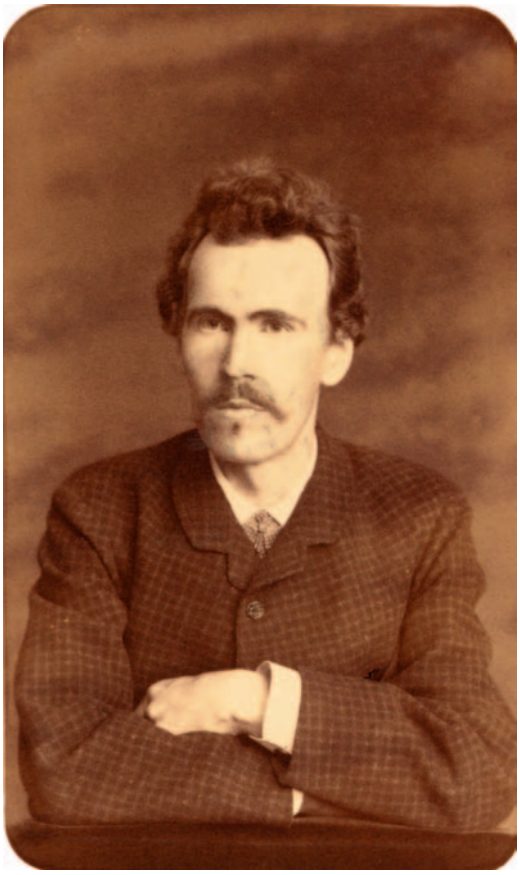
Elm

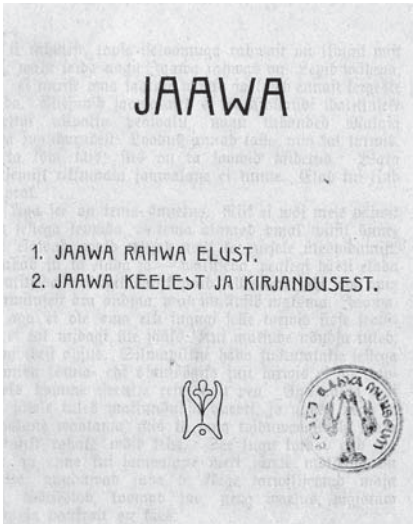
autumn

2010

estonian literary magazine



Elm



More information sources:

Eesti Kirjanike Liit
Estonian Writers' Union
Estnischer Schriftstellerverband

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

Tartu branch:

Vanemuise 19, 51014 Tartu
Phone and fax: 07 341 073
ekl@kirjandus.ee

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

The Estonian Institute would like to thank the Cultural Endowment of Estonia for their generous support

no 31. Autumn 2010

www.einst.ee/litterary

Editorial Board: Andres Ehin, Peeter Helme, Mart Meri, Mati Sirkel, Jaanus Vaiksoo, Piret Viires
Editor: Tiina Randviir **Translators:** Ilmar Lehtpere, Marika Liivamägi, Sadie Murphy, Tiina Randviir
Language editor: Richard Adang **Layout:** Marius Peterson **Cover photo:** Eduard Bornhöhe

Eduard Bornhöhe

in the light of historical narratives

by Andrus Org

The common understanding of the history and historical awareness of Estonian culture has largely been shaped by writers. The historical narrative was mostly established during the period of the 19th century National Awakening, i.e. in the 1860s and 1870s, via various popular texts. The era of National Awakening constituted resistance to the Baltic German ideology, breaking through the narrative blockade, and creating a national narrative. Constructing a new narrative included texts of national literature, political speeches, school textbooks and newspapers, choral songs, patriotic poetry etc. The aim of these narratives was to destroy the other ideology and establish a new one focused on raising national self-awareness, and affirming the values of a suppressed nation.

A significant role in shaping the Estonian historical awareness during the period of national self-awareness and an emerging intelligentsia was played by the work of Eduard Bornhöhe (1862–1923), especially his historical novels. *The Avenger* (*Tasuja,* 1880), written when the author was only 17 years old, is the first original story about Estonian history, and it showed the way to other late 19th century historical novels. A total of 23,000 copies of this popular, simple book appeared between 1880 and 1905.

The story describes the St George's Night Uprising in 1343 and contains a lot of patriotic enthusiasm. The romantic ideal of freedom and protest against oppression lent the book strong social influence.

Bornhöhe's subsequent historical works, *The Struggles of Villu* (*Villu võitlused,* 1890) and *Prince Gabriel, or the Last Days of the Pirita Convent* (*Vürst Gabriel ehk Pirita kloostri viimsed päevad*, 1893), carried on the same ideas, although they were clearly influenced by the mood of the decline of the National Awakening period. The latter adventure story depicts the events of the Livonian War in the second half of the 16th century in Tallinn and in its surroundings. In 1979, the Tallinnfilm studio made one of the most legendary and beloved Estonian films on the basis of Bornhöhe's book, *The Last Relic* (*Viimne reliikvia*, 1979, script by Arvo Valton, directed by Grigori Kromanov). Estonian television still shows it a few times each year. The film, with its action elements, has a truly exciting plot, noble heroes and songs about freedom, which are sung to this day. The lyrics to these hugely popular songs were written by Paul-Eerik Rummo, a poet and playwright of the 1960s generation.

Besides historical books, Bornhöhe's tales of the present also attracted a lot of attention. Due to the emergence of critical realism, the romantic aspects took a back seat. A book consisting of short satirical stories, *The Tallinn Fools and Buffoons* (*Tallinna narrid and narrikesed,* 1892), makes fun of amateur inventors with delusions of grandeur, and poorly educated writers and their pathetic work. This work, too, became better known through the television production *Fools of Fame* (1982). Together with *The Avenger*, this book is included in the compulsory reading list for secondary school students. The realistic story *The Bugbears* (*Kollid*, 1903) also focuses on Tallinn, and tackles the daily life and outdated habits of officials in various social positions. Bornhöhe also played a key role in developing the traditions of Estonian travel writing, especially with his book *Following the Footsteps of the Pilgrims* (*Usurändajate radadel,* 1899), about Near and Middle Eastern peoples and their cultures, which criticises the power ambitions of the colonisers. He described various places and human types also during his travels in Western Europe and by the River Volga.

Due to financial difficulties, Bornhöhe never finished his studies of philology at the University of Tartu. In the course of his colourful life, he undertook many jobs, for example as a technical draughtsman, business apprentice, railway station manager, home tutor, journalist, caricaturist, translator, town secretary, archivist and court official. In this kind of life, fiction was not his priority, and thus he wrote something occasionally merely because the publishers insisted.

However, let us return to Bornhöhe's historical novels. Characteristically, the author did not merely rely on factual historical material, but mostly preferred fantasy, making history more fascinating and noble. Back then, 'historical', both in translations and originals, mostly meant that some historical motifs were intertwined with an adventure story. As in European literature, the first Estonian efforts at historical texts tackled the Middle Ages. These were essentially treatments of history and the past with a touch of romanticism, characterised by sentimentality and heroism, often depicting an ideal love affair that led to tragedy. Topics in European romantic literature related to uprisings and the struggles for freedom of oppressed peoples were popular in Estonia, the best example being the work of Walter Scott.

The Avenger concentrates on the events connected with the St George's Night Uprising near Tallinn in the 14th century. The hero is the just and determined Jaanus, 'the Avenger', a peasant who becomes the leader of his people. The story describes a

freedom fight with the aim of restoring the rights of a small nation that used to be free. This kind of national-romantic historical narrative is primarily characterised by the idea of the continuing existence of a nation – a past dominated by serfdom is interpreted in terms of a future that brings freedom and self-determination to the nation. This approach naturally evokes great and noble emotions, much needed by a nation and culture at a critical moment. The ideal era – the ancient period of freedom before the invading crusaders – was used as material during the pre-National Awakening period, whereas the more tragic and heroic episodes were employed in the historical prose of the Awakening era. This is an artistic method where the tragic is changed into the heroic, the latter in turn connected with the actions of a hero who represents the people. The influence of several literary sources is quite obvious here, e.g. Alexandre Dumas's story of Wilhelm Tell, an inspiring tale about the Swiss freedom fighter, with whom the Avenger has much in common (e.g. both acquired their education with hermits, both want to avenge their father's torturers, and (a tiny detail) both wear hats with feathers).

The Avenger can be divided into two parts: 1) a love story, perhaps inspired by J.W. Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and 2) episodes of revolt on the basis of Johann Renner's chronicles dating from the 16th century. Before the plot starts to develop and the characters emerge, the introduction offers a brief historical overview, where the author characterises the situation of Estonians from the early 13th century until the St George's Night Uprising. Among others, he quotes the Baltic-German pastor and chronicler Christian Kelch, according to whom: 'Estonia and Livonia were heaven for the manor lords, paradise for the pastors, a treasure trove for strangers, but hell for the peasants'.

Although the social and political antagonisms could have offered plentiful material for developing his ideas, Bornhöhe instead emphasised personal conflicts between the protagonist and the ruling class, based on matters of the heart. The main character Jaanus, having been educated by a hermit and having had an upbringing suitable for a knight, gets carried away by ideas of resistance, especially through literature and relying on historical knowledge. At the beginning of the book, he questions the colonial world and criticises the culture of the oppressors and, as events unfold, he starts inciting people to rebellion and fighting for his oppressed fellow countrymen. Despite his colonial education, Jaanus develops into a rebel, a brave representative of people's yearning for freedom. He is also inspired by his grandfather's words uttered on his deathbed.

The main opponent of Jaanus is the young landowner Oodo, an arrogant feudal lord proud of his social status, who begins trying to humiliate Jaanus when they are both children. The conflict between them persists until their final decisive confrontation, where Oodo must die by the sword of the Avenger. An alluring will-o-the-wisp is the romantically pretty and gentle Miss Emilia, Oodo's sister. Jaanus falls in love with her and suffers complicated inner conflicts as a result. However, their childhood friendship fails to lead to anything else, as Emilia chooses a young knight of her own class as her husband. In his last battle, Jaanus does not fight so much for people's freedom – he is instead urged on by his own personal tragedy and a wish to take revenge, tormented by the hopeless, bitter loss of the love of an 'alien princess'.

Referring to the harrowing conditions of serfdom, although historically somewhat distorted, Bornhöhe presented powerful artistic contrasts, showing the irreconcilable conflicts between peasants and manor lords through the black and white contrasts of the characters. Besides patriotic ideology, *The Avenger* describes the derogatory attitude of the alien power towards the repressed population (for example, there is an inte-

resting detail of Oodo naming his dog Taara after the deity of the Estonians, and Jaanus taking this as an insult). Bornhöhe, the son of a granary-keeper at a manor house and educated in a colonial culture, has in his work clearly shown the lower position of Estonians compared with the Germans. *The Avenger* shaped national ideology, which was primarily based on the feelings of us–them opposition. The fictional treatment of Bornhöhe's historical subject matter fit neatly into the context of national ideology, reaching the consciousness of people and thus managing to unite them. Although the author was not involved in any missionary work nor did he aspire towards Enlightenment, he nevertheless encouraged national yearnings. The Enlighteners, who believed in the totally independent statehood of a small nation, its independence from a big country, emerged only at the beginning of the 20th century.

Bornhöhe's national-romantic stories are also allegorical, in their own specific way – they should be read as national allegories, symbolic narratives, where the main features of narrative activities symbolically refer to an idea or situation. In these texts, the capitalist way of life has not separated private experience from the public, i.e. the national sphere; they still exist together, and therefore a tale about an individual destiny allegorically reflected the experience and mood of the whole nation. National allegory is certainly among the main methods of literature and myth-creating, but is also a significant function of colonialist discourse, demonstrating the operating mechanisms of social powers, especially their essential opposition.

Besides shaping the national awareness of history, Bornhöhe's romantic stories lay the foundation for Estonian historical prose, serving as a guide to other authors. In the cultural situation of the time, it was also significant that the weakened censorship favoured historical prose. Historical topics have always been especially scrutinised by the authorities, because power as an imaginary force needs a favourable treatment of history that avoids misunderstandings. The censors of the time allowed more open discussion of the hostility towards the Germans and depictions of all the past clashes and conflicts between Estonians and Germans.

The patterns and pathos of Bornhöhe's depiction of history and that of some other writers of the second half of the 19th century remain the foundation on the basis of which the past is understood and national myths are constructed. Estonian historical prose writing in the early 20th century naturally already bore the stamp of another literary trend, i.e. realism, especially in the novels of Eduard Vilde. However, Bornhöhe's manner continued in the 1920s, when a new wave of historical novels entered the Estonian literary scene (the works of Karl August Hindrey, Mait Metsanurk, Enn Kippel and others).

The diverse work of the talented Bornhöhe still occupies a notable place in Estonian literature. His popularity is proved by numerous reprints, as well as the total print run of his books, and also by translations into other languages, for example into Russian (*Мститель* / *The Avenger*, 1952, 1983, 1989, 1994 and 2005; *Исторические повести/ Historical Stories*, 1954, 1961, 1969, 1972 and 1984), Lithuanian (*Keršytojas/ The Avenger* 1955; *Vilaus kovos; Kunigaikštis Gabrielis/ Prince Gabriel,* 1978), Finnish (*Kostaja /The Avenger,* 1888), Esperanto, Mongolian and Hungarian. By combining mythical-romantic tales with clearly perceived historical narratives about the key events in the Estonian past, Bornhöhe encouraged writing about Estonian history and appreciation of the idea of freedom.

