

# *A Sharp Cut*

*contemporary  
estonian  
literature*

•  
;







*A Sharp  
Cut*

*contemporary  
estonian  
literature*



This edition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

The Publisher would particularly like to thank PM/Scanpix for their kind permission to use their photographs.

Published by the Estonian Literature Information Centre 2005

Design and layout: Rakett

Cover photo: Margus Johanson

A Sharp Cut. Contemporary Estonian Literature

ISBN 9985-9368-2-5

ELIC, Estonian Literature Information Centre

Voorimehe 9, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia

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

## *Contents*

<i>Contents</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Poetry</i>	
<i>Andres Ebin</i>	12
<i>Indrek Hirv</i>	14
<i>Jaan Kaplinski</i>	16
<i>Doris Kareva</i>	18
<i>Kauksi Ülle</i>	20
<i>Kalev Kesküla</i>	22
<i>Sven Kivisildnik</i>	24
<i>Hasso Krull</i>	26
<i>Asko Künnap</i>	28
<i>Viivi Luik</i>	30
<i>Ene Mihkelson</i>	32
<i>Paul-Eerik Rummo</i>	34
<i>Hando Runnel</i>	36
<i>Karl Martin Sinijärv</i>	38
<i>Triin Soomets</i>	40
<i>Mats Traat</i>	42
<i>Mari Vallisoo</i>	44
<i>Elo Viiding</i>	46
<i>Juban Viiding</i>	48
<i>Prose</i>	
<i>Nikolai Baturin</i>	52
<i>Maimu Berg</i>	54
<i>Jüri Ehlvest</i>	56
<i>Mehis Heinsaar</i>	58
<i>Ilmar Jaks</i>	60
<i>Jaan Kaplinski</i>	62
<i>Jan Kaus</i>	64
<i>Andrus Kiviräbk</i>	66
<i>Jaan Kross</i>	68
<i>Viivi Luik</i>	70
<i>Mihkel Mutt</i>	72
<i>Eeva Park</i>	74
<i>Peeter Sauter</i>	76
<i>Tarmo Teder</i>	78
<i>Jaan Undusk</i>	80
<i>Arvo Valton</i>	82
<i>Toomas Vint</i>	84
<i>Tõnu Õnnepalu</i>	86
<i>Ervin Õunapuu</i>	88
<i>Contacts</i>	90

# *Estonian Literature: Entity And Identity*

Estonian literature has at least three beginnings: two of them belong to a written tradition, based on the Latin alphabet, and the third to an oral tradition tracing back to times immemorial. Thus the Estonian literature is an entity with multiple identity, having several independent layers.

The first monumental work is the *Origines Livoniae sacrae et civilis* by Henricus de Lettis, written in clerical Latin in the beginning of the 13th century. The author was a priest of the German Order and he described the conquest of the future Estonian territory from a strongly ideological viewpoint. More chronicles followed during the subsequent centuries, the most relevant of which is the *Chronica der Prouintz Lyfflandt* by Balthasar Russow (1578); however, no artistic literary circles can be found before the first half of the 17th century, when a baroque “pastoral society” was formed in Tallinn, in 1635. The centre of the circle was a German poet Paul Fleming. Local “pastoral poets” were bilingual or multilingual, like the young Reiner Brockmann (1609-1647), who composed dedicatory poems in German, Latin and Estonian.

Bilingualism was the essential feature of the Estonian literature for several centuries. Literary history celebrates the bilingual catechism by Simon Wanradt and Johann Koell (1535) as the first printed book: it was written in Low German and Estonian, two most important colloquial languages in the urban milieu of those days. When a strong movement of national emancipation started in the middle of the 19th century, most of the outstanding literary figures were fluently writing in German as well as Estonian. The bilingual literary space was going to disintegrate only after 1905, when the revolutionary movement brought along a disruption of the society, forced many young intellectuals into exile and shattered the assured position of the nobility. After the War of Independence and the establishment of the Estonian Republic in 1918 bilingual literature became a thing of the past.

Thus, we could mark one beginning of the Estonian literature in the 13th century, with the chronicle of Henricus de Lettis; or in the 17th century, when the “pastoral society” gathered in Tallinn and Reiner Brockmann wrote his few poems. In spite of that, the established literary history has promoted another beginning: the publication of the national epic *The Son of Kalew* by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, in 1857-61. Needless

to say, the first edition of the epic was bilingual. Its artistic merits have sometimes been debated, but whether the epic is a shining masterpiece or a conspicuous failure, it undeniably points to the third, most immemorial beginning of the Estonian literature: the oral tradition and the intensive, singular and labyrinthine runic verse.

The origin of the runic song (called *regilaul* in Estonian) is hazy, but we know it belongs to the older cultural layer that the Estonians share with the neighbouring Fenno-Ugric speakers. One cannot say with much certainty how old that type of song is and where and when it was formed, but there is no doubt that it existed before the 13th century. After the German invasion the Estonian language got into a rapid fonematic change: most of the words and grammatic forms dropped their ending vowels, thus becoming remarkably shorter (this difference can be easily grasped, if we compare modern Estonian to Finnish that has preserved the older structure). However, runic verse resisted the change and became a living archive of the older linguistic shape: it drifted through the centuries like a floating island of an ancient mythical tongue, until the early romantic ethnologists “discovered” it in the late 19th century.

The central figure in the recording, collecting, archiving and publishing of the old songs was Jakob Hurt, a linguist and theologian, whose main source of influence was the Finnish school of ethnology. During 1871-1902 Hurt published numerous detailed instructions for the authentic recording of the old songs and stories, inciting to transcribe the texts quite literally. According to Hurt’s view, even the most unintelligible elements of the oral memory ought to be recorded accurately. Thus he practically gave up the idea of making up a coherent whole out of the fragments of oral tradition, leaving the task of interpretation to the following generations. That fruitful method allowed him to deposit and preserve more than one million runic songs.

But how was it possible to “discover” that bulk of oral literature in the industrial age, just on the brink of the 20th century? How could it keep safe and develop in spite of all the historical and cultural interruptions? Most of the scholars have referred to the tough, crystallized form of the alliterative verse; moreover, old songs were an essential part of the wedding rituals, funerals etc. However, the problem cannot be explained away by mere linguistic automatism. It seems more plausible to say that the old songs survived because of their cosmological impact, their central position in the symbolic structure of the community. If we take into account the variety and open-ended universality of the oral tradition, we can say that until the end of the 19th century oral literature largely overshadowed the scope of the urban bilingual culture.

In this respect, we could also project a fourth beginning of Estonian literature into the turn of the century and two following decades. Modern Estonian literature sets in after the collapse of bilingualism and the marginalization of old oral culture, denying any straight access to its predecessors. On the dividing line between the “two worlds” there stands a single poet, the vatic and confessional Juhan Liiv (1864-1913), who became a symbolic landmark to the new generation. In spite of his mental instability Liiv produced a remarkable body of poetry in his clearer moments; the texts were collected and edited by his younger contemporary Friedebert Tuglas, who published them in a single volume in 1909. Liiv’s poems can be easily memorized and schoolchildren often recite them by heart, while the tragic story of his madness presents the reverse side of the coin.

Friedebert Tuglas himself was a leading literary critic of the generation called *Noor-Eesti* (the Young Estonia), that also involved the influential symbolist poets Gustav Suits and Marie Under. Their position today might be called canonical. At the same time, a literary avant-garde is born: in spite of the scant experience with city life, futurism, expressionism and surrealism found their supporters. Several radical writers produced experimental works, careless of the fact that the public was lacking. After the War of Independence, the literary atmosphere gradually calms down; in 1926-33 an epic novel *Truth and Justice* will be published by A. H. Tammsaare. This voluminous masterpiece focuses on the process of emancipation and urbanization, throwing back an ambiguous glance of a literary refined modern novelist. The 1930s also brought along a new wave of symbolist poetry, including the mystical writing of Uku Masing, who became a legendary underground figure after the Second World War; his poetry and essays were often spread via the local samizdat.

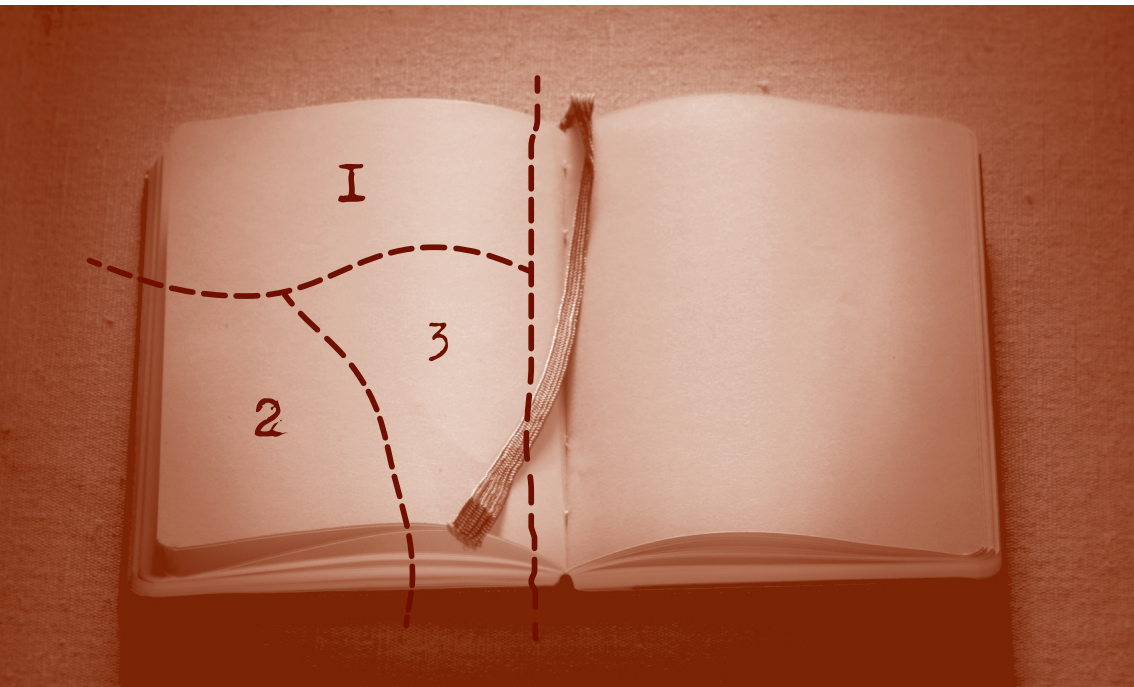
During the Soviet period, Estonian literature was forced to make several twists and turns. Again, it had to emancipate – break free from the restrictions of “socialist realism”, while the diaspora writers (in Sweden, Canada and elsewhere) often tried to hold on to the literary standards of pre-war period. The Swedish Estonian novelist Karl Ristikivi produced a series of novels, focusing on the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Europe; his best known work was nonetheless to be the allegorical *Night of the Spirits of the Dead* (1953), expressing the anguish of the exile that turned out to be permanent. The modernism of the 1960s had to face the iron curtain, but its principal influences – from Kafka to the Beatles – came from the “decadent” West. Dozens of new authors emerged in a relatively short period. Their most radical was the radical experimentalist Artur Alliksaar (1923-1966), centering his poetic creativity on the alliterative capacities of Estonian language. Jaan Kross published several books of poetry, before making a decisive turn towards the historical novels that soon would be much discussed and translated into many languages. Jaan Kaplinski and Juhan Viiding (Jüri Üdi) became the most prominent poets for three subsequent decades. A new breakthrough came forth in the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The intensity, multiplicity and confusion of this period seems to equal the sixties; political change brought along structural shift in the literary culture. However, all the consequences of that shift cannot yet be clearly defined.

In the 1960s there also appeared an urge to re-establish the connection with Estonian oral literature. But this proved to be a difficult task, demanding experimentation and radically new approaches. Estonian literature of the 21st century seems to move along the lines of the same multifarious identity, striving to think of itself as a whole, but having no proper means to bring all the historical layers together. Therefore it won't be an exaggeration to say: it is a linguistic and geographic entity with a deeply rooted “multi-kulti” identity.

*Hasso Krull*







*Poetry*

•  
;

# Andres Ehin

What is surrealism? If it is a historical movement restricted to a small circle of French poets, who gathered around André Breton in the 1920s, then there would be no more surrealists anywhere else in the world. But if surrealism is the name of an artistic sensibility quite independent from its material conditions, **Andres Ehin** (born 1940) would be a perfect example of a poet who has surrealist imagination flowing in his veins. In his first book of poetry *Hunditamm* (1968) the direction was yet somewhat undecided, but from 1971, with

PM/Scampix



the publication of the fabulous *Door on an Opening* (Uks legendikus, 1971) Ehin established himself as the foremost imaginary poet of his generation. This impression was confirmed with *Let the Bird Babble Outside* (Luba linnukesel väljas jaurata, 1977) and an effervescent book of fiction *Chips of Entertainment into Buoyant Flames* (Ajaviite peerud lähvad lausa lõkendama, 1980), mixing dark humour with fantasy and inventing incredible gossip.

Unlike the French surrealists, Ehin has rarely explained his own poetic technique. However, in 1966 he published an early manifesto *Image and the Senses* (Kujund ja meeled), affirming his preference of a certain “eidetic sensibility” as a fundamental principle of artistic creation. “Eidetic phenomenality does not coincide with memory. On the contrary, it brings sensual activity even further. Let us take an example: the artist sees a big rock covered with moss. He will be sensually so enchanted, that after passing the rock he will continue seeing the rock, and he does not even notice the bushes and trees entering his field of vision in reality.” Ehin expresses deep conviction that the eidetic phenomenality might reproduce itself, when the stimulus has long since disappeared, thus becoming the source of creativity.

In 2000 Andres Ehin gathered most of his production into a volume *The Subconscious Is Constantly Drunk* (Alateadvus on alatasa purjus), encompassing about 550 poems over four decades. In a brief afterword to the book he states: “I do not consider myself a formalist. In poetic language I express those moods and states of mind that cannot be expressed otherwise. If the play turns into magic, it won’t be a play any more. I believe in sudden ideas, effects and enlightenment. I believe in inspiration.”

Apart from writing poetry, Ehin has also been an active translator - his interests have ranged from Russian romanticism to Korean or Georgian modernism, from the Chukchi shaman-tales to the Arabian Nights, and from the Sufi mysticism to Jungian psychoanalysis. Andres Ehin has also published two semi-historical novels.

*Text by Hasso Krull*



# Indrek Hirv

**Indrek Hirv** (born 1956) is a true poet. Evidence of this lies in the fact that Hirv feels that poetry is the only way to make contact with the world. He has also worked in ceramics and started to exhibit his work over twelve years ago, but Hirv is better known as a poet – a virtuoso.

On the contemporary Estonian literary scene, where the word can represent the bearer of the message, but in most cases the word

and its bearer are not inextricably linked, Hirv is a rare exception. He could be reproached for clinging to tradition and tending towards mannerism, but this would be to overlook the fact that Hirv's poetry is consciously and profoundly intertwined with European poetry. He is a delicate and pliant branch of a mighty tree which grew out of the entwining shoots of Homer and Solomon. Hirv has never concealed this fact, complementing his own collections of poetry with

translations of the poetry of François Villon, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, etc.

PM/Scampix



Hirv's unusual attention to verse technique, his perfect syllable stress and rhyme have also attracted a different kind of criticism – that his aesthetic perfection is accompanied by ethical obscurity or the complete lack of it. But does beauty always have to carry a message of sculptural clarity? Hirv's elegant verse exudes a strange longing and melancholy which is not intended for the intellect but for intuition. Hirv's words are not directed at time nor at history.

The poet's journey started in 1987 with the collection *Dream Rage* (Uneraev) and continued with an impressive stream of books, of which the closest to Hirv-like perfection was perhaps *Star Beggar* (Tähekerjus, 1993). Hirv's poems could easily move from one book to another, for new collections generally contain both old and new poems.

Although Hirv's work has influenced a whole generation and produced more than one epigone, at the end of the 1990s his poetry seemed to be welling up behind some kind of dam – the form needed innovation, the message needed clarification. An unexpected breakthrough came recently with the collection *Blood of Butterflies Light as Air* (Liblikate õhkkerge veri, 2001), which introduces a new and unfamiliar Hirv. Rhyming in this collection has receded, and the message on occasions becomes aphoristic.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

once your sleep weighed heavy on my breast  
and viscous sadness snaked through my veins  
my imprint in you — birdprint in the air —

if anything should return it is just sadness within

only the wrist flick of a wave remains —  
I too am misty in this memory picture  
but I know for sure as I sip the autumn rains  
that the star-studded clouds are our legacy.

\*\*\*

olives deep in my mid-winter pocket  
I sleep by day — I keep watch by night  
a birch in the south — at home I'm a vine  
at peace and pacing — at the same time

olives deep in my mid-winter pocket  
my mind drifts — steel and glass surround  
I give heed to the dead — and at their behest  
plant my feet firmly here on home ground

\*\*\*

All of your frightening frigidity  
will one day be gathered  
on the moon-landscapes of your light-hued retinæ  
to be set ablaze

Sparks flying like red corpuscles  
will beat against the lenses of your eyes  
until huge bell jars fracture  
and a gust of the odor of love  
wafts in through your splintered irises

Hundreds of mouths will open  
in the soft fogs of the clouds  
their breath will mingle  
with your odorless coolness  
in the bonfire's glow  
and the incandescent starry sky  
will whisper to you the first word  
of the Unabridged Book of Self Deceit

# *Jaan Kaplinski*

The most famous and most translated Estonian writer today, **Jaan Kaplinski** (born 1941), started his literary life as a poet in what are termed the Golden Sixties of Estonian literature. Born in Tartu, the son of a Polish lecturer and a French-language philologist he participated in various types of culture as a boy and in his youth, starting with linguistics. He went on to take an interest in the philosophy, anthropology, ecology and botany of traditional cultures, plus their religious beliefs. Kaplinski

PM/Scampix



has written essays, plays and has translated. Over the past few years, he has cultivated an intellectual style of prose and enriched Estonian literature with his travel writing. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature, and has lectured and given talks in Vancouver and Calgary, Ljubljana and Trieste, Taipei and Stockholm, Bologna and Cologne, London and Edinburgh. He has also been Writer-in-Residence at the University of Aberystwyth in Wales. His wide-

ranging thoughts about contemporary nature, in the broadest sense of the word, can be found on his website at: <http://jaan.kaplinski.com/>

Kaplinski has himself said that his poetry is part of an expression of a love for the world, a long poetic list of people and things which he appreciates. This declaration of love certainly also has its therapeutic function, aimed at nature and individuals, culture and society at one and the same time, seeing nature as one whole and trying to return to the pristine purity of paradise. One important matter is the allusion in his first poetry collection to Buddhism - where he suggests that his wisdom is some two thousand years old. Kaplinski, who is otherwise critical of religion as a whole, has remained involved with the religions of the East to this day.

Although he has become the central and most productive Modernist in Estonian poetry, Jaan Kaplinski has avoided routine and has tried to connect to the basic flow of poetry by constant change. He has written songlike poetry with rhythm and rhyme, poems which are sparsely worded and also towers of syllables, plus prophetic long poems. Lately he has poeticised the simple things in everyday life by writing poetry in colloquial language, devoid of metaphorical reference. He has written poetry directly in the English and Finnish languages, also in the southern regional brand of the Estonian language: Võro kiil.

Kaplinski's poetry has been written by a European humanist who has grown very aware of, and interested in, Eastern cultures.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

In the morning, I was presented to President Mitterrand,  
in the evening, I was weeding nettles from under  
the currant bushes.

A lot happened inbetween, the ride from Tallinn  
to Tartu and to our country  
home  
through the spring that we had waited for so long,  
and that came, as always, unexpectedly,  
changing serious greyish Estonia at once  
into a primary school child's drawing in pale green,  
into a play-landscape where mayflies, mayors and cars  
are all somewhat tiny and ridiculous ... In the evening  
I saw the full moon rising above the alder grove. Two bats  
circled over the courtyard. The President's hand  
was soft and warm. As were his eyes,  
where fatigue was, in a curious way,  
mingled with force, and depth with banality.  
He had bottomless night eyes  
with something mysterious in them  
like the paths of moles underground  
or the places where bats hibernate and sleep.

\*\*\*

The possibility on rain ... If rain is possible,  
everything is possible - spinach, lettuce, radish and dill,  
even carrots and potatoes, even black  
and red currants, even swallows  
above the pond where you can see  
the reflection of the full moon and some bats flying.  
The children finish playing badminton and go in.  
There is a haze to the west. Little by little  
The fatigue in my limbs changes to optimism. I dream  
I borrow a plane to fly to Cologne.  
I must go in too. The sky's nearly dark,  
a half-moon shining through birch branches.  
Suddenly I feel myself like an alchemist's retort  
where all this - heat, boredom,  
hope and new thoughts -  
is melting into something strange, colourful and new.

