

Books from ESTONIA

DAVID VSEVIOV

MART SANDER

URMAS VADI

MUDLUM

MAIT VAIK

PAAVO MATSIN

ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK

EIA UUS

MARTIN ALGUS

ANDREI IVANOV

JOONAS SILDRE

VALDUR MIKITA



Estonian Literature Centre

The Estonian Literature Centre (ELIC) exists to generate interest in Estonian literature abroad. As well as being closely involved with translators, writers and publishers, ELIC also works in close partnership with book fairs and literary events, embassies, cultural and academic institutes. ELIC organizes translation seminars and publishers' fellowships, and coordinates the Translator-in-residence program in Estonia. ELIC has created a unique English language web site on Estonian writers and translators of Estonian literature and maintains a developing database of translations of Estonian literature. The web site and database can be accessed at:
www.estlit.ee

Translation Grants

Foreign publishers and translators can apply for translation and publication support from the TRADUCTA Program. There is a special funding Norsk Pengepung designated for translations into the Scandinavian languages. Applications can be submitted four times a year, on 20 February, 20 May, 20 August, and 20 November to the Cultural Endowment of Estonia at:
www.kulka.ee/programmes/traducta

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DAVID VSEVIOV

Autobiography: The First Two Weeks

MART SANDER

Gentlemen's Club. The War of Women

URMAS VADI

The Ballet Master

MUDLUM

Polish Boys

MAIT VAIK

Sad Little Autumn

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The Horned Blue Beast

At the End of the World. Scenes from the Lives of

Good People

EIA UUS

What It Feels Like for a Girl

MARTIN ALGUS

Something Real

ANDREI IVANOV

The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery

JOONAS SILDRE

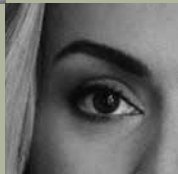
Between Two Sounds. The story behind the music of

Arvo Pärt

VALDUR MIKITA

The Linguistic Forest

The Art of Listening to Chanterelles





DAVID VSEVIOV (b. 1949) is an Estonian historian and a professor of art history and visual culture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. He has been named Estonian Opinion Leader of the Year, and has received the European Parliament's 2016 European Citizen's Prize and the National Culture Award of the Republic of Estonia. For over 20 years, he has run the popular Estonian Public Broadcasting radio program *Müstiline Venemaa* (Mysterious Russia), on which he shares fascinating interpretations of Russian history.

Although Vseviov has written a wealth of books and articles of historical non-fiction, *Autobiography: The First Two Weeks* is his debut in fiction. The author calls himself a "time traveler and elucidator of history", which is a quality that merrily dominates his debut.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Elulugu. Kaks esimest nädalat

Published by Tuum, 2019, 232 pp.

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

TRANSLATIONS

English sample available

DAVID VSEVIOV

Autobiography: The First Two Weeks

Novel

One morning, the midwife Maria Ivanovna Sidorkina wakes up to her downstairs neighbor's cries that Maria's cat Barsik has killed a man. After an investigation by the Soviet *militsiya*, the grotesque morning (which lacked any human victim, regardless) transitions smoothly into a similarly absurd birthday party for Maria's mother that is attended by terrible guests, and during which the woman's husband Vassily makes a joke that falls horribly flat. To mitigate his wife's displeasure, Vassily promises to start studying Estonian using the local newspapers. Thus, a Stalinist periodical with a peculiar attitude towards reality becomes their Estonian textbook.

In 1944, the Soviet Union occupied Estonia for a second time in fewer than five years. Vseviov, an historian, depicts the ways enigmatic Russia strengthened its foothold in the country and how life profoundly transformed. Complemented by extensive photographic illustrations, the novel paints a picture of people's everyday lives in Tallinn over the course of two spring weeks in 1949, shortly after the end of World War II. Newspaper-reading and the reporting of current affairs in a way loyal to the regime are central topics throughout the book.

The narrator of *Autobiography* is a precocious newborn who comments on the situation from his own unusual perspective. One major setting in the novel is the multinational hospital maternity ward, which brings together the stories of women born all across the Soviet Union who have relocated to Estonia. In the second week, the infant moves home to a room in a communal apartment in the city center, where the mother receives visitors with stories that are just as fascinating. The protagonist is born into a mixed Estonian- and Russian-Jewish family; the languages spoken at home also include German and French. This crossroads of cultures and conflicts doesn't necessarily entail collisions alone, but also queer cultural intertwining and interpretations.

The humorous parallel reality conjured up by the newspaper articles (which an alarming number of the Soviet-minded characters do not doubt in the very least) highlights, in fact, the grotesque that could be found in those terrifying years – an era of genuine fear. The reality of Stalinism in Soviet Estonia is woven into the author's historically accurate yet exaggerated characters. Reviewers have called Vseviov's *Autobiography* an historically and politically comedic work of reference.

At the same time, it is a high-spirited parody of autobiographies. The tiny narrator discovers parallels with events that will occur later in life, relating episodes with roots that extend (sometimes mockingly, other times with dire seriousness) into these first two weeks. The nature of compulsory Soviet military service, for example, is revealed all in its unadulterated absurdity. *Autobiography: The First Two Weeks* stylistically resembles Ilf and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs*.

Text by Elle-Mari Talivee

MART SANDER

Gentlemen's Club. The War of Women

Novel

Gentlemen's Club. The War of Women is the first volume of a trilogy. The second volume was published in 2016, and the third in 2019. The work constitutes a classical "history from below". It depicts the dramatic political upheavals of 1939 and 1940 from the perspective of the occupants of a small "private gentlemen's club" in Tallinn; i.e. a brothel.

