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More information sources:

Eesti Kirjanike Liit
Estonian Writers' Union
Estnischer Schriftstellerverband

Harju 1, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia
Phone and fax: +372 6 276 410, +372 6 276 411
e-mail ekl@ekl.ee
www.ekl.ee

Tartu branch:

Vanemuise 19, 51014 Tartu
Tel 7 341 073 (also fax)
berkvaher@gmail.com
www.ekl.ee/tartu

Estonian Literature Centre
P. Süda 3-6, 10118 Tallinn
Tel: + 372 6314 870
ilvi@eki.ee
estlit@estlit.ee
www.estlit.ee

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Editorial Board: Mati Sirkel, Jaanus Vaiksoo, Piret Viires, Andres Ehin, Peeter Helme
Editor: Tiina Randviir **Translators:** Ilmar Lehtpere, Marika Liivamägi, Tiina Kirss, Riina Kindlam, Tiina Randviir
Language editor: Richard Adang **Layout:** Marius Peterson **Cover photo: Teet Kallas (Scanpix)**

Literary Biographically

Interview with Janika Kronberg,

Director of the Estonian Literary Museum

Interviewed by Tiina Kirss

In conjunction with the centennial of the Estonian National Museum, celebrated this spring, it is appropriate to begin with the reminder that the Estonian Literary Museum has grown from the same 'mother tree'. The Literary Museum's Archival Library, the Estonian Folklore Archive and the Estonian Cultural History Archive were founded as integral parts of the Estonian National Museum, and on this basis the Estonian Literary Museum was created in 1940. Whether this was the demolition of something great or rather the right thing to do is an argument that has lasted a long time. At any rate, now we are separate entities, and in addition to the abovementioned archives, the Literary Museum now includes departments of folkloristics and ethnomusicology, both of which have scientific research as their main priorities. But the basis, under continuous elaboration, is still the archives and collections: these are the pillars of the Museum. They have both historical and contemporary meanings. All of the collections developed from a seed of donations from the people. The Archival Library includes the Learned Estonian Society collection, founded in 1838, as well as many personal collections. In the 1920s the Archival Library fulfilled the role of a national library. To this day the collections keep expanding by way of mandatory copies of books; in addition, we purchase reference works and estica published elsewhere. We collect everything published in Estonia, and everything written by and about Estonia and Estonians abroad. The core of the Folklore Archive consists of the collections established by legendary folklorists Jakob Hurt and M.J. Eisen. Since folklore is very much alive and continues to be born, so various campaigns continue to enlarge the collection. In my view it is something unparalleled anywhere else in the world that the president of a republic gives out an award to collectors of folklore. That is how it is in Estonia, and all of the presidents of Estonia to date have considered this very important.

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Classics, Illuminated

Estonian Literary Museum

The Cultural History Archive consists of the archives of many Estonian writers and cultural figures, as well as those of organizations. In recent years there has been a wealth of contributions from abroad connected with the end of a long period of political exile. People send their own intellectual legacy, or that of their parents, to the homeland. We store and keep it, conduct research, and prepare publications. One example of this work is the diary of Karl Ristikivi. Under the auspices of the Museum, the Association of Estonian Life Stories studies recent history, organizing life story writing competitions, and publishing books with both exciting and tragic subject matter,

for example, the life stories of Russians living in Estonia and memoirs of Soviet prisons. Having said this, however, I must emphasize that the Estonian Literary Museum is a research institution, and answers to the Ministry of Education and Science. Our primary role is thus not to exhibit, but rather to collect, sort, preserve and study the intellectual treasures of the people, and to make these available to them. This is the overarching goal of our scientific publishing programs, and of our participation in digital collection projects.

Having claimed that folklore is alive and well in Estonia and at the Literary Museum, what is your view of Estonian literary classics, and their contemporary relevance?

Every culture has signs that can only be deciphered and comprehended if one knows the creations of great men and women of past eras. Classics are alive! In her forthcoming capacious monograph on Marie Under, one of Estonia's best known poets and repeatedly a candidate for the Nobel prize, Sirje Kiin elaborates on a great number of examples of how Under has been read at different times as well as how she is regarded today. Even a dirty poem in a film parodying modern macho cults, where only Under's name is howled over and over again, helps keep her name alive. And yet it is painfully embarrassing to me to meet Estonians who, upon hearing the name of Henrik Visnapuu, one of Estonia's most renowned patriotic poets, ask, who was he anyway? This is a sign of uneducatedness, which has always existed, but under different guises. This in itself is no cause for declaring the death of literature. It, too, takes different forms, and becomes disseminated among the people through songs and fragments, as in the achievements of some young poets who are invited to perform at company parties, where orders are placed for their poems. This could be considered lowbrow, and yet these things have always existed. All the more so, high, aesthetic culture should be emphasized, alongisde the lowbrow and popular, which will always find a way to assert itself. What we have to show is that these phenomena come from the same root, and that they all are important and have their place. Through them literature lives, and the best examples of literature partake of comprehending the world and pondering over it through language, in many respects similarly to what is done in philosophy, with the difference that literature is more accessible and reaches more people at their level. Literature carries tradition and continuity – we do not disown our parents, while young people have always rebelled against the old. On the basis of historical experience the best and most lasting works of literature have always been in relationship to what has gone before – either in an affirmative relation or in polemical revolt.

In different parts of the world, windows open in different directions, outward or inward. If one tentatively divided literary works between windows that open inward (those where the reader needs to be equipped with prior knowledge about context, as well as „secret knowledge" to recognize the author's covert nods and nudges) and windows that open outward (where even the reader who does not read the text in the mother tongue can understand the nods and nudges), how would you apportion Estonian literary classics? What examples would you cite?

This is a very good metaphor, but I think different aspects of it pertain to poetry and prose. Texts of core importance to a language and culture need not address readers in a different cultural space, despite superb translations. The question lies in the reader's understanding of context, and whether the author even seeks to be understood elsewhere besides his or her homeland. Having said this, some works may prove to be unexpectedly translatable, even surprisingly popular among readers in many different languages. The question is also to what extent a text born of local subject matter also carries a universal, more broadly understandable message, which is presented in an aesthetically enjoyable manner. To me a literary text's location

Janika Kronberg (Photo by Scanpix)

keeps growing more and more important as time goes on. I am immediately reminded of James Joyce's Dublin and Mark Twain's Mississippi: these places are used as magnets for literary tourism. In Estonian literary classics we have Tammsaare's Vargamäe and Oskar Luts' Palamuse. Of the two, Palamuse really exists, while Vargamäe is a fictional place, a place that has gotten its name from literature. Often we cannot even remember the real name of the place behind it – and there is the creative power of literature! However, I must say that I am rather surprised by ongoing efforts to translate A. H. Tammsaare's five volume *Truth and Justice* – work at the very centre of Estonian literature, into Finnish and French. This text is strongly wedded to its soil, its land. Though I regret this, it will fall victim of a campaign similar to efforts during the Soviet era to publish mass quantities of the literature of the 'fraternal peoples', in those days, politically correct works. Most of these massive print runs went to the paper shredder. I have rather more faith in the soon-to-be-published Hindi translation of the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*, the folkloric basis of which is more international, and therefore more open to readers' access.

Among classic writers, Jaan Kross certainly wrote in a room in which the windows opened out, with a view of the nearby historic Church of St. Nicholas and the tower of the Tallinn Rathaus. Kross wrote outward deliberately and consciously, as Jaan Kaplinski is doing nowadays. Yet Kaplinski, who is a living classic is not thought of by many critics as a 'real' Estonian writer. Ene Mihkelson, very deeply rooted in our history and our language is one of Estonia's most important writers today, yet her windows open inward. Let us heed a key image from her most recent novel, *Plague Grave* – „the sky flights bound inward." Thus it is all the more to be celebrated that her writings have aroused interest elsewhere, outside of Estonia.

A funny example from most recent Estonian prose also comes to mind – literary scholar Arne Merilai's freshly published novel, *Tyrant Oedipus*. This is play at the highest level, a game that goes all the way to the marrow. Merilai play in the Estonian language, yet he frames his text as the author's translation of the German-language manuscript of one Pontios Chersonesos, with the action taking place in Mussolini's Italy. In his role as 'translator', Merilai does not deny saturating his text with Estonian language and cultural history through crucial, well-marked and decipherable allusions. Yet he also points to the possibility that should the book be translated from the Estonian into some other language, one would have to find acceptable equivalents to all the word plays, allusions, and intertextual cues in the target culture. I have no doubt that he would give maximum freedom to a would-be translator to do precisely this.

You have recently published one of last year's most beautiful books – Karl Ristikivi's diary, so hefty that literary critics begin their reviews with its weight. This might be considered a „window opening inward" in the sense that it allows us to listen in to the writer's whispered conversation with himself. At the same time, paratexts – such as writers' diaries and correspondences – are windows into another era. What would Estonian culture have lost if Karl Ristikivi's diaries had not been published? And what has it gained?

The book really does weigh in at 1.3 kilos, and contains 1100 pages. But this is Ristikivi's own text, and it is the tribute of the publisher that the decision was made to publish it all, and in a single volume. The original of the diary kept from 1957-1968 is kept in the Baltic Archive, deposited in the Swedish State Archives in Stockholm. The copies, prepared by poet Kalju Lepik, are in Tartu in the Literary Museum. My contribution was organizing the publication of the text and preparing the commentary.

Diaries and various autobiographical and biographical sources have become 'marketable goods' of late in Estonia, and many places elsewhere. These belong in a larger category, which loosely termed includes „works written with a will to historical truthfulness". However, it does seem to me that it is not a long way from these to so-called „prose of alternative history" – and Ristikivi has been regarded as one of the initiators and innovators of this kind of writing in Estonian literature – as well as of utopias and fantasy fiction about entirely imaginary societies. Granted, the reading publics of these types of fiction vary somewhat. By the way, the novel *In the Footsteps of the Vikings* that Ristikivi wrote in his youth, the one considered the first Estonian example of „the alternative historical novel" tells of the possible participation of Estonia in the Vikings' discovery and colonization of America. After this he made a name for himself in the 1930s as a creator of realistic and psychological prose fiction, and as a modernist with the publication of *All Souls' Night* in 1953. In exile in the 1960s he wrote his series of historical novels of Europe, beginning with the Hohenstaufens and ending with a Catalan who fled into exile in Paris during Franco's dictatorship. Another novel, written in the spirit of a platonic anti-utopia, *Island of Wonders* wandered in among these as it were. Ostensibly free-standing, at closer glance it is linked by allusions to the historical cycle.

By his cycle of historical novels Ristikivi defines himself as a European rather than an Estonian political exile taking refuge in Stockholm from the Soviet dictatorship. The cycle has a grand sweep, a gesture of resistance to his status and his fate. The diary documents the process of writing the series of novels, but also gives a detailed picture of the everyday life of a person who is continually tormented by feeling like a stranger, as well as by his workaday life in the Swedish state health insurance office, among worries and concerns that are foreign to him. And with health worries of his own to boot. From Ristikivi's single, greatly esteemed poetry collection, *A Human Journey*, we find plenty of proof for his view of himself as a loser in life, or at best someone who can tie the game. Ristikivi's works were never translated, and their reception was mostly limited to the pages of diaspora newspapers. But despite his language choice, he wrote to people who shared his views and his European identity. In his literary works, he transcended the conflicts and intrigues of diaspora politics, and was ahead of them – but this speaks of the tragedy of a great personality.

I am not sure what Estonian culture would have lost if this diary had not been made available. Certainly it has gained a great deal. If nothing else, it has gained a smidgen of understanding that we may not achieve fulfilment and happiness in our lifetime: it may come later, and in the name of this we may sometimes be obliged to „carry bags on a foreign ship, repeating to oneself that work is what gives life meaning." Indeed, these days we increasingly think in a worldly rather than an eternal frame, and more pragmatically. But as to pragmatism, as far as its popularity goes, the book has sold rather well.

How do you regard the matter of the writer's privacy as concerns the publication of his diary? How does the reading of a writer's diary change the reader's horizon of reception? Do you see any dangers lurking here?

I am convinced that Ristikivi kept a diary in the full knowledge – and with the wish – that it would someday be published. For those who knew his work well, and who knew that the diary existed, there must have been great anticipation of its publication – though it may have proved a disappointment to them. As I read the diary several times in the process of editing it, it became more and more interesting to me. What seemed at first to be tiresome repetitions and complaints even came to have a poetic effect. In addition to documenting one person's ordinary worries, this proves what Ristikivi never had a chance to feel in his lifetime: that now he is a winner, a victor. His position in Estonian cultural history has risen beyond compare, and given rise to a large number of interesting interpretations, even translations. It is too bad that this is all posthumous. But if we started out talking about metaphors, then I see his oeuvre as a garden meant for those who came after him, a garden tended by grateful readers.

