

# 10 Books from Estonia



*Jaan Kross  
A. H. Tammsaare  
Albert Kivikas  
Herman Sergo  
Rein Raud  
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Estonian  
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# Jaan Kross

## A NOVEL OF RAKVERE



**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 of the Nobel literary prize.

### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Rakvere romaan*  
Eesti Raamat, 1982, pp. 304  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

**Finnish:** Söderström 1984 & 1993, **German:** Hanser 1997,  
**Swedish:** Fripress Bokförlag 1988 & Natur och Kultur 1992

### 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*** (Professor Martens' Departure)

Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish

***Vastutuulelaev*** (Sailing Against the Wind)

Finnish, French, Swedish

The action of "A Novel of Rakvere" (*Rakvere romaan*, 1982), a classic of Estonian literature by a master of historical fiction, takes place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is concentrated on the struggle between the town of Rakvere, situated on the road between Tallinn and St. Petersburg, and the noble Tiesenhausen dynasty for the town's rights. The narrator is the fictional figure Berend Falck, who moves between the two camps and is aware of the plans and intrigues of both sides. Falck is a tutor in a nobleman's home, but his sympathies are with the townspeople.

Falck also becomes the confidant of Count Sievers, who supports the townsfolk's struggle against the Tiesenhausens. Karl Sievers, who has advanced from a peasant into a count, is a former servant of the Tiesenhausens, and as becomes evident in the second half of the novel, has been the lover of Gertrude von Tiesenhausen, fled from the manor, insinuated himself into the St. Petersburg court, risen to become the favourite of the Grand Duke, and been granted the Sievers name by order of the Grand Duchess. His rise to become a count and the skein of relationships with the real Sievers family is characterised by the

bestowal of comical titles and scurrilous tales about the court.



Alongside the theme of the town's rights unrolls the main thread of the story, Berend Falck's love affair with the cobbler's daughter Maade, which, after several obstacles (Maade's marriage to the publican Rosenmark) finds a happy solution at the end of the book. The point emerges that the personal stories of the protagonists are intimately bound up with the story of the town's rights: at the end of the novel the records reveal that Count Sievers is Maade's uncle, whose agent in the struggle against the Tiesenhausens has been the publican Rosenmark. After the Count's death the marriage is no longer worthwhile, and

through divorce the way is open for the union of Berend Falck with Maade.

The novel brings out Kross' ability to create a coherent and logical text out of little details and what at first seem apparently incidental connections, which is true to actual historical events. For example, he has used the detail that in 1763 there was an attempt to blow up an apothecary's in Rakvere, but it did not succeed, because the bombers inadvertently used turnip seeds instead of gunpowder in the attempt. This humorous little detail, however, possesses an altogether greater significance when it becomes known that the apothecary was one of those conducting the struggle for the town's rights and had documents in his possession relating to those rights. From this little incident, then, develops one of the first cases of political terrorism in Estonian history.

The townspeople are pressing for historic civic rights, according to which they are free citizens of the town, not the subjects of the lords of the manor. In the end they are defeated in their struggle against the Tiesenhausens, and without their civic rights, yet they do not lose hope. As in several others of Kross' historical novels, historical parallels are offered. In the struggle of the town of Rakvere for its independence one may see the struggles for Estonian independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the Tiesenhausens maintained that the town of Rakvere had never existed, or that if it had, it existed no more, the same claim was made about the Republic of Estonia in Soviet times.

# THE MASTER OF KÕRBOJA

Anton Hansen  
Tammsaare

1922 was a special year in Estonian literature: in the autumn there appeared the first novel by the greatest classic writer in Estonian literature, A.H. Tammsaare: "The Master of Kõrboja" (*Kõrboja peremees*). The novel became a truly national event and overnight Tammsaare became one of the most popular Estonian writers.

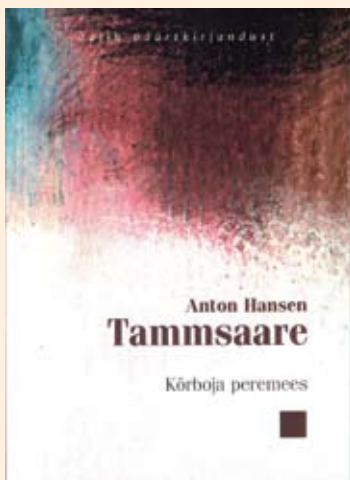
At the centre of the novel are two farms, Katku and Kõrboja, and the concealed mutual attraction between their two hereditary owners, Katku Villu and Kõrboja Anna. The hot-tempered Villu, recently released from prison, applies all his powers to improving the land at Katku farm. Kivimäe, the symbolic place where he quarries stone, becomes fateful for him: a charge goes off in Villu's hand and he is crippled. For this reason Anna invites him to come to live with him as her husband and master of Kõrboja. But Villu fears that he cannot be a proper husband to the adored Anna, being lame, and he commits suicide. The grieving Anna takes Villu's little son to live with her and starts bringing him up to be the new master of Kõrboja farm.