Following the chronological developments, the author describes how the changes are experienced by the women working and residing in the house. As the characters are not naive and possess own political opinions, this leads to quarrels, long dinner discussions, and friction between the six or seven prostitutes. Thus, the brothel stands as a symbol for Estonian society as a whole: just as the Madame of the house is forced to maneuver to maintain her institution, so did Estonian politicians have to take cautious steps in 1939–1940. This situation is explicitly worded on page 242: 'Now, the entire Estonian nation had to learn to prostitute itself.'

The plot begins with the acquisition of a new house: a villa formerly owned by a German family that resettled to the Third Reich in the autumn of 1939. All of the brothel's affairs are arranged by a high-ranking official in the Estonian Ministry of War (known as the Estonian Ministry of Defense until 1937): a certain Mr. Metsla, who is semi-romantically involved with the Madame, and protectively guards the women's business and well-being. At the same time, he is involved in a wide spectrum of espionage, which is revealed in small, suspenseful portions.

At the very beginning of the story, on one of the first evenings in the new house, Mr. Metsla shows up in the company of Soviet officers: troops to be stationed in the newly-established Soviet military bases in Estonia. The country's troubled history during those years is thus recounted rather originally, promising even more suspense in the coming volumes, which will include the Nazi occupation of Estonia from 1941–1944. Many historical details (the outbreak of the Finnish Winter War; the shooting down of a Finnish passenger plane en route from Tallinn to Helsinki on June 14, 1940, which resulted in nine casualties, including two French diplomats and, presumably, one of the brothel workers; etc.) are woven elegantly into the plot.

The descriptions of these events are vivid, with lively dialogues and light humor. The author skillfully and convincingly crafts a wide range of viewpoints and political attitudes of the time. It is history taken from a different perspective – one that is refreshing and, at the same time, poignant, as can be expected given Estonia's fate in those years.

Text by Cornelius Hasselblatt



MART SANDER (b. 1967) is a multifaceted artist who has been publishing novels since 1994. His writing has also included songs, librettos, and criticism for film and theater.

His intriguing novel depicting recent Estonian history, *Gentlemen's Club. The War of Women*, was published in three parts from 2015–2019, and was adapted into a popular television series.

Sander loves the limelight: among other things, he is the director and founder of the vaudeville theater Bel-Étage and is the soloist and leader of its swing orchestra, The Swing Swindlers.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Litsid. Naiste sõda

Published by Ajakirjade Kirjastus, 2015,

279 pp.

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

TRANSLATIONS

English and German sample available



URMASVADI (b. 1977) is working as a radio journalist, and is a writer, playwright and producer. His plays have been repeatedly awarded. Vadi has written film scripts and short stories (winning the prestigious Friedebert Tuglas short story award in 2011 and 2017). His second novel *Tagasi Eestisse* (Back to Estonia, 2012) was mentioned as one of the important novels of the year.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Balletmeister

Published by Kultuurileht, 2019, 193 pp.

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

AWARDS

Viru County Literary Award 2020

TRANSLATIONS

German sample available

URMAS VADI

The Ballet Master

Novel

Vadi's fantasy novel weaves a thrilling version of tumultuous years in Estonian history. When the Soviet Union occupied the Republic of Estonia in 1940, authorities deported the Estonian president Konstantin Päts and his family to Russia. When war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941, he was arrested and imprisoned in various mental hospitals until his death in 1956. In Vadi's novel, four men who have assumed false identities and are masquerading as a folk-dance troupe set out to free the president from the Kazan Asylum. Alas, as their journey commences, they don't even know how to dance. Stitched into their folk costumes are said to be the secret codes the president needs to access his assets. One of the briefcases they were given contains a book on folk dancing. Needless to say, not all goes according to plan.

Vadi originally wrote the story as a play that was staged in 2009, and later reworked it as a film script. *The Ballet Master* is indeed cinematically dynamic and theatrically multilayered, reminiscent of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. The grotesque comedy partly centers around the president, who was a great historical figure, and otherwise follows the rescue squad made up of a firefighter and three potters: four entirely ordinary men who are meant to alter the course of history. The imposters board a train to Moscow from Tallinn and are forced to perform an improvised dance repertoire that very same evening in the dining car. The comical-yet-calculated creativity and mesmerizing quality of the men's movements is detailed from their very first leaps – be it hopping on one foot with their arms crossed and trying to make the others lose their balance while “La Marseillaise” is played, or a dance called “Walk When the Devil's on Your Heels”, which was they learned from a Moscow street urchin named Seryozha to help them survive in war or a metropolis.

Peppered with ample references to Russian literary classics and fairy tales, the four men's adventure through Russia is akin to an unpredictable Russian anecdote. *The Ballet Master's* bizarre cast of semi-folkloric characters is colorful, including humans and animals alike. That said, deeper undertones are not absent at any point in the story. The characters' fates, romances that flourish along the way, and betrayal that is committed are written with witty and concerned warmth from start to finish. Although they do not succeed in freeing the president, the magical tragicomedy (or black comedy) still has a happy ending in store for the dance troupe.

