

# 10 Books from Estonia



*Tõnu Õnnepalu  
Viivi Luik  
Mats Traat  
Nikolai Baturin  
Maarja Kangro  
Kristiina Ehin  
Holger Kaints  
Indrek Hargla  
Eduard Vilde  
Oskar Luts*

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# Tõnu Õnnepalu **PARADISE**



**TÕNU ÕNNEPALU** alias **EMIL TODE** alias **ANTON NIGOV** (b. 1962), the great romantic, is one of the major names of the contemporary Estonian literature. Graduated from Tartu University as a biologist, worked as a teacher, as an editor of a literary magazine, as a governmental official and as the director of the Estonian Institute in Paris, he is now a free-lance writer. His basic novel *Piiririik* (Border State, 1993), published under the name of Emil Tode, was awarded the annual prize of Estonian Cultural Endowment (1993/1994) and the Literary Prize of Baltic Assembly (1994). This was followed by the novel *Hind* (Price, published in 1995 under his proper name Tõnu Õnnepalu) and again under the name of Emil Tode a collection of poems *Mõõt* (Measure, 1996) and two novels – *Printsess* (Princess, 1997) and *Raadio* (Radio, 2002). Before his *Flandria päevik* (Flanders Diary, 2007) he published a novel under the name of Anton Nigov, *Harjutused* (Practicing, 2002).

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Paradiis*  
Varrak, 2009, pp. 196  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

National Cultural Award of the Republic of Estonia 2010  
A. H. Tammsaare Literary Award 2010

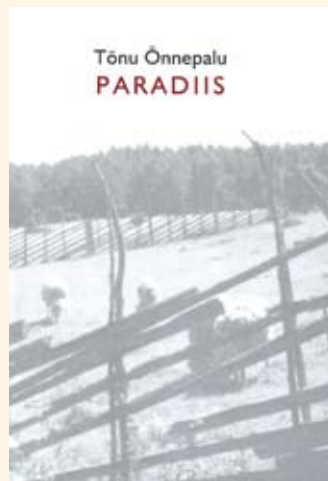
#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Hind* (Price)  
Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish

*Piiririik* (Border State)  
Albanian, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish

Tõnu Õnnepalu is one of the best-known poets, prose-writers, essayists and translators in Estonia. His first novel *Piiririik* (Border State, 1993) attracted world-wide attention as soon as it appeared, and has so far been translated into 18 languages. If *Piiririik* described the time of the opening up of borders in the early nineteen-nineties, the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe at that time of complex changes, and how the Eastern European tried to establish himself and interpret his new identity in this new world, then *Paradiis* (Paradise, 2010) may be seen as the opposite of *Piiririik*. The hero of *Piiririik* yearned to be far from home – in Europe, in the wondrous great city of his dreams, Paris. In *Paradiis* it is the opposite – the main character comes back to his former home on the edge of Estonia, where he lived 20 years before. Instead of a flight into distant lands we have a story in which the protagonist seeks out what is deeply personal and his own, in his own country.

*Paradiis* is the story of one island of Estonia, Hiiumaa – of the island's past, its inhabitants, and its significance. Hiiumaa is Estonia's most westerly island,



the edge of Estonia, which in Soviet times was especially isolated from the outside world, because it was part of a border zone with restricted access. The protagonist lived in an old farmhouse on this island in the late nineteen-eighties, and later left it. Now he is back on the island, and in the course of a week he writes to a friend a story about himself, his life on Hiiumaa, its history and its people. *Paradiis* is a very personal book, and yet it is not a diary. Õnnepalu's writing trembles on the border between fiction and biography, but at the same time there is a sense of fictive play about it. As a poet, Õnnepalu describes the "lost world" of *Paradiis* in a poetic and precise language, which has been compared to that of the Bible. The Biblical

dimension is even present in the title – the world of the late nineteen-eighties is compared by Õnnepalu with the heavenly Paradise. As he himself has said: "For me, this place – Paradise – has been a Biblical place from the beginning. [...] But it was so isolated from the rest of the world and every kind of modernity that it was as if it should not be on this world. But it was. And I lived there. [...] Yet this sacredness, this peculiar way of standing face to face with heaven, never really vanished from it. There were two sides to it. It was very liberating, and at the same time slightly dreadful."

This sacredness and confrontation with heaven permeates the whole book; it is not merely the story of a lost time and a lost world, the Hiiumaa of the nineteen-eighties, but the purpose of the book is to say something essential for human existence. And in doing so, Tõnu Õnnepalu has succeeded in catching not only the measure of the time, but the spirit of time as well.