\*\*\*

The centre of the world is here, in Manchester.  
I carry it with me  
as we all do. The centre of the world  
pierces me, the way a pin  
pierces the body of an insect.  
The centre of the world  
is the pain.

# Doris Kareva

It is easy to say of **Doris Kareva** (born 1958) that she secures her place like a shining pearl in the strong tradition of Estonian women's poetry. However, that would be to say that Doris Kareva is simply a very good poet; that she is a master who knows how to deal with words.

The most striking feature of Kareva's poetry is its strict adherence to form; her wording is not so much economical as minimal.

Kareva's method seems to be to use as few words as possible, astonishingly often the message comes across clearly and at the same time with multiple meanings. On the other hand, the multiplicity of meanings can generate the opposite of clarity: a form of hinting which at its most illuminating becomes utterly oracle-like.

Kareva's language can be compared to that early morning moment when the sun has not yet torn the veil of mist into nothingness but still gives

the mist a golden sheen. Kareva's sense of language is unrivalled and unlimited.

But Kareva-like poetry does not find expression only on a stylistic level. Scarcity of words is accompanied by depth of message. At a time when Estonian poetry is dominated by doggerel, by sociality searching for and finding different meanings, by actuality and social awareness, Kareva's metaphysical sensitivity and unbearable lightness of ontology always strike a fresh and polemical note. Kareva could be criticised for all too often sacrificing the message on the enchanting altar of beauty. Nevertheless, there is at present no other Estonian poet, whose message exudes a powerful moral change that can be physically sensed.

Utterance on the border of silence has made Kareva speak increasingly seldom. The first half of her poetry, from the debut collection *Photographs* (Päevapildid, 1978) up to the collection *Shadow and Instant* (Vari ja viiv, 1986), constitutes five collections over a period of nine years. Between her collected poems *Time of Grace* (Armuaeg, 1991), which also includes new texts, and her most recent collection *Mandragora* (2002) four collections appeared over a period of twelve years, with a gap of five years between *Mandragora* and its predecessor *Soul Circle* (Hingring, 1997). In a sense the final stop for Kareva-like poetry has to be a voluntary retreat into the borderland of falling silent.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

Photo by Pina Ruber



For all  
 who have gone astray at sea,  
 for all  
 who have spilled the day,  
 I pray tonight  
 in the fading light of the candles,  
 from a tiring heart's  
 last pain and power I pray.

Come,  
 tramps, crooks and cripples,  
 vagabonds and courtesans,  
 chiromancers and pimps,  
 loafers, liars, junkies,  
 bums, boozers and prodigals;  
 you, the frightened, the hungry, the cold,  
 you, who were born unfathered,  
 you, turned down by the world,  
 you, who've been lost and despaired for so long —  
 you'll get the softest beds for rest  
 tonight.

For you I will set the table,  
 fine wines and delicious dishes —  
 come.

I shall recognize you,  
 there must be some of your blood in mine...  
 Only for one, the gate will fall silent.

Sadist, you are a stranger to me.

\*\*\*

The world is forgotten, transforming and flowing.  
 All once assembled will merge and be lost.  
 Blood conveying salt of the stars,  
 a purple pulse beats in the memory:  
 don't believe! Your being is past.  
 Don't fear — it all repeats in the mind.  
 Only what never really happened  
 is always at hand.

\*\*\*

For one more while, at the table I stayed  
 amid the high, echoing halls.  
 All of my friends have passed away  
 or taken flight abroad.

How dark the mead.

How strong,  
 how bottomless seems the mug!  
 And still, and still, and still,  
 the blow of grace has not been struck!

# Kauksi Ülle

**Kauksi Ülle** (born 1962) is the central figure of the Southern Estonia regional movement. She has been equally active as a poet and as a promoter of her mother-tongue, Võro, which is officially still considered as a dialect of the Estonian language. However, Northern literary critics usually admit their linguistic incompetence in this field, thus giving empirical proof of the relative autonomy of the Võro tongue.

Photo by Arpo Ilves



Kauksi Ülle has published seven books of poetry, two novels, short stories and a primer of the Võro language for local schools. Her first collection of poetry *On Top of a Hill of One's Own* (Kesk umma mäke, 1987) was already recognized as an eminent digression from the regular path of “regional poetry”: it was lacking the soft romanticism of the countryside and using

forthright expressions with no hesitation. Traditional authority was represented by the figure of the *vanaimä*, the Grandmother, giving necessary instructions to a young girl how to lead her own life. Then, within more than ten years, followed a long series of ballads: *Geese or Swans* (Hanõ vai luigõ), *Morn and Eve* (Agu ni Eha, bilingual with English text), *The Golden Woman* (Kultanaanõ, bilingual with Finnish text) and *Rises the Bride of Joy* (Nõsõq rõõmu mõrsija). The ballads of Kauksi Ülle do not try to emulate the French ballad tradition, although they are usually based on old songs or fairy tales and are written in a short, ascetic verse, and tend to be syllabic. The tonal variety ranges from comic realism to tragic allusiveness, the solution of the story often remains open-ended. In her latest book *Solstice* (Käänüpäiv, 2003) Kauksi Ülle has returned to more intimate personal experiences, yet she continues to affirm the cosmological values dear to her. The conceptual axis of her poetic discourse now is her *immaimmamaa*, “mother’s mother’s land” - evidently Kauksi Ülle’s sense of heritage is far from being patriotic.

In her two novels, *The Boat* (Paat, 1998) and *The Apple Tree* (Uibu, 2003), Kauksi Ülle focuses on a woman’s life, sexuality and social difficulties. *The Boat* covers more than forty years of Estonian history in 150 pages, beginning with the harsh times of Stalinism and ending with the Estonian Republic. The central character Ainu has a visionary power, but the archaic community is disintegrating and does not need her any more. *The Apple Tree* is an obviously autobiographic narrative describing urban experience, akin to the subject of her short stories.

*Text by Hasso Krull*

## *What strangers know about the Seto people*

do they understand

once on the radio I explained  
how the graves of mothers, fathers  
fall on the other side of the border  
and they can't be visited

those estonians, they answered  
do you really need to visit them  
well, we certainly  
don't visit them

and they don't remember  
the old times when people lived in teepees  
in the winter they would dig  
into the earth inside next to the fire  
bury the parents right there

so close they could question,  
grieve with, or talk to them

then later they went to the graveyard  
after church to dine with the dead  
and have a little drink

but now there's the border  
and the land of evil

and you my dear  
must be double-tough  
may it burn and give life  
to the power in your punchy soul

# *Kalev Kesküla*

**Kalev Kesküla** (born 1959) made his breakthrough in Estonian poetry with the collection *Through the City Night* (Läbi linnaöö, 1986) which came into being on account of natural patriotism and social pathos. Basically speaking, Kesküla has remained a lively social poet, although his poetry has become more ironic where the texts are characterised by a special kind of mildness. Kesküla's poetry is neither biting nor spiteful, he looks at problems in society with a wry smile and the poet could be characterised as

“an idealist on the sofa”. Kesküla mainly writes free verse, full of associations where cultural facts, names, paraphrases and quotes are combined. This mildly ironic poet has found his niche amongst the cultural editors of the weekly “Eesti Ekspress” where he is one of the most sensitive voices observing and describing cultural change. Kalev Kesküla's two most recent books have been *Songs of the Republic* (Vabariigi laulud, 1998) and *In Plato's Realm* (Platoni riigis, 2002)

where he continues in the direction of social poetry. The first of these collections is devoted to the Estonian Republic, the second to the European Union. Estonian critics have said that *Songs of the Republic* is “a self-ironic lover's attempt to show his love for his native land under postmodernist circumstances”. In Kesküla's poetry, the republic has been personified and the poems contain a large number of intertextual quotes and allusions. For the author, Estonia is like a typical Estonian man weighed down by complexes and shortcomings, who works hard and drinks plenty of vodka in his spare time. At the same time, the Republic loves its citizens and looks after them in the way a caring father would do. But when the book came out, voices were raised complaining about the author's lack of respect. Nevertheless, the collection won the 1998 annual Estonian Cultural Endowment Award.

*Text by Piret Viies*

Photo by Mallo Kruuser



## *In Plato's Republic*

I live on the eighth floor in Plato's Republic  
 Upstairs are eight Russian and Estonian families  
 My one-metre-twenty wide bed  
 commands two world views

A judge of taste by profession  
 I help art find its place  
 and wine its tipplers

My place is on the eighth floor  
 with a view of the evening sun  
 For seventeen Christmases now  
 I've been fitting an oversized fir  
 between ceiling and floor.

There's no better wine than in Platos' Republic

## *Dr. Faustus*

Dr Faustus works for the International  
 World Food Organisation  
 He connects with all known spheres  
 via Nokia Communicator  
 and has a comprehensive eternal soul insurance policy

His quality of life is of the very best stuff  
 at weekends he polishes it to a mystical shine

Five days a week Saint Dr Faustus speaks  
 to the beasts, birds and veg  
 so that they'd feed the homunculi better

His need for human company is long gone  
 However, he wants to grant joy and prosperity

# Sven Kivisildnik

**Sven Kivisildnik** (born 1964) stands out as the most singular and exceptional figure in the Estonian poetry of the previous decade. His approach to literature has been more daring and rude, but also more innovative than any other writing appearing in Estonia. Often working with no qualms about origins on existing material, Kivisildnik soon established himself as a literary outlaw, although this status is now slowly fading, but will surely remain a point of reference in every biographical sketch for many years to come.

Photo by Meiko Valgripa



The first important text published under the name of Kivisildnik (a pseudonym based on his real surname) was *Wet Viktor* (Märg Viktor, 1989). Its point of departure was a short rhymed poem by Marie Under, the major poet of the 1920s and 1930s, who continued writing poetry in exile after the Second World War. Kivisildnik extracted one single and central word from each line of Under's poem, making it the opening unit of his own verse. This

procedure was repeated 42 times, either by using all the keywords from Under's poem, or by omitting some of them. The production of text, as the author has claimed, was unconscious: each new line was written on a single sheet, after the previous one had been forgotten. The book was illustrated with an electrocardiogram of Kivisildnik himself. (After the completion of the work, he suffered a heart attack and spent several weeks in a hospital.)

In 1996 Kivisildnik published a voluminous book of poetry, extending to over 800 pages and including most of his work to date: *Like Red Agaric to a Bull* (Nagu härjale punane kärbseseen). This serialist aggregate comprises 14 long series of texts, the complete list resembling a sonnet; most of them have been constructed from existing material of literary origin (ancient songs, poems, short stories, novels).

One could also mention the long autobiographical poem *A Human Being Tested on Animals* (Loomade peal katsetatud inimene, 1997), offering a strangely reduced version of human subjectivity; the pornographic parody of religious dogmatics *Like a Tomcat Round a Plate of Male Porridge* (Nagu isane kass ümber isase pudru, 1996 on the web); and the short alternative version of the Estonian epic Kalevipoeg (2003), based on the oral tradition and presenting a series of funny sketches depicting the present-day Estonian mentality. Here Kivisildnik develops a more humorous approach, without giving up his fundamental radicalism. Today Kivisildnik is also well known as a political pamphleteer and literary critic.

*Text by Hasso Krull*

## *The Kalevipoeg Club*

The Traks Grill stands behind the Luua Manor  
near the Kalevipoeg Club.

It came to a man in a dream  
that as the moon waned  
on the first Thursday night  
he should go to the Traks Grill  
straight up to the bar  
which still stands there today.

He should dig on the south side  
under the bar near the cash register  
until he comes across a sewage pipe,  
then roll the pipe aside  
to reveal a kettle filled with coins,  
and if he doesn't fear  
what he will see there,  
if he maintains his composure,  
the wealth will be his.

It is said that the man went and dug  
until he came to the pipes,  
he rolled them aside,  
and there he saw the kettle of coins.

As he began to hoist it from the pit  
glamorous television hosts  
swept up from underneath  
in a cloud of dust and shards  
all hissing horribly,  
meaning to attack.

He flailed at them,  
many fell dead  
but more flew to replace them.  
Fear overcame the man,  
his body was wracked by tremors.

Finally he lept from the pit,  
but on the edge stood  
a large black Eurovision singer  
snarling fearfully  
and gnashing his teeth,  
meaning to attack.

The man struck the singer  
on the head with his spade  
and ran all the way home  
as fast as he could.

As for the coins, they were left  
behind and remain there to this day,  
but they can only be taken one day a year  
on the Day of the Holocaust.

# Hasso Krull

**Hasso Krull** (born 1964) is a remarkable phenomenon in the Estonian sphere of culture. His activity is so multi-faceted, and the content of each facet so important, that if any one of the expressions of his gifts were to be removed, his name would still be known.

First of all, Hasso Krull is one of the most outstanding intellectuals of the 1990s. A popular teacher and shaper of social

Photo by Tii Kolu



thought, Krull has succeeded in familiarising the Estonian reader above all with recent and contemporary European thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud and Pierre Bourdieu.

Of course, Krull's scope goes beyond post-structuralism and psychoanalysis; his writing on history, politics, art, films and philosophy are no less interesting. Part of Krull's creative energy goes into an internet periodical *Ninniku*

which focuses on poetry in translation. But Hasso Krull is first and foremost a poet. His poetry always attracts attention, even if this attention does not always find itself on sure ground.

So far Krull's poetry has been marked by two axes. The first and earlier axis refers to a conscious groundlessness where any given line of a poem can alter the poem's message, meaning, style, direction, voice and target. This was expressed most strikingly in his collection *Poems 1987-1991* (Luuletused 1987-1991). Even the poem's space can be altered, as can be seen in the hypertextual poem *Stairs* (Trepp, 1996), the first of its kind.

The second axis refers to a conscious intertextuality; the fact that any text can be linked to any other text, picture, sound or thought. The clearest example of this is the collection *Jazz* (1999) where the title of every poem is also the name of a legendary jazz musician. The collection *Scales* (Kaalud, 1997) was created together with the photographer Toomas Kalve whose photographs are like 'illustrations' to each of Krull's poems, and vice versa.

In Krull's latest collection *Cornucopia* (Kornukoopia, 2001) a new axis appears – poetry without axes. Poetry that says what it wants simply and directly. Poetry that has no hidden secrets, allusions, references or metaphors. Paradoxically, in Krull's case the end result is particularly impressive.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

the middle of October  
 a big fat housefly  
 buzzes around the kitchen  
 bouncing against the window pane  
 on the kitchen table an empty matchbox

I pick up the matchbox from the table  
 look to see if it's quite empty  
 yes it is, so I keep it wide open  
 creep up on the fly and trap it quickly  
 in the small rectangular room

now I open the kitchen window  
 it's cold outside  
 hardly six degrees Celsius  
 I slide open the matchbox again and the fly  
 vanishes silently on the wind

I close the window and fasten the latch  
 press shut the inner pane too  
 stand in the kitchen it's warm in here  
 the buzz of the fly has stopped  
 only small fruit flies circling around

the big fat black fly  
 flies silently on, in the chill wind  
 grows chilly itself a heavy torpor  
 seizes it its strong patterned wings  
 and its powerful hairy legs

I dedicate this poem  
 to you, noisy nuisance of a fly  
 to the icy October air  
 and to the torpor  
 in its wings legs butt trunk eyes

cars glide along the wet street  
 cats sit among the large leaves  
 looking around them in all directions  
 there's fire in the stove  
 warmth in the kitchen

# Asko Künnap

**Asko Künnap** (born 1971) graduated from the Estonian Academy of Arts as an industrial and graphic designer and subsequently studied interior design at Oslo Art Academy in Norway. He has had three books of poems published: *In Defence of Coincidences* (Kokkusattumuste kaitseks), a combination of his third graphic art exhibition catalogue and poetry book in 2001, *And the Lizards replied* (Ja Sisalikud vastasid), a poetry book in the form of handbook of typography in 2003 and *The Fairest War* (Kõige ilusam sõda) in 2005. His poems are included in the *Arc anthology*, *A Fine Line: New Poetry from Eastern & Central Europe* (2004) published in UK.

Picture from private collection



The art director of a Tallinn-based creative design studio and ad agency Rakett (“The Rocket”), he is an illustrator, designs books, board games and CD covers and runs an alternative micro publishing house Nao Kirik (“The Face Church”) as well as writing poetry. He has

participated in international poetry events and readings and won numerous awards for his design and art direction work. His poems have been translated into English, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Slovenian and Hungarian.

*And the Lizards Replied* is almost a perfect book of pure style, since the content and the design, the text, the script and photos form a unity and amplify one another’s effect. Some of the poems are accompanied by stories that tell about their birth or give some self-ironic commentaries. Playfulness and seriousness change places subtly, and the result is stylish, faultless and cultured. Künnap varies his moods, sometimes playfully, sometimes with a nostalgic desire for unpretentious and real existence. The book received the Estonian Cultural Endowment Poetry Award in 2003.

*The Fairest War*, his latest collection of poetry, is a notebook of a travelling magician illustrated by Künnap’s own photography showing the small but important details captured in the cities visited in en route, secret maps found from his own palm and models of the universe formed by the bubbles in the glass of cider. Künnap’s world is a modern world, striving for internationalism and the beauty of the game; he self-consciously brings together well-maintained mannerism and well-maintained simplicity - the result offers enjoyable reading, but as a rule, it does not scratch, irritate or jolt, as does the poetry of some outstanding shocker or a hardened world reformer.

*Text by Rutt Hinrikus and ELIC*

## *Into the ebony darkness!*

In a café pattering with rain  
 on the embankment in Ljubljana,  
 against a backdrop of sad tin dragons,  
 on each side of a wet table,  
 above raspberry tea and cognac,  
 me and the Dream Sorcerer,  
 In the café lashing with rain,  
 our mouths full of the folktale  
 of the time when dragons' scales  
 were still soft as wine.  
 And the Dream Sorcerer speaks:  
 in father's workroom at night,  
 when the hour cut the dust and darkness  
 into turves for the mice,  
 a crossroads branched off –  
 the four exits in four walls,  
 four focussed corridors.  
 Up to your knees in the carpet,  
 the air was made of question marks!  
 If only you'd gone straight,  
 straight ahead, your eye still  
 imagining ivy and monstera  
 but not making them out.  
 If only you'd gone straight, straight ahead,  
 alone into the ebony darkness!

Me and the Dream Sorcerer,  
 coats ever heavier with water,  
 in the café pattering with rain  
 on the embankment in Ljubljana.

## *Where did the words go?*

My lord, look, the houses are being searched  
 and the thatch is set to fire, the moss, the branches, the oakum,  
 the land on a black-and-white photo, the paper twists:  
 Where did the words go?

Air from the hay – my letters are opened  
 suitcases turned, notebooks, coins, dust,  
 the earth under the moon bereft of villages  
 gravelly under your hand:  
 Where did the words go?

My lord, hallo there, are you with me  
 when night approaches, brother, nephew, sisters,  
 Mars approaches in slow motion, breathe in!  
 Where, where, did the words go?

# Viivi Luik

**Viivi Luik** (born 1946) has written a collection of essays entitled *A Locker of One's Own* (Inimese kapike, 1998) in which can be found a lecture given in Toronto and called *Seven Women* which tells of the Estonian tradition of women poets. Luik here briefly covers the works of seven of the most outstanding women poets from the 1850s to the present day. Viivi Luik herself belongs to this same tradition. Her voice has been present in Estonian literature since the 1960s when she started out as a nature poet. Then, in the 1970s, she

describes the adaptation or the lack of it to the artificiality of society. Her progress as a poet can be described as descending from youthful romanticism down to earth, ascending again to utter prophecies of distress.

PM/Scampix



Viivi Luik came as a child prodigy to poetry from the depths of the countryside. Right at the start, her miniature poems, in Japanese style, expressed immediate oneness with nature. Her first collection of mature poems appeared when the author was

not yet twenty years old. In her later poetry, Luik has expressed an unusual stubbornness, deep individualism and clashing discords. From the start, she has been very much the self-conscious poet and has developed like a canary in a mineshaft, breathing in the spirit of the times. Instead of landscapes, her poems began to portray cityscapes, and the poet began to use ever more sombre tones in her descriptions, rising in her later collections to heights of universality. As a poet of an era, she believes that each epoch has its own pains and concerns which are brought to life again and echoed in poetry. She can be delicate and empathetic, as well as harsh and filled with pathos. The main leitmotifs in her poetry are the wind, ice, blood, earth, death, metal and a starry sky. It can contain brutality and a curse of the Earth above which the heavenly winds of war hold sway in global threat. Aware of her mission as a poet for her people, she at the same time is a poet reaching out to the world, sensing the winds of change in the fate of nations.