Text by Elle-Mari Talivee

MUDLUM

Polish Boys

Novel

Polish Boys is a story of young bohemian-intellectuals who have settled in old dilapidated buildings and who follow their ideals. The novel is located in socialist Poland but space and time are irrelevant and can be seen as an allegory. *Polish Boys* is about the confidence of youth and about aspirations for beauty and truth, how high expectations meet reality, how some people bend and deviate and some don't. Adam, Sulisław, Teofilis and Jerzy grow up together and become influential figures in Warsaw's art and literary circles. They set up the radical cultural newspaper *Płaszcz* and try to transform the society surrounding them. Their radicalism is challenged and not least by the convenient choices offered by the establishment. The same choices are present in their private lives: the unpredictability of free love or the security of a family. *Polish Boys* is a Bildungsroman for the whole generation inspired by the cultural group ZA/UM in Estonia. The author, who was a member of the group, writes from her personal experience with warmth and compassion, which makes the novel's tonality both universal and human.

Text by Tiit Aleksejev

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Poola poisid
Published by Strata, 2019, 400 pp.
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

AWARDS

European Union Prize for Literature 2020
Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Prose 2020

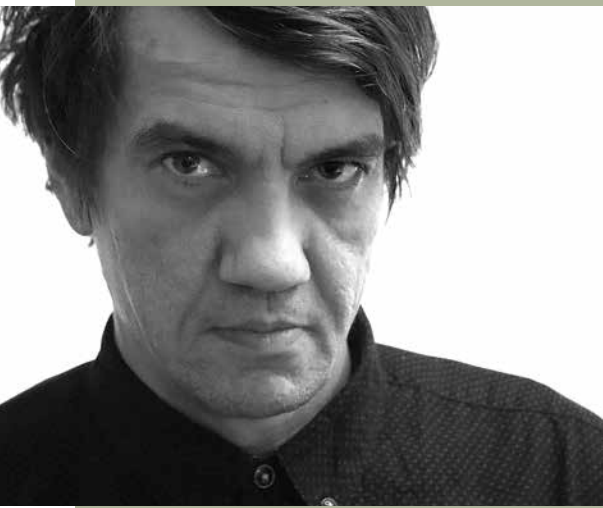
TRANSLATIONS

English sample available



The writer and literary critic MADE LUIGA (b. 1966), who writes under the pseudonym MUDLUM, began to publish her creative output through her involvement with the literary group ZA/UM and its culture and society blog. Her mature, developed debut story collection *Tõsine inimene* (A Serious Person, 2014) earned the instant attention of critics, and was also nominated for the Estonian annual literary prize. In 2017 she was awarded the prestigious Friedebert Tuglas Short Story Award. Mudlum's first novel *Poola poisid* (Polish Boys, 2019) won Estonia's highest annual prose award and the 2020 European Union Prize for Literature.





Since 1989, the writer and musician MAIT VAIK (b. 1969) has played bass guitar in well-known alternative rock bands. His debut book *Kõigil on alati õigus* (Everyone Is Always Right, 2012) was a collection of poetry and lyrics.

Moving from song lyrics to prose brought the author almost instant success. The short story collection, reminiscent of a novella, *Juss ja vennad* (Yuss and Brothers, 2013) established Vaik, garnering a high commendation for a short story in 2015 – the Friedebert Tuglas Short Story Award. A year later, he was recognized for his new short story collection *Meeleparanduseta* (Unrepentant), with Estonia's highest prose award, conveyed by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. Vaik's first novel *Kurvake sügis* (Sad Little Autumn, 2018) was nominated for the European Union Prize for Literature in 2020.



MAIT VAIK

Sad Little Autumn

Novel

Mait Vaik, who in addition to being a celebrated musician and the author of countless songs has stood out for his short prose, has written a curiously captivating book with *Sad Little Autumn*. The work is meticulously accurate (including his expert descriptions of various states of intoxication and the hangovers which follow) and conjures images of apathetic, angst-provoking emptiness. The author tasked himself with conveying sharply distressing emotions such as despair, hopelessness, ineluctability, and resignation. His male characters – fathers and sons; two middle-aged and two young – all find themselves in rather unenviable situations. One father is diagnosed with cancer; the other has been wading through the mires of alcoholism for years and finally reaches a point where he has given up seeking the way out. One son is a “functioning addict”; the other has been pushed into violent obsession by an ill-fated romance.

As such, *Sad Little Autumn* presents us with a brilliantly written quagmire; one both mental and physical. It is accompanied by the bleakness of dense Soviet apartment blocks (familiar from Mati Unt's Estonian literary classic, *The Autumn Ball*) and the removed carelessness of superficially cozier new housing estates. Vaik paints these environments in a seemingly casual but still precise and enjoyable style, just as he does the weather – mostly gray Estonian autumn days in which daylight is in steady decline.

The men go about their depressing lives with defeated thoughts crowding their heads. Whenever they do communicate – to women, let's say – then their attitudes are by and large irritable, almost or entirely unwilling to let conversation lead to a stillborn solution. Vaik's purposeful cacophony of viewpoints requires the reader to stay on their toes if they want to keep track of whose head the author has jumped into now and whose story is being told. Nevertheless, as the author himself declares at the end, there is still happiness to be found in these characters penned by Estonia's Houellebecq – or at least they do earn unexpected redemption in this life.

Text by Peeter Helme

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Kurvake sügis

Published by Puiestee, 2018, 302 pp.