What do you think of the 'fabricated diary' as a literary genre?

In earlier Estonian cultural history we have several examples of biographies written (or attempted to be written) in diary form, with a keen ability to feel the times and the personality. It seems that in cases of more notorious figures, who are 'stripped bare' by such texts, this stuff sells well. Looking critically, though, these are no more than collections of legends. As for myself, I put more store in authenticity, though an elegant mystification is not without its intellectual charms. Indeed, it would be entirely possible to extend Ristkivi`s diary right up to his death in 1977. One could use correspondences, the memories of his contemporaries, and other documentary material, create a context for the works, and describe ongoing health problems. But what would be the point? Besides, Ristikivi both opened and closed his diary with a deliberate gesture, with appropriate entries for both occasions.

These days the diary has moved from intimate space into the blogosphere, public from the very moment of inception, and I have not the vaguest interest in this kind of chatter. Of course there are some exceptions, such as a text introduced in this issue of ELM – Tõnu Õnnepalu's diary in the form of poetry, *kevad ja suvi ja* (spring and summer and). Õnnepalu's previous book, the popular *Flanders Diary* was written in a Belgian village. This one is set on an Estonian estate. The place guarantees a firmness of tradition, which has its effects in the text as well.

What comments do you have concerning ELM and Estonian literature?

I have been writing short introductory reviews of new literary works for ELM since 1996, I believe about 120 of them in all. What motivates me is the good quality of Estonian literature – the judgment that some works are well worth translating, and the desire just to show what we have – including some real curiosity pieces. It is also stimulating to me – in addition to working with Estonian classics and other responsibilities – to keep my eye on the whole picture of Estonian literature. To keep myself in shape, as it were. Literature has a role to play in society, even though from time to time there is talk of the end of the book and the end of literature. The task of the humanities – including literature and the arts – is to remind people of the virtues and responsibilities of being human. As the world becomes more and more 'measurable', quantifiable, this role grows more and more important, though perhaps for a smaller number of people. Lately I copied out a quote from Estonian literature's most consistent surrealist – the poet Ilmar Laaban: „Everything is being drawn into the net of numbers. We have to draw the world of science into our net of creative art before it casts it net over us." Something tells me that we have already lost this battle – but we must continue it, just as Dr. Rieux in Camus' *La peste* continued his battle against rats and the plague.

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Searching for translators

by Ulrike Plath

After a wave of translations of Estonian literature into German in the early 1990s, the number of such books dropped before the decade was out and has stagnated further since then. Whilst Estonian drama is increasingly better known, the opposite is the case for books at the Frankfurt and Leipzig Book Fairs. How can we explain this setback for Estonian literature in Germany?

The decline in this field is certainly a reflection of falling interest at German universities in Estonian language and literature, a trend that was accelerated by the reform programme in German higher education. An important difference should be pointed out here between the Estophile generations. First there were those connected with the Baltic region through some family ties, and whose interest in Estonian culture and literature became established during the perestroika period and especially after Estonia became independent. On the other hand, of the large number of Germans arriving here since the early 1990s for personal or work reasons, none has taken up literary translation.

For decades, literary translations from Estonian has been undertaken by a handful of people, such as Irja Grönholm, Cornelius Hasselblatt, Gisbert Jänicke, Bernhard Thomas. There is a limit to what they can undertake, as their preferences are clear. The larger the circle of translators, and the broader their age structure, the wider will be the spectrum of Estonian literature available in Germany. It will become more exciting and more varied. Young authors require young translators. Authors and translators must find each other.

As the whole process seemed to lie dormant, ELIC, the Estonian Literature Centre, decided to spring into action. To stimulate interest in translating Estonian literature, and to provide the necessary tools as well as a relevant marketing strategy, the Centre organised a training seminar from May 25 to May 29, 2009 at the Baltic Centre

Zum ersten Seminar für Übersetzer estnischer Literatur ins Deutsche. Visby, 25.-29. Mai 2009

The first seminar for translators of Estonian literature into German, held at Visby from May 25-29, 2009

for Writers and Translators in Visby. Eight applicants with German as their mother tongue were chosen on the basis of test translations which they had submitted.

The group consisted mainly of women around 20 years old, so newcomers to this work who had only just finished their education. Most had spent an exchange year in an Estonian school so had picked up considerable language skills whilst staying with a local family. When they returned to Germany, the question inevitably arose as to how they could link their interest in Estonia with their future careers.

The seminar was largely run by Irja Grönholm and Cornelius Hasselblatt. It

brought together different generations of Estophiles who had previously been largely unaware of each other. Both generations are equally fascinated with Estonia, but see the country which has gone through such radical changes, differently. However, more important than their differences was a common interest in its language and literature.

During three days of intensive work, Jaan Kaplinski's *The Same River,* Andrus Kivirähk's *The Man Who Spoke Snakish*, and poems by Marie Under, Viivi Luik and Jürgen Rooste were discussed in detail and an extract from Marin Algus' play *Thirst* was translated. In the practical sessions, the possible freedoms and dangers in literary translation were discussed, and Irja Grönholm showed the young translators what the daily life of a translator could be. The tough labour of self-expression proceeded nicely in a pleasant atmosphere.

As part of the practical sessions, Cornelius Hasselblatt gave a lecture on the development of Estonian prose and poetry and Irja Grönholm gave one on Estonian drama. Katrin Kern discussed the different online dictionaries now available for Estonian, and also various aspects of colloquial Estonian. The final lecture was by Oliver Ihle, publisher of Eeva Park's novel A *Trap in Infinity,* which has recently been translated by Irja Grönholm. He gave an overview of the initial steps that need to be taken by a translator to generate interest at a German publishing house.

This would turn out to be the toughest issue discussed at the seminar. To succeed in the German publishing world as a translator of work from a small language such as Estonian requires a great deal of initiative, persistence and enthusiasm together with a practical knowledge of marketing. A flair for the language is of course essential too, but it must be com-

bined with knowledge of the book trade in general and of the market for Estonian books in particular. These must be combined with the ability to approach potential publishers and to self-market. The seminar ended with advice on running a successful book launch and a discussion of the future.

The time spent at Visby showed how addictive literature can be. The contours of the personality needed in a new translator can now be clearly designated. This result stems of course from the inspiring environment that the Writers' and Translators' House provided, and from the discussions and networking opportunities that arose during our stay as we talked to the local staff, to translators and to writers. Visby will continue in our lives with a monthly newsletter in which participants will exchange ideas on translation, promotion, new publications and on progess in their personal careers. Visby has however left an even stronger mark on all of us. In due course we will see how strong our passion for literature is, how strong or weak our talents are and how addictive the translation virus turns out to be. I am very grateful for this experience. Everything else will take time.

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Estonian Literary Awards 2008

by Peeter Helme

• The annual award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment was given to the journalist and writer **Mari Tarand** for her childhood memoirs, *Inside the Image of Time*, about her brother, poet Juhan Viiding.

The genre awards of the Estonian Cultural Endowment's Literature Foundation in 2008 were distributed as follows:

• The prose award went to **Mari Saat** for her novel *The Redeemer of Lasnamäe*.

• The best achievement in poetry was **Maarja Kangro**'s *Heureka*.

• **Peeter Sauter**'s play *In the Cellar* received the drama award.

• **Piret Raud-Kalda**'s *Princess Luluu* and *Mister Body* was selected as best among books for children and young adults.

• The essay and memoir award was given to **Hellar Grabbi**'s childhood memoirs *Child of the Republic*.

• The award for translating from a foreign language into Estonian went to **Kersti Unt** for William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

• **Irja Grönholm** received the award for translating Eeva Park's *Trap in Infinity* from Estonian into German.

• The jury also gave a special award without any genre specifications; this time it went to **Margus Laidre**'s monograph *Dorpat 1558-1708*.

• The award for best article was received by **Aivar Põldvee** for *Superstitious practices of common Estonians and the comeback of Johann Wolfgang Boecler. Contribution to the history of church, literature and customs* (Ajalookirjutaja aeg, no 11).

• The award for literature in Russian was given to **Tatjana Kašneva** for her *The Mundanely Short Memory of Ours…*as well as for her long-term achievements, and to **Josef Kats** for *Old Tallinn. Four Seasons*.

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• The 2008 Betti Alver Debut Award went to **Urmo Mets**' *The Dossier of Unoccurred Influx*.

• The 2008 Friedebert Tuglas Short Story Award went to **Indrek Hargla** for *My Days with Liina* (Looming 2008, no 8) and to **Jüri Tuulik**'s *Tellicate* (in the book *Baltic herring, tiny nice fish: selected stories and recipes*, 2008).

• In 2008 the novel competition jury decided not to give the first place award, but instead gave one second place award to **Milvi Martina Piir** for *Thirsty Butterflies*, two third place awards, to **Birk Rohelend** for *My Bovine Friend* and to **Marion Andra** for *Algolagnia*, and two consolation prizes to **Liina Lüecke** for *Autumn Mystery* and to **Raul Kurvitz** for *Sacred and Dreadful Smell*. Two novels were also shortlisted: **Robert Randma**'s *Cigarette* and **Helju Pets**' *Lilacs without Lucky Blossoms*.

• The Eduard Vilde Award of Vinni Parish went to **Rein Raud** for his novella *Brother*.

• The Virumaa Literary Award was given to **Merle Karusoo**'s *Full Rooms*. Life stories of the Estonian people in theatre texts.

• **Mari Tarand**, who also received the annual award of the Cultural Endowment, was granted the Anton Hansen Tammsaare Albu Parish Literary Award for *Inside the Image of Time*.

• The Võru County government's Bernard Kangro Award for authors who are either from Võrumaa, connected with it or whose work depicts Võrumaa, went this time to **Ilmar Vananurm**'s poetry collection *Take Across Take*.

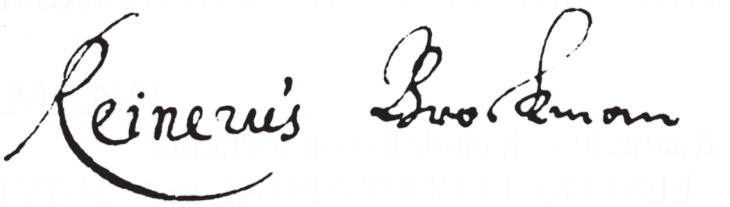
• The Juhan Liiv Award is issued for the best Estonian-language poem published for the first time during the last year, by Alatskivi Parish, together with the Alatskivi Secondary School and Liiv Museum. This time **Triin Soomets** received it for her poem *Death doesn't pass us by*.

• The Gustav Suits Poetry Award, granted since 2004 by the Tartu city government and the Cultural Endowment of Tartu for a philosophically profound collection, went this time to **Kalju Kruusa** for his untranslatable *Pilvedgi Mindgi Liigutavadgi* (an approximation would be *even the clouds move me too*).

• The Estonian science fiction Stalker Award is granted annually by the Estonian Science Fiction Association in different categories. The prize for the most important of them, best Estonian science fiction novel, went this year to Reserve Lieutenant-Colonel, military analyst and writer **Leo Kunnas** for his *Gort Ashryn: part 1. Before the last war*.

Reiner

Ich hab wollen Esthnisch schreiben
I wanted to write in Estonian



by Marju Lepajõe

In 2009, Estonian culture celebrates a remarkable anniversary, which is a reminder that the history of Estonian poetry does not begin with the 19th century national-romantic poetry of the Awakening period, but a few centuries earlier: in April this year 400 years ago, the first Estonian poet, Reiner Brockmann (28 April 1609–29 November 1647), was born. He wrote the earliest surviving published Estonian-language poem, a wedding song in alexandrines, with the Latin title *Carmen Alexandrinum Esthonicum ad leges Opitij poėticas compositum* (*A song in Estonian in alexandrines, composed according to Opitz's poetic rules*). It was printed in Tallinn on 20 November 1637, on the occasion of the marriage of Hans von Höveln and Margaretha Stahl.[1]

Brockmann

This anniversary will be celebrated in various ways. From 17 to 19 September, an international conference takes place in Tallinn, where Brockmann arrived as a 25-year-old young man in 1634, as a professor of the Greek language, and where he wrote his four poems in Estonian and translated a number of church songs. The conference is being organised, in a cooperative effort between Tallinn and Erfurt Universities, under the title *Paul Fleming, Reiner Brockmann und ihre Nachwirkungen: Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturkontakt im Baltikum* (the main organiser is Professor Mari Tarvas). In addition, various research papers will be published etc. A special recognition of the whole of Estonian literary science is the fact that on 3 August Kristi Viiding (University of Tartu) had the honour of opening the 14th Congress of the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies in Uppsala, by delivering her plenary paper. Although she did not directly tackle Brockmann, instead addressing poetry in Latin written in Estonia in the 17th century generally, it was research on Brockmann's poetry that provided the strongest impetus in the second half of the 1980s to properly study 17th century Estonian literature as a whole (mainly written in Latin and German). Now, 20 years later, an entire school of scholars has emerged from this impetus, working at the Department of Classical Philology at the University of Tartu. The work of the new generation has, in turn, added a new perspective to the treatment of Brockmann's poetry.

