

# 12 Estonian Books to Translate







Tiina Tammetalu „Estonian Landscape XI” 2004 (fragment)

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## INDREK HARGLA

## Apothecary Melchior and the Pirita Strangler

*Apteeker Melchior ja Pirita kägistaja*

*Apothecary Melchior and the Pirita Strangler* is the fourth „Melchior” novel: a tale dating to the year 1431, set at the beautiful and mysterious Convent of St. Bridget in Pirita. In this part of the series, Town Apothecary Melchior Wakenstede is already at a ripe old age; his twin son and daughter have grown to adulthood, and are readying to leave home. Melchior Jr. is awaiting springtime, when he will sail to Germany to become a journeyman for the apothecary vowed to serve Greifswald—a post that will last for three years, after which he will return to take his place as his father’s heir. Melchior Sr.’s daughter Agatha, who contrary to customs has become her father’s right hand, is still at home. The apothecary is called away on business to the Pirita Convent, just outside the city, where a young nun has lost her ability to speak. Before reaching the convent, Melchior discovers a body in the snow—it is the first in a line of murders that are committed to protect a secret of the convent, and the mute nun, still nearly a child, is soon to follow. Nothing is sacred to the murderer: at the convent, the terrified nuns await each new death, unable to predict who it will be, where it will take place, or how it will be committed. Characteristic of Hargla’s books is a secret that ramps the tension up further and further, and is only solved in the final pages of the book when Melchior—in a manner reminiscent of Agatha Christie’s detective stories—demonstrates the kind of logic hidden within the cruel killer’s acts.

The convent itself is a closed and strictly-regimented environment: in order to function within it, the murderer must be hellishly clever. The living conditions in the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Pirita convent are brought to life in the novel: the reasons for its residents’ decisions to take the veil are drawn out along with their broader fates, and due to the convent being an international pilgrimage site, the cast of characters has a colorful

pan-European tone. The mysterious legend of the convent’s founding is just as stimulating as the crime novel itself, and is interwoven into background of the murder tale. To this day, a great deal remains unexplained about the history of the founding of the Bridgettine Order’s convent at the mouth of the Pirita River in the Marienthal (now Pirita) Valley. [The Bridgettine Order was named for the Swedish noblewoman Birgitta Birgersdotter (1303–1373), who was proclaimed a saint in 1391. The convent, which was the grandest in all of Livonia, was destroyed in 1577. In 1999, Pope John Paul II declared St. Bridget the patron saint of Europe, and the convent has been partially restored as of 2001.]

Melchior ultimately solves the murder case shrouded by its very grim circumstances—in order to do so, he is forced to roam far and wide, and must even come to understand the secrets of the convent’s founding and functioning, along with finding its relic. The healing methods of the time are described in detail: for example, Melchior’s own wife falls ill during the course of events, and in order to save her, the apothecary and his children concoct a powerful medicine; the „tip achievement” of an apothecary’s medicinal possibilities, the ingredients of which also include the finger of a mummy.

Having been torn away from his work in Tallinn at length, he finally returns to its gates: the town has been without a pharmacy for too long, he finds.

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*



And then something else happened, which had never happened before. The church door was thrown open, and Father Lambert ran in—his chubby frame was out of breath from rapid running, his eyes were bulging out of his skull, and he *shouted and looked at the sisters*.

„Someone, come fast!” he exclaimed. „Your sister... Juliana!” He had no more words to speak, apparently realizing his grievous violation of convent rules (just now, he had severely broken so many requirements that he should have received water and bread in a solitary cell along with whipping for three full days), because he pulled the door shut and bolted off.

Kandis likewise did what she had never done before; but on this day, the rules no longer seemed to be valid there in the convent. She motioned for sisters Anneke and Gertruta to come along with her, and made her way towards where Lambert had directed them in the courtyard—into the male section of the convent, through the „Gate of Reconciliation and Clemency”, and from there directly on into the western cloister. There, they turned into the southern cloister, where Kandis could already see Father Gerlach standing, agitated, at a distance, in the company of other preaching brothers, who did not even trouble themselves with casting their eyes away upon seeing her. Kandis walked quickly and proudly, striving to suppress her fear, while the sisters scuttled along in her wake, breathing heavily from their distress. The rules allowed the abbess to speak with the confessor in especially complicated situations—directly and during the time that they were required to maintain silence; yet, always in the presence of other brothers and sisters. This is precisely what Kandis planned to do.

Juliana Welser lay halfway in a sitting position on a reading bench in the cloister. She had died in frightful throes: her thick, purple tongue protruded from her mouth; her head was tilted; her eyes bulged and protruded from her head. Her face was stained a reddish-brown color by congealed blood, because the murderer had sliced a cross into her face—one cut was drawn from the edge of her scalp to her chin, the other along the line of her eyebrows.

***Apothecary Melchior and the Pirita Strangler***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

The highly anticipated books of Indrek Hargla (b. 1979) are crime novels depicting medieval Tallinn: in this series, apothecary Melchior Wakenstede hunts down criminals, with one character as the mysterious 15<sup>th</sup>-century Hanseatic city itself. The first of the four parts in the series published so far, *Apteeker Melchior ja Oleviste mõistatus* (Apothecary Melchior and the Mystery of St. Olaf’s Church, 2010), has been translated into several languages and awarded esteemed literary prizes, including the annual Award for Estonian Literature.

Pre-Melchior Hargla had for years been Estonia’s most exciting and fruitful science-fiction writer, and was likewise the most awarded in the genre. The former diplomat is now a freelance writer and the screenwriter of many popular television series.

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Indrek Hargla  
Apteeker Melchior ja Pirita kägistaja  
Varrak, 2013, pp 412  
Rights’ contact: The Hanbury Agency Ltd:  
enquiries@hanburyagency.com  
or Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

**AWARDS**

Annual Award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment 2011 for the Apothecary Melchior crime series

**TRANSLATIONS**

Apothecary Melchior novels published in:  
Finnish: Moreeni 2011 (vol I), 2012 (vol II), 2013 (vol III)  
French: Gaïa Editions 2013 (vol I), vol II in work  
Hungarian: Metropolis Media 2013 (vol I)

**Rights sold to:**

Germany: CEP Europäische Verlagsanstalt GmbH  
Latvia: Zvaigzne ABC

English manuscript of vol I available.

# ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK

## The Man Who Spoke Snakish

*Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu*

Somewhere near the realms of fantasy and science fiction exists a much more thrilling and allegorical form of writing, which bends the rules of the genre to suit itself: Atwood's admonitory novels, Vonnegut's attempts to reach outside the bounds of reality and time, Bradbury's philosophical allegory encased within a science-fiction story, and so on... To say that Andrus Kivirähk's novel *Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu* (The Man Who Spoke Snakish, 2007) is a fantasy story in the Pratchett mould of humorous pseudo-history is simply to underestimate it. It is an allegory about the fading of the ages and the vanishing of worlds, and what is more, it is laced with a good dose of black humour. The story is simple: on the fringes of medieval Christian Europe lives a forest people, whose members have survived so far thanks to their knowledge of snake-words. The adders are their brothers, as are the bears—although the latter are dim-witted and overly lustful. This forest people is gradually losing its identity: they are moving to live in villages; eating tongue-numbing, tasteless bread; honouring their overlords, the crusading knights; and dreaming of becoming monastic eunuchs or getting into the knights' beds. Leemet—the main protagonist, whose life we follow from birth to death—is ultimately the last man to be proficient at Snakish; the last to know the dwelling-place of the giant, mythical Northern Frog, who was sent to defend the land and its forest-dwellers, but has fallen into an eternal sleep. It is a different kind of history, and a different kind of Europe than the one we know: here, it is not knights conquering the land from forest people (as depicted by battles chronicled in history books, or in Hollywood pseudo-history), but rather one people melting away of its own accord; fading into new habits, customs, and currents of fashion. Leemet's story is a tragic one, and if it were not peppered lavishly with Kivirähk's malicious humour, it would merely be

a dismal and fateful tale ending in mad berserkery and blood-letting, in which Leemet and his legless, flying, deranged grandfather embark on a revenge mission against the knights and the stupid villagers. Yet, it is an attempt made in vain: no one is left alive in the forest, Snakish is forgotten, and the land sinks into decay. This could merely be the story of the disappearance of a small nation (such as the Estonians), but taken in the broader picture, it is an allegory of the disappearance of an old world, its magical skills, and its people. Kivirähk is an Estonian national treasure, and is the most loved Estonian writer of the past decade or so. He is, of course, a humorist and a joker in the best sense of the word, but perhaps one can only speak of the most painful things in life by smiling through tears.