Würst Gabriel

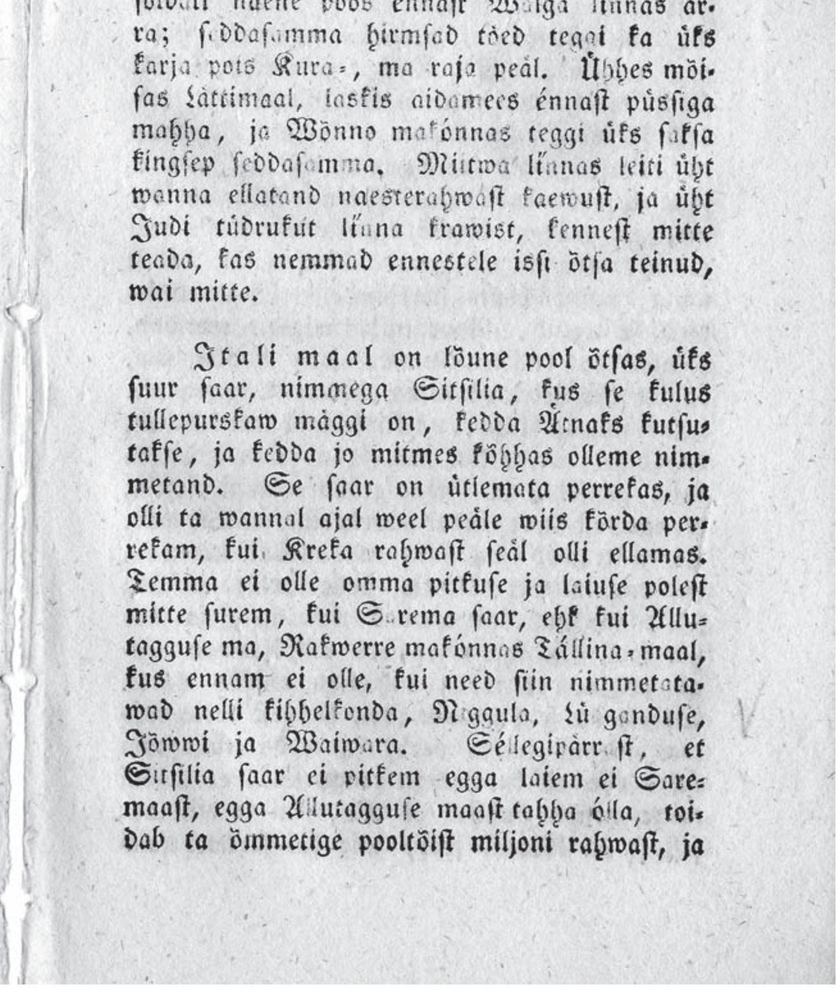
ehk

Pirita kloostri wiimsed päewad.

C. Bornhöhe
(Eduard Brunberg'i)

ajaloolik jutustus suurest Liiwi sõjast
(1558—1583).

Tallinnas.
Trükitud G. Pihlaka tuluga.


jotvali naene poos ennast Walga linnas ar-
ra; seddasamma hirmsad töed teggi ka üks
karja pois Kura-, ma raja peál. Ühhes mõi-
sas Lättimaal, laskis aidamees ennast püssiga
mahha, ja Wönno makónnas teggi üks saksa
kingsep seddasamma. Miitwa línnas leiti üht
wanna ellatand naesterahwast kaewust, ja üht
Judi tüdrukut línna krawist, kennest mitte
teada, kas nemmad ennestele issi ötsa teinud,
wai mitte.

Itali maal on lõune pool ötsas, üks
suur saar, nimmega Sitsilia, kus se kulus
tullepurskaw mäggi on, kedda Ätnaks kutsu-
takse, ja kedda jo mitmes kõhhas olleme nim-
metand. Se saar on ütlemata perrekas, ja
olli ta wannal ajal weel peäle wiis kõrda per-
rekam, kui Kreka rahwast seál olli ellamas.
Temma ei olle omma pitkuse ja laiuse polest
mitte surem, kui Sarema saar, ehk kui Allu-
tagguse ma, Rakwerre makónnas Tállina-maal,
kus ennam ei olle, kui need siin nimmetata-
wad nelli kihhelkonda, Iggula, Lügganduse,
Jöwwi ja Waiwara. Séllegipärrast, et
Sitsilia saar ei pitkem egga laiem ei Sare-
maast, egga Allutaggusest maast tahha ólla, toi-
dab ta ömmetige pooltöist miljoni rahwast, ja

Estonian Travelogues

by Anneli Kõvamees

For a long time, socio-political circumstances have restricted Estonians' travel opportunities, and thus a view of the rest of the world has largely depended on travel writing. A travelogue makes it possible to undertake a journey without even leaving your room; it introduces the reader to unfamiliar people in faraway lands. A chance to travel in your mind is especially significant when physical movement is restricted, as was the case for most of the inhabitants of the Soviet Union. Many people used that manner of travel, evident in the popularity of travel writing during the Soviet era.

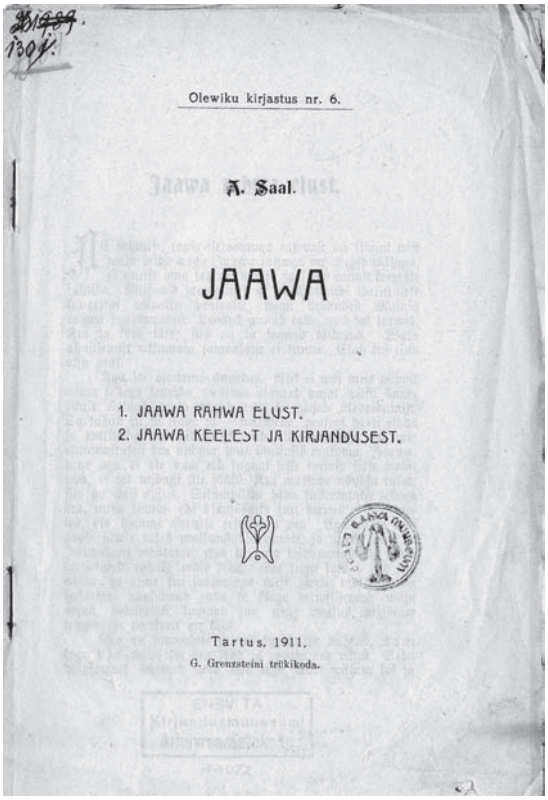
In an effort to sketch the history of Estonian travel writing, we should first of all mention that the Estonian-language versions appeared after various translations of travelogues. There were also overviews of events and typical phenomena occurring in closer or more distant lands, which often introduced the culture and history of countries. Such overviews appeared, for example, in the first continuously published newspaper, *Maarahva Nädalaleht* (Country People's Weekly), issued in 1821–1823 and 1825 by the Enlightener Otto Wilhelm Masing (1763–1832). Among other places, the paper described Sicily: 'It is a warm country and blessed; various fruit trees grow all sorts of precious fruit. Some land is not cultivated. Sicily gives us lemons, oranges, figs, almonds, raisins and expensive plums; it produces silk, precious oils, delicious wines, and other goods that can be used everywhere' (21 July 1823).

Another source of information about strange lands and peoples was *Ma-ilm ja mõnda mis seal sees leida on* (The world and some things to be found in it), published in one volume in 1849. The author was Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), the author of the Estonian epic *Kalevipoeg.* Readers could learn, for instance, about Italy, and various unfamiliar things had to be explained to Estonians, e.g. fountains (Kreutzwald called them leaping wells) and macaroni: 'Macaroni comes in many varieties: thin and delicate as yarn, cut into short pieces, long and wide like chips from a carpenter's plane, or thin and curved like little snakes.' Kreutzwald also translated the first travelogues into Estonian. He translated A. F. F. Hoffmann's travel stories from his *Land-und See-Bilder* (1848–1849) and published them in the first and second part of *Ma ja Merre piltid* (Pictures of Land and Sea, 1850–1861, 3rd part). The first part focused on South Africa, the second on the Indian Ocean and the Island of Ceylon. The third part of *Ma and Merre piltid* consisted of a description by the American Elisha Kent Kane (1820–1857) of his journey to the Arctic Ocean.

Estonians' opportunities for travel were restricted for a long time. Only a few were able to travel, mainly missionaries and the military, and not everybody put their impressions down on paper. The first travel writing appeared mostly in the press, with the newspaper *Eesti Postimees* publishing the first original Estonian-language travelogue – *An Estonian's* Voyage Round the World on Board the Askold (1867–1869). It was written by Jüri Jürison (1832–1899), an engine officer in the Russian battle fleet, and describes his journey from Kronstadt to Vladivostok and back. The ship visited a number of harbour towns on different continents. Jürison focused on Japan, its customs, habits and peculiarities that caught his European eye. The writer never showed any arrogance towards Japan or other countries and nations; instead, Europeans came out badly, as they demonstrated their sense of superiority regarding the native peoples. Jürison also drew parallels with life at home, repeatedly emphasising the importance of education. The whole travelogue is written in a fluent narrative manner, and the author addresses the reader informally: 'I would like to tell you a little about this.' In addition to examining different countries and peoples, the book describes various events and incidents aboard. Jürison's personal impressions and opinions are the qualities that make the travelogue such a fascinating read and distinguish it from earlier geographical materials.

In addition to Jürison, another author of early travelogues was the missionary Hans Tiismann (1829–1886), whose impressions were published in newspapers and books. His major travel book was *Petlehem* (1865), about the birth town of Jesus, with the focus being, as expected (considering the writer's position), on the Christian perspective. On the whole, Tiismann preferred locations and stories connected with Jesus, briefly describing the everyday circumstances, clothes and activities of townspeople.

Eduard Bornhöhe (1862–1923), an



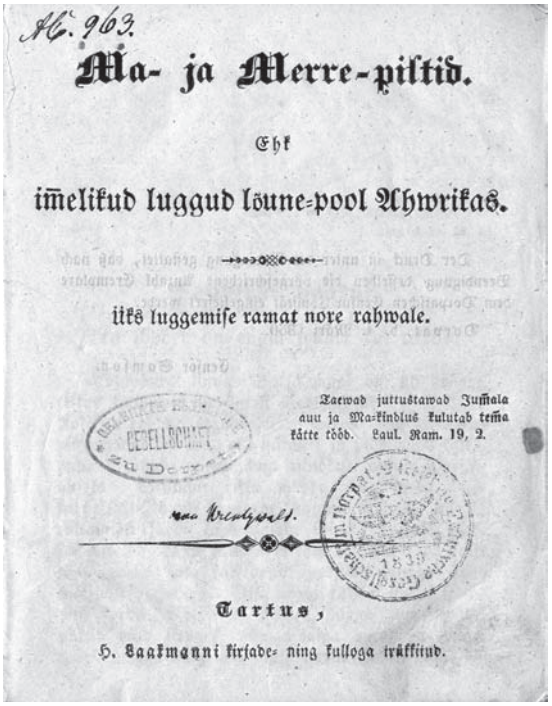
Olewiku kirjastus nr. 6.

A. Saal.

JAAWA

1. JAAWA RAHWA ELUST.
2. JAAWA KEELEST JA KIRJANDUSEST.

Tartus, 1911.
G. Grenzsteini trükikoda.



Ma- ja Merre-piltid.

Ehk

imelikud luggud lõune-pool Ahwrikas.

ütks luggemise ramat nore rahwale.

Tartus,

H. Laakmanni kirjade- ning kulloga trükkitud.

Estonian writer and the author of the historical novels *Avenger* (1880) and *Prince Gabriel or the Last Days of the Pirita Convent* (1893), introduced fictional figurativeness into Estonian travel writing. Bornhöhe not only mentioned facts but also added colourful episodes and types of people; his writing is characterised by an affable chatty tone. The subjective element had considerably increased. The most remarkable travelogue was *In the Footsteps of Pilgrims* (1899), offering impressions of Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, Italy and France. The book reveals the writer's excitement and joy in discovering the world, his optimism and an agreeable sense of humour. This was an Estonian of the late 19th century, who was discovering significant places from world history and culture, both for himself and his readers. Places and objects are mainly described from the historical perspective, peppered with personal impressions and observations. There are no lengthy insightful discussions or philosophical reflections – this feature is also typical of other Estonian travelogues of the same era.

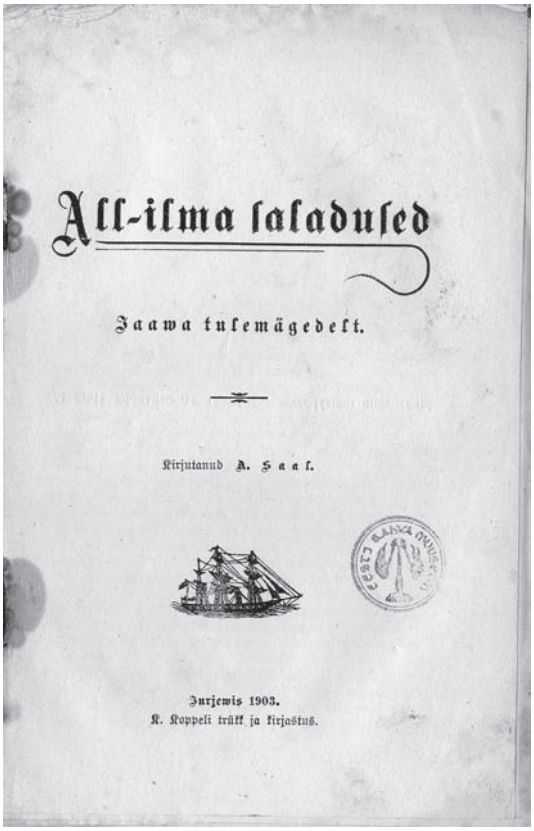
Among the travelogue authors of the same period, we should mention Andres Saal (1861–1931), who is primarily known to Estonian readers for his historical short stories, such as *Aita* (1891), *Leili* (1892), and *Vambola* (1889). For some years, Saal lived on Java and examined the life and culture of the island in his books *Secrets of the Underworld* (1903) and *Java* (1911).