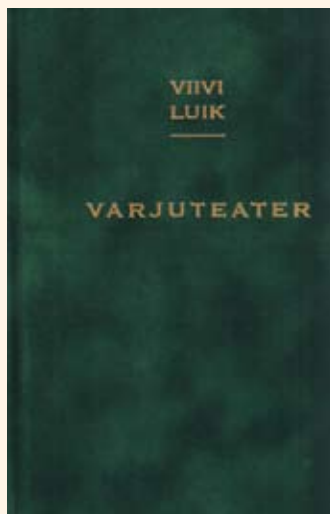
Viivi Luik is one of those Estonian writers whose touch turns everything to gold. Her poetry is deep within the common cultural memory of the Estonian people, as are her novels *Seitsmes rahukevad* (The Seventh Spring of Peace, 1985) and *Ajaloo ilu* (The Beauty of History, 1991). Both novels have also gained international attention and have been widely translated.

Nineteen years passed between Viivi Luik's last novel and the new one, *Varjuteater* (Shadow Theatre, 2010). For those 19 years Viivi Luik had been assembling what now appears before the reader in Shadow Theatre. It has been called a mosaic novel, whose pieces consist of the author's experiences in Estonia, Helsinki, Berlin, Rome and elsewhere. These fragments are distinguished not by colours but by decades and places, and the fragments themselves are snatches of dialogues, accidental meetings and little observations taken from Luik's memory. The most important pattern, however, is formed by the author-protagonist's story of "how I came to be myself".

The main thread running through the novel is the story of the author's arrival in Rome, where she had been drawn by a longing ever since childhood. With a masterful hand, Viivi Luik joins up points in time that at first seem unconnected – the beginning of her yearning for Rome during the deportations of March 1949, Tallinn at the time of the coup of 1991, and Rome, the Eternal City, at the end of the twentieth century. As the critics have noted, Viivi Luik weaves a text in which time and space change places, moments take shape as things, people become images. In principle, everything in the narrative is present all the time; everything is possible. A book that opens on Rome, taking the place of a picture of the Colosseum found on the floor of some deportees' home in 1949, is a window onto eternity. And Viivi Luik's road to Rome, which begins there, is indeed a road to eternity. Arrival in Rome at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the wife of a diplomat is for Viivi Luik comparable to a lifelong pilgrimage.

Viivi Luik herself has said: "I didn't write so that people would praise me but to express that one single human experience which only I could express." Such honesty and individuality is the key to Viivi Luik's creation. There is a character in the novel, an influential German critic, who says to the protagonist: "Always write what you are most ashamed of. /---/ Don't lie." One could say that in this book Viivi Luik has followed that recommendation. She does not lie.

Viivi Luik is an author who transcends periods and nations; her Shadow Theatre is not only a part of Estonian literature but a deeply European and human work. In her novel there is a measure of eternity, a rising above time and space, a sharp perception of the interrelationships of the world and the breath of a very great author.



**VIIVI LUIK** (b. 1946), poet and a prosewriter is a free-lance writer since 1967. She has published volumes of poetry, novels, essays and children's books. The most important are the novels *Seitsmes rahukevad* (The Seventh Spring of Peace, 1985) and *Ajaloo ilu* (The Beauty of History, 1991). The first depicts rural life in the 1950s in Estonia through the eyes of a child, the other depicts the resonances in Estonia and Latvia to the events of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Her novels have been translated into 13 languages.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Varjuteater*  
Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2010, pp. 312  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

Cultural Award of the Republic of Estonia 2011

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Seitsmes rahukevad* (The Seventh Spring of Peace)  
Finnish, French, German, Latvian, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish

*Ajaloo ilu* (The Beauty of History)  
Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Norwegian, Russian, Swedish

# Mats Traat **POMMER'S GARDEN**



**MATS TRAAAT** (b. 1936) is like a cornerstone of Estonian literature, prolific in prose and poetry. In 2010, with the novel *Õelate lamp* (The Lamp of the Wicked, 2010), he finished the sequence *Minge üles mägedele* (Go Up the Hills), consisting of 12 parts and a prologue, beginning with the eighteen-forties and ending after World War II.

Traat made his début with verses close to the soil, sensitive and sharp, and has for decades written the *Harala elulood* (Histories From Harala), alluding to Edgar Lee Masters, of epitaphs from a village cemetery. His novel *Tants aurukatla ümber* (Dance Around the Steam Boiler, 1971), translated into ten languages, is considered among the most seminal works in Estonian literature.

He reawakens the past in a fascinating and thoughtful way, and has won numerous significant literary prizes, including the Estonian Cultural Endowment's annual prize for his whole oeuvre and the University of Tartu award for his contribution to Estonian national identity in 2010.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Pommeri aed*

Pegasus, 2008, pp. 252, first published in 1974  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

Polish: Czytelnik 1983, Russian: Izvestija 1980

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Tants aurukatla ümber* (Dance Around the Steam Boiler)

Bulgarian, Czech, Kyrgyzian, Esperanto, Finnish, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Tajik

*Inger* (Inger)

English, Finnish, German, Russian, Ukrainian

In *Pommeri aed* (Pommer's Garden, 1974) a schoolmaster named Jaan Pommer cultivates his garden as well as his pupils in a little one-roomed schoolhouse in a Southern Estonian village in the eighteen-nineties. This is a teacher's novel of a borderland, set against the background of the systematic 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russification process of the Russian empire's western border territories, and belongs among Traat's "trilogy of teachers".

