

# EUPL

NINE PRIZE WINNING AUTHORS FROM  
ESTONIA, LATVIA  
AND LITHUANIA



EUROPEAN UNION  
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

Tiit Aleksejev (EE) • Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė (LT) • Meelis Friedenthal (EE)  
Janis Jõeņvs (LV) • Paavo Matsin (EE) • Giedra Radvilavičiūtė (LT)  
Undinė Radzevičiūtė (LT) • Osvalds Zēbris (LV) • Inga Žolude (LV)



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International  
Booksellers  
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# Foreword

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The European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL) is unique; it is the only award for books by new and emerging authors from so many countries. Since its launch in 2009 the Prize has been awarded to a total of 108 remarkable authors from altogether 37 European countries, all writing in their own languages. With this Prize we showcase the wealth and true diversity of Europe's contemporary literature and continue to inspire and encourage the translation, publication, selling and reading of books from other countries.

The Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are the Market Focus and guests of honour at the London Book Fair in April 2018. Positively, this brings great and many opportunities for their authors and books to reach and enrich new audiences worldwide. We very much wish to join in this important celebration of the Baltic countries and their outstanding literatures. With the special anthology you are now holding in your hands we invite you to discover the nine prize winning authors from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania through excerpts from their books.

2018 is a special year for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, marking a centenary of independence. This is the perfect occasion to celebrate the cultures and the long literary traditions of these three countries and enhance both the visibility and the international success of Baltic authors and books.

At the same time, 2018 is also a year of celebration for the EUPL: 2018 marks its 10th anniversary edition. This year, the spotlight is on all EUPL laureates since the beginning of the Prize in 2009. We will make the EUPL travel across Europe to showcase each of these exceptional authors and illustrate the unique diversity of European literature.

In the following pages you will get to explore the stories of **Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė**, Lithuania (2009), **Tiit Aleksejev**, Estonia (2010), **Inga Žolude**, Latvia (2011), **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**, Lithuania (2012), **Meelis Friedenthal**, Estonia (2013), **Janis Jonevs**, Latvia (2014), **Undinė Radzevičiūtė**, Lithuania (2015), **Paavo Matsin**, Estonia (2016) and **Osvalds Zebris**, Latvia (2017).

To help these wonderful works travel across cultural and linguistic borders, excerpts in the original languages appear side by side with English translations.

And by the way, this is one of the great advantages of the EUPL; the awarded books may profit from the support of the European Commission's Creative Europe programme and receive grants for literary translation into other European languages. So far, the programme has co-funded about 450 translations of EUPL winning books; this means an impressive average of 4 translations per book.

Together with our partners from the EUPL Consortium; the European Writers' Council (EWC), the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) and the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF), I look forward to a very special year of celebrating the first 10 years of the European Union Prize for Literature.

Literature is a way to get to know other worlds and a book could be a door to new realities and new understanding. I invite you to browse this anthology, to wander in other European literary landscapes and there to discover our nine prize winners from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

**Martine Reicherts**  
Director-General  
European Commission – Education & Culture

A small nation, Estonia has preserved through hardships and found its place in the world, upheld through all the twists and turns of history by its language and culture. Literature which under the totalitarian regime played a crucial role in the preservation and enhancement of national self-consciousness, can now thrive sustained by material welfare and healthy competition. Estonian literature today is as varied and dynamic as ever.

The cornerstones of a vivid literary life are of course the writers. How to support and encourage the writers to plunge into writing something big, important and time consuming?

In 2016, Estonia introduced a writers' wages system. The pilot project of writers' wage enables writers engaged in a liberal profession at their creative peak to dedicate themselves to creative work for a longer period of time and, thus, contribute to the development of Estonian culture. So, at the moment 11 writers have the freedom to write for three years not having to worry about their everyday income. New ideas and new stories can flourish!

Books and stories can entertain and excite us. They can make us laugh and cry. They can comfort us and show us new possibilities. Books can awaken in us new and interesting issues which give us something to think about. Books develop our thinking. They give us concepts to think with and new ideas. They widen our consciousness and our world.

Estonian identity is strongly rooted in language and culture, our literature is rich and multifaceted. Books are the ones to help us develop our language and our vocabulary. Hopefully this is not too bold to say our culture is based on stories, on literature. Estonia can boast with the largest collection of folk songs in the world, with written records of about 133,000 folk songs.

Estonian culture is rich in contrasts and mixes old traditions with novel ideas. By culture consumption, Estonia is one of the leading countries in Europe. Our 1.3 million inhabitants make about 3.3 million museum visits, 3.1 million cinema visits, 2 million concert visits and 1.2 million theatre visits annually. Ten new books in Estonian are published every day. What a variety to choose from!

Books give us knowledge about other countries and other ways of life, about nature, history, and everything under the sun that we might want to know more about.

Books help us understand that all of us are different, too. Reading books written by authors from other times and other cultures increases tolerance and helps combat prejudice.

Translators and translations can bring other cultures closer to us, they can make a foreign culture more understandable.

European Prize for Literature is a magnificent endeavour – highlighting new interesting authors and through supporting translations also making it possible to introduce new literature to the European readers. This is a unique opportunity for a small country to promote its literature and culture.

**Mr Indrek Saar**  
Minister of Culture  
of the Republic of Estonia



The European Union Prize for Literature is a wonderful initiative. It gives new, up-and-coming authors the opportunity to get noticed and have their work appreciated in the European literary sphere. It goes without saying that to conceive of, live through, and ultimately create a work of literature today, in any European language, means making a statement and reaching a much broader audience worldwide. This is possible due to both the art of translation and to translators as literary ambassadors, as well as to various funding programs and international awards, which serve to motivate further development for these projects.

The Latvian language is one of two living languages in the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language family, and is currently spoken by ~1.3 million people. It was formed in the 10th-12th centuries in what was then Livonia (now Latvia); its written form was solidified in the 16th century. In the 17th-19th centuries, Latvian became a valuable resource for the national awakening and development of national literature owing to the intellectual investment of Baltic-Germans in advancing the language. Latvians who had graduated the University of Tērbata (today known as the University of Tartu) in the mid-19th century laid the foundation for the country's literature, giving birth to the first poetry collections and novels written in Latvian. Our language has been tempered by 20th century revolutions, the founding and loss of the State, world wars, and censorship by authoritarian regimes. Latvian literature often became the nation's intellectual defense mechanism, and when the country regained independence in 1991 - which brought about an awareness of verbal and intellectual freedom - Latvian secured its place as a unique voice among European literatures with the ambition of recreating its history, revealing its truths, and celebrating life. Since 2012, original works of Latvian literature have been among the most-purchased books in bookstores across Latvia, and the most-read books in the nation's libraries. We're especially delighted about the successes of our literature in foreign markets: more than 30 classic and contemporary Latvian works will be published in English translation in the UK in preparation for the 2018 London Book Fair, which will feature the Baltic States as the Market Focus for that year.

Literature is, without a doubt, one of the most powerful artistic tools. It can captivate and alter a reader's world view with the depth of its semantics and the power of its words. Since the European Union Prize for Literature was founded, three Latvian prose authors have been recipients of the award: **Inga Žolude**, **Jānis Jonevs** and **Osvalds Zebris**, each of whom has his or her singular writing style and literary message.

In 2011, **Inga Žolude**, was the first to receive the award, surprising readers with the existential and provocative developmental dynamics of human relationships in her second published work, the short story collection *Mierinājums Ādama kokam* - the foreign rights for which have been sold to six countries. Žolude has published three novels and two story collections, and continues to write prose. In addition to her writing, she actively works to help promote Latvian literature and its authors in international literary festivals.

The 2014 award recipient was **Jānis Jonevs** for his debut novel, *Jelgava 94*, which was widely and well-received in Latvia, landing a spot in the country's list of top 100 favorite books and winning numerous awards - and is even being made into a film. *Jelgava* uses stylistically poignant language to describe the atmosphere of the 1990s "underground" culture in Latvia. Winning this award allowed the book to resonate throughout Europe, and foreign rights for it have since been sold to 11 countries. Jonevs is currently working on a collection of short stories.

**Osvalds Zebris** was the 2017 award recipient for his historical novel *Gaiļu kalna ēnā*, which focuses on events that took place in Latvia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. This period was a defining moment for the establishment of the Latvian nation and State, and the novel urges readers to reflect on tragic destinies people chose in the name of national ideals. *Gaiļu kalna ēnā*, the foreign rights for which have been sold to eight countries, was written as part of the "*Us. Latvia in the 20th Century*" series, which is a unique project featuring novels from 13 Latvian authors that reflect the most significant historical events of 20th century Latvia.

I'm incredibly proud of the strength rooted in the history of Latvian authors and literature, and am thrilled with the opportunity the EU Prize for Literature has given Latvia's stories to find a broader audience in Europe and around the world!

**Dace Melbārde**

Minister for Culture  
of the Republic of Latvia

Prizes for literature, national or international, not only serve as signs for honouring authors, but are also reliable landmarks in literary and geographical travels. Although the world marked by these landmarks is diverse and rich in languages, customs, realities and dreams, forms and ways of expression, actual and created realities per se, we embark on such travels without hesitation when a chance to expand multilayered cultural horizons appears.

This time we travel with three Lithuanian writers, the European Union Prize winners **Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė** (novel *Breathing into Marble* (*Kvėpavimas į marmurą*), 2009), **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė** (selected essays *Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall* (*Šiakt aš miegosiu prie sienos*), 2012) and **Undinė Radzevičiūtė** (novel *Fishes and Dragons* (*Žuvys ir drakonai*), 2015), whose works represent the themes and trends of contemporary Lithuanian literature both well and fairly accurately.

**Laura Černiauskaitė** reveals the main themes of her works, the relationship of man and woman and family life, with great subtlety. With the help of gentle eroticism, playful irony, metaphorical language, gracefully weaving between reality and surreal visions, free from all stereotypes and literary canons, the writer creates a unique palette of intimate experiences.

A popular and loved literary genre in Lithuania, the essay, represents what is born here and now. It examines the most diverse issues and is closely linked to the status of the author. **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**, an author of several books of essays, is one of the most outstanding representatives of this genre. Sharp-eyed, piercing, playful, (self)ironical and pointed, she masterfully juggles real facts and texts in her fictional narrative and tells stories that form a colourful and realistic mosaic of society's habits and mentality.

Almost all of **Undinė Radzevičiūtė**'s books become real events in the literary world of Lithuania. This is especially true of her novel *Fishes and Dragons* (*Žuvys ir drakonai*), in which Western Europe meets the East – in the story line telling about 18<sup>th</sup> century China, the West is forcing its way to the East, while in the other modern story line, the East is thrusting to the West. Peculiar story lines which are unusual for Lithuania picture how the personal world of a European expands during his clash with Eastern cultures and completely different thinking models and how it naturally interblends in the multicultural environment. According to the author, such an environment “always gives more freedom, as different cultural models meet in one space. In the multicultural environment, a person has more freedom to decide on his/her own, what he/she wants to make of himself/herself and the world. It is much easier to create in the multicultural environment.”

This idea reflects the objectives of the European Union to expand the multicultural space and to motivate talented young artists, through such initiatives as prizes for literature, by inviting them to a broader, more diverse and active dialogue, in which the voices of Lithuanian writers are really distinctive, unique and audible.

I am glad that the European Union Prize for Literature Consortium has decided to publish a special EUPL Baltic Writers' Book to introduce the three Baltic States to the London Book Fair and hope that by getting to know the prize winners, people will be encouraged to take a deeper and more consistent interest in the literature of our country.

Enjoy reading.

**Liana Ruokytė-Jonsson,**  
Minister of Culture  
of the Republic of Lithuania



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## Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

### *Kvėpavimas į marmurą*

Breathing into Marble

Publishing House: **Alma Littera**

#### Biography

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė (b. 1976). Prose writer, playwright. She was born in Vilnius. In 1994 she left Vilnius Senvage School and in 1996 – enrolled into Vilnius University Department of Extramural Studies to study the Lithuanian language and literature. In 1998-1999 she worked as a freelance publicist at magazine *Malonumas*, in 2000 – as a language editor at children magazine *Genys*, in 2001-2002 as a journalist at magazine for young mother *Tavo vaikas*. In 1993 she won the republic competition of young philologists and was awarded with 1st rank diploma for the best pupil prose. In 1994 she also won a competition of the First Book organized by the Writers Union. In 2001 a play *Liberate the Golden Foal* (*Išlaisvink auksinį kumeliuką*) won a play competition organized by The Fairies Theatre and Vilnius University Philology Department. In 2003 a prose and plays selection *Liučė Skates* (*Liučė čiuožia*) is published and appears among the 12 best books of the year selected by the experts of Lithuanian Literature Institute. The same year her play *Liučė Skates* is staged in a National Youth theatre. In 2004, *Liučė Skates* (*Liučė Čiuožia*) wins a first prize among 300 participators in an international play fair *TheatreTrefen* organized in Berlin. She is a member of Lithuanian Writers' Union since 2004.

#### Synopsis

*Breathing into Marble* is the fourth book by this young and talented writer. But it is her first novel, a well-crafted drama about painful solitude, family, and relationships between men and women. Černiauskaitė writes about yearning, about unused intimacy, about the gentleness and burdens of the heart, about life, about something from below and something from above. This is the story of a young mother named Isabelle and her young family, which adopts a six-year-old boy who is unable to put down roots in his new family and kills his ill adopted brother. It's a romantic ballad with the plot of a thriller. It's a deep psychological analysis of a mother's soul. It's a book full of so many strong emotions that it is almost possible to feel the characters breathing down your back while you read it.

Į VAIKŲ globos namų teritoriją ateidavo lapė. Ne pro spragą pinučių tvoroje, o, kaip visi, pro vartus. Tarp kamienų lyg dažuose pamirktas teptukas šmėkštelėdavo šermukšnių spalvos kailis. Iš pradžių jie bijojo, kad lapė pasiutusi, ir uždraudė vaikams prie jos artintis. Sargas paspendė spąstus. Bet lapė ėmė lankytis kasdien, spąstus apeidavo, ir netrukus paaiškėjo, kad, nepaisydami draudimų, vyresni vaikai ją prisijaukino. Šitai sužinojusi, Beatricė leido ją šerti maisto atliekomis iš virtuvės.

Bet netrukus lapė dingo. Mažiukai, kasdien po vakarienės nunešdavę jai prie tvoros lauktuves – jei būdavo palankiai nusiteikusi, lapė iškišdavo iš lazdyno pašaipų snukį ir laukdavo, kol jie pasitrauks – neapsakomai nuliūdo.

Maždaug po savaitės sargas ją rado netoli kelio. Lapės kailis nebeliepsnojo, smūksojo samanose kaip paprasta pūvančių lapų krūva. Sargas paspyrė ir atvertė ją aukštiełninką – šviesus krūtinės kailis sulipęs nuo kraujo, gerklėje sustingusi juoda pjautinė žaizda. Jis paslėpė dvėseną po žabais, vakare grįžo su sodininko kastuvu ir užkasė. Vaikams buvo pasakyta, kad lapė atsivedė lapiukų, ir daugiau nebeateis. Kas atsiveda palikuonių, turi užmiršti pramogas, ir jais rūpintis. Žvėrys dažnai tai supranta geriau už žmones, buvo paaiškinta vaikams.

Bet Ilja jau žinojo, kad viskas, kas prasideda kaip pasaka, anksčiau ar vėliau baigiasi gyvenimu. O gyvenime niekas netrunka ilgai. Kiekviena diena ką nors iš tavęs atima, o jei gauni dovanų, tai tik tam, kad jas iš tavęs išplėštų. Tasai, kas šitaip

žiauriai su jais žaidžia, smaginas savo malonumui. Ilja žinojo, jautė, kad tasai yra. Jis pulsavo vaizduotės paribiuose. Kartais ateidavo į Iljos sapnus, bet niekada nevirsdavo vaizdu. Pasklisdavo už nugaros kaip rašalo dėmė, ir pašaipiai švokšdamas alsuodavo į sprandą – nuo jo ledinio kvapo kūnas nueidavo pagaugais.

Ilja jo nebebijojo. Tik nekentė.

Sugrąžintas iš Puškų jis smogdavo kiekvienam, išdrįsusiam prie jo prieiti ir pažvelgti į akis. Ir niekas neturėjo teisės klausinėti.

Iš vieno berniuko mainais už kramtomą gumą jis gavo kišeninį peiliuką.

Lapė nespėjo atsivesti lapiukų.

Jis slėpė peiliuką, suvyniojęs į celofano plėvelę, parke, prie pinučių tvoros. Pats taip sugalvojo. Paslaptis reikia laikyti žemėje. Reikia jas kaupti juodai dienai. Ir laiku išsitraukti. Nežinia kada ir kam jų prireiks, bet jos būtinės.

Ir dar – paslaptys paprastai būna baisios.

\*\*\*

Praėjus ketveriems metams, lapę visi užmiršo. Dabar į mišką už globos namų tvoros ateidavo jauna stirna. Ji buvo patikli, ir, jei neišsigeisdavai per arti prieiti, leisdavo savimi grožėtis. Jos naivios akys ir jaukus, lyg smulkiais lapeliais nubertas kailukas, liaunų kojų grakštumas, kuriuose lyg nekantrus gyvsidabris staiga suvirpėdavo laukinė jėga – nuo viso to Iljai užgniauždavo kvapą. Stirną suglumindavo bet koks netikėtas garsas. Kryptelėdavo grakščiu kaklu – ir jos jau nebėra, tik vos virpa užkliudytos šakos.

Ji buvo tyli ir skvarbi, ir tokia jaudinamai graži, kad Iljai sukutendavo paširdžius, ir jis nevalingai sugniauždavo kumštį, lyg laikytų jame peiliuką. Jis stovėdavo prie tvoros ir laukdavo,

kol stirna išnirs tarp spindinčių liepos lapelių ir pažvelgs į jį gailiom akim. Jis žinojo jos valandas, lyg jie būtų susitarę. Bet laukdamas darydavosi silpnas, o stirnai pasirodžius taip su-traukdavo paširdžius, kad vieną sykį tai turėjo baigtis.

Jis negalėjo būti silpnas.

Vieną dieną Ilja išsikasė peiliuką ir išėjo. Grįžo tik kitą rytą. Paklaikęs ir tuščiomis rankomis, nuo kurių norėjosi nusiplauti kažką gąsdinančiai lipnaus. Upės vanduo neįstengė to nuska-lauti, nors jis kruopščiai išsirakinėjo net panages.

Peiliuko Ilja daugiau nebelietė. Nei to, kuris liko upės du-gne, nei jokio kito.

Kai po keleto dienų tarp liepos lapelių kyštelėjo stirnos snu-ktis, Ilja pravirko – iš pradžių tyliai ir skaudžiai, po to – vis garsiau. Bet tik jai. Stirna nesistebėjo, užjausdama uodė orą, lyg norėtų paragauti vaiko ašarų.

Po tos nakties Ilja ėmė laukti, kol pas jį atvažiuos.\*\*

LIUDAS atvažiavo po pietų, kai mažieji būna suguldyti. Vy-resni globotiniai žaisdavo judriuosius žaidimus atokiau pasta-tų, kad neprižadintų miegančių. Auklėtojai palikdavo juos vie-nus, mergaitės išsibarstydavo po parką, berniukai spardy-davo kamuolį stadione.

Ilja nebuvo iš tų, kurie susideda su visais. Jis turėjo bendra-žygių, su jais pavykdavo nepastebėtiems išsprukti iš saugomos teritorijos į mišką, kartais net iki upės, už plento. Bet dažniau-siai veikdavo vienas.

Liudas paliko automobilį miške, ir iki globos namų terito-rijos atžingsniavo pėsčias. Kieme priešais administracijos pas-tatą šurmuliavo penkiolikos vaikų būrys, dvi pagyvenusios au-klėtojos šūksniais ragino juos išsirikiuoti po du. Liudas sustojo



už tvoros, iš teritorijos pusės dengiamas erškėtrožių krūmo, ir išsitraukė žiūronus.

Vaikai ruošėsi iškylai. Juos vedavo į nesraunų užutėkį, vasarą ten ant kranto priberdavo smėlio, o citrinos geltonumo plūdurai ženklino vietą, už kurios draudžiama plaukti. Nors maudytis jau buvo per vėsu, saulėtas rugsėjo oras tiko iškylai su patiesalais, kamuoliais ir badmintonu. „Eve–li–na, kur tavo kepurė?! – šūkavo apkūni raudonplaukė auklėtoja. – Modestai! Mo–des–tai, kam pasakiau, aš daugiau nekartosiu! Ilja! Il–ja!.. Turėsime tavęs vieno laukti?“

Liudas sukluso ir tol vedžiojo žiūronais po vaikų būrį, kol objektyvas užgriebė paniurusį veidą tamsiomis migdolinėmis akimis. Ilja sukiojosi atokiau, žabeliu stumdydamas akmenukus, ir tarytum delsė. Liudas tuojau pažino išraišką, kuri iškreipdavo Iljos veidą prieš jam ką nors iškrečiant.

Kol vaikai nepatraukė prie vartų, jis skubiai nukurnėjo mišką link automobilio.

Upę Liudas pasiekė pirmas. Automobilį paslėpė atokiau, žemais krūmokšniais apkleistame keliuke, o pats įsitaisė ant pušimis apaugusio skardžio. Iš čia paplūdimys matėsi kaip ant delno.

Iškylautojai pasirodė po gero pusvalandžio. Jų spalvotos striukės sušvytavo tarp pušų kamienų, paskui dingo ir pasirodė jau apačioje, prie vandens. Liudas pakėlė prie akių žiūronus.

Jis matė, kad Ilja kažką rezga, ir tik ieško progos pasprukti iš bendro katilo. Viename paplūdimio krašte mergaitės patiesė kelis apklotus, sukrovė krepšius su užkandžiais, sumetė striukes. Auklėtojos organizavo žaidimą su kamuoliu. Prašydama dėmesio raudonplaukė pliaukštelėjo delnais ir paragino vaikus susiburti arčiau jos.

Tada Ilja ir nėrė į švendres.

Liudas nukūrė skardžiu iš paskos, peršoko taką į paplūdimį, kuriuo ką tik nusileido vaikai. Netrukus krantą apaugę krūmokšniai baigėsi, apačioje sublyksėjo vanduo, ir nuo skardžio Liudas vėl išvydo paknopstom skuodžiantį bėglį. Ilgiau nemąstydamas jis nušliuvožė šlaitu.

Ilja iš netikėtumo stabtelėjo ir atsigrėžė.

Liudas sugriebė jį už alkūnės, surakino lyg replėmis. Ir šitai jį išdavė.

- Sveikas, Ilja, – neatgaudamas kvapo sušvokštė Liudas.
- Nu, labas...
- Kaip laikaisi?
- Gerai.
- Klausyk... mums reikia pasišnekėti.

Nieko daugiau neaiškindamas jis nusitempė vaiką pakrante, kur vėl prasidėjo brūzgynai, o vandenyje – švendrės. Jie nėrė į tankmę kaip vietos lizdui ieškantys paukščiai. Liudas nė akimirkai nepaleido Iljos. Jo veidas pakibo virš vaiko lyg orakulo rutulys – tarytum prieš kvosdamas jis jau ieškotų Iljos veide atsakymo. Šis pakėlė į Liudą akis ir klausiamai sumirksėjo – jų rainelėse blykstelėjo sidabriniai grūdėliai.

– Aš žinau, kad neseniai buvai pabėgęs. Naktį, – Liudas šneka lėtai ir aiškiai, nenuleisdamas skvarbaus žvilgsnio nuo Iljos. Bet šis nė nekrusteli. Jo akys juodos ir neįžvelgiamos, lyg neišpurenta žemė.

- Tai tiesa? – kvočia Liudas. – Nesigink, aš žinau.
- Tai kam dar klausiat? – atšauna Ilja. Šaiposi, prisidengęs išdresuoto našlaičio nuoširdumu.