Her later poetry is noted for cruelty, sharpness and precision and in paraphrasing the words of her imagery we can speak of the painful taste of blood when the tongue touches frozen metal. Here Viivi Luik's gaze is one of a prophet, confirming in her predictions the keenness of times gone by.

Luik has also written literature for children and young people, essays and newspaper columns. Her two novels are *The Seventh Spring of Peace* (Seitsmes rahukevad, 1985) and *The Beauty of History* (Ajaloo ilu, 1991) both of which have been translated into several languages.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

Across the empty page moves a human hand,  
 skin, flesh, fingernails and bones.  
 But held by three fingers, slanted toward the good  
 and evil of the world, is the pencil, firm and true.

Outside howls the wind or the city or history.  
 The gazing eyes have become inscrutable.  
 The heart beats against the chest ceaselessly,  
 but the mouth is mute and cannot explain

why every moment contains a special misery  
 felt by everything that breathes. The hand writes.  
 And the time will come when this dark pain  
 will rise from the page and bring us back to life.

## *Wing shadow*

Say it: “Verdant fir, you dark celestial angel.”  
 Say it poignantly. Unmockingly. With grace.  
 Words infuse the air with white enchanted circles.  
 Don’t observe the manner of your voice or face.

Stars that never tarnish, pious Christmas light  
 lay their curses on a land already damned.  
 All too clear the end, the start not yet in sight.  
 Nations scattered at the slightest gust of wind.

“Til death’s magic mountain rises and explodes,  
 wear the century like a dark engagement ring.  
 All is possible. This too, that heaven’s host  
 may rally from its ashes without warning.

# Ene Mihkelson

**Ene Mihkelson** (born 1944) studied Estonian literature at Tartu University and has since worked principally as a freelance writer in her university town. As an analyst of the tragic episode in Estonian history involving the Forest Brethren, the anti-Soviet guerrilla movement in the late 1940s and early 1950, and herself daughter of such a Forest Brother, she was not regarded as an acceptable writer in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. She

PMScampix



has published ten collections of poetry and five novels, the most recent of which *The Dream of Abasuerus* (Ahasveeruse uni) is an exciting account of a family from those years. It has been regarded as the greatest Estonian novel of the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. The protagonist is investigating the exploits of her own father. This man was regarded as a double agent by the Forest Brethren and sentenced to death by them. The protagonist

also analyses the whole family lineage and her own motivation for studying the subject in the first place.

Mihkelson's poetry is also rooted in these historical layers of family myths and background. Memory, identity, fate and documented layers of history form the keynote of her poems. The poet tries, in the first place, to give everything a name, since only named objects and events retain their essence and manage to survive. With regard to the past, naming is important to prevent matters from slipping into oblivion, in the present naming becomes an invitation to exist, uttered by a human tongue. Mihkelson's vocabulary is painful. Her style of poetry is often one of allegory and holds eternal values. By way of intertextuality, Mihkelson's poems link up with the past and earlier poetic tradition as well as with the present, without becoming mere reportage. While still dealing with her nation, Mihkelson has, over the years, moved to the level of humanity as a whole, incorporating Biblical quotes and allusions to world literature.

Ene Mihkelson avoids interviews and otherwise commenting on her writing. Her motto is to be found in her writings themselves.

Ene Mihkelson has also published short stories and literary criticism.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

Yes still this sense that those rare  
 soulbirds who really hear and know  
 touch as well as flight  
 must be sheltered from night's harshness  
 All souls suffer a body Sadness limits  
 them no less than the soulless who  
 always distinguish cause from effect  
 They preach fundamentals  
 the four compass points while from the birdsouls  
 feather after feather falls in flight  
 until finally the air cannot carry them

*(the Juhani Liiv poetry award 1999)*

\*\*\*

Someday there will no longer be a living soul and people  
 are of glass They describe circles that enclose  
 you as well You ask but no one answers Does not know  
 or feel Your language I would let kill me if you could  
 see I am still alive

\*\*\*

To a provincial town's slow life I rushed  
 impulsively tearing shrouds of the crucified  
 Speaking of vanity that from a distance seemed holy  
 Quite flayed I remained naked  
 Be silent when you touch the heart  
 Borderlands are fiction

# Paul-Eerik Rummo

**Paul-Eerik Rummo** (b. 1942) might be called the most paradoxical “living legend” of the 1960s. His early début in 1962 was quickly followed by two powerful books *Always come close to my joys* (Tule ikka mu rõõmude juurde, 1964) and *Snowlight... snowdark* (Lumevalgus... lumepimedus, 1966),

making him one of the prominent figures of his innovative generation. In 1968 Rummo published a book that is nothing less than the culmination of the symbolist trend in post-war Estonian literature: *Poetry 1960-1967* (Luulet 1960-1967), bringing together some 90 poems of remarkable vigour and brilliance.

This culmination was also a consummation: having completed his youthful work, the poet took

a different direction. If Rummo’s early work clearly represented the symbolist trend, his later poetry became more experimental. The details are usually realistic, drawn from everyday life and conversations, while the structure of the poem is often based on a single joke. In 1972 he made an attempt to publish another collection, called *The Sender’s Address* (Saatja aadress) and bring together the production of the last five years. This attempt was not successful, mainly for political reasons. The book spread via *samizdat*. One might say that this was still a victory, in that the officials were in fact defeated. But Rummo gave up writing poetry. His production in the following three decades has been remarkably scarce.

Paul-Eerik Rummo has also written drama texts, lyrics, film scripts, books for children and literary criticism. He has translated the poetry of Dylan Thomas, John Donne, Eugenio Montale, Alexander Pushkin and T. S. Eliot (*The Waste Land and Other Poems*, 1999). After the fall of the Soviet regime he has been engaged in politics. During 1992-94 he occupied the position of the Minister of Culture and Education.

*Text by Hasso Krull*



PM/Scampix

## *Why don't I kill myself*

I don't want to.

## *Again again again again again*

As soon as I close my eyes  
it happens once more  
What a beekeeper once told me  
about twenty five  
beehives  
that burnt down  
This true-life story  
This truly dead apiary

This is not a poem. The subject matter must crystallize in order to become a poem. I have waited, but it doesn't crystallize, it just doesn't and I can't wait any more. This is not a poem. In a poem you look for hidden meanings, ulterior motives, symbols. But here there are none. This is not a poem.

this is a rake with tines of fire  
that rakes the heather to cinders  
this is a saw with teeth of fire  
this is the gnawing through of the legs of the beehive  
this is the honeycombs melting  
this is the fact that honey does not extinguish fire  
the fact that even honey catches fire  
the fact that the bees sting the blazing air  
they sting the air  
and then they perish  
This is ash butterflies floating in the air

Then a scout returns from afar  
to dance for others the news  
that somewhere he found undiscovered flowers

This is the fact that I do not know  
how to dance for him to see  
all that happened here  
or how to answer him  
when he asks  
what is this all for?

# Hando Runnel

Poet and essayist **Hando Runnel** (born 1938) writes poetry which has a national tinge; a large part of his oeuvre relates to the belief he always retained that one day the Soviet occupation of Estonia would end and the Estonian Republic restored. Right from his first collection of poetry *Children of the Land* (Maa lapsed) which appeared in 1965, Runnel has examined issues of ethical values and resistance.

PM/Scampix



Although Runnel is not an academic, instead an autodidact, he has a feel for the subtleties of his mother-tongue and in his poems he alludes to Estonian folk poetry and earlier literary tradition. This is the main reason why his work has been so well received by Estonians at large and why he is regarded as a national author and why his songs have enjoyed such success, although his texts have the anonymous look of folk poetry. His

scale is wide, ranging from satirical epigrams written with great pathos to ribald ballads whereby he attempts to escape social and psychological strictures. On account of allusions and puns, his poetry has been considered by some as being untranslatable, but this quality helped, by way of ellipsis and subtexts, to evade the censor during Soviet times; Estonians were able to read between the lines. Those texts he was unable to publish because of censorship circulated by word of mouth or copied. But Runnel has also written pastiches where he simply enjoys imitation and creation.

Runnel has also written delicate poetry and sensitive love lyrics. What is on the surface deceptively simple in fact tackles profound issues, existential matters beyond the trivia of everyday existence. His collections of ceremoniously hymn-like poetry in praise of native-land and love, e.g. the collection *Beautiful Country* (Ilus maa) and his thoughts on artistic endeavour, e.g. *Heaven and Earth* (Taevas ja maa, 1994), have been influential.

One of Runnel's more recent masterpieces is the collection *Enigmas* (Mõistatused, 2000) in which he adds to the permanent theme of previous collections: the eternal woman. This collection contains somewhat ceremonious poems in Tagore style where Woman is mythologised, delicate hymns which are now subtly erotic, now more father-daughter in tone, then child-mother, man-woman. The central image here is the Motherland.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Sick of everything*

Sick of everything, sick of love and fear,  
sick of potholes, the hair on your own head,  
sick of ideas, big stacks of books,  
sick of seeing nowhere a glimmer of escape.

Sick of industry, sick of boats and rafts,  
sick of cars, sick of nuclear power,  
sick of the whistle blowing of peace and friendship,  
sick of foolishness, sick of the advice of the wise.

You are because you must be, without appetite you roam  
and breathe,  
even that to your mind is only empty routine,  
but a shudder, the smell of flowers - these you still  
appreciate,  
though you cannot tell why you lick your lips here.

Once life surprised you, you sought a meaning for life,  
but as your life fades, no meaning remains,  
emerges and fades, no meaning remains,  
what one discovers, for another disappears.

## *Lands and forests sleep, and houses.*

Suddenly some birds somewhere scream,  
I open the window, the night outside is muggy,  
the darkness tense with bad omens.

A short while ago everything was safer,  
and joy and peace hovered over the world,  
so where and why do these birds scream?  
Whose hearts cannot hold any more pain?

Beyond the window the night is dense, dark.  
The children wake and walk around the rooms,  
crying, but speaking no words to tell  
what has happened, why it is eery to sleep.

# Karl Martin Sinijärv

**Karl Martin Sinijärv** (born 1971) is one of the more colourful figures from among poets of the younger generation. Combining the role of poet, showman, journalist and gourmet, Karl Martin offers the world surprises both in print and when appearing in public. Karl Martin Sinijärv was recognised as a child prodigy

when he published his first collection of poems at the early age of 17. The poems were regarded as mature for someone of his age and the poet went on to tread the paths of poetic power. Over the years, his poetry has become more intense and subtle. At the beginning of his career, Sinijärv joined the Ethnofuturists, a movement that combined archaic content with futurist form. There were clear allusions to avant-garde poetry from the early 20th

century - Futurism and Surrealism. Alongside his experiments with puns and language experiments, Karl Martin has also written lyrical love poems, which show the romantic troubadour side of him, and these poems are shot through with an element of masochistic self-irony. There is never rest in Karl Martin's poetry, but there is a longing for it, a longing for freedom. In the most recent collections, which have been appearing since 1997, a certain change has taken place. His poetry has become more personal, treating more everyday themes. Now a weariness or even nostalgia has replaced the intertextual games and mood of revolt of the period of transition. Sinijärv's most recent collection "Artutart & 39" (2002) is the poet's best to date. The contours have crystallised, his intrinsic wordplay has taken on more charming aspect. This collection was awarded the Poetry Award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment for the year 2002.

Sinijärv has one quote that will, no doubt survive: "I'm bloody-well going to survive over time". In this grey country, it is perhaps surprising that someone comes up with such an honest truth.

*Text by Piret Viies*

PM/Scampix



Cataclop-cataclop come the horses thru bayward dirt.  
 Farfar their highersides show, for grass grows low,  
 dirtbaygrass.  
 Them riders show as well, cataclop-cataclop,  
 hooded by manes.  
 It is shady in the shade, ruins and wind, shade.  
 Beer has gotten warmish, and then I can not even  
 mount a horse decently.  
 Sand gets into my shoes, dog raves, not the sea.  
 Care I 'bout sea, care grasses and sands except in-shoes?  
 So happy so,  
 clunk in a van in a littermount wall-to-wall,  
 clunk in a van in a littermount door-to-wind. O!  
 I am on a way and even if it's short I'll stretch it long.  
 Exactly as long as I want.  
 My horses will never get tired.

\*\*\*

to drift away  
 at the very moment of your fridge  
 ringing its rong (metallic monotoneous)  
 it's hard  
 üüumm üüumm üüumm  
 and so so rapidly  
 the fridge drifts away and leaves me floating  
 to listen to a fresher tone:  
 rrnnyrn rnnym rnym ymm  
 i know it will cut it soon will abandon me silenced  
 (i'd like to drift as an icebank amongst them swans)  
 brpp! croaks a fridge and stays stays st--  
 crrwōnk! crumples a lampie and crrr--  
 ? what would've i wanted -parwhat caredoes if did  
 unbelievably voiceless  
 (this side of night)  
 unspeakably choiceless  
 (that tide of sight)

\*\*\*

Arcadia, so red the rose.  
 And oh so trivial its simple name.  
 Together they may beautyfully pose.  
 Arcadia, so red the rose.

Wine withers, sloughs congest the hose,  
 high brows get low, shame is to blame,  
 Arcadia! So trivial the rose  
 and all so red its very drunken name.

# Triin Soomets

**Triin Soomets's** (born 1969) poetic trajectory can be summed up most strikingly in the collection *Vein* (Soon, 2000), which contains poems written over a 10-year period, 1989–1999; three collections published in the first half of the 1990s and a fourth, *Skid Mark* (Pidurdusjalg), in 1999. Soomets's way of expressing herself seems to become more polished, more restrained and more defiant. Somewhat surprising, but nonetheless welcome, is her participation in *Pack of Cards* (Kaardipakk, 2001), which

features a common pack of cards and the cooperation of five well-known young poets (alongside Soomets, Karl-Martin Sinijärv, Asko Künnap, Elo Viiding and Jürgen Rooste).

photo by Sven Tupits



*Kaardipakk* is the only literary game played by Soomets so far. Not for her is the 'Poem of the Week' column in some newspaper, although she seems up to it and one can imagine a poem written by her - perhaps on some political

subject – as the brightest star, or indeed the black hole, of the poetry corner.

Although Soomets does not enjoy public attention, it is not difficult to explain her importance in the sphere of contemporary Estonian literature. On the one hand, Soomets's poetry offers moments of recognition, one can sense the currents of symbolism and neo-Romanticism. Sometimes one can perceive echoes of Lorca and Baudelaire in her words and images. On the other hand, there is no other poetry that is as panoramic and physical as hers. As the poet and translator Kalju Kruusa so aptly says, Soomets poetry 'attempts to verbalise the relationship of the individual as cosmos and the individual and cosmos.'

In a word, Triin Soomets's poetry is a world of opposites. It is a universe which is at the same time centrifugal and centripetal. Here pleasure and pain, love and destruction, body and metaphor, love and consciousness, love and meaning clash. Meaning and the suppression of meaning are only half a step apart. Snow burns and flames are blue. In the space of a couple of lines we encounter singing, praying and rape. Soomets's poetry constitutes a harmony which it would be impossible to imagine without her.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

Come to my grave,  
 at the edge of the abyss.  
 Too near the edge: I will slide down.  
 Come to my grave by the flowing water,  
 bind my tainted body with its own slime.  
 It doesn't matter: I am awake.  
 Take your hand from between my legs, it doesn't belong to me:  
 my hands are on my breast.  
 Turn your thoughts away from me,  
 otherwise I will wake up again  
 and we will find each other  
 in whatever century, in whatever suburb.  
 Make short work of it,  
 then, full of hope, we can travel through centuries,  
 without fear of encountering a judging glance except in a  
 mirror.

\*\*\*

Only darkness and shadows,  
 my eye nerves twitch  
 in fear of some strange shock.

Countries and numbers change,  
 colours and tones fade,  
 my finger rots, my ring grows dull.

Morning slices into the horizon,  
 everything is frozen and jealous,  
 as if awaiting sleep or mercy.

The years slip by like hours,  
 not a single trace is left in the sand,  
 not a single shape casts a shadow.

\*\*\*

I remain glittering in your eye,  
 I remain in your landscape - though I am missing,  
 I remain to receive your light letters  
 and summonses to court.  
 Because this connection does not change -  
 the sinuous, brittle smell of an unknown plant,  
 a mood, an accord of colours -  
 I remain deep within you, though elsewhere,  
 the cool of a night mist, its juice on your only jewel.

# Mats Traat

The prolific poet and prose author **Mats Traat** (born 1936) has cultivated the same pasture as the more well-known Estonian author Jaan Kross. But while Kross has often concentrated on figures who have been influenced from beyond Estonian culture, Traat has written in his novels on cultural historic themes about the indigenous population over the past one and a half centuries. More prominent has been Traat's short prose, especially the collection of stories entitled *The Carthage Express* (Kartaago

kiirrong) which contains the short-story *The Cross of Power* (Võimurist) about the death of Admiral Kolchak for an undivided Russia, and won the Friedebert Tuglas Award for Short Prose.

PM/Scampix



Traat made his début in 1962 with a collection of poetry considered to be close to the soil, and has to date published around twenty collections of poetry and three voluminous selections. With regard to his poetry, the term poetry of

social comment has often been employed and this reflects the keenness in the 1960s on science and technical revolution, plus the exploration of cosmos, the scepticism of the following decades, and the joys and pains involved in the restoration of the Estonian Republic at the end of the 20th century. Traat has remained himself. The core of his work involves an ethical pathos and a belief in the retreat of evil before good. His poetry contains a personal lyricism as well as sensitive nature portraits and sharp observations of society, but Traat never makes a cult of form or æstheticism for æstheticism's sake. And when the author, who comes from the south of Estonia, gave his cycle of dialect poems the title *I Flee Into the Languages of Tartu* then this does not mean that he has turned his back on the world, but that he is deriving strength from ancient expressions and values.

Especially significant for Estonian poetry has been *Histories From Harala* which Traat has been compiling for four decades and whose first poems already appeared when Traat first started publishing. It is a collection of epitaphs in the style of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* and where the author sketches the lives of a couple of hundred inhabitants of the village of Harala. The author acts as a chronicler, revealing history by way of the biographies, also the hidden tragedy at the departure of human life, a gentle nostalgia and humour. He shows that every mortal has a life worth recording for posterity.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

*M. Varik*  
*Tsirgusilma primary*  
*school director*

Like any other I wanted to eat  
 and that's why I taught children  
 that the czar is from God  
 and that Germans are our mortal enemy  
 In 1930  
 I taught children  
 that independence is a huge achievement  
 and the Bolsheviks are their mortal enemies  
 Having escaped with my life from the Klooga camp  
 I taught kids in 1945  
 that fascism is society's mortal enemy  
 I was praised as a good teacher  
 but I when I became seventy-five  
 on the occasion of a jubilee it was said  
 as if I, already as a young shepard boy  
 had been a fervent communist  
 and blown the Marseillaise  
 on a trumpet of  
 alder bark  
 I'm sorry, but that is just nonsense

*August Kikas*  
 (1900-1946)

drought scorched the spring grain  
 war scorched my farm  
 moonshine scorched me

# Mari Vallisoo

**Mari Vallisoo** (born 1950) has, unlike most Estonian writers who have an arts education, studied computer programming. In 1982 she became a freelance writer devoting herself solely to poetry. She has not been particularly productive, yet every time that one of her collections appeared, it has received both awards and the praise of critics.

The themes of Mari Vallisoo's poetry are evident in the titles of her collections: "at home", "abroad", "relatives" and "story". The word "speaks" also appears and Vallisoo's poetry indeed speaks and addresses the reader, and only really becomes written poetry. Her writing contains hints of a pre-written phase in history, references to folklore and myth, wizards and elves, Atlas and Jesus. Two collections ago she published *The Presence of Singular* (Ainsuse olevik) where the story of Jacob and his wives Rachel and Lea is depicted. And yet these myths are in no way sacred but are rooted in our era. These everyday activities - sewing,

Photo by Janika Kronberg



mending, cooking, looking for lost objects and so on - are often linked to some ancient and universal theme beyond time. In these poems there is a fusion of myth and history, the sacred and the profane, play and seriousness.