One of the great early 20th century travellers was Eduard Vilde (1865–1933), who introduced critical realism to Estonian literature. He is the author of *To the Frozen North* (1896), *The Dairyman of Mäeküla* (1916), the trilogy *The Mahtra War* (1902), *When the Anija Men Went to Tallinn* (1903) and *Prophet Maltsvet* (1905-1908), and the plays *The Elusive Miracle* (1912) and *The Hobgoblin* (1913). Vilde wrote about his trip to the Paris World Fair in 1900 in *Two Months in Central Europe* (published between 1900 and 1902) and about his 1903

travels in Germany, Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Turkey, Italy and Switzerland, published under the title *Across Land and Sea* (1903–1904). Vilde also wrote a parody of the latter travelogue, a satire titled *Through Soot and Dust* (published in the paper's humour supplement in 1903), which tackles issues of domestic and foreign policy through a distorting mirror. Vilde produced some travel pieces about America as well, which are quite critical and show parallels with present attitudes, e.g. *Across the Big Water* (1911) and *First Time in Prison* (appeared in a newspaper in 1911 and 1912).

However, the above-mentioned travelogues still focus on descriptions and introducing sights, with deeper reflections, associations and more philosophical ideas taking a back seat. The writers were interested in the what, and not in the how. The initiator of more artistic travel writing in Estonian literature was the virtuoso short-story writer and brilliant literary critic Friedebert Tuglas (1886–1971), with his *Journey to Spain* (1918) and *Journey to North Africa* (I-III, 1928–1930). His travelogues are characterised by a good knowledge of the history and culture of the country. Historical flashbacks intertwine with personal impressions and descriptions of contemporary daily life. Tuglas's books offer both enjoyable reading and information. Under the pen-name *Anonymous,* he published the humorous *Chronicle of a Norwegian Trip* (1939), where he achieved a comic effect by using the style of old chronicles.

The number of travelogues issued as separate books increased in the 1920s and 1930s; for the first time, literary magazines published yearly overviews of such books in the 1930s. In the course of two decades, collections of travel articles previously published in the press, plus first editions, appeared. Some examples: the extensively travelled Karl Ast-Rumor's (1886-1971) *In the Country of Scorching Sun and Fanatical Faith* (I-II, 1930; III 1931) on Ceylon and India; the caricaturist and versatile writer Karl August Hindrey's (1875-1947) *Trip to*


All-ilma saladused

Jaawa tulemägedelt.

Kirjutanud A. Saal.

Jurjewis 1903.
K. Koppeli trükk ja kirjastus.

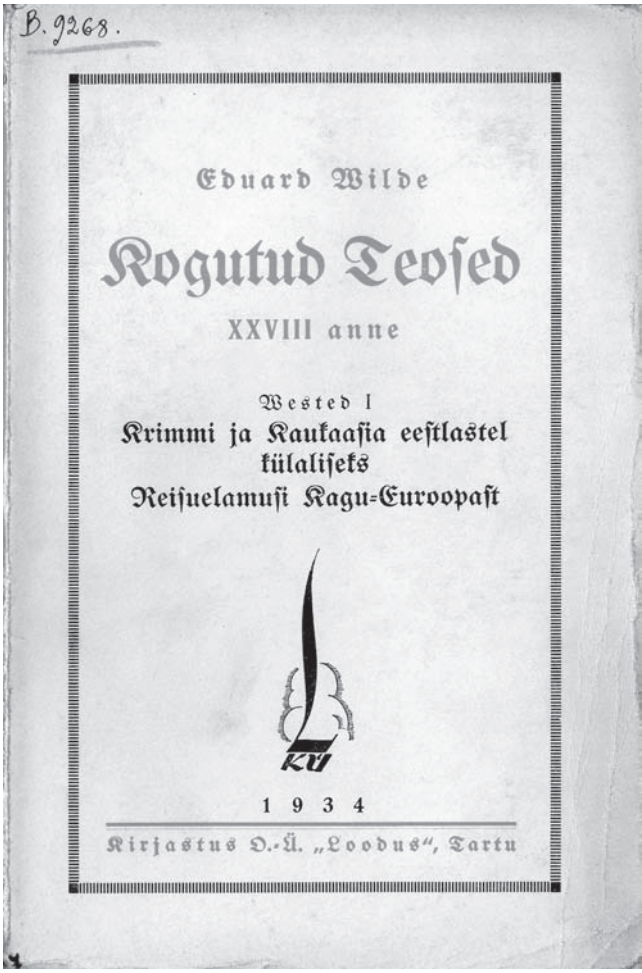
Congo (1929), *Travels, Beaches, Riviera, the Islands of Sõsarsaared and Savoy* (1937); Bernhard Linde's (1886-1954) *The countries of the rising sun: travel notes from Siberia, Japan, China and India* (1925)*, and Towards Creative Central-Europe* (1930); and two books by the writer and translator of French literature Johannes Semper (1892-1970), *Criss-cross Across Europe* (1935) and *Under the Crux* (1937).

The 1940s were not a good time for travelling and writing, and thus only a few travelogues were published. The most remarkable was F. Tuglas's *The First Trip Abroad. Exile Memories from France and Italy 1909–1910* (1945). One of the most striking episodes he describes occurred in Naples, where Tuglas ran out of money and was forced to live the life of a tramp, wandering around the streets during the night and suffering from hunger. Tuglas gives a colourful description of the side streets of the southern city: 'Where the streets

widened out a bit, the inside of the houses immediately poured out. People dragged their beds into the streets, cooked their meals, ate, lay down, and searched one another for fleas. The tailors clicked their needles, tinsmiths tapped with hammers, and women shouted at their washing troughs. The semi-streets also had pubs and dining places. People cooked fish, molluscs, snails and shellfish; cakes, pasta and potato slices sizzled in oil and fat. A red-eyed starfish a few feet long was lying on a table; a client appeared at the table and pointed at the monster; the cook immediately grabbed a large knife, cut off one tentacle and threw it into a boiling pot. The creature's eye turned lilac with pain and seemed to follow the journey of one of its limbs to the pot, and from there to the eater's mouth, with fierce disapproval. Greenish-yellow liquid steamed in a large cauldron, and children with chunks of bread gathered around it; the chunks were opened up and the liquid was ladled into the bread pocket. The bread instantly turned green like poison, and the children wolfed the bread down. All around and in the middle of that bazaar, donkeys brayed, street vendors screamed and beggars begged. The bearded heads of goats were peering down from the windows on the upper floors, and human waste was flowing down into the gutters….'

More travelogues started appearing in the 1950s, although some were reprints from earlier years, e.g. books by Tuglas, Vilde, Bornhöhe and Evald Tammlaan (pseudonym Jänkimees). The series *Maailm ja mõnda* (The World around Us) became increasingly popular, starting in 1957. Besides translations, the series issued books by Estonian authors as well. Travelogues enabled readers to travel via the written word, at a time when countries beyond the state borders were largely unreachable.

One of the most prolific travel writers was Vladimir Beekman (1929-2009), a writer and translator whose publications include *Iceland. 1958* (1959), *Autumn in the Kingdom of Sweden* (1960) and *A Distant Land – Brazil* (1963), as well as writings about Canada, Finland, Armenia, Tajikistan, Norway and



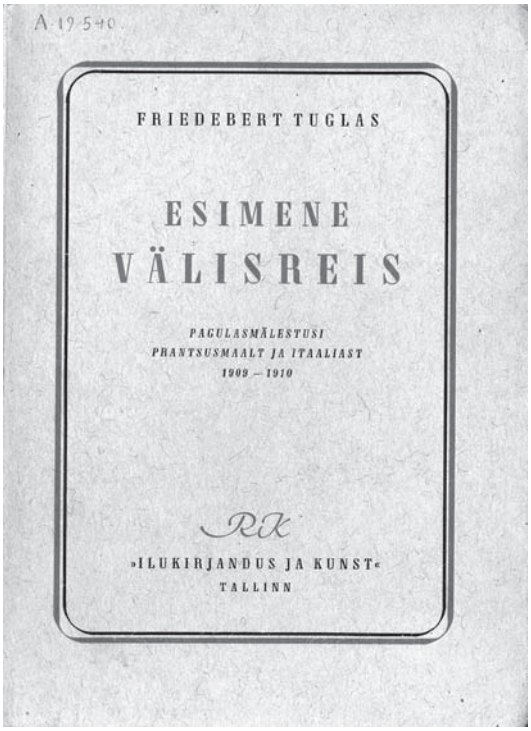
Mexico. Other travel writers and their books, in alphabetical order: Aimée Beekman (b. 1933) wrote on Italy; Aira Kaal (1911-1988) on India, China and Armenia; Jaan Kross (1920-2007) and Ellen Niit's (b. 1928) *Earth and Marble* (1968), about their trip to Turkey, Egypt and Greece; Lennart Meri (1929-2006), a man of letters and later a politician and the President of the Republic in 1992-2001, was fascinated with places in Siberia, the Far North and Central Asia; Mihkel Mutt (b. 1953) wrote about Asia. Two of the most travelled writers, also a married couple, were Lilli Promet (1922-2007) and Ralf Parve (b. 1919): *3´packed suitcases: pictures from Germany, Bulgaria and Finland* (1958), about their impressions of France,

Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania; Rudolf Sirge (1904-1970) wrote about Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand; Juhan Smuul's (1922-1971) best known travelogue described his voyage to Antarctica; Ülo Tuulik (b. 1940) visited Africa in 1965, and wrote *Letters of the Atlantic* and *How to Listen to a Storm*; and Jüri Talvet's (b. 1945) main fascination has always been with Spain.

Besides travelogues where impressions led to essayistic reflections, a type of travel writing emerged which was directed by Soviet ideology. This kind of book often merely described what the author saw, without developing any further. The style of I-was-here-saw-this-then-went-there-saw-that dominated, which could be called tourism-type writing. There are no references to previously read history or art books, fiction or personal impressions. Many Soviet-era books focused on various drawbacks in the capitalist world and also emphasised the negative effect of religion.

Most travelogues were published by authors living in Estonia, exile literature memoirs and novels dominated, and travel writing was not quite as popular. In 1958, a collection of travelogues appeared by eight authors: Karl Ast-Rumor's *Angkor* (Indo-China), Salme Ekbaum's (1912-1995) *A Seagull's Feather from the Superior*, Gert Helbemäe's (1913-1974) *Motifs of Cornwall,* Ella Ilbak's (1895-1997) *Welcome, New World*!, Peeter Lindsaar's (1906-1990) *Across Australia*, Karl Ristikivi's (1912-1977) *Italian Capriccio,* Valev Uibopuu's (1913-1997) *Towards the South* (southern Europe) and Arno Vihalemm's (1911-1990) travel verses.

More opportunities to travel in the re-established Republic of Estonia have brought about a boom in travel writing, both as articles in the press as well as books. The circle of writers has significantly expanded too. Today's authors of travelogues are no longer mostly professional writers, but people with highly diverse backgrounds. The nature of travel has



changed as well – most travelogues do not rely on tourist trips, but on longer stays in a country. Popular books appear in the *My* series, where the authors tell about their experiences of actually living in a place, rather than visiting it (e.g. *My America*, *My Spain*, *My Thailand* and *My Estonia*).

In conclusion, we can say that Estonian-language travel writing started in the last decades of the 19th century, flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, became popular again in the late 1950s, and made a powerful comeback in the 21st century. The visited and described places and the styles of the travelogues have always been diverse. There has been a tendency toward greater subjectivity; initially, the emphasis was on countries and objects, and the author's own ideas and reflections were not recorded, whereas today's travelogues describe the writer's thoughts, feelings and experiences, as seen for example in the titles of the books in the *My* series.

16

Travels and Travelogues

by Olev Remsu

What magic power makes people travel?

What urges them to follow the winds?

We can talk about increasing one's knowledge, we can talk about tasks connected with one's job, or we can talk about something else, but to my mind all these and other reasons are no more than excuses. Surely we can find the necessary information without leaving home? Could someone not find a job that wouldn't require any travel? The real reason for travelling comes from inside a person, and it is a need for impressions, seeking impressions.

Whoever is attracted to faraway places arranges his life, work and especially his spare time to travel, at least sometimes, if it is not possible all the time. I am sure that today's adventurers feel the same kind of excitement in their hearts as did Marco Polo, Columbus and Amundsen; perhaps most of us are just a bit more sensible and sober, so we can at least control the excitement, so that we do not aspire to discover another America.

But where does the information come from that far away everything is thrilling and wonderful? Where else but from travel writing!

Before printed books, Marco Polo's tales of China were conveyed by word of mouth, and we can only imagine how many people were drawn to travel as a result! Even if they never made it to China, they managed to make it to the neighbouring mountain, or the closest seaside. Or, if they were lucky (or perhaps unlucky), they got to a country where a foreign tongue was spoken. Who were the pilgrims? Men in monks' habits, satisfying their thirst for adventure, probably urged on by tales of previous similar holy people.

And when God led the tourists back home from their long or short journeys, they spoke at length about their wondrous trips, occasionally adding crazy details on the principle that the truth had to be embellished in order to look more truthful. And again there were small boys with sparkling eyes and straining ears, and their souls rejoiced – 'I want to go too!'

So – what came first, travel or travelogue? The same problem as with the egg and chicken, and the correct answer is – both developed from zero to today's perfection. However, travel writing is more significant than just urging people to undertake a journey. The desire to travel can, after all, be satisfied even without leaving home, and it does not have to be like smelling a rose through a gas mask. We

Europeans are used to beginning our creative culture with Homer, the blind poet, who lived about 2700 years ago.

In genre, his second epic, the *Odyssey*, is nothing else but a travelogue, and in the respectable language of poetry at that, in dactylic hexameter. The twelve thousand lines have survived to our day and have been translated into dozens of languages. This clearly shows our respect for this literary work, which also means respect for travelling, a fascination with wondrous countries. Who would have cared about a mere silly book for several millennia? No-one at all! Not only has the *Odyssey* itself survived, but the epic has acted as a mighty preserver of travel folklore for many nations.

The roots of travel writing thus go really deep, namely to the beginning of culture. And we Estonians have our own long tradition! The creator of our national epic, Kreutzwald, wrote a book titled *The World and What's Inside It* (1848) in order to educate the rural population, and this is largely a travelogue as well.

The epic-master thus started it all off and the rest went smoothly, as everywhere else in the world.