Vos tvardydamasis, Liudas sugniaužia jo smailą smakrą, ir sušnypščia:

- Tik nebandyk žiūrėti savo nekaltomis akutėmis... Sakyk, kur tą naktį buvai.
- Niekur, – kuo ramiausiai atsako Ilja. – Miegojau.

Galbūt jo akių juodžemyje slypi paslaptys, turtai ar košmarai, tačiau Liudas nežino, kaip juos iškapstyti. Jis stipriau suspaudžia Iljos žandikaulį, lyg grasintų per jėgą iškratyti iš jo teisingą atsakymą.

- Meluoji, žvėriūkšti... Nieko tu nemiegojai.
- Netikit, klauskit direktorės, – atšauna Ilja.

Ir staiga Liudas viską suvokia.

Kas slypi už Iljos nugaros, kas įkvėpė jam įžūlumo.

Su juo jau pašnekėta. Pažadėta neįduoti, mainais už tylėjimą. Gal ir dar kaip nors atsilyginta.

Liudas abiem delnais suspaudžia vaiko galvą ir papurto su tokia neapykanta, lyg ketintų sutraiškyti:

– Dar sužinosiu, kad buvai dingęs – sumalsiu į miltus, supratai? Supratai?..

Ir staigiai paleidžia – Ilja lošteli ir vos išsilaiko ant kojų.

– Mauk pas visus. Greitai!..

Juodžemis Iljos rainelėse net įkaista, jis kupinas tokios pat neapykantos, kokia kunkuliuoja perkreiptame Liudo veide. Kelias sekundes jiedu grumiasi akimis, lyg bandytų, kuris stipresnis. Ilja pasiduoda pirmas – o gal tik atideda kovą palankesniam momentui. Atsuka Liudui nugarą ir, susibrukęs rankas į kišenes, sparčiai nužygiuoja per aukštą žolę atgal pas vaikus.

## *Breathing into Marble*

**Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė**

*Translated from Lithuanian by Jūra Avižienis*

A fox had been wandering into the grounds of the children's home. Not through a gap in the wattle fence, but through the gate like anybody else. Its fur, red like a paintbrush dipped in ashberry-colored paint, would flash between the tree trunks as it arrived. At first, because of concerns that the fox might be rabid, the children were not allowed to come near it. The guard set a trap. But the fox started visiting every day. It would walk around the trap and soon it became clear that despite the rules the older children had tamed her. With this in mind, Beatrice would let the children feed the fox leftovers from the kitchen. But just like that, the fox disappeared. The little ones who used to leave it presents by the fence every day after supper were disconsolate (in the right mood, the fox used to poke its arrogant snout in through the fence and wait for them to move away)

About a week later, the guard found it just off the side of the road. The fox's fur was no longer blazing red: it lay in the moss like a heap of decomposing leaves. The guard gave it a kick and flipped it on its back. The light fur on its chest was matted with blood and a black knife wound on its throat had congealed. He hid the carcass under the brush and in the evening he returned to bury it with the gardener's shovel. The children were told that the fox had had kids and would no longer visit. 'When you have kids, you have to give up fun and games in order to take

care of them. Animals often know this better than people,' it was explained to the children

But Ilya already knew that all storybook beginnings end sooner or later when reality sets in. And in reality, nothing lasts for very long. Each day takes something from you, and if you're ever given anything, it's only so that someone can steal it from you later. *The evil one* who toys with you so cruelly is doing it for his own pleasure. Ilya was certain he felt it that he really exists. He flickered at the edge of Ilya's imagination. Sometimes he would enter Ilya's dreams, but never as anything concrete. His mocking presence would fill the room behind Ilya's back like spilling ink. His icy breath brought chills to Ilya's spine.

Ilya was not afraid of him. He simply hated him. After they returned him from Puškai, he would smack anyone who dared to come near him or even to look into his eyes. And nobody had the right to ask any questions.

With a little boy he had traded a pack of chewing gum for a pocket knife.

The fox never had the chance to have kids.

He wrapped the knife in cellophane and hid it in the garden near the wattle fence. The idea was his own: secrets must be buried. They should be saved for a rainy day so they could be dug up at just the right moment. You never know where or when you'll need them, but you will.

And what's more, secrets are usually terrifying.

Four years later, everyone had forgotten the fox. Lately, a fawn had been coming to the woods behind the children's home. She was trusting, and if you didn't try to get too close, she would let you admire her. Her naïve eyes and velvet fur that

seemed to be speckled with the tiniest leaves and the grace of her slender legs suddenly aquiver when swept up by a primitive force like a boorish quicksilver would take Ilya's breath away. The fawn, startled by the slightest unexpected sound, would arch her elegant neck and then she was gone, leaving only a slight rustling of branches.

She was quiet and shrewd and so astonishingly beautiful that Ilya would get a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach and unwittingly clench his fist as if holding a knife. He'd stand by the fence and wait for the deer to dart out from the lindens and fix her sad eyes on him. He knew her schedule as though they'd planned it. But waiting made him weak, and every time the fawn would appear, it would give him such a knot in his stomach that he knew this could not go on.

He would not be weak. One day, Ilya dug up his knife and went out. He returned the following morning frantic and empty handed. He wanted to wash off something alarmingly sticky from his hands, but as thoroughly as he scrubbed, even under his nails, the river could not rid him of it.

Ilya would no longer touch the knife not the one left in the riverbed, nor any other one.

A few days later, when the fawn's snout peeked out through the linden leaves, Ilya burst into tears. At first his sobs were choked, painful, but they grew ever louder. He was crying for her. The deer was not surprised. She sniffed the air sympathetically trying to taste the child's tears. From that night on, Ilya waited. He knew he was coming for him.

Liudas arrived after lunch when the little ones are usually put to bed for their afternoon nap. The older wards played active games farther afield from the buildings so as not to wake

them. Their teachers let them go off by themselves. The girls separated into little groups throughout the grounds and the boys kicked a ball around the stadium.

Ilya had never been one to seek the company of others. He certainly had co-conspirators to sneak off with into the woods, sometimes even up to the river past the highway. But usually he acted alone.

Liudas left his car in the forest, and headed for the children's home on foot. In the yard facing the administration building, a group of fifteen children was making a commotion, and two middle-aged teachers were hollering at them, trying to get them to line them up into twos. Liudas stopped at the fence; hidden from view by a sweet briar, he took out his binoculars.

The children were getting ready for a field trip to a dam. In summer, sand would be trucked in and lemon yellow buoys floated to mark the line beyond which it was forbidden to swim. Although it was too cold now to go in the water, the sunny September air was just right for a field trip with picnic blankets, ball games and badminton. 'E-ve-li-na, where's your hat?' shouted the overweight red-haired teacher. 'Mo-des-tas, Mo-des-tas, what did I say?' 'I am not going to say it again.' 'Ilya, Ilya, do we all have to wait for you?'

His interest piqued by the mention of Ilya, Liudas guided his binoculars through the group of children until they landed on a sulky face with dark almond-shaped eyes. Ilya was sauntering about somewhat further away; he was kicking some rocks around as if stalling. Liudas immediately recognized the look that distorted Ilya's face when he was up to mischief. Before the kids headed out the gate, he sped off into the woods back towards his car.

Liudas reached the river first. He hid the car further away on a road overgrown with brambles and vines. He set himself up on a hill sheltered with pine trees. From here the beach was clear as day.

The field trippers appeared after a good half hour. Their brightly colored jackets flashed between the pine trunks. Then they disappeared and reappeared by the water. Liudas raised his binoculars to his eyes.

He could see that Ilya was up to something and was just waiting for the opportunity to make his getaway. At one corner of the beach, the girls had laid out blankets on which they'd piled up their jackets and picnic baskets. The teachers were organizing a ballgame. Clapping her hands for attention, the redheaded one was trying to gather the children closer to her.

That's when Ilya dove into the cat tails. Liudas darted down the hill after him; he leapt across the path to the beach which the kids had just crossed. Soon the shrubbery along the shore gave way to the shimmering water, and from the hilltop Liudas could once again make out the fugitive in headlong flight. Without a second thought, he raced down the slope. Ilya, surprised, stopped and stared. Liudas grabbed him by the elbow and locked it with a vice grip. This gave him away.

'Hey, Ilya,' Liudas wheezed, out of breath.

'Well, hello...'

'What's up?'

'Not much.'

'Listen, we need to talk.'

Without further explanation, he dragged the child along the shore back into the thicket, cat tails flanking the water. They



dove into the brush like birds looking for a nesting place. Liudas did not let go of Ilya, not even for a second. His face loomed above the child's like the oracle's crystal ball, as if he were already examining Ilya's face for an answer even before asking any question. Ilya raised his eyes toward Liudas and blinked questioningly, silver grains shimmering in his irises. 'I know you ran away a few days ago at night,' Liudas speaks slowly and clearly, not taking his penetrating eyes off Ilya. But the latter doesn't even blink. His eyes are black and impenetrable like untilled soil.

'Is it true?' demands Liudas. 'Don't defend yourself. I know.'

'Then why ask?' Ilya flings back. He sneers at Liudas, his well-rehearsed orphan sincerity his cover.

Barely containing himself, Liudas grabs the boy by his angular chin and hisses:

'Don't give me that innocent look of yours... Tell me where you were that night.'

'Nowhere,' Ilya answers calmly, 'I was sleeping.' Perhaps there in the blacks of his eyes lie secrets, treasures or nightmares; however, Liudas does not know how to unearth them. He tightens his grip on Ilya's face, as if he were threatening to shake the truth out of him by force.

'You're lying, you little bastard... No way were you sleeping.'

'If you don't believe me, ask the director,' Ilya flings back.

And all of a sudden everything becomes crystal clear for Liudas.

All that lies behind Ilya's back. All that enthralls him with impertinence.

Someone's already spoken with him. Someone's already promised not to turn him in exchange for his silence. Perhaps they're even promising a reward.

Liudas grabs the child's head with both hands and shakes it with hatred strong enough to crush it.

'If I hear about you disappearing again, I'll smash you to smithereens. Do you understand? Do you understand?'

And suddenly he lets go. Ilya jerks back, barely balancing on his two feet.

'Go back to the others. Scram!'

Ilya's black eyes smolder. His hatred is as great as that contorting Liudas's face. For a few seconds they lock eyes, as if battling to see which is the stronger. Ilya looks away first. Or maybe he's just putting off the fight for a more opportune moment. He turns his back on Liudas and with his hands shoved into his pockets, he careers through the tall grass back to the children.

**Tiit Aleksejev***Palveränd*

The Pilgrimage

Publishing House: **Varrak****Biography**

Tiit Aleksejev (b.1968) graduated from the University of Tartu with 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, *Tartu rahu*, won the annual award from the literary magazine *Looming* in 1999. His first novel, *Valge kuningriik*, a thriller whose action unfolds in Paris and retrospectively in Afghanistan in the 1980s, was awarded the Betti Alver Prize in 2006 for best debut novel. In order to write *Palveränd*, Aleksejev researched material for ten years and visited the main battle scenes in the Holy Land.

**Synopsis**

*Palveränd* is Tiit Aleksejev's second novel, set in the last years of the 11th century. The main character, Dieter, is a young man-at-arms, bound for Palestine with the Count of Toulouse's army to conquer it from infidels. Although on the surface an adventure novel, *Palveränd* is above all a meditation on human loyalty, betrayal, love and treachery. Dieter becomes involved in the Crusades as someone who is neither really a horseman, nor a priest, nor an ordinary civilian. Without belonging anywhere, he is able to move between different adventures and environments. *Palveränd* 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 still remains a dream in their minds.

Palveränd

Tiit Aleksejev

*Seigneurs, sachiez qui or ne s'en ira  
En cele terre ou Dex fu mors et vis,  
Et qui la croiz d'outremer ne prendra  
A paines mès ira en paradis  
XII sajandi ballaadist.*

Anno Domini 1148. Boscodoni Jumalaema klooster Provence's.

Mu nimi on Dieter. Kunagi olin ma keegi teine, aga sel ei ole enam tähendust. Maa, kust ma pärit olen, ei ole enam endine ja inimesed, kes mind mäletasid, on surnud. Sest mis on üks maa ja üks rahvas? Veepiisk veenõus, ei enamat. Ma olen siiski üritanud. Olen üritanud koduranda leida. Käsikirjadest ja kaartidelt ja rännumeeste lugudest. Teda pole kusagil. Kuid ma mäletan pilvi tema taevas, udu tema niitude kohal ja jälge, mis jäi tõmbi peaga maost, kes läbi lõikeheina libises. Ja ma tean, et ma ei ole und näinud.

Tõeline kodu on see, mille poole inimene teel on. Mida ta oma mõtteis kannab. Minu mõtteis on linn, mille me uskmatutelt tagasi võitsime. Minu jaoks on ta kõiges ja kõikjal. Igal ööl hiilib kõrb üle mu läve, tuul puhub, luited liiguvad ja palverändurid on ületamas tühermaad. Ja siis ei olegi vaja koltunud reisikirju lehitseda, sest igaüks neist peab rändurit juhatama lähemale Jumalale, mitte kodurannale ja iga kaardi keskpäigas on Jeruusalemm.

†

Aristoteles kirjutab, et inimkehas on kaardistatud kogu kosmos. Minu keha on valu maakaart. See aitab leida kohti, kus ihu on lõigatud, muljutud ja purustatud. Iga arm on osa teekonnast. Iga vigastus on mingi lahinguväli. Öösel lavatsil lebades sulen ma silmad ja libistan sõrmedega üle inimeste maa: Nikaia, Dorylaeum, Harem, Antiookia, Kerbola, Jeruusalemm, Askalon.

Valul on omad mälestused. Põlvedes ja puusades tuikab ratsutamisest. Õlaliiges pakitseb mõõga vibutamisest. Pahklud sadulast langemisest. See kõik on ainult pinnavirvendus. Tõeline valu on mujal. Palverännul öeldi: võitle ja ära karda, elu saab sinult võtta, kuid au mitte iialgi. Aga saab sedagi. Ning autusest saab häbi, mis saadab inimest elu lõpuni. Mis muserdab ja närib ja tuletab end iga Issanda päev meelde: täna, täna, täna. Täna. Kui täna on teie päev, siis te teate. Ja neile, keda häbi maadligi surub, võin ma öelda: ma tean, mida te tunnete. Ma olen teie.

†

Ma olen elanud mitut elu. Ma olen olnud see, kes hoiab sulge, ja see, kes hoiab mõõka. Kõik on hajunud nagu suits tuules. Täna olen ma see, kes hoiab taimi, ja homme olen ma muld, millest taimed uut jõudu saavad. Muld ei hooli, kui palju keegi head või halba tegi, ja õigest mehest ning õelast mehest võrsuvad ühesugused viljapead. Võib-olla on tuules kõikuva vilja jaoks kõik inimesed ühtemoodi õiged.

Ma olen aednik kloostri, mis asub Montpellier' linnast kahe päevateekonna Pühale Kirikule annetas. Issanda aastal 1142 asus kolmteist venda Chalais't teele, et uuele konvendile alus panna. Ürikutesse jäi neist kaksteist, sest kaksteist on apostlite arv. Väljajäänud vend olin mina, aga see ei teinud mulle meelehärmi. Inimese elu sulab nii või teisiti möödanikku nagu kala

vette. Isegi siis, kui see kroonikatesse üles tähendatakse. Jääb ainult kala. Ainult vesi.

Eile kaevust veenõud kergitades kummardusin ma allapoole. Sünkjal pinnal väreles kellegi nägu. Silmade asemel oli kaks mustavat koobast. Kaks musta koopasuud. Mida rohkem ma jälginis, seda hägusemaks muutusid kujutise piirjooned. Näis, nagu tõrjuks maailm mind endast eemale. Sinna alla, sügavikesse, kus elusast saab eimiski ja siis jälle midagi.

†

Ma olin kohal, kui krahv Guillaume vastlaotud kloostrimüüre vaatamas käis. Temaga oli kaasas kõrge külaline, Brabandi isand Godefroy VII. Räägitakse, et selle mehe soontes voolab Godefroy de Bouillon'i, Püha Haua Kaitsja verd. See näis tõele vastavat. Samasugused kõrged põsesarnad. Samasugune ekslev pilk. Veel räägitakse, et Godefroy oli vapraim palverändurite seast, ja ma vaatasin ta järglast huviga. Et milline tema on. Godefroy oli nõrk mees. See, mida vapruseks peeti, oli ainult põikpäisus. Hirm taganeda.

Tõeliselt vaprad jäid Anatoolia mägismaale ja Süüria kõrbe. Issand kutsub õiged enda juurde. Oma vägedesse, et nad mõnes teises lahingus uuesti langeda saaksid. Brabandi käskija vaatas mulle otsa ja ma ei löönud pilku maha. Ma võin seda endale lubada. Ma olen ainult aednik, märkamatu ja tähenduseta nagu rohukõrred kloostriõuel. Öeldakse, et märkamatu elu on Jumala kiituseks.

†

Täna pärastlõunal hakkas Boscodoni kohal vihma kallama. Veejoad paiskusid sellise hooga, nagu oleks keegi lasuursinise peekri ühe hooga tühjaks valanud. Vend Glaber ütleb, et vihm

on osa lunastusest, mida taevas maale laseb osaks saada. Kõlab ilusasti, aga see on kloostritarkus.

Vihmast saavad aru ainult need, kes teda ootavad: talupojad, kelle vili on põllul nädalate kaupa kõrbenud. Sõjamehed, kes on Süüria päikesest poolsurnud. Ma vaatasin, kuidas mullapinnale tekkinud tumedad plekid mõne hetkega laugasteks muutusid. Vihm oleks nagu kõik minema uhtunud, nii mineviku kui oleviku. Jeruusalemma müürid ja kloostrimüürid. Müüride vangistuse. Maailm lagunes ja langes koost, jäi ainult taevast alla paiskuv vesi. Taevane kosk.

Hiljem, hilisõhtul, läksime me kõik missale. Ma seisin vendade keskel, aga mulle tundus, nagu oleksin neid ülalt vaadanud. Mungad laulsid ja nende hääled voogasid uue kiriku võlvide all. Väljas sadas ikka veel.

†

Kloostri siseõues õitseb magnoolia. Päikesepaistel tundub, nagu väreleks igas õiekobaras küünlaleek. „*Post tenebras spero lucem,*” pomises ristikäigus puud imetlema jäänud abt. Seejärel vaatas ta mulle otsa, nagu ootaks mingit vastust. See maailm on täis varje, oleksin võinud öelda. Miks mitte järgmine? Aga ma teadsin, et kloostriülem ei oota minult midagi. Ja ma hoidsin suu kinni.

Boscodoni aias kasvab palju erinevaid taimi, ainult lavendlit mitte. Oleks kaunis, kui see siinsete maadega kohaneks. Kloostri ümber võiksid laiuda lavendliväljad nagu Languedocis, kust me krahv Raymond'i vägedega läbi ratsutasime. Me kõikusime sadulas, päike lõomas pea kohal ja ümberringi sinas lavendel, nagu oleks taevas maa peale laskunud ja öelnud: veel veidi kannatust – Jeruusalemm võib olla juba järgmine linn, pärast taevasinist merd. Ainult veel veidi kannatust. Palju pole enam jäänud.

†

Anno Domini 1098. Antiokia

Pärast päikeseloojangut asume Haremi poole tee. Seitsesada rüütlit, kahvatut ja näljast sisselangenud nägudega. Püüame laagrist lahkuda võimalikult vaikselt, et mitte Antiokia kaitsjate tähelepanu äratada. Lahingukorras liigume mööda Aleppo teed, hääletult nagu kummitused. Vaimude armee, mõtlen enda ümber vaadates. Läbi öö libisemas, hommikuks hajununa. Need, kes ütlevad: oleks juba öhtu. Kellele on varjud sõpradeks. Ja pimedus liitlaseks. Pimeduse hirmud.

Mõned tunnid enne koitu hakkab vihma sadama. Sadu ei ole tugev, sellest hoolimata oleme varsti läbi vettinud. Päikesetõusu ajaks jõuame järve ja jõe vahelisele legendikule, mille Bohémond on lahingupaigaks välja valinud. Me oleme tiibadelt kaitstud ning suutelised kõike ühele ainsale sööstule panustama. Nagu skorpion, kes on astla välja sirutanud ja valmis salvama. Pimesi, vastase suurust hoomamata, kõige lihtsama ründeplaaniga.

Ja siis on taas järjekordne varahommik ja järjekordne lahingukord, aga tunne on iga kord erinev, südame põmm-põmm, tolmumaitse, rauamaitse ja sähvakad silme ees. Teadmine, et sa oled ühes tükis ja elus, nii elus, kui üldse olla saab ja sa võid elada kahesaja aastaseks nagu Aabraham, aga rohkem elus ei ole sa surmatunnini. Me oleme jagunenud kuude *bataille*'sse, vaikivad rüütliid, palverännu löiketera ja piigiteravik ja mida kõike veel. Aga mis toimub ülejäänud viies, sellest pole mul aimugi. Ma tean ainult seda, kes on mu kõrval, ja iseend tean ma samuti, kuigi see tunne on püsimatu ja tahab pageda, nagu pihku surutud lind, kelle süda taob ja kes mõtleb ainult sellest, kuidas end vabaks rebida.



Ja siis kappab rivi ette Bohémond, mustal täkul, punase maoga standart selja taga lehvimas, ja lipuhoidja on noor poiss, päris lapseohtu, ja ta käed värisevad. Ta on noor, ta kardab. See on loomulik.

„Julgust, mehed,” ütleb Bohémond. „Ja seiske kindlalt. Varsti tapame nad kõik. Ei suuda need poniratsanikud meie rünnakule vastu seista. Vihm on nende vibunöörid nätskeks teinud ning lähivõitluses pole neist meile vastast. Mõelge oma esivanemate kuulsuse peale. Ja selle peale, et edaspidi räägitakse teist. Kui te sarvehäält kuulete, siis piigid ette ja andke minna. Nottige paganaid ning Issandal on teie üle hea meel.”

See on hea kõne. Lühike ja selge. Mõõgameeste, mitte kroonikute keeles. Ja siis kõlab sarvehüüd ja me läheme liikvele. Me ei tea, kui palju uskmatuid seal eespool on, aga võib arvata, et tuhandeid. Me ei mõtle sellele. Kõrvuti üles rivistatud viis *bataille*'d ründab mööda Aleppo teed lähenevat vaenlast, kel ei paista meie kohalolekust aimugi olevat. Ühel hetkel on nende ees päikesetõus, lagendik, jõgi ja järv ning järgmisel hetkel kihutab nende poole terasvall ja see terasvall oleme meie ja sel päeval oleme me palju muudki veel. Ja ei ole Ridwani eelväest meile vastast, isegi mitte niipalju, et see meie rünnakuhoogu pidurdaks. Me lõikame sellest läbi nagu sirp viljast, viljapõldu laiu tumedaid tühimikke jättes. Aga see on ainult vastase eelvägi, mida edasi, seda tihedamaks kõik muutub. Aga ikkagi ei suuda nad meid kinni pidada.

On neid, kes arutavad tagantjärele, et oma osa oli siin päikesel, mis meie selja tagant paistis, või siis vasakut kätt jääval maÅ-Nekünkal, mis vastast segadusse ajas, sest neil ei olnud aimu, kui palju meid veel reservis võib olla. Üks on selge – Bohémondi sõjaplaan töötas ja isegi need meie seast, kes olid sisemas surmaks valmistunud, märkavad, et surm on sel päeval uskmatu-

tega ametis ja meie jaoks tal eriti aega ei jäägi. Ja meil, meil jääb üle talle üha uusi uskmatuid ette saata, et vikat ühes suunas sähviks ja et ta niitja kaart ümber ei seaks. See on raske töö ja me anname endast parima ja ainus, millest me aru saame, on see, et tagasivajumise asemel liigume me aina edasi ja me oleksime narrid, kui me seda ära ei kasutaks. Me kardame, et see kõik võib lõppeda, et sõjaõnn pöördub ja siis on meie kord taganeda, nagu toona, peavärava all, seepärast me raiume, raiume, raiume, ühel hetkel näib midagi murduvat, vastupanu ei olegi enam, me raiume ikkagi ja siis on väli meie ees puhas, vaenlane põgeneb ja lahing on läbi. Me oleme Ridwani väe puruks lõõnud ja palveränd on päästetud.