*Text by Jürgen Rooste*



I don't remember my father. And my mother didn't like talking about him; she would always become perplexed and change the subject. She must have blamed herself to the end for my father's death, and I suppose she was guilty. My mother was bored in the village; she didn't care for work in the fields, and while my father was striding out to go sowing, my mother was wandering around the old familiar forests, and she got acquainted with a bear. What happened next seems to be quite clear, it's such a familiar story. Few women can resist a bear, they're so big, soft, helpless and furry. And besides that, they are born seducers, and moreover terribly attracted to human females, so they wouldn't let slip an opportunity to make their way up to a woman and growl in her ear. In the old days, when most of our people still lived in the forest, there were endless cases of bears becoming women's lovers, until finally the man would come upon the couple and send the brown beast packing.

*The Man Who Spoke Snakish*

*Translated by Christopher Moseley*

**Andrus Kivirähk (b. 1970) is one of the most fascinating writers of the younger Estonian generation. A journalist by profession and graduated from the University of Tartu in 1993, he is primarily known for his humorous, taboo-breaking satirical pieces published in newspapers. Kivirähk is an excellent storyteller who writes with warm, gentle humour. He is certainly a highly original comic talent in Estonian literature. He is also quite prolific, having written several books both for adults and children. Kivirähk's most significant titles include: *Ivan Orava mälestused* (The Memoirs of Ivan Orav, 1995), *Kaelkirjak* (Giraffe, 1995), *Kalevipoeg* (Kalev's Son, 1997), *Pagari piparkook* (The Baker's Gingerbread, 1999), *Liblikas* (Butterfly, 1999), and *Sirli, Siim ja saladused* (Sirli, Siim and Secrets, 1999). His novel *Rehepapp* (The Old Barny, 2000), a witty allegorical story about the essence of Estonians, was awarded the literary prose prize of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2000.**

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

Andrus Kivirähk  
*Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu*  
 Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2007, pp 381  
 Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

Eduard Vilde Literary Award 2008

#### TRANSLATIONS

Russian: Aleksandra 2013  
 French: Attila 2013  
 Latvian: Lauku Avīze 2011  
 Czech: Kniha Zlín 2011

#### Rights sold to:

Netherlands: Prometheus

## REIN RAUD

## The Reconstruction

*Rekonstruktsioon*

We meet the narrator of the story, Enn Padrik, half a year after he learns that he has cancer and just about as long to live. He has used these past months to solve a mystery that has troubled him for quite long: five years earlier, his daughter Anni was one of the victims of a collective suicide in an artists' colony in rural Estonia. Enn has tracked down her friends and acquaintances, and has even travelled to Paris, where Anni studied for some time. We meet people from all walks of life: Enn's mother, a retired schoolteacher; the family of his wife, members of the Soviet bureaucracy; Enn's younger sister-in-law, drinking herself into oblivion after a messy divorce from an elderly Swedish-Estonian businessman; as well as the guitarist of a sectarian Christian rock band; a former priest and an authority for spiritual seekers; a militant atheist teenager in a wheelchair, hating her newly converted mother for the efforts she makes to save her soul; and above all, the members of the colony who left it before things went sour, including the sole survivor of the tragic event. Bit by bit, we put together Anni's story: from her involvement with Eastern-European prostitutes in Paris and Muslim women fleeing their families, to her quest for justice and values; and then all the way up to her escalating conflict with the self-appointed guru of the artists' colony, known to us as „the Android“.

This is a story that spans not only two generations, but two entire worlds—the collapse of one society, and the emergence of another. Told in an engaging manner with credible characters and a lively dialogue, without bitterness, excessively dark overtones or moralisation, it ends with Enn's realisation that it is not so important whether the things we believe in are really true; rather, what does matter is what kinds of people these things make us be.

*Text by Rein Raud*



And then that story happened. That accident, about which I needed to find out as much as humanly possible before my time is up. To see the entire chain of events that led up to it. Because actually, things were different, of course. The fire had just begun when it was noticed by chance, and they managed to put out the flames quite quickly. Nothing at all should have hindered the residents from running out the door to continue living.

Aside of the fact that they were already dead by the time the fire started. They were lying side-by-side on the second floor of the house, in the master bedroom, in cramped poses, and each one of them had a small, packed suitcase and a letter squeezed in their fist: I, so-and-so, have settled all of my debts in this world, and can go before God with a clean heart. And what's more: found in another room on the first floor was a further fifth suitcase, as well as a fifth short letter on the floor next to it. Yet, I will discuss that later—it isn't worth rushing ahead of the course of events.

Perhaps why I know all of this interests you. But this is because the relatives of the deceased had the right to find out. And one of those four, whose path ended there in that house, was Anni-Reelika Padrik. My daughter, my only child. My princess.

***The Reconstruction***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

Rein Raud (b. 1961) started out as a poet in the 1980s, and by now has published several novels and poetry collections, numerous essays and translations from many different languages, as well as a great deal of scholarly work, mainly on Japanese cultural history. His novel *Hector and Bernard* received the annual prize of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2004; *Rekonstruktsioon* (The Reconstruction, 2012) won the same in 2013. He was also selected as one of the two best short-story authors of 2012. Although Rein Raud considers writing his primary vocation, he has been active in many fields and is known, among other things, for the large number of foreign languages he speaks, his role in Estonian university reform, as well as for the critical and strongly-voiced opinions he regularly publishes in the press.

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Rein Raud  
Rekonstruktsioon  
Mustvalge Kirjastus, 2012, pp 264  
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**AWARDS**

Estonian Cultural Endowment's Prose Award 2013

## MEELIS FRIEDENTHAL

## Bees

*Mesilased*

In Meelis Friedenthal's second novel, Laurentius Hylas comes from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands to Livonia's University of Tartu to continue his studies, carrying the mottled and merry parakeet Clodia with him in a cage. The bird was given to the traveling scholar as a gift out of sympathy, meant to drive away his sadness. The young man suffering from melancholy reaches rainy Livonia, which has been struck by crop failure and famine, four years before the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The professors at the University of Tartu are already teaching Newtonian mathematics and Cartesian philosophy, and Dutch Rector Jakob Friedrich Below is performing autopsies for academic purposes. Tartu is the granary of the Swedish Empire; however, the local people fleeing great starvation are kept in a low barn beyond the city gates. The young, serious man, who holds a belief in Aristotle's teachings and came from the Netherlands to be with Tartu's muses, experiences dampness, ephemerality, stench, and darkness. His little bird Clodia perishes, but just as if seeing a dream, the young man is visited in his student apartment by a young maiden of the same name, who feeds Laurentius honey—her „eyes of gold, like dark honey, breathing like a buzzing“. Having fallen ill during the journey, Laurentius is indeed unable to eat anything else; fever and bloodletting make him ever weaker. The six days in Tartu described in the novel bring the young man into contact with locals who dread witches and werewolves, while Laurentius himself is ailed by a conviction about his very own evil eye: he fears from experience that whoever looks him directly in the eyes falls ill. In spite of this, he sees and perceives a great deal even without looking directly (literally)—in that rainy town, in the dreamlike haze of his fever, he interacts with imagined beings just as realistic as the learned men he encounters. Acts of witchcraft that he experienced during childhood are reawakened as recollections in

that torturous environment, without Clodia's reassuring company. He carries that once-encountered horror in his eyes, and refrains from sharing it with others. Laurentius Hylas indeed writes his disputation in Tartu on the evil eye and the soul, and the people around him start to improve from his gaze: he gives up something else of himself. He compares the soul to a colony of bees, which flies into an empty hive, „builds it full of honeycomb, and collects honey there. And things go the very same way when on a hot day, the bees suddenly fly out of the hive as a colony, heading somewhere“.

Fluent and convincing, spectacularly beautiful alongside its grimness that draws the reader in, the novel is very firm in terms of composition. The book's thorough afterword penned by the author explains the 17<sup>th</sup>-century sickness of melancholia, the basics of humoral medicine, reasons for fear of the evil eye, the understandings of the soul and illnesses, as well as the history of Livonia and the University of Tartu at that point in time.