"The Master of Kõrboja" uses especially masterful Biblical symbolic language. The novel ends with a child sitting amid red berries, which is the author's folklore-based reference to the birth of the Redeemer. By placing the characters and events within the symbolic system of both Estonian folklore and the New Testament, Tammsaare creates a polysemous and thrilling world, which captivates even modern readers with its various aspects. On a broader level, Tammsaare's novel declared that the newly independent Estonia required a moral and ethical rebirth.

What strikes the reader above all is the love story of the novel's main characters, which is described through frequently allusive episodes containing a fateful symbolism. As a novel of love, "The Master of Kõrboja" is a terrific story. Tammsaare writes somewhat lyrically and very suggestively. Through the subject of love the novel also reveals the complex problems of village life in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Estonia. The declaration of independence of the Estonian Republic (1918) posed many new challenges for the villages of the agrarian nation. The village wants change, but at the same time fears it. Anna of Kõrboja emerges as a distinctive figure, as a "woman who wears a dress and trousers at the same time". She is "a stranger", who breathes new life into the village, for which she is both admired and mocked.

The landscape and descriptions of scenery are very prominent in the novel. On the one hand the uniqueness of the Estonian landscape is prominent; on the other the land-scape is just like a character in the novel, with its own personality and message. An important part is played by the characters' visions of how the surroundings of the village and farms could look. In this way there appear to be several scenes of action in the novel – the real and the imaginary, the actual and the idealised landscape. In a sense, the same can be said of the whole of Estonian society at the time: there was a vision of how the ideal republic could be, and there was the reality, substantially different to it.

A.H. Tammsaare's "The Master of Kõrboja" has always presented its interpreters with consistent interest. The novel has been made into a film, it has been staged, and been the subject of exhibitions and research studies. The tale of Villu of Katku and Anna of Kõrboja has become the most legendary love story in Estonian literature.



**ANTON HANSEN TAMMSAARE** (1878–1940) was an Estonian writer whose pentalogy "Truth and Justice" (*Tõde ja õigus*, 1926–1933) is considered one of the major works of Estonian literature and The Estonian Novel.

Tammsaare came to literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with his short stories of village life. The climax of his creative career began with the play "Judith" (*Juudit*, 1921) and the novel "The Master of Kõrboja" (*Kõrboja peremees*, 1922). Of central importance is his 5-volume novel "Truth and Justice", which outlines the characteristic trends in the development of Estonian society from the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the economic crisis of the late nineteen-twenties. Social criticism is to be found in the allegorical novel "The Misadventures of the New Satan" (*Põrgupõhja uus Vanapagan*, 1939) and "The King is Cold" (*Kuningal on külm*, 1936). Tammsaare's works have a peculiar psychological depth and a sharpness of social criticism. He is one of the most noteworthy of Estonia's representatives of critical realism. His works have appeared in about thirty languages.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Kõrboja peremees*

Avita, 2007, pp. 152, first published in 1922

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

**Bulgarian:** Brjag 2008, **Dutch:** Nederlandsche Keurboekerij 1943, **Esperanto:** Eesti Raamat 1976, **Finnish:** Werner Söderström 1929, **German:** Rütten & Loening 1958, **Hungarian:** Kner Izidor Kiadása 1933 & Európa 1970, **Russian:** Eesti Raamat 1982

#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

**Tõde ja õigus** (Truth and Justice)

Czech, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak

**Põrgupõhja uus vanapagan**

(The Misadventures of The New Satan)

Finnish, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Swedish

# Albert Kivikas **NAMES ON A MARBLE SLAB**



**ALBERT KIVIKAS** (1898–1978) took part as a volunteer in the War of Liberation (1918–1920). As a prose writer, among his earliest works were the futurist experiments “Flying Pigs” (*Lendavad sead*, 1919, printed on sheets of brewery labels), and “Sacrificial Frog” (*Ohverdet kann*, 1919). In the brochure “Down with Lyrical Chocolate!” (*Maha lüüriline shokolaad!* 1920) he took a more realistic literary stance on life. He was the initiator of a new realism in Estonian literature. Kivikas was interested in social relations; in some of his works he treats class differences and the subject of war, such as “Red and White” (*Punane ja valge*, 1927). In Estonian literature, Kivikas remains above all the author of one of the greatest depictions of the War of Liberation, “Names on a Marble Slab” (*Nimed marmortahvlil*, 1936), to which Kivikas wrote sequels after fleeing in 1944 to Finland and thence on to Sweden: the second part in 1948, the third in 1951, the fourth in 1954, which gives a portrayal of Estonian cultural life in the nineteen-twenties.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Nimed marmortahvlil*