Me paneme mõõgad tuppe ja laskume sadulast ja seisame väljal, pead norus, ja on neidki, kes haavadest ja kurnatusest pikali varisevad. Aga siis tuleb Bohémond ja ütleb, et me olete võidelnud Jumala võitlust ja et me oleme võitnud. Ja ta ütleb veel, et kui see kõik ei ole Issanda ime, siis tahaks ta teada, mis Issanda ime üldse olla võib. Aga ennekõike tahab ta tunnustada meie vaprust, sest vapramaid mehi ei ole ta oma elus näinud. Ning ta paljastab pea ning kummardab sügavalt oma armee ees, sest sel hetkel on Jumala armee Bohémondi armee ja see on õiglane, see on välja teenitud. Ma vaatan teda ja soovin, et oleksin suuteline võidurõõmu tundma. Aga ainus, mida ma tunnen, on väsimus.

## *The Pilgrimage*

**Tiit Aleksejev**

*Translated from Estonian by Christopher Moseley*

*Seigneurs, sachez qui or ne s'en ira  
En cele terre ou Dex fu mors et vis,  
Et qui la croiz d'outremer ne predra  
A paines mès ira en paradis*

*From a 12th-century ballad*

Anno Domini 1148. Abbey of the Mother of God, Boscodon, Provence.

My name is Dieter. Once I was someone else, but that is of no consequence. The country I come from is no longer the one it was and the people who remembered me are dead. For what is one country and one people? A drop of water in a vessel, no more. All the same, I have tried. I have tried to find my home shore. From manuscripts and maps and travellers' tales. It is nowhere. Yet I remember the clouds in its sky, the mist on its meadows, and the traces left by the blunt-headed snake that slithered through the cut hay. And I know I was not dreaming.

A man's real home is the place he is on the way to. What he is carrying in his thoughts. In my thoughts is the City of God that we won back from the infidels. For me it is everywhere and in everything. Every night the desert creeps across my threshold, the wind blows, the sand-dunes shift and the pilgrims are

crossing the wasteland. And then it is no longer necessary to leaf through the yellowed travellers' chronicles, for each of them must lead the wanderer closer to God, not to his home shore, and at the centre of every map is Jerusalem.

†

Aristotle writes that the whole cosmos is mapped in the human body. My body is a map of pain. It helps to find places where the flesh has been cut, bruised and broken. Every scar is part of a journey. Every mutilation is a field of battle. Lying on my plank bed at night, I close my eyes and slide my fingers across the peopled lands: Nicaea, Dorylaeum, Harem, Antioch, Kerbola, Jerusalem, Ashkelon.

Pain has its own memories. My knees and hips are throbbing from riding. My shoulder joint smarts from a sword wound. My ankles, from falling out of the saddle. All this is only a ripple on the surface. The real pain is somewhere else. On the pilgrimage they said: Fight and be not afraid, your life may be taken from you, but your honour – never. But it will. And dishonour becomes shame, which accompanies a man to the end of his days. Which crushes and gnaws at one and brings itself to mind every blessed day: today, today, today. Today. If today is your day, then you know. And to those pressed down by shame, I can say: I know what you feel. I am you.

†

I have lived several lives. I have been one who holds a pen and one who wields a sword. It has all vanished, like smoke in the wind. Today I am one who holds a plant, and tomorrow I will be soil whence plants get new strength. Soil does not care how much good or evil one has done, and from the righteous man and the wicked man alike the same ears of grain will sprout.

Maybe for the grain swaying in the wind all men are equally righteous.

I am a gardener in a monastery located two days' journey from the town of Montpellier, Count Guillaume de Montmiral's donation to the Holy Church. In the year of our Lord 1142, thirteen brothers set off for Chalais to found a new convent. The records number them as twelve, for twelve is the number of the Apostles. The brother who was left out is I, but that did not trouble me. A man's life melts into the past, one way or another, as a fish into water. Especially when one is speaking of chronicles. Only the fish remains. Only the water.

Yesterday, raising a vessel of water from the well, I was bending down. On the murky surface flickered someone's face. Instead of eyes it had two black sockets. Two black cavern-mouths. The more I followed it, the more hazy the features of the image became. It seemed that the world was rejecting me from my own self. Down there in the depths, where the living turn to nothing, and then to something again.

†

I was present here when Count Guillaume came to view the newly-laid monastery wall. He had with him a distinguished visitor, Godefroy VII, Lord of Brabant. It is said that in his veins flows the blood of Godefroy de Bouillon, Defender of the Holy Sepulchre. That appeared to be the truth. The same high cheekbones. The same wandering gaze. It is also said that Godefroy was the bravest of the pilgrims, and I looked with interest at his successor. What kind of man was he? Godefroy was a weak man. What was taken for courage was only obstinacy – fear of retreating.

Actually the brave remained in the mountains of Anatolia and the deserts of Syria. The Lord calls the righteous to Him-

self. To his own people, that they may fall again in some new battle. The lord of Brabant looked me in the face and I did not flinch. I can afford that. I am only a gardener, insignificant and meaningless like the blades of grass in the monastery grounds. It is said that an unremarked life is a commendation to God.

†

This afternoon rain started pouring at Boscodon. The water came with such force that it was as if someone had tipped an azure-blue beaker out in a single shower. Brother Glaber says that the rain is a part of the redemption granted by heaven to the earth. It sounds beautiful, but that is the wisdom of monks.

The rain is only appreciated by those who expect it: the peasants whose grain has been parched for weeks in the fields. The soldiers, half-dead under the Syrian sun. I watched as the dark flecks on the surface of the soil changed into pools in a moment. The rain seemed to flush everything away, the past and the present. The walls of Jerusalem and the monastery walls. The imprisonment of walls. The world broke down and fell apart, there remained only water, flung down from heaven. A heavenly waterfall.

Later, late in the evening, we all went to Mass. I stood among the brothers, but it seemed to me as if I were looking down on them from above. The monks sang and their voices undulated beneath the vaults of the new church. Outside it was still raining.

†

In the courtyard of the monastery a magnolia is flowering. In the sunshine it seems as if a candle-flame were flickering in every cluster of flowers. "*Post tenebras spero lucem*" mumbled the abbot as he stopped on the procession to admire the tree. Then he looked me in the eye, as if expecting a response. This

world is full of shadows, I could have said. Why not the next? But I knew that the head of the monastery does not expect anything of me. I held my tongue.

There are many different plants growing in the Boscodon gardens, but there is no lavender. It would be good if it were adapted to the soils here. Fields of lavender could spread around the monastery as in Languedoc, through which we rode with Count Raymond's troops. We rocked in the saddle, the sun blazed down on us, and all around the lavender shimmered blue, as if Heaven had descended to Earth and said: just a little more patience – Jerusalem may be the next town beyond the azure sea. Not much further to go.

†

Anno Domini 1098. Antioch

After sunset we set out toward Harem. Seven hundred knights, pale and sallow-cheeked with hunger. We are trying to leave camp as quietly as possible, so as not to arouse the attention of the defenders of Antioch. In battle formation we move along the Aleppo road, as noiselessly as ghosts. An army of spirits, I think to myself as I look around. Gliding through the night, vanishing by morning. Those who say: would that it were evening. Whose shadows are their friends. And darkness their allies. The terrors of darkness.

Some hours before dawn it starts to rain. The shower is not heavy, but nevertheless we are soon wet through. By sunrise we get to a clearing between a lake and a river, which has been chosen by Bohémond as the site of battle. We are protected on the flanks and able to make a single swoop together. Like a scorpion that has stretched out its sting, ready to strike. Blindly,

without regard to the size of its opponent, with the simplest plan of attack.

And so then it is another early morning and another battle formation, but the feeling is different each time, the boom-booming of the heart, the taste of dust, the taste of iron and the flashes before the eyes. The knowledge that you are in one piece and alive, as alive as you can be, and you can live for two hundred years like Abraham, but you will never be more alive until your dying hour. We are arrayed in six *batailles*, the silent knights, the cutting edge of the crusade, the tip of the lance, and whatever else we are. But as to what is going on with the other five, I have no idea. I only know who is beside me, and I am aware of myself too, though that feeling is fleeting and wants to escape, like a captured bird whose heart is pounding and who thinks only of how to tear itself free.

And then Bohémond gallops up in front of the ranks, on a black stallion, his standard with a red serpent fluttering behind him, and the flag-bearer is a young boy, a mere child, and his hands are trembling. He is young, he is afraid. That is natural.

“Courage, men,” says Bohémond. “And stand firm. Soon we will kill them all. Those pony-riders will be unable to withstand our attack. The rain has made their bowstrings soggy and in close combat they will make no opposition for us. Think of the fame of your ancestors. And of how you will be spoken of in the future. When you hear the sound of the horn, then – lances forward and go on the attack! Slaughter the heathen and the Lord will rejoice.”

It is a good speech. Brief and clear. In the language of swordsmen, not of chroniclers. And then the call of the horn, and we go into action. We do not know how many infidels there are ahead of us, but one can guess there are thousands. We do



not think of that. Ranked side by side, the five *batailles* rush past the enemy, approaching along the Aleppo road, who seem to have no inkling of our presence. One moment they have before them the sunrise, the clearing, the river and the lake, and the next, a wall of iron is bearing down upon them, and that wall of iron is ourselves, and on this day we are much more besides. And the advance guard of Ridwan makes no opposition to us, not even so much as to break the pace of our attack. We cut through it like a scythe through grain, leaving broad dark spaces in the field. But that is only the advance guard, and the further we go, the denser the troops become. Yet still they cannot halt our progress.

There are those who reason after the event that a part was played by the sun which shone behind us, or by the hill to our left, which drove the adversary to confusion, because they had no idea how many we had in reserve. One thing is clear – Bohémond’s battle plan worked, and even those among us who were inwardly prepared for death observe that death was at work that day among the enemy and did not have much time left for us. And for us it remains to drive more and more infidels before us, so that the Reaper’s scythe will flash in a single direction and not turn back on us. It is hard work and we are giving the best of ourselves, and the only thing we understand is that instead of falling back we always move forwards, and we would be fools not to take advantage of that. We are afraid that this might all end, that our luck in battle may turn and then it will be our turn to retreat, as we did that time by the main gates, and so we chop and hack and hew, at one moment something seems to break, there is not resistance any more, we carrying on hacking, and then the field before us is clear, the enemy flees and the battle is over. We have hacked Ridwan’s forces to pieces and the pilgrimage is saved.

We put our swords in their sheaths and descend from the saddle, standing on the field, our heads bowed, and there are those, too, who collapse on the ground from their wounds or from exhaustion. But then Bohémond comes and says that we have fought God's battle and won. And he also says that if this is not a miracle of the Lord, he would like to know what is. But above all he wants to acknowledge our bravery, for he has never seen braver men in his life. And he uncovers his head and bows low before his army, for at that moment God's army is Bohémond's army, and that is right, it has been earned. I look at him and I wish I were capable of feeling the joy of victory. But all that I feel is weariness.



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## Inga Žolude

### *Mierinājums Ādama kokam*

A Solace for Adam's Tree (a collection of stories)

Publishing House: **Dienas Grāmata Publishers**

#### Biography

The prose writer Inga Zolude was born in 1984 and received her master's degree in English from the University of Latvia. She studied English literature at Southern Illinois University through the Fulbright Program and worked as a project coordinator and manager in the field of culture and education. She is currently studying for her doctorate at the University of Latvia. She has been a member of the Writers' Union in Latvia since 2010.

Zolude has had her works published in various periodicals, and her debut novel, *Silta zeme* (Warm Earth) was published in 2008. She regularly reviews works by Latvian and foreign authors. She has also translated poetry by Philip Larkin and Robert Crawford, among others. She received a special award from the cultural magazine *Rīgas Laiks* (Riga Times) in 2007. She has taken part in many literary and cultural projects and has received several grants, including the Nordic Council of Ministers' Baltic Sleipnir Grant.

Recently, the new novel *Red Children* (*Sarkanie bērni*) has won Inga Zolude, both - the annual prize of the Writers' Union of Latvia and philanthropist and entrepreneur Raimonds Gerkenš' year 2011 novel contest prize. *Red Children* have been published in Latvia in March 2012 by *Dienas Gramata*.

Inga Zolude has also turned to playwriting. Her stories and excerpts from novel *Warm Earth* have been translated and published in anthologies in English, German, French, Swedish, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Czech and other languages. Short story collection *A solance to the Adam's Tree* is going to be translated in Hungarian, Czech and Bulgarian. While engaged in writing criticism full time, Inga Zolude is also in process of completing hers PhD in literary studies.

#### Synopsis

Inga Zolude's short story collection reflects on different scenes of life in urban and rural areas in modern-day Latvia. The author's rich and ripe language describes a bright and panoramic view of the past, present and future. A very specific pattern of Zolude's writing (also demonstrated in her first novel) is her skill at destroying any borders between reality and fiction, known and unknown, national and cosmopolitan. Sometimes it is impossible to guess the place or time that frame these stories, which deal with the so-called 'big subjects' at the heart of human life. Despite that, Zolude's stories strongly reflect the atmosphere of 21st century Europe, and make the collection one of the most important prose works published in Latvia during recent years.

## Mierinājums Ādama kokam

Inga Žolude

### Sprīdīte

Es tieši nācu no darbā iekārtošanas aģentūras *Nadežda's Global Human Work Market*, kas specializējies sūtīšanā uz Īriju. Es gāju cauri tiem vecajiem kapiem. Es vispār nesaprotu, kā tur nokļuvu. Man šķiet, es apmaldījos. Eju pa ielu priecīga, ka beidzot braukšu uz Dublinu un satikšu pārējos radus, priecājos, priecājos, pārlasu līgumu un info paketi un pēkšņi skatos — apkārt kaut kādi veci, sagāzušies pieminēkļi. Nebija tā, ka es nesaprastu, kur atrodos, es zināju, tie noteikti ir tie vecie kapi. Es te esmu bijusi agrāk, kad mācījos Banku augstskolā. Mani gan ātri atskaitīja. Negāja man. Vispār gāja labi, bet trīs priekšmetus nevarēju nokārtot sekmīgi — angļu valodu, vācu valodu un latviešu valodu. Jau no bērnības man bija tā slimība, ka neprot lasīt, neatšķir burtus, man viss vienmēr bija jāiekaļ no galvas. Citos priekšmetos es uzmanīgi klausījos un iegau-mēju un pēc tam varēju ļoti sekmīgi atstāstīt. Augstskolā es ie-rakstīju lekcijas diktofonā un ietaupīju laiku, mēģinot atpazīt vārdus. Es, protams, tagad protu lasīt, taču man tas tāpat aiz-ņem nedaudz ilgāku laiku, un ieskaitēs stresa situācijā es vispār visu aizmirstu, tāpēc arī izkritu valodās. Bet man tāpat riebās tā Banku augstskola. Tagad man ir daudz labāks diploms, es pabeidzu LU Ekonomikas un vadībzinātņu fakultāti gandrīz ar sarkano diplomu, psiholoģijā tikai seši dabūju. Vispār biju uzcītīga. Paralēli arī mācījos taisīt manikīru, skropstu ilgviļ-ņus un pielikt mākslīgās skropstiņas. Katrai sievietei tas būtu

jāprot, jārūpējas par sevi, taču nē, raud, ka vīrieši ne tādi, bet pašas kā slaucējas staigā. Paskatieties apkārt!

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Man kļūst baisi. Parks ir satumsis, piepeši te vairs nav tik daudz jauno māmiņu vai citu vienkāršu caurgājēju, bet viņu vietā uzradušies dīvaina paskata cilvēki — rudiem matiem, vasarraibumiem, viņi līdzinās elfiem un sarunājas nesaprotamā valodā. Es mēģinu sev iedvest, ka tas tikai manu baiļu auglis, un meklēju izeju no parka, taču nespēju to atrast. Centrā te ir dīvaina baznīca, iekšā deg gaismas, bet ārpusē tā ir tumša, tumša, melna, un visas durvis ir ciet, slēgtas, tām priekšā režģi. Apeju baznīcai apkārt, raustu visas durvis, bet nekā, dažas no tām ir vispār aizcementētas, līdz sabīstos ne pa jokam, kad ieraugu divus bērnus smilškastē pie baznīcas sienas, viņi spēlējas tumsā, runādami nesaprotamas zilbes, es nospriežu, ka tā vien tāda dīvaina bērnu valoda, bet ieklausoties es saprotu, ka tā ir īsta valoda, un izskatās viņi paši arī pavisam dīvaini — mati gaisā, kā vēja izpūsti, spilgti sarkani kā uguns, un sejas no vienas vietas nosētas vasarraibumiem. Es ņemu kājas pār pleciem un steidzos projām no šīs dīvainās baznīcas, skrienot garām kapličām, sajūtu tādu kā ēdiena smaržu un piepeši atceros, ka esmu izsalkusi, nez cik stundas jau te maldos, jau nakts melnums, bet nākamā doma ir daudz šaušalīgāka — tie noteikti ir bomži, kas kapličā cep tādu pašu nevainīgu meiteni, kas ieklīdusi parkā. Es skrienu, ko kājas nes, man pretī skrien koki, no kuriem nevaru izvairīties, ieskrienu vienā ar plecu, aizķeros aiz saknes, skrienu pieliekusies, lai neviens mani neredzētu, līdz tiešā trāpījumā...

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Zelta pods. Pods ar zeltu. Godadieva vārds! Pamostos no bezsamaņas, galva sāp no trieciena, ar kādu iedrāzos kokā, saknes

spiežas sānos. Es ceru, ka tas bijis tikai ļauns murgs un es tagad piecelšos, iziešu no parka un došos mājās. Arī tumsa vairs nav tik necaurredzami melna, šur tur spīd uguntiņas. Sākumā domāju, ka tās ir laternas, bet tad pamanīju, ka uguntiņas mirgo, nevis spīd rāmi, tās burtiski raustījās, tad izdzisa pavisam, it kā pārtrūktu elektrība. Tad gaismiņa iedegās citur, sāka raustīties un atkal izdzisa. Taču es pamanīju, ka ar katru reizi tās pietuvinājās man, līdz bija tik tuvu, ka es varēju saskatīt, ka tā sākas kā sprakšķis, tad no tās izlaužas liesma un mazs zaļš cilvēciņš, rūķis, kas tur kaut kādu māla podu, no kura nāk gaismas stars, tad tas sāk mirgot, un pazūd gan liesma, gan cilvēciņš, gan pods ar staru. Un es palieku atkal viena tumsā, savākusi savus Īrijas līgumus, pieceļos kājās un eju uz ielas pusi.

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Paldies dievam, es tikpat kā pilnībā biju atguvusies pēc trieciena un gāju mērķtiecīgi uz ielas pusi, es redzēju tālumā mašīnas un autobusu, es domāju, ka tūdaļ man izdosies atrast izeju no šī parka. Taču, kad nonācu jau pavisam tuvu ielai, tā sāka attālināties, es sāku skriet tai pretī, bet tā kļuva arvien tālāka, es jutos, kā skrienot uz skrejceļa trenāžiera sporta zālē, tad es apstājos un skatījos uz ielu, mēģināju saprast, kā lai apmāna šo celiņu, kas mani ved atkal parkā iekšā, un es jau tuvojos dīvainajai baznīcai bez ieejas, kas tāpat deg gaiša un bija sākusi skanēt lūdzēju kora balsi, kas dziedāja kādu meldiņu ar nezināmu tautisku pieskaņu nesaprotamā valodā. Te piepeši pamanīju, ka man pretī nāk divi cilvēki, un es uzelpoju. Es viņiem atvainojos un vaicāju pēc izejas no parka. Viņi uz mani dīvaini skatījās, tad latviski ar šausmīgu, neidentificējamu akcentu jautāja, kāpēc es gribu tikt ārā. Es atbildēju, ka vēlos nokļūt mājās, jo man jāatvadās no saviem draugiem un tuviniekiem un jāsāk kravāt mantas, jo es beidzot došos uz Īriju, kur strādāšu par menedže-

ri vienā no labākajiem restorāniem, kur nāk ēst zvaigznes. Piepriši es sajutu spēcīgas sāpes kājā, tad rāvienu, elpas trūkumu, pārbīli, mani ierāva zemē! Man pie kājas bija pieķēries kāds skelets, liķis!

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Es atguvos un drīz vien sapratu, ka esmu dzīva, man matos un uz sejas bija smiltis un zemes bumbuli, es gulēju uz auksta betona, virs manis bija betona velve, un griestos bija sprauga, pa kuru nāca gaiss un varēju redzēt satumsušas debesis. Man apkārt stāvēja vairāki cilvēki, viņi visi bija nosēti vasarraibumiem, ar ugunīgi rudiem matiem, dažiem no viņiem bija uz priekšu izbidīts apakšžoklis. Kur es esmu, es vaicāju, kas jūs esat? Tu esi tur, kur tev jābūt. Mēs redzējām tavu līgumu. Jā, es braukšu strādāt uz Īriju. Tev nekur nav jābrauc. Tu jau esi šeit. Mēs esam Īrijā. Bet kā? Es pārlaidu skatienu betonētajai telpai. Šī ir Īrija? Ko jūs gribat man iestāstīt?! Formāli šī jau ir Īrija, bet mēs vēl joprojām esam pie ieejas. Tūliņ dosimies tālāk. Un ieeja ir caur kapu, cauri zemei? Kur es esmu?! Vai šī ir elle? Viņi mani piecēla un veda pa gaiteni, kas pārtapa šaurā ieliņā ar mazām mājiņām, uz kurām bija dažādas izkārtnes. Iela kā iela, tikai tā nelīdzinājās nevienai no Rīgas ielām, virs māju jumtiem nebija debesu, bet griesti, kas bija nokrāsoti kā debesis. Viņi mani ieveda durvīs, virs kurām bija izkārtne *Barbers*, tur darbojās tādi paši ugunīgi rudi cilvēki priekšautos, viņi bija draudzīgi, taču es nesapratu daudz no viņu sarunām, viņiem bija dīvaina izruna. Viņi mani iesēdināja krēslā, frizieris, kā izrādījās, atvēra skapīti, kas bija piekrauts pilns ar vienādām kastītēm, viņš paņēma vienu tādu, uz tās bija rakstīts *Irish Red*, viņi man teica, ka, pirms ieeju pilsētā, mani jāsagatavo, lai pārējā sabiedrība mani pieņemtu kā savējo. Pēc aptuveni stundas mani mati bija rudi, tad mani savās rokās ņēma *permanent make-up artist Katy*, un pēc diezgan sāpīgas un nepatīka-

mas procedūras mana seja bija nosēta gaišbrūniem vasarraibumiem. Pēc tam viņi man paziņoja, ka esmu gatava, tikai vēl viena lieta — viņi man uzdāvināja *The Concise Dictionary of Gaelic*. Iekšā bija ielikta lapiņa ar biežāk lietojamiem izteicieniem pirmajam laikam.