Traat, the panoramic describer of Estonian history and a grand writer, treats the past genuinely and sensitively; depicting the spirit of the nation: persistent, even stubbornly tenacious, and he is extraordinary in his cognition of space. His "novel territory" is made up not only of the landscape, but its past, its soul, the fates of its inhabitants and their role in forming the spirit of this place.

Pommer raises the pupils according to his ideals, fights for a better world in his community and therefore clashes with the parish leaders while trying to close the village inn. Far from an ideal character, he is harsh but kind-hearted, steady, strong and permanent. He has a mission to enlighten and educate, and

stands up for his little old schoolhouse in an endless fight for every piece of window glass, an oil lamp or a new blackboard. As a country schoolmaster in an agrarian society, Pommer is a farmer, and he puts his soul into his garden. Pommer's wish to cultivate the garden seems to sprout from Candide's last words of Voltaire's philosophical fairy-tale.

Two of Pommer's own children have chosen their father's path. The only son, Karl, is ill with tuberculosis and writes poetry, secretly believing the ideas of the freedom of his homeland which are only to be hinted at. There is hope in this novel, springing from nothing really "big and important", but significant, like the cold, golden apples the soulful broken-hearted daughter

Anna takes from the hayloft to decorate the Christmas-tree, regaining the belief in life again after attempting suicide. The tricks of schoolboys, their will to learn, make the days bright even when there is no more wood to fire the big oven in the classroom.

Traat is also a poet, and Pommer's Garden has been characterised as lyrical prose. The poetic realism adds to the suggestiveness. In the middle of the novel the age-old schoolhouse burns down on St John's Night as the old parish underling accommodated in the classroom falls asleep with his pipe. It seems to be symbolic of the new era as well. Traat wrote the novel when the new Russification period in Estonia was beginning. Although Pommer may only start building a new and better one, he loses his job, and he hopes for a young schoolteacher to come and take his place, in a job with a much wider meaning. The novel, deeply philosophical, fascinating on both an intellectual and a psychological level, is moving in its belief in the continuity of life: and in the end of the book one of Pommer's apple-trees, rather capriciously, is finally blooming.



# WAY OF THE DOLPHINS

Nikolai Baturin

This drama of human relationships that takes place in a practically post-apocalyptic landscape is intermixed with an adventure story in ocean waters and dark forests. The book contains many stories and many different charming, interesting characters:

1) Sea-Mowgli: a little boy finds himself in ocean waves, where dolphins save him. He cannot speak any human language, nor can he adapt to their way of life.

2) A white girl in South Africa hears that her father, who is a doctor, has died. She is raped during a period of unrest and she flees from her home village, kills the child that is born from that rape, and becomes an indifferent female thug. Thus fate leads her to prison, from where she is selected for a special unit and trained as a killing machine. Sonora finds herself on a sinking ship at sea during an operation. She is saved by dolphins and a strange sea boy, the shepherd of the dolphins.

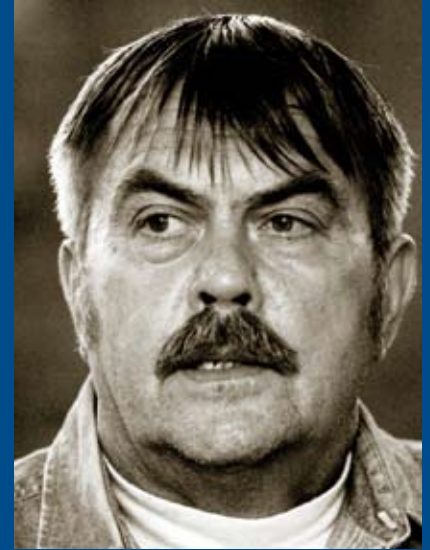
3) A weird Shipwreck Hotel stands on a rather deserted shore somewhere in the lands of old corsairs, where one can find only smugglers, natives and random wanderers. This hotel consists of shipwrecks that hurricanes have piled on top of each other. The hotel is run by four Sisters of Cleansing Passion – sacred whores, whose physical proximity can heal sick men and perhaps even bring the dead back to life.

4) A mission centre run by a former executioner, the fervent believer Papa, is located near that same hotel. The somewhat cynical Dohtor, who is hardened by life, works as a doctor for the mission community.

All these stories are intertwined. The militaristic Sonora, saved by the Dolphin Shepherd, starts living in Shipwreck Hotel, where she at first terrorises the hotel proprietors. Yet long ocean voyages with the dolphin boy make her feminine and open to love. At the same time, the alcoholic doctor Dohtor makes the girl restless. She spurns the ocean boy and goes with the doctor through a thick and tangled forest to a distant village to treat the sick. She starts to discover the value of a life lived for others. Dohtor falls ill on the way back and then disappears, probably dying.