Vallisoo's language is light, as if on the run. "The word non-existent in your mouth/ speech is broken halfway along the line/ come, I will kiss you on the run." Her most recent collections have revealed connections between words and images and although these are ever more dealing with the theme of death, this is done lightly and loftily. The poet avoids a fixed rhyme scheme and a fixed rhythm but the poems, which often contain unexpected rhymes and expressions are linked by changes, pauses, silence and unanswerable questions, uttered in words which refer to a hidden reality. Also her treatment of myth is light, even carefree and more tangential than direct: *Take hold of this, the beginning of time/ I'm going/ I've no time to spend here/ Went away two thousand years now/ we think he was a serf lad/ or a myth.*

The latest collection to date is *Wormed Words* (Ussisõnad) which contains poems in Vallisoo's home dialect. This archaic language of the world view of her forebears, resembles women of past times in a photo. Vallisoo's poetry could be described using the following simile: like a room full of old and dusty objects about which the poet suddenly says that "now the time for concealment is over" and she brings them into the light of day, linking them neatly with our times.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Spring time*

Birches smell on the hills.  
 One would like to bring them inside.  
 Then serious rooms  
 would have at last some spring in them.

Let's go together, sisters and brothers,  
 out the door and the gate!  
 Let's all take along  
 a sharp saw, too.

Oh, that brother of mine is still too little.  
 I'm a big girl, I'll go without a brother.

We'll let the treetops grow.  
 So that birds can fly over them.

## *Potatoes*

Where were you? Your clothes  
 are sooty, and you know  
 the washer is broken!

I came through middle ages,  
 there in fires  
 I roasted some potatoes.  
 Try one. A witch  
 sent a letter. Where  
 is it now, that letter?  
 Maybe I lost it.

Ah how hot they are!  
 Let them cool down a little.

# Elo Viiding

**Elo Viiding's** (born 1974) poetry (in her first three published collections she used the pseudonym Elo Vee) has undergone several sharp swings in form, yet her texts always remain recognizable and individual. In Viiding's poetry one can speak of both modernism and post-modernism, and also posit her texts in the feminist discourse – after all, the poet seeks expression, attempts to contribute something important to the language while at the same time fighting it, intensifies the language, and also happens to be a woman.

Photo by THE BHARAT



However, we can consider Viiding's sometimes acutely intense poetry in a wider perspective. It seems that she perceives with extraordinary clarity the internal impulse of all kind of needs to create. This is the tension between the one who seeks expression and the surrounding

social world. In Viiding's mode the symbolic world always remains at least partly unintelligible, hostile, harassing. Viiding counters this with her weapon: words. Words band together into an army of weapons, and every word has in reserve a vial of antidote.

Viiding's debut took place early in the context of Estonian literature – the collection *Axis* (Telg) was published in 1991. It was followed by two collections of poetry at two-year intervals: *The Casket's Closeness* (Laeka lähedus, 1993) and *In the Light of Debt* (Võlavalgel, 1995). A slightly longer pause followed, until 1998 when Viiding published a collection under her own name, entitled *V*. It presented clearly Viiding's social irony, and on occasions even sarcasm. The collection is full of conceptual games with the same sign system, used by the poet in an attempt to diminish her own presence, which can still be sensed almost physically at moments of greatest illumination.

An even longer pause followed before Viiding's most mature collection *First Wish* (Esimene tahe, 2002), where the poet showers the reader with intensely personal images while at the same time offering an infinitely open – and also paradoxically closed – social eye. In her most recent book, *Certain Exceptions* (Teatud erandid, 2003), Viiding goes even deeper by looking into the eye of her rage against the symbolic oppressions that are given by the social codes and signs we normally so gladly accept and nurture. Viiding's words burn down the bridges built with and by words.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

## *The extraordinary importance of private life*

Man goes to work. He meets breasts, belly, mental health, legs, buttocks, a war criminal dealer, new perspectives on the family centre, belly.

Woman goes to work. She meets belly, legs, belly, breasts, buttocks, impartiality, legs.

Man comes back from work. He meets breasts, breasts, belly, legs, buttocks, the populace.

Woman comes back from work. She meets breasts, a single-edged sword, legs, buttocks, legs, belly.

Man goes to work. He meets buttocks, breasts, pension, legs, buttocks, legs, an ambassador, the extraordinary importance of private life.

Woman goes to work. She meets breasts, breasts, belly, buttocks, legs, legs, buttocks, the role of the intellectual in society, an opinion poll: do you think there's any point in making unnecessary movements?, buttocks, breasts, legs, belly.

Man comes back from work. He meets buttocks, buttocks, legs, belly, legs, breasts, belly, belly, taxpayers' money, belly.

Woman comes back from work. She meets legs — buttocks — belly — breasts — social welfare. Legs, legs, legs.

Man goes to the grave. He meets buttocks (?), breasts (?), a primula (?), legs (?), belly (?), 2 worms, a police officer (?), belly.

Woman goes to the grave. She meets a man (?), legs (?), buttocks (?), a thorn (?), breasts (?), (??), a man, belly (?), a woman?

From the grave, from its depths, come buttocks, breasts, legs, belly (the editors of "Monument" magazine), are popping off for a moment.

# Juhan Viiding

Sometimes the impact of a single poet can be so powerful and overwhelming that his influence will dominate the poetic mainstream for more than a decade. This was certainly the case with **Juhan Viiding** (1948-1995), who published his most important works under the pen-name Jüri Üdi (not a simple pseudonym, but a consciously developed and portrayed *alter ego*). His strongly decentred, allegorical and polylogical writing, with puzzling ambiguities and rapid changes of perspective,

became a universal point of reference for the majority of young poets in the 1970s and 1980s. No other Estonian poet has generated such a flow of imitations, emulations, allusions and remodellings: one might say that Jüri Üdi was the principal mould for poetic language for a whole generation.

The poetry of Jüri Üdi became widely acknowledged in 1971, after his appearance in a volume

with three previously unpublished poets, called *Nerve Print* (Närvitrukk, 1971). Soon more books followed, and in 1978 Juhan Viiding could publish a comprehensive selection *I was Jüri Üdi* (Ma olin Jüri Üdi), thus concluding his most creative phase with a gesture of self-abolition. This book also included a short final sequence called *Poems by Juban Viiding*; however, the difference between the two poetical personalities had not yet become clearly visible. Two years later Viiding published a new book, that still carried a resemblance with the poetry of Jüri Üdi; it was not until 1983 that the readers became convinced of his new, more confessional orientation. After that, Juhan Viiding seems to have written but rarely. In 1995 Juhan Viiding committed suicide.

Juhan Viiding was a professional actor in the Estonian Drama Theatre, acting in several important roles (Peer Gynt, Hamlet etc). His expressive manner of reading and singing his poetry made him a living legend. Several performances were recorded (either live or in the studio), and every reader of his poetry can also recall the highly personal timbre of his voice, that seems to be part of his artistic singularity. In 1998 the *Collected Poems of Jüri Üdi and Juban Viiding* were published: this volume has been reprinted several times.

*Text by Hasso Krull*

Photo by Kallju Suur



## *I have been told*

Make verses: it is no concern of yours  
 how the machine lubricates its bolt,  
 how the machine finds its nut.  
 Is the human being your only interest  
 And liberty the only flame that burns?

Other things are more important: delicate  
 lampshades and jack-o'-lanterns, hearth, doorbell.  
 Is that weakmindedness, the life you study  
 really worth burdening the heart?

When the newspaper appears, you will know who you were,  
 try to withstand some twenty winters more.  
 Try to withstand some twenty years more!  
 When the newspaper appear, you will read who you were.

Try to withstand some twenty winters more  
 without letting the soul's scraps be deadened.  
 And when for the last time you have risen,  
 not to worry, we will have forgotten  
 your only, your lifelong prayer.

## *Ha-ha-ha-ha*

(Couplet)

Comic  
 /In Estonian/

1.

Lately in Estonia there is a lot of fun  
 of course it depends on the place it's not everywhere  
 yesterday under a bush I found a (naked) woman  
 this fun made me laugh I laughed: ha ha ha ha

2.

In the town of Pärnu a woman had an affair  
 the husband was away she went to bed with another  
 who for some time before had desired her  
 the folk of Pärnu had a reason to laugh they laughed: ha ha ha ha

3.

A very funny story happened recently in Türi  
 a drunkard went into the street without pants  
 later with his head clear again shame came over that Jüri  
 the folk of Türi had a reason to laugh they laughed: ha ha ha ha

4.

Again under a bush I found a (naked) woman  
 this fun made me laugh I laughed: ha ha ha ha  
 lately in Estonia there is a lot of fun  
 of course it depends on the place it's not everywhere

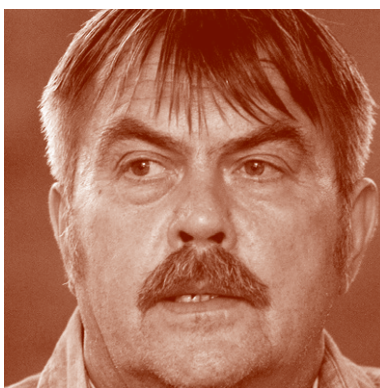




# Nikolai Baturin

**Nikolai Baturin** (born 1936) has been making a mark in Estonian literature for more than thirty years which is difficult to grasp but all the more profound for that very reason. He made his debut in 1968 with the publication of a collection of poems *Underground Lakes* (Maa-alused järved). What is it that makes Baturin a unique phenomenon in Estonian literature? Perhaps the fact that in his work panoramic fantasy, a certain epic quality and a rare sense of language form a powerful combination. It is somewhat ironic that an author with a Russian name has written novels with arguably the richest language in Estonian prose.

Photo by Peet Simson



Baturin's genius is also expressed on another level – he is an outstanding poet, playwright and prose writer. It would be impossible to overlook his prose. The reason is simple: Baturin may be the only writer of big novels in these fast (and frantic) times. And it is not only a question of the length of his novels. Reaching outside the

writer's limits of time and space; imaginary landscapes whose developments and character both startle and surprise, and language which is as rich as the writer's fantasy: this is the essence of Baturin's novels.

Let's name a few of Baturin's most important works: *Bear Heart* (Karu süda), first published in 1989, and the film version in 2002, *Cowardly Nikas, Comber of Lions' Manes* (Kartlik Nikas, lõvilakkade kammija, 1993), *Apocalypse, anno domini...* (Apokalüpsis, anno domini..., 1997). Even works which have not gained public attention, show how deep and multi-faceted is Baturin's yearning clairvoyant sight. A good example is the soft anti-utopia of *Prisoners of the Circle* (Ringi vangid, 1996), a great work fallen into oblivion. Nikolai Baturin is not a man who gives interviews. He lives quietly by lake Võrtsjärv and writes. Recently he wrote the wide-ranging book *Centaur* (Kentaur, 2003) which won a best novel award. Most of the action in *Centaur* takes place in the desert, just as the action in *Bear Heart* takes place in the taiga. Places devoid of people, desert and taiga, are Baturin's preferred landscapes: vast, boundless, transcending and forgetting time. It seems that only Baturin can squeeze this polyphonic boundlessness between the covers of a book. And there it waits like a genie in a bottle.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

## *Bear Heart*

By Nikolai Baturin (excerpt from the novel)

Young and ingenuous as I was then, I knew no other truth except that with the aid of faith, hope and love anybody who was not yet a man, that is a *nganasan*, could become one. Even then, however, my instinct warned me that I would forfeit at least two of these concepts, but there was a long time to go before that would happen.

First I began settling into my new place. I studied the sky star by star and walked the land valley by valley. I studied the native people of the taiga and the settlers in the villages wrinkle by wrinkle. I scrutinized northern nature with its fishes, birds, fur-bearing animals and reindeer... In time I learned that the dog who feels nice and soft to stroke and who does not bite, but wags his tail, is not the best dog for the taiga. The good dog is the one who bites everyone, eats well, sleeps a lot – and spends the rest of the time hunting animals or pulling the sled. But it takes a long time for stupidity to ferment and produce the draught of wisdom. I bought a whole kennel of lazy and good-natured dogs in the surrounding villages – as the finest dogs for hunting and sledding. I bought some of them twice, because the dogs ran away. They were brought back and sold to me again, this time at a price discounted for human compassion. And when I ran out of money, people started giving me dogs. Until all the households and hunters' cabins had offloaded all their useless four-legged whingers. While I combed the dogs' manes and tried to remember their names, they offloaded their fleas on to me. So I told the last of these dog-traders that his hound was nothing but a useless flea-bag. The man took offence and broke off the deal, which made it the only good dog deal I'd ever struck. It was not until much later that I came across real dogs. As the taiga people used to say, a man without a good *laika* is not a hunter but a tramp. One prospector who got fabulously rich and moved to the city left me a black tailless bearhound who worked well in team harness as a going-away present. Some Russian Old Believers sold me two sled dogs for my entire season's earnings, even though it was their fast at the time.

Rafting logs to the mouth of the Great River, I got acquainted with two skippers, one Norwegian and one Japanese. Back in their own countries they were inveterate hunters and kept dogs. The first of them brought me an adult short-haired Norwegian *laika* for the following summer.

"Very good *laika*," he said in English, when he handed over the dog that was cowering down on the deck of his boat.

"Very good sable," I said, handing him the furs in exchange.

The deal with the Japanese skipper, who knew a bit of Russian, worked out even better. We became friends straight away. We used to sit beside each other for ages on the wooden piles of the jetty. Behind us raged the northern sea, showering us with spray from time to time. The Japanese knew how to talk and listen. He didn't look into your mouth or into your eyes, but down at the ground or at your shoulder. For a Japanese the eyes of another person are sacred, to peer into their depths is to commit blasphemy. In this way the Japanese are similar to the Evenk. The same deceptive coyness concealing an innate nobility. Thanks to this little skipper I began to feel unexpectedly close to the distant Japanese people. In a rubber-lined bag at our feet, two *akita* pups were sleeping neck-to-neck.

"Why the rubber bag?" I inquired.

"R-rubber?" the skipper lowered his eyes bashfully. "Magnetism on ship, puppies afraid... tremble, weep."

"Are you giving me both?" I asked.

# Maimu Berg

**Maimu Berg** (born 1945) has worked for a long time as the editor of a fashion periodical and has had columns in the Estonian, Finnish and German press. She began her career as an author relatively late in life when she published *Writers. Standing Alone on the Hill* (Kirjutajad. Seisab üksi mäe peal, 1988) where she takes up the theme of 19th century cultural history. But in her more recent work, Berg has moved more towards the subtle observation of reality and direct perception. Her short stories are

about fears, desires and attempts at self-realisation. Berg captivates the reader with her ability to pick a stimulating subject to which she adds colourful episodes from Soviet life. Berg's social sensitivity comes out in her recent book, a collation of her newspaper columns, entitled *Dancing With a Departed Father* (Tants lahkunud isaga, 2003).

PM/Scampix



Berg's major works are ones which cross the language boundary, namely *I Loved a Russian* (Ma

armastasin venelast, 1994) and *Away* (Ära, 1999). In these works which are set in Estonia during the last years of the Soviet Union, the author raises a subject that was taboo at the time: complex personal relations in a multiethnic society. Instead of a "foreign" Baltic German overlord from the 19th century, it is now a postwar Russian who dominates the scene in the split level novel *I Loved a Russian*. His animality and enigmatic soul are depicted without any attempt at prettifying, and from a new point of view; that of a 13-year-old girl who experiences her first sexual intimacies. Her love of the Russian radiologist also reflects her search for a lost father. But the novel ends in a betrayal of love and with the doctor being accused of rape. The second level of the novel, the "now" of the author, is a description of life in Wiepersdorf, Germany and in contemporary Estonia which would be incomprehensible without the other part of the novel.

The betrayal of love in Soviet society is also the theme of the novel *Away*. It tells a love story of people longing to leave the Soviet "paradise" in the 1970s. They get married, divorce as agreed, and then get married to fictitious foreigners, and come together again later. This scenario actually played itself out in reality but becomes crucial to this work: escape brings the protagonists no solace; they find themselves in a world where the key tokens of humanity are lacking.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *I Loved A Russian*

By Maimu Berg (excerpt from the novel)

Go back a short distance from the tram stop and turn left - that's where we're sitting in the large sunroom, with the double doors to the veranda open and white curtains billowing in the breeze. There is Maie with her long, dark curls and very pale skin, and her mother, Helmi. Helmi has a fancy hairdo and the jacket of her off-white suit has narrow, stringlike pleats. She is smoking and her long dark amber cigarette holder is rimmed with silver. I am there with my mother who is wearing something pale-blue. And He is there, sitting with his back to the opened doors so his features are obscured. The sun is bright behind his dark hair and it's late in the afternoon.

Today I wouldn't be able to find that house where Maie used to live. I didn't know the address and I can't recall much beyond the sunroom, the veranda, the billowing white curtains and the open double doors. That house may have been demolished long ago. Memories are not exact. One can't remember everything and I'm not even sure whether any of this ever occurred.

Words should carry thoughts and every thought should reflect truth. That much seems self-evident and straightforward. And yet it isn't that simple. There are too many words, all interesting and distinct, with multiple meanings and varying nuances. When they are recombined and realigned in one's memory or speech, or on paper, they can assume unexpected sequences and form meanings that may be completely different from what was intended. They create totally new worlds where things cannot be recalled, because everything has assumed entirely different meanings, new texts have been created, new thoughts. At first it may seem that the words have started to convey lies, but over time these are reformulated into new truths. Words don't lie. Lies don't even exist, because there is an honesty in words. One can trust them. That's how curtains can billow in the breeze and sunrooms can have double doors, even though these events may just as well have occurred in some kitchen corner under a window with flowered chintz curtains, around a large round dining table, in a low-roofed wooden bungalow next to the pavement, a bungalow people passed with disgust, disdaining its lowliness and smell, or feeling superior, they may not even have noticed the day the house no longer stood there.

Maie's mother closes the doors and draws the curtains so that her daughter won't catch cold, or maybe so that flies won't enter, or to lessen the noise from the tram, or perhaps to see His face better. The light behind His back is waning and His features are outlined against the white curtains as if on a white screen and to this day I can visualize all this very clearly.

When I was five I developed a respiratory illness and had to be hospitalized. I was so worn out by the long fever that the hospitalization didn't frighten me. I was wrapped in a rose-covered quilt and was glad that the quilt would come with me. During my illness I had stared at the pink roses and green leaves on its red background, and occasionally these had coalesced into misty blotches. At other times I had seen faces of fairies, or hook-nosed witches in the rose-leaves. Now they wrapped me in this quilt and carried me to the ambulance. The boy next door, who was a little younger than I, walked beside us and started to cry when they lifted me into the ambulance. I remember his loud wailing. I could hear it even after they closed the ambulance doors.

# Jüri Ehvest

**Jüri Ehvest** (born 1967) is one of the most exciting and mysterious authors to feature in recent Estonian prose. His works have attracted a great deal of attention over the past decade and he has received several literary awards. On two occasions, Ehvest won the prize for prose writing awarded by the Estonian Cultural Endowment, and twice the Tuglas Award for short fiction.

Ehvest's first collections of stories appeared in 1996: *Still in Baghdad* (Ikka veel Bagdadis, 1996) and *Cruciania* (Krutsiaania, 1996). Since that time the author

has become established as a writer of shorter prose. Ehvest's method of creation could be described as magical realism. His stories have to be peeled away, layer by layer, and have many intertextual references, but not so many literary ones as ones involving religious texts. Ehvest has thus brought Old Testament discourse to Estonian literature which he has interwoven with simple, human matters: tales of love, beauty and

wisdom as well as the search for truth. Against this background, it is important to note that Ehvest has studied both biology and theology at university. Critics have seen in his texts the urge towards "cabalistic interpretation" where the world of today is explained by way of certain key texts. Reading Ehvest's stories is like unravelling riddles invented by the author himself. The associations made in them are often unexpected, while at the same time the reader is drawn into Ehvest's games of meaning. It is easy to fall under the spell of his texts, perhaps also because he uses the mystical and magical power of language when writing his stories. Ehvest was more anarchic, even schizophrenic, in his earlier stories, the best of which have been collected in *Tom Thumb Writes* (Päkapikk kirjutab, 1997). His more recent works, especially the collection of stories entitled *A Horse From Nowhere* (Hobune eikusagilt, 2002) are clearer, more tranquil and even exhibit a certain undertone of social commitment. Ehvest's idiosyncratic style has become part and parcel of Estonian literature, and a number of younger authors are following in his footsteps.

*Text by Piret Viires*

PM/Scampix



## Anamnesis

By Jüri Ehlvest (excerpt from the short story)

Am I really a shaman, I thought, as I packed my things that sunny day, ready to abandon pleasant Berlioz Street and head for Burgundy. This time the departure had a completely different feel about it – compared to the departure a few weeks ago from the damned Copenhagen Sheraton...