Why are *new* perspectives necessary? Brockmann's position in the history of Estonian literature is by no means unequivocal. His initiative is recognised, but his poetry has not yet been integrated into the aesthetic logic of the development of Estonian literature. On the one hand, this is because he was not Estonian, Estonian was not his mother tongue and his poetry is regarded as an artificial foreign effort; on the other hand, he lacked an Estonian audience whom his poetry could have influenced and inspired. It is difficult to see Brockmann as a clear link in a clear chain, which would make the research on his role in literary history so much easier.

However, if we widen the perspective and admit the complexity of earlier Estonian literary history, if we view Brockmann's Estonian poems in the context of his whole legacy, mostly in Latin and German with some Greek thrown in, and then place the legacy against the background of poetry during Brockmann's lifetime, then some fascinating light is cast on Estonian poems. Some factors connecting 17th century 'verse concoctions' with 19th century Estonian literature also appear.

Brockmann's education

The first knot to unravel if we wish to explain Brockmann's poetic legacy is his education. One of the typical features of 16th–17th poetry is its direct dependency on education. In today's literature, it is nearly always very difficult to guess what kind of education, if any, the author has. During the humanist period, on the other hand, the situation was totally different: education inevitably found expression in poetry.

Reiner Brockmann was born in northern Germany, in the town of Schwan (Duchy of Mecklenburg), the son of a pastor; he went to school in Rostock and Wismar and to a Hamburg secondary school.[2]

What was the basic principle of school education of that time? We could say (at least ideally) that it was moderation and providing people with a sense of moderation – the idea that the Italian humanists, influenced by the ancients, began emphasising again. Moderation took root in thinking, was realised in decision-making and was expressed in language, as well as in an ability to control body and soul. Curricula mainly contained subjects that were supposed to help people to shape their *inner* human character, consistently polish their sense of moderation, and develop an ability to make ethical decisions and acquire an appreciation of beauty: Latin and Greek, rhetoric, logic, poetry and history were taught. Mathematics, physics as a science about nature, metaphysics and theology also played a role. People learned to know and shape themselves according to clear ideals, which were mostly taken from antiquity. During secondary school, Greek and Roman culture became a natural part of every educated man's world of thinking, which then influenced people's daily decisions.

The focus of the curriculum was language, especially language through poetry: poetry is the moderation of language and its understanding. Writing poems in Latin, which required a great deal of time and attention, meant imitating ancient authors in a specially concentrated manner and, at the same time, undergoing an extreme polishing of one's own language, trying out various Latin metres and forms of stanza forms. Poetry was supposed to manifest the freedom of erudition and depth of education. The ideal of the ideal in this context was the Greek language combined with poetry, but writing poetry in Greek was not possible for everybody.

Brockmann's interest in Greek was evident quite early, when he was studying in Wismar. Even in his funeral sermon (1648), the deacon Andreas Sandhagen deemed it necessary to mention that it was in Wismar that Brockmann "successfully laid the foundation for his knowledge of Greek, both in prose

and in poetry." During his studies at Hamburg, Brockmann's mother and father died in the same year. At the death of his father, the 17-year-old wrote a poem in Greek, which unfortunately has not survived (as far as we know).

For a time, Brockmann studied theology at Rostock University. His achievements in Greek must have been excellent, because in 1633 he received an official invitation to take up the post of Professor of Greek at the Tallinn Gymnasium (founded in 1631).

We can only assume that his taste in poetry and his habit of writing poetry had already been established, although no work of that period has survived. A phenomenon called 'occasional poetry' had probably become second nature to him, although no one can quite say where occasional poetry ends and 'real' poetry begins. Occasional poetry is defined by its external qualities: it is written for pivotal events in people's life (e.g. baptisms, weddings, funerals, defending a thesis etc.) in order to create a festive atmosphere. It was especially popular in Western Europe throughout the period of humanism, and is sometimes cultivated today as well. It is, of course, impossible to guess how much of this kind of poetry was written with a wish to express 'real poetic qualities' which, however, failed to reach the desired depth.

Brockmann in Tallinn

Brockmann arrived in Tallinn at the end of May 1634, and stayed until the end of his short life. Besides the Greek language, his task at the Tallinn Gymnasium, where he worked for five years as a professor, was to teach history (he also taught this in Greek), Latin and theology. A year after his arrival, he married Dorothea Temm, the daughter of the St Nicholas Church pastor. As a superb linguist, Brockmann immediately took an interest in the Estonian language, going to church to listen to sermons in Estonian. Three years later, he was already able to produce prose translations of hymns, and also write poetry, in Estonian.

The literary life in Tallinn centred around the professors at the gymnasium.[3] This might have been due to habit or the inspiring impact of the poetry-loving environment. In any case, the Tallinn Gymnasium publications soon began publishing Brockmann's poems, not only in Latin but also in German, the latter poems being quite a bit longer.

German-language poems in the prevailing academic Latin-language environment were by no means an obvious choice and show Brockmann as a scholar of the new era. The explosive increase in writing German-language poetry in the first half of the 17th century is usually associated with the influence of Martin Opitz (1597–1639). The success of his practical poetry manual *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* (1624), and the impact on both contemporary and later German poetry, is truly amazing (the manual was reprinted nine times during Brockmann's lifetime alone).

It is doubtful whether Opitz's booklet would have found such acclaim if it had not corresponded to deeper tendencies in German educational life, characterised by Wolfgang Ratke's (Ratichius, 1571–1635) innovative reform plans, which aimed to make schools change to German-language teaching, i.e. to use the mother tongue. Ratke emphasised his continuity with Martin Luther's ideas: just as understanding the deepest religious truths required use of the mother tongue, so education as a whole had to be available to all.

Brockmann and Fleming

Brockmann's splendid alexandrines, in which the German sounds like music, provide some proof that he already knew Opitz's poetic rules before coming to Tallinn, and that they suited his views and his talent.

Another fact was certainly no less influential: from January 1635 to April 1636 the greatest contemporary German poet, Paul Fleming (1609–1640), stayed in Tallinn. He was there in connection with the Oriental travels of Friedrich III, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, and his entourage, to which Fleming belonged. Brockmann and Fleming, who were the same age, shared the same interests, and were fascinated by Opitz, became close friends. A group of friends formed a 'shepherds' society', as was fashionable at the time, undertaking joint trips into nature, and organising parties with music and poetry. Fleming saw this period as the happiest in his life, and the same might well have been true for Brockmann, although it was not the most productive time for him. For Brockmann's wedding in 1635, Fleming composed one of his longest works of poetry, in fact a whole book, where the poems are set in a short story-like narrative form.

First poems in Estonian

The trend towards use of the mother tongue inevitably led to attempts to write verse in Estonian, although there was no hope of having the public enjoy them in the near future. This was obvious from contemporary descriptions about the dismal conditions in which Estonian peasants lived, as well as in Brockmann's own correspondence, published in his *Works* (see footnote 1). Hymns had been translated into Estonian before, even during the Catholic period, but there had been no poetry before Brockmann based on the human dimension in the here and now. The scholarly anthology by Villem Alttoa and Aino Valmet, *Occasional Estonian poetry in the 17th century and early 18th century* (see footnote 1) shows that if Brockmann had not started writing, someone else would have done it at more or less the same time – the gaps between new Estonian-language poems and authors (a total of 18 at the time) are that small.[4]

Brockmann's wedding song *Carmen Alexandrinum Esthonicum* is a sublime start to an author's poetry. It is addressed to the bridegroom, who in his piety and patience has earned his reward, marital bliss. The supple alexandrines of the first verse directly refer to the First Psalm in the Bible, which begins: *Blessed is the Man ….* Brockmann varied this to: *How blessed is the man who relies on the Father / (who is fully settled) and waits for happiness ….* The genuine piety of the first stanza leads unambiguously to the marital bed in the last stanza: *Go and play then, it will soon be seen,/ what your playing has achieved in the night*.

Brockmann's first poem brilliantly captures the natural melody of the Estonian spoken language, whereas the next secular wedding song with the Latin title *Oda Esthonica Jambico-Trochaica* (*Estonian-language iambic-trochaic ode*, 1638) is fully folkloristic.

It must be said that Brockmann certainly realised his Estonian poetry manifesto, which he published after *Carmen Alexandrinum Esthonicum* in the same wedding booklet in 1637: *Andre mögn ein anders treiben;/ Ich hab wollen Esthnisch schreiben./ Ehstnisch redet man im Lande/ Esthnisch redet man am Strande/ Esthnisch redt man in der Mauren/ Esthnisch reden auch die Bauren/ Ehstnisch reden Edelleute/ Die Gelährten gleichfals heute./ Esthnisch reden auch die Damen/ Esthnisch, die*

auß Teutschland kamen./ Esthnisch reden jung' und alte./ Sieh/ was man von Esthnisch halte?/ Esthnisch man in Kirchen höret/ Da GOtt selber Esthnisch lehret./ Auch die klugen Pierinnen/ Jetz das Esthnisch lieb gewinnen./ Ich hab wollen Esthnisch schreiben;/ Andre mögn ein anders treiben.

Brockmann in Kadrina

In 1639 Brockmann abandoned his professorial position in Tallinn and moved to Kadrina (*Tristfer*) where he became a pastor. He had been repeatedly invited to take up this post. As seen in the surviving correspondence, his workload increased and his duties changed, but his prolific poetry-writing did not diminish. He seemed to focus on translating hymns, 23 of which were published posthumously in 1656.

It is not known what caused Brockmann to fall ill in November 1647, but the illness resulted in his death on 29 November.

In conclusion, Reiner Brockmann's legacy is not bulky (a total of 47 poems in four languages), but it has timeless significance. We could write the history of German poetry largely on the basis of Martin Opitz's influence on authors[5], and thanks to Brockmann this history also includes poetry in Estonian, an influence that lasted even into the 20th century. It is unlikely that even an educated Estonian could have produced better verses than Brockmann at that period, and we have to agree with Cornelius Hasselblatt: "Literature is written with ink and not with blood".[6]

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[1] Reiner Brockmann, *Teosed.* (Works) Edited and compiled by Endel Priidel (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2000), 93–94. All of Brockmann's Estonian-language poems have been academically edited before: Villem Alttoa, Aino Valmet, *17. sajandi ja 18. sajandi alguse eestikeelne juhuluule* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1973), 23–30. "Carmen Alexandrinum Esthonicum" appeared in contemporary language in the first part of the anthology *Sõnarine* (compiled by Karl Muru) (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1989), 11–12.

[2] The most precise and concentrated Brockmann biography so far is in Martin Klöker's lexicon article: Carola L. Gottzmann, Petra Hörner (eds.), *Lexikon der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Baltikums und St. Petersburgs: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Bd. 1 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 298–303.

[3] A thorough overview of this period is offered by Martin Klöker's fundamental monograph *Literarisches Leben in Reval in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts (1600–1657): Institutionen der Gelehrsamkeit und Genese städtischer Gelegenheitsdichtung*, Bd. I–II. (Frühe Neuzeit, Bd. 112.) Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005 (over 1400 pages).

[4] The most comprehensive overview – both theoretically and statistically – of the conditions under which Estonian occasional poetry in various languages was born, as well as of different interpretations and poetic principles, is available in Kristi Viiding's article "The literary background of early Estonian secular writing: the current situation and future perspectives in research." In: Kristiina Ross, Pēteris Vanags (eds.), *Common Roots of the Latvian and Estonian Literary Languages* (Frankfurt/M. *et al.*: Peter Lang, 2008), 147–163.

[5] See Klaus Garber, *Martin Opitz – „der Vater der deutschen Dichtung": Eine kritische Studie zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Germanistik.* Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1976.

[6] Quoted from an interview with Cornelius Hasselblatt: Kalev Kesküla, "Literature from the same planet." – *Estonian Literary Magazine* (spring 2007), 29.

22

Teet

Works and adventures

by Peeter Sauter

I am visiting Teet Kallas at his home in Laulasmaa, where he has planted no less than 652 different varieties of tulips in his garden.

"I dare say I have killed off a few," says Teet squinting in the smoke of a Camel cigarette and staring at the tulips.

"Really? How?"

"Fertilisers."

"Do you go hunting for new bulbs at tulip markets?"

"Never. I get them by post. I used to order them from Holland. Now I prefer Latvia. Their bulbs are more used to our weather."

At first we sit inside, slurping the coffee made by Alla Kallas, and for a long time I am at a loss, as I clearly see that Teet is itching to go somewhere. He had mentioned the shooting of another soap series where he is the scriptwriter but that was on Sunday. Then I notice his restless hands and finally it dawns on me.