A gentle love story follows, which is ever more threatened by dangers: in order to win the attention of his beloved, the Dolphin Shepherd has abandoned the great migratory route of the dolphins and puts on performances with his brothers.

As if by magic (or with the help of the sacred whores) the Dohtor has come back to life and returns. It turns out that he is Sonora's father. Yet this does not avert tragedy: the Dolphin Shepherd is senselessly and brutally beaten to death. Furthermore, Sonora finds a memorial tablet during her wanderings, from which she reads that the residents of the hotel died long ago in a shipwreck. The hotel, however, has already disappeared, like a simulacrum.



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

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Delfinide tee*  
Eesti Raamat, 2009, pp. 192  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Karu süda* (The Heart of the Bear)  
Russian

Maarja Kangro

## MONKEYS AND SOLIDARITY



**MAARJA KANGRO** (b. 1973) has published four books of poetry and a book for children. *Ahvid ja solidaarsus* (Monkeys and Solidarity, 2010) is her first book of fiction. For her poetry, she has won the Estonian Cultural Endowment's Award for Poetry, and twice the Literary Award of Tallinn University. She has written five opera libretti and other texts for music; she writes literary criticism and has translated poetry, philosophy, and fiction from Italian, English, and German into Estonian.

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Ahvid ja solidaarsus*  
Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2010, pp. 192  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

### AWARDS

Estonian Cultural Endowment's Award for Prose 2010  
Friedebert Tuglas Short Story Award 2010

### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Heureka* (Eureka)  
Udmurt

If such a phenomenon were possible at all, it could be said of Maarja Kangro that she is the female intellectual Bukowski. The first-person protagonist of Kangro's short stories looks at the world with a cheeky eye; she passes through dim evenings and nights in various European cities, she is open about sex, even predatory. She is not afraid of anything, is almost violent, at the very least challenging. The men around her mostly seem inept – mentally blocked, excessively childish or downright impotent – they tend to be gentle and vacillating beings. Apart, of course, from the “monkeys”, as the first-person protagonist (both ironically and sincerely) calls the road-workers, with their brutish ways. Hence the teasingly sneering name of Kangro's only collection of stories to date, *Ahvid ja solidaarsus* (Monkeys and Solidarity, 2010). But this reference to monkeys leaves no special place for the *macho* men, as if they were a different species; there is not much to discuss about them – or if there is, it is with some more intelligent man, in studying the meaning of solidarity.

This sequence of stories deals with the attempts of a young woman ap-

proaching middle age, the protagonist, to get pregnant. Here, men are viewed and admonished repeatedly as “a sperm bank”, and the hero is searching for good eugenic material – indeed, at times even frantically, aimlessly, and she would not rule out taking the first man she comes across on the beach. At the same time, all her attempts are doomed to fail, the body will simply not obey the command and submit to the search for a pregnancy. The noble efforts to acquire progeny, to reproduce her own genetic material, decay into promiscuity, into idly rolling around this world.

The question of tolerance is viewed with a jaundiced, playful eye: there is a violent solution to a quarrel about a

cultural issue, when one lady at a Baltic film festival in Rome expresses contempt for small cultures; there is a provocative defence of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ incident in front of employees of foreign embassies in Estonia; physically repulsive and mentally odd people are viewed with disgust, in addition to the case of the ‘monkeys’ already mentioned, with an ironical view of the male sex. Yet the arrow of black humour is here primarily aimed at the views and way of life of the protagonist herself.

The scene of Kangro's action is an ageing, museum-like Europe – a secure and romantic place in which people are most ambushed by their own passions, and ‘multiculturalism’ is mostly expressed in the darkness of the eyes of a man chosen as a sexual partner, or in petty intellectual disputes where too much wine is drunk. Her method is old-fashioned and Hemingwayesque in a positive sense: often, only the tip of the iceberg is showing, and what happens is a reference to a world which arouses the reader. The style is amusingly haughty, enjoying the challenge, while in Kangro's bold heroine(s) there is something ridiculous to mitigate them. It is as if, ultimately, this world cannot be taken very seriously, but rather it is just a Bukowskian experiment: what happens in the laboratory of the world when a strange, unexpected sort of catalyst is introduced into it.



