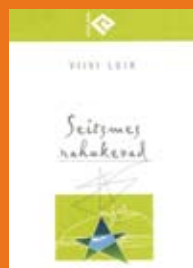
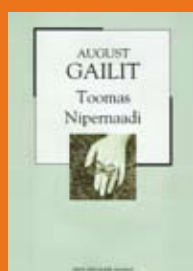


10 Books from Estonia



August Gailit

Karl Ristikivi

Jaan Kaplinski

Jaan Kross

Ene Mihkelson

Viivi Luik

Mati Unt

Tõnu Õnnepalu

Andrus Kivirähk

Mehis Heinsaar



No 1 Spring 2008

August Gailit



TOOMAS NIPERNAADI

Toomas Nipernaadi is widely regarded as August Gailit's most personal work of fiction. It is the story of a man who leaves town in early spring, at the time when the ice starts to melt, and sets off to wander around, from one village to the next. Wherever he turns up, adventures and trouble ensue. Nipernaadi works as a rafter and a pastor, drains swampland, becomes the master of a farm. He spins wondrous (fairy) tales to the village maidens who then all fall in love with him.

Toomas Nipernaadi is a phenomenon in Estonian culture. Its heyday was just after its publication. Reviews abounded and critics were unanimously enthusiastic. Despite universal praise, readers interpreted the book in quite different ways. For some, the joyful motto of the book served as a key to understanding the whole thing: A sailor came from Rasina, hey-ho, hey-ho. Others were taken with the more serious side of the novel. Nipernaadi's adventures were by no means infinite merrymaking, but rather slipped constantly into tragicomedy. Nipernaadi was one of the first works in Estonian literature that was translated into many languages.

The first was the German translation in 1931. The German critics' reaction was lively and extremely positive (the critics included Hermann Hesse and Hans Fallada). Such success understandably increased the novel's popularity at home even further and raised great hopes in the author: the Nobel prize and a Hollywood film.

Following Toomas Nipernaadi's wanderings through spring, summer and autumn, the reader perceives a mythical model of life in the novel: the sequence of seasons, repetition, the closed circle, the cycle of life. And in that circle is Toomas Nipernaadi – the eternal wanderer. What gives Nipernaadi the aura of a mythical character is his direct contact with nature. Nature is a significant component of the novel which, through Gailit's masterful descriptions, acquires the status of a character in its own right. Not by chance was the German edition entitled *Nippernaht und die Jahreszeiten*, stressing the importance of nature. The whole composition relies on the seasons.

Gailit was a romantic, and his attitude towards women was romantic too. He never ceased to worship all those girls and women to whom he gave life in his work. Women also play a significant role in *Toomas Nipernaadi*. The novel, consisting in fact of seven short stories, focuses on love affairs and amorous adventures. Nipernaadi's famous passionate monologues might well seem to the reader like masterly adaptations of the Song of Solomon.

Toomas Nipernaadi is an ode to love, symbol of love. At that level, there is no doubt as to Gailit's attitude to women. The novel's central idea is that of deeply perceived human love. This book was written by a man who loved life and people for whom love was sacred.

AUGUST GAILIT (1891–1960) was a writer of exuberant imagination, a late neo-romanticist, whose entire output focuses on the eternal opposition of beauty and ugliness. At the age of nineteen he published his first work *Kui päike loojub* (When the Sun Sets, 1910) and from then on, he lived the life of a writer for half a century. In 1944 he emigrated to Sweden where he also wrote his last oeuvre, the trilogy *Kas mäletad, mu arm?* (Do You Remember, Dearest? 1951–1959).