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*



It rained all the time. Rain had rotted the crops on the fields, had covered the wooden walls of the buildings with mold, had made ships' deck boards as sopping as seaweed. For already several months' time, Laurentius had been eating rotten bread, had been living in mildewed buildings, and in the last week, had also been slipping across the soggy deck of a ship. Black moroseness collected within him like sludge atop a stake stuck into a riverbed. Now, he finally stepped from the lurching boat onto the harbor dock, onto the slippery boards nailed onto logs that were rammed into the mud beneath the water, and peered hesitatingly at his surroundings. The wind flung drizzle into his face in bursts from the low sky, and he strove to understand what sort of land it was, to which he had arrived by his own free choice. The bare, white sand and lone patches of reeds along the strip of shore, as well as the identical gray clouds very much resembled the harbor, from which he had set off. The mast of the post ship looked just the same against the gray sky, and the sheets that had been raised on it appeared just as gray and featureless as they had when he cast off. Next to the pier, which extended far out into the sea, a jetty buried halfway beneath the muddy water could be seen, and on top of it was an old watchman's house crouched down in the water, which no one had apparently used for already quite some time. These ruins could be found in every harbor, and despite their pitiful appearance, such an image rather instilled a sense of confidence in Laurentius for some reason. Even here, the harbors had been rebuilt; even here, they had been enlarged for new ships to dock, and the old watchmen's houses had been abandoned.

He sighed, and nervously adjusted the cover over the cage dripping with rainwater.

**Bees**

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

*Translation paid by EUPL, the European Union Prize for Literature*

**Meelis Friedenthal (b. 1973) has defended a doctoral thesis on a 13<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical/theological manuscript at the University of Tartu. Having worked on the faculty of the Department of Theology, he is currently a senior researcher at the University of Tartu Library, where he focuses on 17<sup>th</sup>-century history of ideas.**

**Friedenthal gained recognition as a science-fiction writer: his first novel, *Kuldne aeg* (Golden Age, 2004), which represents the European sci-fi tradition and tells of the nightmarish world of Cronus, received third place in a 2004 novel competition. In 2005, his narrative *Nerissa* won the Stalker Award for Science Fiction. The author is a member of the editorial staff of online sci-fi magazine *Algernon*. His novel *Mesilased* (Bees, 2012) speaks of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is a dreamlike story written with a historian's sense for detail.**

**Meelis Friedenthal was chosen as the 2012 Estonian Writer of the Year. His novel *Mesilased* received the 2013 European Union Prize for Literature.**

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Meelis Friedenthal  
Mesilased  
Varrak, 2012, pp 212  
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**AWARDS**

European Union Prize for Literature 2013  
Estonian Writer of the Year 2012

## ENE MIHKELSON

## Plague Grave

*Katkuhaud*

The ordeals of many ordinary Estonians in the Stalinist times and later have still rarely found adequate artistic expression. The torturous memories and experiences have been covered by official clichés, which tend to bury the complexities, pain, and confusion under wishful thinking and clear-cut narratives of praise and blame, villainy and heroism. Fortunately, Ene Mihkelson is exceptionally qualified by her experience and artistic temperament to offer a fuller, more probing, and ultimately deeply disturbing version of those times when no amount of courage, goodwill, decency, or even conformism could save one from official repressions and the dark forces unleashed by the communist violence. The first Soviet year of 1940–1941 heightened the deep-rooted internal tensions of an Estonian village. In the summer of 1941, many families fell victim to the burnt-earth tactics of the retreating Soviet collaborators. After the return of the Soviets in 1944, many peasants had no option save to hide or perish. However, by the mid-50s, even the Forest Brothers were deeply infiltrated by the Soviet secret services, sometimes used as pawns in international intelligence games against the subversion attempts sponsored by the British MI6. The lines demarcating collaboration from resistance, and resistance from terrorism, were often very fine indeed.

The elusive and troubled narrator of Ene Mihkelson's novel *Plague Grave* (*Katkuhaud*, 2007) was raised by her aunt Kaata after her parents went into hiding in 1949 to escape deportation to Siberia as kulaks—a fate met by almost 40,000 Estonians under Stalinism. In 1953, her father was killed by the NKVD; two years later, her mother „legalized” herself, i.e. emerged from hiding. The novel is set in our time, as the narrator tries to discover the exact circumstances of her father's death and the role that his fellow Forest Brothers (or „bandits” in Soviet parlance), his wife, and her sister

played in it. Who betrayed whom?—the question echoes the song from the finale of Orwell's 1984: „Under the spreading chestnut tree. / I sold you and you sold me.”

A „plague grave”—a grave for the victims of pestilence, whose exhumation can start a new cycle of the epidemic—serves as a metaphor for buried memories of the mid-twentieth century. The novel is composed as a series of encounters between the narrator and her aunt Kaata, who tries to confess her deeply wicked role as a NKVD informer, but is not quite able to bring herself to do so. On her part, the narrator goes through an excruciating endeavor to fill in her memory gaps and to reconstruct a fuller, more adequate version of the events of her childhood. The novel overturns cheap stereotypes of trauma narration such as redemption through commemoration. It shows quite unambiguously that, in cases like hers, truth does not set you free. But neither, of course, does denial. The novel touches something very sensitive and significant in today's collective life, in which memories and commemoration have creepingly usurped the place once occupied by utopias and designs for the future. Through all of her inner torments and many encounters with the participants of those shady post-war happenings, Mihkelson's narrator finally accepts life in a damaged, post-humanist world, where our expectations and hopes for humanity have to be trimmed down. To put it crudely, *Plague Grave* reads like Thomas Bernhard or W. B. Sebald cum Sofi Oksanen, combining the strongest sides of each author in a recognizably unique way.

*Text by Märt Väljataga*



It was like a dark cloud, an eclipse in the heavens, I repeat now, several years later, when I think back to what was. It isn't possible to retell life even by employing a dream, because then also, if we were able to move from moment to moment, fingering what has passed with all possible endeavoring for perfection, something would be left out—something, which does not submit to being put into words is always left out. The comparison to an eclipse applies when the days are gloomy and autumn-damp for weeks at a time, as well; when the span of seeping light between morning and evening is compressed into a barely-glowing circle; when it is as if time springs through a burning ring held by the team captain. When the site of the last battle is marked off by tape emphasizing a police investigation.

***Plague Grave***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

Ene Mihkelson was born in 1944 in central Estonia as the daughter of a farmer. She studied Estonian literature and language at the University of Tartu, and has worked as a researcher in the Estonian Literary Museum. She has been a freelance writer since 1979.

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Ene Mihkelson  
*Katkuhaud*  
 Varrak, 2007, pp 320  
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**AWARDS**

A.H. Tammsaare Literary Award 2008  
 Estonian Cultural Endowment's Prose Award 2007

**TRANSLATIONS**

Finnish: WSOY 2011

**Rights sold to:**

Latvia: Mansards

## MIHKEL MUTT

## Mice in the Wind

*Hiired tuules*

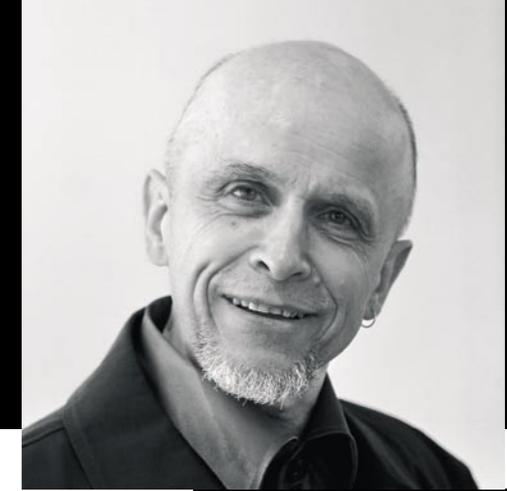
Never before or since have the fine arts enjoyed such a high social standing as in the late Soviet decades. In spite of or rather perhaps due to the censorship, the artists and their pursuits occupied a central place in the late communist social consciousness. As Philip Roth quipped about the artists' situation in the Eastern bloc: Nothing goes, and everything matters. There were many reasons for this. First, all other channels for self-fulfillment, such as business, politics, and religion, were officially denied to the Soviet citizens, leaving the arts as one of the few tolerated outlets for human energies without the need to compromise one's principles. Second, arts functioned as a safety valve, allowing the expression of discontent in symbolic forms. And finally, in the relative absence of other consumerist opportunities, the wider populace was eager to buy books and attend exhibitions, concerts, and performances. In such a context, many passionate dramas, elaborate intrigues, and high ambitions were acted out on the arts scene as if in special artificial laboratory conditions.