Eesti Päevaleht, 2005, pp. 312, first published in 1936

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

Finnish: W. Söderström 1944 & 2002

With an autobiographical background, “Names on a Marble Slab” (*Nimed marmortahvlil*) describes the Estonian War of Liberation (1918–1920), centred around some schoolboys from Tartu who go to the war as volunteers. The novel is one of the classics of Estonian literature. During the first republic (1918–1940) the work quickly became “the true” depiction of the War of Liberation. During the Soviet occupation (1940–1991) the work was banned and had a reputation of a cult book. The popularity of the work today has been helped by a feature film of the same name (2002).

The main character in the novel, Henn Ahas, is at the beginning of the book vacillating between two world-views – socialism and nationalism. Each of these views is espoused by two of Ahas’ closest friends, and in addition Ahas’ brother is fighting on the Red side. In the first half of the novel there is a thorough grounding in both viewpoints and in the conditions of the war years. One of the basic questions in the book is: how to choose, and which one? The main character ponders at length which is right, the Red or the

White side? – he vacillates like Hamlet.

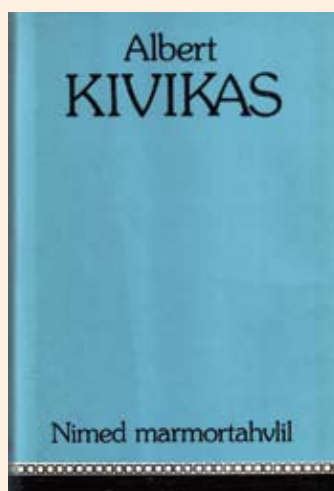
Ahas does not immediately join with his schoolmates, who decide to go to fight for Estonia, but he does join them later.

Another central problem posed in the book is how war changes a person. The main part of the book centres around this. The battles are described realistically and in detail; the novel is based on historical events, depicting the changes the young men undergo in war with psychological empathy. It is not a mere portrayal of the daring rush into battle, or scenes of unrealistic bravery; the work does not make war heroic, but rather one might say that Kivikas takes an anti-war position.

It shows the metamorphosis of schoolboys in battle, the fear of death they feel at the beginning (in the first battle Henn and

some of his comrades take to their heels), and in time a passion for killing is awakened in the young men, out of their revulsion. By the end they will not even stop at killing prisoners. This is related to the suffering and brutality that the boys have to face. Most vividly the change in a man in war is portrayed in the person of Kohlapuu, who in the beginning is a convinced pacifist (he refuses to fire on the enemy), but who later develops into the fiercest of fighters, the first one to kill, and who finally goes mad.

At the end of the novel, Ahas finds a solution to the question of which side to choose, which ideology to support: he must fight for an independent Estonian state, with a just society. Most of Ahas’ schoolmates perish, and only their names remain, on a marble slab.



The novel "Spriteshoals" (*Näkimaladalad*), regarded as Herman Sergo's main work (it originally appeared in three separate volumes in 1984) was written in the spirit of the historical fiction that appeared in Estonia in the early nineteen-seventies. The subject-matter is innovative in Estonian literature: Sergo portrays the life and fate of the Swedish diaspora on Hiiumaa, an island off the coast of Estonia, against the background of historic events in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The action begins with the annexation of Estonian territory to the Russian tsar's empire in 1710 and ends with the forced deportation of the "coastal Swedes" to the lower reaches of the Dnieper river by a ukase of Empress Catherine II.

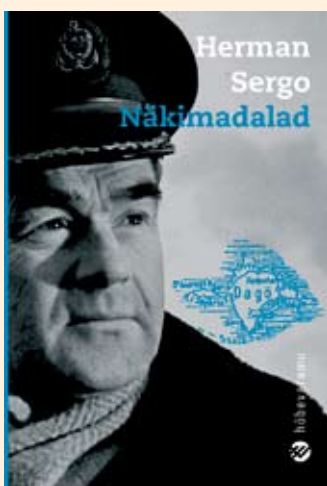
The basic problem running throughout the novel is the question of the status of the "coastal Swedes". With the transfer of Estonian territories from the Swedish crown to incorporation into the Tsarist empire, the landowners tried to change the free Swedish peasants into serfs. The central axis of the novel is the stubborn struggle of the coastal Swedes for their rights, lasting over several generations. In writing the book, the author has made use of many kinds of studies and archive materials; particular documents and translations of them are introduced in the pages of the novel.