On that occasion, I had had in the end to pay the hotel bill myself. Those damn curs, so much I finally found out, weren't Germans at all, despite their names, but were pure-blooded East Germans, con men, curs. I'd been waiting for them and their money for ten days, all for nothing. And what to do with the germanium. Besides, I was bored rigid by Hamlet's city, no whores to be found anywhere. I bought a ticket to Hamburg for 30 marks. Drank all the way and read Foucault. All my life, I had had the nagging suspicion that someone who reads about solitude and sexuality is no businessman. I opened *Aufklärung*. What is modern time? It now transpired that my suspicions were well founded. The precondition for becoming a modern man is getting over an acute sense of being underage. A citizen's duty to pay his taxes bears no relation to how interestingly he is able to weigh up the pros and cons of tax system. No taxes for me from now on! To Hamburg, where I'd squander my last penny, and then come what may. In Foucault's opinion, understanding how modern thinking had discovered itself in the squabbles with the contra-modern thinking is far more important than investigating what distinguishes modern time from the pre-modern or post-modern. In some underdeveloped countries, for example, there aren't even any decent brothels. I left the book in the bus, made my way to that street named after St. Paul. Eventually, I found hookers in the cowshed, fresh hay rustled in the crib. Who was the first to use the trick of running films backwards? As if time had turned round. A shattered vase – an archetype of sadness (who hasn't tried to fit the pieces together afterwards and kept them in a larder, thinking of one day buying some good glue) – flies back onto the table as an archetype of joy, once again forming a whole. This is how a negro showed a film to me in a porn cinema. It turned out to be the most archetypal of archetypes because there was no change in the story-line, it didn't make any difference which way the world moved anyway, in the early evening I sat among the beggars in the gutter. One explained the weeping of poppy flowers to me. You have to cut tiny slashes then wipe the poppy tears with gauze, which must dry in the open air in sunshine – I liked the story immensely as it reminded me of a short story by Mann about a man who injured others in order to experience sublime joy, the joy of giving, when he later looked after those he injured. Then the vocabulary grew too complicated, I remember someone asking how many units I wanted. I woke up a day later, eased my hangover with a pint of beer for my last five marks. As it turned out, it hadn't really been of any help at all, I still didn't know what to do with the germanium. I set off. After much staggering about, I reached the beginning of the Berlin Road, and raised my thumb. A pretty girl gave me a lift. She said she was tired. I tried to be social, explaining that if a woman wished to offer her body to many different partners (of her own or opposite sex), she has every right to do so. Then she said she had a friend once, who also had interesting ideas. I said that Estonia should legalise prostitution since you can't actually offer your body. I said: "It's not a remotely modern way of thinking, when me is me, and I have a few things, including a body. Thanks to the fact that I exist, fleas, fungi, genes, mitochondria, why not even embryos, can live as parasites on me."

# Mehis Heinsaar

Although **Mehis Heinsaar** (born 1973) has only published two collections of short stories, he has enjoyed unprecedented success amongst critics and has been awarded several prizes. Heinsaar is a self-ironic “traveller in rooms”, a suburban bohemian, whose ideal, according to his own admission is a normal middle-class existence following the principle of “seeing the world through the eyes of someone living his first day there”.

Photo by Janika Kronberg



The most striking feature of Heinsaar’s work is when everyday life rubs up against myth and unusual occurrences in familiar settings. Miracles are quite commonplace in Heinsaar’s prose. He provides the reader with details, but not in excess, he is succinct in his use of language and his stories are light and airy, with the imaginary dimension introduced in realistic scenes, sometimes in an absurd or surrealistic way. For example: a

butterfly man doing tricks at the circus vanishes and turns into a caterpillar; when a flat door is opened there is a hilly ridge filled with old men playing there, and so on. At times, reality is shot through with streaks of the unconscious, yet the texts are clear and have an ironic dimension to them. The settings can be just about anywhere and sometimes the stories have an intertextual reference. The cat, lapping up wine and dictating a story in the story *Oliver Helves’ Tale* (Oliver Helvese lugu, 2001) is likely to be a relation of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s cat Murri. And the story *Encounter in Time* (Kohtumine ajas, 2001) which is gaily hallucinatory and in which a smelly old man rapes a girl on a park bench, deluding himself that this is his childhood love has the ring of *Lolita* about it. The critics claim that Heinsaar has been inspired by, among other things, the Old Testament and a number of Bulgakov’s magical realist tales.

In Heinsaar’s book *The Chronicles of Mr Paul* (Härä Pauli kroonikad, 2001) there are also unreal occurrences in everyday settings at the interface between ordinary time and space, but which obey hitherto unknown rules of physical dimension. At the Academy of the Unknowing, run by Mr Paul, whose main building, lecture theatres and students consist of only him, research is done into the mysteries of material. Heinsaar’s work also tends to contain a respect for life of the kind found with Albert Schweitzer.

Heinsaar’s imaginative stories can certainly be regarded as gems of intellectually oriented prose with plenty of room for play.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Butterfly Man*

by Mehis Heinsaar (excerpt from the short story)

As he touched the door handle, something in Anselm snapped and separated from him in the form of a swarm of butterflies, scattering in all directions around the director's office. Anselm turned deathly pale and started to flap his arms about, trying to catch the fluttering creatures. In the process he smashed a few vases and an aquarium with a few goldfish in it. The butterflies he caught he stuffed into his mouth, casting wild glances towards the director who was standing petrified, watching the conjurer's every move.

"I usually have lunch at this time," was Anselm's stupid explanation. "And I want to keep to my meal times." Realising how feeble this sounded, the conjurer fled from the room.

As he ran downstairs, he heard someone panting behind him, and ran faster. At the front door, however, the director caught up with the fugitive. "Hey – what's the big hurry? What you just showed me, all those butterflies – that was brilliant!"

"... Oh, please, don't mock my disability," interrupted Anselm. "I've suffered enough already. It's always the same, every time I experience a strong emotion, these creatures start flying off my body. I was bullied at school for it, and my relatives, even my parents, saw me as some kind of freak although I've always been of perfectly sound mind. Only a maniac biologist once took a perverse interest in my phenomenon, actually she became my mistress in order to examine me more thoroughly. Among my body butterflies she found marsh carpets and bagworm moths, but she took a particular fancy to the purple emperors who emerged when I experienced physical ecstasy. She counted over five hundred species, each supposedly indicating a particular mood of mine. I finally got fed up with her nonsense and sent her packing. So now you know."

"But it's simply fantastic!" exclaimed the director, overjoyed. "Your biologist was a gem and you, my dear young friend, are a great magician. Tomorrow you will be our star attraction – if you're happy with that, of course – and your salary will be tripled. Come and meet your wonderful colleagues who will show you your quarters." The flushed director dragged Anselm to the back rooms and pressed an unexpectedly large sum of money into his hand. "This is an advance. Irmgiird!" he yelled. "Come and show our young magician his new home!" The director made a slight bow and left.

Irmgiird turned out to be a huge woman, possibly more than three metres tall. Her thick red hair was tied back in a ponytail and her smile revealed a row of sharp white teeth. "Irmgiird, lion tamer," she introduced herself in a low purring voice and held out a scratched hand. "Glad to meet you – I'm Anselm – mediocre conjurer and I suppose you could now call me butterfly man too," muttered Anselm staring foolishly at his feet. Smiling, Irmgiird took him by the arm and the odd couple went to explore backstage.

Anselm saw a really weird selection of people there, it was rather like wandering into some kind of strange dream world. He saw a man with a transparent body surrounded by gorgeous women with non-transparent bodies who seemed to form his harem; he saw an old wrinkled woman with a long white horn growing out of her forehead and whose sweet breath reminded Anselm of a long-forgotten world. Two children with wings for arms were floating near the ceiling and their flight resembled that of bats. There was also a troupe of acrobats practising various routines who were distinctive in that their skin was covered in fish-scales. Countless attendants were bustling around everywhere, ready to satisfy the "artistes'" every whim.

# Ilmar Jaks

**Ilmar Jaks** (born 1923) is without a doubt one of the Estonian authors whose Second World War was most adventurous. During that war he fought for the liberation of both Estonia and Finland, escaped from captivity, was conscripted after the war into the Red Army. In 1945 he managed to swim across to a Finnish ship in Leningrad harbour and so flee to Sweden. He studied law at Uppsala University, worked as a Swedish civil servant as well as running his own law firm. Since then, he has lived in various parts of Europe, in Brittany for a number of years, and has now returned to Sweden.

Photo by Janika Kronberg



Jaks started out as a chronicler of memories of war, and between 1958 and 1977 he published four collections of short stories to which he added, in 2003 the collection *Darkness / Blindness* (Pimedus). Significant is his change of emphasis with regard to the content of his stories. He started out examining the war and its aftermath from the

point of view of a refugee living in exile. Then he introduced more universal themes including the fate of the individual, taking as point of departure an episode or detail from everyday life which, by way of the author's treatment gains in humour, irony, the grotesque or, on occasions, tragedy.

Jaks the author can be contrasted with Jaks the lawyer, and this contrast emerges in his novels where human laws are questioned. One of the key works of Estonian Modernism is the novel *No Man's Land. The Jottings of Siimon* (Eikellegi maa. Ülestähendus Siimonist, 1963) where the protagonist jots down associative fragments of memories which on occasions approach poetry. In the novel *Farm* (Talu, 1980) Jaks examines the urge to own property, as he does the need for rules in human society and the primeval theme of love between those opposites, man and woman and where the man's freedom comes at the cost of the farm burning to the ground. The novel *Neptune. Behind the Scenes at Law* (Neptun. Õiguse telgitagustest, 1981) tells of a lawyer who abandons his legal practice when he encounters the clash between the law and human values.

In his writings, Jaks creates his own utopia, the no-man's-land of his own "pure" existence and contrasts that with the animal regimentation of human society, which theme gives rise to a large number of descriptions of animals in his works. For this reason, critics have termed Jaks the consistent anarchist whose sceptical views help promote a true sense of justice.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Native Soil*

By Ilmar Jaks (excerpt from the short story)

‘OUR NATIVE SOIL at a modest price’ ran the heading in the newspaper for the first week in June, ‘consignments of earth measured in pinches or grams. Yours faithfully, Jaak Väärtnõu, Industrialist’.

Not even in their wildest dreams had the couple guessed that the business could take off as it had. Orders for amounts large and small arrived at the office by mail or phone.

Moved by the heartfelt nature of the simple words ‘Even a tiny speck will do!’ Jaak set about packing up the merchandise.

‘It would be wonderful if we could have it before Midsummer’s Day, before our daughter and her husband emigrate to Canada. It would be a lovely souvenir to give them’.

‘Price is no object – the funeral will be next Sunday and I would like a handful at least to scatter onto his final resting place’.

From morning to night the weighing and packing went on in the Väärtnõu’s flat. Even the night hours were used to satisfy orders placed by customers, whose large numbers included friends as well as complete strangers, but all inspired by the wish to receive goods which would acknowledge their sense of belonging, their attachment to hearth and homeland.

It was unpremeditated and for an uncalculated reason, love for his country, that Jaak Väärtnõu had knelt down by the ditch while escaping and forced his nails into the caterpillar tracks left by the tank, squeezed them into the ground and dug, his eyes glistening with tears, deaf to his surroundings.

These days the soil had turned out to be like a precious metal, but despite him selling it only in tiny amounts, it was disappearing rapidly and this worried and scared him a great deal.

By any reckoning the stocks would be exhausted by September at the latest and then – as he had nothing planned – the factory gates would be there waiting for him again. He had put off the last shipment as if it were tantamount to suicide. People who had had even a single taste of entrepreneurship were ever after unable to submit to the wishes of others, thought Jaak anxiously, smoking one cigarette after another. More painfully than ever before, more intensely than that time in May he sensed the gulf between man’s dreams and the opportunities available to him.

On 30th September the final consignment of soil was despatched to someone named Evi Nael in Australia.

‘There’s not so much as a speck of soil left,’ said Elli, as if asking a question of her husband.

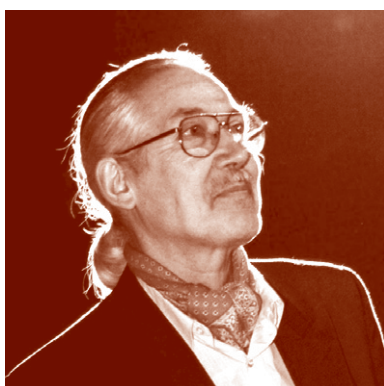
‘You mean there’s not a jot left at all?’ muttered the man angrily after his wife had pronounced this platitude.

‘Not a jot. I’ve scoured the jar, I could maybe use it for jam.’

# Jaan Kaplinski

**Jaan Kaplinski** (born 1941) has written poetry and essays in parallel. At the end of the 1980s he published a prose poem entitled *Through the Woods* (Läbi metsa) and an autobiographical collection of prose *Where the Night Came From* (Kust tuli öö). His three works from the late 1990s are all more philosophical excursions in prose where Kaplinski discusses those woes most pressing mankind by way of parable and allegory.

PM/Scampix



The first part of his novel *Hektor* is the diary of an intelligent mutant dog, the second the confessions of his creator, a geneticist. As always with an artificial being, Hektor suffers from loneliness and broods on the imperfect nature of human society. He sees the warped nature of civilisation as reflected in mankind who has challenged nature in its own pride. *Eye* (Silm) tells of a paranoid theologian imaginary tale and scenes of challenge by magical gods. A Chinese magus puts a simple

question to the creator: why did God create parasites or destructive evil in the world? But in the hierarchy of the gods, no one takes responsibility for imperfection and in the end all achievements get tangled in paradox.

Kaplinski's prose works are written in a neutral almost characterless style and remind us of Ancient Chinese parables or philosophical dialogues. In order to achieve this distance from the reader, the author often uses diaries, confessions, appendices and notebooks as the form into which he casts his thoughts. The answers to fundamental questions are sought in genetics, theology, mathematics, religion, semiotics and mathematics, yet all that is arrived at is paradox. Although the works contain an element of dreamworlds, they do not belong to the usual type of science-fiction, but are more reminiscent of the works of Borges or Hesse - the challenging of the gods in *Eye* reminds one of the magic theatre in *Steppenwolf*, a magical train of thought where people are merely biological waves in the brains of a god, and here Kaplinski appears to be influenced by the American philosopher Alan Watts, who claims the world to be the dream of a mad god. As a critic of religion Kaplinski's sympathies lie with Buddhism and he opposes the revolution of the West to the evolution of the East and posits Western technological development as the reason for global problems.

Kaplinski's soulmate, Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that philosophy is an expression of itching. Kaplinski causes an "itch" with his sharp wit and erudition written in prose which is none the less easy to read when he touches upon the sore points of human existence.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## For my Father

By Jaan Kaplinski (excerpt)

I have something in common with Pushkin, for example the fact that I am able to produce my best writing in autumn, late autumn, when nature is descending into slumber, closing in on itself, and movement, scent and rhythm are not such a distraction any more. I have also written in the summer however, especially on summer evenings when the day's work is done, during the peace of the approaching night when the wind is dropping, the clouds sinking in the western sky, the colours fading and the songs and chirrupings of birds and insects are beginning to be heard more clearly. Autumn though, is in its own way nature's evening, the time when nature becomes still, and falls silent, the time when thought is more creative. It was now, in autumn, that the thought of writing to you, writing a book, came to me, as did the feeling that I would be able to see it through to the end.

The fact that there were others who shared my fate is something that probably struck me for the first time at a Christmas party. The party was for children whose fathers were absent, killed in action, in jail, in exile, or whose whereabouts were unknown, and it had been organised by Dr Klaudia Bezhanitskaya of Tartu. The party was in a big hall which, I believe, was the hall at the State Health Workers' Cultural Centre, although Dr Bezhanitskaya's daughter Tamara Miljutina thinks that such a controversial party would not have been held there. Nevertheless, I have a clear picture in my mind's eye of the hall in particular, where there was a large Christmas tree and lots of children were sitting with their mothers or grandmothers. I also remember Father Christmas, from whom each of us received a present. What the present was escapes me; I can hardly remember what Father Christmas asked me either, or what my reply was. It was probably something to do with my father. Probably about where he was. A question which I would have been unable to answer then and would have some hesitation in answering now. What if...? What if there is something or someone somewhere, what if death is not really the end? For some reason or other life after death has never really interested me. Why do we think that eternal life is a good thing? I would find the possibility somewhat frightening if I really believed in it. Living forever as me, as Jaan, your son and therefore perhaps with you, my mother, grandmother and the entire extended family of whom I know only a few individuals ...

If one believes in life after death, in everyone meeting again on the other side, then there would be an awful lot of us there. The difficult question is though, determining who was first, who is the original ancestor, who is Person Number One. Where do you start? Where would the Heavenly Father start if he were to divide all people into sheep and goats, into wheat and chaff? With *Homo Sapiens sapiensis*? *Homo erectus*? *Homo habilis*? At what point did the *homo* species emerge with free will, guilt, and sin, which are punishable by divine right? Were *Homo erectus* sinners? or were they beyond sin, at a pre-sinful stage, more like animals who have done nothing to deserve hell or paradise? Very well, let us begin at *Homo sapiens*. But who was the first *sapiens*? Did he evolve from *Homo erectus* rapidly or over a long period of time? And were sin and guilt ascribed to man gradually as he evolved into man?

Might our most distant ancestors be punished less severely for their sins, to half, a quarter, a tenth of the extent, that we could be for ours? Always assuming, of course, that we are true men. Perhaps we too are an intermediate stage between man and his ancestors: perhaps we are only half-way there and do not in fact know who we are or what we do.

# Jan Kaus

**Jan Kaus** (born 1971) is one of those independent Estonian writers of the younger generation who has emerged around the turn of the millennium. Already known as a well-received essayist and literary critic, he made his début as a prose author with his collection of short stories *Above and Around* (Üle ja ümber) in 2000 where various excursions into different styles were brought together. This was followed in 2001 by personal experiences from his boyhood years and the social politics of a newly independent

Estonia in *World and a Few* (Maailm ja mõnda). Kaus' best book to date is perhaps his latest *The Hour of the Blessed* (Õndsate tund, 2003). Kaus' stories are grotesque in a postmodernist way and the author tends to mix the more lofty forms of culture with a more popular type. Kaus' protagonists are pop musicians, pop artists and what could be termed weirdos. The majority of the stories have a parodic quality about them - Kaus' canonade of parody satirises

commentators on Internet sites, aestheticising artists, middle-class nouveaux riches, wannabes and action movies. Kaus plays with language, stretching Estonian written slang and Pidgin English to its limits, a jargon popular with the Estonian youth of today. For all his postmodernist fireworks, Kaus nevertheless maintains his own ironic and wry status as an author and the reader thus sees the ridiculous nature of the situations the protagonists find themselves in. At the same time, Kaus has a firm grasp of ideal literature - sensitive, immersed in human nature and precisely worded, a text, which analyses people's hopes and fears. As with a number of other young Estonian authors, Kaus does not restrict himself to Estonian themes. Kaus is a citizen of the world and for him post-Soviet Estonia is part of a global whole. The problems and situations described by Kaus could happen to someone anywhere, speaking any language you like. But since Kaus is an Estonian writer, so the names and the stories are Estonian ones. An international mass culture reaches every corner of the globe, but takes on specifics there, local forms and this is something, which Kaus observes with success. Jan Kaus has published a collection of essays under the title of *Through the Minotaur* (Läbi Minotauruse, 2003) and in other publications, including journalistic ones; his poetry has also appeared and has been translated into Finnish.