Theatre novel was an appropriate genre for depicting these struggles, and Mihkel Mutt's first novel, *Mice in the Wind* (*Hiired tuules*, 1982), belongs to this very tradition, stretching back to Mikhail Bulgakov's *Theatre Novel* (1937/1965) and Mati Unt's *Via Regia* (1975) (not to mention more distant antecedents like Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*). Mihkel Mutt's book engages in a particularly close parodic dialogue with the theatre novel by his older friend, Mati Unt. Although Mati Unt's treatment of his heroes—the participants of the late 1960s theatre reform—was highly ironic in itself, Mihkel Mutt ups the ante for even more fun and satire. The differences in their respective approach reflects the clash between the mentalities of the 60s and 70s generations. Whereas the modernists of the 1960s struggled hard to eliminate the border between life and art, often sacrificing their private

relations in the course of doing so, the 70s generation had a more detached, cynical and skeptical attitude towards the prospect of elevating everyday life through artistic creativity, while remaining as committed to the life of the mind.

This conflict is embodied by the two protagonists of the novel: the narrator-character Victor Kakk (the author's alter ego), who is a humanist man of letters, theatre-critic, and minor writer; and Kalle Jermakoff, a self-educated stage-director and a „natural genius“. This pair echoes Thomas Mann's *Serenus Zeitblom* and Adrian Leverkühn in a low, burlesque key. The title *Mice in the Wind* alludes perhaps to the Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*—the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*, which features human virtues, vices, and endeavors in a parodic form. Kalle Jermakoff belongs to the rearguard of the 60s generation in his attempt to realize its utopian artistic program in a changed, sobered milieu. His Grotowskian experiments in 'holy theatre' result in a series of comical incidents, recorded with a mixture of incredulity and mock-admiration by the more pedestrian observer Victor. The novel, which was quite a sensation when it appeared in the early 80s, has aged well: the scenes from the cultural life of the 70s, while still funny and full of sparkling wit, have gained in value as an historical, although artistically distorted reflection of a cultural era quite different from our own. It is like the Spinal Tap mockumentary set in the late-70s theatre scene.

*Text by Märt Väljataga*



„What are you laughing at! It's just disgusting to hear your thoughts! You have a crippling effect on people, who take life as it is; who work day in, day out, and approve of what they do; who see a point in their life and the job they do. You can count on them. They don't commit any nonsense in the name of some lofty ideals. What would happen if every one of them were to start debating and going on about things the way you do—about the sensibility of suicide, for example. You can go and prove that each reasonable person has to think about it, but—good heavens: humankind can't kill itself over some theory now, can it?! You understand these things at least just as well as I do, but you purposefully speak despicable things, because you're a degenerate being. You can't handle simple sublimity, pure feelings, and a sound take on life. You yourself are ruined, and you'd like everyone else to be the same as you. You don't even grasp that love in a hut is no less pure than affection in a palace, or that a nuclear physicist's fondness might be more boring than a sheep-herder's.“

„Truly, comrade Snaut—why don't you love the simple man? Why do you love the complicated man?“

„It's not about that at all,“ the man being questioned responded irritably. „I don't talk about complication in and of itself, but about *how* something becomes complicated. Everything must have a calm, smart start to it. Like with drinking, or even with women. And the intellect is the very worst in terms of this. If a person develops over time, learns and observes, then there's no danger at all. In the end, the person doesn't take anything especially seriously: he has little faith, but a great deal of interest, and possibly even an understanding love. Such a being will never kick the universe over. He won't set the world on fire. If he can be criticized for anything, then it's for not going to extinguish that burning world, either. That complicated person has become simple once again. But if a person, who has been cut off from the world of intelligentsia for his whole life thus far suddenly discovers it and jumps feet-first into the very deepest intellectuality right away, then he can easily turn into a fool.“

***Mice in the Wind***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

Mihkel Mutt was born in 1953 in Tartu, and studied journalism there. He has edited the cultural magazines „Sirp“ and „Looming“, with a brief interlude in the early 1990s as an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Besides writing short stories and novels, he has been a versatile author of cultural criticism, feuilletons, and memoirs. He brings to each of these genres his penetrating gaze, analyzing the mores and habits of his contemporaries, various generations, and social groups in a satiric vein that resembles the early Aldous Huxley or the moralists of the Classical Age.

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Mihkel Mutt  
Hiired tuules  
Muti Raamat, 2001, pp 263  
First published in 1982  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## PEETER SAUTER

## Don't Leave Me Alone

*Ära jäta mind rahule*

Sauter's novel *Ära jäta mind rahule* (Don't Leave Me Alone) is defined as a love story, in which the first-person character is a middle-aged man. He has several children somewhere, and a lengthier cohabitation that painfully crumbled, now behind him. He lives in the Tallinn district of wooden apartment houses called *Uus Maailm* (New World), in the so-called „Poor Writers' House”: an old, stove-heated wooden building that houses quite a number of other writers.

That same, nevertheless relatively secretive building located next to the neighborhood's commune-like community social house is certainly a character of the love story as well. The words „loser-writer” pop up in several places throughout the book. The label does not rule out creative need and creative works, but even the opposite: although every now and then, it seems as if there is no activity for quite some time, writing appears to be somehow quintessential—somewhat like breathing. Everything turns into creativity: at times, the characters even live for it and in that manner; experimenting, so that both the outcome and the process might be written down. This stationary state is a journey in its own way: Kerouac's *On the Road* is a text mentioned on several occasions in the novel. One returns (moneyless) from travels to the house and the apartment time and again—it is something dependable and clearly drawn out in an often quite hazy world.

The writer does not live alone: solitude does not suit him. His adult son Kustas stays with him for some time in the attic of the apartment, but dies unexpectedly. Another more frequent guest is the writer's child Sissi, a tot from his previous marriage. Sissi is perhaps the most everlasting object of love in the given love-story novel: such a love is unchanging and enviable. This indescribable love for a child can particularly be found in the heartbreaking farewell to the writer's son Kustas.

However, the love story is also aimed at defining the relationship with two young women: firstly with the young and beautiful Laura, who indeed becomes the writer's wife by the end of the book. Even she is somehow unbalanced: fragilely perched upon the edge of being. Secondly is the Eastern German university student Jessica, who moves from the community house into the writer's apartment: being together with her is terrific, at least at first; both in conversation and in silence.

The feelings of a man past the mid-point of his life—alongside living with nearly two women, alongside sex, which is a topic that spans the book in turn; just as how alcohol is undoubtedly one of the characters (or catalysts of activity)—intermingle with a fear of being alone. Overarching this fear, however, is the need to demonstrate care: Laura, just like his child Sissi, and Kustas—maybe even Jessica as well—all require care in their own way. Just as the writer needs it himself: at the same time, one gets a sense of how difficult it is to often achieve or express this intimacy, regardless.

And so, the work is an exceptionally distinct love story all the same—written in an unexpected way: obscenely Sauter-ish, without glossing anything over or leaving anything unsaid, and rather playing things down than exalting them; although this in no way reduces the greatness or existence of the love. In fact, it even deepens it. The novel is doubtless deeply autobiographical, and as such, it is more than enchanting: it is written in a profoundly philosophical and tragic way about very simple things, next to heating the stove and cleaning the kitchen; it is a poignant story about a person's vulnerability, addiction to relationships, and the forms and triangles of every sort of love.

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*



To get married, or just to buy rings and wear them? —these thoughts had come and gone for us. When one of us wanted to, then the other wasn't enthralled by the idea (oh, you want me? well, fine; I don't know why I should have to want you, then—I've got plenty of time), and when the other wanted to presently, the former took some time to think about it.

But when we were buzzed and in bed, it sometimes happened that we were in consensus as well. And simply buying rings—you haven't worn a ring in your life—seemed innocent and trivial enough to play with.

We had looked at those rings. Somewhat non-standard rings of white gold within a yellow-gold ring in turn.