I remember the excitement with which one of our lecturers, Juhan Peegel, spoke about Jüri Jürison, probably the first Estonian to have travelled around the world. I was totally hooked, probably because I was open to it. I chose as my course work Jürison's serialised story *An Estonian's Journey around the World on Board the Askold* (1867-1869). At that time, the text had not yet been published as a book, and I had to read it in instalments in old newspapers in the archive library of the Literary Museum.

Oh, Lisbon, oh, Rio de Janeiro, oh, Cape Town, oh, Singapore, oh, Shanghai! My heart expanded with dreams and yearnings. Enjoying Jürison's writing, I decided to at least go and see Vladivostok, as it was impossible for me to get anywhere else. Incidentally, it was pretty difficult to travel even to Vladivostok during the Soviet era, as it was a closed town. Luckily I managed to get some bogus papers for an official trip from the Association of Journalists, which I showed to the border guards who had come on the train to sort the passengers into suitable categories: those who could carry on, and those to be thrown out. Mind you, this border was inside a country…

Our superb university lecturer, Juhan Peegel, was truly fond of travel writing, and I remember to this day his infectious enthusiasm when he talked about the missionary Hans Tiisman, who devoted his life to trying to convert the pagans. Again, I was immediately captivated by Tiisman's *Letter from Africa* (1865) and *The African Bloom, or the Blessed Days of Pauliine Fathme* (1882). Tiisman was, however, not my first trip to Africa; I had been there with Ernest Hemingway, reading his *Green Hills of Africa.*

I travelled around China for the first time, gulping down Tammsaare's *China and the Chinese* (1938). Tammsaare, one of our most prominent novelists was a famously sedentary man, and indeed he wrote his China book without leaving home. Consider Homer: he certainly never spent any time in the company of the Cyclops Polyphemus and the witch Circe, nor did he sail past the Island of the Sirens. Kreutzwald, too, stayed where he was when teaching the country people about distant lands.

I re-read Tammsaare's China book recently, and was amazed – how on earth could he be so clever? How come he knew everything? To put it briefly, this is timeless literature! In honour of the classic, I borrowed quotations from his book as mottoes to start my own travelogue about Taiwan.

Another of our classics, Eduard Vilde, was our first professional travel writer. Konstantin Päts, the editor of the newspaper *Messenger* at the time and later our first president, despatched him to Europe in the early years of the 20th century to report on the goings-on there. This is certainly a job I am thoroughly envious of! Tammsaare wrote at home and Vilde during his travels, and

both were brilliant. The second option definitely prevails today, which I also prefer. It's much more fun taking a look yourself and wandering around in strange places rather than putting a book together on the basis of what others have written. A large number of reference books are currently published today in Estonia and, on the whole, access to them does not require anything but an Internet connection.

Judging by the texts, it is difficult to decide whether the compilers/authors of such travel books as Lonely Planet, Eyewitness Travel Guides, Baedeker and Michelin, all available here and some even translated into Estonian, have actually been to the places they write about. It must be admitted, however, that the answer to that question is often hidden, which leaves a lot to speculation. In my opinion, the objective information acquired from reference books and travelogues form the foundation upon which personal observations can be based, and I anyway mostly focus on observations. Considering one settlement or another, I still tend to mention the number of people there, although I don't count them all myself if there happen to be more than a dozen. All our classic writers have written travelogues, not just Vilde and Tammsaare. Why is that? Partly perhaps because a small nation has to be aware of what is going on elsewhere; we cannot afford to live in isolation, which is possible only for big nations.

During the Soviet era, our second president, Lennart Meri, was primarily a travel writer. He classified his mammoth essays on Finno-Ugric peoples and the importance of comets in the spiritual life of Estonians as travelogues. He probably thought about the amount of imagination permitted to the genre ever since the time of Homer and Marco Polo.

In January 2010, I was in Samarkand, and my travelling companion had brought along Lennart Meri's Uzbek-essay, *Following the Trails of Cobras and Black Widows* (1959), where the author writes that Samarkand has belonged to 15 empires. I counted them on my fingers – the Soviet Union was definitely one of them, otherwise the number would have been wrong. This showed the superb skill of writing between the lines. Had he written that the Soviet Union was an empire, the censors would have banned the book (or at least deleted the relevant lines), plus the author might have been punished, but nobody noticed because it was shrewdly concealed. Similar tricks are part of the art of writing, and it is, in fact, a great pity that they have disappeared in the new freedom of speech age.

Our poetry starts with travel poetry. Kristjan Jaak Peterson (1801-1822) wrote his poems in the 'pub of the winds', i.e. by the roadside, under a spruce tree. Our classics even include some collections of travel poetry, for example Ain Kaalep's *Notebook of Samarkand* (1962). When we were there, we had that with us as well, and it was an enjoyable read. It was thrilling to be in the same place as the author, only a half century later.

It occurs to me how much I have lost by forgetting so many travelogues I once read. It seems like forfeiting your own self. These tales and verses certainly influenced me at some point in the past to make decisions and choices that make up my life today. They evoked feelings in me that still determine my attitude to everything and everybody I happen to meet. It is, of course, scary to admit that, at best, you remember only the author and perhaps the title, and considerably more vaguely the impression you had back then. This led me to the idea of actually reading everything again that urged me to undertake my journeys in my younger years. Maybe I finally understood myself…

So who were these inspiring authors? I can't avoid a bibliographical list, and here it comes: James Cook, Norbert Casteret, Jiří Hanzelka-Miroslav Zikmund, Fridtjof Nansen, Alain Bombard, C. W. Ceram, Arkady Fiedler, Thor Heyerdahl, David Livingstone, Rockwell Kent, Sven Hedin, Vladimir Arsenjev, Robert Scott, Juri Senkevits, Nikolai Roerich, Otto von Kotzebue, Heinrich Alexander Stoll, Francis Chichester, Alexander von Humboldt, Gerald Durrell and many others; among Estonians

Olev Remsu (right) interviewing an engine driver (Photo by Tiit Pruuli)

Eduard Bornhöhe, Friedebert Tuglas, Karl Ast-Rumor, Ants Laikmaa, Karl August Hindrey, Johannes Semper, Voldemar Panso, Juhan Smuul, both Beekmans, Deboora Vaarandi, Ivar Murdmaa, Enn Kreem, Arvo Valton, Jaak Kangilaski and others.

Quite a long list, isn't it, with some later names slipped in as well? One thing is certain – I will never forget my youthful excitement at the Tartu Town Library (then named after Gogol), where I popped in every few days to borrow yet another pile of books, mostly travelogues. How my enthusiasm increased with every step home, my imagination soaring and my mind ready for new journeys and discoveries.

And another thing for certain – the books by the above-mentioned authors somehow united our generation, trapped inside the borders of the Soviet Union as in a concentration camp, although we fervently desired to see the world. We should read them all again! That is, alas, impossible as new travel books are published all the time, demanding to be explored. Does anyone at all command a comprehensive overview of our travelogues? I certainly don't, as I have not managed to get through many of them, so I am not competent to put together a top ten list, but I would like to mention some contemporary writers: Õnne Pärl, Ivar Soopan, Jaanus Piirsalu, Kaire Hunt, Kätlin Hommik-Mrabte, Epp and Justin Petrone, Ülev Teemantvälk, Ave Ungro, Mathura, Lii Unt, Peeter Vähi, Erik Holm, Tarvo Nõmm, Krister Kivi, Mai Loog, Priit Pullerits Epp Petrone Mati Õun, Jaanus Paal, Margo Pajuste, Jaanus Plaat, Tiit Pruuli, Jaan Tätte, Peeter Sauter, Kaljo Raid, Enn Vaino, Marje Aksli and many other colleagues. My own five-six travelogues are but a drop in the ocean.

I should perhaps finally reveal my credo.

Do you remember what Marco Polo says in Italo Calvino's novel *The Invisible Cities,* when the Khan asks him why he is always talking about remote countries, and never says anything about his home-town, Venice?

He said something like this: 'When describing far-away places, I am always describing Venice.'

I am naturally no Marco Polo, but this would more or less be my answer to that question. What do you think should stand in for Venice?

Kant, Münchhausen and the militia

by Olev Remsu

The sun has not yet risen when I knock on the glass window at the petrol station in Nida, trying to wake the old woman. I tell her in Russian that I would like to pay for petrol. Lithuanians are easy with the Russian language. Only a few years ago, you could get nowhere if you started speaking Russian in Poland or Latvia, but now they are facing up to reality and do not try to twist their tongues by speaking English.

The woman shakes her head, squeezes her temples and seems surprised by my request. She at once realises her error, takes my bankcard and her movements are now purely automatic. The Lithuanian border guards are asleep as well, and have to be roused. Enjoying sweet dreams at the border of the European Union at three in the morning?! It is getting lighter by the minute, the birds start singing in the national park, and they are dead to the world. 'I want to go to Russia,' I declare and rap my knuckles on the window.

'It's not Russia, it's eastern Prussia,' I am corrected by a sleepy uniformed official, probably encouraged by the Estonian number plates on my car.

People at the Russian border are really sleeping the sleep of the just but, once awake, they get busy. Passport, driving licence, pay for this and pay for that. I had acquired the visa in Tallinn for the staggering sum of 750 EEK, and now there's some sort of ecological tax of 200 roubles, a vehicle tax of, inexplicably, 120 and 20 roubles, and all this requires a lot of walking from one booth to the other.

'Is this for the bicycle?' I enquire, because I clearly remember paying for the car back in Tallinn.

'You have a bicycle too?' the uniformed man is astonished. Only a blind person could have failed to notice the bicycle fixed to the roof of the car. Another 120 and 20 roubles. 'And now insurance,' orders the tax man.

The bankcard does not work here and I get stuck in the insurance booth. The minimum time is a fortnight, and a plump lady asks for 1400 roubles and some.

'I don't need two weeks! I'm going just for the day!' I explain. After all, an area one third of Estonia, both in territory and population, should be easy enough to cross. Alas, not possible.

This is robbery at the state level! Don't you think that if the state is blatantly cheating, the citizens will follow suit! Who cares about the rules and regulations of a cheating country, I am dying to tell the insurance woman, but I manage to bite my tongue.

Olev Remsu trying to hitch a lift (Photo by Tiit Pruuli)

'How much have you got?' asks the woman, obviously concerned.

'One thousand two hundred,' is the result of my counting.

Immediately we find a compromise. The woman suggests the cubature of my car is smaller, and so is the insurance - a mere 1160 roubles – perfect! This is entirely her own idea, and she does not earn a kopeck for herself. She even admits that people should be able to pay with their cards, and perhaps there should even be a cash machine.

'We will get there in the end.' The buxom woman wearing a lace-collared dress is admirably optimistic.

What should we call this? Ethics above dry regulations, morals above law? In the EU, such a solution would have been out of the question. That's Russia for you, with all its pluses and minuses. It takes me over an hour and a half to cross that border.

I am travelling along the long and narrow Curonian Spit southwards. The river, currents and winds have created a most peculiar situation here, a hundred-kilometre-long sandy spit with up to 70-metre-high dunes, which used to move forward each year a few hundred metres and bury whole villages underneath. Nida has been twice caught up in sand, and the inhabitants had to move their possessions inland, whereas their houses vanished into the yellow grave. People managed to halt the dunes in the late 19th century, at first with turf and then by planting forests on them. Only one road runs on the spit, which ranges from a few hundred metres to three kilometres in width. I turn my head, hoping to glimpse both the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea, but no luck.

What Lithuania, what Russia! This has been the case only in the last sixty-two years. There is hardly a region with a more colourful recent history than the Curonian Spit and the whole Kaliningrad Oblast. I worked my way through all the museums in the Klaip□da area (Memelgebiet), and not a squeak anywhere about which country owned the area and when, although this data can be found even in the

hopelessly Soviet-style Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya (Great Soviet Encyclopaedia).

The Lithuanians have something to hide. We belonged to the same country as Memelgebiet or Memelland for a very long time, and not only during the Soviet era: we were also part of the Teutonic Order for nearly two centuries, 1328–1525.

Urged on by the Soviet Union and with a mandate from the League of Nations, in 1923 Lithuania invaded the German- and Lithuanian-speaking Memelgebiet and declared it an ancient Lithuanian territory. According to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, the area was given to Hitler, but as a return Lithuania received an even sweeter mouthful – the town of Vilnius, which had been taken from Poland. Lithuanians claim it to be their ancient capital. So – I am driving along my former homeland.

Myths, myths, myths

What comes to mind for a person of my age, education and upbringing when approaching Kaliningrad? Several myths whirl through my head, quite a few huge ones at once. What about the Amber Room? Have those raised bridge halves across the Pregel River finally been lowered? And Hitler's bunker, is there an access to it via secret passages? As in Wells' *War of the Worlds*, weapons and soldiers were allegedly hidden here, ready to continue the temporarily disrupted endless war. And how is Kant doing, the great philosopher Immanuel Kant, whom only a few read, but almost everybody respects?

Just as ancient Greeks were united by the escapades of Zeus, the Soviet people were united by the mystery of Kaliningrad. Stalin managed to grab various countries, at first while fighting on the side of Hitler, and later while fighting against him, a truly amazing feat that made the old fox Churchill scratch his head in disbelief. He failed to pull off such a trick, much to his annoyance. The area bombed by the Royal Air Force exudes a weird sense of alienation. Nothing fits here, least of all the name.

What Kaliningrad? Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, a member of the Politburo connected with Tallinn (Reval to him) as well, having married here, a starost (elder) of the Soviet Union, happened to pass away in 1946, and Stalin ordered a town to be named after him, as if there weren't enough settlements in Stalin-land with that name already! This is how the Generalissimo expressed his gratitude for absolute loyalty, an example to others – do the same, and you might get a town named after you! The town thus got the name of a person who had absolutely nothing to do with it. What if this saved Tallinn from being renamed Kalinin? Nomen est omen.

Actually, the town still has many names. It is Karaliaucius to Lithuanians, Królowiec to the Polish, Kr□lovec to the Czechs; all these have a logical and historical basis, except the Russian name, which is purely accidental.