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No citiem paslepšus debesis vērojošajiem uzzināju, ka ir arī citas ieejas, viņi man uzzīmēja karti, un es apstaigāju šīs vietas, daudzi no portāliem bija kapličas, kur rūķi glabāja savus zelta podus. Tie bija portāli starp tagadni un pagātņi, mājām un Īriju, taču es nekad nemēģināju neko vairāk, nebāzu galvu ārā pa šķirbu, neskatījos, kas notiek virszemē, jo mani būtu ieraudzījuši mazie zaļie rūķīši — spiegi un portālu sargātāji, bet es nevēlējos pamest šo laimīgo zemi, kur par cilvēkiem tika gādāts, sākot no friziera reizi mēnesī, kurš piekrāsoja saknes ar *Irish Red*, beidzot ar integrēšanu sabiedrībā un dzīves līmeņa celšanu. Īrija piepildīja manus sapņus.



*A Solace for Adam's Tree (a collection of stories)***Inga Zolude***Translated from Latvian by Suzanne McQuade***Thumbelina**

I've just come from Nadezhda's Global Human Work Market, an employment agency specializing in emigration to Ireland. I was walking through this old cemetery. I don't really know how I got here. I seem to be lost. I'm walking along the road, happy that I'm finally about to go to Dublin and meet my other relatives, happy, happy, reading the contract and the info packet and suddenly I look up—all around me are these old, crumbling monuments. It wasn't like I couldn't figure out where I was, I knew that this must be the old cemetery. I've been here before, when I was studying at the BA School of Business and Finance. They counted me out quickly. I didn't do well. I did well in general, but I couldn't successfully pass three subjects -- English, German, and Latvian. I've had that disease since childhood where you can't read, can't differentiate the letters, I always had to chisel everything out of my head. In other subjects I listened carefully and memorized and then I could very successfully recite it all. In high school I recorded the lectures with a dictaphone and set aside time to try to identify the words. Of course, now I can read, but it still takes me a little more time and in a stressful test situation I forget pretty much everything, and so I failed languages. But I hated the BA School of Business and Finance anyway. Now I have a much better diploma, I graduated from the University of Latvia in the Faculty of Economics and

Management, nearly with honors; I only got a middle passing grade in psychology. Basically I was diligent. I also learned how to do manicures on the side, give eyelash perms and apply false eyelashes. All women should be able to do that, should be able look after themselves; if not, they cry over the fact that they don't have such and such a guy, while they themselves walk around looking like milkmaids. Look around!

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I've become frightened. It's gone dark now in the park, suddenly there aren't as many young mums or other mere passers-by, these strange looking people have appeared in their place—red-headed, freckled, looking like elves and speaking in an unintelligible language. I try to reassure myself that they're just a creation of my fear, and I look for the exit from the park, but I can't find it. Here at the center there's a strange church with lights burning inside of it, while the outside is dark, dark, black, and all the doors are shut, locked, covered by grates. I walk around the church, pulling on all the doors, but nothing, some of them are practically cemented shut, until I'm startled, no joke, by the sight of two children in the sandbox at the door of the church. They're playing in the dark, speaking in unintelligible syllables; I decide it must be one of those strange languages children have, but on listening further, I understand that it's an actual language, and they look just like all those strangers—their hair in the air, as if blown by the wind, bright red like fire, and faces dotted everywhere with freckles. I hightailed it, racing away from this strange church, running past the crypt, sensing the smell of food cooking and suddenly I remember that I'm hungry, I've no idea how many hours I've been lost here, the night already grown dark, but my next thought is far more gruesome—they must be bums there in the

crypt, bums who cook the very same innocent girls who wander into the park. I run as fast as my legs will carry me, trees racing towards me, I can't avoid them, I run into one with my shoulder, tripped up by roots, I run stooped over, so no one will see me, until the direct hit...

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A golden pot. A pot of gold. God's honest word! I wake from a blackout, roots pressed into my side, head aching from the blow of running into a tree. I'm hoping that it was all a bad dream, and now I'll get up, leave the park, and head home. Even the dark is no longer so impenetrably black, little fires burn here and there. At first I think they're lanterns, but then I notice how the little fires glimmer rather than shine calmly, they literally flicker, then fade completely, as if the electricity had been cut off. Then the little light ignites somewhere else, begins to flicker and fades again. But I'm noticing it get closer to me each time, until it's so close that I can see how it starts like a sparkle, and from that sparkle a flame breaks out, and a tiny little green person too, holding some sort of stone pot emitting these beams of light, then it begins to glimmer, and then it disappears: the flame, the tiny person, even the pot and its beams. And I'm left alone again in the dark, gathering up my Irish papers, rising to my feet and heading towards the road.

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Thank god I'd almost completely recovered from the blow and was heading determinedly towards the road. In the distance I could see cars and buses, I thought I'd manage to find an exit from this park any minute. But when I came almost right up to the road, it started to get further away, I started to run towards it, but it grew even further. I felt like I was running on a treadmill at the gym. Then I stopped and looked at the road, trying

to understand how to trick this path that carries me back to the inside of the park, and then I was right up next to the strange entranceless church with its burning lights, and there was the sound of a church choir, voices singing a little melody of an unknown folk song in an unintelligible language. Here I suddenly noticed two people approaching me, and I took a breath. I excused myself and asked for the exit to the park. They looked at me strangely, then in Latvian, with an awful, unrecognizable accent, asked why I wanted to get out. I answered that I would like to get home, I have to say goodbye to my friends and relatives and have to start packing my things, I'm finally headed to Ireland, where I'm going to work as a manager in one of the finest restaurants, where all the stars come to eat. Suddenly I felt an intense pain in my leg, then a jerk, the loss of breath, a sudden shock, and I was pulled into the ground! I'd been caught hold of at the leg by a skeleton, a corpse!

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I came to and soon enough understood that I was alive, there was sand and clumps of dirt in my hair and face, I lay on cold cement, above me, a cement vault, and in the ceiling there were cracks that let the light through, and through which I could see the darkening sky. Several people stood around me, all of them had faces dotted with freckles and fiery red hair, some of them had underbites. Where am I, I asked, who are you? You're where you're supposed to be. We saw your contract. Yes, I'm going to work in Ireland. You don't have to go anywhere. You're already here. We're in Ireland. But how? I cast a glance around the cement room. This is Ireland? What are you trying to tell me?! Technically this is Ireland, but we're still only at the entrance. We'll head further soon. And the entrance is through a grave, through the earth? Where am I?! Is this hell? They

picked me up and led me down a hallway, which changed into a narrow lane with little houses on which were posted various signs. A street like any street, only not like any streets in Riga, there was no sky over the rooftops of the houses, but a ceiling painted to look like the sky. They led me to a door signposted “Barbers,” there the same fiery red people worked in pinafores, they were friendly, although I didn’t understand much of their conversation, they had a strange accent. They sat me in a chair, the hairdresser, as he turned out to be, opened a cupboard stocked full of identical boxes. He took one of them out and on it was written “Irish Red”; he said that before entering the city, I had to prepare myself so that the rest of society would accept me as one of their own. After about an hour my hair was red, then “Permanent Make-up Artist Katy” took me in her hands, and after a rather painful and unpleasant procedure my face was dotted with light brown freckles. After that they informed me that I’m ready, just one more thing—and they gave me *The Concise Dictionary of Gaelic*. Inside, a one-page insert of the most useful beginner phrases.

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From the other secret sky watchers I learned that there are other entrances as well, they drew me a map, and I made the rounds of these places. Several of the portals were crypts where the gnomes kept their pots of gold. These were portals between the present and the past, between home and Ireland, but I never tried anything more, never thrust my head out through the cracks, never looked at what was happening above ground, for I’d see the little green gnomes—spies and portal guards—and didn’t want to leave this happy land, where I’d come to be expected, starting with the hairdresser, once a month, who colored my roots with *Irish Red*, and ending with my integration

into society and the promise of a better life. Ireland fulfilled all of my dreams.



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## Giedra Radvilavičiūtė

### *Šiandakt aš miegosiu prie sienos*

Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall

Publishing House: **Baltos lankos**

#### Biography

Giedra Radvilavičiūtė was born in 1960 in Panevėžys, Lithuania. After finishing secondary school in Panevėžys, she graduated from Vilnius University in 1983 with a degree in Lithuanian language and literature. After that, she worked for a few years as a school teacher in her native region of north Lithuania. From 1987 to 1994, she worked as a journalist in Vilnius, for family and parenting magazines, and from 1994 to 1998 she lived in the USA, where her husband Giedrius Subačius was teaching at Chicago University.

She now lives in Vilnius with her daughter (a student of design at Vilnius Academy of Arts), where she is working at a government institution as a language editor.

#### Synopsis

These short stories, which can also be seen as semi-autobiographical essays, mostly deal with everyday occurrences, seemingly insignificant experiences and perceptions. Their sophisticated sensibilities reveal a rich existence, a deep sense of every quotidian moment. They are also very readable, devoid of any pomposity or exultation, often tinged with irony, dealing with such experiences as illness, physical fragility, loneliness, inability to pursue stable relationships, the burden of domestic chores, and so on.

“Writers are completely naked in their texts, even when they desire to conceal themselves under fantasies, such as the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, events from other lives, or the opposite sex,” says Giedra Radvilavičiūtė. Some of the stories deal with the situation of a middle-aged woman, living with her daughter in a small flat in the Old Town of Vilnius; they look deep into everyday events, but at the same time the exquisite literary quality of the text contributes to a rewarding reading experience.

One of the segments in this book, ‘The Allure of the Text’ (which was included in the Dalkey Archive Press anthology, *Best European Fiction 2010*), lays out five criteria for a good literary work, which the author then goes on to illustrate in the unfolding story. Another story, ‘Those Whom I Would Like to Meet Again: An Introduction’, is a narrative reflection on a very diverse set of characters.

## *Šiagnakt aš miegojau prie sienos*

**Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**

### **„Susipažinkite: tie, kuriuos sutikti norėčiau dar kartą“**

Būsiu praleidusi gerą gabalą pasakojimo galvodama, kaip atsitiko, kad šita moteris tapo geriausia mano drauge. Drauge, kurios kaip ir kitų, kuriuos norėčiau sutikti dar kartą, objektyviai aprašyti neįmanoma, nes tam trukdo meilė. Šitą prieštaraimą yra pastebėjęs ir Salingeris: „...rašau apie juos su ne-blėstančia meile (o šie žodžiai, man rašant, jau irgi tampa netikri), bet nevirtu talentu, ir šis nevienodumas, užuot pateikęs ryškų ir tikslų veikėjų paveikslą, beviltiškai gramzdina juos meilėje, kuriai talentas niekada neprilygs ir kuri, talentą pranokdama, veikėjus tarytum saugo.“ Galėjau viena tyloj praleisti dvi savaitgalio dienas, bet pasikviečiau ją čia ir įtariu, kad Salingerį teks dviem dienoms padėti ant palangės. Draugė buvo skaičiusi tik Zoščenkos apsakymus, ir tai neatidžiai. Ekspresyvieji jos žodžiai beveik visi buvo rusiški, nemokėjo jokios užsienio kalbos.

Televizorių žiūrėdavo nuolat spaudydama nuotolinio valdymo pultelį, negaliu to pakęsti. (Eisim miegot, „Imtynininko“ nežiūrėsim, ir be to aišku, koks Rourke'as „sbornikas“.) Jos išlaidos buvo neadekvačios pajamoms, sakydavo, kad Dievas sukūrė pasaulį per mažai pinigų ir ji jų pasiskolinanti iš velnio. Apie intymius dalykus kalbėdavo nejausdama ribos („Jei būdavo galima rinktis oralinį seksą ar karpį su drebučiais, rinkdavausi žuvį.“) Be pastangų laužydavo kalbos klišes, kurdama naujas prasmes („Pedofilai turi sėdėti kalėjime iki negyvos galvos.“) Kolekcionavo skelbimus nuo stulpų. Vertingiausias eksponatas toje kolekcijoje buvo lentelė, kurią ji nuplėšė basei-



no persirengimo kambaryje: „Džiovintuvas galvos plaukams džiovinti.“ Šiais metais draugei turėjo keisti širdies vožtuvą. Ji laukė operacijos taip, kaip aš laikiu parduotuvėje pasikeisti per mažo numerio batus. Įsivaizdavo, kad mirs taip pat kaip jos senelis. Nuo širdies smūgio. Žaisdama pati su savim vakaro spindulių apšviestoj verandoj. Daržė už stiklo kaip kompiuterio ekrane bėgioja kaimynų anūkai. Kibiro vandenį suvirpina įkritęs šapas. Kur ne kur ant palangių priberta žieminių obuolių. Ant sofos guli trys cukinijų krokodilai ir nutukęs moliūgas. Lėtai lenkdama kelius ji įstrižai ima slinkti nuo šiaudinės kėdės, išsigandusi katė iš sterblės strykteli į amžinybę, ir pirštai atsigniaždami paleidžia pasianso kortą.

Tokias cigaretes kaip draugės – „Parliament“ – Čikagoje rūkydavo vienas advokatas. Kiekvieną sekmadienį apsivilkęs rudu kostiumu ir baltais marškiniais, su lazdele jis ateidavo į pseudo-lietuviško maisto restoraną. Kai sakoma, kad Amerikoje galima atrasti kiekvienos šalies kultūrą, visada patikslinu, kad ten galima atrasti kiekvienos kultūros surogatą. Pavaduodavau tame neva lietuvių restorane sekmadieniais dirbusią lietuvę studentę. Padavėjos sakė, kad advokatas bankrutavęs. Užsisakytos anties jis beveik neparagaudavo. Vyras pusvalandį paukštį pjaustydavo kąsneliais taip, tarsi kepsnyje būtų paslėptas žiedas su briliantu, ir nusivylusia veido išraiška užsirūkydavo sėdėdamas visada prie to paties staliuko „for smoking“. Vienąkart jis nebaigęs cigaretės pašoko ir iš kišenės pabėręs ant stalo dolerius išbėgo į gatvę stabdyti geltonų taksi. Buvo praėję jau kokie trys darbo toje kavinėje sekmadieniai, kai sužinojau, kad advokatas yra aklas. Norėčiau sutikti jį dar kartą. Norėčiau sutikti jį dar kartą taip, kaip kartais magia sulaukti filmo pabaigos.

Kitas visiškai aklas žmogus, kurį norėčiau sutikti, yra mano dėdė. Akti jis ėmė dar studijų metais, mokydamasis ispanų ir

anglų kalbų Pedagoginiame institute. Instituto nebaigė, nes tada nebuvo diktofonų, kompiuterių ir audiolaboratorių, prieinamų akliesiems. Jis nuvažiavo į Odesos klinikas ir ten oda, paimta iš apatinės lūpos, jam užlopė akies obuolį. Ligoninės palatoje gyveno armėnas, kuris neskirdavo svetimose kalbose giminės ir asmenų, kai eidavo atnešti vyno, sakydavo: „Nu, moja pošla.“ Kai vyno atnešti eilė atėjo dėdei, jis pasiklydo. Su viena užklijuota akimi ir išputusia lūpa. Apgriuvusio namo kieme už praviro lango stovėjo pusnuogė moteris, atsirėmusi į lango rėmą. Dėdė net pamanė, kad ten prasideda garsiosios Odesos katakombos. „Gal ta gidė buvo nuoga, – pasakojo jis po daugelio metų, – bet neatsimenu, kad žemiau palangės būtų matęsis jos gyvenimo centras. Kai iš jos išėjau, tai kitoj pusėj namo plytėjo dykuma, nepažymėta Ukrainos žemėlapyje.“ Dėdė nesinešiojo baltosios lazdelės ir vaikščiodavo gimtajame mieste greitai, viską regėdamas atminties akimis. Bet vienąkart jis apvertė ant tiltelio stovėjusį vežimėlį su vaiku. Vaiko motina kažkodėl išvadino jį impotentu, vežimėlis nuplaukė upeliu iki Nevėžio. Berniukas į krantą išsikabarojo ant gulbės nugaros, vėliau tapo miesto garbės piliečiu, dirba dabar Susisiekimo ministerijoje. Su dėde iki šiol keičiamės dovanomis. Paskutinė mano dovana jam buvo katalonės dainuojama „Bésame mucho“. Pagavau tą merginą po koncerto sename dvare. Papasakojau jai apie nebaigtą mokytis dėdės ispanų kalbą ir ji net neišklausiusi istorijos iki galo padainavo jam tą dainą į mano mobilųjį telefoną. Tiksliau – jie dainavo kartu. Apšviesti telefono akinamai balti kataloniški dantys, o kitame krašto gale – dėdė visas: apsmukusi pižama, vilnonės kojinės, kambarys be šviesos. Šviesa tame kambaryje neatliko jokios funkcijos, muzika dėdei dabar reiškė tą patį, ką kitiems šviesa. Kai man buvo treji metai, dėdė dar matė. („Nesijaudink, puikiai atsimeinu, kaip pašviesėja arbata puodelyje, kai į ją įmeti citrinos.“)

Jis fotografuodavo moteris, tas, kurios sendavo nepastebimai, šachmatus ant lentos, jei jie išsidėstydamo patu, šaligatvį išlaužiančius blyškius ūglius. Sušukdamas – *Hola!* – jis išmesdavo mane ant delno iki lubų, kurios tada man rodėsi kaip tėvų nuomojamas medinis dangus.

Iš visų viena ranka pakeliamų vaikų norėčiau sutikti dar kartą tik savo mažą dukterį. Iš egoizmo, kaip besąlygiškai mane mylėjusį žmogų. Virtuvėje Panevėžyje ji atsidarydavo spintelės duris ir žaisdavo pupomis. Žiūrėdama iš šono mėgdavau išardyti mergaitę detalėmis. Plaukai – iš močiutės (anos), šypsena – iš mano mažos motinos portreto, kaulai ir logika – iš tėvo, balsas – iš manęs, erdvinis mąstymas – iš Dievo. Kaip sakė vienas Woody Alleno filmo herojus – Dievas buvo dizaineris, nes viską sukūrė. Dukra nutarė sekti jo pėdomis. Dabar ji užaugo, kai stebiu ją iš šalies, nebeišsinarsto detalėmis. Įtariu, kad ji turi besąlygiškai mylintį žmogų. Gimimo dieną jis atsiunčia SMS, joje būna parašyta, kurioje Vilniaus vietoje užkasta dovana. Sidabrinio kastuvėlio miltams semti dukra išsikasa dėžutes, kuriose būna to vaikinio padaryti žaislai: žibintas su išgraviruotomis ant stiklo susikabinusių pelių ir katinų poromis, skėčiais, skirtais prisidengti nuo baimės, ir neegzistuojančio rojaus paukščiais. Karuselė... Ji sukasi, o vietoj krėslų aplink skrieja per pusę perskeltų graikinių riešutų kevalai, kuriuose cukruotus migdolus neša plastikiniai sklandytuvai. Kartais tose dėžutėse būna rašteliai.

Jei prisiminiau besąlygiškai mylinčius, reikėtų paminėti ir vieną vyrą iš savo biografijos. Jis mane traukė kaip psichiatras ligonį, o aš jį... Manau, kad būnant su manimi pasaulis jam atsiverdavo ryškesniais gabaliukais, toks, koks jis matosi tarp greitai lekiančio traukinio vagonų. Mūsų pora buvo be perspektyvos, kiekvienas gyvenome kituose pasauliuose, darni

pora turėtų gyventi šiame. Man patiko viena jo mintis: „Žemėje esu laimingas dviem atvejais – kai prisigeriu arba kai sugalvoju ką nors nauja.“ Kartą jis nuvažiavo komandiruotėn į Prahą. Po konferencijos su kolegomis išgėrė cisterną „Budvaizerio“, o turėjo kvailą įprotį, jei leidžia aplinkybės, miegoti nuogas. Kitaip nei man, nuogas kūnas jam nesisiejo su siela, tai tik viena iš medžiagų, sakydavo jis, kaip molis, asbestas ar šilkas. Naktį vienutėje mano draugas atsikėlė iš lovos, dviem žingsniais į kairę pasuko į tualetą, užsimerkęs grįždamas dviem žingsniais, deja, pasuko vėl į kairę ir paskui save užtrenkė duris. Atsimerkė ilgame viešbučio koridoriuje: blausiai apšviestas naktinių lempučių, kyšančių iš matinio stiklo lotosų, raudonas takas it sapno tęsinys driekėsi į niekur. Išeičių buvo nedaug. Pirma – pasibelsti į gretimą duris, kur miegojo konferencijos dalyvis iš ne visada mums draugiškos, bet tikrai krikščioniškos Lenkijos. Antra – susivynioti į taką ir kaip Kleopatrai pasirodyti registratūros antonijams. Pasilenkė, pačiupinėjo – takas buvo per kietas ir per ilgas. Moteris, tą naktį budėjusi prie registratūros stalelio, pamačiusi jį net nemirktelėjo, įdėjo į ištiestos rankos delną raktą (Prahos senamiesčio lankstinuką draugas pasiėmė nuogybei prisidengti).

O kai aš grįžau kartą iš Lenkijos, nešiau perone sunkią tašę. Nežinau, kodėl iki dabar nesu nusipirkusi lagamino su ratukais. Turiu dar vieną trūkumą – jei kas mane sunervina, reikėtų sakyti – sujaudina, atsimenu, kuo buvau tąsyk apsirengusi, nors po to įvykio būtų praėję net dvidešimt metų. Tempiau tašę geležinkelio stotyje ir staiga pajutau, kad nešulys kyla į viršų. Atsisukau – perone užmiegotomis akimis stovėjo tas vyras, kuriam būnant su manimi pasaulis atsiverdavo ryškesniais gabaliukais. „Tu čia ko nors lauki?“ – paklausiau. „Laukiu“, – atsakė jis žiūrėdamas man į akis. Aš irgi žiūrėjau į jį, bet mačiau savo dukart persisukusią kūno spalvos kojine, išsiklaipiusį per

du pasienius veidą, beretę ant riebaluotų plaukų ir pleistrą ant dešinės kojos kulno. Ir jei toliau istoriją pasakotų tašė, perono įvykiai klostytųsi taip. „Vyras mane nunešė prie mašinos, įmetė į tuščią bagažinę. Moteris iškėlė vėl. „Nedurniuok, Kalėdos gi, pažiūrėk, kiek žmonių net prie troleibusų stotelės laukia, nuvešiu tave iki Panevėžio.“ Vyras liko sėdėti ant priekinės sėdynės pirštu sprigtuodamas kabantį pliušinį voriuką, o moteris pasuko į autobusų stotį. Laukdama bilieta eilėje ji padėjo mane ant pritryptų grindų ir užkrito ant viršaus – laukiau, kad iš knygų, dėžučių, skardinių ir batų sudėti mano šonkauliai suplėšys šonus. Tik aš žinojau, kad aname bėgių gale prieš penkiolika valandų ją išlydėjo irgi vyras. Perone jie bučiavosi. Matyt, tai, kad šitame bėgių gale netikėtai ją pasitiko kitas, ji laikė nuodėme.“ Pamąstau, kaip būčiau pasielgusi dabar. Tikriausiai su tuo žmogumi, kuriam nuogas kūnas nesisiedamas su siela atrodė tik viena iš medžiagų – molis, asbestas, šilkas, būčiau keliavusi į pragarą. Ar kas iš viso žino, kur prasideda bėgiai? Kur jie baigiasi ir kas laukia jų gale.

## *Tonight I Shall Sleep by the Wall*

**Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**

*Translated from Lithuanian by Elizabeth Novickas*

### **“Those Whom I Would Like to meet Again: An Introduction”**

I will have missed a good portion of the story by thinking of how it happened that this woman became my best friend. A friend who, like others I would like to meet again, is impossible to write about objectively, because love gets in the way. Salinger isn't the only one who has noticed this contradiction; his epigraph is from Kafka: “...I write about them with steadfast love (even now, while I write it down, this too becomes false) but varying ability, and this varying ability does not hit off the real actors loudly and correctly but loses itself dully in this love that will never be satisfied with the ability and therefore thinks it is protecting the actors by preventing this ability from exercising itself.”