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

AWARDS

Nominated for the EU Prize for Literature in 2020

TRANSLATIONS

English sample available

PAAVO MATSIN

Congo Tango

Novel

Magical realism, slipstream, science fiction, alchemic literature – *Congo Tango*, Paavo Matsin's fifth and thickest novel to date, has earned those epithets and many more. On the one hand, the plot is simple: the Tower of London's ravens disappear and the search for them stirs up deep wells of trouble. On the other hand, *Congo Tango* is composed of numerous layers and secondary plots which whisk the reader away to Cairo, London, Prague, Budapest, and Brussels.

The novel tells of an old Europe – one that tends to be forgotten. In it, we encounter individuals, objects, patterns of behavior, and attitudes which, if they have not petered out of existence already, have become highly eccentric. Obviously, this is deliberate. Fine hats and the fine differences between them in central London, old Jewish men debating the nature of God in a Prague café, and a composer's apartment museum in that same city which is open for only a few hours on Tuesdays and has walls painted almost entirely blue are just a few examples of Matsin's host of European oddities. Once he adds Brussels' Congolese community and the La Sape subculture (along with the music of Papa Wemba) which ties its members to their motherland, the cocktail is exquisite. The reader realizes that indeed, what Matsin is doing beneath the cloak of a quest for lost ravens and the activities of a bloodthirsty angel who has gone astray is something much greater. It concerns Europe as a whole. Matsin demonstrates that as Europeans, we are often blinded by the allure of distant cultures while failing to notice the exoticism of our own – be it alchemy (one of the author's favorite subjects) or simply the thick, interwoven blanket of culture that binds the whole continent together. In addition, Matsin questions the tenacity of the connections between Western and Eastern Europe.

Every loose end is tied up neatly by the end of the novel – storylines that meanwhile unraveled are resolved, and the reader is left feeling quite mellow. Europe may be old and dusty, but the treasures that collected over the course of centuries still rest beneath that layer of grime. All it takes is a single blow for them to sparkle again.

Text by Peeter Helme

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Kongo tango

Published by Lepp ja Nagel, 2019, 231 pp.
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

AWARDS

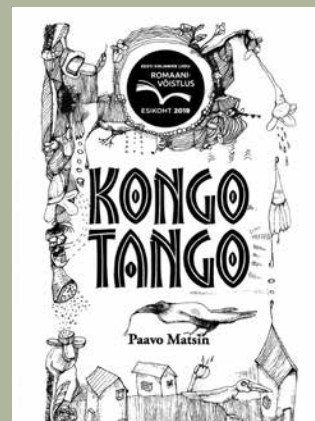
Winner of the 2019 Estonian Writers' Union's Novel Writing Competition

TRANSLATIONS

Full English translation available



PAAVO MATSIN's (b. 1970) works are imbued with vivid, limitless fantasy; a toying with time, space, and history; as well as layers upon layers of added meaning and subtext. He exercises an incredibly dense prosaic language. However, irony and a warm sense of humor also burst forth in his somewhat absurd, tense, and grotesque texts. Matsin graduated from the Estonian Institute of Theology and has worked as a college- and school teacher, in addition to being a respected literary critic. Matsin's novel *Gogoli disko* (Gogol's Disco, 2015) received both Estonia's most prestigious annual prize for prose and the 2016 EU Prize for Literature. His novel *Kongo tango* (Congo Tango, 2019) won the 2019 Estonian Writers' Union's Novel Writing Competition.





ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK (b. 1970) is the most translated Estonian contemporary writer. A journalist by profession, Kivirähk is an excellent storyteller who writes with warm, gentle humor. He is certainly a highly original comic talent in Estonian literature. He is also quite prolific, having written several books both for adults and children.

Kivirähk's bestselling novel *Rehepapp* (November, 2000), a witty allegorical story about the essence of Estonians, was awarded the literary prose award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2000 and made into a movie, titled *November*, in 2016. His novel *Mees, kes teadis ussisõnu* (The Man Who Spoke Snakish, 2007) has been translated into ten languages and is a best-seller in France.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Sinine sarvedega loom

Published by Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2019,
310 pp.

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

TRANSLATIONS

English sample available

ANDRUS KIVIRÄHK

The Horned Blue Beast

Novel

The Horned Blue Beast is a grotesque artist's novel in which Estonian mythology is transformed into an untethered element of quotidian life. Dr. Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald published the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* first in German, then in Estonian, in the mid-19th century. *Kalevipoeg* is something of a cornerstone work in the Estonian fine arts – its motifs echo in literature, art, and musical composition, and it laid the groundwork for the formation of national consciousness. In the 1910s, the young and talented Estonian artist Oskar Kallis, whose works blend art nouveaux and national romanticism, became the first to illustrate the epic. Kallis's art brought about *Kalevipoeg*'s second coming and was a vividly-colored visual triumph for its hero of giant proportions.

Kivirähk's novel is a spellbinding interpretation of the creation of Kallis's radiant illustrations. Written in diary format, the young artist conveys his semi-psychedelic encounters on the path to understanding *Kalevipoeg*. The protagonist doesn't simply imagine the characters, but journeys alongside them in a mythological world while simultaneously growing distant from the real one – the streets of a harbor town preparing for a grim war. The epic's oftentimes outrageous characters and their intrepid adventures literally clamor to be drawn and called into being for readers and appreciators of art. The ordinary world seems to stifle and fail to understand this, staying indifferent to the artist's attempts to communicate the joys and spectrum of colors he finds in the mythological world. The artist's wild, enchanting, and ultimately tragic story – one akin to a sensitive participatory experiment – poses the questions of how a person in the arts perceives the world and where the lines between the real world and their reality are drawn. By his final entries, the mirthful young man has turned into a full-fledged, bone-weary man whose last works of art are woven into topics far beyond his original absurd escapades – love and the quest for peace beyond the grave. Kallis died in early 1918 at the age of 25 on the Crimean Peninsula, where his teacher and romantic partner had him taken to recover from tuberculosis. Kallis had never left his hometown of Tallinn before arriving in Yalta, but his works – the creation of which Kivirähk has depicted in a clever and masterful way – were in close discourse with the finest artistic traditions of Europe and Scandinavia. Kivirähk's powerful use of language brings the artist's inner landscapes to life. *The Horned Blue Beast* is an uproarious tale which strums the deepest heartstrings – just as the author frequently does – and amazes the reader by how such a heartbreaking book can still be so cheerful.