The work is a unique kind of family saga; its main figure is the plucky and stubborn Clemet, who fights for the rights of the coastal Swedes, as do his descendants. Clemet is one of Sergo's favourite types: physically strong, enterprising and successful in his undertakings on both land and sea. There is a love story running through the work – the story of Clemet and Getter, which has certain parallel motifs with Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt"; just like Solveig, Getter comes to live with Clemet, but they do not become a couple immediately; their story has several twists. At first, Clemet marries Walborg and they have children. Getter, however, waits for years for her beloved in her little forest hut. In a poetic conclusion to the book, Getter meets Clemet, who had been lost at sea years previously and declared dead.

The novel follows the course of several generations. Clemet's son Bore becomes a champion of the rights of the coastal Swedes. The life of their grandson Jörgen, however, is bound of with the colourful tavern-keeper Britta, who turns out to be the descendant of a depraved priest who once served on Hiiumaa. The characters are individual and psychologically credible depictions. The author has skilfully drawn elements of adventure into the narrative, without falling into the clichés of light fiction.

With interest, empathy and expert knowledge he has described the living conditions, the seal-hunting and fishing, the customs and beliefs of the coastal Swedes. With its richness of detail, the novel has been called an "ethnographic novel". Central to the work is the historical identity of Hiiumaa. In the novel, Sergo calls the shallows of Hiiumaa "Näkimaladalad" ("sprite-shoals"), Swedish: Näckmansgrund – later this became a historic place-name.

*Näkimaladalad* was made into a four-part television series in 1989.



**HERMAN SERGO** (1911–1989) was born on Hiiumaa and trained in seafaring (he gained qualifications as a sea-captain), and worked at the same time as a writer of fiction, known chiefly for his works describing the life of seafarers and coastal dwellers, and the coastal villages of Hiiumaa. His novel "The Refugee Ship" (*Põgenike laev*, 1966) describes the life of the coastal people on pre-war Hiiumaa and their escape to Sweden in 1944, the first treatment of this subject in the literature of Soviet Estonia. His novel "The Beach Robber" (*Randröövel*, 1988) centres on the Hiiumaa landowner Otto von Ungern-Sternberg, who lured ships onto the reefs with an illusory lighthouse and plundered their goods. Sergo's works are marked by an intimate knowledge of life on the sea and the coast, realistic description and a fluent gift for narrative.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Näkimaladalad*

Pegasus, 2008, pp. 918, first published in 1984

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

# Rein Raud **THE BROTHER**



**REIN RAUD** (b. 1961) started out as a poet in the nineteen-eighties, and has up to now published four novels, four collections of poetry, numerous essays and translations from many different languages, as well as a lot of scholarly work, mainly on Japanese cultural history. His novel "Hector and Bernard" received the annual prize of the Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2004. Although he considers writing his primary vocation, he has been active in many fields and is known, among other things, for the large number of foreign languages he speaks, his role in Estonian university reform, as well as for the critical and strongly voiced opinions he regularly publishes in the press.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Vend*  
Tuum, 2008, pp. 116  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

#### AWARDS

Eduard Vilde Literary Award 2008

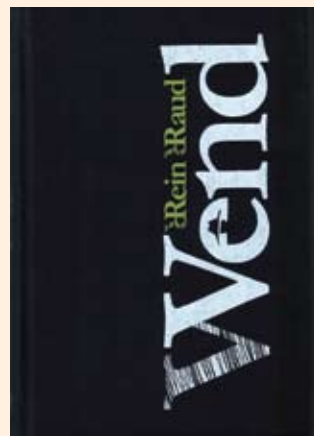
#### SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Hector ja Bernard* (Hector and Bernard)  
Lithuanian

A stranger arrives in a small nameless town that is held in a tight grip by a group of corrupt men of power. A stranger, wearing a large hat and a long black cloak, claiming to be the long-lost brother of a young woman, who has been cheated out of her inheritance... And suddenly everything starts to change.

Rein Raud's short novel is, in his own words, a spaghetti western told in poetic prose, simultaneously paying tribute to two such incompatible figures as Clint Eastwood and Alessandro Baricco. And it ends with a hint of a ghost story coming as a surprise, when a young lawyer's assistant turned detective uncovers a secret that makes us unexpectedly look at the "brother" from a different perspective altogether.