Publishing details

Toomas Nipernaadi

First published in 1928, pp. 253

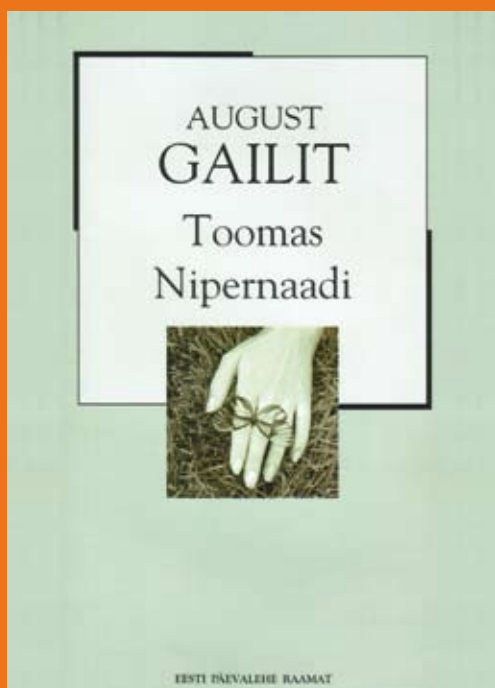
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

Czech: Smolík 1935. **Dutch:** Scheltema & Holkema [193-]. **Finnish:** WSOY 1955. **French:** Editions de la Sixaine, Tychone 1946. **German:** Propyläen-Verlag 1931. **Latvian:** Liesma 1994. **Lithuanian:** Vaga 1971. **Polish:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1988. **Russian**

Selected titles in translation

Leegitsev süda (Flaming Heart)

Finnish, Latvian, Swedish



Karl Ristikivi

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

Hingede öö (All Souls' Night) is a novel that may be understood – or misunderstood – on many levels. The narrator, who has spent seven years in exile, walks aimlessly in the streets of a strange town. Quite accidentally he enters a house he assumes to be a concert hall. A concert does actually take place, although there is something peculiar about the program. He makes the acquaintance of several individuals, some of whom seem to know him already; he attends a banquet, visits an art exhibit (consisting of only one picture), witnesses a wedding at which the bride gives birth, and ends up in the hall in which the master of the house lies in a coffin. Each individual encounter is realistic, but they are combined according to some perverse illogic; reality recedes into irreality, out of which there is no escape – as there is no escape from the weird house, where you may arrive on the top floor by going *down* the stairs, and where the same door may lead to different rooms in turn.

If the first half of the book shows some kinship to “Alice in Wonderland”, the godfather of the second half must surely have been Franz Kafka. The narrator happens to find himself somewhere resembling a frontier crossing point, then in a doctor’s waiting room, is seen by the doctor and then taken to court, where witnesses are being examined in front of a judge and two counsels – the narrator can never figure out which is the counsel for the defendant and which is the prosecutor. It very soon becomes clear, however, that the witnesses are really defendants, each of them being charged with one of the seven deadly sins. Although their innocence would be obvious in any world functioning according to normal logic, in the upside-down world of “All Souls' Night” they meekly accept their guilt – with the exception of one, who receives praise and commendation from the judge for a recitation of real crimes. The narrator finds that he is destined to be the seventh and final witness. He is accused of the double crime of having fled from communism out of pure selfishness and of *acedia* – the medieval crime of sloth and apathy. The court condemns him to go on living; he defies the court and walks out, finally finding his way to the exit, knowing at the same time that there is no escape from the doom of having to continue his life as an exile.

The story line does not do justice to the power of the book, which is derived mainly from the hypnotic intensity of its mood. The dead man’s house can be taken as an allegory: it could be the narrator himself – or any one of us – who is imprisoned in his own body, called to testify before the court of one’s own memories and conscience. There is no exit; the landscape of the soul is a dead man’s house, and Reason lies in state in its catafalque.

KARL RISTIKIVI (1912–1977) was a writer of historical novels, one of the most European authors of Estonian literature. Studied geography at Tartu University, later settled in Sweden in 1944. He became an acknowledged writer publishing the novel *Tuli ja raud* (Fire and Iron) in 1938. Together with the two following novels, which were still published in Estonia, these books make up his Tallinn Trilogy, where the connecting motif of all novels is *Inimese teekond* (Man’s Journey), depicted within the genre of psychological realism.