Text by Elle-Mari Talivee

At the End of the World. Scenes from the Lives of Good People

Novel

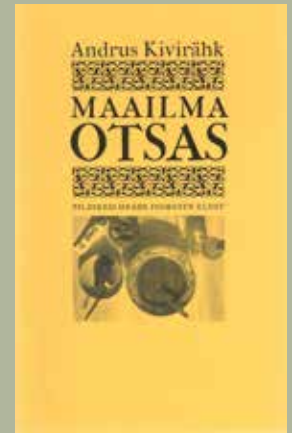
Andrus Kivirähk always writes about the same subject: average Estonians with their endless prejudices, common beliefs and patterns of behavior, their deep distrust and general caution in dealing with the world. His tumbling and fantastic world is funny and positive, and most of his characters are sure that life is fine.

At the End of the World is a funny, enchanting book about “small people”. We meet a whole gallery of characters whom we may even have met in real life: the mother Malle with her various phobias, her middle-aged son Eevald, whom she bosses around in various ways, and many others. These people are connected by the old wooden house where they all reside, and by different small activities that fill their days and sometimes give rise to hopes or dreams, which need to be controlled with the help of the bottle. People meet and drift apart, they have common friends and acquaintances, and everything has already happened and is constantly repeated.

One of the characters who plays a more central role, Ülo, owns a bar called Opossum, which offers only one course of food, which varies from day to day. The people who visit the bar and whose paths cross there are also one-course-per-day-people. They are not pretentious and only rarely do some of them wish for something unexpected, such as a trip to the end of the world. But maybe they all already are at the end of the world and they should try to find out how to escape from this end ...

Text by Rutt Hinrikus

The author himself has said: “There is little literature about common people whose lives lack extraordinary events. It’s usually exceptional and heroic personas with big egos, and the colorful and event-filled who make it between the covers of books. I wanted to try writing about nothing, but in a manner that would still be interesting to read.”



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Maaailma otsas.

Pildikesi heade inimeste elust

Published by Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2013,

390 pp.

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

AWARDS

Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for

Prose 2014

TRANSLATIONS

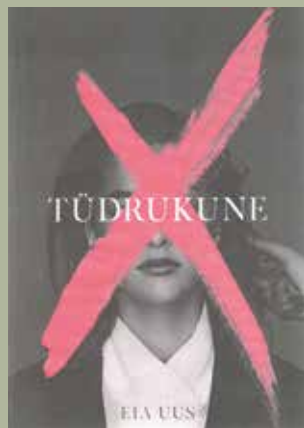
Russian: Aleksandra (Tallinn),

Octopus (Moscow), 2016

English sample available



EIA UUS (b. 1985) made her literary debut in 2005 with the young-adult novel *Kuu külm kuma* (The Moon's Cold Heart). Written on the topic of depression, it was awarded the Eduard Vilde Prize for Literature. Uus has published four novels as well as travelogues and a children's book. Although she has enjoyed the opportunity to live in several places around the globe, writing has remained her true passion.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Tüdrukune

Published by Postimees Kirjastus, 2019,
272 pp.

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

AWARDS

3rd place in the 2019 Estonian Writers' Union's Novel Writing Competition
2019 Readers' Favorite at Apollo bookstores

TRANSLATIONS

English sample available

EIA UUS

What It Feels Like for a Girl

Novel

The female body stands at the core of Eia Uus's newest novel. It is a book that speaks to women and may irritate many men, as the author states frank, unvarnished truths about what life is like for a woman in our masculine world. At the same time, Uus does not clearly demarcate gender roles. The story is set in motion by a party at which the narrator Lilian, still reeling from losing her job, meets a woman close to half her age – Mona. Inexplicably, Mona stirs up erotic feelings in Lilian which gradually swell into nearly oppressive maternal instincts – or, perhaps, a selfish desire to sculpt a socially-acceptable companion for herself. Uus's novel would be a modern *Lolita* or *Pygmalion*, were its mission not divergent and its social spectrum less expansive. Worked into the story are attractive and enterprising women's attempts to break through the glass ceiling in the traditionally male-dominated world of PR and politics. It is a world that ingrains in women from a very young age the notion that they are inadequate. Accounts of sexual harassment inflicted upon the protagonist as a girl tend to recur, but there can never be too many of those stories – who has ever heard of a woman who knows no other woman who has suffered from harassment? That being said, the author's storytelling style is in no way piteous or depressing – on the contrary, Uus's book is written in a light, engaging manner; you could even say with zest. It is intimate, erotically charged, and at the same time grittily honest and acute. *What It Feels Like for a Girl* isn't an enervated individual's personal drama, but rather a concentrated portrait of a woman striving to understand the reactions which the female body provokes. It tells the untold stories of so many women – stories that have been buried beneath the feelings of guilt and shame that society forces upon them. Uus's novel has sparked heated debates on a variety of topics in Estonia and contains ample material for many more.