I could have spent two weekend days alone in the quiet, but I invited her here, and I suspect I'll have to put Salinger aside on the window sill for two days. All my friend had ever read was Zoshchenko's stories, and that not very carefully. Her expressive words were almost all Russian; she didn't know any foreign languages. She constantly switched stations with the remote control while watching television; I can't stand that. (We'll go to bed without watching *The Wrestler*, and besides, it's obvious what a *sbornik*, a scumbag, Rourke is.) Her expenses do not correspond to her income: she used to say that God created too little money for the world and she was borrowing it from the devil. She talks about intimate things without sens-

ing the boundaries. (“If it were possible to choose oral sex or jellied carp, I would choose the fish.”) She effortlessly breaks language clichés, creating new meanings. (“Pedofiles should be put away in jail for death.”) She collects signs from posts. The most valuable item in that collection was a sign she tore from a swimming pool’s changing room: “Dryer for drying hair on the head.” This year they were supposed to replace a valve in my friend’s heart. She was waiting for the operation the way I’d wait in a store for them to exchange shoes a size too small. She imagined she’d die the way her grandfather did. From a heart attack. Playing with herself on a veranda lit by the evening’s rays. In the garden beyond the glass, like on a computer screen, the neighbor’s grandchildren run about. The water in a bucket stirred by a fleck falling in. Winter apples strewn here and there about the window sill. Three zucchini crocodiles and a fattened pumpkin lying on the couch. Slowly bending her knees she starts sliding sideways from the wicker chair, the startled cat leaps from her lap into eternity, and her fingers, relaxing, let go of the solitaire card.

The same cigarettes my friend smoked—Parliament—were smoked by this lawyer in Chicago. Every Sunday, dressed in a brown suit and a white shirt and carrying a cane, he would come to a pseudo-Lithuanian restaurant. When it’s said that you can find every country’s culture in America, I always correct this to you can find every culture’s surrogate there. On Sundays I used to substitute for a Lithuanian student who worked in that supposedly Lithuanian restaurant. The waitresses said that the lawyer had gone bankrupt. He would barely touch the duck he ordered. For half an hour, the man would cut the bird up into little pieces as if there were a diamond ring hidden in the roast, and then, with a disappointed look on his face, he would smoke a cigarette, always sitting at the same ‘for smoking’ table. Once,

without finishing his cigarette, he jumped up, and throwing some dollars on the table, ran out into the street to stop a yellow taxi. Some three work Sundays had already passed in that cafe before I found out that the lawyer was blind. I'd like to meet him again. I'd like to meet him again the way I sometimes want to get to the end of a movie.

Another completely blind person I'd like to meet is my uncle. He started going blind when he was still a student learning Spanish and English at the Pedagogical Institute. He didn't finish at the Institute, because back then there weren't any tape recorders, computers, or audio laboratories accessible to the blind. He went to a clinic in Odessa, and there they took some skin from his lower lip and patched it over his eyeball. There was an Armenian in the hospital ward who didn't distinguish gender and person in foreign languages; when he went to fetch wine, he'd say: "*Nu, moja poshla.*" When uncle's turn came to fetch the wine, he got lost. With one covered eye and a swollen lip. In an open window of the courtyard of the dilapidated house stood a half-naked woman, leaning against the window frame. Uncle even thought that the famous Odessa catacombs started there. "Maybe that guide was naked," he said many years later, "but I don't remember seeing the center of her life below the window sill. When I left her, a desert that wasn't on the map of Ukraine spread out on the other side of the house." Uncle didn't carry a white cane and walked the streets of his hometown quickly, seeing everything with eyes of memory. But one time he knocked over a carriage with a child standing on the little bridge. The child's mother for some reason called him an impotent; the carriage floated down the creek to the Nevėžis. The boy scrambled up on shore on the back of a swan, later became an honorary citizen of the town, and now works in the Transportation Ministry. Uncle and I still exchange gifts.



My last gift to him was a Catalan woman singing “Besame mucho.” I caught that girl after a concert at an old manor house. I told her about uncle’s unfinished studies in the Spanish language, and she, without even listening to the end of the story, made a gift of that song on my mobile telephone. More accurately, they would sing together. The blindingly white Catalan teeth lit up the telephone, and on the other end of the country is all of uncle: sagging pajamas, wool socks, and a room without light. Light in that room didn’t perform any function; music now means the same to my uncle as light does to others. When I was three years old, uncle could still see. (“Don’t worry, I still remember perfectly how tea turned light in the cup when you put some lemon in it.”) He used to photograph women, those who aged imperceptibly; chess pieces on a board, if they were in stalemate; and pale sprouts breaking through the sidewalk. Shouting “Hola!” he used to throw me on his palm up to the ceiling, which at the time looked to me like parents’ rented wooden sky.

Out of all the small children lifted on one hand, I’d like to meet only my small daughter again. Out of egotism, as someone who loved me unconditionally. In the kitchen in Panevėžys she would open the cabinet door and play with dried beans. Watching from the side, I liked to disassemble the girl into parts. The hair was from her grandmother (the other one); the smile was from my mother’s portrait as a little girl; the bones and logic were from her father; the voice from me; the spatial thought from God. As one of the characters in a Woody Allen movie said—God was a designer, because he created everything. My daughter decided to follow in his footsteps. Now she’s grown; when I look at her from the side I no longer disassemble the parts. I suspect she has someone who loves her unconditionally. On her birthday he sends an SMS; it includes the spot in Vilnius where her gift is buried. With a silver scoop for measuring flour

my daughter digs out a little box containing toys made by that young man: a flashlight with hugging mice and cats couples engraved on the glass, umbrellas designed to hide from fear, and non-existent birds of paradise. A carousel... It turns, and in place of chairs, walnut shells split in half fly around, in which plastic gliders carry sugared almonds. Sometimes there's notes inside those little boxes.

If I remember unconditional lovers, I should also mention one man from my biography. He attracted me like a psychiatrist attracts the patient, and I him... I believe that when he was with me, the world used to open itself to him in brighter pieces, the way it looks through the cars of a train traveling at great speed. Our pairing had no future; we both lived in other worlds—a harmonious couple should live in this one. I liked one of his thoughts: “There’s two instances when I’m happy on this earth—when I’m drunk, or when I think up something new.” Once he went to a conference in Prague. After the conference, along with his colleagues, he drank a tanker of Budweiser, and he had a silly habit, if circumstances allowed, to sleep in the nude. Unlike me, he didn’t associate a naked body with the soul; it’s just a material, he used to say, like clay, asbestos, or silk. During the night in his cell my friend got out of bed, in two steps turned to the left into the toilet, returning in two steps with his eyes closed he unfortunately turned to the left again, and slammed the door behind him. He opened his eyes in a long hotel corridor: dimly-lit night lights protruded from frosted glass lotuses, and a red runner, like the continuation of a dream, stretched to nowhere. There weren’t a lot of choices. The first—knock on the neighboring door, in which a conference participant from Poland, a country not always friendly to us but truly Christian, was sleeping. The second—wrap himself up in the carpet runner and show himself like Cleopatra to the

registration Anthonys. He bent down and felt it—the runner was too stiff and too long. The woman working that night at the registration desk, without even blinking when she saw him, put the key into the outstretched palm (my friend took a brochure of Prague’s old town to cover his nakedness).

And when I returned one time from Poland, I carried a heavy bag down the platform. I don’t know why I still haven’t bought a suitcase with wheels. I have yet another fault—if someone makes me upset, or I should say, agitated, I remember what I was wearing at the time, even if twenty years may have gone by since. I was hauling the bag through the railroad station and suddenly felt the pack rising upwards. I turned around—on the platform, sleepy-eyed, stood that man for whom the world opened up in brighter pieces being with me. “You’re waiting for someone here?” I asked. “I am,” he said, looking into my eyes. I looked at him too, but I saw my beige stockings twisted around twice, my face bedraggled from two border crossings, the beret on my greasy hair, and the bandage on the heel of my right foot. And if the bag were to continue the story, the events on the platform continued thusly: “The man carried me to the car and threw me into an empty trunk. The woman lifted me out again. ‘Don’t be silly. It’s Christmas, look at how many people are waiting at the trolleybus stop, I’ll take you to Panevėžys.’ The man remained sitting on the front seat, flicking the dangling toy spider with his finger, while the woman headed for the bus station. Waiting in line for a ticket, she put me down on the muddied floor and fell on top—I expected my ribs, piled up out of books, boxes, cans, and shoes, to tear the sides. Only I knew that fifteen hours ago, on the other end of the tracks, a different man saw her off. They kissed on the platform. Apparently, she thought the fact that a different one unexpectedly met her on this end of the tracks was a sin.” I thought about

how I would behave now. I probably would have traveled to hell with that person to whom the naked body, unrelated to the soul, appeared to be just one material of many—clay, asbestos, silk. Does anyone really know where the tracks begin? Where they end, or what's waiting there?



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## Meelis Friedenthal

### *Mesilased*

The Bees

Publishing House: **AS Varrak**

### Biography

The Estonian writer Meelis Friedenthal (b.1973) has written a doctoral thesis at Tartu University on a 13th century philosophical-theological treatise about seeing and vision. Friedenthal has worked as lecturer in the faculty of theology and history and is currently working as a senior researcher in Tartu University Library. His current research topic is the intellectual history of the 17th century.

Friedenthal has earned a reputation as a speculative fiction writer, his first novel *Golden Age* is about the role of history in shaping our identity and won third place in a national novel competition in 2004. The following year, his story 'Nerissa' won an Estonian science fiction prize. He is also a member of the editorial board of the webzine *Algernon*, which publishes science fiction stories, news and articles. His latest novel *The Bees* depicts the end of the 17th century and is a bleak vision about the voyage and encounters of a student who has come from Leiden to Tartu. Friedenthal has also written an extensive postscript about the historical context of the events described in the novel.

### Synopsis

Friedenthal describes the adventures of Laurentius Hylas, a student travelling from the University of Leiden to the Academia Gustavo-Carolina in Tartu, Livonia.

Laurentius arrives in Estonia and Livonia some years before the end of the 17th century, together with his parrot Clodia. The parrot's sanguine temperament is supposed to help counteract the melancholia that affects Laurentius. Tartu has a reputation as a city of muses, but Laurentius sees starving people behind the city gates and feels the dampness of the houses. Thus, his melancholia worsens and he starts to suspect seeing again the ghosts which have haunted him from his childhood onwards. Laurentius begins to feel the black bile inside him piling up and slowly descends into a dreamlike disease where he is unable to differentiate reality from unreality.

Everything he eats tastes of mud and putrefaction, and he feels weaker and weaker every day. He tries to find some cure for his disease but only manages to arouse suspicion of witchcraft. He feels that the suspicion is somewhat justified as he believes that he is the bearer of an evil eye, with everybody who looks into his eyes falling ill or having some kind of accident.

Laurentius hears a professor talking about the medicinal theories of Boyle and follows his advice of moderate bloodletting to cure his condition. Unfortunately, the process does not work and Laurentius faints from loss of blood. In the haze of weakness he sees a girl who has, “eyes like gold, like the dark honey, her breathing like humming”. The girl offers him bread and, after that, Laurentius regains some of his strength. She starts appearing at night offering him more food and, later, Laurentius begins to discover that strange events are happening around him. He is unsure if it is possible to explain them naturally or supernaturally, as the competing philosophical theories he follows permit both.

Kogu aeg sadas vihma. Vihm oli mädandanud saagi põldudel, pannud hallitama majade puust seinad, muutnud vetikaligedaks laevade tekilauad. Laurentius oli juba mitu kuud söönud mädanenud leiba, elanud hallitavates majades ja viimasel nädalal ka libisenud ligedal laevatekil. Must sapp kogunes temasse, nagu jõkke torgatud toki otsa koguneb kõnts. Nüüd astus ta lõpuks kõikuvast paadist sadamakaile, selle põhjamudasse rammitud palkide peale löödud libedatele laudadele ja vaatas kõhklevalt ümbruskonnas ringi. Tuul puhus madalast taevast hoogude kaupa veepritsmeid näkku ja ta proovis aru saada, milline on see maa, kuhu ta enda vabal valikul oli tulnud. Lage, valge liiva ja üksikute pillirootuttidega kaldariba ning ühtlased hallid pilved meenutasid väga seda sadamat, kust ta oli teele asunud. Postilaeva mast paistis samasugusena halli taeva taustal ning palakad, mis nendele olid tõmmatud, paistsid samasugused hallid ja ilmetud nagu siis, kui ta oli teele asunud. Pikalt merre ulatuva silla kõrval oli näha pooleldi porise vee alla mattunud muul ja selle otsas vees kõssitav vana vahimaja, mida ilmselt juba mõnda aega ei olnud keegi kasutanud. Neid majavaresid oli kõikide sadamate juures ning vaatamata oma armetusele sisendas selline pilt Laurentiusele miskipärast hoopis kindlust. Siingi oli sadamaid ümber ehitatud, siingi laiendati uute laevade tarbeks, vanad vahimajad jäeti maha.

Ta ohkas ja kohendas närviliselt veest tilkuvat katet puuri peal.

Oma varustuse kaasavõtmiseks ei pidanud ta kuigi palju pingutama – üks tammelaudadest kokku löödud kast mahutas

täielikult selle, mida ta oli pidanud vajalikuks kooli kaasa võtta. See läks koos laeva trümmis veetava kaubaga tolli ning ilmselt võis selle alles täna õhtul kätte saada. Laeva last, ka reisijate isiklik pagas, vaadati hoolikalt üle ning pandi kirja kõik, mis võis vähegi maksu alla käia. Sellega ei olnudki tegelikul muret, tal polnud seal suurt midagi väärtuslikku, kõik tema vähesed isiklikud raamatud olid ka ametlikult lubatud ja medikamente oli ta kaasa võtnud vaid minimaalselt. Raskusi valmistas hoopis puur kaeluspapagoiga. Juba kodus oldi teda hoiatatud, et linnu transportimine ei pruugi kõige lihtsam olla, ning olud, mida ta siit eest leiab, võivad sellele saatuslikuks saada. Samas ei tahtnud ta kuidagi oma seltsilisest loobuda ja otsustas pigem riskida. Praeguseks oli kõige suurem mure saada lind võimalikult kähku külma vihma käest kuhugi soojemasse kohta.

Laurentius pühkis laiaäärsest kübarast hoolimata silmadesse valgunud vihmavee ära, heitis mantlihõlma alt pilgu taskukellale ja jäi otsima kedagi, kes võiks teda mingi trahteri juurde juhatada ja võib-olla hiljem ka kasti tollist ära tuua. Puuri ei julgenud ta kellelegi teisele usaldada. Tegutseda tuli kiiresti, sest teed olid juba praegu üsna viletsad ning ta ei tahtnud mingil tingimusel kauem oodata, et siit linnast edasi sõita. Sügisised, järjest tihedamaks ja rajumaks muutuvad vihmajärgid uuristasid niigi pehmeid radu ja iga päevaga muutus nende läbimine vaevalisemaks. Õhk tõmbus aeglaselt jäiseks. Papagoi võis külma saada. Tuli kohe leida mingi vanker või tõld, mis Tartu poole minema hakkaks.

«Hei!»

Vihmast ligedal sadamakail olid vaid mõned üksikud uudishimulikud, kes olid vastikust ilmast hoolimata tulnud saabuvaid paate vaatama. Nad teadsid ilmselt väga hästi, et erilist lootust tööd leida neil ei olnud, ning ei osanud seega Laurenti-



use hüüde peale kohe reageeridagi. Kogu lasti ladusid tollima- ja juures maha meremehed ja tüdinud hooletusega askeldasid kaupmeeste palgatud laadijad, kes libedaid kaste ja niiskunud kotte kärudele vinnasid. Ametnikud märkisid kaupu üles.

Laurentius hõikas veel kord.

«Hei, sina seal!»

Kui hõreda ja kulunud kuuega uudistaja tuimalt üles vaatas, viipas Laurentius talle kutsuvalt käega juhuks, kui teine tema keelest aru ei peaks saama. Mees ise nägi välja nagu tegelane ajaloo keskmise perioodi süngete kunstnike maalidel, mida ta oli Hollandis näinud: loperguseks vajunud viltkübara alt ulatusid salkudena välja ebamäära värvi juuksed, nina oli muhklik ja punetas, harva habemetüüka alt aimus haigusarmiline lõug. Laurentiusel oli tunne, et mehe kaela oleks sobinud suurepäraselt silt «Nurjatus». Kõikides sadamates luusisid sellised ringi ning enamasti oli nende välimuse põhjal tehtud instinktiivne otsus õige. Samas olid need tegelased alati ka kõige paremini linna kõrtside ja võõrastemajade olukordadega kursis, ja nii võis neist ka palju kasu olla. Petsid nad muidugi alati, küsimus oli vaid selles, kas said rohkem või vähem petta.

«Juhata mind korralikku kõrtsi,» teatas Laurentius lühidalt ja vaatas, kuidas mees sõna lausumata minekule pöördus. Loodetavasti sai ta siiski keelest aru – või siis aimas.

Laurentius tõstis ettevaatlikult papagoipuuri sülle ja hakkas mehe järel linna poole liikuma. Lind kriiksatas ärevalt.

«Tss, Clodia, ole tasa.»

Nad kõndisid järjest tihenevas hämaruses edasi ja Laurentius püüdis võimalikult vähe puuri kõigutada. Öhtuse taeva taustal joonistusid ähvardavana välja toekatest kividest laotud sirged

ja paksud linnamüürid, ümarad keskaegsed kindlustornid ja neli kõrget kirikut, madalamad majad neelas endasse pilvedest imbuv nätske hämu. Mees tema ees kõndis ootamatult kebjal sammul ja näis väga hästi teadvat, kuhu ta kavatseb välja jõuda. Temal endal seevastu hakkas vana haigus üha tugevamalt ja tugevamalt välja lööma. Praegune lakkamatu, kõigesse imbuv ja turrutav niiskus mõjus rängemalt kui varasematel aastatel. Sisikonnas kääriva musta sapi üleküllus muutis ta keha tavali- selt alles hilissügiseks jõuetuks ja unetuks, kuid sellel suvel al- gasid vihmad juba jaanipäeva paiku ning see lõppematu sabin oli tema sisikonna, südame ja aju kleepuvasse udusse mähki- nud. Nüüd laevalt maa peale asudes ja lamedatel läikimahõõ- rutud kivilidel kõndides tekitas mere kõikumise mälestus sellele lisaks veel tunde, nagu peaks ta soost läbi pressima. Iga samm oli pingutus.

«Eh,» ühmas ta omaette. «Veel veidi.»

Ta vaatas ees kõndiva kaltsaka kookus selga ja mõtles, et ilmselt peab ikka kellegi teise oma kastile järele saatma. Niivii- si sadamast leitud juhuslike tegelastega võis sageli mingi jama tekkida. Tõenäoliselt oskab kõrtsmik aidata. Ta püüdis meelde tuletada, millised on Tallinna vääringud, mille kohta olid talle laeva peal erinevad reisijad nõu andnud ja millest ta juba siis järeldas, et täit selgust siin ilmselt kätte ei saa. *Ars apodemica's*, reisimise kunstist rääkivates raamatutes, ei puudutatud Eesti- ja Liivimaa olusid peaaegu üldse – seal olid pigem üldised juht- nöörid, mida tähele panna ja kuidas arukalt ümbrust jälgida. Siinsed linnad ja maad olid apodeemiliselt täiesti kirjeldamata – huvi pärast reisitakse ikkagi ju mujal, lõunas. Kultuuri ja aja- looga paikades. Ta ei suutnud midagi asjalikku meelde tuleta- da. Pea oli paks.

«Olgu,» otsustas Laurentius lõpuks. «Kuuendikust öörist peaks igal juhul piisama.»

Peaaegu kottpimedas peatusid nad lõpuks kollase laterna all, mis valgustas ootamatult viisaka väljanägemisega kõrtsi, mis asus vaid veidi maad enne linnaväraid, ja mees sirutas käe pikale. Laurentius poetas sinna juba salaja taskust välja otstitud väikese mündi ja lõi pilgu maha. Mees tunnistas hetke talle antud raha ja naeratas siis laialt.

«Pagan,» mõtles Laurentius. «Ikka andsin liiga palju.»

Ta tiris puuri uksest sisse.

«Kas ta soovib veel midagi?» uuris kaltsakas ootamatult heas saksa keeles.

Laurentius kõhkles. Kõige parema meelega oleks ta näinud, et mees kiiresti minekut teeb, sest need, kes end ise sulle külge kleebivad, on tavaliselt erilised kaabakad.

«Mul on vaja Tartu poole minna,» ütles ta siis eneselegi ootamatult. «Ja võimalikult kähku.»

Kasti järgi saadab ta siiski kellegi teise, aga tee uurimises ei olnud ju midagi halba. Mingisugusel hetkel pidid neil siin käima voorimehetõllad ja laevas teati rääkida, et pea iga nädal pidi mõni seltskond Tartu poole minema. Talle oldi kaardi pealt isegi kahte võimalikku teed näidatud – mõlemad võtsid mõni päev aega, olenevalt teeoludest võis ka kauem minna.

Mees heitis veel kord pilgu papagoipuurile ning lahkus siis – Laurentiusele tundus, et pilkliku kummardusega.

Ta kehtas õlgu, tõstis puuri kaminale kõige lähema laua peale, tõmbas tumeda niiskunud riidepalaka sealt ära ja vaatas, kuidas papagoi end õrrel kohendas.

«Noh, Clodia, oled valmis veel üheks reisiks?»

Koldest tulvav soojus mõjus ergutavalt ja ravis tema meeleolu ja papagoi külmetavat keha. Võtnud taskust paberi seest mõned seemned, puistas ta need puuri põhja. Polnud kindel, et siin kandis võis kusagilt päevalilleseemneid leida, ning seega oli ta neid ise kaasa võtnud. Nagu tavaliselt kogunesid muidu ruumis tegevusetult seisnud inimesed kohe puuri ümber, kes kõik tahtsid imelikku värvilist lindu näha.

«Kust selline ka pärit on?»

«Mida ta sööb?»

«Kas ta laulab ka?»

Laurentius seletas. Ühest küljest oli muidugi papagoi kaastassimine tülikas ja ebamugav – ja mitte vaid Laurentiusele endale, arvatavasti kannatas lind selle käes isegi rohkem –, kuid teiselt poolt aitas see suurepäraselt inimestega kontakti luua ning Clodia oli talle juba laevas suureks abiks olnud.

«Olete üliõpilane, jah?» küsis keegi laua tagant tõustes.

«Jah,» vastas Laurentius. Tundus, et mees oli teda juba mõnda aega silmitsenud – ta tajus selliseid asju väga täpselt ning oskas pilku maas hoida, et mitte kogemata mõnele juhuslikule uudishimulikule otsa vaadata. Juba noorukina oli ta aru saanud, et sellest tulevad pahandused. Alguses hakkavad inimesed kahtlustama, pärast hoiavad temaga rääkides sõrmi selja taga ristas, pööravad tänavanurgalt tagasi ja väldivad hoopiski. Kõige kindlam on pilku maas hoida.

«Mina ei soovitaks teil Tartusse praegu minna.»

Mehe pindmise viisakuse tagant õhkus irooniat ning ka tema teietamine oli kuidagi pilklik.

«Miks siis?» üritas Laurentius vastu vaielda. Tegelikult ta muidugi teadis, milliseid vastuväiteid võiks Tartusse minemisele tuua.

«Halvad ajad. Ka professorid võtavad oma ülesandeid praegu väga laisalt. Suvi oli vihmane, nälg on vältimatu, kõik hinnad lähevad üles.»

«See on igal pool nii.»