Publishing details

Hingede öö

First published in 1953, pp. 307

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

Selected titles in translation

Põlev lipp (L'étendard en flammes)

French



Jaan Kaplinski



THE SAME RIVER

Jaan Kaplinski is probably the best-known Estonian public intellectual and poet. He has taken part in two poetic revolutions: the first, in the 1960s, consisted in introducing modernist diction and oriental imagery into Estonian poetry. The ambition of his incantatory songs was to heal the cleft between the self and the world, private and public being. Despite (or rather thanks to) official suspicion, he achieved almost rock-star celebrity among his generation. In the early 1980s, in the second of the two revolutions, he renounced the shamanic claims of his poetry and took an “antipoetic” turn – purifying his language of literary tropes and concentrating on recording little, everyday epiphanies. In recent decades he has switched to prose, writing essays, travelogues, memoirs, and “theo-fiction” in the manner of British philosopher and science fiction writer Olaf Stapledon.

Seesama jõgi (The Same River, 2007), which took almost twelve years to write, is Kaplinski’s first proper novel. This semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, set in the early 1960s, narrates the efforts of Kaplinski’s youthful *alter ego* to lose his innocence and attain sexual and mystical knowledge. The twenty-year-old protagonist finds an unofficial teacher in a retired theologian and poet, who is out of favour with the communist authorities. After a summer spent in intellectual and erotic soul-searching, the sexual and political intrigues finally overlap, leading to a quasi-solution. KGB and university apparatchiks take a close interest in the teacher-disciple relation of the two poets. The student outgrows his mentor, who despite accusing the human race of puerility, turns out to be a big and jealous child himself. This, in brief outline, is the novel’s plot, in which realist descriptions alternate with mystical epiphanies, psychological probings, and reflections on culture, with precisely rendered shots of the social climate of the period, big emotions with subtle ironies. These “emotions recollected in tranquility” and tongue-in-cheek observations of his former naive self, together with unpretentious, nimble, and occasionally self-mocking style, make the novel an unqualified success.

JAAN KAPLINSKI (b. 1941) is a European humanist very much aware of Eastern cultures. He is the most famous, and most translated, Estonian writer living today. His mother was Estonian; his Polish father disappeared in the Gulag archipelago during the war. Kaplinski studied linguistics at Tartu University and wrote his first romantic poems as a schoolboy. He has worked as a researcher in linguistics, a sociologist, an ecologist and has translated poetry from French, English, Spanish, Chinese and Swedish into Estonian. He has been among the nominees for the Nobel Prize for Literature and awarded several national and international prizes. His novel *Silm. Hektor* (The Eye. Hector) got the highest annual award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2000. His long confessional essay in a novel form called *Isale* (To My Father, 2003), is actually a private letter offered to the public to be read and evaluated.

Publishing details

Seesama jõgi

Vagabund, 2007, pp. 322

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

Swedish: Natur och Kultur 2008

Selected titles in translation

Silm. Hektor (The Eye. Hector)

Hungarian, Swedish

Jää ja Titanic (Ice and the Titanic)

Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Swedish



TREADING AIR

Paigallend (Treading Air) is the 13th novel of the grand old man of Estonian prose Jaan Kross, where he tells the story of his generation. The same subject – an unhealed wound in recent Estonian history – has been present in the majority of Kross's short stories and in such novels as "The Wikman Boys", "Mesmer's Ring", "Excavations". The title of the novel – "Treading Air" – is a striking metaphor.

The story of Ullo Paerand is partly given as a first-person narrative, from the main character's viewpoint, and partly as the recollections of his schoolmate Jaak Sirkel, a character of several Kross's previous novels. The novel opens with Ullo's reminiscences of a childhood trip to Germany in the 1920s and ends with his death, or more strictly, with his vision of meeting his aged father, who had fled from his creditors to the West with his lover. The frivolous father deserted his family, just as the Western world was building a wall of silence and superciliousness between itself and Eastern Europe, blaming history.