„But what'll we engrave in them?”

„*Chto takoe osen'—eto veter...*”—„What is fall—it is the wind,” I replied immediately, because we had just been listening to all kinds of Russian music, one song after another. We proposed all kinds of other words. On top of that, you're half Russian, and I might very well be as well, because I have no clue what different bloods flow in me. All of the songs' lyrics suited very well, and acquired new meanings in a flash. If they had been in our rings.

„No—you know what we'll write?” you said, staring at the ceiling. I didn't answer, but waited eagerly. You stretched your thin, beautiful, naked body over mine, your little breasts dangling, and took a sip from your wine glass: „I said, „don't leave me alone,” and then you liked it.”

„When'd you say that?”

„I was starting to fall asleep, and you were talking about something, and said it was better you left me alone, and that's when I said it.”

„Don't leave me alone?”

„Yeah.”

„Sounds really great. The same line in both rings?”

„Yeah, if it fits.”

I fell asleep with a grin on my face.

***Don't Leave Me Alone***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

Peeter Sauter (b. 1962), the author of a dozen books, has been an important name in Estonian short prose since 1990. He studied drama at the Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn and at John Moores University in Liverpool. His works include plays and film scripts, travel books, a collection of poetry, and children's literature. A master of dialogues, the logic and rhetoric of Sauter's characters hold a kind of organic naturalism coupled with a very humane warmth. Sauter has translated the works of Jack Kerouac and Charles Bukowski into Estonian. Sauter's short novel *Indigo* (1990) was the literary manifest and turning point of his generation. The last few years have been very fertile for the author, and were ultimately crowned by his full-length novel *Ära jäta mind rahule* (Don't Leave Me Alone, 2012).

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Peeter Sauter  
 Ära jäta mind rahule  
 Kirjanik OÜ, 2013, pp 396  
 Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## NIKOLAI BATURIN

## The Heart of the Bear

*Karu süda*

The protagonist of Nikolai Baturin's novel *The Heart of the Bear* is the experienced, skilful, and able hunter Niika, who lives in Siberia. He has spent most of his life in the solitude of the woods, where a human being has to face both the dangers of the world and the depths of his own soul. The novel is centred on an extreme situation of existential nature. Masterful descriptions of nature and exact details of everyday life first give the impression of a realistic work, representing man's battle with nature, and an instant parallel to E. Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea* crops up.

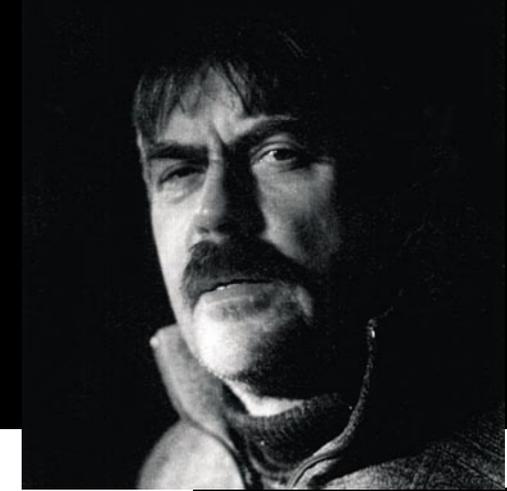
However, the cyclically flowing time marks the novel with a magic seal. The hunter's progress in the woods is both temporal and timeless; apart from a spatial journey, this is also progress in his own soul, as well as in the mythical consciousness of the Nordic peoples. Niika the human being does not overthrow nature, but rather attempts to live in harmony with it. He has tasted the fruits of civilization, but has turned away from them. An ancient Nganasan—a guide of his fate and a mysterious Other, who follows all the events of his life—lives within Niika. In this duality, which is sometimes rendered in the form of a dialogue, Niika is placed on the border of two worlds—between primeval nature and civilization, mythical and historical time, sustainable living and the mentality of limitless wasting. Preferring the laws of nature to those enforced by men, the hunter chooses the former of these polarities, because he conceives happiness as something that is useful to nature.

The reality depicted in the novel acquires a full magical dimension when Niika catches a strange mute woman, who probably suffers from polar madness, in an empty wood. Her behaviour is reminiscent of a she-bear. They name their child Ursula (*ursus* is 'bear' in Latin). According to the beliefs of the peoples of polar areas, the bear's heart is the centre of all that exists; thus, we

could interpret Niika's meetings with the bear woman as his reaching the sources of perception, just as Alejo Carpentier has represented a journey to the mythical consciousness of Latin America in his novel *The Lost Steps*.

*The Heart of the Bear*, one of the most unique novels in Estonian literature of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, is an exotic Nordic odyssey of a traveller, who eventually reaches his real home. It is a philosophical book; its ethical sentiment has lost nothing of its relevance, affirming the idea that a primeval and redeeming power can be found in all living creatures and in traditions.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*



## The First Halt

The river makes a sharp turn to the northeast. Between the rocky banks, at the end of the trail, I stop the sled and let the dogs take a rest. I also rest, lowering my stiff body into the canoe-shaped sled. I take a plug of resin out of a tobacco pouch, stick it into my mouth and chew. My eyes—lively green bugs—scan the pale wintry horizon.

I was born in another place, not so very long ago. By the time I ended up in these parts, I was a grown man. My soul was young and unspoiled; I was brimming with vitality. I took a liking to this remote corner of the world: its impenetrable thickets and raging rivers, wild and wonderful beasts and forest; the people, whose character and customs were as simple, beautiful, and artless as their mother—the nature of the North. They were rich in their poverty, generous in spirit, content with their lot. I fit in as if I were one of them, as if I had only left them temporarily in order to be born. But here was where my eternal cradle rocked, in the treetops of the taiga, I realised as I wandered, bearded, along the tracks and trails of the wilderness. Naturally, I also became a hunter and a gatherer, a reindeer-herder and a fisherman. Otherwise, I would have attracted the attention of the evil spirits. All this lasted for quite a long time; for a quarter of my life. The seasons ran through their dignified rotation, like the tired leaders at the front of the reindeer herd. My paths—through the taiga and to the hearts of my friends—were well-trodden. Nature was nature, people were people, I was myself, no one was anyone else. And outside this circle, there was nothing happening. So now, I would like to ponder a little on who that other person was, and what it was that happened when nothing was happening...

My name is Niika. I am supposedly a Nganasan.

*The Heart of the Bear*

*Translated by Krista Mits*

**Nikolai Baturin's (b. 1936) life is extraordinary – he served in the Soviet navy, then spent a couple of decades in Siberia: at first on a geological expedition, and then for a long time as a hunter. Nowadays, Baturin lives in the forests of Southern Estonia. He is an outstanding poet, playwright, and prose writer. Panoramic fantasy, a certain epic quality, and a rare sense of language form a powerful combination in his works. A few of Baturin's most important works include *Karu süda* (The Heart of the Bear—first published in 1989, filmed in cooperation with Russia in 2001), *Kartlik Nikas, lõvilakkade kammija* (Cowardly Nikas, Comber of Lions' Manes, 1993), and *Kentaur* (Centaur, 2003), which won the Estonian Cultural Endowment's award for best novel of the year.**

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

Nikolai Baturin  
Karu süda  
Elmatar, 2001, pp 436  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## TRANSLATIONS

Czech: Balt-East 2001 (an excerpt of 96 pages)  
Russian: N. Baturin 1998

# ÜLO TUULIK

## Trampled by War

### *Sõja jalus*

Ülo Tuulik's primary work is one of Estonia's most pivotal pieces of literature of the 1970s: the modernist and documentary (anti-)war novel *Sõja jalus* (Trampled by War, 1974), which is supported by his own childhood experiences. The residents of the Sõrve Peninsula in Southern Saaremaa—altogether about three thousand souls—were deported in October 1944 by the German forces retreating to their homeland. The novel is a reflective story about the journey, which a four/five-year-old remembers in bits through his psychological trauma, while the narrating author reconstructs the events in retrospect, searching out Sõrve residents who remember their „road to Golgotha“. The fleeing Estonians' path crosses the sea—a target for bombers—into Poland and Germany—suffering the anguish of the war's end—and is marked by hunger and the atrocities of WWII. As the war comes to a close, their long journey turns around into a path home, which is just as long and—for the most part—traversed on foot. This leg of the journey in turn extinguishes the candles of many of the deportees, mostly children. The travelers arrived back in Estonia the following summer, finding a land scorched bare by war: it remained partially unsettled, and a number of entire pre-war villages could no longer be recognized in the landscape just a few decades later. The author simultaneously searches for that lost, pre-war land of his childhood, which in some places is no longer even possible to find on a map. One sub-topic that Tuulik writes about is the Soviet army's Vintri landing on Saaremaa: an invasion on the night of October 12, 1944, which was basically the reason for the evacuation of Sõrve's residents. It was a landing that failed at its very conception: the Estonian Rifle Corps was driven into the water by the Russian navy, the attack force dispersed, and the German coastal defense (which had been warned of the attack) shot the invaders floating helplessly in

the water; the unfortunate soldiers either died or were taken prisoner. The events were later hushed up in Soviet history, which mostly reported the victorious side.