"You are dying to have a smoke, shall we go to the balcony?"

"Yes, let's go." Strange that he did not say so himself before. He is now lighting one Camel after another: "The doctors suggested I not quit. I've been smoking for ages. My health is not that good. If I suddenly quit, who knows what might happen."

Teet Kallas's acclaimed novel *Jingle* was recently reprinted.

"Teet, *Jingle* came out again. Has there been any reaction yet?"

"It seems the publishers' hopes for large sales were all in vain; the books are gathering dust."

"The Writers' Union chairman, and some critics said it was one of the best books in the Estonian language ever. A cult novel, no less."

"The joy of rediscovery for some, perhaps. I was in Pärnu last autumn, at a show-off conference of our capitalist fat cats. They invite one writer or another to glamorize the atmosphere. My books sold like hot cakes. Somebody bought one, and the others had no choice but to follow suit. True, half the men said: "This is for my wife."

"So they wouldn't have to read it …"

Kallas laughs: "My poor hand was worn out from all those autographs. I usually do not attend that kind of shit, but Pärnu was actually great fun."

Kallas

of younger years

Teet Kallas (Photo by Scanpix)

"What was your paper about, what did you tell them?"

"What's there to tell? I talked about the times at the end of the sixties, seventies. Well, you know, the KGB and the rest of it. I think they listened pretty keenly. Successful gentlemen or those pretending to be successful. I saw their cars parked in front of the house. The crisis was about to hit and everybody was talking about saving and economising, but I had never seen so many Ferraris before."

"People in wealthy countries like Norway often drive round in total wrecks, but not here. I just met an Australian girl who was really amazed at what she saw – in Australia you drive a car until it falls to pieces, but in Estonia everybody stuffs his arse into a brand new model."

"We just have to go through this phase, I suppose. Some drivers shouldn't be allowed to drive at all. I, for example, do not drive. There's a man who comes here every year, a Ukrainian builder. He seems to have a problem with me not having a car. Six months before he had asked about it, but he forgot. I explained that I take trams and trolley buses, where I can listen to what people talk about. He was fine with that – indeed, he once used public transport himself, and it was interesting to him. I'd say that about half of the writers do not own a car.

During the Soviet era, I did have a vague plan, thought that perhaps I should get one. The Writers' Union distributed permits to buy cars, and I even had the money. But I kept

Teet Kallas (Photo by Scanpix)

postponing it – ha-ha – and gave my permit to others. I was then the secretary at the Writers' Union. I got driven around in the cars I gave away. Once to Viljandi, when they staged my only play there. In winter. We threw a party for the actors. It was a trivial play, *Four Conversations About Love*, actually suitable for a TV programme."

"Why haven't you written more plays? Your dialogue flows beautifully."

"No idea really; I just don't want to. I actually almost went there, you know, an amateur actor, was even invited to join a professional theatre. So I've seen this stuff from the inside. At first everything seemed big and holy and exciting. I got small bits in television and films. Still at school then. But then there was military service, and problems at school. I was not allowed to sit the final exams. I was drunk and there was some political misunderstanding as well. Had to repeat a class because of Lenin. Allegedly I had misbehaved at a meeting dedicated to Lenin. I fell out totally with the class teacher. I was dragged from class to class, because I edited the school almanac, and it had to appear. I wanted to be transferred to evening school. Got badgered for smoking all the time, dreadful nuisance, got fed up. Besides, I was earning my own living, through journalism and other such stuff."

"The famous *Tale of the Tall* was published when you were in school?"

"Yes, it was written in secondary school. And was supposed to be published as my first book. However, because of my pranks and hooliganism the plan was scrapped. It appeared in the magazine *Noorus* (Youth) in autumn 1962. I read the first instalments in Estonia,

but the second part was sent to me to the Russian army, where I had been packed off to. A book would, of course, have been more effective, but it did not do that badly in the mag either. At some later point I went through it again and threw out the most naïve bits. I retained the feeling but the insufferably silly I cut out."

"What about *Horses under the Rainbow*?"

"That was written in the army. I called them short stories, but some thought it was a novel. I didn't think I would ever bother with novels. And now it turns out I have written the thickest of them."

"You were quite a literary Wunderkind. Did this perhaps cause some psychological effects which led to rebellious acts, drinking and mischief?"

"Well, I was spinning pretty fast, and the army was the obvious solution."

"Spinning? You mean you felt almighty, life was jolly, and the girls…"

"No. That ended rather quickly. I have been very lucky. Sometimes you do get too big for your boots, but then something always happens. I was relieved when I went into the army and left all that behind."

"Let's look at the work of your younger years, chronologically. Tell me what you like or what you don't, and what you feel about them now."

"How many books are there actually? 25?"

"I found 23 on the Internet, but it does not list everything. The first, *So Much Sunshine*, was published in 1964."

"The first book was obviously quite important to me. It had a story called *Toivo Võrk, a Young Communist*, and Alla chucked it out when she translated the book. Said it was too red. The story had a real prototype in the midst of his Komsomol career. It is the only story of that type I have written. We all have had a few, if you look around. Even Jaan Kross. The first book together with the communist Alma Vaarmann – a history of the Estonian workers' theatre. Laaban wrote an ode to Stalin when he was young. He claimed he had meant it as a parody, although nobody noticed that. I was fascinated with the events of 1918, but I have never written about them. Won't either."

"Still, you have now written the first part of your novel trilogy about life in 1969, a complicated period in your life, and you had to do some research for that, right?"

"No. I had notes, written since 1968."

"The next book is *The Strange Light of Avenues*."

"My first collection of short stories. Uneven. Showed possibilities, trends. The first science fiction stories. A few adequate stories, and some in fact rather good that I am not ashamed of even today."

"I have the feeling that your short prose is sounder than your novels, more compact. I really enjoyed *Arvi's Fireplace*, and that story about an August hurricane."

"For a while I had the same feeling. Some stories travel around the world quite successfully. I once found on the Internet – someone in America put together a PhD thesis on *Yearning for the Storm*, a story written in the third person singular. He put me in excellent company, Kafka and the like. The most travelled story is *Back to the Rocks*. I prefer *The Meeting,* that strange story; eight attempts have been made to turn it into a film, but something always goes wrong."

"Exactly. I was recently supposed to produce the script, but I got greedy and in the end they could not afford to pay me."

"The Ukrainians were keen on it too. A studio in Kiev."

"The next was *A Bloody Pillow* in 1971?"

"Well, that was a jolly one to do. Two stories were immediately chucked out, and one I removed myself. It is still unpublished. I had quite forgotten about it. Descriptions of a lunatic asylum. When it came out, shrinks who knew nothing about me wanted to meet me – apparently I had been spot-on in my description."

"The fourth book – *Shadows on a Rainbow.* Three stories for young adults."

"What to say? I was young when I wrote that, part schoolboy, part soldier."

"I read them when I was young too. Powerful stuff. Can't produce that kind of thing in old age; youth is an asset."

"Naïve stories, but with a certain feeling, hopeful."

"The next was *Jingle*, which we've already mentioned, and then *The Last Murder*."

"I bumped into a friend after the latter came

out, and he said: 'I expected something much better after *Jingle*.'" (Laughs.) You shouldn't actually write similar things one after the other, and *Murder* has several decent stories. I didn't want to get stuck in one type of writing."

"Stories of *Evening Light*?"

"I remember there was some kind of hullabaloo around it."

"The Case of Engineer Paberit?"

Kallas chuckles at length: "Yes, well. It was *Paberit* that had the loony-bin tales, and not the *Bloody Pillow*. Paberit had a most vital prototype all right. I wrote another story about him as well, and may write a third before I die. The other story was *The President's Visit,* where a man turns up and offers his services as president. He has done thorough research on it, all recorded in a thick notebook – decides he would make the best president. This hasn't been published in a book. I haven't bothered with short story collections for some time. The prototype is mostly a perfectly normal man, but occasionally sinks into a manic state. His name, by the way, is Enn. His wife is sensible. Before the last presidential elections, Enn produced a homepage, with a list of events and Enn's fantasy is that he will celebrate his 65th birthday in his own garden, with a male choir, and then he indeed becomes president. He is a bit vain too. From time to time, he tells me what he has done, hoping I will write another story about him."

"Corrida?"

"Corrida was written purely for money. Just like Balzac did. I had borrowed heavily to buy a summer cottage. Had to pay it back the following year. It was ten thousand roubles and I had paid only one. I wrote for the novel competition, hoping to get some sort of an award, and then it would be published too."

"Did you manage to pay off your summer cottage?"

"More or less. The award wasn't that much – three thousand. But the book in those days fetched over ten grand."

"Was Oskar Kruus Rass's prototype?"

"No, he wasn't. Kruus decided he was, all by himself. I could not care less. He made a big thing out of this non-existent prototype business and said he had to put up with it, as the character was positive. I had no prototypes whatsoever. Except the bulls.

Still, the dramatic happenings connected with the novel *Niguliste,* involving the KGB, are perhaps more of interest here. When I was arrested, they took the manuscript too. Of course I only had it in one copy, the way manuscripts were then. It was on my desk and the Russian KGB men took it, just in case. When I got out, I did not get the manuscript back for quite some time. Years later, a KGB officer, also a writer, brought me a sheet of paper from his office, and I put it at the end of the book. It was the certificate issued by the main censor, a former boxer named Adams, written by someone else. Only one sentence – '*Niguliste* is not anti-Soviet after all.' I am grateful to Adams to this day. I was arrested in 1969 and got out in 1970, without much fuss. Once I shouted in the Gloria restaurant – Down with the Soviet power! Nothing happened. But they had great plans for me …"

"Wanted to turn you into a KGB stool pigeon?"

"No. I think it was an attempt to set an example. It was a confusing time. The thaw was over, although they did not quite resort to violence either. Threatened politely. I was even offered the services of an interpreter – I refused. I had been watched for a year – I worked then at the *Looming* magazine."

"You didn't realise you were being watched?"

"I was so naive. I even had no idea what the letters KGB stood for. They showed me pictures where I was talking with various people. I'm sure they thought they had found the right guy. Writers' House was an easy place to keep an eye on someone; there were always lots of suspicious people hanging about. A smart move on the part of the security people – to have non-Estonian speakers follow the cultural people – what on earth can you expect from this sort of thing!

For example, my employment certificate listed both *Looming* and *Loomingu raamatukogu* [Library of Looming magazine – a small publisher of good-quality literature, still going strong - Ed], as they were a joint publishing company. And then the same Colonel Podkov asked me whether I was materially responsible for anything. I could not understand this – what material responsibility? 'But what about *Loomingu raamatukogu*!' he said triumphantly."

"Oh right – Teet Kallas is responsible for a whole lot of books!"

"Exactly. What a relief when I heard that. I realised the level of that interrogation. My hands were slightly shaking. After all, I hadn't known how serious this could become. When I shouted the sentence in Gloria restaurant, I was taken to the militia station. The boys there were worried, thought this could have grave consequences. Then they said they would go and find out who was the public prosecutor that day. It turned out the prosecutor was a young woman, actually a friend of my girlfriend long ago. She was terribly flustered, said she would fine me ten roubles and I should pay it at once. I said I would, but wondered whether things would become nasty afterwards. She said they might. About a month later, I read in the paper that the chief prosecutor complained about some punishments being too lenient. The prosecutor, the girl, phoned me thirty years later and said she had been raked over the coals because she had not started criminal proceedings.

On 10 October 1969 I went to work – and strange things happened. I saw a white Volga car moving towards me against the traffic. Next, at a street corner I was suddenly surrounded by three thugs. Very polite, although that was the last time I was addressed as Comrade. Eight men searched my flat, and all spoke Russian only. They got quite excited when they found a collection of short stories by Juri Kazakov, with the author's dedication to me. I also had some posters by an American artist that revealed the evils of capitalism. Among them there was a picture of a naked woman. The comrades giggled like teenagers!

However, after a while they phoned for a specialist, who immediately found what they were looking for: various letters from 'unsuitable' persons, political epigrams I had written at the age of twelve, caricatures of the great Soviet leaders etc.

I was made to understand that if I behaved properly, I might get off lightly. But I did not behave properly; I did what I needed to do.

Paul Kuusberg at the Writers' Union tried to protect me. He did not sack me from *Looming* magazine. When I was released after a year or so, from a lunatic asylum, Kuusberg advised me to leave *Looming* of my own free will, for health reasons or something. So my record was clean.

Then I freelanced for 17 years, didn't even try to find a job."

"Did you manage to get by?"

"The first years were pretty difficult. Still, my Russian colleagues said that after their release from prison they could not get anything published for ten years and had to earn their daily bread with translation work, whereas I had a short story published in Estonia almost at once."

"You had been to the loony bin once before, hadn't you? Of your own free will."

"Yes, I had a little rest there after one particularly difficult summer. It was connected with some sort of paranormal phenomena and the world beyond, but I won't bore you with all that. I was never officially diagnosed."