Text by Kerti Tergem

MARTIN ALGUS

Something Real

Novel

Inspired by true events and written as a dialogue between two men, Algus's debut novel offers an opportunity to peer deep into the darkest currents of the human soul in today's internet-entangled world. The story is captivating in such a horrifying way that one delves into the finest nuances almost unintentionally, envisioning minute details and experiencing fear as well as sympathy in situations into which one might otherwise never have thought of putting themselves, much less expecting to understand them. *Something Real* is an intense expedition that plunges the reader into issues of loneliness, foolishness, greed, as well as simple chance and curiosity.

The shadowy world of the internet gives one of the characters – a young man recently released from prison – the abhorrent idea to use his young stepdaughter to lure perverts out of the murkiest layers of the web.

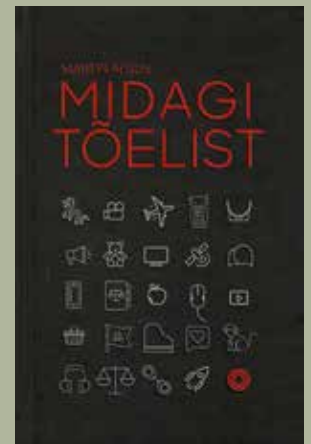
A middle-aged man who is fed up with his marriage and is a regular patron of porn sites takes the expertly-placed bait, starts chatting with the young girl offering sexual services, and ultimately asks to meet. Once he arrives, the man finds himself staged to be guilty of statutory rape. He falls into the blackmailer's disgusting trap, though he soon discovers that many others have taken the ever-younger internet bait as well – some of them genuine monsters. The men's alternating perspectives of the escalating situation only add tension as the plot arrives at critical, odious, unnerving, and unexpected twists. Algus depicts what is inarguably a filthy version of reality – addictions, extortion, fear, cruelty – but in doing so, he somehow manages to show its polar opposite of caring and despair.

One reviewer called the drama of disquiet 'as sharp as a razor blade' – keen, precise, masterful, and cutting to the core of what is true. The keywords cinema, universality, and contemporaneity can also be applied. Algus himself has asked: 'If we spend more and more of our days in a virtual state, what will it do to us over time?' Justifiably, he has also asserted that every topic in the work realistically exists in Estonia and the greater world right now.

Text by Elle-Mari Talivee



MARTIN ALGUS (b. 1973) is an actor, screenwriter, playwright, dramaturg, and translator who has written scripts for several popular Estonian TV series and films. Among other awards, he has received Estonia's most celebrated prize for humor and is often recognized for the genuineness of his dialogues – an exceptionally strong suit of his debut novel as well. Algus's novel has likewise been staged as a play. Although he is a debutant in the world of prose, *Something Real* is the author's sixteenth work of drama.



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Midagi tõelist

Published by Varrak, 2018, 177 pp.

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

AWARDS

Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Award for Prose 2018

Eduard Vilde Literary Award 2019

TRANSLATIONS

English sample available



ANDREI IVANOV (b. 1971) graduated from Tallinn University as a Russian philologist, lived in Denmark in a hippy commune, travelled elsewhere in Scandinavia, and he writes in Russian. His novels that have won several important literary awards, often deal with refugee life.

Ivanov's most well-known book to date *Hanuman's Travels* has been translated into Estonian (2012), German (2012), French (2016) and English (2018). His novel about Russian exile life in Paris, *The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery* (2019), is one of the most brilliant achievements in Estonian literature of the last few decades.

ANDREI IVANOV

The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery

Novel

The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery is a panoramic novel which vividly brings to life the worlds of three generations of Russian émigrés in Paris. To recap, the Russian emigration began with the October Revolution and continued apace for two decades, meaning that by the start of the Second World War almost 80,000 Russians had established themselves in France. Paris quickly became the capital of the Russian emigration, not to be replaced by New York until the middle of the century.

The novel contains multiple voices, including three first-person protagonists, whose voices start to overlap, to intertwine, and set off unexpected echoes. The novel's main narrator is the Soviet émigré Viktor Lipatov (not necessarily his real name), a former dissident who spent several years in psychiatric detention, fled to America, and then arrived in Paris at the beginning of 1968, where he found work in the editorial offices of a Russian émigré newspaper.

The second first-person narrator is Alexandr Krushchevsky, a doctor who was born to first generation Russian émigrés in Belgium, served as a volunteer in the Belgian army during the Second World War, was captured by the Germans, fled, and then lived in Saint-Ouen in France, where he mixed in French avantgarde art circles, before turning up again in Paris in 1968.

The main protagonist of the novel, who brings the diverging stories together, is the multitalented Alfred Morgenstern, also a first-generation Russian émigré who was born in Moscow in 1896 before leaving with his family for Paris in 1906. A doctor by profession, he is also a pianist, an actor, a model, and an obsessive writer. Morgenstern and Krushchevsky are good friends, they are united by several shared experiences, and they share a secret which adds a subtle element of crime-fiction to the novel.

The colorful lives of the Russian émigrés are portrayed from the perspectives of these three characters. We learn about the difficulties they have acclimatizing, the traumas inflicted on them by war, their struggle against Communism, and their homesickness. In this world, real-life and fictional characters mingle freely; at the risk of oversimplification one can argue that there are three types of characters in the novel: fictional characters, characters inspired by real-life people, and real-life historical figures.