# *The Bees*

## **Meelis Friedenthal**

*Translated from Estonian by Adam Cullen*

It rained all the time. Rain had rotted the crops on the fields, had covered the wooden walls of the buildings with mold, had made ships' deck boards as sopping as seaweed. For already several months' time, Laurentius had been eating rotten bread, had been living in mildewed buildings, and in the last week, had also been sliding across the soggy deck of a ship. Black bile collected within him like sludge atop a stake driven into a riverbed. Now, he finally stepped from the lurching boat onto the harbor dock, onto the slippery boards nailed onto logs that were rammed into the mud beneath the water, and peered hesitatingly at his surroundings. The wind flung drizzle into his face in bursts from the low sky, and he strove to understand what sort of land it was, to which he had arrived by his own free choice. The bare, white sand and lone patches of reeds along the strip of shore, as well as the identical gray clouds very much resembled the harbor, from which he had set off. The mast of the post ship looked just the same against the gray sky, and the sheets that had been raised on it appeared just as gray and featureless as they had when he cast off. Next to the pier, which extended far out into the sea, a jetty buried halfway beneath the muddy water could be seen, and on top of it was an old watchman's house crouched down in the water, which no one had apparently used for already quite some time. These ruins could be found in every harbor, and despite their pitiful appearance, such an image rather instilled a sense of confidence in Lauren-

tius for some reason. Here as well, the harbors had been rebuilt; here as well, they had been enlarged for new ships to dock, and the old watchmen's houses had been abandoned.

He sighed, and nervously adjusted the cover over the cage dripping with rainwater.

He had not been required to make all that much of an effort in bringing his paraphernalia along—one chest hammered together from oak planks fit what he had deemed necessary for bringing with him to school entirely. It was sent to customs together with the goods carried in the ship's hold, and he would apparently only receive it that evening. The ship's cargo—even its passengers' personal baggage—was looked through carefully, and anything at all that could be subject to a tax was written down. There was actually no real worry about that—Laurentius had nothing of great value in the chest; every one of his few personal books was also officially permitted, and he had taken along only the bare minimum of medicines. What posed a difficulty was actually the cage containing a rose-ringed parakeet. Already when he was back at home, he had been warned that transporting a bird might not be the easiest thing, and the conditions that he would find before him could be fateful for the animal. At the same time, he did not want to give up his companion in the very least, and decided to take the risk instead. As of now, his greatest worry was getting the bird out of the cold rain and into a warmer place somewhere as quickly as possible.

Laurentius wiped away the rainwater that trickled down into his eyes despite the wide-brimmed hat he wore, glimpsed at a pocket watch beneath the hem of his coat, and started looking for someone who could direct him towards some pub, and maybe also retrieve his chest from customs later. He did not dare en-

trust the cage to anyone else. He had to act quickly, because the roads were already rather abysmal, and under no condition did he want to wait any longer to travel on from this town. The fall showers, which were becoming ever thicker and more furious, made furrows in the already soft paths, and traversing them became more toilsome with each passing day. The air slowly turned icy. The parakeet might freeze. He needed to find a wagon or a coach that would start making its way towards Tartu.

“Hey!”

Only a few lone, curious individuals who had come to watch the arriving boats in spite of the nasty weather stood upon the dock, which was slippery from rain. They were apparently very well aware that there was no great hope in finding work, and were thus unable to react to Laurentius’ cry right away. The entirety of the cargo was being unloaded at the customs house by the sailors, and the haulers hired by merchants bustled around with wearied carelessness, heaving the sopping crates and moist sacks onto carts. Officials were marking down the goods. Laurentius called out a second time.

“Hey, you there!”

When one onlooker wearing a threadbare, worn coat glanced up expressionlessly, Laurentius beckoned in case the man did not speak his language. The individual himself resembled a figure in the somber paintings of artists from the Middle Ages, which Laurentius had seen in Holland: hair of an indeterminate shade poked out in clumps from beneath his lopsided felt hat, his nose was knobbed and reddish, and a chin scarred from sickness could be detected beneath his sparse stump of beard. Laurentius had the feeling that a sign reading “Wickedness” would hang wonderfully around his neck. This type of person could be found drifting around all harbors, and the instinc-



tive decision made on the basis of their appearance was, for the most part, correct. At the same time, these characters were always the most familiar with the situations in the town's pubs and boarding houses; thus, they could be of great use as well. They would always deceive you, of course—the question was merely whether you were deceived to a greater or a less extent.

“Direct me to a proper pub,” Laurentius stated curtly, and watched as the man turned to leave without saying a word. Hopefully, he spoke the language all the same; or else he surmised its meaning.

Laurentius picked up the parakeet cage, cradling it carefully in his arms, and started following the man into town. The bird screeched anxiously.

“Shh, Clodia, be quiet.”

They walked on in the progressively thickening dusk, and Laurentius strove to rock the cage as little as possible. The straight and sturdy town walls stacked from robust stones, the round, medieval defense towers, and the four lofty churches cast a threatening silhouette upon the evening sky, while the lower buildings were swallowed up by a dank murk, soaking from the clouds. The man walked in front of him at an unexpectedly brisk pace, and appeared to be very well aware of the destination that he planned to reach. Laurentius himself, on the contrary, began to suffer from stronger and stronger waves of his old illness. The current, ceaseless, all-penetrating and all-waterlogging dampness affected him more harshly than it had in earlier years. The excess of black bile fermenting in his innards usually made his body feeble and sleepless only by late fall, but that year, the rains had already begun around midsummer, and the endless drizzle wrapped his intestines, heart, and brain in a viscous fog. Now, having disembarked the boat and

walking upon the flat stones worn to a shine, the memory of rocking at sea further added to it a feeling, as if he had to press his way forward through a swamp. Every step was an exertion.

“Eh,” he said under his breath, “just a little further.”

He kept his eyes on the crooked back of the vagabond walking before him, and pondered that he should probably send someone else to fetch his chest all the same. Some sort of a mess could often arise with the chance characters found at a harbor. The bar-keep would likely be able to assist him. He strove to remember what kind of currency Tallinn dealt in: he had inquired about this from various passengers back on the ship, and had concluded that he apparently would not achieve full clarity in the question. *Ars apodemica*, books that spoke of the art of travel, almost did not touch upon the conditions in Estonia and Livonia at all—rather, they contained general tips on what to pay attention to, and how to intelligently observe one’s surroundings. The towns and lands here had not been apodemically described at all—people naturally traveled elsewhere out of interest; southward. To places with culture and history. He was unable to recall anything practical from it. His head felt thick.

“Fine,” Laurentius ultimately decided. “A sixth of an öre should be enough, in any case.”

Finally, in the nearly pitch-black night, they halted under a yellow lantern illuminating a pub with an unexpectedly decent appearance, located just a slight distance before the city gates. The man stretched out his palm.

Laurentius slipped the small coin into it, which he had already secretly searched out of his pocket, and cast his eyes away. For a moment, the man studied the money that he had been given, and then smiled broadly.

“Curses,” Laurentius thought to himself. “I still gave him too much.”

He lugged the cage in through the door.

“Would he like anything else?” the vagabond inquired in unexpectedly good German.

Laurentius was taken aback. He would have been gladdest to see the man quickly making his way back, because those, who glue themselves to you on their own, are oftentimes especially great scoundrels.

“I need to go towards Tartu,” he then spoke, even surprising himself. “And as quickly as possible.”

He would still send someone else for his chest, but there was nothing wrong in having him look into the journey. Haulers’ carriages had to stop by here at some point, and the other ship passengers had said that one group or another was supposed to embark in the direction of Tartu nearly every week. They had even pointed out two possible routes to him on a map—both took a few days’ time, but could also take longer, depending on the road conditions.

The man cast a glance at the cage one more time, and then left—with a mocking bow, it seemed to Laurentius.

He shrugged, lifted the cage onto the table closest to the fireplace, pulled the dark, damp piece of fabric off of it, and watched the parakeet adjust itself on its perch.

“Well, Clodia—are you ready for one more trip?”

The warmth that cascaded out from under the mantle had a stimulating effect, and healed his mood as well as the parakeet’s freezing body. Taking a few seeds out of a piece of folded paper in his pocket, he sprinkled them over the bottom of the

cage. He hadn't been certain of whether one could find sunflower seeds anywhere in these parts, and had therefore taken some along himself. As usual, the patrons, who were standing around the room and had nothing to do otherwise, immediately gathered around the cage, each wanting to see the strange, colorful bird.

"Where's that'n from, ey?"

"What's it eat?"

"Does he sing, too?"

Laurentius explained. On the one hand, hauling a parakeet around with him was naturally inconvenient and a bother (and not only for Laurentius himself—the bird presumably suffered from it even more than he), but on the other, it was a fantastic means for helping him make contact with people, and Clodia had already been of great aid to him on the ship.

"You're a university student, yeah?" someone asked, rising from a table.

"Yes," Laurentius replied. It seemed that the man had been eyeing him for already some time—he had a very sharp sense for such things, and knew to keep his eyes on the ground in order to not accidentally look directly at some random, curious observer. Already as a young boy, he had realized that trouble could come from it. At first, people grow suspicious, and afterward, they make a cross with their fingers behind their backs when talking to him, turn around from the street corner, and avoid him entirely. The surest way to go about things was to keep his eyes on the ground.

"I wouldn't recommend you going to Tartu right now."

Irony radiated from behind the man's superficial politeness, and even his respectful manner of addressing Laurentius was somehow mocking.

"Why is that?" Laurentius tried to argue. In reality, of course, he knew the kinds of objections that could be made against going to Tartu.

"Bad times. Even the professors are taking their tasks very lazily at the moment. The summer was rainy, famine is unavoidable, all of the prices are going up."

"That's how it is everywhere."





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## Jānis Jonevs

*Jelgava '94 (2013)*

Publishing House: **Mansard**

### Biography

Born in 1980 in Jelgava, Latvia, Janis Jonevs was educated at the Jelgava State Gymnasium and the Latvian Academy of Culture where he was awarded a Master's Degree. Jonevs works as a copywriter and, since 2002, he has also worked as a reviewer and translator from French.

### Synopsis

Even though Jelgava '94 is Jonevs' debut novel, the book quickly proved to be a big hit and bestseller in 2013. The story is set in the 1990s in the Latvian city of Jelgava and looks at the craze during this period for the alternative culture of heavy metal music. Jonevs takes the reader deep inside the world described in the novel: combining the intimate diary of a youngster trying to find himself by joining a subculture, as well as a skilful, detailed and almost documentary-like depiction of the beginnings of the second independence of Latvia. This is a story that is even more captivating for the generation that lived through the events described in the book – Jonevs is the first writer to stir up memories of this period through a fully-fledged literary depiction.

Jelgava '94 is a portrait of a generation in the 1990s who are searching for their own identity and are fans of alternative culture. This is a touching story about us as youngsters, when everybody is against the whole world and tries not to become 'one of them'. But is it for real? Can one keep the promise?

*Jelgava '94 (2013)*

**Jānis Jonevs**

**1**

/../ Tas ir neticami, viņš šo kreklu atrada humpalās. Tas bija brīnums. Mēs visi pēc tam metāmies pārmeklēt humpalu kau-dzes. Es arī uzrakstīju mammai sarakstu, kādi krekli jāņem, tikko tos ierauga: Death, Cannibal Corpse, Anal Count, Brutal Truth, Carcass, Hypocrisy. Nevienu tādu viņa neatrada, viņa atnesa kreklu ar uzrakstu Michael Learns to Rock un trīs smai-dīgu puišu à la Zaks Moriss fotogrāfijām. Par spīti dumpnie-ciskajam nihilismam, mana sirds gandrīz salūza no mīļuma. Tomēr to kreklu es uzvilkt nespēju.

Bet Nāve atrada humpalās Obituary kreklu par piecdesmit santīmiem. Un vēl viņam nebija labi. Viņš bija tāds kā drusku mānīcīgs un uzskatīja, ka ar šo kreklu nopircis nelaimi (tas, protams, viņu necik neatturēja to cītīgi nēsāt). Tā arī tagad viņš teica:

— Es teicu! Es teicu! Vienmēr kaut kas neveicas, kad man mugurā tas kreklis!

Mēs nupat bijām izmesti no vilciena Jelgava–Rīga. Par nie-kiem. Mums nebija biļešu. Konduktoru brigāde nokomentēja mūsu matus un izlika mūs ārā, ka noplīvoja vien. Vilciens aiz-brauca tālāk, bet mēs stāvējām šeit, Olainē.

— Ko darīsim, kungi?

Nāve paskatījās pakaļ vilcienam, nekas no tā vairs nebija sa-skatāms. Edgaram nekad netrūka padoma:



— Es domāju, mēs varam sist suņus un tirgot ādas!

Viņš neapšaubāmi bija jucis. Viņš dzīvoja Nāvem kaimiņos. Jukuma un pārliekas mīlestības pret šausmu kino dēļ viņu dēvēja par Zombi.

— Drīz vietējie tirgos mūsu ādas.

Mēs ērgļu acīm nopētījām pilsētu, kas pletās mūsu priekšā, krūmiem aizaugusi. Nemanīja nevienu pašu cilvēku. Bet krūmi izskatījās aizdomīgi.

— Pazūdam.

Un mēs gājām uz šoseju.

Te Zemgales lidzenums bija aplūkojams vēl labāk, Jelgavas puses pamale šķita vēl mīlāka, mīlāka nekā ilgotā Rīgas puse. Rīga mūs neinteresēja, bet, izbraucot tai bezmaz cauri, varēja nonākt Biržā. Tā bija pasaules galvenā vieta. Dažkārt saukta arī par Panku Biržu. Mamma stāstīja, ka tur jau septiņdesmitajos hipiji mainījušies ar platēm. Biķernieku mežā, līdz kuram varēja tikt ar astonpadsmito trolejbusu vai varbūt tramvaju. Cilvēki pulcējās mežā — atstumtie, ārpus likuma esošie, kuri negribēja citu vietu, pulcējās mežā un darīja tur savas lietas, par kurām nenojauta pilsēta un pasaule apkārt.

Ko viņi tur darīja? Pagaidām zinājām tikai, ka mainījās ar kasetēm. Ar to pietika. Kasetes mums vajadzēja. Vairs nepietika ar Nirvana un Pearl Jam.

Es pa klusam vēl dažreiz klausījos Nirvanu. Tomēr biežāk jaunās kasetes. ././ Mūzika, kurai līdzīgu es nekad agrāk nebiju dzirdējis. Es vispār nekad nebiju spējis iedomāties, ka kaut kas tāds pastāv. Šī patiešām bija cita pasaule. Bija labi sēdēt te uz asfalta, kopā ar Nāvi un Zombi, ceļa vidū uz citu pasauli.

— Sprāgala! Pērtele!! Ibanāts!!!

Zombis lādējās tīrā deviņdesmito manierē. Atkal mašīna slaidi aizšalca mums garām. Lai cik atraktīvi Zombis vicinājās un ieņēma teatrālas pozas, stopēšana nevedās. Un tā jau minūtes piecpadsmīt, spriežot pēc saules (mums nevienam nebija pulksteņa). Nāve drūmi pareģoja:

— Tā mēs uz biržu netiksim. Tur sākas desmitos.

— Tad varbūt beidziet sildīt kules uz asfalta un nāciet kaut ko darīt? Man jau roka nopuvusi.

Es gan neticu, ka Zombis jelkad nogura. Tagad viņš ceļmalā plūca garākās nātres un slānija ar tām neredzamus pretiniekus.

Pie stopēšanas ķēros es. Nāca satiksmes mikriņš, un es atrāvu roku, aizliku aiz muguras un novērsos no ceļa. Naudas taču mums nebija. Tad nāca otrais žigulītis, vīrs stabili turēja abas rokas uz stūres un skatījās tikai uz ceļu, sieva smaidīja un noraidoši kratīja galvu. Bet aizmugure viņiem taču bija tukša. Viņi izskatījās viena gadagājuma ar maniem vecākiem, kuri vienmēr ņēma stopētājus. Tad nāca pavisam vienaldzīgs auģiks vai kas tamlīdzīgs (es neatšķiru mašīnu markas, zinu tikai tēta žigīti). Vēl kāds ārzemju lūznēns, tajā sēdēja kāds pieklājīgs cilvēks, viņš parādīja ar ikšķi pa labi, sak, tūlīt griežos, citādi paņemtu. Īss, cilvēcīgs kontakts. Nākošās mašīnas vadītājs man pamāja pavisam miklainu garāmbraucēja žestu. Ko tas nozīmēja? Audz, zēn, nelien ārā no mājas, kamēr nav pašam savs fordiņš?

Tā es sarunājos ar autobraucējiem, manai sarunai bija ilgstamība un attīstība, bet viņiem — tikai mirklis. Es sarunājos ar pašu tūkstošgalvaino ceļa gājumu, apturēts savā punktā — lūk, mašīna mums pamirkšķina un sāk bremzēt, Nāve jau griežas skatīties, kur Zombis pa plāvu aizcīnījies, bet iekšā pilns knapi par mums vecāku deģenerātu, noteikti no Olaines, viņi smejas un uzgāzē, viņi tikai gribēja mūs piemānīt, un prom ir,

pat viņi, kas veltīja mums uzmanību, jau ir mūs aizmirsuši pēc divām minūtēm, pēc trim kilometriem.

— Man piegriezās. Neķeras. Pamēģini tu.

Nāve nāca, skumjš uz visu pasauli, nošņaukājās un ietrieca roku telpā virs ceļa. Viņš skaitīja mantru:

— Stājies taču, idiot!

Mašīna bija gara kā zvaigžņu kuģis, tās mirdzošajam, garāmslidošajam sānam nemanīja gala. Mašīna apstājās. Tas laikam bija no dārgajiem auto, spīdīgs. Monsieur paliecās ārā un jautāja:

— Kur tad džekiņiem jābrauc?

Uz Plakanciemu, man nez kāpēc nikni iešāvās prātā, bet Nāve atbildēja lietiski:

— Uz Biržu.

— Hā, hā. Birži uz otru pusi, džekiņi. Lietuvā.

— Uz Rīgu.

— Nu kur tad?

— Uz Rīgu!

Šis atkal pasmējās.

— Nu, pavedīsim. Varam pavest.

Zombis skrēja no pļavas, aplipsis zaļumiem kā jukušais Līrs, un pirms iesēšanās saņēma norādījumu:

— Nopurinies.

Automobilis slidēja klusāk par žiguli, un pār otra priekšējā sēdekļa pleciem kaskādē plūda brīnišķīgi mati, to spožums cirta acīs, kad trāpīja saule, bet ēnā tiem piemita asinskrāsas roman-

tika — blakus saimniekam sēdēja metālists! Nē, es paskatījos spogulī, tur skatījās meitenes acis. Viņas tēvs piespieda gāzīti, un es piespiedu degunu logam, lai atsāktu sarunu ar ceļu. Lūk, deģenerātu auto, viņi sēž klusi, katrs skatās citur, viņiem nav ko darīt bez mums, lūk, es pašaujos viņiem garām un parādu slepenu fakucīti. Tad mēs apdzenam mīklaino mājēju, viņš ir tikpat nopietns. Tad pieklājīgais pagrieziena kungs, kāpēc viņš nav nogriezies? Lūk, arī žigulis ar padzīvojušo pāri, sieviete groza galvu un pamana mani, un atkal smaidot krata galvu, nē, nē.

— Ko tad Rīgā džekiņi darīs?

To, protams, jautāja mūsu laipnais pavedējs. Katrs no mums klusēja, gaidīdams, ka atbildēs kāds cits.

— Ko?

Viņš jautāja vēlreiz. Nāve un Zombis atbildēja reizē, pie kam Nāve teica:

— Iesim uz veikalu.

Bet Zombis:

— Skaitīsim pensionārus.

Neviens vairs negribēja pieminēt Biržu, nez kāpēc tā šajā pēc „Wunderbaum“ un ādas smaržojošajā mašīnā šķita neaizsargāta.

— Hā, hā. Jociņi džekiņi jūs esat.

Vispār jau ir tāds likums, ka stopētājiem jāsarunājas ar laipno vadītāju. Lai darījums sanāk savstarpēji izdevīgs. Es jau domāju pateikt, ka labs laiks vai ko tādu, bet viņš pats nelikās mierā:

— Kas jūs tādi esat?

Eksistenciāls jautājums. Tiešām, kas mēs esam? Zombis lēni atbildēja:

— Zē-ni.

Balsī, kas signalizēja, ka viņam nenormāli nāk zviedziens.

— Nu, es domāju, kas jūs esat, nu, visiem mati, jūs esat no kaut kādas vienības, vai?

Mēs raustījām plecus — ko nu mēs, mēs tāpat vien.

— Jūs taču neesat tie trākie metālisti?

Bznn, nu, kā lai pasaka... Esam it kā, vai kā? Čaļi, sakiet kaut ko?!

— Kādu mūziku jūs klausāties?

Nāve vairs negribēja izlocīties.

— Cannibal Corpse.

— Ko, ko?

Saimnieks pat pagrieza klusāk savu mūziku, tā bija visklasiskākā no klasiskās mūzikas, turklāt baisi samiksētā popūrijā. Viņš pagrieza klusāk un pagriezās uz mūsu pusi, ko?

— Cannibal Corpse.

— Ko tas nozīmē?

— Tulkojumā no angļu valodas – kanibāla liķis.

— Domā, es nemāku angļiski?

Un pagrieza skaļāk ar bumsīgu ritmu piesmieta Bēthoveni. Pēc minūtes viņš jautāja atkal:

— Tu domā, es neprotu angļiski?

— Nedomāju.

— Tad kāpēc tu tā saki?

— Nesaku.

— Kā, nesaki? Tie bija tavi vārdi!

— Atvainojos.

Šis stūrēja tālāk, cik nu pa Jelgavas šoseju vispār jāstūrē.

— Man, piemēram, patīk laba mūzika. Jūs tādu zināt? Zināt vispār, kas skan?

Bēthovena piektā bija neticamā veidā pārmiksējusies uz Brāmsa „Ungāru dejām“. Bet es neko neteicu.

— Nezināt!

Nez vai meitene viņam blakus, droši vien viņa meita, joprojām skatījās spogulī ar savām meitenes acīm? Es neskatījos.

— Un kāpēc jums nepatīk laba mūzika?

Nāve bija skaidri apņēmis neko vairs neteikt, pat skatienu bija izslēdzis, to viņš mācēja perfekti. Zombis kaut ko mēģināja:

— Gribas kaut ko interesantu.

Saimnieks tikai piespieda gāzīti, es gribēju iemest aci spidometrā, lai piedzīvojums nepaļauj garām un vēlāk varētu pastāstīt, uz cik mēs nesāmies ar šo trako, bet neuzdriksējās, jo tā es noteikti ieskatītos spogulī, un tur varbūt būtu meitenes acis. Skatījos atkal uz ceļu. Tur bija lapsa, sabraukta.

— Un kāpēc jūs neizskatāties normāli? Zini, kāpēc? Es pateikšu, kāpēc!

Komandieris bija uzvilcis:

— Jūs nemaz negribat būt normāli. Jums tas liekas stulbi. Jūs domājat, ka esat par visiem gudrāki.

Viņš vairs nebija valdāms. Un mēs vēl necik nebijām pietuvojušies Rīgai.

— Tagad jūs iesēdāties manā mašīnā, redzat, laba mašīna. Vai es ar to izpelnījos kaut kādu jūsu cieņu? Nē!

Tagad man palika pa īstam baigi. Jo viņš runāja tieši to, ko es šobrīd domāju.

— Jums vienalga, ka cilvēks ir kaut ko sasniedzis. Jūs domājat — nu un, ka cilvēks labi dzīvo, gan jau zaglis vai pārdevies, nē, jūs vispār par to nedomājat. Jums viss ir vienalga.

Es jutos ļoti neērti par šo savu monologu.

— Šitā pasaule jums nav laba diezgan. Jūs esat tie īpašie. Normāli dzīvot, censties — tas jums liekas stulbi! Lai tie lohi paved mašīnā, lai uzsauc aliņu! Bet mums vajag kanibālus studēt.

Viņš uzmanīgi pārvietojās uz labo joslu, tad apturēja mašīnu šosejas malā.