"Were the paranormal ideas useful in the novel *Jingle*?"

"No. It's an ordinary science-fiction book."

"Would you say that *Jingle* is your magnum opus?"

"No way. I don't have a magnum opus. The most successful seems to be *Corrida*. I think it has been translated into 5-6 languages."

"You wrote that in a few months, and it won an award?"

"The first place award was not given; *Corrida* got the second place award."

Kallas continues at length with the adventures of his younger years, which I manage to wrench out of him. How he proposed to Alla in a café, the first time he set eyes on her, and how the marriage has survived for decades. And how the tiger in the Tallinn Zoo bit off his finger and how several Russian writers produced short stories based on this incident, although he himself didn't.

Kallas shows me his little studio house in the garden. Very cosy. Both for churning out the next soap series, as well as for working on his novel trilogy. When I finally take my leave, Kallas stops at the gate. He seems to be contemplating what he has so carelessly told me, and how I might use the material, but then he shrugs, lights the next Camel and says: "Oh well, you do what you want with this. I don't give a damn."

Poems by a

Man of Many Trades

by Ene-Reet Soovik

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever," John Keats once wrote. There is a beautiful bilingual book that strives to make some things, if not last forever, at least vanish less quickly. The book gives voice to representatives of Estonia's endangered species. What makes it unique is that these species – both animals and plants – are not objectified, listed and described from an external point of view, but have been attributed consciousness of their fates, which they share with the reader, speaking in the first person. These rare inhabitants of the nature of this country tell us about their past and disclose their fears for the future; often they reflect on disappearing habitats, yet occasionally also express the hope of surviving side by side with humans. Lending a voice to those without power of speech is rare, and it is by no means the only unusual thing about the book. This amply illustrated work, published on handmade paper, is born out of a rare cooperation, being the fruit of an international cultural project and joining the efforts of people from the American Embassy in Estonia, the Ukrainian community in Estonia and an Estonian poet. Its English-language title is *The Poetics of Estonia's Endangered Species* (*Poeetiline punane raamat*, 2007) and it is written in verse. The author of the brief and suggestive lines is Timo Maran, a member of the Erakkond circle of poets, who has published two other collections of poetry – *Ground Water* (*Põhjavesi*, 2001) and *Turning to the Forest* (*Metsa pööramine*, 2007).

While *The Poetics* merges different art forms and unites the skills of people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, Timo Maran's activities demonstrate a similar blend of different fields, for he is indeed a man of many trades. Besides being a poet, he is also a biologist by training and a semiotician by vocation. As a scholar, he is a mimicry specialist – his doctoral dissertation discussed this phenomenon of deceptive similarity from the point of view of the semiotics of communication. His research may seem to lead towards theoretical abstractions, yet he is no stranger to Estonia's wild fields and woods – his knowledge and experience of the local wildlife informs his poetry. He has also been involved in film-making (itself a collective art), participating in the film projects of his father, Rein Maran, a renowned director of nature documentaries.

Critics who have written on Maran's poetry have mostly proceeded from the premise that his work is best appreciated within a tradition labelled 'nature poetry'. Indeed, nature writing and nature poetry are among the key words he mentions on his website (http://lepo.it.da.ut.ee/~timo_m/index.html). The tradition certainly has a venerable history in Estonian, from archaic folk songs, through the formulaic flowery meadows of the 19th century up to the 21st century, in which nature often stands side by side, or is intertwined, with markedly more technological landscapes and mindscapes. It seems to be taken for granted that Maran's poetry can be compared to the biology-aware writings of Jaan Kaplinski, probably the internationally best-known contemporary Estonian poet, and Tõnu Õnnepalu, who also writes under the pseudonym of Emil Tode and is one of the internationally best-known contemporary Estonian novelists, although he started off as a poet and continues to write poetry. It certainly makes sense to read Maran's poems in this light. However, the ease with which the tradition can be seen to accommodate his texts has made some reviewers wary. The critics who have wished to escape what they have perceived as facile labelling have ended up claiming the opposite, or rather erasing the absoluteness of the category. Thus, Maran undeniably appears to be a nature poet, but also more than that. And, as befits a semiotician, he is more than aware of the power of creating and blurring borders and categories. On the one hand, Timo Maran the scholar poses the direct question "Where do your borders lie?" as the title of an article on the semiotical ethics of nature. On the other hand, the persona of a poem from *Ground Water* warns the reader of the deceptiveness of water's clarity and prefers to adopt the guise of an amphibian, dwelling in two realms close to the bank and seeking simple truths – certainly not the One Truth.

Simplicity is another notion several readers of Maran's poetry have focussed on. The perceptive

critic and Maran's fellow semiotician Sven Vabar has offered a persuasive discussion of Maran's verse, raising questions to which he professes to have found no easy answers: Is the poetry so simple and clear as to make its ethically environmentalist point too obvious? Do you as a reader intellectually agree with the poems' messages, while remaining emotionally aloof, or do you feel empathy with their quiet spirituality? In short, is Timo a Mimicry Man who presents himself as a poet to mediate his world view, his respect for the living? Or is he a Poet in the romantic sense, inspired by Nature, with no conscious agenda in mind? Such critical discussions once again draw attention to the impossibility of categorising the poems, their occasional balancing on the thin line between broad generality and intimate introspection. It appears that, in principle, simple truths could be discovered in both of these.

Such an awareness of the instability of categorisations, seeing the world in a flux of change, often is stereotypically linked to what could be termed postmodernist

playfulness. And it is here that the poems really part company with the expectations one might have in terms of form and linguistic texture. For their formal side indeed is simple, often directly referential, evoking sensory experiences of natural environments in short lines, proceeding in a rhyme and metre that lend a certain protective structure to the poems, as if to assure the reader: “Look! We are poems! We are truly poem-like!” Also, these texts are anything but excessive, although, paradoxically, it is Artur Alliksaar, the Estonian master of playful linguistic excess par excellence, whom Maran has mentioned as a favourite poet and to whom he pays explicit homage in *Ground Water*.

The sensitive translations into English by Riina Kindlam emphasise the images – both visual and sound images – rather than the dialogue, with its formal traditions of versification. The small selection published here illustrates the qualities of waiting, anticipation, change and return, which are so characteristic of Maran’s poetic universe, the nooks and crannies of which give refuge to the furry bumblebee, tired at the end of its busy life, as well as the kingfisher, who also appears in *The Poetics of Estonia’s Endangered Species* and might be nearing extinction. In addition to manifesting itself in settings with tangibly sensory qualities, the universe has a marked temporal dimension, the past and future sliding into the present moment, caught in the particular frames of individual poems. The sections of space-time brought into focus by the lens of each text may be descriptive scenes that take the transparency of language for granted – such poems are more numerous in the earlier collection. Yet this predominantly traditional poetic world is seasoned throughout with indicators of other approaches, flotsam and jetsam that have seeped into the stream of poetry from other disciplines. The question of the sufficiency of verbal representation flashes by on the wings of the kingfisher, whose flight across the river’s surface makes the poet admit that for this there are no words. A conservationist’s Red Book of Endangered Species may be needed to read a human heart. In a twist of grammar, people become trees – the very title *Metsa pööramine* suddenly becomes ambiguous if interpreted from the point of view of grammatical terminology, for the Estonian words could also be translated as *Conjugation of the forest*.

So, once again the texts generated by Maran manifest themselves as meeting places of different modes of expression, and different disciplines and genres. While they tend to reflect a material world with a strong ethical and spiritual dimension, they are also contained in a material world of books as objects. In this day and age of virtual reality, in which poems can spring up and live out their ephemeral lives on computer screens, his books are beautiful as material objects. While the poems themselves may have begun on odd scraps of paper, they have been allotted space to breathe on pages that also contain illustrations – tiny pale grey insects, spiders and tadpoles, drawn by the poet’s sister Kärt, scuttle across the pages in *Ground Water*; and drawings of birds in black and white have been inserted into the cloth-bound *Turning to the Forest,* which was selected as one of the twenty five most beautiful books in Estonia for the year 2007. Maran has taken care to create aesthetic environments for his poems to dwell in, and it is the balance and harmony of the environment we dwell in, even if fragile and endangered, that his words set out to seek and protect.

From the collection:

Ground Water

Erakkond 2001

• • •

Your wings are
worn, let
me lift you,
bumblebee,
with the back of my hand.
The room is cool,
I'll place you on the
lampshade.
We cannot stop
the coming of winter
and fatigue
although we may try.
Let your departure then
be bright and
let me light
those worn senses
into molten wax
with the room's warmth
and honey from the comb,

so you may say farewell
to the fragrant wild thyme
in your language
of buzz.

The paleness of the early fall sun.
Rowanberries. Time
stops briefly – flows,
falls as the first leaf.
The nights are not very cold,
but in the evenings you can
still feel
the fragility
of the past.

Fly away then
swifts, fly high.
The insects left behind
will be snapped up by winter
nonetheless.

• • •

The light fades,
it's February.

It lasts but a moment –
I write
that the spruces are pale with frost
and a spry hare has left
tracks on the open snow.

and yesterday I dreamt
that seventeen cedar waxwings sat
in the rowan tree beyond Toome Hill

From the collection:

Turning to the Forest

Erakkond 2007

The river winds in spots,
as does life.
In other spots, it is clear all the way to the bottom,
and there is no question.
In places, the river churns fast,
this we remember well.
Sometimes it is sleepily peaceful,
some doze in fact.
Occasionally the river is sheltered beneath a lid of ice,
and the best is kept inside.
Occasionally it takes everything in its path,
then great deeds are accomplished.
Sometimes the kingfisher, like a blue jewel,
nests in its bank.
For this there are no words.

Turning to the Forest

i am a willow we are oaks
you are a spruce you are birches
she/he is a chestnut they are aspen

The Red Book (of endangered species)

I remind you
of myself. With a word.
At the very bottom of your memory bank
is your secret place,
a bright spot.

A sanctuary
for love.

I once looked
deep into the Red Book of your heart.
But there I was listed as:

Occasional.
Range unknown.

Translated from the Estonian by Riina Kindlam

Moonstruck

The First International Full Moon Poetry Festival

by Ilmar Lehtpere

„I've long dreamt of organising the poetry festival that I would like to be invited to. A poetry festival that would bring people together in some beautiful place in the countryside, a festival that would naturally unite poetry and song as one and would make Estonians conscious of the fact that by virtue of the existence of Estonian regilaul, we are not only an ancient nation of song, but an ancient nation of poetry as well." – Kristiina Ehin

Last year Kristiina Ehin, with the help of her parents, the well-known poets and translators Ly Seppel and Andres Ehin, turned her dream into reality and the 1st International Full Moon Poetry Festival (I Rahvusvaheline Täiskuu Luulefestival) was born. Twenty-four poets, singers and songwriters from Estonia and abroad, from as far away as the Shetland Islands to the west and Japan to the east, gathered at Luhtre Farm and Haimre Village Hall in Raplamaa county under a full moon from the 12th till the 16th of September in a communal celebration of poetry and song. Among them were such well-known figures as Sujata Bhatt, Viggo Madsen, Mathura, Lauri Sommer, Kauksi Ülle, Andres Ehin, Ly Seppel and Ban'ya Natsuishi, to name but a few. And of course Kristiina Ehin.

Folklore and tradition have always played a central role in Kristiina's very contemporary poetry. There is no contradiction in this. Kristiina's work reflects a strong sense of continuity, a holistic view of the world that treasures Estonia's ancient poetic and musical heritage, indeed folklore and tradtion in all its manifestatations, and incorporates them in the world we live in. She regards herself as heir to the tradition of Estonian *regilaul* singer-poets. The Popescu Prize judges, in awarding the most prestigious prize for poetry in translation in the English-speaking world to *The Drums of Silence*, Kristiina's first volume of poetry in

English translation, said that Kristiina's work is „at once shamanic, drawing on deep historical traditions, but at the same time extremely of the moment".

This merging of the traditional and the contemporary, and the melding of poetry, song and music, characterised the whole Full Moon Poetry Festival. The participants stayed at an old restored farm in Raplamaa. There they all started the day together with breakfast in the farm house and from there they set off every day on fascinating trips devised by Kristiina and her team. As the festival's English translator, I had the great pleasure of taking part as well.

One outing led to Sillaotsa Farm Museum, where the participants learnt about the process of traditional bread making, from grinding grain to the finished product. They baked bread themselves and later did some Estonian folk dancing. On another day the historian and folklorist Jüri Metssalu took the group on an unforgettable tour of old sacred sites – sacred trees, sacred stones, sacred hills. He spoke enthusiastically about these sites, about their significance and about the

need to respect and protect them. His listeners were visibly moved. On the following day the road led through Läänemaa to the sea. On the way Ly Seppel shared her poignant childhood memories of the Soviet occupation and the suffering it caused. These were just a few of the many very special moments shared by the festival participants.