Ullo is the exceptionally talented only son of a wealthy father, who preserves the travel memories of his happy childhood in his extraordinary memory. All the more so, as he no longer receives any royal presents comparable to this trip from life. His father deserts his family and his luxurious childhood is followed by lean years. With his mother Ullo fights for a better future, in spite of small humiliations and an occasionally empty stomach he is able to get a secondary education in one of Tallinn's best grammar schools. He has a rapid career, rising, due to his excellent memory and enterprising spirit, to an important position in the Prime Minister's Office. Clearly discernible portraits of several historical characters can be found in the book. But fate lets Ullo down the second time round. The Soviet and German occupations do not leave him any chance of embarking on an honest career. Ullo works with nationalists for the restoration of the Estonian Republic, he refuses a favourable chance of escaping to the West offered by a representative of the Vatican. He lives his remaining life – some forty years – in inner emigration, doing menial work, making suitcases in a factory. The fate of a wingless bird is the price he has to pay for not making compromises, this is the resistance of the prisoner. The language of the novel is brilliant, the composition is skilful and the symbols are clearly understandable.

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

Publishing details

Paigallend. Ullo Paeranna romaan

Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2002, pp. 386, first published in 1998

Rights' contact: Ilvi Live at estlit@estlit.ee

English: The Harvill Press 2003, **Finnish:** WSOY 1999, **French:** Noir sur Blanc 2006, **Latvian:** Atena 2002,

Lithuanian: Petro ofsetas 2003, **Russian:** KPD 2000, **Swedish:** Natur och Kultur 2007

Selected titles in translation

Kolme katku vahel (Between Three Plagues)

Finnish, German, Russian

Keisri hull (The Zar's Madman)

Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German,

Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish,

Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish

Professor Martensi ärasõit (Dr Martens'

Departure)

Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian,

Russian, Spanish, Swedish

Vastutuulelaev (Sailing Against the Wind)

Finnish, French, Swedish

Jaan Kross



Ene Mihkelson



PLAGUE GRAVE

The latest novel by Ene Mihkelson, *Katkuhaud* (Plague Grave), is a deeply disturbing, saturnine book. The elusive and troubled narrator of *Katkuhaud* has been raised by her aunt after her parents went into hiding in 1949 to escape deportation to Siberia as kulaks – a fate met by at least 50 000 Estonians under Stalinism. In 1953, her father was killed by the NKVD (Stalin's security police), two years later her mother “legalized” herself, in other words, came out of hiding. The narrator tries to discover the exact circumstances of her father's death and what role his fellow forest brethren (or “bandits” in Soviet parlance), his wife, and her sister played in it. Who betrayed whom? Were the forest brethren so deeply infiltrated by the NKVD to make them mere pawns in bigger intelligence games, involving even the British MI6?

Since the restoration of the Estonian Republic, the ordeals of the forest brethren have been officially depicted as unequivocally heroic acts of resistance. Mihkelson's novels reveal a more complicated story. The line demarcating collaboration from resistance, and resistance from terrorism, were often very fine indeed. A “Plague grave”, a grave for the victims of pestilence whose exhumation can start a new epidemic, serves as a metaphor for buried memories of the mid-twentieth century. The novel is composed as a series of encounters between the narrator and her aunt, who tries to confess her role as a NKVD informer but is not quite able to bring herself to do so. Mihkelson's novel overturns the cheap stereotypes of trauma narration such as redemption through commemoration. It shows quite unambiguously that, in cases like hers, truth does not make you free. But neither, of course, does denial. Mihkelson's personally experienced story touches something very sensitive and significant in today's collective life, in which memories and commemoration have creepingly usurped the place once occupied by utopias and designs for the future.

ENE MIHKELSON (b. 1944) studied Estonian literature at Tartu University and has since then worked principally as a freelance writer. As an analyst of the tragic episode in Estonian history involving the Forest Brethren, the anti-Soviet guerrilla movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and herself daughter of such a Forest Brother, she was not regarded as an acceptable writer in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. She has published ten collections of poetry and six novels. Her latest novels *Ahasveeruse uni* (The Dream of Ahasuerus, 2001) and *Katkuhaud* (Plague Grave, 2007) are among the greatest Estonian novels of the post-1990s.