The novel's form is unusual: fragmented shards of memory are interspersed with other journeyers' recollections, excerpts from their letters and diaries, and other documents, in turn reminding the author—the individual collecting these shards—of the unforgettable shadows of war. Together, fragmentality, the skipping of and repeated return to an important detail, and the narrator's path of searching recreate the feelings of fleeing in the haze of battle: this is how it might have been, and such is how later shards of memory recall it; shards, which require explanation in order to forget and be able to live with this knowledge. One by one, the fates of Sõrve's residents left along the long road unfold from memory and fragments.

Tuulik's novel can be compared to Kurt Vonnegut's works: it is an Eastern European text of this sort. *Trampled by War* appeared uncensored and in its full form only as of 2010. In the novel, both armies are treated as a machine of war, and the possibility of preserving a sense of humanity is re-examined on both sides. It is a war novel in the most direct meaning of the phrase: not a „front-line novel“, but the perspectives of those—involved individuals who are basically not part of the war—who are a burden to the fronts; whose world that has lasted so far crumbles before their eyes. It all begins with a scared little boy's expression; a boy, who fears losing sight of his own mother and father on their path of escape.

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*

We were taken away at night.

In the chilly moonlight, a German soldier pushed a rattling cart towards the sea along a parched, clay-colored road.

My father and mother walked close behind the soldier, taking turns carrying their year-and-a-half-old child, and my sister trotted in their wake, holding a small cloth bundle.

The rocky road, which slithered across an expanse of juniper, glowed far ahead of us beneath the moon, as if confirming the possibility of going astray. It led one only to the Sõrve Peninsula, and the ships were waiting there.

It was October 27, 1944.

When I try to recall everything once again now, all I can envision is the bright, nighttime moon-path, and strangely, I feel a sweet vibration in my legs: Jüri and I are sitting almost motionless in the cart, our legs hooked beneath the seat, looking back in fear to make sure that our father and mother did not fall behind the strange man pushing the cart.

I remember nothing else.

I turned five just half a year later. It was in the Klein Lubs camp in the former Polish corridor. A German doctor was inspecting my brother and me—two clear-eyed, blonde-haired children—and said to our father:

„Zwei Soldaten für die deutsche Armee.“

Behind his glasses, my father's short-sighted eyes expressed neither espousal nor denial—wartime eyes most frequently held bewilderment, indifference, and non-understanding, or else the feigning of it to hide their inner thoughts. My father said nothing.

But even this I do not remember myself: my father was probably telling an unfamiliar man about it in Põide, Saaremaa immediately after the war. They were drinking vodka together, because the man had made us a lamp. He worked the stiff white wick that he had found in some charred ruins into the lamp base, and that was in turn stuck atop a brown, square bottle of oil. There was no glass around the flame. We were not allowed to run around, as it might have blown out the light.

My father was a schoolteacher. He could read and speak German fluently. Even now, I have a coverless German-language encyclopedia left by him.

I recall once again that glowing road in the chilly moonlight, the vibration of my legs, the sparse clumps of forest, the stone piles, the white tufts of cloud—a fall night of long ago; I strain to hear within myself, hoping for the faded voices and noises to awaken, but truth be told, nothing sounds apart from the creaking of the cartwheels. My father and the German do not speak.

***Trampled by War***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*



**Ülo Tuulik (b. 1940) is a writer and a twin: he and his brother Jüri Tuulik are from the Sõrve Peninsula on Saaremaa Island, and both grew up on the tiny island of Abruca. They also studied Estonian philology together at the University of Tartu, and the topics of the sea and islands dominate both men's creative works. Having made his debut with travelogues from fishing ships on the Atlantic Ocean (*Aafrika kuum meri, Africa's Hot Sea, 1965*), Ülo Tuulik has written in a fascinating way about foreign lands and seas. He does this with the hand of a humorous portraitist, but also very seriously, such as his travelogue about the early 1980s in Cambodia (the title story in the collection being *Kõrge taevas, High Sky, 1985*). Tuulik has been awarded Estonia's annual prize for literature on two occasions, has likewise received the Friedebert Tuglas Short Story Award, and was named a People's Writer in 1986.**

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

Ülo Tuulik  
*Sõja jalus*  
 Kadmiell, 2010, pp 220  
 First published in 1974  
 Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

Estonian Cultural Endowment's Prose Award 1975  
 Juhan Smuul Literary Award

#### TRANSLATIONS

Czech: Naše vojsko 1984  
 Bulgarian: Partizdat 1983  
 Latvian: Liesma 1983  
 Lithuanian: Vaga 1981  
 Polish: Czytelnik 1978  
 Russian: Sovetski Pisatel 1976  
 Finnish: Gummerus 1976

## HERMAN SERGO

## The Beach Robber

*Randröövel*

Herman Sergo's historical novel *The Beach Robber* (*Randröövel*, 1988) centres on the Baltic-German Hiiumaa landowner Otto Reinhold Ludwig von Ungern-Sternberg (1744–1811), who lured ships onto the reefs with an illusory lighthouse and plundered their goods.

*The Beach Robber*, which is based on archive materials and thorough research, paints a portrait of a very psychologically complicated personality: when plundering cargo ships drawn to the false lighthouse on Spriteshoals, the manor lord does not flinch from committing almost a single one of his crimes, while on the other hand, he does not lack high ethical ideals as the master of his island and his family. For the most part, Von Ungern Sternberg is also able to claim before a judge that his looting is actually work done to rescue the ships, and thus he outmaneuvers the justice system. A desire to become the ruler of the entire island—which at that time was a place called Dagö („Day Island”)—propels him to plundering; in addition to the Hohenholm Manor located nearby the shoals, he acquires the grand, white Grossenhoff Mansion before long. A dual standard of living likewise teaches the criminal experts a derivation from dual morals.

The Count of Ungru sends the goods robbed from the shipwrecks with his coastal Swede Carl Johan Malm for selling in the harbors of Europe; later, Ungru's fleet is increased by several more vessels. The coastal Swedes were a free people: as such, Captain Malm, who has traversed the seas to the Atlantic Ocean, is also a free man. The novel is similarly a sequel to Sergo's trilogy „The Spriteshoals”: time has passed, and Captain Malm is one of the few coastal Swedes left on Hiiumaa—the grandson of the trilogy's hero Skallus Clemet, he has avoided deportation beyond the Dnepr as ordered in an *ukase* given by Tsaritsa Catherine II. One of the novel's sideline stories is the love affair between Captain Malm and the Estonian girl Anu. Anu is a serf at Ungern-Sternberg's manor: a young, beautiful maiden given to

the lady of the manor as a child, and schooled as a housemaid. The young girl, who has secretly become engaged to Malm, is seduced by the manor lord's eldest son, the military officer Gustav, who is otherwise a student in St. Petersburg. Ungern-Sternberg skillfully resolves even this situation: although a child was to be born from the union, the birth would be covered up, and the boy would be given as a foster child to the same family that raised Anu. The young woman would, however, still be wed to the captain as if she were a virgin, and would become the lady of Skallus Farmstead.

The relations between father and son are nevertheless ruined. When Gustav comes home several years later with a request that his father pay off the debts he accrued as a young officer, and simultaneously tries to win over Anu's heart once more, the Count of Ungru sharply refuses. Considering his honor as an officer, the young man—who has a sudden temperament—shoots and kills himself. According to the book, the boy's father built Hiiumaa's Reigi stone church in his memory. Anu and Malm's cloudless days of happiness last for many a year until by chance (while he is now already making a personal attempt to cheat his bread-giver Ungru in the shipping business), someone accidentally betrays to Malm—a happy father of two—the conspiracy that accompanied his marriage. Malm goes to demand justice from the manor, and the Count of Ungru kills him in self-defense. Ungern-Sternberg is sent to Siberia for the murder, and so ends the era of the plunderer's false lighthouses as the ruler of Spriteshoals.