But the storyline is only one part, and perhaps not the main part of the novel. Raud's most recent books have contained a fair share of philosophical discussions, and similar aphoristic thoughts are not completely absent from this novel either. Still, it is the tender and lyrical language, precise and strongly visual imagery, along with the technique of introducing important, sometimes



crucial turns of the plot in dependent clauses of complex sentences, that makes this book gourmet reading instead of the fast food that westerns traditionally are. Playing with the conventions of the genre, Raud's manner of creating characters is sharp, but sketchy, they are symbols rather than in-depth psychological portraits of real people, just as befits the characters of a western. There is the banker, who intuitively realises that the series of misfortunes that has befallen him and his associates since the stranger's arrival is not just coincidental, introduced to us as "a strong man, who had already begun to take note of his health, and had achieved enough in his life to answer yes/no

questions with one word". The fact that a former surgeon is now a professional killer is revealed to us by a comment on his mother's death: "luckily, this happened before the surgeon, head stuffed by his snuffles, had cut into a rich man's girl in the wrong way and was put behind bars for some time – from there, a different man returned, whose knives were nevertheless just as sharp"; the professional seductress Dessa "had never been to this town before, because people whom someone hates passionately enough to get in touch with her usually tend to live in more sophisticated places", and when the protagonist learns that a beautiful girl whom he had mistaken for one of the idle rich is actually a music teacher, she asks him: "Am I now different in your mind? When you know that the option to let time pass senselessly does not soil me?" The words the people speak in the book are larger than life, and so are their deeds. But although the story could take place anywhere, and, apart from a few cellphones, anytime, it is still also a very Estonian story, coming from a society ruthlessly divided into winners and losers.

# THE SAVIOUR OF LASNAMÄE *Mari Saat*

Mari Saat's short novel "The Saviour of Lasnamäe" (*Lasnamäe lunastaja*, 2008) tells a story of a Russian mother and daughter who try to cope with the ordeals of everyday life in the changed circumstances of independent Estonia. Natalya Filipovna had moved to Tallinn in the nineteen-eighties when Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union. She lives in the dreary residential area of Lasnamäe together with her teenage daughter Sophia, and works at an electronics factory. Sophia is an exceptional girl who dreams of becoming the president of Estonia. The diagnosis of her potentially harmful malocclusion puts an immense strain on the meagre family budget. After a layoff at the electronics factory the unemployed Natalya is forced to accept work as a prostitute. The plot of the novel takes some ironic turns before a surprising, somewhat anticlimactic denouement. Through the ordeals of Natalya a marked religious dimension enters the novel, and moral concepts such as forgiveness, charity and meekness find their artistic equivalents in the narrative. The novel takes on a multilayered structure where everyday events are accompanied by symbolic meanings derived from the orthodox doctrine of Sophiology. In many ways "The Saviour of Lasnamäe" is not, and isn't trying to be, a realist novel: the main characters are generalised types of different ethnic groups – the Russians, a Jewish family, a Finn. It gives the book the feel of an allegory, or at any rate a fable. The story is narrated from the perspective of the two protagonists, the mother and daughter, and employs their free indirect discourse. The style has an enchanting lucidity comparable to Orthodox icon-painting.

Mari Saat's empathetic book marks an important turn in Estonian literature to serious moral issues after decades of postmodernist experimentation. The plight of the Estonian Russians could not be a more topical issue right now in Estonia. But Mari Saat's treatment is far from unequivocal journalistic clichés. This small lyrical book achieves a subtle synthesis of natural and supernatural, quotidian and quietist.



**MARI SAAT** (b. 1947) is an author whose sparse output is among the very best of Estonian letters. Her first book "A Catastrophe" (*Katastroof*, 1973) won the Tuglas prize. Since then she has published three books of short stories, four novels and some children's books. Her work is available in English in the collection "Estonian Short Stories" (Kajar Pruul, Darlene Reddaway, eds., Northwestern University Press, 1996) and in the book "What do we Do about Mother" (Moscow, 1985). Her work has appeared also in Hungarian, Latvian, Russian, Slovak, and in short story anthologies in German, Finnish and French translation. Mari Saat has studied economics and teaches business ethics at Tallinn University of Technology. She is married to Raul Meel, an internationally acclaimed avant-garde artist.

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Lasnamäe lunastaja*  
Tuum, 2008, pp. 150  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## AWARDS

Estonian Cultural Endowment Award for Best Novel 2008

## SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Katastroof* (A Catastrophe)  
German, Hungarian, Latvian

# Eeva Park **A TRAP IN INFINITY**



**EEVA PARK** (b. 1950) was born into a writers' family and her work is marked by a striving to avoid standing in the shadow of both her parents. Her mode of expression is versatile, making use of the medium of poetry, the novel and the short story. Park is at her strongest in short prose about social issues, with a forceful personal element, exact nuances of emotion and of vocabulary. While her stories contain psychic tension, Park's use of language is succinct and precise. Her collection of short stories "Ticket to the Merry-Go-Round" (*Pääse karussellile*, 2000) forms a whole with recurring themes and characters and is almost a novel. The author, who began with lyrical nature poetry, has published five collections of verse, three collections of stories and four novels.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Lõks lõpmatuses*  
Tänapäev, 2004, pp. 208  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