Everything in Kaliningrad seems wrong, totally wrong. The houses that survived the multiple destructions do not suit the Russian atmosphere, and the houses built in the bomb craters clash with those next to them. However, externally, the Speer-type barracks' asceticism and Stalinist Empire style have been put together with some order in mind: the houses are the same height, and the windows at the same level. But the message is wrong.

Lie upon lie

And then a beggar turns up and asks you for some cash in German! Just as in the Klaipeda area in Lithuania (also in Neringa or the Curonian Spit), the first language here is German. But German is out of place here! Or perhaps it fits only too well. Like a glove? It's difficult to decide. Before German, people in this area spoke Prussian, a language in the Baltic group. No fewer than three catechisms were published in that language, before the Prussians adopted German.

The pre-war population of Königsberg was 370 000; when Stalin invaded after a three-day attack on 9 April 1945, it had diminished to just 20 000. And these people were later deported, to East Germany, not to Siberia! The operation cost the Soviet Union 150 000 soldiers, and this tragically large number was later used as an argument to conquer the whole area.

Kant, of course, is right – he did live in Königsberg. He only left it once when visiting a manor lord a stone's throw away, and wrote his textbooks of geography and his philosophy here. Russia and the Soviet Union have been remarkably unenthusiastic in recognising foreigners. Nobody, except Marx and Engels, has earned their respect. However, in Kaliningrad, Kant has become a brand that attracts the public. Even the tiny island in the River Pregel called Altstadt was renamed Kant Island, although it had never been called that before. The university in Kaliningrad is also named after Kant, and the cathedral restored with German money on Kant Island is nicely looked after.

Kant was the last to be buried in that church in 1804, the side chapel fell into disrepair in a decade, and the grave is about to collapse. On Kant's 200th anniversary in 1924, the Weimar Republic finally restored the tombstone, and the Gothic church acquired a constructivist pillared edifice. The bronze sculpture of Kant was scrapped (a metal German holding a hat), but a copy has now been made and stands proudly in front of the Hotel *Kaliningrad*, inviting travellers to spend the night and partake of breakfast. There are a number of plaques with Kant's name scattered around the town, and the ruins of the old university bear his famous quotation in German and Russian: 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily reflection is occupied with them: the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me.'

The cathedral with Kant's tomb has been turned into an ecumenical temple (there are currently aisles for the Orthodox and the Protestants, and aisles for the Catholics, Jews and Moslems are soon to be added), a museum and concert hall. Besides Kant, there is also a statue of Friedrich Schiller in Kaliningrad, having survived the war and the post-war period, when identities were radically changed. However, Schiller's plays were never performed in Königsberg and he never set foot in that town, just like Kalinin. For some reason, there is not a single monument to Kalinin!

Perhaps the most suitable statue of all in Kaliningrad is that of the brave fibber, the German Baron von Münchhausen, who served Russia. Münchhausen was a most agreeable and honest man, and his statue is certainly more appropriate than that of the hoarse-voiced dissident singer Vladimir Vyssotski, which stands next to the bronze Kant in the central park of Kaliningrad, called Victory.

Incidentally, I respect Vyssotski just as much as I respect Kant.

Preparing for dinner

I drive around Eastern Prussia some more, and arrive back in Kaliningrad a bit before midnight. Within the administrative borders, I am stopped by no less than two traffic militiamen who brandish their red staffs and point to the roadside. Between them and me is a STOP sign. One militiaman demands my driving licence, grabs it from me and immediately starts scolding me:

'You have violated the traffic regulations of the Russian Federation. You did not stop at the STOP sign!'

I start to argue, saying that I obeyed the militia's orders and stopped when told. Words fly between us, until I am finally ordered to cross the four-lane motorway and report to the militia booth, where a major in a neatly pressed uniform, his hair carefully parted in a Bond-style hairdo, is speaking on two telephones at once. A while later, when he finds time to deal with me, he merely repeats what I heard on the other side of the road. I refuse to give in. I claim that, when ordered by the militia, I have to drive on through red lights and a STOP sign. At last the major bursts out with: 'Look here, we are preparing for dinner, but we have no money! Perhaps you can spare us 50 roubles!'

I have a feeling I cannot refuse. After all, I started the day by cheating on my car insurance. If they decide to scrutinize my documents, the deception might be revealed. The smallest banknote I find after rummaging through my pockets is 100 roubles. I place that on the table, hoping to get 50 back. No such luck!

It's awful to admit, but I am actually relieved that I got off so easily. Now back to Europe!

Who said this was Eastern Prussia? It's Russia, one hundred percent.

Estonian Literary Awards 2009

by Peeter Helme

The annual award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment was given to the translator Hendrik Lindepuu for the translation of *Selected poems* by Tadeusz Rózewiczi and other significant works of Polish literature.

The genre awards of the Estonian Cultural Endowment's Literature Foundation in 2009 were distributed as follows:

• Literary prose: **Kalev Kesküla**, *Elu sumedusest* (The Mellowness of Life)

• Poetry: **Hasso Krull**, *Neli korda neli* (Four Times Four)

• Essay: **Jaan Kaplinski**, *Paralleele ja parallelisme* (Parallels and Parallelisms)

• Award without a genre: **Jaan Undusk** (compiler), **Friedebert Tuglas**, *Valik proosat* (A selection of prose)

• Children's literature: **Mika Keränen**, *Peidetud hõbedane aardelaegas* (A Hidden Silvery Treasure Trove)

• Translation from a foreign language into Estonian: **Piret Saluri**, *Sinuhe* by Mika Waltari

• Translation from Estonian into a foreign language: **Jean Pascal Ollivry**, *La Colline-du-Voleur. Vérité et Justice*, vol 1 and *Indrek. Vérité et Justice*, vol 2 by A. H. Tammsaare

• Russian language prose: **Andrei Ivanov**, *Putesestvie Hanumana na Lolland*

• Russian language poetry: **Nikolai Karajev**, *Bezumnoe malabarskoe tsaepitie*

• Article: **Marju Lepajõe**, *Reiner Brockmanni värsside vältimatusest* (Verses of Reiner Brockmann) in Keel ja Kirjandus, no 10

• • •

• The 2009 Betti Alver Debut Award was given to two authors: **Sandra Jõgeva** for her essay collection *Draamapunkt* (A Point of Drama) and for **Triin Tasuja** for the collection of poetry, *Provintsiluule* (Province poetry).

• The 2009 Friedebert Tuglas short story award went to **Indrek Hargla** for *Minu päevad Liinaga* (My Days with Liina, Looming 2008, nr 8) and to **Jüri Tuulik** *Tellikaatne* (in a collection of short stories and recipes, 2008).

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

• First place of the youth-novel prize of The Estonian Children's Literature Centre and of the publishing house went to **Reeli Reinaus** for the manuscript *Must vares* (A Black Crow), winner of the second place was **Ketlin Priilinn** for *Sefiirist loss* (The Fudge Castle), **Marianne Harju** and **Kristel Kriisa** share the third place respectively for *Talvehullus* (Winter Madness) and *Neetud* (Damned).

• Novel prize of the publishing house Tänapäev was won by **Avo Kull** for *Haiglaromaan* (Hospital Novel), second place went to **Taavi Kangur** for *Kõigile saab kurikaga virutada (Everybody Can Get Bashed with a Bat*), third place winner was **Marek Kahro** for *Kaljud ja kameeleonid* (Cliffs and Chameleons) and a special award went to **Mihkel Tiks** for *Poiss sai 50* (The Boy Turned 50).

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

• **Mari Tarand**, who last year received the annual award of the Cultural Endowment, received the Anton Hansen Tammsaare Albu Parish Literary Award for the same book, *Ajapildi sees* (Inside the Image of Time).

• The Võru County government's Bernard Kangro prize for authors who are either from Võrumaa, connected with it or whose work deals with Võrumaa, was awarded to the reserve lieutenant-colonel, military analyst and writer **Leo Kunnas** for his *Gort Ashryn. I osa. Enne viimast sõda* (Gort Ashryn, part 1. Before the last war).

• The Juhan Liiv Poetry Award goes to the best Estonian-language poem published during the last year for the first time, issued by Alatskivi parish, together with the Alatskivi Secondary School and the Juhan Liiv Museum. This time **Triin Soomets** received it for her poem *Surm ei möödu meist* (*Death doesn't pass us by)*.

• Gustav Suits' poetry award, granted since 2004 by the Tartu city government and the Cultural Endowment of Tartu for a philosophically profound collection went this time to **Kalju Kruusa** for his untranslatable *Pilvedgi Mindgi Liigutavadgi*.

• The Estonian science fiction Stalker Award is given annually by the Estonian Science Fiction Association in different categories, the prize for the most important of them, the best Estonian science fiction novel went to **Leo Kunnas** for his *Gort Ashryn: part 1. Before the last war*. Stalker for the best novella was awarded to **Indrek Hargla** for for *My Days with Liina* (Looming 2008, nr 8) and the best short story to **Laur Kraft** for *Ultima Cthule* (Algernon 2008; April).

• The debut prize First Step (Esimene Samm) of the literary festival Prima Vista in 2009 was awarded to **Berit Kaschan** for her poems published in the November 2008 issue of the youth literature magazine Värske Rõhk.

• Last year also writers Karl-Martin Sinijärv, Jürgen Rooste, Asko Künnap and Peeter Helme founded a private annual prize called *Wordwormer Prize* (Siugjas Sulepea), which went to **Holger Kaints** for his novella *Planewatcher*.

Mathura

a local world poet

It's better to write attentively and free of the burden of ambition;
it brings greater transparency, breadth and sincerity.
Sometimes I would like to give up all this writing, all my learnt skills...
And write then.
Mathura (in his essay *Attentively*)

A key with which to start a piece about the younger generation Estonian poet Mathura was provided by Mathura a few years ago when he was visiting me. 'Every writer, however local, ought to write as a world writer,' he said on a warm summer night on the island of Saaremaa. This is not so much about the topics or language or demands for distributing and reception of works: it's more a cognitive difference which provides a posture for the process of writing. A frame of action, where one searches for the full amplitude of expression.

by Mihkel Kaevats

Under his Indian pen name, Mathura writes, paints and translates Margus Lattik (b 1973), who at present lives in a village called Lelle in central Estonia, with his long-time girlfriend Kadri and six-month-old daughter Gerda Liila. He entered the Estonian poetry scene in the nineties in the literary group Erakkond, and in the early years circulated printout collections among his acquaintances. His first appearance in an 'official' collection was Erakkond's *Ühek-savägine* (double sense in Estonian: Might of Nine or Great Mullein) with eight fellow poets in 1997. Since 2001, he has published six collections of poetry, a children's book, a travel book and a CD of poetry and music, and has translated, among other things, Derek Walcott's and Kunwar Narain's work into Estonian. He is a prolific literature and film critic and an essayist on art. His poems have been made into songs by several bands, the most devoted to their author being the folk group Kirtana Rasa. He has written words for pop songs (these are the most widespread and also, by piece, best paid of his oeuvre) and has had many personal exhibitions of paintings through the years. Quite recently his poems were translated into English and published as the collection *Presence and other poems* (Allikaäärne, 2010); they were translated by the author, with the renowned Kristiina Ehin translator Ilmar Lehtpere and Sadie Murphy. He is a poet 'with a positive program', who has 'no competition in his own poetic path and his combination of styles', in the words of reviewers.

The pen-name Mathura might be confusing at first. It is the name of a town in the Uttar Pradesh state in India and the birthplace of the god Shri Krishna. The name was given to the Estonian lad by his Krishnaite teacher in India, where he lived for a year. The pen-name and the range of impulse, though, have long since outgrown their origins.

Not that his poetry lacks a religious sense. In his most lucid expressions, Mathura's creative talent proves that poetry can be a pantheistic vision without dogmatism, without the need to remain tied to established meanings and revelations. But, at the same time, he is 'not a believer and not an atheist', which is to say that 'what I believe in are these twilights / and this low sky'. Or forget religious thinking altogether, in the name of a direct view of nature or an experience. His most cogent poems dealing with the actual topic of religion are those where he distances himself from 'the disavowing saints and deceived devotees, the towering / cathedral domes or clinging canon', while 'darkness / is profounder than inability to recall paradise, or this unwillingness to find / a meaning for one's existence'.

In his poetry, Mathura is subliminal and flowing. He tries to rely on his own experience and not write something that comes from outside: to find uniqueness and catch the continuity of the universe in a single moment or sensation. He regards it as important to dismantle his knowledge, to be 'new' to writing, not tied to a learned trade or fixed imagery. To sense the subtle transitions of energy and meaning, one has to be both emotionally involved with and distanced from them. This means intimacy and love, but also letting go and trying to understand. Or, to put it another way, being able to be positively native and a stranger to different contexts. Poetry then is a search and a shift between atmospheres, where you try to be new in a writing situation, but also retain your heart (a work of art without heart is petty, he believes). Good lyric poets are stalwart fighters and Mathura has proved this point both in his poetry and his essays.

His mainly free-verse style can be characterized as a comprehension of the senses, a simplicity of utterance, spiritual paradoxes, a quest for some kind of enlightenment, the music of sounds, a striving for beauty, happiness and sincerity, to name a few aspects. There are two thematic threads that run through his works: the primacy of nature and the visibility of landscapes that he has encountered either during his travels (many of his poems have been written while travelling and can also be viewed as poetic travelogues) or his time

Mathura (Photo by Paavo Eensalu)

spent in the Estonian countryside. They make up the backbone of his poetry; they're like a starting point from which to spread out or take off into his writing ('departure might be your only arrival'). Every poem is carved out with a determined will to reach, and each projects detail into some kind of vastness. Almost all of his poems have some kind of scenery centring on contemplation, which makes his poetry almost tactile and places the reader in a living space, while time, often, seems to stand still or move at another pace.