# THE MAN WHO MADE THE SUN STAND STILL

## SOUTH-ESTONIAN FAIRY TALES

Kristiina Ehin

*Kristiina Ehin:*

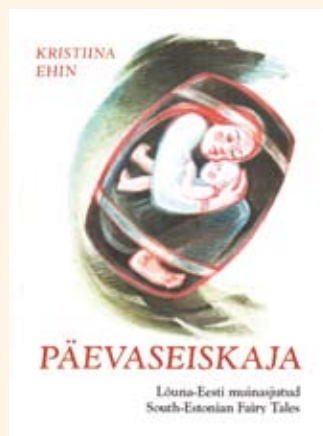
"I have selected these fairy tales from the vast treasury stored at the Estonian Folklore Archives and retold them. These are fairy tales for young and old which embolden us to take the reins of life into our own hands in spite of hardships, to stand up for what is right and just and resist evil. Reading these tales of wonder, let us listen to the wonders hidden within us."

*Poet Sujata Bhatt on Kristiina Ehin's poetry:*

"Here is a generous, honest imagination: visceral, shamanistic and wise. She is a visionary poet with a discerning and distinctive voice, a voice resonant with genuine passion, close to the primordial world of spirits and myths but also rooted in history and in contemporary life. There is a refreshing lightness and originality to her poems, which are nonetheless poignant. She is able to express strong emotions without being sentimental. Her work has truly haunted me; it has entered the deepest layer of my being with its rare combination of directness and subtle nuances, ancient traditions and modernity."

*Translator Ilmar Lehtpere on translating Kristiina Ehin:*

"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. Not many translators are able to say this. Kristiina's very contemporary poetry is imbued with folklore and folk song and hence with fundamental human experience. She increasingly makes use of folk music in her readings and incorporates traditional *regilaul*, a two thousand year-old, still living form of Estonian folk song, in some of her poems. Continuity is central to her work, indeed she has said that she regards herself as heir of the ancient Estonian tradition of female singer-poets. Her poetry spans centuries, millennia. That is at once modern and primeval. There is a timeless quality in her work, and this of course applies to her use of language as well."



**KRISTIINA EHIN** (b. 1977) has become one of the most successful poets of the younger generation. Her fourth and most voluminous collection of poems, *Kaitseala* (The Protected Zone, 2005), written during a year spent as nature reserve warden on an uninhabited island, Mohni, off the north coast of Estonia, was a real bestseller, and *Luigeluulinn* (Swan-Bone City, 2003) sold out three printings. Ehin does nothing to appeal to her readers. On the contrary, she claims that she writes about the things that only she herself feels attracted to and touched by, and declares that she does not strive for popularity.

Kristiina Ehin's poems have been translated into English, Russian, Swedish, Slovenian, Icelandic, Finnish, Slovak, Udmurt, Komi and German. Her poetry selection from her collections, *The Drums of Silence* (2007), translated into English by Ilmar Lehtpere, won a prestigious prize for poetry in translation, the Poetry Society Popescu Prize. Her most recent poetry collection in English, *The Scent of Your Shadow*, a selection of poems from Ehin's most recent book *Emapuhkus*, 2009 again in Ilmar Lehtpere's translation, published in April 2010 by Arc Publications, received the Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation award while still only a manuscript.

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Päevaseiskaja. Lõuna-Eesti muinasjutud*  
The Man Who Made The Sun Stand Still.  
South-Estonian Fairy Tales  
English translation by Ilmar Lehtpere  
Huma, 2009, pp. 216  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

# Holger Kaints **AIRPLANE SPOTTER**



**HOLGER KAINTS** (b. 1957), literary reviewer and former bookshop keeper is presently a freelance writer. He is absolutely original both in his style and his choice of topic, making it impossible to leave the book aside. His debut novel *Teekond mäetipu poole* (Journey Towards the Summit, 2003) was subtitled as a fantastic tale. There the utopian society is the still existing Soviet Union in the year 2012, having survived the dissolution. In his second novel, *Lennukivaatleja* (Airplane Spotter, 2009) Kaints writes a story of today that is as intense as a thriller, but more a picture of the ways of thinking. For this novel he received the Wordwormer Prize.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Lennukivaatleja*  
SA Kultuurileht, 2009, pp. 144  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

Wordwormer Prize 2009

There is a residential area near Tallinn Airport that is everything but a new settlement conforming to EU standards. There are no house permits or building permits in the area. Outcasts live there. No, not criminals or homeless persons, rather people who are behind the times, leftovers of the Soviet Union who do not know how to adapt to the new world and the market economy.

The protagonist is just a regular person, one of many, but one important trait distinguishes him – he is an airplane spotter. He keeps a very detailed diary, where he enters all airplane arrivals and departures. And then he notices something different: some airplanes seem to land somewhere farther, somewhere else, as if at some remote, hidden military base. Since he sees a television broadcast at his friend's place that talks about secret American prisons in Europe, and about prisoners being taken from Guantanamo to unknown locations, he becomes anxious and suspicious. At about the same time, a suspicious BMW, the grim symbol of Estonian traffic deaths, starts following the man in the city and in his home neighbourhood, downtown at the open-air market and on village streets.