Publishing details

Katkuhaud

Varrak, 2007, pp. 320

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee



THE SEVENTH SPRING OF PEACE

During the rule of Soviet censorship the publication of *Seitsmes rahukevad* (The Seventh Spring of Peace, 1985) seemed nothing short of a miracle, along with its publishing in Finnish next year. This was but the beginning of the remarkable success of Luik's novels in Europe. Joel Sang compares the novel with the paradigmatic childhood novel of Estonian literature, Friedebert Tuglas's *Väike Illimar* (Little Illimar, 1937) (another tempting parallel would also be Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, 1977). Both are autobiographical and observe the world through the eyes of a lonely 5-6-year-old country child, conveyed by an adult narrator, but the milieu could not be more different. Unlike Illimar's manor house idyll, the world of Luik's child means a parochial village during the Stalinist collective farm hysteria, empty farms of those deported and guerrillas hiding in the forests: life in the midst of poverty, irrational evil and fear as a contrast to the appealing and dashing Soviet utopias. Tuglas wrote that "I would like to be little Illimar again", whereas a "Soviet" writer claims to be "wholeheartedly happy that my childhood is behind me ...". Luik says: "I chose this child not because I wanted to describe myself and my childhood, but because she was most suitable in depicting that era.The pathos, naivety and optimism of the time – I think the child has all that in her."

Seitsmes rahukevad is a highly poetic, figuratively braced text with dozens of budding poems inside; a kind of prose poem. The style is confessional, reflections of the past, present and future intermingle. The profusion of associations hides a simple story line provided with a palette of semi-animistic intuitions of an imaginative young girl. She wishes to act like a radio battery that captures all the voices fluttering in the air. The girl makes no distinction between friends and foes, victims and aggressors, she sees everything around her as a fascinating bustle which she eagerly tries to communicate with. The linguistic universe of text is polyphonic and magic: the standard language of internal speech of the fictional narrator alternates with the dialogical colloquial and dialectal speech, the communist newspeak with national style layers from folksy ballads and church songs or from bourgeois reading material to allusions of high poetry. The work contains a peculiarly humorous sadistic pleasure, a special irony towards its character. The environment, often not understood by her at all, becomes perceptible in the consciousness of an adult reader – the fading tang of history comes alive again.

VIIVI LUIK (b. 1946), poet and a prosewriter, freelance 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

Seitsmes rahukevad

Tänapäev, 2000, pp. 276

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

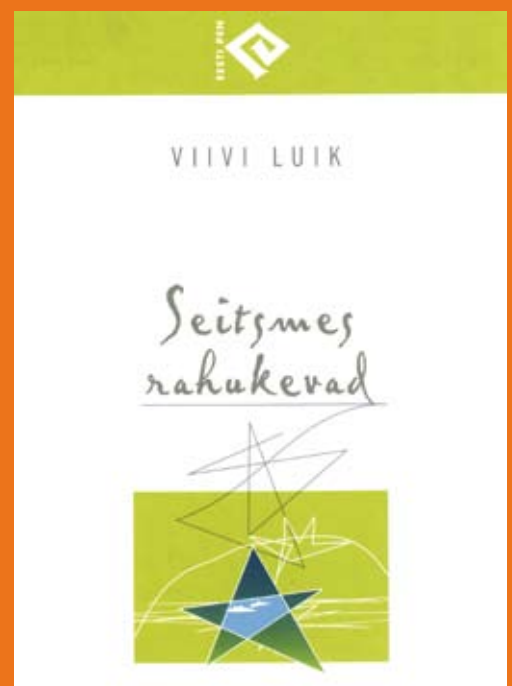
Finnish: Tammi 1986, **French:** Éditions Christian Bourgois 1992, **German:** Rowohlt Verlag 1991, **Latvian:** Preses Nams 1995, **Norwegian:** Samlaget 1988, **Spanish:** Seix Barral 1993, **Swedish:** Fripress: Legenda 1990

Selected titles in translation

Ajaloo ilu (The Beauty of History)

Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Norwegian, Russian, Swedish

Viivi Luik



Mati Unt



AUTUMN BALL

Mati Unt was a writer perfectly tuned to the smallest vibrations of *Zeitgeist*. He had a special genius for capturing the latent myths and archetypes circulating in the collective unconscious of his time. *Sügisball: stseenid linnaelust* (Autumn Ball: Scenes of City Life, 1979, written in 1977) is probably his greatest achievement as a novelist.