— Esam atbraukuši.

Mēs paskatījāmies ārā. Tā noteikti nebija Rīga. Parasta šosejas mala. Ievērojamākais objekts te bija krūmi. Mēs laikam kavējāmies pārāk ilgi.

— Ko tieši es pateicu nesaprotami?

Mēs kāpām ārā. Vai Nāve nepateica paldies? Tas būtu viņa garā. Auto aizbrauca. Zombis saldi smējās, it kā būtu noticis kaut kas ļoti labs. Bet Nāve rezumēja:

— Es jums teicu — kreklis! Nu mēs uz Biržu nepaspēsim.

Es atkal skatījos uz ceļu, ko citu lai es darītu. Aizbrauca žigulītis, auģiks, fordiņš, tā vadītājs mums atkal mīklaini pamāja, varbūt nu jau kā paziņām, bet varbūt bija mūs aizmirsis, jo mājieni bija tieši tāds pats. Bet pieklājīgo cilvēku, kurš solīja nogriezties, vairs neredzēja. Viņš tiešām bija nogriezies. Tolaik cilvēki bija godīgi un atcerējās, ko nolēmuši darīt. Arī deģenerāti, kuriem tūlīt vajadzēja būt klāt, noteikti nebija aizmirsuši manu fakucīti.

## *Jelgava '94 (2013)*

**Janis Jonevs**

*Translated from Latvian by Ieva Lešinska*

### 1

././ Incredible, I know, but he found that shirt in a used clothing shop. A real miracle. The rest of us rushed to dig through the piles. I even made a list for Mum of shirts that she should buy as soon as she sees them: Death, Cannibal Corpse, Anal Cunt, Brutal Truth, Carcass, Hypocrisy. She did not find any of these, she brought me a shirt with Michael Learns to Rock and pictures of three smiling guys à la Zack Morris. My rebellious nihilism notwithstanding, my heart almost broke to pieces, I felt such a surge of love for her. That didn't mean I could ever wear that shirt, however.

So Death found an Obituary shirt in a used clothing pile and paid 50 santims for it, and still he was not happy. He seemed to be a little superstitious and felt he had bought a disaster in the shape of this shirt (that, of course, did not prevent him from wearing it all the time). So now again he said, 'I told you! I told you! I always have bad luck when I wear this shirt!'

We had just been kicked off the Jelgava-Riga train. For nothing, really. We did not have tickets. Having made comments about our hair, the team of conductors kicked us out, hair flying. The train continued on, whereas we were stuck here, in Olaine.

'What are we going to do, gentlemen?'



Death looked after the train, which had already disappeared from sight. As usual, Edgars had a plan: 'We could kill dogs and sell their pelts!'

He was certifiably crazy, no doubt about it. He lived next-door to Death. Because of his craziness and excessive love of horror movies he got the nickname Zombie.

'Soon the locals will sell our pelts.'

We trained our eagle's eye on the town that spread before us, overgrown with bushes. Not a single soul seemed to be around. Yet the bushes looked suspicious.

'Let's roll.'

And we started walking toward the highway.

Here the Zemgale plain offered an even better view of itself, the horizon on Jelgava side seemed even more loveable – much more loveable than the much coveted Riga side. We were not interested in Riga, but once you got almost through the city, you got to the Burse. That was the place to be in this world. Sometimes it also went by Punk Burse. Mum told me that hippies had exchanged records there as early as the 1970s. It was in the Biķernieki Forest, which could be reached by trolley-bus No. 18. Or was it tram? People gathered in the woods: the outcasts, the ones on the other side of the law, the ones who did not want another place, just gathered in the woods and did their thing, about which the city and the outside world had not the slightest idea.

What did they do there? For now we only knew that they exchanged cassette tapes. That was all we had to know. We needed cassette tapes. Nirvana and Pearl Jam were not enough anymore.

Sometimes I still secretly listened to Nirvana. More often to the new cassettes, however. /../ It was music like nothing I had ever heard before. No, I had not even thought it possible that such music existed. It was a totally different world. It was good to sit here on the tarmac together with Death and Zombie on our way to another world.

‘Tasser! Slag! Dickfuck!!!’

Zombie was cussing in a pure nineties style. Another car swished elegantly by. No matter how attractively Zombie was flailing his arms, no matter how theatrical his poses, hitchhiking was a bust. Judging by the sun (nobody had a watch), this situation had lasted a quarter of an hour. Death had a dire prediction to share:

‘We won’t make it to the Burse. They start at ten.’

‘So maybe you should stop warming your bollocks on the tarmac and get to work? My arm is falling off.’

Though I found it hard to believe that Zombie would ever tire. Now he made himself busy plucking the tallest nettles and whipping invisible opponents with them.

Then it was my turn to try to stop someone. A public transportation van was coming. I lowered my arm, put it behind my back and turned away from the road. After all, we had no money. It was followed by a second-generation Lada; the man kept both hands firmly on the wheel and his eyes on the road while his wife was smiling and shaking her head. Yet their back seat was empty. They looked to be about the same age as my parents, who always picked up hitchhikers. Then a totally indifferent Audi or something like that drove by (I don’t really know the makes of cars, the only one I recognize is a Lada, like my Dad’s). Then came some foreign heap with a polite man

inside: he pointed right with his thumb, meaning, I am turning in just a moment, otherwise I'd take you. A brief, civilized interaction. The driver of the next car waved at me in a totally mysterious way. What was that supposed to mean? Grow up, lad, don't leave the house unless you have your own little Ford?

That's how I kept conversing with the drivers, and this conversation possessed sustainability and development, whereas for them it was just a passing moment. I was talking to the manifold denizens of the road, having been stopped right here and now, and look, a car blinks at us and begins slowing down, Death is already turning to see where Zombie is fighting his enemies on the field, but it turns out that the car is full of plonkers just slightly older than us, definitely from Olaine; they are laughing and then step on gas, they'd only wanted to have some fun at our expense, so now they're gone; even they who paid us some attention forget us in two short minutes, after three short kilometres.

'I'm fed up. They just don't bite. You try.'

Death came over; sad about the entire world, he sniffled and pierced the space over the road with his hand. He kept reciting a mantra:

'Stop, you idiot!'

The car was long like a starship, there seemed to be no end to its gleaming side that was sliding by. Then it stopped. Must be one of the expensive cars, very shiny. Monsieur leaned out the window and asked:

'So where are you lads going?'

To Plakanciems, I thought, for some reason annoyed, but Death was all business:

'To the Burse.'

‘Ha. Biržai are the other direction, lads. In Lithuania.’

‘To Riga.’

‘So where then?’

‘To Riga!’

The driver laughed again.

‘All right. We’ll take you for a ride then.’

Zombie was running out of the field, all covered with green stuff like some demented Lear and received an admonishment before getting into the car:

‘Shake it off.’

The car glided more quietly than a Lada, and beautiful hair cascaded over the shoulders of the other front seat; its brilliance hurt the eyes when hit by the sun, whereas in the shade they took on a romantically blood-red tinge: a metalhead was sitting next to the owner! But no, I looked in the mirror and met the eyes of a girl. Her father stepped on the gas and I pressed my nose to the window to resume my conversation with the road. See, here’s the plonkers’ car, they are sitting there quietly, each looking in a different direction, they are bored without us, and see, I whizz by them flipping a secret bird at them. Then we overtake the mysterious waver, and he is just as serious as before. And after that it’s the turning gentleman, so why hasn’t he turned? And finally here’s the elderly couple, the woman is turning her head this way and that, then she sees me and again shakes her head with a smile, no, no.

‘So what are the young lads going to do in Riga?’

That of course was a question asked by our kindly driver. Each one of us kept silent expecting someone else to reply.

‘Huh?’

He asked again. Death and Zombie answered at the same time. Death said:

‘We’ll go shopping.’

But Zombie said:

‘We’ll count pensioners.’

No one was inclined to mention the Bourse; for some reason it seemed too vulnerable in this car whose interior smelled of “Wunderbaum” and leather.

‘Ha, ha, funny lads you are.’

There is of course the rule that hitchhikers have to keep up a conversation with the nice driver. So that the deal is to the advantage of both parties. I was about to say something about the nice weather or such, but he was not going to let go.

‘Who are you?’

An existential question. Really – who are we? It was Zombie who slowly answered:

‘We’re boys.’

He did it in a voice that suggested that he is really cracking up.

‘No, I mean, who are you, like you all have this hair, are you from some group or something?’

We just shrugged: whatever.

‘You’re not those crazy metalheads, are you?’

Duh, what can we say, man... We kinda are, you know? Hey, guys, say something.

‘What kind of music do you listen to?’

Death had decided to stop trying to wriggle out of this.

‘Cannibal Corpse.’

‘Whaat?’

The owner even turned down his music; it was the most classical of classical music, plus it was mixed in a terrible potpourri. He turned it down and turned to us, *whaat?*

‘Cannibal Corpse.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘To translate: it’s the dead body of a man-eater.’

‘You think I don’t know English?’

And he turned up his Beethoven that had been adulterated with an umpah rhythm. A minute later he asked again:

‘You think I don’t understand English?’

‘I don’t.’

‘Then why are you saying this?’

‘I don’t.’

‘What do you mean you don’t? Your exact words.’

‘I am sorry.’

The man kept on steering. As much as you really need to steer down the Jelgava highway.

‘I, for one, like good music. Do you know of such a thing? Do you know what we are listening to?’

Beethoven’s Fifth had somehow transformed into Brahms’s “Hungarian Dances.” But I kept my mouth shut.

‘You don’t!’

I wonder if that girl next to him, probably his daughter, was still looking into the mirror with her girl's eyes? I didn't look.

'And why don't you like good music?'

Death had apparently resolved not to say a word, he had even turned off his gaze, he was perfect at that. Zombie gave it a try:

'Just feel like something interesting.'

The owner of the car just stepped on the gas again. I felt like glancing at the speedometer, so as not to miss the adventure and later be able to tell everyone how we were just flying down the highway like crazy, but I didn't dare, because then I would probably glance into the mirror and there I would probably meet the girl's eyes. So I turned back to the road. There was a fox, run over.

'And why don't you look normal? You know why? I will tell you why.'

The captain was all whipped-up.

'You simply don't want to be normal. You think it's stupid. You think you are smarter than anyone.'

He could no longer contain himself. And we were still far away from Riga.

'Now you got into my car, and you saw that it was a really nice one. Did that earn me any respect? No!'

Now I was really horrified. Because he was saying exactly what I was thinking at the moment.

'It is all the same to you if a person has achieved something. You are thinking: so what if this chap is living well, he's probably a thief or has sold out. But no, you don't even think about that. It's all the same to you.'

I felt very uncomfortable with this monologue of mine.

‘This world is not good enough for you. Like you are something special. To live a normal life, to try for something – you think it’s stupid! Let these nincompoops drive you around, let them treat you to a beer! Whereas we must study cannibals.’

He carefully changed lanes to the right one, and then stopped the car by the side of the road.

‘We’re here.’

We looked out the window. That most assuredly was not Riga. It was just a side of the road. The most noteworthy object here was bushes. We must have taken our time.

‘What exactly did you not get from what I said?’

We got out of the car. Did I hear Death saying thank you? That would be exactly like him. The car took off. Zombie was laughing his head off, as if something great had happened. But Death summed it up:

‘I told you, it’s that shirt! Now we’ll be late for the Bourse.’

I stared at the road again, what else could I do? There was the Lada, then the Audi, then the Ford, whose driver once again waved at us mysteriously, perhaps even in a familiar way now, as if we were acquainted, but maybe he had already forgotten about us, because the wave was exactly the same. The polite one, the one who said he was turning, was nowhere to be seen. He must have turned. People were honest then and remembered what they had set out to do. Even the plonkers who must be here any second, surely had not forgotten my bird.





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## Undinė Radzevičiūtė

### *Žuvys ir drakonai*

Fishes and Dragons

Publishing House: **Baltos lankos**

#### Biography

Undinė Radzevičiūtė was born in 1967. She graduated from the Vilnius Academy of Arts where she studied art history, theory and criticism. She worked for ten years as a creative director for international advertising agencies including Saatchi & Saatchi and Leo Burnett.

Her first short novel was published in 2003 and was favourably reviewed. *Fishes and Dragons* is her fourth and biggest book so far. Two of her earlier novels have been translated into Russian, and one into Estonian. Her new novel is due to be published in 2015.

#### Synopsis

The title of the book symbolically refers to two cultures: Christian European and traditional Chinese. Two different stories are interwoven here: one depicts the life of a Jesuit painter in 18th century China, the other mostly takes place in an old-town flat of a present-day European city. The flat is inhabited by an old woman, her daughter and two adult granddaughters; it eventually turns out that one of them is writing the Chinese line of the book.

The novel is suffused with dialogue that can be seen through the prism of Zen principles (as the author herself has suggested). On the other hand, the misunderstandings and playfulness in the book creates a comic effect with a tinge of the absurd.

With her signature lapidary style, Undinė Radzevičiūtė has written a novel where the texture of the modern European storyline is coloured with oblique reflections of traditional Chinese culture and mentality. The Chinese narrative subtly reveals the unbridgeable gap between Christian European and traditional Chinese mindsets in the context of the failure of the Jesuits' missionary effort.

**1.**

Komisija vėl ilgai abejoja prie jo arklių.

Kai kurie komisijos nariai primerkia tai vieną, tai kitą akį.

Kai kurie – kaišioja smailius liežuvius, tarsi bandytų tuos arklius palaižyti. Iš tolo.

Kai kurie – išverčia apatinę lūpą, kai kurie žvairuoja siauromis akimis, kai kurie pučia žandus.

Kaip kokie eunuchai Imperatoriškojo teatro scenoje.

Komisijos nariams atrodo: arklių galvos per mažos, o čiurnos per plonos. Aiškinimas, kad tai – Iberijos arkliai, ir kad jie kaip tik tokie ir turi būti, nepadedą.

Komisija, atrodo, abejoja ne tik dėl Iberijos arklių, bet ir dėl pačios Iberijos.

Ji įsitikinusi: pasaulyje egzistuoja tik mongolų arklys.

Laukinis mongolų arklys.

Kuklus, atkaklus ir šiek tiek klastingas.

Tiek, kiek gali būti klastingas laukinis arklys. Trumpomis kojomis ir rudomis baltomis dėmėmis.

Kaip karvė.

Ir arklio uodega turi būti balta. Būtinai. Ir būtinai turi siekti žemę, sako komisija, o karčiai būtinai turi dengti akis.

Kam jiems reikalingi nieko nematantys arkliai?

Dar komisija sako: jo arkliai netikri, nes ramūs, o arkliai ramūs nebūna.

Pakartotinis tvirtinimas, kad tokie, kaip tik tokie ir yra Iberijos arkliai, tik padidina komisijos nepasitikėjimą.

Netiki jie nei Iberija, nei Iberijos arkliais.

Dabar jau atvirai.

Komisijos nariams tai – įžūli ir bjauriai tiesmuka apgaulė, galinti net įžeisti Imperatorių.

Žinoma, Penktasis Imperatorius pats neis arklių žiūrėti.

Komisija sako: Imperatoriui ir nėra ko eiti žiūrėti, nes šitie arkliai neturi kaulų.

Jis bando įtikinti žinovus, kad arkliams kaulai nėra būtini, ir girdi savo balse gaidžius.

Geriau jau Penktasis Imperatorius pats ateitų pasižiūrėti, nes Tėvas Kastiljonė pradeda nebetikėti nei savo arkliais, nei Iberija, nei savo misija šitoje žemėje.

Komisija abejoja dėl arklių kaulų garsiai, po to tyliai, o po to pereina prie peizažo kaulų.

Dėl peizažo kaulų komisija visiškai neabejoja.

Jų nėra.

Komisijos nariai reikalauja, kad peizaže tie „kaulai“ būtų ir kuo aiškiausiai matytųsi.

Ir tvirtina: geriausia – jei peizažą aplink arklius tapytų kinas.

Gal Leng Mei arba koks kitas kinas.

Yra čia tų kinų.

Tokiais momentais Tėvas Kastiljonė staiga pradeda nebesuprasti kiniškai ir jam ne visai aišku – kas dabar bus.

Komisija dar nenusprendė, tarsi tik pasakė: nenorinti Tėvui Kastiljonei patikėti ne tik medžių už arklių, bet ir priekyje.

Ji tik prašo jo nupiešti perspektyvos eskizą, o Leng Mei ar kas kitas pagal jį nutapys peizažą su visais medžiais ir jų „kaulais“.

„Kaulais“ kinai vadina daiktų, gyvūnų ir žmonių kontūrus.

Kinams, skirtingai nei europiečiams, kontūrai svarbiau nei erdvė.

O už kontūrus jiems svarbesnė tik tuštuma.

Imperatoriskajai meno žinovų komisijai jokia itališka perspektyva nereikalinga.

Jiems užtenka kiniškos miglos nusileidžiančios.

Nuo kalnų.

Arba pakylančios iš ežero ir uždengiančios visus peizažo erdvės trūkumus.

Perspektyva reikalinga Imperatoriui.

Tik neaišku, kaip ilgai.

Bet apie tai, kad norėtų perspektyvos, Imperatorius pasako tik per komisiją.

Dar komisija Tėvui Kastiljonei sako:

peizaže medžiai ir kalnai neturi būti panašūs į tikrus, kur nors matytus medžius ir kalnus;

Imperatoriumi nereikalingas konkretaus medžio ar kalno atvaizdas;

medis ar kalnas turi apibendrinti visus kada nors matytus medžius ir kalnus;

konkreto medžio tapyba – tai amatininkiškas užsiėmimas;

jeigu į ką nors peizažas ir turi būti panašus, tai visų pirma į senovės kinų peizažo meistrų kūrinį.

Visą reikalavimų sąrašą komisija vardija nuobodžiu unisonu.

Kastiljonė supranta: kinai nori, kad medis būtų nepanašus į medį.

Jis galvoja: niekingiau ir žemiau už arklių tapymą gali būti tik natūrmortai.

Su peiliu padalintu melionu ir omarais.

Ir citrinomis.

Spirale.

Nunerta oda.

Tokius natūrmortus geriausia ne tapyti, o valgyti.

Tegu juos tapo olandai.

Kastiljonė klausosi komisijos šiek tiek palenkęs galvą į priekį.

Kastiljonė stengiasi, kad jo galva nenusvirtų.

Nei į kairę, nei į dešinę.

Jis stengiasi stovėti nuleidęs akis ir nežiūrėti tiesiai į komisiją.

Tik įstrižai.

Komisijos nariai kalbasi.

Kastiljonė stengiasi nesiraukyti.

Ir neraukti nosies.

Ir išsaugoti vidinę ramybę.

Ir neatrodyti nusiminęs.

Nors maloniam atrodyti jam greičiausiai irgi nesiseka.

Kastiljonei norisi žiovauti, bet jis stengiasi.

Nežiovauti.

Ir neprikąsti lūpos.

Jis du kartus pereina per savo dirbtuvę.

Santūriai.

Oriai ir solidžiai.

Kastiljonė daro viską tiksliai taip, kaip prisakė Ignatius Loyola.

Kalbama, kad prieš suformuluodamas šias elgesio taisykles Ignatius Loyola labai daug galvojo.

Net verkė.

Ir septynis kartus malda kreipėsi į...

Sudėjus arklių eskizus į vieną akivaizdu – juose nėra šeimininko, sako komisija.

Šimtas arklių ir šeši piemenys paveiksle – tik svečiai.

Kastiljonė siūlo komisijai išsirinkti vieną arklį.

Ir jis nutapys tą arklį didesnę už kitus.

Kinai juokiasi.

Kastiljonė klausia, ar komisija nori, kad jis nutapytų Imperatorių.

Kinai nesijuokia.

Kastiljonė dar nematė, kad taip greitai juoką pakeistų tylą.

Tylą nutraukia komisijos pirmininkas Syma Cao.

Jis pasitaiso prie diržo kabantį mėlyno šilko maišelį, siuvinėtą aštriais trikampiais, auksiniais kalnais ir banguotomis upėmis.

Komisijos pirmininkas Syma Cao aukštesnis už daugelį kinų ir apsirengęs puošniau už kitus komisijos narius.

Jį iš tolo galima atskirti iš leopardo kepurės.

Jei nežinotum jo istorijos ir negirdėtum jo kalbant, galėtum pagalvoti: jis per daug pasipūtęs, per daug išdidus ir per aukštai įvertintas.

Ir greičiausiai – be pagrindo.

Syma Cao – eunuchas.

Komisijoje – vienintelis eunuchas.

Kiti meno žinovų komisijos nariai – aukštesniojo rango mandarinai<sup>1</sup>.

Nuo kitų eunuchų meno komisijos pirmininkas Syma Cao skiriasi ne tik tuo, kad nedvokia šlapimu, bet ir ypatingu protu.

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1 \* Mandarinai – patarėjai. Portugalai šį žodį perėmė iš malajų kalbos.

Daugelis Kastiljonės Uždraustajame Mieste sutiktų eunu-chų tinka tik vartus atidarinėti, Imperatoriaus žmonas šilko rūbais aprenginėti ir pjesėse žandus s pūsti.

Arba moteris vaidinti.

Kastiljonės mokinys Leng Mei – gali būti, komisijos pagei-davimu jam bus patikėta nutapyti peizažą už arklių, – Tėvui Kastiljonei pasakojo – ir kaip atsitiktinai išgirsta žmogaus isto-rija gali pakeisti nuomonę apie žmogų ir netgi sukelti jam pa-garbą ir meilę – taigi, mokinys Leng Mei Kastiljonei pasakojo: komisijos pirmininkas Syma Cao tapo eunuchu ne savo ir ne šeimos noru, o Senojo Ketvirtojo Imperatoriaus sprendimu.

Ir jis kilęs ne iš žemiausių, kaip kiti eunuchai, o iš aukščiau-sių visuomenės sluoksnių.

Jo tėvas buvo, Senojo Ketvirtojo Imperatoriaus manymu, nepaklusnus ir pavojingas generolas.

Imperatorius įtakingąjį generolą liepė suimti, o dešimtme-čiam jo sūnui – nupjauti genitalijas.

Didelės tragedijos neįvyko.

Po to paaiškėjo: Senasis Imperatorius gal ir klydo.

Dėl generolo neištikimybės.

Patikėjo intrigomis.

Išaiškėjus tiesai, berniuką Senasis Imperatorius liepė atvežti į Uždraustąjį Miestą.

Čia jis užaugo ir padarė karjerą.

Jam vienam iš nedaugelio eunu-chų leista puoštis tamsiai mėlynais drabužiais: siuvinėtais upėmis ir trikampaiais kalnais.



Be to, jis gali kreiptis tiesiai į Imperatorių.

Kiti meno žinovų komisijos nariai – mandarinai tokio familiarumo sau negali leisti.

Syma Cao rūmuose užima tikrai išskirtinę poziciją.

Net nežiūrint į tai, kad Cingų dinastija eunuchus vertina visiškai kitaip nei prieš tai valdžiusi.

Nei Mingų, – labai tyliai sako Leng Mei.

Ką reiškia – visai kitaip? – klausia Kastiljonė.

Cingų dinastijos Imperatoriai nebelaiko eunuchų svarbiais žmonėmis, – sako Leng Mei.

Komisijos pirmininkas Syma Cao nutraukia komisijos narių juoką ir paaiškina Kastiljonei: „šeimininku“ peizaže kinai vadina ne Imperatorių, o didelį kalną.

Dažniausiai tapomą dešinėje paveikslo pusėje.

Visa kita peizaže vadinama „svečiais“.

\*\*\*

Kinijoje – kaip ir Europoje, galvoja Kastiljonė.

Kiekvienas žmogus turi savo vietą.

Savo rangą.

Bet Kinijoje kiekvienas vertinamas ne atskirai, o tik ryšyje su kuo nors kitu.