The airplane spotter shares his observations with his closest friends, who could in all honesty be considered eccentrics and/or drunkards. For instance, one of them is a former KGB man who still turns the dials of his wireless transmitter from time to time, hoping someday to once again be useful to his bosses, to prove himself again at the right time, to start serving them again. This contingent has no illusions concerning the Republic of Estonia. The Republic really doesn't concern them in any way other than irritating them with its new way of organising time and life. The airplane spotter forces himself with difficulty to go to the library – the market, the library and the newspapers he reads there, meetings with the tenant of his flat in

the city (he retains the flat from the past, when his wife was still alive) – that is all the contact the protagonist has with the world.

Now a grim, black BMW is following him and strange deaths, traffic accidents and fires start occurring in the settlement. Of course, the airplane spotter understands that this has to be connected with his discovery. If only he could manage to somehow get this information to the media! But no. That Grim Reaper finally catches him at an unexpected moment...

In the course of the story, it is hinted that real estate developers want to take the little village over by hook or crook. In any case: in the end, it is not quite certain what leads to the tragic events. Is it delusion, the greed of businessmen for profit, or something else altogether?



# APOTHECARY MELCHIOR AND THE MYSTERY OF ST. OLAF'S CHURCH

Indrek Hargla

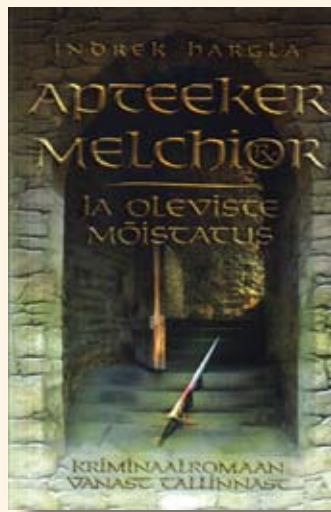
Indrek Hargla's detective novel *Apteeker Melchior ja Oleviste mõistatus* (Apothecary Melchior and the Mystery of St. Olaf's Church, 2010) plunges into 15<sup>th</sup>-century Tallinn, not yet completed, a town of foreign merchants and engineers, dominated by the mighty castle of Toompea. It was the century of close connections with Western Europe: Estonia (Livonia) was on the edge of the Christian lands, it was the last foothold before the East. This was the era of building towns and castles, and the flourishing of convents and guilds, and the time of war for power over the Baltic Sea.

A high knight of the German order coming from Visby is killed in the castle of Toompea, found with a Gotlandic coin in his mouth, and a young and clever, also very inquisitive apothecary Melchior is asked to help in solving the mystery. But the murderer does not stop, filling the town with horror, and the labyrinth of secrets leads Melchior into the heart of the ancient folk legends of the town and the Baltic Sea. He learns about the brotherhood on the sea called the Victual Brothers (*Vitalienbrüder*), who were first encouraged by the Hanseatic League, then turned to open piracy and became the curse of the Baltic Sea, occupying Gotland. They were at last caught in marine battle and their leaders, also the legendary Klaus Störtebecker, beheaded. But some, among them Magister Wigbold, the Master of the Seven Arts, seem to have escaped a terrible end.

In the middle of the mystery stands the most beautiful gothic church in Tallinn, partly under construction then, St. Olaf's church, which was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the tallest building in the world with its 159-metre tall steeple. It aspired to high altitude as a maritime signpost as well, making the trading city of Tallinn visible from far out at sea. The circle of Melchior's suspects is wide, enfolding the miscellaneous townsfolk of merchants and order warriors, goldsmiths and church builders, the Dominican monks and lay brothers, aldermen, a sad minstrel from Milan, wandering journeymen, young lovers and Estonian stonemasons, and last but not least the hilarious, unique Brotherhood of Blackheads of bachelor merchants who had the secret duty to serve and protect the castles and churches.

The nervous, thrilling and most unexpected conclusion comes in the very last pages of the book, when Melchior accuses the culprit, claiming justice on the grounds of the Lübeck Law, tempting the reader all the time to peek ahead to the solution. Besides the people, the town of Tallinn rises among the characters as a miracle – fragile, beautiful, mysterious, and depending only on a gloomy secret itself, *death dancing around it*. It is a novel that enables a most wonderful glance into a European Hanseatic port of the Middle Ages: into a budding, adventurous townscape.

The novel has a sequence in at least six volumes to come.