The group very quickly bonded into a big family. Throughout the festival there was a lot of fun and laughter, a lot of spontaneous folk music, regilaul, and folk dancing. Although the poets and songwriters were all very individual, Kristiina and her parents had invited people who were fundmentally like-minded in their very separate ways and who supported the underlying principles of the festival. As the festival charter states, „Every festival guest brings along their own poetry together with its roots and branches“.

The first two full days culminated in poetry and song evenings for the general public at Haimre Village Hall on a stage set designed by Eliisa Ehin. This building is located near Luhtre Farm deep in the Estonian countryside far off the beaten track. And yet the hall was full to bursting – all the seats were taken, some people stood throughout, others sat on carpets laid out on the floor. They came from the surrounding countryside but many also drove for two hours from Tallinn or three hours from Tartu to be part of this remarkable event.

The evenings began with regilaul composed by Kristiina Ehin and sung by Kristiina and Dave Murphy. The poets were

introduced by Kristiina and 10 year-old Lõma□. The poets read from their work in their mother tongues and the readings by the poets from abroad were followed by Estonian translations made by Andres Ehin. The translations were read by Kristiina, Ly Seppel and Andres on the first evening and actress Maria Peterson and Andres on the second evening. There was a very broad spectrum of poetry offered, ranging from the work of the poets already mentioned, as well as Pär Hansson, Knuts Skujenieks, Martin Vabat, Patrick Cotter, Sayumi Kamakura and Katalin Szlukovényi to the irreverent humour of Contra, the sound poems of Peter Waugh, the songs of Lise Sinclair, Dave Murphy, Siiri Sisask and Jaak Johanson and the traditional singing of Meelika Hainsoo and Lauri Õunapuu. After the readings, everyone was invited to gather round a bonfire outside where the *regilaul* singing continued well after midnight. The poets then returned to Luhtre Farm where the music and conversation carried on into the wee hours. The poets from abroad were absolutely astonished that an audience would happily sit through more than four hours of poetry. They all agreed that such an event was impossible in their homelands.

On the final evening there was a reading for the poets at Luhtre Farm. As the readings for the general public had been translated only into Estonian, on the last evening English translations were read along with the originals, so that the poets could understand and appreciate each other's work. For those who didn't wish to read in English the translations were read by Sadie Murphy. Afterwards there was more folk dancing outside led by Kristiina, which then moved indoors and again lasted until the small hours, as no one wanted the festival to end. On the following morning there was a palpable air of sadness as everyone went their own way.

There was an organic unity about the Full Moon Poetry Festival with each activity, each event branching out naturally from the others like a tree, creating a living entity. Trees were a recurring motif on the excursions, and rightly so – trees are as firmly rooted in the Estonian soul as they are in the Estonian soil. The festival grew with Kristiina's nurturing like all of her work - rooted deep in the soil of her homeland, it grew spreading out, reaching for the sun and the magic of the full moon.

I asked some of the participants for their impressions six months after the festival and this is what they had to say:

Lise Sinclair (Shetland): Only six measured moons? But the memory of walking in the Estonian forest; the particular trees and people met; hearing the songs and the stories; the cranes from beneath the surface of the lake; music and dancing; the night dogs; haiku voices of Estonian and Japanese; and the absolute warmth of friendship, sauna, dark bread... all are now as immediate as the moon appears on Shetland and Estonia at the same time and we are joined by those silver threads, woven through the sky of a whole winter.

The festival is very special, the poets who are lucky to have met at that point in time and place, under the moon, have been given an Estonian gift.

Mathura (Estonia): For me the Full Moon Festival was one of the greatest literary events I have had the good fortune to be part of. By great I don't mean the festival's scale, which didn't appear to be anything out of the ordinary. I mean the precedent that the festival set – in a social context as well as for the participants individually. The Full Moon Festival confirms how fundamental it is to be together, come together before setting off on new personal creative journeys in discovering oneself and the world.

Pär Hansson (Sweden): Moments I will not forget from the festival:

When Lise from Fair Isle started to sing in the round chapel in Haapsalu and Dave, the Irishman, answered from the big church room, a small, almost silent song. The collective dancing in the yard of Luhtre farm on the last evening. All the singing at the dinner table, by the fire outside Haimre Village Hall, in the sauna and from the stage. I didn't know a word, but couldn't resist singing along. The bus trip to ancient and sacred places with Juri Metsalu. Some of the poems I brought back to Sweden for translation.

The festival gave me the opportunity to meet Estonian poets such as Mathura, Kristiina Ehin and Lauri Sommer. This April I will bring my writing students from Gotland folk high school to Estonia and Luhtre farm. We will come for education as well as pleasure, meet some of the poets and connect with our Estonian neighbours.

Lauri Sommer (Estonia): This festival bore the countenance of its creators, the Ehin family. Here was Kristiina's broad romanticism and quest for closeness to the land, Andres's surrealism and sharp humour and Ly's practical organization and maternal steadiness. Singers and poets were presented here for probably the first time in Estonia in more or less equal co-operative roles in which they melded together. The ground they share – poets' musicality and improvisation skills and musicians' feeling for text and ability to arrange words – should be developed and expanded to the advantage of both. The variety of participants led to many fresh exchanges of opinion.

Viggo Madsen (Denmark): The mere title is enlightened evidence: The First International Full Moon Poetry Festival!

Through all time two kinds of creatures have been connected with the Full Moon – werewolves and poets. And nobody really believes in werewolves anymore!

The actual event arranged by Kristiina Ehin, the Ehin family and others in Raplamaa was just as overwhelming as you can imagine. Just close your eyes and see:

23 poets from about 10 different countries all over the world, meeting, living together, exchanging poetry and thoughts, sightseeing in the beautiful countryside, two five-hour evenings of readings and music for an enthusiastic audience in a fully crowded theatre in a small village (which also includes an excellent library). Talk about wavelength! We were all on the same frequency!

It was marvelous to witness, to be part of! During those two evenings, to the best of my knowledge, we visited nearly every room in the house of poetry: the poem as next-door neighbour to song on the one hand, related to picture on the other, pure sound (leaning against silence), and as idea – just to give the range of the spectrum, from dada to rhyming, from figurative to abstract. Indeed, we covered it all.

And apropos singing: one of the greatest impacts of the whole festival is the Estonians' singing! In a living tradition we in Denmark lost a long time ago – if we ever even had it. I am thinking of those spontaneous chain-songs – a „cheer-leader" taking the first line, everybody repeating – which can go on for hours. In that sense all Estonians are poets. Singing poets. My respect!

Festival Charter

TÄISKUU FULL MOON POETRY FESTIVAL is an international gathering of poets under a full moon at an old farm in Raplamaa amid tall fir trees, a place far away from the tumult of the city. Here the twilight hour is kept, as is customary on Estonian farms. In the silence the ear can hear every rustle, the ear can even hear the inaudible, the eye perceive the invisible...

This, our first poetry festival, is very conscious of traditional culture. Our point of deparure is the knowledge that we are an ancient poetic nation whose treasury of folk song, indeed soul, is brimming with pure folk poetry. Only yesterday we lived in a world where the whole of nature was imbued with a soul and mythology was full of secret meaning to us. Something of this lives on within us to this very day. Creating poetry was not just some private, personal matter for Estonians, but a communal activity and shared joy of creation full of collective power.

Folklore and tradition speak to us even today. They haven't exhausted their significance. A way of life bowing to the cult of consumerism presents us again and again with new challenges. We have to learn again to hold together, preserve nature and use its gifts wisely.

Ancient wisdom is the wisdom of living roots – where we come from and where we are going. "We come from a land of underground birds and three-coloured dogs, but where are we going?"asks the poet Andres Ehin.

On full moon nights we are all a little moonstruck, a little mad. Then together we dare to ask the right questions that impel us to listen deeply to the answers, so deeply that we don't know if they come from the collective unconscious or from the bottom of our very own hearts. Or even if they are speaking to us about our past, present or future. Every festival guest brings along their own poetry together with its roots and branches.

This somewhat mad communal power at the time of the full moon will help us to hear the inaudible, see the invisible and say what can't be put into words.

Kristiina Ehin

Emapuhkus

Maternity Leave

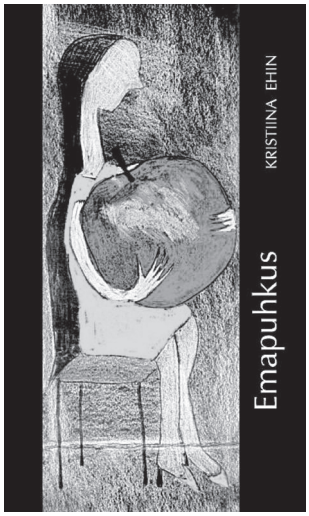
by Tiina Kirss

Tallinn: Pandekt, 2009, 107 (5) pp. Ill.

Cover illustration by the author;

illustrations Lemmi Kuulberg

photographs Ingmar Muusikus



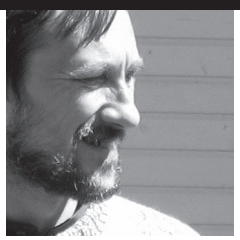
The inexactitude of translating the title of Kristiina Ehin's fifth poetry collection *Maternity Leave* is telling: in Estonian, the time period of two years after a child's birth during which a mother receives a (small) state salary is designated *emapuhkus* – literally 'mother-rest' or 'mother-vacation. Those who have known and lived together with young children nod knowingly at the oxymoron: The first two years of a child's life are no vacation, and not necessarily restful, particularly for the mother. Furthermore, only in the ideal does this state-sanctioned interval provide her a break from the workplace and from earning her bread: too often, a 'mother-salary' is not enough. Kristiina Ehin`s boldly worded and defiant title resists the bureaucratic flatness of the concept of *emapuhkus*: throughout the collection she restores colour and lyricism both to the word and the life season. Ehin's own two years with her little son did indeed allow her to draw breath, for poetry to flow, and for it to bump over real-world obstacles with the gracious help of words – the absence of places for children in a busy airport, the dream image of a bird harmed by an oilslick jarring with the peaceful glimpse of her sleeping infant. Most of the collection does not take the tone of reproach, nor does it fall into cooing, pink-and-blue sentiment. Ehin`s poetic motherhood may at times be a blatant sort of theme, at times understated, but throughout she celebrates her subject, fiercely, as is proper to poetry. In this collection, more than in her earlier ones, the personal becomes public, and locates the verge of the political: making a world habitable for children and other human beings must insist on a liveable environment, and provoke the caring to make it so.

Some Estonian readers may find that by making her motherhood thematic, Ehin defects from lyricism, reflecting squeamishness about explicit mention of a woman's body in the condition of motherhood, however traditionally honourable the role. The spectre of 'feminism' of whatever kind and feather remains a spook in Estonian public discourse, met most frequently with embarrassment, or a derisive laugh. But why not make mothering visible in full colour? Kristiina Ehin is in good company among Estonian women poets in this respect – Tiia Toomet, Katre Ligi, Kauksi Ülle, and the poet's own mother, Ly Seppel-Ehin, to mention a few, have also written poetry about motherhood – its humour, quick flickers of deep wisdom, as well as its ordinary, repetitive, and drab aspects. If the emphatic quality of her thematization of mothering extends slightly beyond the Estonian comfort zone, Ehin brushes fingers with women poets elsewhere in the world, such as Robin Morgan, Denise Levertov, Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Livesay, Marie Ponsot, Margaret Atwood – in their evocations of the mother-condition.

Kristiina Ehin's poetry is brewed from folklore, which continues to rouse her imagination. The depth and range of her knowledge points to her university studies, with an MA thesis in comparative folklore on feminist possibilities for the interpretation of Estonian folk poetry. Many of the best, most pungent poems in *Emapuhkus* are narrative, and paradoxically the images in these poems are brighter and more definite than in her more discursive free-verse poems in which the extraordinary is born or stands revealed from the peeled skin of the ordinary. Many of the poems breathe in the tempo of ritual, and draw on Finno-Ugric myths and folktales. There are bold accents, appropriations and reversals: processions of maidens in this collection (*Neiud kui me lähme haprad küünlakroonid peas*/Maidens when we go bearing fragile crowns of candles), on their way to a wedding or to feed the blue sea-cattle on the shore are passionate, not demure. In one of the early poems, the poet is taking off (instead of putting on) a white silk wedding dress – perhaps one she has never worn –, in order to shape-shift into a bright bird, the bearer of 'feathered humans' into the world.

