commonplace form of realism to convey something entirely different. Considering how much and how thoroughly Kivirähk has experimented with the styles of classic Estonian authors like Oskar Luts, A. H. Tammsaare, and others, this should come as no surprise. What is admirable is how he, while masterfully mixing so many layers and milieus, still manages to achieve

true international fame and acclaim. Given that, it makes no difference what ornate term is used to label Kivirähk's writing. What does matter is that the cocktail master knows the secret ingredient!

***Karl-Martin Sinijärv** (b. 1971) is an Estonian journalist, poet, and TV presenter. He was the head of the Estonian Writers' Union from 2007–2016.*



ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK, VEIKO TAMJÄRV
November
Rehepapp. Novembri esimene pool
Graphic novel
Kratt Werk, 2021, 144 pp.
ISBN 9789916407370

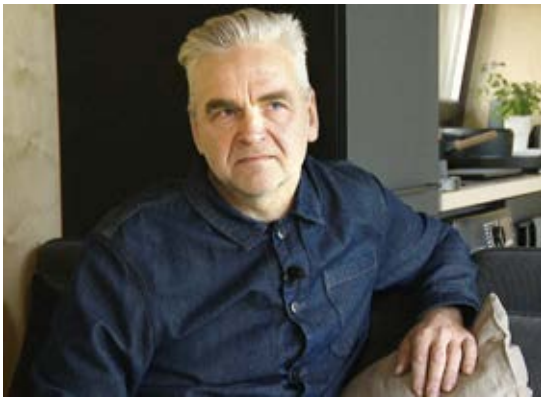
Review by Mari Laaniste

At this point in time, an Estonian novel getting adapted into a graphic novel could be described as a phenomenon that's only slightly more common than unicorns. In fact, the two-part adaptation of Andrus Kivirähk's bestselling novel from 2000, *November*, by Veiko Tammjärv is the only existing example of this. Moreover, this pioneering rarity of an adaptation is a stunning, unequivocal success.

Among the handful of Estonian artists even capable of drawing professional-quality comics, Tammjärv's talent, mostly expressed in experimental, often word-shy short stories, for this medium has been evident and admired by connoisseurs ever since the 1990s when he first emerged as a fresh art school graduate with a degree in printmaking. However, the socioeconomic and cultural realities of Estonia in the past three decades meant that rather than focusing on comics, Tammjärv built a fine career in advertising, and only published his first graphic novel in 2020: an adaptation of the cult film *Dead Mountaineer's Hotel*. Thus *November* is technically only a sophomore effort, but it has the measured and polished air of a work by an experienced, confident professional.

Kivirähk's novel, with its themes of greed, pettiness, malice, and general misanthropy, makes a mockery of nostalgic nation-building narratives of morally pure pastoral idyll. The beautiful, stark, and neatly structured adaptation presents the story in a fast-paced, matter-of-fact manner. However, Kivirähk's trademark's folksy, satirical tone

VEIKO TAMMJÄRV / photo ERR/Scanpix Baltics



ends up somewhat overshadowed by the adaptation's decidedly more Gothic and melancholy atmosphere suggested by the artwork (a near monochrome color palette with stark shadows, the almost square page format echoing the oppressiveness of low, blackened ceilings and heavy November clouds). We learn that the unspecified village where events unroll is a microcosm mostly forsaken by the divine, yet Hell and the devil, witchcraft, and werewolves, as well as a seemingly endless array of monstrous, threatening entities, some lifted from Estonian folklore, others invented by Kivirähk, are a constant, annoying presence. For those stuck in that harsh place, even sheer survival is a challenge, mostly just about manageable with a bit of cunning and ancestral savvy. But it takes a toll, as almost every character ends up complicit in some of the many casual, even fatal, cruelties that are committed within a single month. The grim narrative, however, serves as a backdrop to bright, sensitive subplots of pure, tender, yet entirely unrequited love, felt by those too young to have grown as callous as their circumstances would merit.

***Mari Laaniste** (b. 1977) is an Estonian art historian, who studies various forms of visual and audiovisual culture: film, animation, comics, etc. In addition to research and teaching at the Estonian Academy of Arts, she writes for the press on film and pop culture and has also published fiction.*

ANDRIS FELDMANIS, LIVIA ULMAN
Erik Stoneheart
Erik Kivisüda
Postimees Kirjastus OÜ, 2022, 320 pp.
ISBN 9789916712207

Review by Eva Kinkar

Erik Stoneheart is a story of grief, family ties, and budding friendship that centers around a lonely 11-year-old boy. Adapted from Ilmar Raag's 2022 feature film, the original concept was inspired by Sass Henno's children's book *Mereröövlimäng* (The Pirate Game, 2009).

When Erik's family inherits his great-aunt Brunhilda's house on an island, the boy's life changes dramatically. The building is shared with a man and his nasty little daughter named Maria, with whom Erik ends up embarking on an unexpected sea journey aboard *The Big Blue*. Thanks to the mysterious events that ensue, adults and children alike soon realize what truly matters in life.