**INDREK HARGLA** (b. 1970) is the best Estonian writer in the field of science fiction, fantastic horror and heroic fantasy. His first collection of stories, *Nad tulevad täna öösel!* (They Will Come Tonight!, 2000), gathers texts belonging to these three genres and reveals a high sense for narrative construction. *Baiita needus* (Baiita's Curse, 2001) is a fascinating adventure and medieval witchcraft novel. *Pan Grpowski 9 juhtumit* (Nine Cases of Pan Grpowski, 2001) is centered on a Polish exorcist who fights across the world against evil spirits. Recently Hargla has brilliantly cultivated speculative history, imagining what the world would have become if certain decisive events had not happened. In these unlikely universes impregnated with magic he develops suspenseful stories, whether romantic, like *Palveränd uude maailma* (Pilgrimage to the New World, 2003), or humorous, like *French ja Koulu* (French and Koulu, 2005), which plays with the stereotypes of Estonian identity.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Apteeker Melchior ja Oleviste mõistatus*

Varrak, 2010, pp. 312

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

Eduard Vilde

# THE DAIRYMAN OF MÄEKÜLA



**EDUARD VILDE** (1865–1933) was the first professional writer of Estonia, whose enormous output, comprising serious novels, dramas, short stories, comedies, various light pieces for magazines and political journalism, runs to 33 volumes in his collected works. He was the first writer to introduce realism or naturalism to Estonian letters, acquiring notoriety as a “filthy” author. His historical novels did much to arouse Estonian national consciousness, and as an influential socialist journalist he had to spend several years in exile, mainly in Germany and Denmark, away from Czarist Russia. In the first months of the independent Republic of Estonia, Eduard Vilde served as the ambassador to Germany.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Mäeküla piimamees*

Eesti Päevaleht, 2006, pp. 152, first published in 1916  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

English: Eesti Raamat 1976, Esperanto: Eesti Raamat 1983,  
Hungarian: Európa Könyvkiadó 1967, Portuguese: Cavalo de Ferro Editores 2004, Latvian: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība 1963, Lithuanian: Vaga 1965, Russian: Hudožestvennaja literatura 1965, Avita 2000

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Mahtra sõda* (The Mahtra War)

German, Latvian, Romanian, Russian

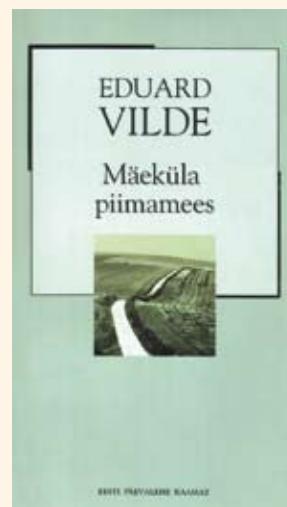
*Prohvet Maltsvet* (The Prophet Maltsvet)

Latvian, Russian

When published in 1916, the last novel by Eduard Vilde was hailed by the critic Karl August Hindrey as the “first genuine Estonian novel”. Eduard Vilde, who had established himself as the most popular and prolific author of short stories, humour, historical novels and drama, achieved in this book, written in exile in Denmark, a new maturity and psychological insight. Whereas his earlier naturalist stories and novels were often *Tendentzliteratur*, serving the Estonian nationalist or socialist cause, *Mäeküla piimamees* (The Dairyman of Mäeküla) rises above political agitation.

The novel is set in the eighteen-nineties in a manor near Tallinn. The master of the manor, an ineffectual old bachelor, Baron Ulrich von Kremer, falls for Mari, the charming wife of his tenant Tõnu Prillup. Ulrich devises a plan of leasing his dairy to Prillup in exchange for having his wife as a mistress. Prillup, who is even more incompetent than von Kremer, becomes obsessed with the idea of managing a dairy and winning the recognition of his fellow men, which he has lacked so far. He insists that Mari accept the deal. Finally

Mari gives in, begins seeing von Kremer and taking pleasure in urban luxuries, while Prillup, predictably, is not good in business, takes to drink, and develops a grudge against his wife. Finally he freezes to death while returning drunkenly from one of his market trips. Mari, now an attractive widow, rejects her suitors (who seem to be more interested in the dairylease anyway), dumps von Kremer, and escapes to the city.



What makes this rather banal plot into a brilliant novel is the author’s impartiality, a mixture of cynicism and compassion. The deeper plot of the novel is concerned with what René Girard has termed the “triangular or mimetic desire” – a disposition of modern human beings not to desire spontaneously but imitate the desire for the object entertained by the other. Thus Prillup’s main aim

is not so much prosperity itself as to be seen to be prosperous, and to evoke envy and admiration in others. Von Kremer’s motives are the exact opposite – he desires private happiness without being perceived as having any. Mari, the most sympathetic character in the novel, remains a mystery – without being a passive victim or a mere token in men’s transactions, she retains a certain self-sufficiency, independence of will and curiosity towards the world.

Besides the psychology of desire, the novel has impressive socio-historical implications. The barren von Kremer becomes the symbol of the decadence of the Baltic German nobility, depicted with ironic empathy rather than the fierce condemnation of Vilde’s earlier work. The subtle entanglement of sexuality, power and economic relations and post-colonial attitudes makes this stylistically innovative novel one of the great masterpieces not of only Estonian literature but of the novel genre in general.