Indeed, the spice and beauty of this collection comes in part from the fact that in becoming and singing 'mother', Kristiina Ehin is vitally attuned to the maiden and the crone. The voice of the older woman is emphatically present through family tradition, and she speaks in prose. As Ehin explains on the book's flyleaf, she has framed her own experience of mothering with excerpts from the written memoirs of women in her motherline, inserted in handwritten pages between groups of her own poems: aunts, great-aunts and great-grandmothers speak in their own voice and dialect, their names and birthdates embroidered on a blanket photographed on the facing page, growing ever denser in its web of references over the course of the collection. This maneuver is both deeply honouring as well as risky: quoting from memoirs is a subtle but real appropriation of others' speech – even when the speakers are 'close ones' – one's blood relatives and intimates. There is an implicit warning here to respect reticence when that may have been the speaker's wish – to be remembered quietly. Would it not have been enough to evoke the names on the blanket? Ehin shows her tact and does not trespass this often slender boundary: she refrains from „taking the voice" of the foremother deported to Siberia, or the one who buried a child who died of plague – and writes no poems in which she embodies another.

Emapuhkus is a book of exquisite visual design, rich in pattern and colour, a book to touch and treasure: in dire economic times, with a stiff sales tax on books, this is a book to own and give. As there is already one fine collection of Kristiina Ehin's poetry translated into English (*The Drums of Silence,* Oleander Press, 2007), it is to be hoped that this one will follow closely on its heels.



by Janika Kronberg

Short Outlines of Books by Estonian A

Jaan Kaplinski
Paralleele ja parallelisme
(Parallels and Parallelisms)
Tartu UP, Series: Contemporary Thought
2009, 275 pp.
ISBN 978-9949-29-040-9
ISSN 1736-3136.

The basis for this book is a somewhat expanded version of the lectures Jaan Kaplinski gave at Tartu University as Professor of the Liberal Arts in 2000-2001, with the overarching title *Thoughts about Languages and Cultures*. Appended to the 20 lectures is the previously published treatise *621*, which, reminiscent of Wittgenstein's treatise, contains that number of fragments, devoted to the discussion of similar themes.

Kaplinski is one of Estonia's most renowned and translated writers. He is first and foremost a poet, though he has never wanted to fit into a predetermined frame, and of late has even resisted being deemed a writer. Indeed, as a writer, aesthetics has never particularly interested him. He once wrote in one of his poems that the time has come for aesthetics to die. In one of the lectures in this series, mostly devoted to his own creative work, Kaplinski admits that in his own view he has already done his poetic deed. He has always been more interested in anthropology, astronomy, natural and exact sciences, and philosophy. The current book, written by the philosophical Kaplinski, reminds us that as far as his education is concerned, Kaplinski is a linguist above all.

As the author confirms in his introduction, he is not a producer of ready-made truths and thoughts, as these are abundantly available on the market these days. Kaplinski's primary preoccupation is with the ethical development of thinking, along the lines of the Finno-Ugric philosophy of life, which Oskar Loorits, classic Estonian scholar of folkloristics has summarized as follows: Live and let live. To the extent that Kaplinski, the child of a Pole (with Jewish roots) and an Estonian, avoids emphasizing or constructing a national identity, so he is also a stranger to drawing firm boundaries, formulating definitions so characteristic of Western philosophy, and to normativity of all kinds. Kaplinski stands sovereign both with respect to his own literary creations and his philosophical thinking, and it is this latter sovereignty that the book of lectures represents.

and Rutt Hinrikus

by

n Authors

Kapliinski takes language and culture as his point of departure, studying the ways thinking has been determined by them, calling into question some truths and concept of Western philosophy, among them the direct connection between thought and the language of sight. Through this Kaplinski's originality becomes apparent: he is a linguist who knows many different languages and cultures. Although the differences of worldview between finnougric and indogermanic languages was already discussed by Nietzsche, Kaplinski assembles support for that claim on the basis of rich and unusual pondering of evidence from the Finno-Ugric peoples to the Dravidians. Thus he makes distinctions between hierarchizing description and representation in philosophy, clearly signalling that he strongly prefers the latter. He illustrates the difference with a wealth of examples from Eastern thought and the Estonian language, and sees a significant similarity between them in approaches to thinking—in contrast to the abstraction characteristic particularly of Latin and Greek. Kaplinski refers to these opposing types of cultures as meditative and communicative, whereas the latter type steadily distantiates itself from nature and naturalness, moving more and more toward dogmatism and theories: „In meditative culture both philosophical and religious discourse tend to be groping and tentative. In philosophy, a clear distinction is made quite early on between a word and its meaning on the one hand and things on the other. If in communicative culture what dominates is philosophical realisms, belief in the isomorphism (one-to-one-correspondence) between things and words, in meditative cultures what comes to rule is nominalism, the belief that words are not the lords of reality, but rather guests—as articulated by the ancient Chinese thinker Zhuang-zi.

Jaan Kaplinski (Photo by Scanpix)

Finding more support for his claims among Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thinkers, alongside a few isolated Western thinkers (Nietzsche, Wittgenstein) and the rich linguistic material, Kaplinski clearly directs his critique at Western civilization, particularly in its modern condition. Among

the effects of the modernization of modes of thinking, he sees the violent adjustment of Estonian language to Western standards, and efforts to overcome national inferiority complexes from the starting point of B. L. Whorf's Standard Average European. Instead, Kaplinski wants to go back, to take his point of departure from the ancient and the unique, from what is natural and authentic, and in this he seems to have quite the right idea. Nevertheless, his critique is not an enraged one, nor is it even particularly polemical. These lectures, articulated in neutral argumentative mode have been delivered in a style of stoic peace and tolerance. *JK*

Memory literature

and Henn-Kaarel Hellat

Inimese tegemine I-V

(The Making of Man I-V)
Tallinn, Faatum, 2002-2008

In recent years, Estonian critics and the press have more than ever before been talking about a boom in memoirs. 'Memoir' has become a common term to mark a large variety of publications that share only one common feature – they all talk about somebody's life and this 'somebody' is usually a real person. Memoirs have become a flowering business, books are written about older local stars and starlets, as well as about artists in their full creative power, and some artists have successfully written their autobiographies.

Besides superficiality, we can find true gems among memoirs. Searching in a library catalogue among Estonian-language publications for the year 2008 by using the key words 'memoir' and 'life story', we get a list of a couple of hundred various titles. The list includes all kinds of memoirs and biographies, from voluminous books of memories written by scientists and public figures to picture books, modest efforts put together by amateurs, jubilee collections and a few scientific monographs – the number of the latter is, unfortunately, very small. In addition to life stories of 'famous and odd' people, produced by journalists, there are many memoirs and reminiscences penned by modest country or townspeople, who have followed the principle of relating their life stories as truthfully as possible.

Both the public and journalists have asked whether the number of publications is too large and the noble name of literature is being trampled into the mud. How should the past be written about? Whom do these books address? Which subjects do these books cover? And how should we group the authors of these books?

Mostly, the authors hope for a 'wide audience'. But memoirs undoubtedly offer more to those people who have had experiences similar to the author's, such as people of the same profession, or people who were deported to Siberia. Another group is formed of books written about the time when Mother/Grandmother was young, directed to children, but often more interesting for adults, such as Heljo Mänd's *Little Dandelions* or Leelo Tungal's comic and ironic books (*Comrade Child and Grownups*).

Comptroller General Hindrek Meri says in the introduction to his memoir *Reminiscences from a Rolling Freight Wagon* (*Tagasivaateid veerevast vagunist*) that middle-aged people, let alone young people, do not even think about writing down memories of their lives. *The whole idea of my present undertaking is to record for the next generations some images of the life of Estonians, starting with the pre-Second World War years.* The same wish has driven many other authors – physicians, scientists, specialists (Paul Ariste, Raimund Hagelberg and Hindrek Meri), soldiers, musicians, foresters, writers, Estonians living in Estonia

and abroad, religious people and exhibitionists, weirdos and moralists, etc.

The most popular books of memories and life stories are Mari Tarand's sensitively and skilfully written *Inside the Image of Time* (*Ajapildi sees*) (see ELM no 28) and Mihkel Raud's *Black Mud on Your Face* (*Musta pori näkku*). The latter has topped sales lists and has obviously fanned the flames under the kettle of memory literature. Raud has, for 30 years, played in different Estonian rock bands. His book is an honest and brutal, obscene and tragic image of its time. Many people mentioned in the book are well known to the reader, which adds to the public interest.

Mihkel Raud's book may be rivalled by Vladimir Wiedemann's *School of Mages: Estonian Occult Underground 1970-1980* (*Maagide kool: Eesti okultne underground 1970-1980*), but the characters of this book are unknown and the public interest is therefore much smaller.

Single books can be evaluated from several different aspects, but all together they create a substantial picture of the Estonia of the 20th century, especially of the period of Soviet occupation. Besides facts and images, the reader of memoirs of the Soviet time usually expects some kind of assessment of these years and activities. Sometimes, such an assessment is hidden, sometimes it is loudly voiced. Biographical experience is universal, but there is no universal answer to the challenges it poses.

Among the creators of a substantial picture of time, Henn-Kaarel Hellat's (1932) work of five volumes, *The Making of a Man*, is without doubt one of the best.

The meaningful title of the series is divided into five subtitles: I – *The Gluer of Thread* (*Niidiliimija*); II-III – *Boys' War 1-2* (*Poiste sõda 1-2*); IV – *I Gallop Far Away* (*Kappan kaugele*); and V – *In Temple and Tavern* (*Templis ja tavernis*).

The author examines himself as a case study, striving for impartiality. "This is not my true biography, although I have given the protagonist my own name. I am not ashamed to admit that my memory is quite bad. /—/ Trying to use a metaphor, I should say that these memories from far away decades are like pieces of thread, which I try to glue together into one long colourful thread, into a whole spool of thread. And as glue, I use fantasy, imagination."

The descriptions that fill the book are intense and exhaustive, including mentality and spirituality, and principles of childrearing, but also the environment of things from the past. The author is a child of an army officer, who remembers the spiritual milieu of his childhood years, the 1930s, as the period when the foundation was laid for the 'making of a man' of him. His mother had to make a choice between a career as a violinist and marriage; she chose marriage. Children were brought up according to strict principles, firmly based on work ethic, as the family did not want to pamper the children. The description of Hellat's home gives us a picture of a home of Estonian intellectuals in the 1930s, of a lost world.

The following two parts, titled *Boys' War*, examine the years during and after WWII. Hellat lost his father and brother in the war years, and the end of the war did not mean the end of awful times. The Soviet regime returned and the echoes of the war shaped the atmosphere of the period, accentuated by the fear of deportation in 1949 and endless work on a farm. The hope for his father's return was not realised; only his cousin, who had 'become red', i.e. an orthodox communist, came back.

Mihkel Raud (Photo by Scanpix)

The last part, *In Temple and Tavern*, is about the years 1954-64. Hellat entered the university, studied law, became disappointed in his choice, met many creative people, lived a stormy student's life, etc. He says, "The 'making of a man' of me was especially intense just during this period. A large number of masters of very different skills, mentalities and aims took pains to reach this goal /—/ I have to cope with the result."

The Making of a Man is Hellat's best work so far. It shows that biographical writing often opens hidden doors and memory brings out long lost treasures. The world that Hellat gradually and reflectively delves into, trying to describe his realisations as precisely as possible, is much different from the present one. Detailed and colourful memories are very often the best history lesson. *RH*

Elu täis üllatusi. Helga Nõu 75. Maale ja mõtteid 1956-2009

(Life Full of Surprises. Helga Nõu 75. Paintings and Thoughts 1956-2009)

There are not many writers who are equally successful in literature and in art. Among Estonian writers, the prolific prose author Toomas Vint is a well-known artist. The exile Estonian poet Arno Vihalem, who lived in Sweden, was a professional artist. A list of writers who are also amateur artists would be quite long.

Helga Nõu (1934), who lives in both Estonia and Sweden, has been actively painting since she gave up her job as a schoolteacher. *Life Full of Surprises* is dedicated to Helga Nõu's 75th birthday; its pages offer both her poems and her paintings. As a writer, Helga Nõu became familiar to the wider Estonian public probably only in 1990, when her novels *A Bad Boy (Paha poiss*) and *Tiger, Tiger* (*Tiiger, tiiger*) were reprinted in Estonia. Her name figured in newspapers earlier, when the writing couple Helga and Enn Nõu began participating in Estonian public life as soon as it became possible, at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. They have done a great job of bringing home Estonian literature that had been hidden for a long time. During the Soviet era, only a few had access to exile Estonian literature, which was carefully guarded by censors. Surprisingly, a harshly critical review of Helga Nõu's first novel, *A Cat Eats Grass* (*Kass sööb rohtu*) (1965), was published in the Soviet Estonian newspaper *Noorte Hääl*. Public criticism of the book, published by an exile writer in Sweden, which was prohibited at home and could not be sent here by mail, informed the public of the existence of the writer.

The Baltic Sea was surging behind my window
It could not be crossed
Stopped by the Iron Curtain
I cried in my new home
Behind my curtain,

recalls the writer in her book of surprises, which shows her from new and unexpected angles. This is a retrospective book that can, to a certain extent, be seen as a memoir.