The authors paint a vivid picture of a child whose parents are infrequently there for him. They permit him screen time aplenty if it means more time for them to concentrate on their own hobbies, for example. Or they consistently buy their son, who is nearly

ANDRIS FELDMANIS and **LIVIA ULMAN** /
photo Teet Malsroos, Õhtuleht/Scanpix Baltics

a teenager, childish dinosaur-print slippers and bedsheets, though he has no clue why they should think he has any interest in prehistoric creatures. Adapting to his environment, Erik has thus become Stoneheart: a cold, unshakeable child who obediently exists in his own little world.

Things are different for the passionate and fierce Maria, who spends tons of time with her father doing an array of fun activities, like swinging in the garden and making pancakes on weekends. The girl's mother, however, vanished on a sea expedition. On the quest to find her, the kids enter the In-Between World: a place of wandering souls whose loved ones cannot let them go, preventing the deceased from fully crossing over. During the adventure, the children come face-to-face with a ship full of pirates. Delving into the story and its thrilling descriptions, readers may feel like they've ended up right in the middle of another *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequel.

Without getting bogged down in metaphysical details, the story spellbindingly addresses the topics of death and loss, which are uncommon in children's literature. Doing so, the authors successfully avoid the trap of melancholy pathos while still showing empathy for the child. Maria comes to accept the reality of her mother's death and the story comes to a happy ending when the two headbutting protagonists become friends, their family relationships are rejuvenated, and Erik Stoneheart can simply become a boy named Erik.

***Eva Kinkar** (b. 1991) is a copyeditor and literary researcher employed at Tallinn University.*

KADRI KIHO, STELLA SALUMAA
Endel and Kati
Endel ja Kati
Päike ja Pilv, 2022, 43 pp.
ISBN 9789916630259

Review by Jaanika Palm

The success of *Endel and Kati*, by Kadri Kiho and Stella Salumaa, began with winning first place in the Knee-High Book Competition for children's book manuscripts. Although meant for rather young readers, its two main characters are grown-ups.

KADRI KIHO / photo Aron Urb

Endel is a bus driver who feels so at home behind the wheel that he wears slippers instead of shoes while driving. Kati is his faithful co-worker, who lives somewhere behind the colorful lights on the dashboard. Whenever Endel begins his bus route, Kati's mellow but confident voice announces the names of the stops through the speakers. One Thursday morning, Kati falls ill and Endel must manage the announcements by himself. Speaking in public is his absolute least favorite thing, so he's understandably thrown into a panic. How will he be able to squeak out names like Five-Toe, Penguinless, Duckery, or Ertshertsog Ernst Square?

Kiho's use of language is wonderful, and she gives her imagination free rein when inventing witty names. Some are humorous takes on actual Tallinn bus stops or given flair with childlike spelling, others are the fruits of her own fantasy: Empterdi, Ocher Cat, and Front Paw, for example. It sometimes seems as if the author is testing the reader's literacy and awareness!

Whereas *Endel and Kati* is funny on an expressive level, it also raises important universal and very human topics. Using the dilemma faced by the driver, who gradually overcomes his apprehension and even becomes enthused by the task, Kiho invites us to consider mental health challenges like anxiety. In doing so, she also encourages readers to face their fears, try out new things, and perhaps even make unexpected discoveries, all to avoid leaving life unlived and dreams unrealized.

Endel and Kati is the illustrating debut of animator and comics artist Stella Salumaa. The fluidly integrated pictures and text form a whole that enchants readers big and small.

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

LIIS SEIN
Mona's Dad Has Some Ideas
Mona isepäine isa
Illustrated by Ulla Saar
Pegasus, 2022, 88 pp.
ISBN 9789916162354

Review by Kairi Look

Liis Sein began her writing career with plays that have been both staged, and awarded in playwriting competitions. She also co-wrote the screenplay for an Estonian children's television series. Nevertheless, Sein is best known as a children's author. She has published ten works to date, many of them picture books.

Mona's Dad Has Some Ideas is a collection of ten stories about a father who is battling boredom and maybe even a dose of midlife crisis. One morning, he decides that life is too dull and sets out to spice it up with a new job or hobby. He tries his hand at art collecting, cooking, and athletics; dabbles in filmmaking, writing, and hotel management; and flirts with the idea of moving or enrolling at the university. Mona and her mother do their best to rein him in a little and keep his escapades from hurting their family. Luckily, all ends well, and he gets a second wind without damaging any domestic ties.

The hobbies that Mona's dad picks up are anything but a walk in the park for them. While collecting art, some demanding guests settle into their home: Rembrandt's night watch must take formation and Wiiralt's annoying tiger, which hangs above Mona's bed, constantly wants to snuggle with her. Cohabitating with an ambitious amateur athlete also takes its toll in the form of all-family morning jogs, but his culinary attempts are a source of fun and jokes. Luckily, Mona and her mom have patience in spades and, with feminine elegance, gently steer the events into something suitable for them all.

Sein's story is realistic and comfortably set in the present day. The book is sprinkled with light fantasy and warm humor, and nothing dangerous or scary transpires. Chapters flow smoothly into one another, though there is no strict linearity. Overall, *Mona's Dad Has Some Ideas* is an upbeat book suitable for readers aged seven and up.