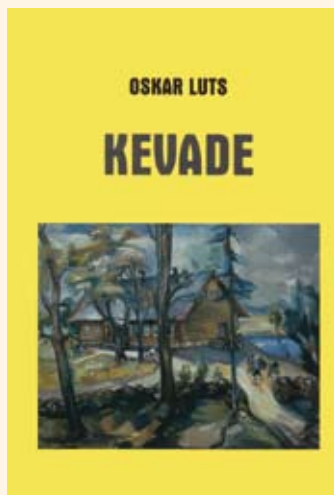
# THE SPRING

# Oskar Luts

If asked to point out a single work of literature which has had the strongest impact on Estonian vernacular and popular consciousness by introducing new turns of phrase, figures of speech, proverbs and stock-characters continually alluded to and understood by the majority of Estonians, this work would undoubtedly be *Kevade* (The Spring) by Oskar Luts, modestly subtitled “Scenes from Schooldays”. First published in two volumes in 1912–1913, it has become the most frequently reprinted Estonian book, giving rise to various sequels by Oskar Luts himself as well as to film and stage adaptations. *Kevade* has been translated into 14 languages.

The narrative depicts one schoolyear in a small rural school of Paunküla in the mid-eighteen-nineties (inspired by Luts’ own childhood village of Palamuse). Under the superficial veneer of gaiety and all kinds of schoolboy tricks and escapades runs a sombre, almost fatalistic stream of grave consequences caused by initially insignificant missteps, broken promises, and tiny lies. The main protagonist, Arno Tali, breaks a promise given to his schoolmate Teele, thereby starting a cycle of guilt, doubts, jealousy and resentment which leads to getting drunk with the sexton Lible and falling ill. In the second part of the narrative a similar cycle recurs when Arno gets involuntarily involved in a plot to sink the raft of the neighbouring gentry school and has to choose between betraying his friend Tõnisson or lying and thereby causing the indictment of the innocent Lible. Once again Arno falls into a deep depression but recovers after a dream-vision of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

The melancholy deep structure is not always easy to recognize behind the surface gaiety of schoolboy pranks, mainly started by the hyperactive, almost daemonic Joosep Toots. The gallery of other characters taps the deep resources of archetypes in the collective unconscious. All kinds of human relations – master/slave, teacher/disciple, man of action/contemplative man – and existential attitudes, temperamental and social types are exemplified by the characters and incidents of the story. This, together with vividly figurative language, and the range of sensibility, from sublime romanticism to coarsely burlesque, has made Oskar Luts’ first novel an imperishable classic.



**OSKAR LUTS** (1887–1953) has sometimes been called the Estonian Dickens, as both writers exhibit the same kind of mixture of melancholy and humour as well as technical inventiveness. He grew up in Palamuse, Northern Tartu county, studied pharmacy in Tartu, and was conscripted into the World War soon after his literary debut with *Kevade*, and some comedies and short stories. His main literary model was Nikolai Gogol. He was married to Valentina Luts, nee Krivitskaya, and wrote several sequels to *Kevade*, exploiting the same characters and scenes and experimenting with metafiction. He was the author of more than 30 novels, plays, and short story collections and a cycle of third-person memoirs. Oskar Luts is by far the most popular but also one of the technically most inventive Estonian writers.

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Kevade*

Ilmamaa, 2008, pp. 360, first published in 1912–1913  
Rights’ contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

Armenian: Aiastan 1970, Bulgarian: Otetšestvo 1989, Czech: Svět Sovětů 1961, English: Perioodika 1983, Finnish: Arvi A. Karisto OY 1973, Latvian: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība 1965, Lithuanian: Valstybine Grožines literaturos leidykla 1957, Polish: Nasza Księgarnia 1968, Romanian: Univers 1977, Russian: Pravda 1987, Avita 2000, Slovak: Vydali Mlade 1960,

## SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Tagahoovis* (In the Back Yard)  
Latvian, Russian

*Nukitsamees* (Bumpy)  
English, German, Kyrgyzian, Russian

## Estonian Literature Centre

The Estonian Literature Centre (Eesti Kirjanduse Teabekeskus) exists to generate interest in Estonian literature abroad. The centre publishes information on Estonian literature in several languages. As well as being closely involved with translators, writers and publishers, ELIC also works in close partnership with book fairs and literary events, ministries, embassies, cultural and academic institutes, other literature information centres, libraries and universities both in Estonia and abroad. ELIC organizes numerous literature events and translation seminars around the world and coordinates the Translator-in-residence programme. ELIC also maintains a database of translations of Estonian literature in other languages. ELIC was founded in 2001.

### Translation Grants

To support the translation of the works of Estonian authors into foreign languages there is a translation grant TRADUCTA for translators of Estonian literature. Applicants may request grants to cover translation expenses for translations from Estonian directly. TRADUCTA is financed by the Estonian Cultural Endowment. (For more information see [www.estlit.ee/subsidies](http://www.estlit.ee/subsidies)).

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