In addition to the story of the main character's life and Hiiumaa's history, the novel—written by a ship captain—speaks of seafaring and how the residents of the island risen from the sea depended upon it: no matter whether this was as seafarers or pirates.

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*

The nights turned ever darker. The water washing up upon Reigi's shores blackened, the restless splashing of waves in the harbor lapped at the mossy dock posts and swashed against the tarred boards of the boats' hulls.

In the daytime, blackish-grey lumps of cloud flew across the sky, from time to time sifting out a flurry-fine drizzle, sometimes interspersed with thicker drops, which made the backs of the oxen plowing the manor fields glisten, and rolled as steel-cold tears into the shirt-collar of the farmer marching behind the plow.

The storks, geese, and swans left. They went in search of a warmer land and a more richly-set table. Yet, the people were stationary: some free, some in serfage, some noblemen, some simple servants.

That fall of 1795 was long and muddy. The weather did turn a bit frosty in November, forcing people to don their coats and even showing some snow; but then, the winds turned to the west again, the tides flooded the shores, the sea crashed upon the Sprite Shoals, and occasionally, a seal released its howl there upon them.

For the ships, that fall was particularly fortuitous; but for the master of Hohenholm, it was a blessed time in terms of catches. And these catches were cast into his lap directly in such a manner that there was no need to fear the imperial coast guards, Stenbock of Grossenhoff, or any other snooping observers. One great Brit was moored on the Sprite Shoals in a rather quiet breeze and gentle waves. True, the fog was indeed thick and as white as milk, and Dagerort was not visible that time, either. The master had ordered the ropes anchoring the buoys that surrounded the shoals to be cut. He had a trustworthy man for the job: the Estonian harbormaster Ranna Toomas, whose mouth did not let excessive words slip, and who received quite a pretty penny from the master for that task and his many other useful activities.

The Brit was stuck fast, and when the wind turned to the northwest and the hump of the sea was already starting to appear from the fog, the master of Hohenholm himself was on the spot with his boats.

***The Beach Robber***

*Translated by Adam Cullen*



Herman Sergo (1911–1989) was born on Hiiumaa, an island off the coast of Estonia, had training in seafaring (he gained qualifications as a sea captain), and worked at the same time as a writer of fiction—known chiefly for his works describing the life of seafarers and coastal dwellers, and the coastal villages of Hiiumaa. His novel *The Refugee Ship* (*Põgenike laev*, 1966) describes the lives of the coastal people on pre-war Hiiumaa and their escape to Sweden in 1944, the first treatment of this subject in the literature of Soviet Estonia. The novel *Spriteshoals* (*Näkimalad*), regarded as Herman Sergo's primary work (it originally appeared in three separate volumes in 1984), was written in the spirit of historical fiction that appeared in Estonia during the early 1970s. The subject-matter is innovative in Estonian literature: Sergo portrays the life and fate of the Swedish diaspora on Hiiumaa, against the background of historical events in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Herman Sergo  
Randröövel  
Pegasus, 2009, pp 429  
First published in 1988  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## JAAN KROSS

## Between Three Plagues

*Kolme katku vahel*

*Between Three Plagues* is Kross' epic tetralogy about medieval Tallinn and the chronicler Balthasar Russow, which has been published in Russian, Polish, German, Finnish, and just recently in Latvian. Called a „symbol of the Estonian historical novel” and being the most voluminous of these, it derives in one way from tremendous historical research, but does not for a single moment fall behind any work of prose in terms of its pleasant readability. The unique manner of writing characteristic of Kross is to make a character familiar to a reader through and through—the novel's narrator is situated above the character, and conveys the flickering of his soul.

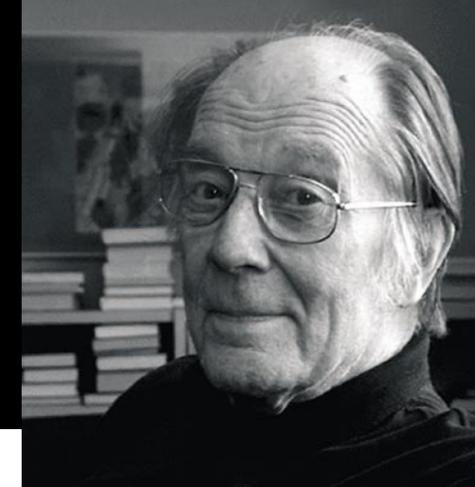
The main character of the novel is Balthasar Russow: a pastor for the congregation at Tallinn's Church of the Holy Ghost and a historical figure, who wrote the much-read *Chronica Der Prouintz Lyfflandt* (1578). This work has spread far and wide via several re-prints, and relates the history of Old Livonia from the time before and during the Livonian War. In Kross' interpretation, Russow is of Estonian descent—the son of a hauler from the then suburb of Tallinn, Kalamaja: this claim is based on the research of Tallinn-born Danish historian Paul Johansen (1901–1965). Thus, the novel is woven from historical events recorded in Russow's chronicle, as well as those that the chronicler witnessed with his own eyes.

The novel is made extremely intriguing by the chronicler's position between two worlds as a result of his rural origins. Russow's talent and ingenuity bring him out from the conditions inhabited by the subjugated people, in which he began as a boy named Pall. This boy possesses an ability to read circumstances well, as well as his father's support for his urge to acquire knowledge; quite many fortunate occasions to be taken advantage of come up, and his curiosity leads him onward from there. Young Balthasar studies at universities in Germany, and

by the time he returns to Tallinn, is already a member of a different standing. It is essentially a transformation into someone else (regardless of the fact that the pastor never forgets his origins, and even takes part in the Estonians' rebellion), and the payment of dues to both sides: in this way, the main character is both a symbol of Estonian potential and an intellectual's positioning between two different worlds. The book has been called a „tightrope-walking novel” in which that, which was initially intended, cannot always be carried out according to plan when faced with the danger of tumbling. The novel indeed begins symbolically with a scene, where the boy views tightrope dancers while he is skipping school: Pall the schoolboy is likewise a tightrope walker by nature, who revels in danger. Connections to the status of the intelligentsia at the time that the novel was published, in 1970s Estonia, are undoubtedly a parallel story: one's personal echelon, the game of hide-and-seek with those in power, and compromises made with one's own conscience.

On the other hand, the novel can also be read as the compelling story of one man's development and love(s). His individuality is also a burden, and the chronicle a book written honestly throughout his life. Russow's heroic loneliness is assuaged by his loyal friend Märten Bergkam—the son of a Tallinn captain, and the voice of his conscience. The medieval town of Tallinn is an independent character, while the author's spellbinding writing style leads the reader into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A film of same name was also made based on the novel (1970).

*Text by Elle-Mari Talivee*



... Because right then and there, Balthasar came downstairs. His bronze-colored beard, combed severely in place from his ears, bristled around his peculiarly cheerful and defiant mouth. He held a book. Balthasar placed the book on the table, and looked at the household members' faces one by one. He said:

„My friends. Some of you have paid heed to this on your own, and whoever has not, let it be known to them now—” He began in the local dialect, as he was of course accustomed to doing so from the pulpit and in the case of speeches made from his office (furthermore, more than half of his current audience would not have understood him speaking in German), but then found that even so, it would be more proper for him to use German because of Elsbet and Mihkel and Meckius, and so he continued in a mixture of both languages; however, he decided right then that everyone around the table had to understand Estonian sufficiently well, and desisted from translating himself:

„Living here with you under the same roof for several years, I have been laboring and toiling away at a great piece of writing—” he spoke, and added for those, who had no clue of his work, „at, as they say, a n n a l s concerning our dear and much-tried Livonia-born affair. Perhaps during this time,” he continued, „I have not had the capacity to pay attention to everything in my office and my house that might have been necessary.” No, he did not start to apologize to them for his possible carelessness. (And he would have been a fool if he did, Märten mused.) Balthasar picked the book up from the table, and said simply:

„Now, I am finally finished with this work. What becomes of it henceforth—well, that is already the concern above all of, let us say, the captains of our land, and then the German bookmakers, and finally those, who happen to recite what is printed from memory, if the Lord provides; in short, it is the concern of so many, that we must regard it so much as the Lord's concern. But at this time, I would like for you to drink a chalice of wine along with me—on the occasion of having brought it to a final close.”