The novel observes the life of six characters during one autumn in the late 1970s in a Soviet-style new residential area Mustamäe, Tallinn. The characters are a lyric poet Eero, concerned with the lack of audience; a single mother Laura, obsessed with a Western TV soap; her son Peeter sensitively observing his environment; misanthropic hair-dresser August, technocratic architect Maurer, and restaurant porter Theo, a macho-man with esoteric interests.

Although they live in the same neighbourhood, their life-trajectories intersect only by chance. Mustamäe, the modernist apartment district of Tallinn, emerges as the seventh main character of the novel. The book is remarkable for its vivid style combining sensitively observed details of the late Soviet everyday life with (mock)erudition, urban folklore and apocalyptic intimations. The tone oscillates between understated humour and suffocating gloom. The modernist technological optimism of the 1960s is giving way to an ominous sense of alienation and doom. The slightly paranoid atmosphere is reminiscent of Don DeLillo's early work.

The Brezhnevist social background of *Sügisball* is actually the same as the one described in Sergei Dovlatov's book "The Compromise". Although both works are set in Tallinn in the late 1970s, the artistic temperaments of Unt and Dovlatov cannot be more different. Living as a Russian journalist in Soviet Estonia, Dovlatov captured the cynicism, emptiness, irony, isolation, careerism, and dissonance of late Soviet communism. Mati Unt, although an ironist too, was never directly interested in satire and social critique and his work had to pass the Soviet censorship anyway. Hence the rich symbolist texture of his novel, full of allusions, omens, signs and gossip, although emptiness and isolation are also Unt's topics.

In 2007 Veiko Õunapuu directed an award-winning art house film "Sügisball" based on Mati Unt's novel. The film has transferred the setting to a thirty years later period and to another Tallinn neighbourhood, altered considerably the plot and the set of characters. But the combination of humour, apocalyptic gloom and quotidian anxiety of Mati Unt's novel has been wonderfully preserved.

MATI UNT (1944–2005) was an unconventional prose writer, playwright, literary critic and producer. He started his activity in the early 1960s as a "wunderkind". His secondary school graduation essay developed into a novel *Hüvasti, kollane kass* (Goodbye, Yellow Cat, 1963) that immediately made him famous. The novel was followed by numerous short stories, shorter novels and plays: prose collections *Kuu nagu kustuv päike* (The Moon Like the Outgoing Sun 1971), *Mattias ja Kristiina* (Mattias and Kristiina, 1974), *Must mootorrattur* (The Black Motorcyclist, 1976). His novel *Sügisball* (Autumn Ball, 1979) made its author known internationally and has been screened with great success. His collection of short stories and plays *Räägivad ja vaikivad* (Speaking and Being Silent) was published in 1986, followed by his three novels *Öös on asju* (There are Things in the Night, 1990), *Doonori meelespea* (Diary of a Blood Donor, 1990) and *Brecht ilmub öösel* (Brecht Appears at Night, 1997).

Publishing details

Sügisball: stseenid linnaelust

Eesti Raamat, 1979, pp. 184

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

English: Tallinn 1985. **Finnish:** Gummerus 1980.

German: Aufbau-Verlag 1987. **Norwegian:** Det

Norske Samlaget, 1987. **Slovakian:** Smena 1988.