*Text by Piret Viires*

Photo by Pina Ruber



## *At the Edge*

By Jan Kaus (excerpt from the short story)

One more thought, fragment, flash – signals. My uncle used to work on the railway, checking the rail junctions and the signals. At home he had a book on his shelf, now long gone, out of my possession, he thought. The book was twenty years older than he was, and all the pictures were in black and white. The only spots of colour were the signal lights. The picture would show signal lights or a semaphore signal and the railway sleepers were depicted as lines of varying thicknesses - for some reason in his young head he had imagined feeling the taste of iron on the roof of his mouth – which ran from the lower edge of each picture until they melted into the horizon. You couldn't see the sleepers very well in some of the pictures because standing on them, or more probably travelling on them, there was – a train. Only the back end of the final coach could be seen. But the book belonged to the State, which encompassed thousands of miles of railways; thousands of miles of railways on which no train had ever travelled or only once if at all, or which had been travelled only by pump trolleys or Whickham trolleys; the signals stood there, but the lights in them did not shine and they stood, severely askew, rusty, with virgin forest standing around them, the boggy land dragging the sleepers into its depths, and he felt sorry about it all. A desire began to burn within him to go, to travel, and that book had left the clear impression in his mind that the only road, the only real way to travel was the railway – the way it goes and travelling on it are different - you can't change course, that is how it is with its two lines of sleepers – the only road which did not melt into its surroundings but reached out into them only at certain points – stations, whistle stops, water stops, and then only briefly and imperfectly. It was not possible to reverse a train into the bushes and hide it under a tarpaulin in the backyard of some house, and that is exactly what he liked; that was why as a child he had begged his uncle to climb up to the top of the signals and put all the lights on; that was why it seemed to him now, just now, that summer, (he had mainly spent his summer breaks from high school here), that summer and the railway belonged together, are bound up together. And railway signals were different from the usual ones, he said, and he found that they still are: the colours of usual signals were, from top to bottom, red, amber and green. But railway signals were amber, green, red. That's how it was when he was still a child. Later they became more complex with four lights. That was not quite all, however, far from it. Then there were the shunting lights. The blue light was stop and the white light was go. The blue light sparkled under the summer night sky. Next to it stood another, taller signal post which shone red, followed by green, then after some quivering, back to red, then amber – the amber light is on so seldom, then green, red.

And now he was standing here in the kitchen where ten years previously he had wolfed down pancakes and gulped down milk. The table was empty. Valentin's shouts on the platform were not to be heard, more cracks could be seen in the platform, as could blade grass, wild camomile, healing leaves. The table had been cleared by the people - close friends and relatives but strangers *here*, who were now asleep in the living room. But he was unable to go and sleep, sleep did not come, sleep stayed away, as if waiting for him to reply to his own question.

# Andrus Kivirähk

**Andrus Kivirähk** (born 1970) is a most remarkably prolific, innovative and powerful figure on the Estonian literary scene of today. He is a virtuoso who can easily shift from one style to another, producing short stories, newspaper columns, pamphlets and dramatic texts, writing for children and for TV. However, Kivirähk is most appreciated for his novels - first and foremost for *Old Barny* (Rehepapp, 2000), a literary fantasy based on folklore. The story borrows enormously from the old oral tradition, using

PM/Scampix



legends concerning werewolves, treasure-collecting beings called *kratt*, spirits of the forefathers and wild ghosts of the forest, the Plague coming to the village in a guise of a young girl, etc. The *Old Barny* is a trickster-like hero embodying wisdom, magical powers and cunning; in the novel he represents the practical mind, sometimes apparently cynical and rude, but offering necessary points of reference to get by in different worlds.

Kivirähk has a continuing interest in history as a fiction, as a myth underlying and constructing popular consciousness. He has little interest in historical facts, but has a knack for penetrating the most hidden layers of local mentality. His first novel *The Memoirs of Ivan Orav* (Ivan Orava mälestused, 1995 and 2003) is an extensive parody of the rewriting of history after the disappearance of Soviet occupation. Ivan Orav is a miraculous being who claims to have survived all the heroic epochs, crucial periods and turning points. Not a single cliché or popular stereotype remains untouched; the narrator's voice is constantly oscillating between ingenuity and imbecility. Kivirähk's second novel *Butterfly* (Liblikas, 1999) is more sophisticated, tracing back the history of Estonian theatre. This time the voice is a "ghostly voice", belonging to a dead actor who writes his memoirs in the grave; however, the book has no sinister aspect, centering on the biography of his wife Erika Tetzky and retelling countless jokes about the actors.

Kivirähk's short stories fall under the classical category of *humour noir*. In this genre he has few equals in Estonian literature. The best collection until today is *Baker's Gingerbread* (Pagari piparkook, 1999). The apogee of the genre seems to be the dark comedy *Romeo and Juliet* (Romeo ja Julia, 2003), an excellent mixture of a pastoral idyll and regional realism, ending with a terrifying parody of the mystical union of the alchemists (to put it briefly, two lovers will be cooked and served as a jelly, wherein their flesh and limbs have become inseparable).

*Text by Hasso Krull*

## *A Brave Woman*

By **Andrus Kivirähk** (excerpt from the short story)

Marge was 18, and had a crush on a disc jockey. He was a tall handsome man, with an easy tongue and an ambiguous vocabulary, which always made Marge giggle and blush. She kept a photograph of the disc jockey in her student hostel room, also a tape with the man's patter. If only she could have his autograph! Marge had tried a few times to get closer to her idol, had timidly waited after a disco at the club door, but the man had never noticed her. He always had others with him, long-legged pretty babes who climbed squealing into the disc jockey's Mercedes, leaving the shy Marge staring after them with envy.

But one evening when Marge again stood in the falling snow and waited for her prince, the disc jockey emerged from the club alone. It was immediately obvious that he was missing something. His glance roamed around expectantly, and he was frowning... Suddenly he saw Marge and a wide smile spread all over his face.

"Damn it! And I thought that all my little kittens had vanished into thin air and left their Daddy in the lurch," he said. "What are you standing here for, shivering? Climb in! Make it snappy!"

Marge took a deep breath and did as she was told.

After a few months she realised she was pregnant. She was quite taken aback at first. What now? Abortion? No, this is not what Marge wanted, she was afraid. Ask the disc jockey for help? No chance... that bastard – yes, Marge's opinion of the man had crashed from the attic to the cellar – would not be of the slightest use, he would merely grin and perhaps try to drag her into bed again. Phew, how she hated the disc jockey, and all other men into the bargain. She had, after all, only gone with him to get his autograph; had in fact nervously fumbled in her breast pocket for her pen when the man, like a melting snowman, descended on her and dragged her down to the bed, on top of the carelessly discarded T-shirts, jeans and earphones. A video cassette under Marge's back pressed a deep red weal into her skin. The brute!

This unpleasant experience made Marge regard all men with some suspicion. You trust them, and they... She noticed her best friends peering at her legs or trying to get a look down her cleavage. Well, well! You give in to them, remain alone with them, and... You can't rely on anyone, only yourself.

She has to give birth to her child and bring it up on her own!

She had no intention of leaving the university without finishing it, education is so important nowadays, that much was clear. But she could not very well take the baby to the student hostel, that was no place for a small infant. She needed somewhere else to live, she needed her own house.

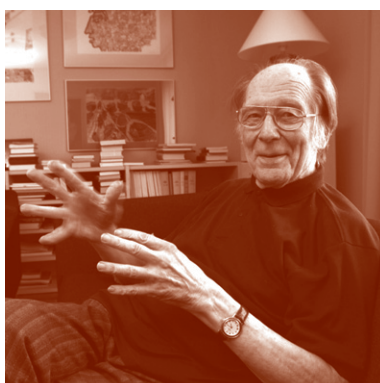
Still, that would cost a packet! Of course, if she built it herself, it would come cheaper... But the materials! Stone and timber, mortar and glass. Everything costs, and is so expensive that the mere thought of it makes you feel hollow inside.

So what was there to do? The only chance to get some money was to earn it!

# Jaan Kross

Estonia's most bestknown and most translated writer is **Jaan Kross** (born 1920). He has been tipped for the Nobel Prize for Literature on several occasions for his novels, but did in fact start his literary career as a poet and translator of poetry. On his return from the labour camps and internal exile in Russia where he spent the years 1946-1954 as a political prisoner, Kross renewed Estonian poetry, giving it new directions. Kross began writing prose in the latter half

PMScapix



of the 1960s, first with a film scenario *A Livonian Chronicle* (Liivimaa kroonika) which dealt with the life of the author Balthasar Russow (1536-1600) and which also became the subject of his first masterpiece *Between Three Plagues* (Kolme katku vahel, 1970), a suit of four novels. From that time onwards Kross moved by stage nearer to our present time in history, describing figures from Estonian history, first in short stories and novellæ, later in novels, also in writings where he has drawn upon his

own experiences. The heroes of his novels tend to be of Estonian or Baltic German origin and cultured people, though on the margins of society and are usually faced with a moral dilemma of some sort.

Kross himself has termed his own books psychological character novels. When writing about history, Kross always manages to make hints and allusions to his own era. Russow's Livonian chronicle plays around with the idea of censorship, while the Czar's madman, Timotheus von Bock is declared mad for criticising the Czarist régime, a fate which also befell dissidents in Soviet times. The professor of law, Martens, serves an empire which blithely ignores human rights, whilst the excavations in the novel of that name reveal a 13th century manuscript which threatens the totalitarian nature of the Soviet régime by their contents. In his most recent autobiographical novels, set against the background of personal experiences, Kross describes the loss of Estonian sovereignty in the late 1930s and early 1940s (*Treading Air* (Paigallend)) where he describes the fate of one of a number of schoolmates as the Estonian Republic disintegrates and the Second World War ensues. Kross has also held a series of lectures at the University of Tartu, collected in the volume *Autobiographism and subtext* (Omaeluloolisus ja alltekst, 2003).

Jaan Kross' twelve full-length novels, his short stories and novellæ cover a cross-section of Estonian history in a European context. This is literature, which is psychologically enriching and emotionally satisfying, whose influence is acknowledged by readers in many countries.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *The Czar's Madman*

By Jaan Kross (Excerpt from the novel)

Until that time, I had only spent a few hours at Voisiku, on that day in the autumn of 1813 when Eeva and I were sent off in a coach, on our way to our new life.

I knew that the estate did not rank among the most splendid in Livonia, but it was one of the more prominent estates in the northern part of Viljandi province, if not by virtue of the splendour of its manor, then by the number of its buildings, the age of its park, the size of the orchard, and, above all, by the size of its holdings which extended all the way to the valleys of the Pedja and Ema rivers.

The so-called new manor, already a century old, was a stone building with a main floor and an attic. Even though my peasant standards had already been elevated by our sojourn at Masing's two parsonages, the luxuriousness of the place stunned me at first. Now I understood: if I had had to move there four years ago, I would have felt timid and awkward, just like any other young peasant. Now I found the luxury disturbing, and the more I thought about it, the more I had to admit that it evoked a feeling of impatience in me...

On the main floor there were sixteen rooms and a kitchen. The attic floor had four rooms for servants and visitors of minor importance. I asked Eeva for one of these, even though it had been her original intention to let me occupy two rooms on the ground floor. I liked it better up there under the roof, and I would have the place to myself. So it was agreed for me to move into the garret facing the orchard in the left wing of the manor. By the way: although Timo had two studies at his disposal on the ground floor, he also chose one of the garret rooms in the right wing as yet another study to read and write in. For the same reason: greater privacy. I didn't even have to use the main entrance and make my way past all the von Bocks and von Rautenfeldts staring down into the great hall from their gilt picture frames in their wigs and once fashionable coiffures. The staircase to the upper floor could be reached from the door on the orchard side, and I used it from the very first day I spent here.

Timo and Eeva insisted that I take at least dinner with them every day. I didn't object to that, since no one appeared at their dinner table except for themselves and Dr Robst. Timo's younger brothers, Georg and Karl, were both away, and his sister Elisabeth (I think I mentioned this before), who got married four years ago, now lived in Estonia. Elisabeth did not make any efforts to visit her favourite brother and his young wife, something I would have thought the normal thing to do. But we were not a normal case, and we found that out soon enough, in a number of ways. As soon as Eeva and Timo had arrived at Voisiku, they sent out the customary invitations to their neighbours – at least to those neighbours of whom it might be assumed that they weren't busy denouncing this marriage as Jacobinical swinishness or canine rutting. However, none of those invited deigned to appear. Some were travelling abroad, others had taken to their beds due to a cold brought on by the autumn weather, or they had some other excuse. Consequently, we did not take our meals in the dining room which was close to the kitchen and hence afflicted by the odours of cooking – Timo couldn't stand those – but in the green tea salon next to the drawing room. The table, however, was set with the von Bock family's heavy silver. I had heard that old Baron von Bock had died a poor man, through no fault but his own (in the summer of 1812, as a captain in charge of military hospitals during Buonaparte's offensive, of "hospital fever"). Hence, Timo had to be a poor man as well... But it wasn't only the family silver that made me realize what a curious thing it is, this poverty of the wealthy.

# Viivi Luik

**Viivi Luik** (born 1946) is first and foremost a poet, a child prodigy from the early 1960s who stepped into the Parnassus straight from her school desk. Luik has also written prose. She is sparing with her words, knows their value and has not been a prolific author, but this means that people are all the more eager to see her next work appear. During recent times she has mainly contributed articles for the press, written in Rome and elsewhere, but previously her two novels have betokened new

departures in Estonian prose. Both have been translated into several languages, thus finding admirers far beyond Estonia itself. The leitmotifs of Luik's prose are: a child from the countryside, the city and the artificiality of society there, plus the world at large.

PM/Scampix



The novella *The Edge of the Secret House* (Salamaja piir, 1974) and other prose for young people written in the 1970s led ultimately to her major novel *The Seventh*

*Summer of Peace* (Seitsmes rahukevad, 1985) where events are seen through the eyes of a five-year-old girl: an obscure village in postwar Estonia, where families have been sent to Siberia and the Forest Brethren anti-Soviet guerrillas stalk the woods. This novel, set in several time frames, surprises with its genuineness, where on the one hand there are fears and anxiety, on the other an epoch which contains the optimistic symbols of a totalitarian society. This is the story of the discovery of the world by a child who lacks illusions, where the narrator sometimes borrows points of view from her which do not have the shades of nostalgia which are usual for memoirs of childhood.

The neutral, unemotional style of *The Seventh Summer of Peace* has been termed a "cruel style" and has also continued to be much present into Luik's second novel *The Beauty of History* (Ajaloo ilu, 1991). This title is meant elliptically, or at least ironically: history in this instance is everything but beautiful, it can be horrific or frightening. The laconic plot of the novel takes place in 1968, in Estonia and Latvia, but against the background of the crushing of the Prague Spring, which events reverberate in the Soviet Union. With sententious phrases Luik conjures up a visual feeling for atmosphere, she describes the protagonist's love story, but from the position of an observer, rather than a participant. The novel is made more poetic by the addition of expressive and Biblical figures. In it we can find the breath of the apocalyptic anxieties of the turn of the 21st century.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *The Beauty of History*

By Viivi Luik (excerpt from the novel)

This evening is followed by a long day in a previously unfamiliar part of the country. The windows of the bus do not open; black coal-dust penetrates through the ventilator in the roof. The grass is parched, the leaves of the trees brown. Corn is cut with a scythe. The old Polish women have on their heads ominous black cloths and wear half-coats, tied at the waist, with pleated hems, and nothing of the kind has been seen before or since. The wind murmurs. The fields and clearings are like large battlegrounds; even the clouds above these battlegrounds are like the blue official envelopes which can contain a death notice.

The Estonians do not want to go to Auschwitz. They curse in whispers: 'Why don't they show us the camps in Siberia!' Everyone in this bus could immediately tell a number of true stories about the Siberian death camps; these stories have been passed on from father to son and mother to daughter by mouth, just like charms to cure snakebite or curses for iron.

Grumbling, they finally reach their destination, climb unenthusiastically out of the bus, pull up their trousers and smooth their hair. Their attention is drawn to the lemonade kiosk, and they attack it immediately. Poison-red and TNT-yellow liquids fizz and splatter foam and sparks on to faces. This coloured water could equally well be drunk in a thousand other places, but only here can one look over the rim of one's paper cup at the rusted railway tracks and wooden surveillance towers that everyone has seen in pictures.

Dusty buses stand in rows in the square. Beside them are residential buildings. Sunflowers and dahlias blossom in the gardens, babies' bloomers dry on washing lines, cats sit on balconies washing their faces. A man is painting his fence. The view is ordinary, modest and idyllic.

Then they walk through the famous but, in reality, rather small and seemingly insignificant 'Arbeit macht frei' gate and are *inside*. *Inside*, everything looks like the inside of any country school on the first day of term. People holding bunches of gladioli and clearing their throats shift their feet on the spot like embarrassed parents on the red, gravel-strewn pathways between the low, reticent brick buildings. The ceremony is either about to begin or else it has just ended. Only the white-socked schoolchildren are missing.

People wipe their sweat away and look around them. Some weep, others laugh. The weeping and the laughter give rise to a strange hubbub. Now the voices of the Estonians are heard. The ones standing further back ask the ones further forward: 'Have you seen the hair yet? Where's the *hair*?'

In the end, even those at the very back get to see the famous pile of hair. The faded, dusty and tangled hair is a disappointment to everybody. Here, close to the hair, boots, spectacles, toothbrushes and mugs have also been put on show. Spectacle lenses glint mockingly as if they knew something completely new and particular about hell and cabaret, human hearts and the teachings of religions.

Everything is explained by a small, dark woman, a former prisoner. Cheerfully and vividly she tells the story of the thousand women who were given just one bucket of water a day for both washing and drinking. It is just as if she were telling a story which always begins in the same way: 'Es war einmal... Zili byli... Once upon a time...'

The former prisoner belongs to the camp heart and soul; she is the camp's veteran and *patriot*. The visitors eye her bare legs and arms with open interest, seeking wounds and whip-lash marks, and they are deeply disappointed not to find them. In order to make a bigger impression on them, she should have bones, instead of feet, stuffed into her shoes.

# Mihkel Mutt

**Mihkel Mutt** (born 1953) grew up as the son of the famous English philologist and translator Oleg Mutt. He claims never to have enjoyed a real childhood, being instead born precocious, and that his critical eye and penchant for humour stem from the multilingual nursery. Mutt began his prose career as the author of critical pieces and as an editor, after which he turned his attentions to the short story. Apart from stories and novels, Mutt has also written and translated plays, written a book of

travel essays to places such as New Zealand, Mongolia, Sweden and England, plus newspaper articles. Since 1997, he has been the editor-in-chief of Estonia's leading cultural weekly *Sirp* (Sickle).

PM/Scampix



Mutt's fictional prose can be characterised by an English-style comedy of manners combined with biting irony and hyperbolic wit. In his satires has mainly focused on the cultural world and that of journalism, analysing art

and life in a way that is almost blasphemous vis-à-vis the sacred pastures of the cultural élite. Mutt's first novel, *Mice in the Wind* (Hiired tuules, 1982) is set in theatre circles and exposes artistic bohemianism by way of the characters of two eccentrics. The title suggests that artistic people are without ideals, sniffing out trends wherever they find them, are mice scurrying at the foot of the mountain of art. Symptomatic of the novel is the fact that the main protagonist, when searching for a definition of culture in an encyclopædia, fails to find one. The novel, which was published in 40,000 copies, immediately became a cult object in itself.

Two decades later, Mutt has written a sequel *Progressive Mice* (Progressiivsed hiired, 2001) which is a savage satire on present-day journalism and the world of private art galleries and the artists exhibiting there. The work is more fragmentary than its predecessor, containing passages from novels plus pieces resembling essays. Mutt continues here to observe and describe, despite the looming presence of the grotesque.

Both in his fiction and non-fiction, Mihkel Mutt is something of a moralist who takes delight in detail and whose sharp pen exposes strange behaviour in a variety of social contexts.

*Text by Hasso Krull*

## *My Enchanting Slum*

By Mihkel Mutt (excerpt from the short story)

In the country man becomes more simple, true enough. Country simple, town sophisticated – there is something very apt in the terse juxtaposition. And the fact that the simplicity was still regarded in certain circles as making a person more beautiful means it is no surprise that everyone wanted to go to a place where they would become more beautiful. Fabian's film actor friend who recently managed to get away to the San Moreno Festival and knew the Moscow elite once told the story of a party in someone's flat that lasted several days. Before leaving, the film actor had inquired of one his regular companions, 'Tell me, who are you really?' His companion boomed back, 'Misha.' It later became clear that he was a Nobel Prize winner. The actor has enjoyed telling the story to this day, 'He was an extremely ordinary bloke!' and this sounded like high praise indeed. Nevertheless, in Fabian's opinion the relationship between sophisticated and simple could be assessed differently. The country deprives people of a lot of things which would otherwise make them interesting, it robs them of their masks, complexes and affectations, it forces them to be 'themselves' against their will. What a dreadful, dreadful thing country living is! Its effect is like insulin to a town person, all the more so once they get there and start eating this fatty food, they cannot help but put on weight, accustomed as they are used to lounging around in coffee-shops. What is there to glorify in all of that? Fabian found that most people at any rate were depressingly simple, why make them even more so? Let them try and become a little more sophisticated – if they can!