There is a sense of unity in all of his six books of poetry – a constant flow that often harmonically changes from book to book. In his first books, his poetic voice is emphatically peaceful and contemplative, as if to be certain that every utterance will endure. The poems in these books are tender and small. The urge to be simple, musical and frugal creates, in some of these poems, an opportunity for the reader's will to accept them as simplicity and not triviality. In recent years, he has been more and more daring, adding social and ethical critiques, and political stands. The amplitude of his thought, topics and vocabulary has also grown, while not destroying the old charms. Simplicity in his later books has a different sensual and intellectual aura. It's not so much the new topics, but the overall boldness of his lyricism that indicates a remarkable and poetic progression in Mathura's work.

For me, his most accomplished work is his fourth book, *Presence* (*Kohalolu*, 2006). It is here where his voice grows forceful and finds a new, immediate and fresh flow of speech. It is a book of simple sensibility and vision, like

all his books, but also of strong and critical stands. He unites experiences from different countries, tries to make some sense of history, identifies a space free of them and zooms in on the question of being actually able to be present in a moment, a place or a – written – language. More than in his other books, he has been able to renew his writing in this one. The outcome is also programmatic: 'I work at every word, / shape my lines like well-tended garden beds / so that each of them might become something as simple / as a streak of sunset and a few gusts of wind, / something that would sound as naturally / as the singing sand or the lapping of waves / and still be something regal and / exalted'. With this book Mathura presents a challenge to what you might call the 'contemporary (Tallinn-centred) Estonian mainstream'. Or, to put it more mildly, the book presents new attractive possibilities.

• • •

It has been said that every Estonian writer bears an obligation to not just write, but also to translate. This obligation comes from a combination of the smallness of the nation and our culture's need to domesticate foreign authors to our own literary canons. It is clear in this small culture, as in any other, that translating belles-lettres is an independent literary art, a form of the translator's self-expression and creative fulfilment. For a writer, translating provides an excellent chance to make the closest inquiries into the worlds of great foreign authors in order to enrich his own. Estonian poetry would be smaller in spiritual and poetic capacity without the translations of Greek and Roman authors, Shakespeare, Pushkin or Baudelaire, to name a few of the most obvious influences.

Mathura has contributed to this tradition with several translations, two of them being, as mentioned before, poetry. The poet's choices in translation reflect his personal sympathies – which come in handy when introducing him to foreign readers. The two poetry translations, the works of Walcott and Narain, have received positive critical attention, though the attention has been rather limited.

Derek Walcott's *Islands: Selected poems 1948-2000* (*Saared: Valik luuletusi 1948-2000*, 2009) may, in time, become an influential translation. According to Mathura, Walcott has been an author close to him for a long time and the translation is a fruit of many years. The aforementioned collection *Presence* seems to have been influenced by Walcott. It is strange how this faraway author's home islands are in some way so similar to this year's hot summer in the Estonian islands: laid-back, provincial, proud and newly touristy. Mathura's translation stresses this familiarity, with its clear, tempered language and homely flow. In this way, Walcott has now also become a marvellous Estonian author.

The same goes for Kunwar Narain, whose selected poems appeared under the title *No other world* (*See ainuke maailm*) in Mathura's recent translation. A fellow poet and translator has already deemed the translation 'truly elating and powerful, one of the best publications of poetry in Estonian in a decade'. Narain's world is farther from the Estonian, resting, for the most part, in Indian history and metaphysics. But still, it's his style that makes him a comprehensible author, even in these parts. Translating Narain, Mathura has had the opportunity to unite different experiences of his India and his poetry on a fresh level.

• • •

In every occupation or calling, there is a vision by which the worker, if he is consistent and in some humble way excellent, is blessed. The shortest evaluation of the work of Mathura might be this: it is visible, or 'visionable' or evident poetry that tries to catch a sincere frame.

Let's now turn back to the starting aphorism: 'Every writer, however local, ought to write as a world writer.' Mathura, living on the periphery, has managed to maintain a position that originates from wider contexts than the small and lively Estonian literary scene. He has managed to keep looking outside as well as inside.... This gives life to the otherwise empty aphorism, and makes Mathura an interesting author here and abroad.

poetry by Mathura

Presence

I hadn't planned this. Roads
meet in a valley and wind through
a town amidst snow-capped mountains.
Winter nears from the north.

Sunlight appears a scattered mist,
it turns glaring, covers everything,
makes mountains lines of clouds
for as long as you can watch them.
Lago Maggiore, the embankments,
the sky, all dissolve into a backdrop,
a broad silken cloth. I dive in
though a young mother smiles
at me. Oh!

A red boat waits at a dock,
seagulls laze on the handrails of a pier
and a sign says in an incongruous language:
'No unauthorized fishing allowed.'
Ducks and dippers float about,
ridges loom like dreams
that are soon to doze off into oblivion.

I hadn't planned this –
this journey, this life, the day to be
with you again,
you the one I met so early in my progress,
there in the afternoon streets
of my Nordic town.

All things pass – this day, this light,
this season – and no-one will ever tally up
the passing hours, their pleasures and pains,
to find some hewn truth in them.
No one even needs it.

By nightfall, churches light up on the hillsides
like white Christmas candles,
the villages and towns
a network of bulbs.

Numerous lives go on waiting
for a slow day.

A Fragment of a Poem

There
where your tiny fingers reach out to the earth's
all-pervading sorrow and sweetness,
where a baby's teardrops converge into a river,
struggle over the rocks,
fall into an ocean,
or the virgin white apple blossoms
decorate the land's slowly awakening bosom and
later turn into ash,
where an endless night meets
the abrupt, shocking rays
of a strong and speeding sunrise,
where a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of
a second glances over the borders of
the seemless realm of eternity,
where the reader

moves on
from reading the same line over again
into contemplating the larger contexts
of his lifelong epic,
while the quill stops,
to consider a conclusion,

it is still a long way
from only a fragment
of a poem.

In a farmyard

You ask me, 'What happened?'
I took a dip in a forest stream.

i

A Legacy

for Ben Okri

The night the monsters were released,
the rest of the world seemed very beautiful.
I sat on a mattress and it smelt of cat's pee,
I was writing about your fluttering blond locks
and greenish grey eyes. I was welcomed
now to the path of love
and pink bougainvilleas, indeed, made familiar
with the gracious brutality,
and with the mechanics of massive
spatial construction.
And when the stars burst into flames,
I knew but this –
the fruitlessness of science and
the promise of redemption.

A hidden river lay there before me,
I had to cross it.
A black-winged falcon soared above me,
bringing messages I had trusted and believed.
There was a crystal of perfection
there in front of me. I had to crush it,
hurl it at the hard dry loam,
and only then did I stand a chance
of perceiving a different kind of vigour,
a different kind of vitality.
Casually, like a creator unravelled from his creation,
the lines that I had written
upon my tanned belly, in blood,
had to be erased.

Then, at the other side of the quondam,
I spoke to a dark and tarry ghost
who said, 'Oil. Mother Earth.'
He said, 'Love letters. All kinds of
romance. Red radiant sunrise.
Religions of rites –
there's your velvet coffin,
your patch of land for nothing
but a headstone.'

He spread out his indefinable hands
and with a gaze like that of a baker
or a tyre repair man, revealed a choice
that did not declare, 'The end of the road
holds nothing but beauty.'
There, my loyal heart surrendered.

ii

Time passed till a sulky sodden summer's day
made me discover a coarser, a grosser side
of my being. I farted in the face of all those
who tried to possess me, who tried to feed me,
educate me, bring me up to follow the right path.
It was then that I destroyed a half of the fleshless city
and sacrificed the other half
to the sea and the angels. Lavenders
smelled inebriatingly, wild herbs
suddenly became rampant on carefully
tended flowerbeds. No-one understood anything,
apart from the fact that not much
is meant to last.

A serpent of anger bit me and I killed it,
swallowing its power. Clouds rumbled,
mist appeared in a second
and dispersed as quickly. Yesterwords
had little sense for today or tomorrow.
Heavens opened and burnt up everything
that was lifeless or already dead.
Great oceans recovered.
Protective churches melted into dark snot.
Slogans dwindled into a flood of nothing.
Political leaders looked naked and
particularly ugly. The whole military force
was re-imagined. Florid fireworks in the sky
were silent.
Life changed.
The soul motioned.
From now on, everything was equally important.

iii

And there was no holiness in pretence,
no shadows whiter than others. The forest,
pines wet and red like cinders,
moss dew-grey and cosy,
steamed in thick droplets
that were as tiny as miracles.
Deep yellow bursts of sunlight
reflected on calm gleaming blue waters,
a full-size rainbow had lifted
its blazing body to the firmament.
Its fire was, perhaps, a fire of courage,
or it might have been a sign
or someone's welcome wave
for the times to come.
All that I had looked for,
all that I had ever wished to be
I was already, somewhere inside me.
Somehow, I was going to bring it to the surface,
somehow, indeed.

Translated by the author with Ilmar Lehtpere and Sadie Murphy

Vishnu

how to keep mythology alive

by Urve Eslas

Without living mythology, a nation can fade, according to the translator of *Kalevipoeg* into Hindi Vishnu Khare, because mythology is what makes people live. Urve Eslas visited the poet, literary critic and translator in India.

It made the news in Estonia three years ago that a Hindu had started to translate our national epic *Kalevipoeg* into Hindi. When we spoke on the phone back then, we only discussed the book. Now we are hearing that a Hindu has founded an Estonian cultural society in India and is trying to introduce our literature and films there. Is this all your doing?

Indeed, I founded the Indo-Estonian Cultural Society. We have had two meetings, one attended by Jaan Kaplinski, and the other by Hasso Krull and Carolina Pihelgas. The Estonian poets read their poems, and the Indian poets read theirs. Indian readers made up the audience. The other undertaking was sponsored by the Indian Literary Academy and this fact can be regarded a truly historic event.

What's in it for you?

I love literature and I love Estonian literature. Nobody in India knew anything about it before I started talking about it. Nobody knew anything about *Kalevipoeg* either, before I started talking about it. A country called Estonia, somewhere far away in the north, seems a miracle to Indian people… How warm is it now over there?

Khare

It snowed yesterday.

You see, and here it is approaching plus 40. In sum, compared with India, Estonia is minute and in the far north, and there are ten times fewer people in the whole country than in Mumbai alone, and still the Estonians have their own literature, music and films. This seems almost incredible here. And the fact that such a tiny country has its own national epic.

How is the translation going?

I am approximately half-way through. I write by hand, then edit and only then enter everything into the computer. The biggest problem is the names of trees, countries, people, animals and customs. Luckily, India is a country where mythology has survived without disruption for the past 4000 years. Or, to be more precise, India is currently the only such country. For us, mythology is only too real, as all the deities are revered here to this day. They are alive.

Our mythology is rich; it contains miracles, demons, gods and goddesses, magic… but also conflicts, wars and killings.

How is a country with such a rich mythology going to receive another mythology which is so different?

For an Indian, the world described in *Kalevipoeg* is quite familiar. The lightning speaks, the sea speaks, the sky speaks – the same happens in our mythology. Family ties, and tasks the heroes must tackle are similar too. It is thus truly strange that this world is 6000 kilometres away in a cold northern country, and belongs to people who number barely over one million. Mythology, as it is understood in India, is not an invention or something that happened long ago that has been distorted by time; it is instead something that happens now, every day.

Estonian mythology is not as alive as Indian mythology.

We know this. It is, of course, up to you what you do with your own mythology, but once you have a record of it, it would be silly to let it disappear. Mythology is what makes a nation live.

As a member of a nation that has managed to keep its mythology alive, do you perhaps have any advice about what we should do to achieve the same?

The Estonian situation is different. Your mythology was suppressed by the arrival of Christianity.

There is no split in India between mythology and religion, as you have between mythology and Christianity. In India, we do not really know when myth became religion and religion became myth, because they are so closely intertwined. In Estonia, they are separate and this makes the situation more difficult. First of all, this difference should be acknowledged. Estonians should then learn to accept their

mythology as superior to later Christianity. Mythology came before, so it is closer to the Estonian people.

Still, *Kalevipoeg* is a literary epic. It is something that is not quite as close to people; it is literature rather than mythology.

This is only partially true. The initial impulse was folklore and this has survived. What form it took and how much Kreutzwald added are no longer important. Our mythology differs from yours not only because it has turned into a text in the course of millennia, but also because it is still growing.

More stories emerge every day, because the present is entitled to add them to mythology. Every Indian person has the right to do this. There are tales of Hanuman and Ganesha which do not occur in the written, 'initial' mythology. However, they crop up everywhere, even in comic strips. These tales are all improvisations, further developments.

True. I have noticed in bookshops that Estonian comics are mostly about Mickey Mouse, whereas in India the hero of comics is Ganesha.

Why shouldn't someone turn your *Kalevipoeg* into a comic strip? From there, you could then proceed to books. The protagonist Kalevipoeg is now chained to a rock, as this is how the epic ends. Someone could write a sequel, about what happened next.

Mythology has always been created by people, it is a continuous creation. However, if you start feeling embarrassed about mythology, not wanting to read and enjoy it, if you feel embarrassed about its meaning, mythology dies. Five hundred years ago this

sort of activity would have also been a sacrilege in India. Later, however, we realised that mythology cannot be over-protected; it must be allowed to live. And changes are welcome, because the old tales do not disappear. They have been written down and are preserved. As long as the new tales do not insult the gods and heroes, as long as the characters remain the same as they were, people are free to create new stories. In this way, the deities change, but at least they are not dead deities.

There are people in 20th century India who resemble the gods. For example, Sai Baba, a holy man. Or Sri Aurobindo in Auroville. For many, they are incarnations of gods, and tales about them are created, just as there are tales about Shiva or Hanuman. For us, mythology lives on and nobody can say that that's it, that you must stop here.

All that ended in Estonia with the arrival of Christianity. The latter has killed several mythologies, and many no longer believe the myths of Christianity either. People believe in values, but not in myths. Estonians could revive mythology, and not just Kalevipoeg, but other mythological characters as well. This would not prevent you from believing in Christian values. You probably have many more mythological stories, not yet collected or published. Also about Kalevipoeg.