Ulla Saar's illustrations add a vibrant luster and expertly convey the characters' personalities in a contemporary and elegant style. Her art expands the writing with finely-tuned humor that is a pleasure for all ages. Layers and textures are objects of playful experimentation, and the colors are fresh and vivid. Added as a cherry on top is a color scheme that is prevalent throughout the whole design and only realized by the end of the book: Mona's dad is yellow, her mom is blue, and she herself is a greenish mixture of the two.

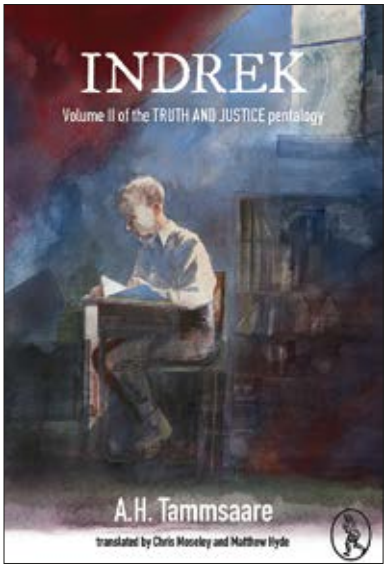
Mona's Dad Has Some Ideas is a lighthearted funhouse-mirror reflection of a timeless domestic topic: how to break out of a mundane routine. In every one of his endeavors, Mona's father stays fantastically selfless. How can you collect colorful memories to share with your future grandkids if you don't lead an exciting life? In any case, readers young and old will be left with bright, fond memories of the book and Mona's dad's adventures.

***Kairi Look** (b. 1983) is an Estonian writer.*

LIIS SEIN / photo ERR/Scanpix Baltics

Recent translations

ARABIC
ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK
Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu
الرجل الذي تحدث الثعبانية
Translated by Rania Sabri Ali
Published by Al Arabi Publishing, 2022
440 pp.

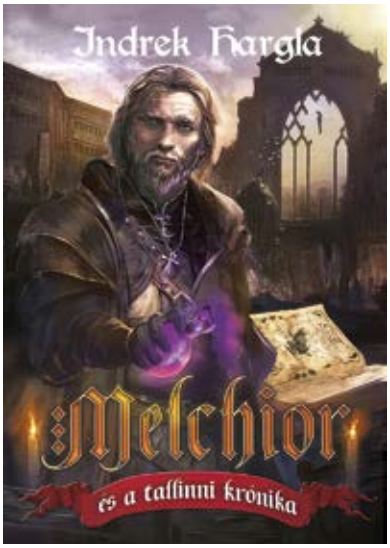


ENGLISH
A.H. TAMMSAARE
Tõde ja õigus II
Indrek. Volume II of the Truth and Justice pentalogy
Translated by Matthew Hyde and Christopher Moseley
Vagabond Voices, 2022
464 pp.

ENGLISH
ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK
Oskar ja asjad
Oskar and the Things
Translated by Adam Cullen
Published by Emma Press, 2022
296 pp.

FINNISH
KARL RISTIKIVI
Hingede öö
Sielujen yö
Translated by Jouko Vanhanen
Published by Enostone, 2022
309 pp.

GERMAN
KÄTLIN KALDMAA
Lydia
Lydia
Translated by Maximilian Murmann
Published by Baobab, 2022
48 pp.

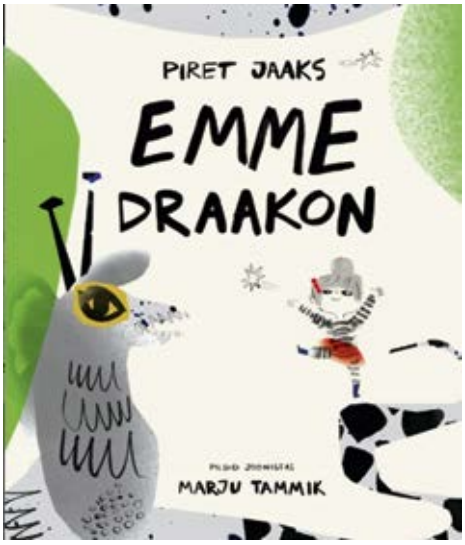


HUNGARIAN
INDREK HARGLA
Apteeker Melchior ja Tallinna kroonika
Melchior és a Tallinni kroonika
Translated by Nóra Rácz
Published by Metropolis Media, 2022
336 pp.

LATVIAN
LEELO TUNGAL
Seltsimees laps II ja III
Biedrs bērns: otrā un trešā grāmata
Translated by Guntars Godiņš
Published by Latvijas Rakstnieku Savienība, 2022
296 pp.

LATVIAN
AINO PERVIK
Kunksmoor
Burmemme
Translated by Maima Grīnberga
Published by Liels un Mazs, 2022
160 pp.

LITHUANIAN
ENE MIHKELSON
Torn
Bokštas
Translated by Agnė Bernotaitė-Jakubčionienė
Published by Lietuvos Rašytoju Sajungos leidykla, 2022
112 pp.



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