Fabian remembered how as a first-year university student he went to the summer house in early autumn with other freshers on his course. After Saturday and Sunday when they had eaten, drunk, gambled, danced, they had set off at dawn for the five o'clock train so that they would make the first lecture. One boy had sat quietly on his own the whole time and gazed wide-eyed at what had gone on. He came from a small town, was the child of older parents and had seen little of life; and perhaps the shadowy and erotic atmosphere which inevitably set in on such evenings was too novel to be attractive. But on the way to the train he was already fairly merry. Striding along the railway embankment, his white mane of hair caught by the wind, the country boy's large, clear, honest, freckled face was glistening as if it belonged to a young, healthy god. From time to time he put his hands around his mouth and whooped loudly so that the forest would echo back. The birds were twittering and the sun was beginning to rise. Fabian was no less drunk than he was, in fact he was rather more so, but could not imagine himself doing anything remotely similar, regardless of what freedom and relief he felt, even if he had drunk ten times more. The fusion of the boy with nature staggered him. The boy doubtless knew the language of the birds and creatures, fed bears and boars by hand, thought Fabian later. Since that occasion, every time he happened to be in the country, it always seemed to him that country people expected the same kind of behaviour from him and that he should whoop, throw cartwheels, and talk slowly without using foreign words (if possible, refrain from articulating anything at all, just point towards your mouth, shake your shoulders about or point to your loins), you should greet the morning with a ceremonial upstanding rather than staying in bed until mid-day, and eat plenty of simple, healthy food. Fabian almost never smoked in the country. He didn't have the need to, he didn't even get the urge to because it was not appropriate for a town person to smoke in a country setting. How ridiculous the slender white *Marlboro*, *Kent* or even *Silva* seemed in the spectacular scenery of Haanja, in the rolling countryside when you stop in the middle of your evening stroll on a romantic ridge, lungs full of fresh air and tumultuous thoughts in your head.

# Eeva Park

**Eeva Park** was born into the writers' family in 1950. Her work is marked by a striving to avoid standing in the shadow of both her parents. She began as the author of mood poems depicting nature and has said that she mixed feeling and thought in her poetry, while her prose is a mixture of understanding and memory. In her short prose works there are shades of nostalgia, real shards of memory written down with the help of imagination but which also contain the anxieties and vicissitudes of Soviet

reality over the decades. While her stories contain psychic tension, Park's use of language is succinct and precise. Her collection of short stories *Pass to the Merry-go-round* (Pääse karussellile, 2000) forms a whole with recurring themes and characters and is almost a novel.

Picture from private collection



Park's first novel *Dust and Wind* (Tolm ja tuul, 1992) forms an autobiographical diology with *A Student of Laughter* (Naeru õpilane, 1998). It is a post-WWII saga which

follows the fate of a family and depicts the world through the eyes of a protagonist who resembles Park herself and her efforts to shrug off her parents' heritage with a madness which lurks in the family and society itself. These works are dominated by psychological realism and a movement towards a liberating balance and harmony.

In the novel *A Trap in Infinity* (Lõks lõpmatuses, 2003) the author has found liberation and instead of reminiscing concentrates on current themes of brutality. *A Trap in Infinity* is an exciting social novel describing a young woman who is smuggled into Germany to work as a prostitute and her look back over her life up to the present, plus the dramatic dénouement. When she returns illegally to Estonia and starts a new life in a shabby slum district with all its scavengers and selfishness, but then kills her smuggler and ultimately herself. Both Berlin and Tallinn are depicted with feeling and Park describes the less attractive sides of the welfare state. When showing what the trade in human beings in Eastern Europe is really like, Park does not exaggerate but does manage to generate powerful associations and descriptions. An example of this is how the young woman, when fleeing from her oppressors, ends up at an exhibition by Günther von Hagen, called von Toth in this novel, and feels as if she herself is being flayed alive. The woman she moves in with for protection in Berlin says she is a representative not of a "lost" generation, but of the "last" one. In this fine novel, there is also social criticism as well as a dedication to the outcasts of life.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *A Trap in Infinity*

By Eeva Park (excerpt from the novel)

### The silent forest

I didn't know I loved snow. In fact, I don't know anything any more. I don't even know if I'm still myself. There's no mirror, only one unbroken window left in that house, but it's filthy, covered in dust, dark, and what's more the glass is cracked and when I notice myself in it I see only flickering matt fragments of somebody.

Now that I'm thinking it over that is the most accurate picture of me. I try to avoid thinking about it. That's easier than usual today because I have had to wait for this day for over a month, I had the feeling in the meantime that I would be unable to bear it.

On the first night I when curled myself up there in an abandoned kitchen corner I was sure that everything would come to a head by the morning.

I had got there.

It felt absolutely incredible, but I was here, in a place so close to Tallinn if I went to the coast I could see great illuminated ships arriving in port.

In the evenings the cluster of lights in the city centre began to illuminate the low autumn sky and although the rising shimmering was not exactly the same as it is in real large cities, where the daytime ugliness of the box-like buildings gives way as night approaches to a glittering town of enchantment full of opportunities, what happens here on the edge of the city is completely different from darkness, it does not begin with the sunset, instead it oozes out of the rotten slums like thick, blackened layers of mud.

In fact I am sometimes sure that the darkness does not come from above, that there is no kind of cycle of day and night, instead the darkness has its roots below this place and as I awaken, shivering, uncomprehending as to where I am, then it feels as if the pitch-black darkness is actually nestling within me.

There are no lights burning here, either in the streets or in the houses.

The electricity was probably switched off long ago, water too. We are in no-man's land. We are free, as people who no longer have anything always are. The sky sees to light and water here, but even at midday it is hazy and dark.

A month ago I was afraid of everything here, but no longer. As of today, everything will change.

Today I shall buy a pistol.

*'The goods are dearer than I'd thought... That's inflation for you, take it or leave it... Seven grand and the working Brazilian Rossi's yours,' said Marko as he switched his phone off without saying any more.*

He didn't want to say anything more to me.

At times he didn't answer his calls and the sterile woman's voice you hear on mobile phones would tell you for days on end that the telephone was switched off or out of range.

# Peeter Sauter

**Peeter Sauter** (born 1962) is a key name in Estonian prose of the 90s. His books *Indigo* (1990), *Loafing* (Luus, 1997) and *All the Stuff* (Kogu moos, 1998) introduced a new method, a new world view and a new stylistic technique.

Sauter is one of the few writers who has fully adjusted to the transition of his homeland from rusty communism to febrile liberalism. While most Estonian writers regard contemporary

PM/Scampix



media with ill-disguised caution, Sauter is a successful copywriter and prolific, witty columnist, one of the most interesting among hundreds of self-made shapers of opinion. With casual elegance he throws out ideas, gives interviews and poses with his family for photographers. Sauter writes little stories which are sold in pocket-size format on newspaper stands across the country.

All the more surprising then are Sauter's first person narrators who as a rule lack initiative – or what is generally perceived as initiative. The stories they tell are not vertical, they have no redeeming features. Sauter's narrators do not save anyone, not even themselves. To call them heroes would be a gross exaggeration.

Sauter has been accused of excessive naturalism; superficial critics refer to a text written for Estonian Independence Day which was published in the literary journal 'Looming' some years ago and which is full of all kinds of vulgar expressions. The naturalism of Sauter's most successful works stems from his focus on depicting mundane matters. This kind of naturalism belongs organically to the logic and rhetoric of Sauter's characters. If there is no metaphysics, tragedy or great conflict, the framework of the narrative is composed of trivial details which are not generally considered worthy of literature. Making coffee and drinking it, a chair, a table, the fart of a sleeping girl or the blood and pain of a girl in labour, dirty socks, resignation, the view from a window: Sauter makes of this everyday life mosaic a complete and detailed picture. Admittedly, we do encounter Sauter's first person narrators in more active roles too, for example, a tramp in Europe. But, clearly, Sauter's "heroes" bear no resemblance to Sauter himself; he hides on the fringes of society where there are no big mountains to conquer in a blaze of glory.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

# Torpor

By Peeter Sauter (excerpt from the short story)

“Motherfuckers!” I yelled in Russian and sprang up from behind the table. I had a glass in my right hand and a half-smoked cigarette in my left. Usually, it is the other way round. I leaped up to belt height, let my body ease back along with my chair which now stood on its back legs and jumped up. A splash of the mix sloshed on to my knee and onto the floor. My arse had touched the chair perfectly. I was drunk alright, but I had jumped up so expertly that the chair had flown backwards with a crash right across the stone flag flooring but had remained upright. My arse has surgical precision is what I was thinking at the time.

I bent my knees, raised my arms to shoulder level and bawled: “Giddy-up” and stamping my feet on the floor, cowboied my way around the table, holding my cigarette and my glass at head height. Half-way round I came to a halt and shouted: “Who dares to come for a race, brothers, who dares to come to town.” I took a quick swig and a dragon my fag. “Are there any fucking men in here or not?”

Around the table sat a whole bunch of my fucking mates, plus two women. “The lads are here but where are the horses?” K was leaning on his elbows at the table, holding his glass of the mix in both hands in front of his nose and looking at me between his hunched shoulders.

“They shoot knackered horses on the spot,” said Kati and exhaled her cigarette smoke with a smile. She liked me to clown around. She was all done up, not a bit like she used to be.

“But what about the cows?” I continued to ramble. “It’s so sad it brings tears to your eyes.”

I felt that if I rambled too long, the spark would die out, and I bawled once again: “Giddy-up”, rode on and yelled: “Hoh delee, hoh delah, hoh hoh hoh hoh hohhoh hoooh.”

I stamped really hard and this time some of the mix flew out of the glass and ash fell from the end of my fag.

I was standing behind M who was wearing glasses when he said: “I was wondering why you drink like a horse, but now I realise you are in fact a horse.”

I stopped in my tracks. “Am I drinking on your money, you old shit, or what? You could come and fight, if your cock weren’t so long. I’ll show you.” I squatted down and quickly put my glass and cigarette on each side of M on the floor. “Got any feeling for balance?” I took hold of the legs of his chair and pulled.

“Nutter!” shouted Kati.

M flew onto the floor, my glass was trapped under him and his spectacles flew off his nose.

The wind went out of my sails. I looked to see whether they were pieces of my glass or of his spectacles. The spectacles were lying some way off, in one piece. M looked at his wet elbow.

“You’ve gone and wasted a lot of my mix,” I said. “Fuck, what a hen you are. Hen go and lay me a new drink.”

“I’ll be fucked if I do, you shit.” M was bending the sidepieces of his spectacles and put them back on his nose.

“Shit is what I’m full of from top to toe anyway.”

I went back to my seat. M picked up his own chair and sat down.

The waiter brought a brush with a long handle and a dustpan. He swept up the glass, hardly needing to bend his back.

# Tarmo Teder

**Tarmo Teder** (born 1958) who is at present well into his forties, has achieved - or is about to achieve - his hour of fame, at what many would call the eleventh hour. Although Teder was first published back in 1990, he came to wider public attention in 2001 with the publication of his collection of short stories *Stories from Cell 27-1* (Jutte kambrist 27-1). There was a break of six years after the publication in 1995 of both a voluminous collection of poetry *In the Light of the Sky* (Taevatule valgel) and a novel *Bedevelled* (Kurat kargas pähe).

PM/Scampix



Although a collection of poetry entitled *Shadows of the Eel Bush* (Angerjapõõsa varjud) appeared in 2001, and a year earlier the Society of Estonian Film Journalists awarded him a prize for publishing and editing texts on audio-visual matters, he can be considered first and foremost a prose writer. Teder established his own particular style and subject matter in 2002 with

the publication of a collection of pithy short stories, *Attic Stories* (Pööningujutud) – singled out for praise by several literary critics that year.

Under what influence is Teder's richly scented literature born? In contemporary Estonia when gaps between the reality of society and people's ideals appear that sometimes seem impossible to bridge, Estonian prose often opts for ideals and condemns reality. Often siding with the man on the street, this kind of prose simplifies reality, which is always more colourful and less clear than it appears to any given individual, even if the individual is well-known, for example, a writer.

Teder's heroes are also marginal people: people or things from the fringes of society (the main hero of one story is a passport). The status and fate of his protagonists are best characterised by a frequent symbol in his stories – the attic. The attic is a place for storing rubbish, it is a suburban attic where rainwater laps over dead rats in rusty bathtubs. At the same time a beautiful and jarring view can be seen through the blurry window pane, and for those whom life has treated harshly the attic is the closest they will come to heaven. Thus – although Teder's world is considered naturalistic, rough and mean, it is not in fact lacking in humour, profound tragedy, warmth, dreams and everything else that constitutes good literature where, next to black and white, there is space for many other colours, even if they are hard on the eye.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

## *Redemption*

By Tarmo Teder (excerpt from the short story)

There was something in a man's tool that was terrifying to Tolik but which was at the same time awe-inspiring and attractive. The money which went hand in hand with the forbidden, furtive activity now and again allowed him to make both ends meet more comfortably in his shabby existence. Tolik had been with dozens of men. He rated the Finns more highly because they plied him with gifts and didn't hurt as much as the Russians. An old Estonian man who had given him shelter had recently given Tolik trouble when he was unable to satisfy the pensioner's wish for a fuck from behind. While a passive pederast was squeezing him and sucking his dick, Tolik felt he was a valuable commodity which had been claimed. Especially in the hands of Finns. In the role of a bitch, the most painful and unpleasant moments were characterised by the power of the stronger man which took his breath away. At the same time the calculated knowledge of the price of the illicit transaction accompanying the service was an inducement. The fact that Tolik was a member of no-one's family and was consciously offering himself as an undemanding, vagrant rent boy made him easy pickings for exploitation. Males of dark appetite and same-sex lecherings all but competed to surpass the terror imposed by society and restore the laws of nature with no appreciation of the repercussions their actions would have. Everyone knew that paedophilia was a particularly contemptible area of crime in society although none knew how extensively all kinds of forms of the sin and its secondary outcrops had spread.

Having watched in excitement the film full of chases and shootings, Tolik wandered aimlessly on the street again. Seldom was there any specific purpose to his activity, mostly he lingered in a state of foggy desire, hoping against hope for something: something to fulfil his basic needs of food, shelter, the fun of entertainment, and money to increase his freedom. His area of movement had physical boundaries – either from the harbour to the station or from the cinema to the department store. Tolik was cautious but not cowardly; foolish yet intelligent in a different sort of way. In spite of being pictured on 'Wanted' notices he dared to steal, urged on by his empty belly, from shops which had no CCTV.

His feet were pointed in the direction of 'Stockmann', his belly was full and in his pocket rustled 100 kroon notes which were simply screaming at him to buy something. No longer a child but not yet a youth, the boy loved chocolate and grapes and, given the chance, wouldn't have said no to heroin. But they don't sell that in Stockmann's yet.

# Jaan Undusk

With **Jaan Undusk** (born 1958) one can only wonder at the inverse proportionality of the size of his work and its importance. There are a number of good writers in Estonia who have published as many as twenty or thirty books, but there is no one on a par with Jaan Undusk. His first and only novel to date was enough to make literary history.

The fact is that not only is Jaan Undusk one of the literary milestones of the past decade but he is also an eminent interpreter of Estonian literature, a creator of meta-literature. He has analysed exile literature, Baltic German literature, the language of Stalinism, and so forth. In an article in 1988 he formulated the main task of Estonian literature as “the creation and recreation of the Estonian national and cultural identity.” This is how Jaan Undusk has become one of the most important writers and literary theorists of the 1990s.

PM/Scampix



1990 is considered a watershed in Estonian literature. One of three causes of this watershed is Jaan Undusk’s novel *Hot. A Story of Young Love* (Kuum. Lugu noorest armastusest, 1990). The importance of the novel lies in the fact that it does not (just) describe the world but it concentrates on describing itself. *Hot* is a remarkably self-conscious attempt to write in an intertextual manner and on as broad a basis as possible. *Hot* is a book where words, which are generally used as a means of describing the world, become something like characters in the book – in so far as this is possible. The literary theorist Epp Annus says, “In Undusk’s *Hot* the joy of words, every sentence, the perfectly polished quality of expression and the pleasure of its very existence causes the reader to pause rather than move on.”

As an interpreter of literature, Jaan Undusk created a landmark with the publication of his collection of essays *Magical and Mystical Language* (Maagiline müstiline keel) in 1998. Thus two books – a novel and a collection of essays – mark Undusk’s brilliant trajectory over the last decade of the twentieth century.

*Text by Jan Kaus*

## *Bibliophilia*

By Jaan Undusk (excerpt)

Everything was happening as if in the dim recesses of my consciousness. The next time I looked at the clock it was seven minutes past ten. The library was therefore officially closed. I raised my head. Silence, emptiness, serenity. The closeness of heavy human bodies had disappeared from the reading room, the atmosphere had become light, the dusk behind the window drew a line up the glass. How good it was to read. How genuinely good it was to read now. 'They won't let me sit here for long!' I thought to myself and continued with my enjoyable work. The minutes spent with the Wörterbuch were worth their weight in gold. And honestly, how good it was to read now. In my view the space occupied by the reading room was best experienced alone. The moment the lights went out I realised that I would be unable to delay my departure. But several kinds of obstacles presented themselves. First I was unable to put the books back in the right places on the shelves in the dark. I fiddled around for a while and still ended up taking them back to my table. Gropping my way along, I left the reading room although it was once again something of a long journey. While on the stairs on my way to the catalogue floor it became clear that the building was suspiciously dark throughout. Maybe a guard was sitting around down there somewhere. But I didn't want to meet him. Instinct told me for some reason or other that I was not to approach the guard. How good, how refreshing it was to be in the library all of a sudden! I felt no kind of particular disquiet. And I went upstairs again. I groped my way back again to my desk. I recognised Mauthner by the smell. The spine of the part-leather binding of the second volume of the Wörterbuch was still moist from the discussion. I felt no particular disquiet. I was among friends this evening. My new love spent the night with me. The soft flooring was at least more or less comfortable enough to sleep on. I put some hardback Estonian literature under my head by authors beginning with M – Metsanurk, Männik.

This is the only night I have spent in a large library. I believe that the company I kept that night was the most reliable of all the nights in my social life. Mauthner was right beside me and Kant was snoring somewhere further off. It was interesting that a man as small as Kant could snore so loudly. Hegel slept peacefully, deeply and disappointedly, up to his eyes in brandy. This was the six-starred man of German philosophy. Goethe slept in a more bourgeois fashion as I would have expected, with his cheek resting on his hand and a nightcap on his head. But Metsanurk under my head moaned all night. At first I thought it was Männik, but no, it was Metsanurk. In the small hours I finally shoved Metsanurk to the side and slept just on Männik. Yes, there was a smell somewhere. Somewhere it smelled of violets all that night. At first I didn't understand where it was coming from. But in the early morning when, exhausted, they had given in to sleep, and the window was already letting in a little light, I went and read their names out. Aino Kallas and Virginia Woolf were dozing, embraced, on the lowest shelf, each of them well away from their proper places.

I woke up because the lights had come on. There was quarter of an hour before it was time for the library to open and that was how long I had to spend crouching down behind the reading box. The town hall clock had barely struck the hour when the first reader arrived. She shuffled about at what was apparently her traditional reading-berth, cleared her throat several times in a voice that was deeper than average for a woman and then I heard the very crisp rustling of a page being turned.

# Arvo Valton

**Arvo Valton** (born 1935) began his career as a writer in the 1960s. He is still a productive writer today and has been translated into many languages. He has tried his hand at all genres, from voluminous novels to the briefest of aphorisms, and has also written literary criticism, plays, film scenarios, travel books, poetry and non-fiction.

Valton's writings have varied a good deal over the years. In the 1960s,

he first made his mark as a writer of short stories with the grotesque and strangeness as leitmotifs. Valton is a master at suggesting a link between the bureaucracy of totalitarian régimes and examines the borders of existentialist concerns. One of his best short stories is *Eight Japanese Women* (Kaheksa japanlannat) where the delicate dancers whirl between the muddy puddles of a building site, where they are being shown the achievements of human progress.

PM/Scampix



In the 1970s, Valton continued an interest in the early history of Europe and Asia which he had already exhibited in some of his stories, now in longer prose form in the novel *Road to the Other End of Infinity* (Tee lõpmatuse teise otsa, 1978) where he describes a meeting between Genghis Khan, the Mongolian conqueror and the monk Chan Chun, along with the dialogue there on differences in world view. Oriental motifs and aboriginal peoples, along with myths of the Borealis, dominate Valton's prose in the 1980s which includes his fantasy story cycle *Arvid Silber's Trip Round the World* (Arvid Silber'i maailmareis, 1984) which can be treated as a love story, plus *Lonely People in Time* (Üksildased ajas, 1985) which contains six novellas in two volumes. The theme central to these novellas is a growth of mankind out of the rut of routine into individual lives, a Taoist movement on the borderline of eternity and infinite space. In Valton's prose, the difference between East and West becomes ever greater as the author becomes more convinced of the way the West has erred.