In order to revive mythology, it must first be taught to your children. Next, you might establish a Kalevipoeg academy, training the researchers of *Kalevipoeg* and the rest of Estonian mythology. Every year, an acclaimed scholar should get a Kalevipoeg award for researching the epic. A few universities should have a chair of *Kalevipoeg*. This would help revive Kalevipoeg and bring him back to culture.

Another possibility is a TV series, with Kalevipoeg as the protagonist. When the series made on the basis of *Ramajana* was shown in India, the streets were deserted in the evening, because everybody was watching. People are very fond of 'mythological' films.

Is it allowed to make fun of Indian deities?

People in the villages are used to making fun of Hindu deities, which are truly funny sometimes – Shiva is semi-naked and rides on a bull; he is often incredibly naive and finds himself in all sorts of strange situations, does weird things and smokes ganja (cannabis–Ed). Isn't that funny?

This is what differentiates Hinduism and Islam. People do not make jokes about Allah, except for the poets, and then they do not call him Allah, but Huda. It is strictly forbidden to make fun of Muhammad. There is even a saying: you may make fun of Huda, but be careful with Muhammad.

What happens to a nation that fails to revive its mythology?

That nation would be very poor. Spiritual and intellectual impoverishment leads to decline. However, there are very few nations that have no myths at all. If people are embarrassed by old myths, they adopt new myths from recent history. For example, your relations with the Russians, regaining your independence and the popular movements connected with these events – such tales have almost taken the place of myths. The myth of how a tiny country called Estonia defeated the big enemy Russia is a powerful myth. However, old myths of your ancestors should be kept alive as well; they can be just as eventful.

National myths sometimes cause a number of problems, for example fierce nationalism.

Nationalism has become an issue everywhere in the world. It exists in India as well. There have always been tensions and crises between the Hindus and the Muslims. However, the Muslims also believe in their culture, history and mythology. Although there is an essential difference between monotheistic and polytheist religion, they can find a great deal in common if they approach one another culturally, and not politically.

This interview first appeared in Postimees, on 2 May 2010

by Janika Kronberg

Short Outlines of Books by Estonian

Kalle Käsper
Buridanid (I – V)
(The Buridans I – V)
Tallinn, Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2005-2010

Kalle Käsper (1952) is a lone wolf among Estonian writers, being a creator of large narratives *in spe*. Perhaps he should have been writing in some other era, since the reception of epic panoramas is rather lukewarm right now. Käsper's break-through came in 2002 with his *Brothers Luik*, a novel about intellectuals in the Estonia of the 1970s to 1990s. If this novel had been published a couple of decades earlier, during the time it depicts, it would have caused discussions and evoked the attention of the media. The tradition of that time appreciated epic novels that were loved by audiences and noticed by critics.

Now, Käsper is putting the finishing touches on his next epic novel, *The Buridans*, which is even more ambitious than his earlier works. The fates of the members of one family open vistas into Estonian history but, as Estonian history has always been connected with processes going on in large countries, it also explains the history of Eastern Europe.

The novel follows the life of an Estonian-Russian-German family in the 20th century. It is a kind of case study, where the 'small history' – human fate – is connected with the large history. The Estonian Aleks (Aleksander) has, with the help of the dowry of his wife Marta, a descendant of German colonists, worked his way up in the grain business in Russia before WWI. Aleks is the founding father; he creates an industry in Russia and lays the foundation of his family's wealth. But history, in the form of the Russian Revolution, is merciless, and Aleks's life work is ruined. To save their lives, the family, following the example of many Estonians in Russia, opts for Estonia in the early 1920s.

Kalle Käsper (Photo by Scanpix)

Authors

The Buridans have thus, thanks to Aleks's intelligence, luck and diligence, risen from the bottom and are on their way to joining the bourgeoisie. Large families do, however, have members of very different world-views and personal histories. Among Marta and Aleks's children, more attention is paid to the lives of Hermann and Ervin. Ervin has lost his health in the GULAG labour camps; the novel opens with his flight from home in order to preserve his dream of freedom. The plot of the novel proceeds as a series of episodes woven around the lives of the characters. We could say that these episodes by themselves offer more enjoyable reading than the whole of the novel, which covers almost a century and contains about fifty characters, whose activities are not depicted linearly, but by quite a mixed time-line. This is somewhat confusing and does not seem to be the best choice for a large number of different stories that take place in different time periods. But the problem may also be in the fact that the novel has been published in parts, with one to two years between the instalments.

The plot meanders from the end of the century back to its beginning, stopping here and there, with unexpected but credible meetings, and showing family dramas, lovers, disappointments etc. The most questionable parts of the work are the chapters that give voice to real historical persons: the Russian tsar, Hitler, Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, Churchill, the Estonian President Konstantin Päts et. al. These chapters, written as internal monologues, are not grotesque but, rather, strive for historical and psychological credibility. The subtitles of different parts of the novel, *Troy in Flames*, *Destruction of the Gods* and others, revealing inter-textual hints, also indicate the ambition for historical drama.

The author of *The Buridans* has set himself a monumental goal, worthy of great narrators of the 20th century. The historical panorama that is represented as the saga of the Buridans is impressive; its kaleidoscope-like structure has the effect of a film. The historical gallery of the members of the Buridan family is credible. The author has raised high the roof beams, and it is interesting to follow him even if we would want to argue about some details.

Mart Kivastik

Eesti asjad: näidendid

(Estonian Things: Plays)
Tartu, Kaks Musketäri, 2010. 288 pp

Mart Kivastik's (1963) book contains three plays discussing the 'Estonian Thing'. What is the Estonian Thing? Perhaps it is the core, hidden within the shell, but the shell may be built up of many multi-coloured layers and often it is very difficult to tell the core from the shell.

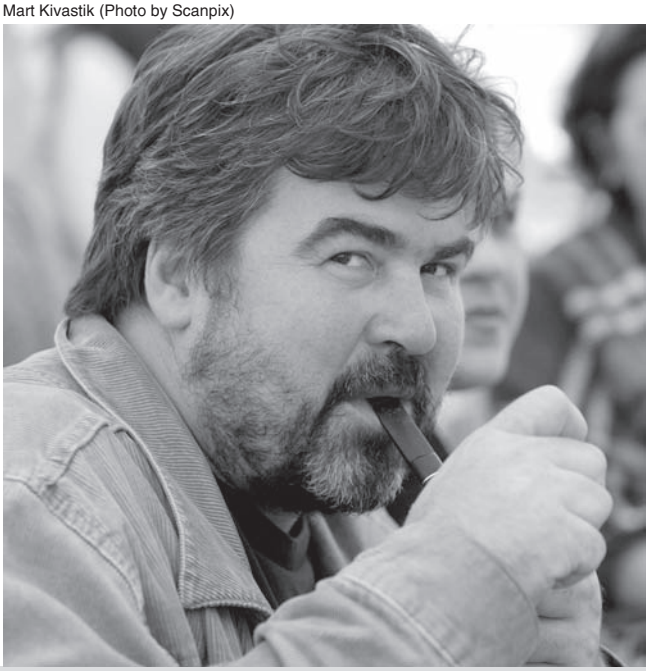
Each of the three plays discusses one Estonian Thing. All of them have a historical background, but none of the three is a historical story. Although history only lends the settings to the plays, history is unavoidable when dealing with the Estonian Things. Kivastik is searching for the moment when the Estonian Thing is still only developing.

In the first play, *Käsu Hans's Lesson*, the main character states in his opening sentences, 'Only I know what is really happening, what has been and what will come.' In literary history, Käsu Hans is known as the author of an 18th-century lamentation. The lamentation is a sad story told by the town of Tartu, where the town mourns its lost splendour after it has been destroyed in the Northern War by the army of Peter I.

Very little is known about the real Käsu Hans; probably, he was the cantor at Puhja Parish. Kivastik's play does not discuss the real Käsu Hans or his lamentation; Kivastik uses an earlier episode from Estonian cultural history. In the late 17th century, the schoolteacher Forselius took some Estonian boys to visit the King of Sweden to show the king how the country boys had learned to read. Among the characters of the play there is a prodigy – little Hans, who can read. Later, the old Hans recalls how little Hans, although he was able to read, tried, but could not change anything in history. The author proceeds from the name of the main character – Käsu Hans (käsk = order in Estonian) – a man who obeys orders. For Hans, the question is whether he should obey an order although he knows that the ship carrying the boys will perish. Should he follow the order, knowing that nothing can be changed... Little Hans sees the past, but old Hans hopes to convince himself of the need to go into the future, because the future can, perhaps, be changed.

The most charming among the three plays is titled *Estonian Thing*. This play, again, discusses how the Estonians learned to read, but the true Estonian Thing is, actually, the Song Festival. The play is set during the first Song Festival in 1869. Before that, the young Pastor Livio, a recent university graduate, gets his first posting in the far back-country, in Krimuna. The dull and witless Estonians living there have to be beaten to knock any sense into them. Livio decides to teach the people in Krimuna to sing and to take them to the Song Festival. The Estonians may be dull and witless, but some of them already know that when you learn to read you can become a human

Mart Kivastik (Photo by Scanpix)



being. If you have saved enough money to buy a farm, you need to know how to read as well. Thus, this is another quite grotesque story about the Estonians' process of becoming civilised and becoming a nation. One of the characters, a wife of the rather stupid farmer Tolla, says, 'I shall go to Tartu [to the Song Festival]. If you, man, want to keep rooting in the ground, I cannot stop you. But I will not let them beat me any more – I am Mrs. Zobel and I cannot go back.' The rise of a new class and the fall of the old one is illustrated by the dream of flying of the Krimuna manor owner. His flight is beautiful, and its end is beautiful too – he falls. The archetypal characters of the play remind us of the characters of another of Kivastik's popular books, *Old Barny*; the time and the treatment of history are also similar in these two works. The words 'I will not let them beat me any more' refer to the words of a historical person, who was ready to die rather than to let himself be beaten after the uprising in 1905. In the winter of 1905/1906, the Tsarist government sent Cossacks to punish the participants in the uprising and many people were beaten to death or crippled. In this respect, Kivastik's grotesque and funny story, where an Estonian is constantly beaten and does not return to the country after the Song Festival, is not an exaggeration. Estonians were beaten by the authorities even in the early 20th century, when they were already free people. The Song Festival and the 'thick hide' that survives beatings are both Estonian Things, as well as the intelligent behaviour of 'keeping your mouth shut and your hide intact'. The subject of the Estonians' survival seems to be endlessly productive and we hope that Kivastik will find still new and intriguing approaches to it.

The third play in the book, *A Stone Guest,* examines, again in the key of the grotesque, the old age of the Estonian writer Eduard Vilde and his last romance.

Maarja Kangro

Ahvid ja solidaarsus

(Monkeys and Solidarity)
Tallinn, Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2010. 191 pp

Maarja is among the most popular first names of her generation (Maarja Kangro was born in 1973). Kangro is quite a common Estonian family name, carried also by a well-known Estonian writer (Bernard Kangro, 1910-1994) and a well-known Estonian composer (Raimo Kangro, 1949-2001). These two men are not related, but we should mention that Maarja Kangro is Raimo Kangro's daughter and her mother is the poet Leelo Tungal.

Kangro started her literary path as a translator; her first poetry collection was published only in 2006, followed by two other collections of poems of mature and precise wording. In recent years, literary magazines have published several of Kangro's short stories, so her collection of short stories did not come as a surprise. Critical reception of the book has been remarkably positive, although, besides excellent stories, some weaker ones have been pointed out.

Kangro's short stories examine human relations; testing solidarity and tolerance, she reveals a discord between the ideal and the real. Interpersonal relations, including intimate scenes, are depicted in a mercilessly precise manner; the text is full of physicality and physical sensations that in some cases may extend to the grotesque. Kangro firmly directs the conversations between her characters so that the situations and conversations support each other. Some critics have mentioned a lack of emotion in Kangro's poetry. A superficial reader can err in this direction even when reading her stories. In reality, the attitude in her stories is passionate and intense, bold and exhaustive.

Monkeys and Solidarity contains ten short stories, written in the first person singular, where the author examines herself and her surroundings. The immediate report

given by the 'I in action' is somewhat alienated by the irony of the 'I who observes the actions'. The first person narrator, a woman, is self-confident and always ready to engage in intrigues, but she is also seeking closeness with other people, "... I decided to ask Olle for a dance, but the young man refused, saying that he had already had too much beer to be able to walk adequately. I looked at his friends, who also seemed to be much advanced in this direction and realised that, in this company, there was no buddy for me for that night."

The woman is stronger, and she can have her way anywhere except in bed, because the man simply cannot function. Or except when facing self-assured stupidity, because she cannot contain herself when dealing with it. The physical side attracts her, but also gives her disappointments that she vents in destructive behaviour. "About tolerance – this is not tolerance, but endurance," she reflects. "My imagined philanthropy breaks down with the first whiff of somebody's stinky breath."

Maarja Kangro (Photo by Scanpix)

In 2008, in an interview for the newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht*, Kangro explained that "I want to write my stories in order to warn people. I believe that the best text is born from one's own experience, and this is why I want to write down my own stories."

Rein Põder

Unustatud. Teekonnanovel

Forgotten. A Novel of a Voyage.
Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 2010. p 271.
ISBN 978-9985-65-777-5

Rein Põder (b. 1943), a prolific novelist and a geographer by profession, often tackles historical and geographical subject matter in his works, possessing a good grasp of different eras and landscapes. His most recent novel, *Forgotten*, mainly describes the final years of World War II and post-war Germany. According to the subtitle, which seems to provide a genre determination, this is a novel of a voyage, although it could just as well be called – despite the title – a novel of memory. This would smoothly fit into the currently popular trend of biographies, enlivened by various series of books by Rutt Hinrikus and Tiina Kirss. It is easy to find episodes in such books that are quite similar or even identical to those in Põder's novel. According to this interpretation, all the refugees who wandered across Europe in the autumn of 1944 and later, just like the characters in the novel, are birds of passage, trying to find a secure nest. This security was often found in countries beyond the sea; only a few remained in Germany and even fewer returned home.