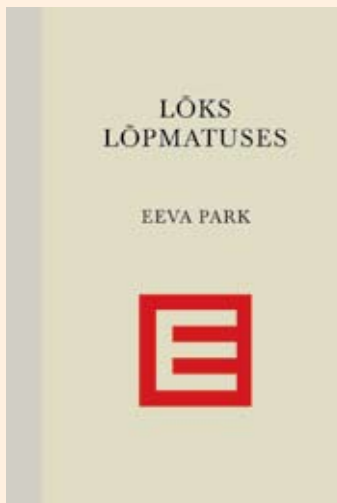
German: Ihleo Verlag 2008, Norwegian: NyNorden 2008,  
Swedish: Norstedts 2007

#### AWARDS

Eduard Wilde Literary Award 2003

In her third novel Eeva Park has evidently achieved just the kind of concentration and result she had been aspiring for. This intense novel has a very well-defined composition, it discusses sharp social and psychological problems, it has an engaging plot and you feel that the end comes too quickly. We could say that this is the very novel that many writers dream about writing, and these kinds of problems have been overlooked for too long.

"A Trap in Infinity" (*Lõks lõpmatuses*) is about trafficking, prostitution, but also about children in the streets, about human relations and about the limits of tolerance and permissibility, both in life and in art. The first person narrator, a young woman in her twenties, cowers in a half-burnt house among outcasts, remembers past events and hides some kind of secret. She is also planning something. In due time her story, which is at the same time trivial and frightening, comes out. She had met a young and handsome rich man, fallen under his spell and, dreaming about the good life, had gone with the man to Germany to sell some rare stamps, which she had inherited. But the man she fell in love with sold not the stamps, but the girl.



The author spares her readers the brutal scenes of everyday life of a sex slave; we get some glimpses of it only when the protagonist recalls some fragmented memories. She manages to escape with the help of dollars that came from another girl who was killed in a similar attempt. She was in Berlin, alone and without documents, and finally returned to Tallinn. Now, her goal is revenge. The novel ends when she has achieved her goal. A group of people party on a tourist farm; in earlier times, she herself could have been among them. Now, she keeps vigil outside, with a gun in her hand. When Lars, the dazzling

salesman, who had successfully sold her, goes to swim after a session in the sauna, she pulls the trigger, and then puts the gun barrel into her own mouth. All that had once been is burnt to ashes.

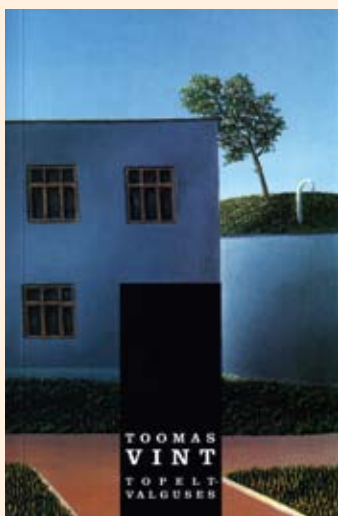
This novel is a challenge to those who, either cynically or short-sightedly, talk about prostitution as a form of enterprise that needs regulation. It is also a warning to young girls. It could be said that the road that leads to prostitution in a post-socialist society is often even more trivial, the deals are even cheaper, fewer words are wasted on the subject and the social background is even clearer. "A Trap in Infinity" could also be called a psychological thriller that cuts deep into an abscess of society, and keeps its readers enthralled to the end.



# IN DOUBLE LIGHT

Toomas Vint

"In Double Light" (*Topeltvalguses*, 2005) is the middle part of a loosely connected trilogy, also consisting of "The Janitor's Wife" (*Kojamehe naine*, 1995) and "Woman with a Memory Gap" (*Mäluauguga naine*, 2007). All the parts of the cycle are independent self-sufficient wholes, linked by the character Helger Tepner. Still an intellectually curious and sensitive young man in "The Janitor's Wife", Helger has evolved two decades later into a sexually ambivalent and cynical communist apparatchik. The events of "In Double Light" unfold during the Velvet Revolution of 1988, when the Soviet system is unravelling under the pressure of top-down reforms and the grass-roots national movement. The novel is a first-person narrative of Viivika, an easygoing society girl in her early twenties. She has broken up with Andres, a lightweight bohemian egotist, while carrying his child, and starts an affair with her boss Helger which leads eventually to their marriage. He is a generation older and belongs to a totally different social rank. A highly intelligent and domineering member of the inner circle of the Communist party, Helger knows when to switch sides in the current political struggle. Having secured some assets for himself and his mistress, he joins the nationalist Popular Front. Meanwhile Viivika is considering abortion, deciding eventually against it. With sly skill the novel juxtaposes sexual deception and political cunning, suggesting that the dearly won national independence may have been just another communist ploy. Just as Viivika passes off Andres' child as Helger's, Helger himself, both a manipulator and manipulated, makes a smooth transformation from a communist to a nationalist leader. But the political events are just one layer in this subtly complex novel, containing sexual ambivalence and role-play, mysterious optical observation rendered in a vividly sensuous and lucid style, containing allusions to music, paintings, films and the author's own earlier work.