For ideological reasons, Valton was not for a long time allowed to publish that portion of his oeuvre which was critical of Soviet society. Latterly, the author produced a selection of such banned prose in the book *A Walk With the Tour Guide* (Rännak giidi saatel, 1988) Valton's recent prose includes the autobiographical novel *Depression and Hope* (Masendus ja lootus, 1989) where he describes his childhood in Siberia with his parents who had been deported by the Communist régime. He was the first author of his kind to use such a theme for a novel.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Me, me, me*

By Arvo Valton (excerpt)

I drew an animal once.

I didn't know what animal it was.

None of the friends I showed the drawing to knew either.

That animal made us all anxious.

One day it took pity on me and began to live.

I put a collar round its neck and we went for a walk out the back.

People said, 'Oh!' when they saw it and several of them said, 'Ah!' So apparently, they didn't know what animal it was either.

I took my animal to see the scientist. He put his glasses on and studied his book. He said nothing and just shook his head.

I offered my enigma to the zoo. They wouldn't take it because they didn't know what notice to put on the door of its cage.

I came home knowing that I'm a dreadful artist.

[...]

I carry my love as if it were a small porcupine in my hand.

Suddenly it begins to talk in a human voice and says, 'No!'

'Why?' I ask.

But try as it might, it is no longer able to produce human speech to explain what it means.

Maybe it doesn't even know itself. Although I don't detect any astonishment in the porcupine, it appears altogether proud of its lack of knowledge. Or maybe it is proud that it made such a heroic effort and said 'no'.

What can you do with it? It's lovely, true enough, this prickly existence. Really special straight away.

But when you think about it in depth and absolute honesty, would I want it to dandle in my hand for life? It's needling me already.

For the present my hands are hardened but what about in years to come? Perhaps I'll be less thick-skinned and want to let the needler go? But in the end it is mine to pledge!

There's no escaping it. It's true, love is always complicated.

# Toomas Vint

**Toomas Vint** (born 1944) is known as a painter of metaphysical landscapes, and a modernist, whose work counters the current trend of mediatisation. In his landscapes which depict sterile park vistas with hardly a human being present, green dominates. Similar landscapes in his prose are, however, populated and here the characters act in a voyeuristic way in the garden suburbs and parks of the city, making sharp comments to themselves in an inner monologue which contains a flow of private memories. In

Vint's more recent works, there is a marked ironic stance taken towards childhood and youth along with some strangely adolescent sexual fantasies.

PM/Scampix



Vint began to write short prose in 1970 when his themes consisted of aspects of individual and married life and where he surprised his audience with unexpected points of view. In his first longer work, *A Provincial Novel* (Väikelinna romaan, 1980) he describes the

stagnant cultural life of a small town in ironic terms. After a long period of silence, Vint wrote the novel *The Janitor's Wife* (Kojamehe naine, 1995). The author has now moved on to describing the problems of art and society. This novel adopts the form of an old-fashioned picaresque novel, describing the hero's rise in society from his sexual adventures and spiritual crisis in his cellar flat. In the novels *A Never-Ending Landscape* (Lõppematu maastik, 1997) and *An Artist's Novel* (Kunstnikuromaan, 1998) Vint attacks, from a conservative point of view, the postmodernist concepts of artistic endeavour and examines the role of the artist in society. Such late works by Vint are composed with exactitude and are in the form of outer stories within which a number of points of view jostle for prominence. Motifs such as ecofascism and paranoia come into play and there are many intertextual references to the situation in cultural life today.

Vint's latest novel, *My Marriage to a Prostitute* (Minu abielu prostituudiga, 2003) describes the course of one day. After a row with his wife, a middle-aged man wanders about in the city in his slippers and without a penny in his pocket, tries to borrow money and – on the expense of the brothel-keeper – even manages to get a prostitute whom he tries to marry without result. What would seem on the surface to be a light and trivial subject nevertheless touches upon fundamental existential problems and the hypocrisy of society. Vint deliberately abases human beings as a species, brings to the fore their heavy, dark side, but not with the sombreness of Dostoevsky, but in a free and lightly lucid way.

*Text by Hasso Krull*

## *My marriage to a prostitute*

By Toomas Vint (excerpt from the novel)

### Running with blinkers on

*My world had now been closed off to me and without banker's cards and car keys there was nothing much I could do. I realised that we live in a world which is exactly like the one we imagine or, if you want to be very precise, the one we have become accustomed to imagining. The harsh realities of life are of no interest to us because they may be unpleasant and we have no desire to think about them particularly often. A comparison comes to mind of a horse galloping round a race course, eyes covered by blinkers which allow it to see only the part of the course at the end of its nose. A blinkered horse such as this may on each occasion be left with the false impression that it has won the race. And doubtless even in defeat it feels a genuine thrill of victory if the blinkers prevent it from comparing itself with the rest of the field. But perhaps other impressions are of no significance?*

The more I think of the fact that I have only one kroon in my pocket, the emptier my stomach grows. I last ate this morning, during the day eating didn't enter my head and I didn't have time for it anyway. I can hear my rumbling stomach, and the aroma of roast meat wafting out from someone's garden crowns my feelings of hunger. Aroma! An exquisite word which conjures up the delights of eating and brings back memories of special culinary experiences, your salivating mouth dribbles, before your eyes generous bronzed portions of meat sizzle, spitting fat, but I am unable for the moment to do anything to satisfy my ever-growing craving for flesh. I am in a predicament. I cannot remember when something like this last happened to me and I wonder whether the best thing to do might be to go back home and play the scene again with a different result. And then pretend that everything is tickety-boo.

The thought that I might go back and open my own home, draw back the curtains on the next performance of our domestic drama (farce? jest?) makes my will fail and my spirit faint. I am unable to see my wife's face now, the sight of which was the subject of my dreams only a few years ago (I was crazy about her!), when she spent three (insanely long) months in the United States and whose picture I am in the habit of occasionally taking out of my wallet and gazing at for ages... I am now trying to reproduce one of the moments when I took the picture out and bring to mind the kinds of feelings that went through me when I gazed at my wife's image, but this is not a good thought, because I immediately see a face transformed by hatred or absolute rage, her anxious hand fumbling on the table-top, wanting the fingers to happen upon objects they could wield to make me non-existent. Is her hand trying to find the big cook's knife with the serrated blade? Do those beautifully cared-for hands with pearly nails really yearn to find a lethal weapon there?

'Things can't be as crazy as all this,' I mutter and I believe that my fantasy picture is an exaggeration, that fear is worse than reality, and paints everything in a false light.

But I am neither able nor willing to understand how a few phrases flustered her so. The effect of the phrases (maybe only the odd word) was probably like drips in a full mug, or a mouthful of air in fully-inflated balloon.

# Tõnu Õnnepalu

**Tõnu Õnnepalu** (born 1962) has published works under the pseudonyms of Emil Tode and Anton Nigov) is one of the most interesting and internationally known Estonian prose authors. He began his writing career as a poet in 1985 and has published three collections. His real breakthrough came in 1993 when he published *Border State* (Piiririik) under the pseudonym Emil Tode for which he received the annual literary award given by the Baltic Assembly. *Border State* enjoyed an explosive success

internationally and became the most translated Estonian book of the 1990s, appearing in 14 languages. It is a book which could not have been written and published before in Estonian. There is the then new experience of Estonia and the rest of the former Soviet bloc as life beyond its borders is opened up. The novel examines the opposites east and west, Estonia and Europe. The protagonist is a young homosexual man on a bursary in Paris who tries,

photo by Pina Ruber



by way of personal experience, to fathom the changes taking place throughout Europe in the early 1990s. The themes of the book are his relationship with an older West European man and a murder sub-plot. At the start of the 1990s, the principle questions an Estonian would ask himself or herself was: who are we? What is this world we see before us? What rules have to be obeyed here? The protagonist is a representative of the “noble savage” who tries to familiarise himself with these new rules. Maybe the international success of the book was on account of this dimension: the East European “savage” spoke, but did so in a way understandable to readers in Western Europe. Writing as Emil Tode, the author continued this theme in *Price* (Hind, 1995) and a novel from a woman’s point of view *Princess* (Printsess, 1997). Central to these books is a quest for identity in a changing world. Under another pseudonym, Anton Nigov, the author has published a further novel entitled *Practicing* (Harjutused, 2002) which is a kind of confessional diary. Again writing under the name Emil Tode, the author published that same year a continuation of the themes examined in *Border State* in *Radio* (Raadio, 2002). This time the theme is the life of an ageing diva whose life is intricately intertwined with that of a young gay. In all his books, Õnnepalu seeks the answers to various crucial human questions covering love and loneliness, sexuality, social life and religious freedom, power over others and betrayal. Õnnepalu has translated works by François Mauriac, Charles Baudelaire and Marcel Proust.

*Text by Piret Viies*

## Practicing

By Anton Nigov alias Tõnu Õnnepalu (excerpt from the novel)

I don't want any changes. In my life, that is. Nothing about it must change. Let it all stay the way it always has been. Everything around me can change, that's fascinating; it's thrilling to observe the reforms, catastrophes, revolutions and wars. But only from a distance. My greatest mistake has been to imagine I want changes in my life.

Why should life change? It's disturbing enough without any changes. It's hard enough to make sense of it already.

Routine is the greatest blessing, but in my ingratitude I have regarded it as the source of my despair. And yet by instinct I have never sought anything but stability. A means to make my life so routinely repetitive that it would fade away completely, allowing me an unobstructed view.

Today, like every other working day, at about two o'clock I took a train to the Notre-Dame des Champs metro station. There's one change to make on the way, but it's still quick. I know all the stops by heart. I know which end of the train is more convenient and what comes after what: Rue du Bac, Sevres-Babylone, Rennes, Notre-Dame des Champs.

There's a small sandwich bar there that I discovered last summer, when this exhibition was on in the Jardin de Luxemburg. It's cheap, only 35 francs a meal. For that I get a toasted panino -- either chicken curry or turkey emmental -- an iced tea (there aren't any hot drinks on the menu) and a flan -- a dull-looking, actually rather repulsive cake that I like because it reminds me of the custard cake or pie of my childhood. I always pretend to make my selection carefully, then with calculated pauses I inform the girl, the woman or the man -- whoever happens to be standing behind the counter at the time -- of my choice. This is my daily act of social intercourse, my gesture of communication with this city. I have no desire for any more intimate relationship with the people at the counter. I feel annoyed by the very fact that they recognize me and are accustomed to my daily appearance. If it were up to me I'd make them forget me every day, so I could just keep on dropping in for the first time, in passing.

But what's more important than that is that the sandwich bar holds no surprises for me. The panino and the cake always taste the same. The flavour of the iced tea depends on whether I bother to specify citron, otherwise they always give me *peche*, the peach. That makes no great difference. But today for some reason I decided to vary my menu and took apple tarte instead of the flan. This change bothered me right through the meal. I had to think about the apple tarte, I couldn't be sure it would prove satisfactory. And in fact, it was a bit too sweet.

At this time of the day, when I get here, there aren't many people in the bar, it's after two and lunchtime is almost over. It's mostly students who come here. There are a lot of schools in the neighbourhood. And I know the bar brings back memories of my own primary school cafeteria. Two cream buns and a glass of tea, all for nine kopecks.

I always sit on the stool right beside the door. The door is open and I can see the passers-by in the street. Not that I watch them. Or maybe I do, but in any case I don't remember anything about them. They pass straight through my mind. After eating the panino I slide off the stool and step out into the street. I forget the bar and the meal immediately. I am possessed by the sense of satisfaction that follows eating. I walk through the park. Leaves are falling; workmen rake them together with special wide rakes. Every day another flowerbed has been cleared. The weather is warm and the flowers could carry on blooming, but apparently the schedule requires the flowerbeds to be cleared. The whole of civilization is based on the concept of predictability, invariability. I love civilization, especially this afternoon in the Jardin de Luxemburg. The sun's coming out.

# Ervin Õunapuu

**Ervin Õunapuu** (born 1956) began in the 1970s as a painter and stage artist. Over the years he has widened his field of operations. He has been a co-author of plays and has himself staged them, written radio dramas, novels and various types of short prose, as well as making short films. His début as a writer came with the novel *Olivia. Master Class* (Olivia. Meistriklass, 1996) which was also staged as a multimedia opera and swiftly became his breakthrough.



PM/Scampix

*Olivia* was based on inspiration gleaned from the works of others, especially the painting by C.D. Friedrich *Woman at the Window*. The novel sets out to make variations on the theme of Ahaseurus, the Wandering Jew, but this time in the guise of a woman. The novel is magical realist and demonstrates various phases of development a human being goes through; at the same time it is a journey through world wars and revolt right up to

the era of present-day terrorism. At the time of its appearance, the novel was raised rightly by critics to cult status who pointed out its grotesque and surrealist atmosphere and the careful craftsmanship of its composition. Õunapuu values revolt and individual freedoms, rejects authority, at the same time gives the curse a human face.

In his short stories, Õunapuu often contrasts the town with the countryside. He depicts village life as violent and the benighted mentality mental life of country people as grotesque and crude, occasionally resorting to naturalist description. But in his negation he praises life in all its richness and is against all manner of limitations, asceticism and spiritual poverty. For instance, in Õunapuu's sixth work, *The Sword* (Mõök, 2002) there is not even one sympathetic character. Alongside the Pharisaical and lecherous representatives of power, no quarter is given either to those working in the church and those seemingly noble freedom fighters who simply display the same traits of acquisitiveness and corruption in the Communist empire. In the paranoid society depicted in the novel, where everyone is informing on everyone else, the fine point of a sharp imagination culminates with the fact that the artist protagonist turns out to be a valued KGB informer, nicknamed "The Sword".

What drives Õunapuu's work is a struggle with authority and the authorities, principally with the church, a struggle against the uncritical attitudes of believers and fanatics dangerous to society. On the other hand, Õunapuu is also an aesthete who is captivated by small, exclusive details and a measure of aristocratic behaviour, grandeur and individuality.

*Text by Janika Kronberg*

## *Domestic matters*

By Ervin Óunapuu (excerpt from the short story)

He is now eight. So. Only eight more years to go. Eight and eight make sixteen. Kaalu will then get a passport and go away to a big city. In Paide, for instance, he will surely find a job which earns him his daily bread. Work in daytime, and school in the evening. Kaalu had heard that the real workmen go to evening classes to acquire knowledge. In his mind's eye he saw himself standing in front of a mirror, taking off his overalls and putting on a suit, so as to look decent in class. May-be he will marry the teacher, and they will learn mathematics and biology together at home. And how babies are born. Kaalu will most certainly go to a canteen - and pay with money he had earned himself. He goes to the canteen and tells the woman there, in a deep voice: "I could do with a plateful of macaroni and cutlets, enough for a hard-working man. Some bread, and a compote too. How much is it?" A fair-haired woman in a white smock smiles pleasantly, clicks the beads of a wooden abacus and says in a ringing voice: "Fifty three kopecks, please!" Kaalu hands her a brand new one rouble note and says casually: "I don't have anything smaller at the moment, perhaps you have some change?" The kitchen-lady smiles: "No problem with that, dear." Kaalu smiles happily in return: "Well, that's all right then. I'll have enough left for pictures." The kitchen-lady is about to hand Kaalu his change, when she suddenly turns bright red in face and starts pulling the boy's hair.

"How dare you laugh in your sleep, you lying worm!" yelled mother in a rage. She was standing in front of Kaalu's bed, in a worn flannel nightshirt, and pointed the torch straight into Kaalu's face. "You were laughing at your mother, weren't you? Confess! Tell me right away - you were smirking at your good hard-working mother! Who were you discussing me with in your sleep?! Who with, you useless bastard! Who were you luring to the pictures! Where did you get the money?! Have you started thieving?! Has the son of Hilda Sebedeus become a thief?!"

She took an officer's belt and lashed out at Kaalu with a heavy hand. The sharp copper buckle broke his knuckles. Suddenly mother stopped beating, flung the belt down into a heap of ash in front of the stove and sunk to the earthen floor, sobbing. Her emaciated body twisted in cramps and her eyes turned dull like blotting paper.

Kaalu rushed to the window, then to the door; back to the window again, and the door. He did not know what to do. At last he thrust the mug into a pail of water and poured the content into mother's face. Mother shut up, shook her head and touched her face, massaged her temples with her fingertips and opened her eyes. She looked dazedly around, saw Kaalu and asked:

"Who am I...Where am I? Who are you, boy?"

Kaalu squatted down besides mother and explained patiently:

"Your name is Hilda Sebedeus, this is your home. I am Karl Sebedeus, your son."

Mother sat up, propped her elbow on the bed and started to rock herself forwards and backwards. Kaalu lifted the lamp closer, thought for a while, then took hold of mother's chin and asked her point-blank:

"Where is my father? Who is my father?"

Mother turned her red eyes towards her son, sighed hoarsely and started to talk, picking at a hole in the sock heel at the same time. She spoke with a low and sad voice, staring into a dark corner:

"Dear Kaalu, I swear to you on everything I hold sacred that you will never know that. Never!"

# Estonian Literature Information Centre

The Estonian Literature Information Centre (Eesti Kirjanduse Teabekeskus) exists to generate interest in Estonian literature abroad. It maintains contacts with international publishers, takes part in international book fairs, and participates in seminars and important literary events abroad. The centre publishes information on Estonian literature in several languages.

## The aims of the Estonian Literature Information Centre

- To increase awareness of Estonian writing abroad, with particular emphasis on fiction, poetry, drama and children's books.
- To provide the international literary world with up-to-date information on Estonian literature and the literary scene in Estonia.
- To establish and mediate contacts between Estonian authors and foreign publishers, magazines etc.

## Activities

The Estonian Literature Information Centre generates interest in Estonian literary fiction abroad by providing information. In order to keep foreign publishers informed of successful Estonian quality literature it produces dossiers with translated extracts from a selection of titles which have proved artistically and commercially successful. The centre collects information on Estonian literature in translation. It also organises seminars and other activities in co-operation with the Estonian Writers' Union. The ELIC works closely with the Estonian Literary Magazine (published by the Estonian Institute), one of the main publications that promotes Estonian literature abroad. A small library of the more important Estonian books has been created for the use of foreign translators.

\*

The Estonian Literature Information Centre is an independent, non-profit institution established by the Estonian Writers' Union and the Estonian Publishers' Association. ELIC is supported by the Estonian Ministry of Culture.

## Contact Us

ELIC, Estonian Literature Information Centre  
Eesti Kirjanduse Teabekeskus

Voorimehe 9, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia

Tel: + 372 6 314 870

Fax: +372 6 314 871

E-mail: [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

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

## Translation grant TRADUCTA

Traducta is a major literary translation grant funded by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (Eesti Kultuurkapital). The Traducta grant has been established in order to encourage the translation of Estonian authors into foreign languages and facilitate the publication of Estonian literature abroad.

### Requirements for applying:

- the application form of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia which can be found on the web.
- a contract between the translator and a foreign publisher confirming the publication of the translation
- a contract between the foreign publisher and the owner of the Estonian rights.
- when translating a work of drama, a contract with a legal entity that is going to produce the work of drama
- The translator should also include a CV and a list of previous published translations. (If the translator has already translated part of the book, a suitable excerpt may also be included with the application.)
- The grant also covers accommodation in Estonia if the translator so requires, as well as the cost of a return air ticket.
- Any translator of Estonian is eligible to apply for the Traducta grant.

Applications for this grant should be sent to the offices of the Cultural Endowment. The Traducta grant is issued at the sole discretion of the Cultural Endowment, which alone shall choose the recipient, and shall decide the value of the grant bearing in mind the size and difficulty of the book to be translated.

The deadlines for applications for the Traducta grant are four times a year: 20th February, May, August and November and they should be sent to the following address:

Eesti Kultuurkapital  
23, Suur-Karja  
10148 Tallinn  
Estonia  
Tel (+372) 69 99 150, fax (+372) 69 99 166  
E-mail: [kulka@kulka.ee](mailto:kulka@kulka.ee)  
<http://veeb.kulka.ee>

A Sharp Cut. Contemporary Estonian Literature  
ISBN 9985-9368-2-5

ELIC, Estonian Literature Information Centre  
Voorimehe 9, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia  
[www.estlit.ee](http://www.estlit.ee)