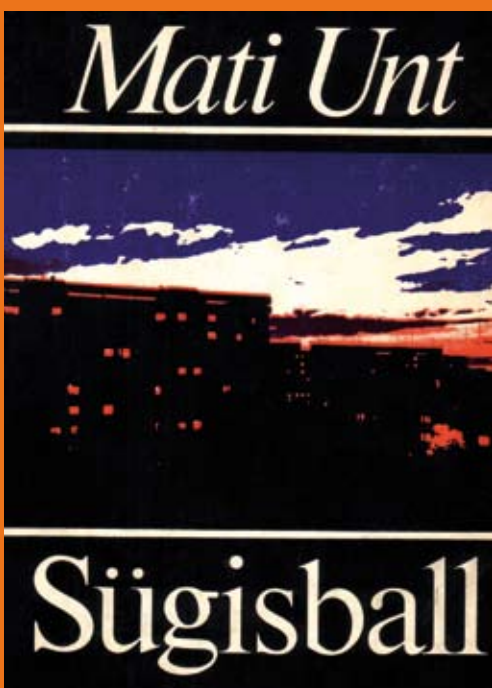
Swedish: Fripress Bokförlag 1983

Selected titles in translation

Doonori meelespea (Diary of a Blood Donor)
Finnish, English

Öös on asju (There are Things in the Night)
English

Brecht ilmub öösel (Brecht Appears at Night)
English



FLANDERS DIARY

In the middle of the 1990s, Tõnu Õnnepalu/Emil Tode became one of the most translated Estonian writers with the publication of his novels *Piiririik* (Border State) and *Hind* (Price). In his most recent prose works he has practiced the genre of the essayistic diary. *Flandria päevik* (Flanders Diary) was written over a period of only 40 days in fall 2007 at the Villa Hellebosch writers' residence near Brussels. It is a book about being away from home, about exile, albeit not in a political sense, as it is for a Kurdish writer living in the same residence. Rather, Õnnepalu uses the term exile in the sense of being estranged from the everyday, progress-oriented world. In another respect *Flanders Diary* is a book about time, where being apart provides space and time for deepened concentration on history through reading and meditation. As the author himself has stated in an interview, what mattered most to the writing of the book was a quest for understanding and reflection on the world; genre and the author's self-presentation are of secondary importance. „Being a writer is a modern form of vanity that is already going out of style,” says Õnnepalu, at the same time admitting that though he tries to escape the coils of the 'aesthetic word', he does not prove successful. For this very reason, the outcome of his attempt, *Flanders Diary* is personal, sincere, and refreshing.

Õnnepalu sets an utopian way of life based on cyclical and traditional models and oral memory against the contemporary explosion of information and its accompanying noise pollution. His authorial image resembles that of a sun-worshipper in a culture closer to nature, or a monk in a medieval cloister. The second level of meaning that the diary weaves works to intensify this image. Õnnepalu imagines himself a companion or double in the form of a monk from the same region of Estonia where Õnnepalu is actually from, as the son of an elder of the ancient Estonians; there were many such taken as hostages to the monasteries in Europe by the 13th century crusaders in the Baltic region. In the diary, this imaginary aged monk's biography is rendered through impressionistic memory images. This level of the text is separable from that of the diary, though the landscapes and impressions melt together. This is a 'time capsule', a place outside time and history, where the author meets his creation. It is not an attempt to reconstruct what once was, but a thinking game, the goal of which is to perceive and represent the same way of being.

Õnnepalu's diary is characterized by distanciation, renunciation of the world and participation in it in the manner approaching Stoic apatheia or Buddhist detachment. Though the author stands at the centre of the world, watching it with close concentration, he nevertheless allows everything to flow past or through him. This immediacy of mode of representation, the maturity of the reflections and their intellectual charge make *Flanders Diary* a consummate achievement of Estonian literature in the year 2007.

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 freelance 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 “Flanders Diary” (2007) he published a novel under the name of Anton Nigov, *Harjutused* (Exercises, 2002).