The novel consists of episodes and has three initially independent stories with their own characters. Richard Klinkmann, an acclaimed photographer in pre-war Tartu, leaves his homeland by land on 23 September 1944. Quite by chance, he shares his journey with *Obersturmführer* Heinrich Lenz, who has fulfilled a mysterious mission. Ellen

Rein Põder (Photo by Scanpix)

and her two daughters leave Tallinn on 16 September on board the Moero, which is later sunk by Soviet aircraft; they are luckily on the boat's next to last voyage. Grenadier Kalju Illu's road to Germany starts on 1 April 1943, by train from the Tartu railway station. The moment of departure is captured by a photographer's lens. The book contains a great number of such meetings, which are sometimes known only to the reader, and also direct contacts, including intimate scenes. The characters travel through all of Germany and, typically of the refugees in that situation, mostly westwards and southwards, away from the Soviet occupation and war-torn Germany. When the western front approaches, it is only Kalju Illu, wounded during training in the Alsace-Lorraine region, who decides to flee east. His journey takes him back home through the Czech hell, where the Estonians suspected of collaborating with the Germans are horrendously punished. Ellen and her girls manage to get to England via Calais, where Ellen finds work, and they later travel on to Canada. Richard Klinkmann ends up in the United States. The women's last meeting with Richard takes place thirty years later in the Estonia House in Toronto and only virtually, while at a photographic exhibition, where they recognise themselves and remember old times. The very last encounter occurs between the descendants of the main characters on 26 September 1994 on the ferry *Estonia,* on its way from Stockholm to Tallinn – again fortunately on its next to last voyage. On the ferry are Julia, the daughter of Ellen's daughter Viktoria, the product of rape by American soldiers in Nurnberg, and Kalju Illa's son Erlend, who saw his father for the first time at thirteen years of age, when Kalju returned from a prison camp. Incidentally, it is Illa who saved the girl from the three American soldiers in Nurnberg, or it might all have ended much worse. The descendants are unaware of all that. The novel leaves their future unclear.

The characters are, of course, all fictional, although there are a few people who really existed. The novel remains firmly within the bounds of realism and aspires to historical truthfulness. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect for Estonian readers is the character of the photographer Klinkmann, because it invites a search for prototypes from real life. Three men continuously recorded the war and their escape journey, and their legacy is well known: Karl Hintzer, whose comprehensive archive is currently maintained at the Herder Institute in Marburg, Donald Koppel and Eric Soovere. Klinkmann seems to be a compilation of all three: Soovere, for example, spent his last years in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the writer also places Richard. Donald Koppel spent some time in a camp near the small town of Debica, as does the grenadier Illa. A large number of Koppel's photographs have survived, inspiring pictures of national lawn

decorations, Litzmann's speech on 6 June 1943 and Estonian guest performers in 1943 – these episodes are also depicted in the novel. Koppel left Europe via Madeira for the USA, just like Rein Põder's Richard Klinkmann.

In his skilful compositions, Rein Põder develops the stories presented in episodes, and brilliantly ties up all the loose ends. The result is a panorama of Estonian life, wartime tragedies and later encounters between Estonians at home and abroad in later generations.

Kalev Kesküla
Elu sumedusest
(The Mellowness of Life)
Tallinn: Tuum, 2009. p. 136.
ISBN 978-9985-9897-9-1

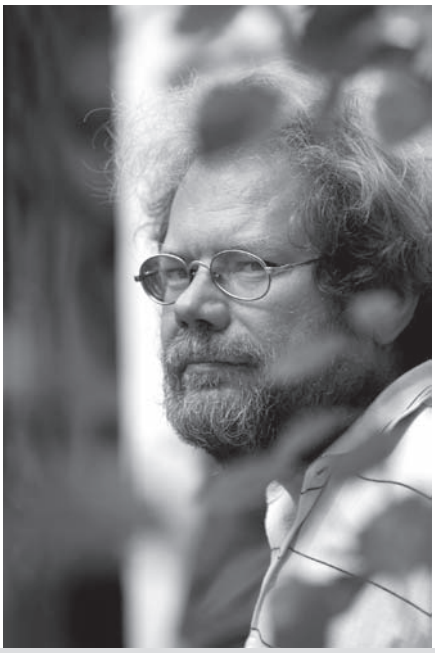
On the occasion of his 50th birthday, the self-ironic, lyrical, long-time literary editor of the weekly *Eesti Ekspress* (Estonian Express), encyclopaedist and wine critic Kalev Kesküla (1959) published a little book of essays titled *The Mellowness of Life*, which promptly received the prose award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment. After a serious illness, the writer died last June. He is remembered by friends and colleagues as a wonderful and kind-hearted man, a sparkling wit. His tragic death thus makes the sense of eternity and morbidity in the essays, noted by critics when the book was published, quite personal.

The 66 short essays in the book – each only a page or so – are divided into five cycles. The form is, therefore, quick and modern, the content educational and refreshing. In an interview, the author once said that in his jubilee year he wanted to write fiction, but the texts acquired a form of prose between essay and poetry, and this seemed the suitable means to express the general experience the author wished to convey. He managed to keep to the chosen form; his words are measured, precise and laconic, occasionally paradoxical and aphoristic, and might be seen as free verse if they were graphically reorganised.

Kesküla's writing is cosy, relying equally on his extensive reading and his experience of wandering around the streets like an enthusiastic *flaneur*, especially in the slums. As a writer and critic, and in close contact with life itself in his journalistic career, his memory had recorded a great deal, enabling him to offer an array of fragments of knowledge and recollections. Kesküla lets his thoughts about life, love, society, writers and nationalism run freely along literary associations. He brilliantly plays around with words and ideas, producing enjoyable texts; he offers generalisations in a slightly humorous manner, supported by the viewpoint of an experienced man. More than anything else, the book seems to focus on the relations between ethics and aesthetics, habits and pleasures, always in a light, mellow and ironic key. For example, the essay *Ode to Joy* examines Carla Bruni's origins and adventurous life and her marriage to the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, with the conclusion that this is a splendid European contract – a union of art and power: 'After all, how many women eight years younger than me could there be who were so imbued with European culture, whose life was pure art. The magazine *Time* chose Sarkozy among the 100 most influential people in the world this year, saying that after being dumped by his previous wife, Sarkozy found himself the most beautiful woman in Europe. Beauty saves Europe.' At the same time, this splendid irony actually directs attention to a more modest 'low profile' and 'living in a way that life will not find you'. Readers of the book certainly notice how much attention the

author pays and how much he appreciates classical humanist values, for example in discussing love and rejoicing in his wife. Kesküla never closed his eyes to life and, instead of theoretical constructions, his writing is closer to a phrase from Goethe's *Faust* about the grey theory and the golden tree of life. Kesküla saw both the splendour and the misery of human existence, and perceived its tragedy of the absurd, supported by, besides Estonian literary classics, such world names as Günter Grass, Milan Kundera and Goethe.

According to some critics, Kesküla's essays, which resemble marginalia, short stories and newspaper columns, contain features in common with the work of the Finns Erno Paasilinna, Paavo Haavikko and Veikko Huovinen: a matter-of-fact style, dry humour, and a mixture of (self)irony, melancholy, stoicism and expansive humanism. His essays are shrewd observations on the world, and they show the intellectual soul of a mature person, understanding, empathy and tolerance. Without a doubt, Kalev Kesküla was one of the most outstanding critics of taste and manners in Estonian public life, and his value criteria were well established.



Kalev Kesküla (Photo by Scanpix)

Aare Pilv

Ramadaan

(Ramadan)
Tallinn, Tuum, 2010. 443 pp
ISBN: 9789949901432

The tradition of travelling to discover the Ancient Rome and writing travelogues about it, initiated in Europe during the Enlightenment period, reached Estonia in the late 19th century, when Estonian writers travelled in the Mediterranean region. Literary classics Eduard Bornhöhe and Friedebert Tuglas mediated their travel impressions to the readers at home. Later, in the mid-20th century, Karl Ristikivi came to love the Mediterranean countries, and his work is topped with his last novel, *Roman Diary* (1976), 'written' by Kaspar von Schmerzburg, a contemporary of J. J. Winckelmann.

The world, borders between the states and the order of society have all much changed during the passing time, but travels to Rome are still continued. *Ramadan* is the first book of prose of literary critic and poet Aare Pilv (1976); the book was inspired by the month of September in 2008 that Pilv spent in Italy with the support of the Finnish Väinö Tanner Foundation. As the ninth month of the year is also the holy month of Muslims, it has given the book an ambiguous title. On the one hand, this can be compared to a pilgrimage to a holy place – to the sources of European culture; on the other hand, it lets us take a critical view of the Occidental civilization.

Although *Ramadan* has the structure of a diary, it is still no ordinary travelogue. It is fragmentary, containing poems, but also

private letters, reflections on appropriate subjects and a contextually fitting paper on urban culture, all woven into the text of a diary. There are passages in *Ramadan* that do not open up easily for the readers, but require effort in following all etymological and historical finesses. All the contemporary phenomena have their roots in history and the sometimes etymological digging of out of them offers the joy of discovery for more intellectual readers. Pilv does not overlook even the later layers of history that have stratified upon the Ancient Rome and offers his readers a good overview of Naples and Florence as well. In the latter, Pilv recognises his ideal city and creates intimate bonds with it, "This is the feeling that you are always there, *everywhere in the whole city*, and the city is an extension of your own body; you navigate the city, and the city navigates you – this is a mutual trustworthiness and commitment, born of encounters and encompassing. This truly is a friendship."

Ramadan gets its individuality from not only descriptions, but from something that the author calls "intuitive cultural geography", and from comparisons with the Nordic "depressive small town of Estonia". The constant need for self-proving of the Estonians as the members of a small nation is good-naturedly mentioned in comparison with the Italians' self-satiety and natural way of being. This idea is confirmed by the Italians' everyday life and their way of communicating with strangers, at present, with Estonians, who are, in some cases, taken as Caucasians. Italy's place in the contemporary world culture can, for example, be found and fixed in those places, where Andrei Tarkovsky shot his *Nostalgia*. In the global dimension, Pilv's text is enlivened by references to Clive Ponting's book *A Green History of the World* and Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon.

Aare Pilv (Photo by Scanpix)

Against the background of the holiness of Islam, Pilv's attitude towards the Occidental culture is mildly critical. Comparisons with Islamic culture which differs from that of Europe, has force and powerfully unites people, find support from TV broadcasts of pilgrimages and are seconded by the threats uttered by the President of the USA of the time, George Bush, and Donald Rumsfeld (the book reflects the September of 2008). "Terrorism has no place in the modern world!" - these words of Bush bait the author to contradict them, but linguistically, an argument would as well be a justification of terrorism and nobody would wish that. "Could the first motivation of those walking around the Kaaba, or the Chinese synchronised swimmers, or those who will die or kill for their homelands, be not a positive belief but a negative fear of becoming valueless, worthless, pointless in the eyes of the others, to become an odd living lump?" Pilv could be described as an enlightened sceptic who, without connecting with any confession, regards the Christian culture as a phenomenon that cannot be avoided, since one has been born into it.

In his charming way, Pilv bypasses dull political correctness and reflects on the cultural diversity of the world. The discovering of Rome is still going on, and Pilv's *Ramadan* is a worthy contribution to it.

16 Recommended Translation

The Scent of Your Shadow by Kristiina Ehin

translated by Ilmar Lehtpere

This young poet (born in 1977) has already published several books, received many awards, (her collection *The Drums of Silence* won the 2007 Corneliu M Popescu Prize), and been translated into a dozen languages. "In translating Kristiina Ehin's poetry I have the great good fortune of translating the work of the poet I admire most in any language", her translator writes – and indeed, Ilmar Lehtpere, a poet himself, the child of Estonian refugees and entirely bi-lingual, makes these poems read as easily as if originally written in English.

It is hard to imagine this latest book not being as appreciated as the earlier ones. Ehin's fresh voice is part of the ancient Estonian tradition of female singer-poets, and her work evokes the reality of the life of that Northern region - both the defensive closing-in against the winter cold, and the almost ecstatic joy at the return of tender fresh spring growth. The history of the Baltic states during the Second World War, and the years of Nazi then Soviet occupation, form a dark background to the vivid images of the skies, beaches, rivers and bogs of her native region, and of Tartu, the city where she now lives.

In the poem which begins, "Sand martins sea-stone black", the birds of Tallin tell:

how the alarm bells were rung
how mothers ran with their children
when everywhere walls were in the way
and the Russian bombers kept coming and coming
from the east
when it was all burning screaming and crumbling
cracking and bursting

"Through Kristiina`s poetry and prose I have begun to understand what it means to be a woman, to be a mother. Her work has lodged in my soul …", her translator writes; and the poems dealing with the poet's son, both before and after his birth, are impressive.

We`ve looked into each other`s eyes
only in dreams
your eyes inside me
your mouth inside me
your heart right here
closer than anything else

- and a few years later, the busy mother-writer:

My child clambers on the windowsill
With one hand I keep him from falling
with the other I write

I was intrigued by the title of this collection, *The Scent of Your Shadow*, then found the poem in which the line occurs in the final stanza:

I am empty
from the beauty of the purple streak in the sky
the horses of the mother of God
and the scent of your shadow
at the bottom of the valley

Scents and smells are important triggers and signifiers in these poems. 'Smell' seems to be used for something very specific: "the smell of white horses" or "your big sinewy mother / smelling of Antonovka" (a variety of apple); 'scent' for an almost metaphysical quality, as "the scent of your shadow" or "the sweet anxious scent / of that blood-red flower" (the dark red poppy of her heart). Kristiina Ehin's ardent and complex poetry should have many readers in this excellent translation.

Turn to page 29 to read a poem from The Scent of Your Shadow

The Scent of Your Shadow is published by Arc, priced at £9.99 **PBS Members' price £7.50**

Kalev Kesküla (Photo by Scanpix)