The three main protagonists are examples of the first type, embodying certain general features of the Russian émigrés, but lacking any specific historical counterparts. A whole gallery of historical figures feature in the novel, including Nikolay Berdyaev, André Breton, Paul Éluard, Théodore Fraenkel, Charles de Gaulle, Pavel Milyukov and Boris Poplavsky.

It could be said that the city of Paris is the fourth character in the novel. Ivanov makes Paris almost physically tangible, and does so for all three of the historical periods which the novel covers. At the start of the novel, the author gives a captivating description of Paris life, through the words of the character Morgenstern. To provide a flavor of this, I quote

at length: 'Paris whips you on, kicks you up the backside, sprinkles you with rain, splashes you in puddles, plays pranks on you, spits swearwords at you, whispers gossip in your ear, grabs at coat hems and shopfronts, pulls you close, kisses you on both cheeks, fishes cash out of your pocket, waves its hat at you, looks you longingly in the eye, and then embraces you in its dark, satin night.' (p. 44).

Ivanov has gone to great lengths to ensure that all of the historical details are correct, including the physical environment (it's clear that he has visited all of the novel's locations), and the historical events. He has taken inspiration from a range of Russian émigré memoirs and diaries, including those of Boris Poplavsky, Ivan Bunin, Felix Yusupov, Teffi (Nadezhda Lohvitskaya) and Anna Kashina-Yevreinova.

In addition to the richness of historical detail, *The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery* is a homage to the art of the novel. Ivanov has found space for the majority of his literary influences here. There are multiple references to Dickens, in particular *The Pickwick Papers* to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, while Céline and Joyce interact in intriguing ways, as do Bunin and Nabokov. One can detect the stylistic influence of Mikhail Bulgakov, traces of Cormac McCarthy's approach to form, as well as the influence of Goncharov's *Oblomov*.

But the greatest appeal of *The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery* lies in Ivanov's command of language. No one else writes quite like Ivanov. Ivanov's writing grabs the reader and pulls her into its embrace, wraps her in multiple narrative strands, leads her through labyrinths, providing intermittent flashes of light and relief, before dragging her back into its depths.

The Inhabitants of the Curious Cemetery is Ivanov's first full-length symphony, a work in which he demonstrates his talents in every literary form, and on every instrument.

Text by Marek Tamm



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Original in Russian:

Обитатели потешного кладбища

Published by Avenarius, 2018, 572 pp.

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

AWARDS

Cultural Endowment of Estonia's

Russian Author Award 2019

TRANSLATIONS

Estonian: Varrak, 2019



JOONAS SILDRE (b. 1980) is a graphic designer, comics artist, and caricaturist. He has organized showings and retrospectives of contemporary Estonian alternative comics. He teaches comic art and illustration at various institutions of fine arts and respective workshops.

A prolific and well-loved illustrator, Sildre has published children's comics and a graphic novel on Arvo Pärt, *Between Two Sounds*, which depicts the world-renowned composer's musical quests. The book was nominated for an annual literary award from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and received accolades for its design.

JOONAS SILDRE

Between Two Sounds. The story behind the music of Arvo Pärt

Graphic novel

Between Two Sounds tells the story behind the music of the world-famous Estonian composer Arvo Pärt.

Arvo Pärt's (b. 1935) music became increasingly popular throughout the world following his forced emigration from then-Soviet Estonia in 1980. International performances and recordings swelled to the point where today there are over 500 professional recordings featuring his works. The online concert tracker *Bachtrack* has listed him as the world's most-performed living classical composer for the past eight years running (2011–2018). Pärt's music, and sometimes that of his imitators, has become ubiquitous in film and television.

In spite of this success, Pärt has remained incredibly private and modest, granting almost no interviews. Until now, there have been no biographies published on any part of Pärt's life. Information about his personal and career developments prior to 1980 has been limited to snippets from print interviews and Estonian film documentaries. The graphic novel *Between Two Sounds* provides unprecedented insight into this uncovered area. It is worth mentioning that Pärt himself was closely involved in drafting the story and staying true to the facts.



Between Two Sounds starts with Pärt's birth, moves through his youth and the kindling of his love of music, covers his musical education and early years as a composer, and gradually arrives at his retreat from the world as he searched for his own musical voice. Pärt's first creative period can be called avant-garde modernism. He was perceived as an "angry young man" in the Soviet music scene of the 1960s. The second part of his career emerged in the mid-1970s, when his own spiritual technique evolved: *tintinnabuli* (little bell-like). The shift between these two fundamentally different musical languages happened slowly but dramatically. Pärt ceased writing music for the public for about a decade, fully immersing in his search for a new, individual compositional technique. *Between Two Sounds* shows what led him to this change and how he succeeded.

The graphic novel also touches upon a universal artistic problem: an inability to fully express oneself through skills or a desired technique. Another sub-theme is Estonians' struggle during the Soviet occupation: the severe restrictions on the freedom of speech, garnished with attempts to contain and control ideas and beliefs; restrictions that sometimes played out in utterly absurd situations. The repression of Pärt's career under the Soviet regime eventually culminated in his forced emigration to the West.

In October 2018, the first Estonian-language hardcover print of *Between Two Sounds* was published by the Arvo Pärt Centre in conjunction with Centre's grand opening. As of February 2019, it has been nominated for six different literary and cultural prizes. It received the annual Golden Book Award from the Estonian National Library and was selected as one of Estonia's Best Designed Books of 2018. The work has naturally received widespread media attention, including lengthy positive reviews in Estonia's largest newspapers.