**TOOMAS VINT** (b. 1944) is equally accomplished as a novelist and a painter of Magrittean landscapes. He has studied biology at the University of Tartu. His first book was a short story collection "On Both Sides of a Hedged Road" (*Kahel pool hekiga palistatud teed*, 1974) and twenty books of fiction have appeared since then, exploring his favourite themes such as sexual obsessions, social and erotic role-play, artistic creativity and the bohemian lifestyle, and the fragility of personal identity. Two of his short stories, "The Swan-Stealing" and "This So Unexpected and Embarrassing Death" are available in English translation in the anthology "Estonian Short Stories" (Kajar Pruul, Darlene Reddaway, eds., Northwestern University Press, 1996). "The Love That Was..." was published in an anthology bearing the same name (Moscow, 1982). His books have appeared also in Russian and Finnish and his short stories are represented in anthologies in Slovak and French translation. Toomas Vint has also been active as a forceful polemicist against post-modern conceptual art. He is married to the painter Aili Vint.

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Topeltvalguses*  
Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2005, pp. 272  
Rights' contact: Ilvi Liive at [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)

## SELECTED TITLES IN TRANSLATION

*Väikelinna romaan* (Smalltown Novel)  
Finnish

# Tiit Aleksejev THE PILGRIMAGE



**TIIT ALEKSEJEV** (b. 1968) graduated in history from the University of Tartu, where he also obtained a master's degree in medieval history. He has worked as a diplomat in Paris and Brussels, and currently lives in Tallinn. His first short story, "The Peace of Tartu" (*Tartu rahu*) won the annual award from the literary magazine *Looming* in 1999. His first novel "The White Kingdom" (*Valge kuningriik*), a thriller whose action unfolds in Paris and retrospectively in Afghanistan in the nineteen-eighties, was awarded the Betti Alver Prize in 2006 for the best debut novel. In order to write "The Pilgrimage", Aleksejev collected material for ten years and visited the main battle scenes in the Holy Land.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Palveränd*

Varrak, 2008, pp. 304

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

"The Pilgrimage" (*Palveränd*, 2008) is Tiit Aleksejev's second novel, which takes the reader into the last years of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of genre it is a historical thriller, based on the four chronicles of the First Crusade (1096–1099), whose authors took a continuous part in the events described. The main character of the novel is a young man-at-arms, who is bound for Palestine with the men of the Count of Toulouse to free it from the Moslems. He is faced with trials, in the course of which it becomes clear that there are several dimensions to the crusade and that in order to conquer the infidels one must first conquer oneself. The main character sees cities the like of which do not exist in the western world, and at the same time he and his brothers in arms are face to face with a completely new type of warfare. In addition he has to take part in a struggle for power between the Normans and Basileos Alexios I, to which no rules apply and in which all the figures use every means available.

Although an adventure story outwardly, on the internal level "The Pilgrimage"

is above all a meditation on human relations, loyalty and betrayal, love and treachery. While the author is historically very accurate in reconstructing the medieval world, the characters' interior world and use of language are modern enough in their presentation to invite the reader's interest and sympathy.

The novel is presented as the reminiscences of an old monk, a monastery gardener, living in the South of France, who is in fact that young man-at-arms, Dieter, whose life and adventures the work relates. Dieter gets involved in the Crusade as a young man, who is not really a horseman, *miles*, nor a priest, nor



an ordinary person. Thus he is a very suitable hero for an historical novel, who does not really belong anywhere and therefore is able to move between different adventures and environments. In a sense "The Pilgrimage" may be seen as a novel of Dieter's development, since the changes he undergoes on the "armed pilgrimage", as the crusade was called in the Middle Ages, are great and unexpected.

In the context of Estonian literature it is certainly unusual that the subject matter of "The Pilgrimage" does not concern Estonian history at all, although right at the beginning the reader is given a hint that this old monk may have been born somewhere in northern Europe, in an area still uncharted by maps of the time. In this regard Aleksejev may be viewed primarily as a successor to Karl Ristikivi, who likewise chose subjects from Western European history for his classic historical novels, rather than the heir of Jaan Kross, who saw it as important to bind his historical novels to the fate of Estonia.