Helga Nõu (Photo by Scanpix)

I was asked: do you remember
Do you still remember?
I saw myself in Pärnu
In the yard in Jalaka Street
Everything was gray and small
I was grown up
The chickens of my childhood
Had all long ago been made into soup

Nõu observes her life through words and images, verse and paintings. Even in short forms, she is often paradoxical, her best images are unexpected and full of thorns, and her poetic voice is restrained. Images and texts alternate in the pages of the book. Nõu's colourful paintings are in accord with the text: "Pictures express only isolated thoughts woven into the fabric of life, or into a sweater," writes Helga Nõu. The verbal reminiscences of this writer with a long career in teaching are often witty, perceptive, didactic and playful. The texts and images standing side by side sometimes relate to each other in an entirely unexpected way, sometimes in a more traditional mode. Helga Nõu as an artist is in no way inferior to Helga Nõu as a writer, but as an artist she is a surprise to her readers. *RH*

Olev Remsu.

Musketäride muutumised. Tartu romaan viieteistkümnes peatükis

(The Changing Musketeers.
A Novel about Tartu in Fifteen Chapters)
Tallinn, Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2008. 455 pp

Olev Remsu (1948) is a prolific writer. The baroque abundance and volume of his prose have now and then hindered the reception of his works. His book *The Haapsalu Tragedy* (*Haapsalu tragöödia*), or more precisely its first part, has so far received the most acclaim. It seems to me that *The Changing Musketeers* is more solid. Although the subtitle of the book suggests that this is a novel about Tartu, I would place it together with other Estonian school novels.

The number of canonical Estonian school novels is not large. This list opens with Oskar Luts's *Spring* (*Kevade*) (1912), with its archetypal characters, who have become a part of the Estonian identity. The second part of A. H. Tammsaare's monumental *Truth and Justice* (*Tõde ja Õigus*) (1929), actually a development story about the main hero Indrek, is also a colourful story of a colourful school. We should not forget Mati Unt's *Good Bye, Yellow Cat* (*Hüvasti, kollane kass*) (1963), written by a very young author when he was still in secondary school. In addition to the eternal problems of young people, this fresh book also contained plenty of signs of the upside-down Soviet period, which modern schoolboys would not even recognise.

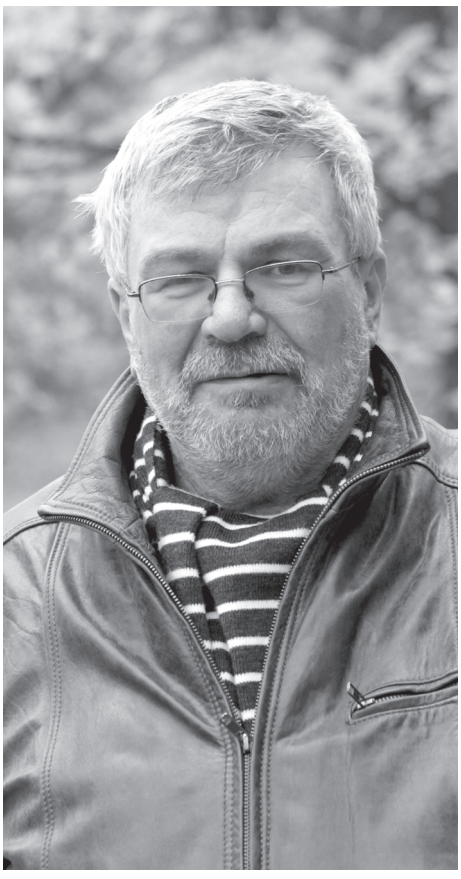
Jaan Kross' *The Wikman Boys* (*Wikmani poisid*) (1988), a novel about a class of boys in a Tallinn elite school and the spirit of the 1930s, has become a classic. It is a novel about the *bel epoque* of the Estonian Republic, which was violently disrupted and destroyed by the war. We should add some novels from the teacher's viewpoint: Karl Ristikivi's *The Garden* (*Rohtaed*) (1943) and particularly Mats Traat's *Pommer's Garden* (*Pommeri aed*) (1973). These teacher novels differ from other school novels in their bigger share of fictionality.

A characteristic feature of a school novel is the author's use of autobiographical subject matter, the umbilical cord of memories that connects the authors with their long lost school time. From the distance of time, they observe themselves and their friends from a new perspective. The writer's licence makes it possible to add fictional aspects and the whole picture with all its temporal relations is retrospectively revealed.

Remsu has (unconsciously?) modelled his school novel on the best representatives of the genre and he closely follows one year

in the lives of four friends – four musketeers – which is also the last school year of his protagonist.

The story of the protagonist Kolla, Nikolai Mjarg, is related from the third-person aspect; Kolla is observed from outside and carefully alienated from his creator by the voice of the narrator. A favourite book of the post-war generation, Alexander Dumas' *Three Musketeers,* was published in Estonian in 1957. According to Remsu's book, Kolla, a strong, robust and talented boy from the slums who is being reared by his mother, is Porthos in the game of musketeers. Another boy, Schultz, resembles the musketeers' Athos. Kolla, shaped according to autobiographical material, and Schultz, seen through Kolla's eyes, are living characters. The remaining two friends have names, but they are not brought fully to life, although they are quite dutifully talked about. The cast swirling past the reader is colourful, including many persons whom people living in Tartu can easily recognise. Out of politeness, Remsu has given them new names, but preserved their biographical details.



Olev Remsu (Photo by Scanpix)

Remsu, who usually takes liberties in his work, has in this book been quite true to reality, allowing only slight shifts in time. Compressing time, he brings forth characters who are easily recognised and events that actually took place during his own university years. The novel encompasses three main lines: Kolla's development, the life and tricks of the Soviet times, and the landscapes and moods of the town of Tartu.

Remsu describes Tartu very truthfully, using real place names, but often only mentioning them in passing to create a background for his characters. The greatest bonus that the book offers to its readers is the recording of the time and place, as Kolla, with his painful loves and joys and troubles of growing up to be a man, is quite an ordinary character. The images of school created by Oskar Luts or Jaan Kross are full of memorable friends, classmates and teachers, but Remsu's novel is much less crowded. He introduces some teachers too but, as characters, they remain rather superficial.

The book is an interesting read for Remsu's contemporaries and especially for people living in Tartu. Other readers may miss some of the joy of recognition. Remsu skilfully mixes fiction and true memories, and a character described as "the chief of the KGB with the name of a city" does not make it clear whether it is Comrade London or Comrade Pariis. A short and rather funny dictionary of words used at that time is added for those who had not yet been born then. At the same time, all this makes us wonder whether Remsu would not have done better by

choosing an openly autobiographical and documentary genre to create an even better image of those times. Or, contrary to this, maybe he should have gone even further and used even bolder fantasy. Everybody's school years can be described as a comedy or a tragedy. Remsu's novel offers us both, but comedy is still prevalent here. *RH*

The Diary of Karl Ristikivi 1957-1968

Tallinn:Varrak. 1012 pp.

The last decade has brought before the public a wealth of memoirs and diaries. Whether or not this is connected to a general surge of interest in all kinds of autobiographical materials (ego-documents), writers' diaries have moved to the centre of Estonian cultural space. Certainly this is an indication of the high degree of esteem in which writers and their creations continue to be held in Estonia, and a key factor in the way these texts signify. This is particularly true of the diary of Karl Ristikivi: everything that the author says, reveals or withholds contains some kind of truth about him as a writer.

For a long time, Karl Ristikivi's diaries have been a closely kept secret. In the second half of the 1930s, this son of a servant girl from Läänemaa became a literary star in Estonia. As far as we know, Ristikivi began keeping a diary quite late, around the time he was completing his university studies on the threshold of his 30th year. On 23 October 1941 he picked up a small notebook and wrote on the cover: literary diary.

Though it was started as a record of his literary reflections, the diary soon turns autobiographical, and is interrupted in January 1944, when the writer flees to Finland. He continues on to Sweden in September of the same year. After a long period of depression, during which his best friend marries and his first novels written in exile are met with accusations and reproaches, he resumes his diary on 1 August 1957. The opening lines of the diary are ordinary—even perhaps too ordinary: a self-introduction, but addressed to whom?

1.8. 57—Thursday.

It is a very ordinary day, this day on which I begin my diary. I do not know which attempt this is, nor whether I will get farther with it this time than I did the previous times. But now I have decided to keep it for 10 years. Thus it would replace the newspaper clippings—which I am now finished with—after 10 years of work.

And so, for starters, my coordinates. I am 44 years old and work in the Solna health insurance office/—/This is located diagonally across the street at Rasundavägen 100, and I am sitting under the window.

As is often true of diaries, Ristikivi's does not contain the information one would expect, nor does it reveal great secrets. Rather, it corresponds to all the characteristics of the canonical diary: it is monotonous, full of repetitive openings, memory fragments, returns to the same themes. It is unexpectedly circumstantial while also unexpectedly private—a very human document in its moving helplessness. Nevertheless, it is very deliberately written as the diary of a writer, a public figure who belongs to the public sphere. While concealing everything that is deeply personal, information is periodically divulged about conditions surrounding writing, including the writer's health. The author knows that the diary is a personal document, but he also knows that one day it will be found and read. Otherwise, why would it be composed so

thoughtfully? The writer notes the dates and ceremonies that are important to him, and emphasizes the way he recollects the past. He heals past trauma through scriptotherapy, sometimes dramatizing the past in order finally to be freed from it. Daily writing allows him to lighten his heart, and helps him begin writing again. The first-person narrator of Ristikivi's last work, *Rooma päevik* (Roman Diary) refers to his diary as a hermit's monologue. Ristikivi interrupts the fictive monologue of *Roman Diary* in mid-sentence. Ristikivi's own writer's diary, however, resembles a secret drawer. The writer does not hold out the key to the reader, but hands him a secret message directing him to the next hiding place, where yet another secret message awaits him.

In many famous diaries self-examination is prevalent: the writer seizes the opportunity to know himself or herself in such a fashion as only God could know their inner self—to know themselves truthfully, thoroughly and from the inside. In his diary Ristikivi is free of all pride, but he never takes himself apart completely: God knows him anyway, and we can only guess that besides himself he has written the diary for a reader, whom Ristikivi trusts, yet from whom he also hides a great deal.

He complains to his diary about all those things that he never complains about to his friends in real life, yet even here he chooses what exactly to confide, and what to conceal. The main themes of the diary are the writer's state of mind, his hopes and fears, creative plans and progress reports about his books, failures to cross the language barrier, events of the past and anniversaries of significant events, in addition to impressions from his travels and miscellaneous circumstantial information.

The diary is often the only reliable place to talk about depression. Along with this, the diary is often filled with anxieties of being different. Self-examination is often accompanied by the feeling that others see him as something strange. Repeatedly he confesses his fears:

I am afraid of people, afraid of illness, afraid of accidents. And unfortunately this is not without reason (12.10.57)

When day dawns and with the coming of the lighter season of the year, these existential fears recede and Ristikivi exerts himself to find a topic that would attract

him enough to be able to start writing again. Often the greatest obstacle is not so much the present with its everyday fears and routine, but images from the past that continue to make themselves felt. Just as the writing of history is a dialogue between the present and the past, so also is a diary. *Sixteen years ago I left Estonia. I had no real place there, neither do I have one here*.“ (26.11.59)

Along with isolated images from the past and coded messages, the diary presents quite a thorough chronicle of creative work, both works in progress and those Ristikivi actually wrote. In addition to brief notations, there is much material about the many books he plans to write—drafts of outlines, choices, gathering source material, and the process of writing.

As Ristikivi finds his writing rhythm, his depression subsides, and the diary entries increasingly become reports of how his writing is progressing: information not only about his choice of topics but about how he writes. Ristikivi's creativity is lively, yet there is the perpetual question of finding a new form. For example, in the diary Ristikivi does not reveal the entire design of his series of historical novels up front; rather, he only alludes to it.

True to promise, Ristikivi kept a diary for 10 years, and even a bit longer: 1 August 1957-21 June 1968. It seems that at least at the beginning he intended to write a page a day. Some longer entries can be found in the pocket calendars he kept during the period 1947-1977.

There is no doubt that the diary is a helpful resource for those conducting research on Ristikivi‘s life and work. For other readers, it is a human document. However, if the curious reader expects a glimpse of the angel „barring the way with a sword“ from Ristikivi‘s poetry, he will find no more of this in the diary than has already been said in the poem. Instead, we find the writer's self, firmly held in check, and despite the self-revealing helplessness, it is in part constructed. How else would it be possible?

The original manuscript of the diary is kept in the Baltic Archives in the Swedish State Archive in Stockholm. The diary has been prepared for publication Janika Kronberg, a scholar deeply versed in Ristikivi's work, and who has also provided the diary with extensive commentary. *RH*

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