Text by Arvo Pärt Centre



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Kahe heli vahel

Published by Arvo Pärdi Keskus, 2018,

222 pp.

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

AWARDS

Bologna Ragazzi Award (BRAW) Comics –

Young Adult 2020 Special Mention

National Library of Estonia's

Golden Book Award 2019

25 Estonia's Best Designed Books 2018

TRANSLATIONS

German: Voland & Quist, 2021

Full English translation available



VALDUR MIKITA

Valdur Mikita (b. 1970) is an Estonian author, semiotician, ethnic cartographer, and forest philosopher. His wildly popular works include *Lingvistiline mets* (The Linguistic Forest, 2013), *Metsik lingvistika. Sosinad kartulikummardajate külast* (Wild Linguistics: Whispers from a Potato-Worshippers' Village, 2016), and *Kukeseene kuulamise kunst* (The Art of Listening to Chanterelles, 2017). In his writing, Mikita explores the essence of Estonianness and the nation's almost inherent intimacy with thick forests and bogs, endless in their breadth and depth alike. Mikita preaches a dizzying array of thought-provoking theories: that the forest invokes synesthesia, that Estonia is tropically influenced by its primordial geological layers, that particular sounds in the Estonian language are borrowed from birdsong, et cetera. As the Estonian writer Hasso Krull noted in a review of *The Linguistic Forest*, Mikita's thoughts, theories, and musings are not joined linearly, but rhizomically. His philosophical forays in a quest to reach the core of Estonian (and Finno-Ugric) linguistics, culture, and identity are daring, but they pay off, taking the reader to exhilarating heights of new questions that spiral like fossilized snail shells, exposed in wave-lapped limestone on the shore of the brackish Baltic Sea. Citing the Estonian author Andrus Kivirähk, "Of course, anyone who wishes to criticize Mikita's theories can find many loose ends to sink their teeth into and tug at, and then spitefully unravel the whole fabric, but to what purpose? Mikita's writing is, above all, myth, and myths are not criticized [...] Myths really shouldn't be taken very seriously; otherwise, they become obsessions and an official religion."

Text by Adam Cullen



PUBLISHING DETAILS

Lingvistiline mets (The Linguistic Forest)

Published by Välgi metsad, 2013, 240 pp.

Rights' contact:

Ilvi Liive at estlit@estlit.ee

AWARDS

Cultural Endowment of Estonia's Annual Award, 2013

Viru County Literary Award, 2014

In Search of the Estonian

Extract from an essay by Valdur Mikita

A good book is like a shed where the back wall has fallen out, creating an opening into infinity. I would like to stand in that wall-less room and listen to rust gnawing on the handlebars of a bike. A good book may first ruin the reader, then redeem them. A very good book will give an impression of possible redemption at first, but will then ruin the reader, rapidly and utterly.

Finno-Ugric peoples are among the few nations who have inhabited the fringes of bogs and swamps since time immemorial; who have settled a damp and level landscape dotted by divine islands of pine forests. The majority of humankind lives in dry and hilly areas: mossy greenery certainly isn't an element of most peoples' cultural image. Most yearn for a sip of water; we, on the contrary, yearn for a patch of dry land, and most of all for the white-mossed pine forest where one's spirit soars in flight. Estonians are, by nature, often amphibious. An Estonian's mental world may not be dried or drowned; rather, it is to be kept sufficiently moist.

For Estonians, one's place of existence is of great importance alongside one's place of living. It is a phenomenon particularly common among peoples with ancient modes of thought that comprises coiled-up, semi-mystical encounters with nature: our childhood, memory, and meanderings in the forest are often stitched together by these kinds of memorable "dodges". Here, they figure in as a natural part of the intuitive creative method typical of someone with a mythogeographical perception of the world.

It's uncommon for a Finno-Ugric person to seek a point to life. The thought rarely even crosses an Estonian's mind. He seeks, rather, a mythological site; a chamber of being that provides spiritual space. He seeks it eternally. People here yearn most for their spirits to be left in peace; for them to be "left alone". For the Finno-Ugric person, life's great questions always have some kind of a geographical projection.

The visions had by early-19th-century "skywalkers", for instance – female prophets of an anti-feudalist religious movement – vividly reflected our ancestors' genuine mythogeographical cognition. Primevally alluring pastoral hyperrealism, possessing an unbelievable suggestive force, was revealed in the young peasant girls' conceptions of paradise: a spacious threshing-room dwelling where Grandpa serves the children more honeycomb than they could ever manage to eat. Gigantic red wild strawberries luminesce on the field.



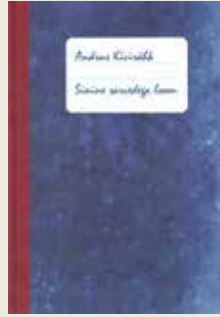
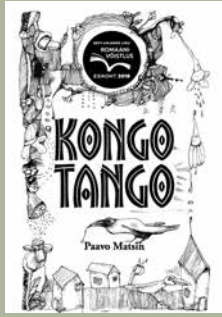
PUBLISHING DETAILS

Kuke-seene kuulamise kunst
(The Art of Listening to Chanterelles)
Published by Välgi metsad, 2017, 160 pp.

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

TRANSLATIONS

Finnish: Sammakko, 2018



Estonian
Literature
Centre