Publishing details

Flandria päevik

Varrak. 2007. pp. 338

Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

Selected titles in translation

Hind (Price)

Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish

Piiririik (Border State)

Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish

Tõnu Õnnepalu



SNATCHER OF OLD MEN

Mehis Heinsaar

Mehis Heinsaar attracted attention in Estonia with his earliest short stories, and his first book, *Vanameeste näppaja* (Snatcher of Old Men), received the prestigious Betti Alver award. The book consists of sixteen short stories divided into three cycles. The author's unmistakable skill unites the exotic and local slum romanticism with traditions of world literature. It abounds in biological, spatial, and temporal mutations, mixed with Soviet kolkhoz life and weird characters. There is, for instance, a strange creature called Gerko living in a maze field, the latter being a crop cultivated on Moscow's orders despite utterly unsuitable climatic conditions. Such true-life Soviet absurdities, like the campaign to make Siberian rivers to run in the opposite direction, greatly enrich Heinsaar's imagination and form the foundation of his work. The writer himself emphasizes the friction between the worlds of the everyday and that of myths: their convergences are surprising and novel, waking the reader from either real or magical sleep. The effect is the more powerful as the reader cannot immediately understand into which of the two worlds he has been aroused.

Heinsaar notices details but does not heap them; his language is scant and his stories simple and "ordinary", at least at first sight. They become unusual by absurd twists and turns, which are rendered in a casual, everyday manner, as if fairy tales and witchcraft were natural parts of our lives. Heinsaar's stories could be described as magic realism: "How Death Came to Mirabel" for example, could easily be the title of a Garcia Marquez short story. Although Heinsaar often operates in a clearly Estonian key, many of these stories could happen anywhere and have obviously been inspired by world literature. The cat dictating stories is probably related to E.T.A. Hoffmann's cat Murri; some reviewers have cited influences in the Old Testament, Bulgakov, and especially surrealism. The last story, "Encounter in Time", is a depressing hallucinatory piece about a stinking tramp who rapes a girl on a park bench, mistaking her for the love of his youth. This, too, is a metamorphosis, mutation in time, and reference to *Lolita*. The story even has a moral side to it, although Heinsaar's work should be relished in the spirit in which it was written – with soaring imagination and inventiveness.

MEHIS HEINSAAR (b. 1973) is one of the rising stars of new Estonian literature. Originally aspiring to become a long-distance runner, he soon moved on to writing short stories for which he has already received several prestigious awards. In addition to a novel *Artur Sandmani lugu* (Arthur Sandman's Story, 2005) he has published three collections of short stories *Vanameeste näppaja* (Snatcher of Old Men, 2001), *Härri Pauli kroonikad* (The Chronicles of Mr Paul, 2001) and *Rändaja õnn* (The Wandering Bliss, 2007). Heinsaar is a suburban bohemian, a self-ironic "traveller in rooms"; his imaginative stories can be regarded as gems of intellectually oriented prose with plenty of room for play.

Publishing details

Vanameeste näppaja

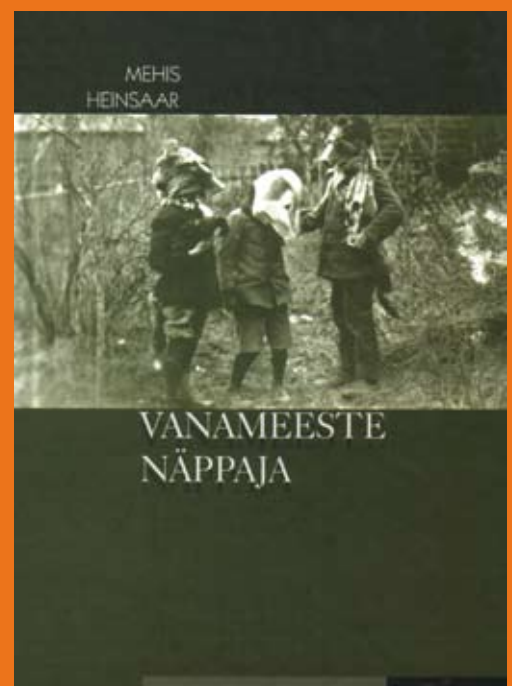
Tuum. 2001. pp. 155

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Selected titles in translation

Härri Pauli kroonikad (The Chronicles of Mr Paul)

Finnish, Hungarian



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.

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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).

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PHOTOS by Estonian Literary Museum, Alexandra Cool, Egert Kamenik, Peeter Langovits, Ove Maidla, Michael Normann

DESIGNED by Kristel Sibul

PRINTED by Pakett Printing House

ISSN 1736-6895

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