*Between Three Plagues*

*Translated by Adam Cullen*

**Jaan Kross (1920–2007) was the grand old man of Estonian contemporary literature. Having graduated from the University of Tartu in 1944 as a lawyer, he also tried his hand in journalism and as a translator. Kross was arrested in 1944, accused of conspiracy against the German occupation forces. From 1948–1951, he was held prisoner in a Stalinist labour camp in the Komi Autonomous Republic, and from 1951–1954 was exiled to the Krasnoyarsk region. After returning home, he dedicated himself to literature as a freelance writer and literary translator. His novels present important historical figures from Estonian (cultural) history; their fictitious structure is based on thorough historical research, and the works have received broad international recognition. His works have been translated into more than 20 languages. Jaan Kross was an Honorary Doctor of both the University of Tartu and the University of Helsinki. He has won numerous Estonian and international prizes, and has been a nominee of the Nobel Prize in Literature several times.**

**PUBLISHING DETAILS**

Jaan Kross  
Kolme katku vahel  
Eesti Päevaleht, 2008, pp 1082  
First published in 4 volumes: 1970–1980  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

**TRANSLATIONS**

Latvian: Jānis Roze 2012  
Finnish: WSOY 2003  
German: Carl Hanser Verlag 1995  
Russian: Leningrad 1990 (vol I)  
Polish: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1979 (vol I)

**AWARDS**

National Cultural Award 1977  
Estonian Cultural Endowment's Prose Award 1973

## KARL RISTIKIVI

## The Abode of a Righteous Man

*Õige mehe koda*

One can distinguish in Karl Ristikivi's works a period, in which he wrote about Tallinn, ending in 1947. This comprises the „Tallinn Trilogy”: *Tuli ja raud* (Fire and Iron, 1938; first place in a novel competition), *Õige mehe koda* (The Abode of a Righteous Man, 1940), and *Rohtaed* (The Herb Garden, 1942). The trilogy describes the course of western Estonians' lives upon moving from the country to the city: the first addresses the fate of a working-class citizen, the second a bourgeois, and the third an intellectual. Living as a refugee in Sweden, the writer added the dilogy *Kõik, mis kunagi oli* (All That Ever Was, 1946) and *Ei juhtunud midagi* (Nothing Happened, 1947)—a farewell in its own right to Estonia and to Tallinn, and then turned towards European history in his writing.

*The Abode of a Righteous Man* was published in Soviet-occupied Estonia in 1940. The publisher wanted the title to be *Võõras majas* (In a Strange House), but the originally-planned title was restored in the book's second print in 1943, during German occupation.

*The Abode of a Righteous Man* is a spatial novel, in which the shifts caused by the process of urbanization, the modernization of the Hanseatic city, the confrontation between the native- and the new city, as well as rural Estonians' arrival in the city and their taking root within it carry an especially fascinating influence. On the other hand, the novel is written to Tallinn with love—it is addressed to its history and architecture in a spatial-poetic style. Ristikivi also has a deep sense of the story of one city's transformation. Jakob Kadarik, the main character, grows up as an orphan in the house of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Baltic-German: the ward becomes an apprentice and a journeyman, and ultimately a husband to the family's daughter Elsa Abner, as well as the owner of the merchant's house. This involves a tragic love story: as a girl, Elsa loved Jakob's half-brother, the hauler's son Villem, with whom she would not have remained

together at that time because of their difference in social standings. The novel also speaks of the old city falling by the wayside on its path towards becoming a new one, of the conflicts brought along by the rapid change of the entire urban lifestyle, and the transformation of a dusty provincial town in the Russian Empire into the capital of the young Estonian Republic. Paradoxically, the Estonian Jakob—himself a new inhabitant of a strange household, and in a way an envoy of the new reality—is the one, who is last to understand the necessity of the changes that have happened. The novel's spatial depiction is extremely intense: in the merchant's house, there is a wish to preserve a frozen, ideal picture of life, which is derived from the days experienced during the merchant Paul Abner's lifetime. The building is similar to a castle in a „gothic” (i.e. „dark”) novel of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England—it is a place saturated in time and memories. With its frozen space-time, the merchant's house is an anachronism in the changing city that surrounds it, dividing its own dwellers, who must choose sides; although this is complicated for them because of their origins. Parallels can be drawn on the one hand to Thomas Mann's Lübeck of *Buddenbrooks*, while on the other hand, the novel has ties to John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and its treatment of London. At the end of the novel, the merchant's house is destroyed in a fire, and a tall, modern structure is built upon its ruins; however, the new building does not escape the ghosts of the old house and its era. The *Bildungsroman*'s Ristikivi-Tallinn was written about on the eve of a world war: the reader perceives the questionable permanence of the city's enchantment, as well as its changing nature and openness to different interpretations, conveyed by both the depiction of space and the descriptions of the city itself.

Text by Elle-Mari Talivee



The city had grown more populous, and that population was more diverse and rowdier than it had been before. The grey walls that lined the square on the one side and the shacks that had crept up close to the ground on the other were still the same; the new city was growing out there, somewhere in the space between the highways and upon every drier knoll on the city's borderlands, from which it then spread out into the lower and marshier hayfields. A wooden ring closed around the city's stony heart, but it wasn't plausible that in the pitifulness of its shantytowns, it would ever manage to start choking the enclosed. He walked carelessly past the Cattle Gate well, where the noblemen's servant-maidens found an opportunity for making a sacrifice when they came to fetch water for tea—a sacrifice, which the women of every land have always made near a well, and for which they, alas, do not even always need that well. He furrowed his brow, staring past the bare space beneath the trees and out onto the muddy grounds beyond the gate—grounds with their booths and public, and thought it better to pace the streets within the walls that protected the city center. Behind its ironbound doors, that city was living in its Sunday peace and the comfort of plush furniture. That city overlooked the other, which crept around only for primary means—money, having made that its goal. That city overlooked the other, which increased the mass of people, who no longer wished to perhaps believe their superiors, and who believed quite little in God, too. And finally, it also overlooked Jakob Kadarik, who crept outside their closed abodes and doors, because he had seen such creepers before as well. No matter whether the city won and spat out the unwanted stranger, or whether the stranger won and remained—in the end, the city always won. It was capable of digesting them all, and over the course of time, they became wealthy citizens, good Christians, and the purest type of Germans that spoke Baltic-German; citizens, whose parents had to have come from Lübeck on this ship or that, if some heroic Swedish mercenary with a somewhat impolite nickname and crest was not to blame for their existence.

Jakob Kadarik walked along the city's main streets like a lover beneath his sweetheart's window, and when—slogging his way up the hill on the street named Pikk Jalg—he saw the cold, yellowish sun swimming above the black and red roofs, he removed his hat from his head for a moment to cool the heat, and it was like a salute.

*The Abode of a Righteous Man*

Translated by Adam Cullen

Karl Ristikivi (1912–1977) was a writer of historical novels, and one of the most European authors of Estonian literature. He studied geography at the University of Tartu, and later settled in Sweden in 1944. He became a recognized writer upon publishing the novel *Tuli ja raud* (Fire and Iron) in 1938. Together with his two following novels, which were still published in Estonia, these books make up his „Tallinn Trilogy”, depicted within the genre of psychological realism. One of the coupling motifs throughout these novels is Man's Journey, which is also the title of his only poetry collection (*Inimese teekond*, 1972).

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

Karl Ristikivi  
*Õige mehe koda* (Tallinn Trilogy vol 2)  
 Pegasus, 2008, pp 501  
 First published in 1940  
 Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## TRANSLATIONS

Russian: Avita 2001  
 Finnish: WSOY 1953



Estonian  
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Centre

## ESTONIAN LITERATURE CENTRE

ELIC, founded in 2001, has created a unique English language web site on Estonian writers and translators of Estonian literature and maintains a developing database of translations of Estonian literature. The web site and database can be accessed at:

[www.estlit.ee](http://www.estlit.ee)

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