"The Pilgrimage" is the opening volume of a two-part novel planned by the author, which is why the adventure remains incomplete – the crusaders manage to conquer Antioch, but Jerusalem is still merely a dream in their minds. The second part of the novel, which should culminate in the conquest of Jerusalem, is promised by the author by 2010 at the latest.

# PILGRIMAGE TO THE NEW WORLD

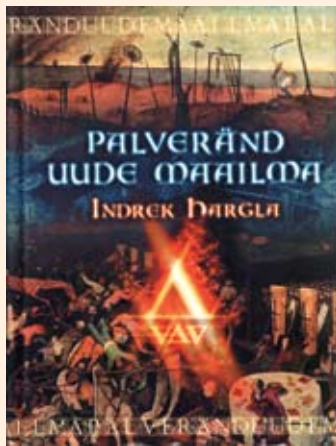
Indrek Hargla

The action of the novel "Pilgrimage to the New World" (*Palveränd uude maailma*) unfolds in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in a universe parallel to our own in which history has followed a different course: the belated termination of the Spanish Reconquest has greatly retarded the exploration and colonisation of America, and the political division of Europe does not confirm to what we know.

The central figure is a young German peasant girl, Grethel, who has the power to kindle fire with her eyes. Investigated for sorcery by order of the "Guardians", directed by Martin Luther, she is picked up by a troupe of wandering comedians who undertake to take her away to Bordeaux, in order to let her embark for the New World. Caught by her pursuers after a voyage full of vicissitudes, Grethel contrives to flee with Aidann, the young man with whom she shares the wagon and with whom she has ties of friendship. She is then carried away by a savant versed in the occult, Heinrich Agrippa, who has discovered a way to travel from one world to another. Convinced that Grethel is the incarnation of the fourth element, he needs her in order to accomplish a magic rite which will allow him to gain access to "the womb of the world". But to do this he must proceed to the summit of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlán. Instructed on his journeys in other worlds (notably our own), he turns, to assure the success of his expedition, to an obscure Spanish notary named Hernán Cortés.

Aidann, who meanwhile has traced the steps of his friend, comes to join an expedition to America. He arrives at Tenochtitlán at the moment when Agrippa is commencing the rite, the final phase of which consists of taking Grethel's virginity on the altar of the temple. At the end of a series of turns of events, it is ultimately Aidann, having arrived at the summit of the pyramid, who is asked to perform the rite by Agrippa, who is mortally wounded. While the Aztec army is winning its victory over the soldiers of Cortés and over an army of Moors led by Christopher Columbus, the carnal union of Aidann and Grethel opens the "door of Fire" and allows them to pass into another world.

This book, which is at one an historical novel, a sorcery novel and a picaresque novel, is suffused with a great epic and romantic spirit. Making use of the uncomplicated narrative technique of popular literature, the author composes a breathless-paced story, scarcely slowed down by several encyclopaedic interventions, expounding the historical and political realities of this imaginary world. The positive characters are vivid and attractive, and the "baddies" are described without excessive Manicheism. Exciting in its intrigue, this novel is also very mentally stimulating, with its imaginative reorganisation of European and American history in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



**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, "They Will Come Tonight!" (*Nad tulevad täna öösel!* 2000), gathers texts belonging to these three genres and reveals a great sense of narrative construction. "Baiita's Malediction" (*Baiita needus*, 2001) is a fascinating adventure and medieval witchcraft novel. "Nine Cases of Pan Grpowski" (*Pan Grpowski 9 juhtumit*, 2001) is centred 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, such as "Pilgrimage to the New World" (*Palveränd uude maailma*, 2003), or humorous, such as "French and Koulu" (*French ja Koulu*, 2005), which plays with the stereotypes of Estonian identity.

#### PUBLISHING DETAILS

*Palveränd uude maailma*

Varrak, 2003, pp. 448

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

## 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 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)).

### Contact us

ELIC, Estonian Literature Centre  
Eesti Kirjanduse Teabekeskus  
Süda 3-6, 10118 Tallinn, Estonia  
Fax +372 6 314 871  
Information: [estlit@estlit.ee](mailto:estlit@estlit.ee)  
[www.estlit.ee](http://www.estlit.ee)



Ilvi Liive, Director  
E-mail: [ilvi@estlit.ee](mailto:ilvi@estlit.ee)  
Phone: +372 6 314 870

Kerti Tergem, Director of Foreign Affairs  
E-mail: [kerti@estlit.ee](mailto:kerti@estlit.ee)  
Phone: +372 6 314 872

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**COMPILED AND EDITED** by Estonian Literature Centre

**TEXT** by Antoine Chalvin, Rutt Hinrikus, Anneli Kõvamees, Rein Raud, Marek Tamm, Maarja Vaino, Märt Väljataga

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