Kiekvienoje situacijoje žmogus yra arba mokytojas, arba mokinys, arba tėvas, arba sūnus, arba šeimininkas, arba svečias.

Kinijoje savo rangą turi net peizažo elementai, galvoja Kastiljonė.

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– Gal Jūs dar norite, kad aš atsakyčiau į klausimą, kodėl du tūkstančiai pirmųjų metų pabaigoje „mesendžeriu“ susirašinėjau erotinėmis temomis? Su rašytoju iš Maltos, – ekrane paklausė Mama Nora.

– Taip. Kodėl? – paklausė žurnalistė ekrane.

Miki pagarsino televizorių, nes to gestų kalba pareikalavo Senelė Amigorena, ir pasipiktinusi pasakė:

– Kodėl-kodėl? Kodėl-kodėl? Kodėl žurnalistai neturi kitų klausimų? Tik tą „Kodėl“. Ką norėjai, tą ir darei tais du tūkstančiai pirmaisiais metais. Tu dabar ką, turi prieš visą tautą atsiklaupusi ant kelių su ašaromis akyse atsiprašyti? O po to gal dar eiti bučiuoti vėliavos? Tu juk ne prezidentė, – pyko ir piktinosi Miki.

Miki dar turėjo jėgų piktintis, bet niekas nebeturėjo jėgų klausytis, visus domino pokalbis ekrane.

– Tu tikrai du tūkstantis pirmaisiais metais kalbėjaisi „mesindžeriu“ erotinėmis temomis su rašytoju iš Maltos? – paklausė Miki.

– Jis visiškai neturėjo nei humoro jausmo, nei analitinio mąstymo, – atsakė Mama Nora. – Tai ir nebuvo apie ką daugiau kalbėtis.

– O ką, du tūkstančiai pirmi metai buvo kuo nors ypatingi?  
– paklausė Senelė Amigorena. – Tik tuo, kad jie buvo seniai, –  
pasakė Mama Nora.

– Televizoriuje tu atrodai geriau, – pasakė Senelė Amigorena ir paaiškino: – Storesnė.

Senelė Amigorena sėdi prieš televizorių pasipuošusi jaunystėje našlaitėmis siuvinėtu violetiniu megztuku.

Ji taip išsipusčiusi, tarsi sėdėtų ne šiapus, o anapus ekrano.

Bet jai negalima šito sakyti.

Senelei Amigorenai jau aštuoniasdešimt metų ir ji labai nemėgsta žodžio „anapus“.

Užtat jai labai patinka žodis „išgrūdo“.

Dabar ji sėdi priešais televizorių su savo reprezentatyviniu kostiumu. Ne tokiomis iškilmingomis akimirkomis Senelei Amigorenai patinka ir čigonų stilius.

– „Chanel“? – paklausė Senelė Amigorena, rodydama į Mamos Noros juodą megztuką ekrane.

– Beveik, – atsakė Mama Nora.

– Beveik „Chanel“? – paklausė Senelė Amigorena.

Labai gerai, kai namie yra bent vienas toks ypatingas vardas.

To visai užtenka, kad visi kiti tuose namuose būtų pavadinti kaip nors paprasčiau.

Ilgai čia visi galvojo, kad „Amigorena“ reiškia – *visų draugė*, bet vėliau,

pasidomėjus ispaniškų žodžių žodynu, paaiškėjo, kad *amigo-reno* ispaniškai reiškia *draugas-vyriškos giminės šiaurės elnias*.

Tai paslaptis, kuri niekada netaps tokia vieša, kad Senelė Amigorena apie ją sužinotų.

[...]

Senelė Amigorena gimė Argentinoje.

Jos tėvai ten emigravo per Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą, o po to grįžo.

Su ja ant rankų.

Ir labai kvailai padarė.

Iš Argentinos laikų Senelė Amigorena prisimena tik keletą ispaniškų žodžių, bet naudoja juos tik kaip keiksmazodžius.

Kalbėti apie Argentiną Senelė Amigorena nemėgsta.

Nuo to ją tik pradeda slėgti.

Tėvų kaltė.

– Klausyk, o kodėl tarp jūsų viskas nutrūko? – per reklaminę pauzę įdėmiai stebėdama Mamą Norą paklausė Miki.

– Tarp ko – tarp mūsų? – paklausė Mama Nora.

Abejotina, ar Senelė Amigorena kada nors skaitė Ibseną.

Ji tą Norą kur nors nusižiūrėjo arba nusiklausė.

– Tarp tavęs ir rašytojo iš Maltos, – pasakė Miki.

– Rašytojo Išmaltos? – paklausė Senelė Amigorena.

– Iš Maltos, – pasakė Mama Nora.

- Gali man nekartoti, aš labai gerai girdžiu ir dar viską suprantu, – pasakė Senelė Amigorena. – Aš labai protinga.
- Mes prasilenkėm, – pasakė Mama Nora.
- Kur? – paklausė Miki.
- Mintyse, – pasakė Mama Nora.
- Kokiose, – paklausė Miki, – mintyse?
- Na, aš norėjau pabėgti į salą.
- O jis?
- O jis norėjo pabėgti iš salos, – atsakė Mama Nora.
- Pa... bėgti? – labai susidomėjusi paklausė Senelė Amigorena. Bet į jos klausimą niekas nesureagavo.
- Tai kai viską išsiaiškinote – išsiskyrėte? – paklausė Miki.
- Ne iš karto, – atsakė Mama Nora. – Aš dar nusiunčiau jam du kalėdinius atvirukus.
- Labai geras darbas, – pasakė Senelė Amigorena.

## *Fishes and Dragons*

### **Undinė Radzevičiūtė**

*Translated from Lithuanian by Ada Valaitis*

Again, the commission is spending a long time doubting his horses.

Some members of the commission close one eye, and then the other.

While some stick out their pointed tongues, as if trying to lick the horses.

Some furl their bottom lip, some squint, narrowing their eyes, some puff out their cheeks.

Like eunuchs on the stage of an Imperial theatre.

The members of the commission think that the horses' heads are too small, and that their hocks are too thin. The explanation that these are Iberian horses, and that they should look like this, does not help.

It seems that the commission doubts not only the Iberian horses, but Iberia itself.

It is convinced that only the Mongolian horse exists.

The wild Mongolian horse.

Modest, persistent, and somewhat insidious.

As insidious as a wild horse could possibly be. With short legs, and brown and white spots.

Like a cow.

And a horse's tail must be white. Absolutely. And it must reach the ground, says the commission, while the mane should cover the eyes.

Why do they need horses that can't see anything?

The commission also says: his horses aren't real because they are calm, and horses are never calm.

The repeated confirmation of the notion that Iberian horses are just like this only increases the committee's doubts.

They don't believe in either Iberia or Iberian horses.

Now it's out in the open.

To the members of the commission, this is a brazen and nasty unequivocal deception, which might even insult the Emperor.

Of course, the Fifth Emperor will not come to look at the horses himself.

The commission says there is no reason for the Emperor to come and look, because these horses have no bones.

He tries to convince the experts that horses don't need bones, and hears the hesitation in his own voice.

It would be better if the Fifth Emperor came to see for himself, because Fr. Castiglione no longer believes in his horses, or in Iberia, or even in his purpose here on this Earth.

The commission doubts the horses' bones out loud, then silently, and then they move on to the bones of the landscape.

The commission does not at all doubt the bones of the landscape.

There are none.

The members of the commission require that the ‘bones’ be present and clearly visible in the landscape.

They insist it would be best if a Chinese person paints the landscape around the horses.

Perhaps Leng Mei or some other Chinese person.

There are Chinese people here.

In these moments, Fr. Castiglione suddenly stops understanding Chinese, and he doesn’t really know what will happen now.

The commission has not yet made a decision, they only say that they do not want to trust Fr. Castiglione with the trees, not only behind the horses, but also in front of them.

They are only asking him to draw a sketch of the perspective, and Leng Mei or someone else will use it to paint the landscape with all of the trees and their ‘bones’.

The Chinese call the contours of things, animals and humans ‘bones’.

For the Chinese, unlike Europeans, the contours are more important than the space.

And the only thing more important for them than contours is emptiness.

The Imperial Art Expert Commission has no need for Italian perspective.

A descending Chinese fog is enough.

From the mountains.

Or rising from a lake and covering all of the landscape’s empty space.



The Emperor needs perspective.

It's just not clear for how long.

But the Emperor expresses his desire for perspective only through the commission.

The commission continues speaking to Fr. Castiglione:

In the landscape, trees and mountains do not have to be like real trees and mountains that you've seen before somewhere;

the Emperor doesn't need a portrayal of a specific tree or a mountain;

the tree or mountain should approximate all trees and mountains that you've seen before;

the painting of a specific tree, well, that's the work of a craftsman;

if the landscape has to be similar to something, then primarily it should mirror the works of ancient Chinese landscape painters.

The commission imparts the list of demands in tiresome unison.

Castiglione understands: the Chinese do not want the tree to be like a tree.

He thinks: the only thing lower and beneath painting horses is painting still lifes.

With a sliced melon and lobsters.

And lemons.

Peeled.

In a spiral.

These types of still lifes should be eaten, not painted.

Let the Dutch paint them.

Castiglione listens to the commission with his head slightly tilting forward.

He is trying not to let his head droop.

Neither to the right, nor to the left.

He tries to stand with his eyes looking down, not looking directly at the commission.

Only slanting.

The members of the commission are discussing.

Castiglione tries not to scowl.

Or wrinkle his nose.

And to preserve his inner tranquility.

And not to look upset.

Though he probably can't really look pleasant.

Castiglione wants to yawn, but he tries not to.

And not to bite his lip.

He walks through his studio twice.

Reservedly.

Dignified and solid.

Castiglione does everything just as Ignatius Loyola told him to.

It is said that before formulating these rules of behaviour, Ignatius Loyola contemplated for a long while.

He even cried.

And prayed seven times...

When you combine all the sketches of horses into one, it is clear that there is no master depicted, says the commission.

One hundred horses and six shepherds in the picture – they are only guests.

Castiglione suggests that the commission pick one horse.

And he will paint that horse larger than the others.

The Chinese laugh.

Castiglione asks if the commission wants him to paint the Emperor.

The Chinese do not laugh.

Castiglione had never before seen laughter turn to silence so quickly.

The silence is broken by Syma Cao, the chairman of the commission.

He adjusts the blue silk bag hanging from his belt. The bag is embroidered with sharp triangles, with golden mountains and wavy rivers.

Syma Cao is taller than most Chinese men, and is dressed more fancily than the other members of the commission.

You can spot him from afar by his leopard print hat.

If you didn't know his history, and had never heard him speak, you might think he's too pompous, too arrogant, and held in too high regard.

And most likely undeservedly.

Syma Cao is a eunuch.

He is the only eunuch on the commission.

The other members of the Art Expert Commission are senior mandarins.

Syma Cao is distinct from other eunuchs, not only because he does not stink of urine, but also because he has an extraordinary mind.

Many eunuchs one might meet in Castiglione's Forbidden City are only fit to open gates, dress the Emperor's wives in silk clothes, and puff their cheeks in plays.

Or to play women.

Castiglione's student Leng Mei (it may be that the commission will ask him to paint the landscape behind the horses) told Fr. Castiglione that Syma Cao became a eunuch not by his own will or his family's, but because of the decision of the Old Fourth Emperor (a person's story learnt by chance can change your mind about that person, and even elicit respect or love).

And he did not come from the lowest ranks of society, like the other eunuchs, but from the highest social class.

According to the Old Fourth Emperor, his father was a disobedient and dangerous general.

The Emperor ordered that the influential general be arrested, and that the genitalia of his ten-year-old son be cut off.

It was no big tragedy.

Afterwards, it became clear that the Old Emperor was wrong, perhaps.

About the general's disloyalty.

He believed the rumours.

When the truth became known, the Old Emperor ordered that the boy be brought to the Forbidden City.

There, he grew up and started a career.

He is one of the few eunuchs who are allowed to dress in dark blue embroidered with rivers and triangular mountains.

Besides, he can address the Emperor directly.

The other members of the Art Expert Commission, the mandarins, are not allowed this level of familiarity.

Syma Cao really does have a special place in the palace.

Regardless of the fact that the Qing dynasty views eunuchs very differently to the previous one.

"Even the Ming dynasty," Leng Mei says quietly.

"What does that mean, very differently?" asks Castiglione.

"The Emperors of the Qing dynasty do not consider eunuchs important people," says Leng Mei.

The chairman of the commission, Syma Cao, stops the members' laughter and explains to Castiglione: the Chinese do not

consider the ‘master’ of a scene to be the Emperor, but a large mountain.

It is usually painted on the right side of the painting.

Everything else in the landscape is called the ‘guests’.

\* \* \*

In China, it is just as it is in Europe, thinks Castiglione.

Every person has his place.

His rank.

But in China, every person is valued not individually, but only in relation to someone else.

In every situation, a person is either a teacher or a student, or a father or a son, or a master or a guest.

In China, even the parts of a landscape have their own rank, thinks Castiglione.

\* \* \*

“Perhaps you want me to answer the question why, at the end of 2001, I wrote erotic messages to a writer from Malta?” Mama Nora asked on the screen.

“Yes. Why?” asked the journalist.

Miki turned up the volume on the television, because Grandmother Amigorena asked her to, and said angrily:

“Why-why? Why-why? Why don’t journalists have any other questions? Just this ‘why’. You did what you wanted to do in 2001. And now what, you have to kneel before the entire nation

and beg forgiveness with tears in your eyes? And after that, do you have to go and kiss the flag? You're not the president," Miki said, in anger and exasperation.

Miki still had the strength to be exasperated, but no one had the strength to listen; everyone was interested in the conversation taking place on the screen.

"Did you really send erotic messages in 2001 to a writer from Malta?" asked Miki.

"He had absolutely no sense of humour, neither did he engage in any sort of analytical thinking," responded Mama Nora. "So there wasn't much to talk about."

"So was 2001 special in some way?" asked Grandmother Amigorena.

"Only in that it happened a long time ago," said Mama Nora.

"You look better on television," said Grandmother Amigorena, and went on: "Plumper."

Grandmother Amigorena sat in front of the television wearing a purple sweater that she had embroidered with pansies in her youth.

She was dressed as if she was sitting on the other side of the television screen.

But you cannot tell her this.

Grandmother Amigorena was 80-years-old, and she really didn't like the phrase 'on the other side'.

That was why she liked the phrase 'forced out'.

She sat in front of the television in her best clothes. Grandmother Amigorena liked the Roma style of dress, when she was not engaged in such solemn moments.

“Chanel?” asked Grandmother Amigorena, pointing at Mama Nora’s black sweater on television.

“Almost,” replied Mama Nora.

“Almost Chanel?” asked Grandmother Amigorena.

It’s very good that there is at least one unique name in the house.

It’s always enough, so that everyone else in the house can have plainer names.

For a long time, everyone here thought that Amigorena meant ‘friend to all’, but later they learned that *amigo-reno* in Spanish meant ‘friend – male reindeer’.

This is a secret that will never be learnt by Grandmother Amigorena.

[...]

Grandmother Amigorena was born in Argentina.

Her parents emigrated there during the First World War, and then they returned with her in their arms.

It was a ridiculous move.

Grandmother Amigorena only remembers a few Spanish words from her time in Argentina, and she only uses them as curse words.

Grandmother Amigorena does not like talking about Argentina.

It weighs on her.



It's her parent's fault.

"Listen, so why did it all end between you two?" Miki asked during the commercial break, looking intently at Mama Nora.

"Between who – between us?" asked Mama Nora.

"Between you and the writer from Malta," said Miki.

"The writer Fromolta?" asked Grandmother Amigorena.

"From Malta," said Mama Nora.

"You don't have to repeat yourself, I can hear very well, and I also understand everything," said Grandmother Amigorena. "I'm very smart."

"We passed each other by," said Mama Nora.

"Where?" asked Miki.

"In our thoughts," said Mama Nora.

"What thoughts?" asked Miki.

"Well, I wanted to run away to the island."

"And him?"

"He wanted to run away from the island," said Mama Nora.

"Run... away?" Grandmother Amigorena asked with increased interest.

But no one responded to her question.

"So when you cleared it all up, that's when you broke up?" asked Miki.

"Not right away," responded Mama Nora. "I still sent him two Christmas cards."

"Very well done," said Grandmother Amigorena.





© Merle Karu

## Paavo Matsin

### *Gogoli disko*

The Gogol Disco

Publishing House: **Lepp ja Nagel**

#### Biography

Having started his literary career with self-published experimental avant-garde poetry books, Paavo Matsin has moved on to very tense and naturalistic prose writing. Loosely mixing history, fiction, fact and fantasy, alchemy and the esoteric with ironic but warm humour, his sharp, concise and exact use of words put more substance into his work than one might judge by volume alone. Matsin has received a number of prizes and acknowledgements, including the Criticism Prize of the cultural weekly Sirp in 2011, Siugjas Sulepea/The Serpent Pen Prize in 2012, as well as nominations for the State Cultural Award in 2012 and the Prose Book of the Year in 2014.

#### Synopsis

A small Eastern European town is inhabited by new settlers after a war in the imaginary future. As they are calmly going through their everyday business, the settlers' life, devoid of memory, is disrupted by the sudden resurrection of the classic Russian horror writer Nikolai Gogol.

# Gogoli disko

Paavo Matsin

## “Kotletid Gogolile”

Katerina oli terve päeva üksinda allkorrusel Grigori kadumise tõttu nutnud, lõpuks rahunenud, läinud Opiatovitši keelust hoolimata vastu ööd tagasi tööle, avastanud, et baariuks on lahti ning leidnud Gogoli Koidu ja Tartu tänava nurgalt pargis kuuvalgel magamas. Ta läks korraks veel tagasi koristama ja laenas siis vastasoleva kohtumaja hoovist aiakäru, millesse sealne veel haruldasest eesti soost kojamees tavatses punaste katusekivide allakukkuvaid tükke kokku koguda. Siis kärutas ta silmatorkavalt ja ebaharilikult riietatud mehe otsustavalt endale koju. Ööklubi juures ilkusid hilised suitsetajad tema ja ta käru üle, aga Katerina oli harjunud tülivate kundedega ega teinud teist nägugi. Gogol tuli turvalisse kohta viia. Vastik munakivisillutis, mille uus tsaarivõim oli kohe oma esimestel päevadel kõikjale maha tagunud, pani käru rappuma, nii et Katerina võttis peast pehme roosidega rätiku ja pani selle oigavale Gogolile selja alla.

Kodus hakkas ta rohkem närvide rahustuseks kui nälja pärast hommikupoolses hahetuses kotlette praadima. Katerina oli Grigorist lootnud paljutki, mees oli talle taevad ja maad kokku lubanud, isegi kottidega sisse kolinud, kuid nüüd siis ikkagi kadunud ja veel niimoodi kiirustades, et polnud allkorruse tualetis isegi vett peale tõmmanud! Üldse oli Grigori kummaliselt palju peldikus istunud, viinud sinna veel kruusigi, nagu tahtnuks loputusvett juua! Issake! Ehk oli tal hoopis mingi kummaline haigus? Mingi verine piss? Kahju muidugi, et kõik nii

läks... aga hea, et vähemalt nüüd mingigi meeshing jälle majja tuli! Pealegi tundis Katerina vaikiva prohveti suhtes seletamatut kiindumust, Gogol oli söönud Romaanis isukalt ta päevapraade ja rääkinud otse südamesse minevaid sõnu, kauaoodatud vastuseid tema suurtele küsimustele. Ta ei rääkinud ka kunagi nende jubedate kolmekordsete väljenditega! Katerina tundis seletamatut elevust ja väarikust, talle tuli millegipärast kogu aeg pähe üks popplaul, kus kaunitar elas jõeäärses majas, mille alt hakkas ühel ilusal päeval välja voolama selge veega oja. Ka meenus talle evangeeliumist just see, et lõpuks jäid Lunastaja risti alla ainult naised, sest kõik mehed põgenesid!

Kotletid tulid imehead, suur Gogol sõi vaikides ja aeglaselt nagu elluärganud vana gravüür, mis järsku, mingi vale valgustuse tõttu paistab öisele vetsuminejale liikuvat. Kui naine pakkus veini, näitas võõras käega keedukannule ja lasi sooja vett klaasi juurde valada. Katerina pani tähele, et mehel on imelik komme teha saiast kuulikesi. Ja veel, aknad ning peeglid pidid olema kogu korteris kaetud. Kui nad saabusid ja naine andis värisevale Gogolile selga Grigorist maha jäänud dressipluuse, oli prohvet vaadanud pikalt välja ööpimedusse ja rääkinud midagi enda viimasest eluasemest, mille ees kõik sõidukid olid sooritanud ümberpöõret, nii et toaknad alati üleni porised olnud. Gogol oli sikutanud rulood ja Katerina oli täitnud mehe kummalise soovi ning lasknud ise kõik katted alla. Nii et kui verine ja selgelt hullunud Grigori tuli, kutsus talle hulluauto hoopis naaber, ja Katerina ei osanud muud kui vaadata sinise taksoga äraviidavat meest, kellest ta nii palju lootnud oli, ülevalt rõdult. Siis oli naisel külm hakanud ja ta oli magama jäänud Gogoli juurde tukastama istunud, omamata mingisugustki ettekujutust, kuidas purunenud eluga edasi minna. Vahepeal Katerina ärkas ja katsus Gogolit, selle käed oli jääkülmad ja ta näol olid väikesed, ilmselt surimaski tegemisest jäänud vigastused,

pisikesed haavad, mida naine lootis hommikul hea defitsiitse Jugoslaavia nardikreemiga ravida. Korra ärkas öösel ka külaline ja, viibides mingis sumbuurses seisundis, tahtis komberdada ülakorrusele, kus pidavat olema kodukabel! Paar korda kutsus Gogol unes ulgudes teenrit appi, aga ilmselt väsis siis ja suikus uuesti. Pärast hommikusööki tahtis Gogol aga harjunud kombel veeta päeva tualetis ja Katerina ei keelanud talle seda väikest veidrust, kus see surnu siis ikka olema pidi. Ta viis sinna ka paar pastapliiatsit ning natuke märkmepaberit. Paar eestikeelset kirjandusteost – kellegi vanema autori Jaan Kausi „Ela ja sära“ ning eesti-nigeeria nobelisti Berk Vakri paks „Tartu lugulaul“ – olid seal ka mittelugemiseks kasepuust riiulil olemas, nagu tsaarivalitsuse määrus kadunud eestlaste ilukirjanduslike teoste suhtes ette kirjutas, et ikka vähemalt kaks teost nimekirjast ja hoida hügieeniga seotud ruumis. Gogol oli õnneks öelnud, et need on liiga keerulised tema jaoks... Katerina ei tahtnud probleeme, ta elas vaikselt ja täitis alati kõiki riiklikke korraldusi, see oli nii sisse juurdunud, et ta kaalus mõttes ka koduseid kotlette riikliku grammimäära alusel, mis siin rääkida veel siis niinimetatud sinistest määrustest, mis reguleerisid inimese vahekorda eelmise riikluse jäänuste ja esindajatega.

Järgmiseks õhtuks oli Katerina kutsunud külalise. Tema ainus rõõm siin elus olidki sõbrannad. Kõige lähedasem neist, Katja, töötas kahe teineteisest võrdlemisi kaugele jääva tehase juhina, nii et ta külastas hingeõde tihti juba puhtpraktilisel eesmärgil, et oleks, kus ööbida. Kuid Katerina ootusjoovastuse hajutas ootamatu sündmus. Ta ei olnud Katjale midagi öelnud Gogoli kohta ja kavatses sellist pommuudist serveerida nii-öelda koos sisselükatava serveerimislauaga, aga nagu ikka, läks köögis just kõige kiiremal hetkel midagi kõrbema. Katja jäi esikusse üksinda ja kohe kuulduski tema karjatus, sest ta oli avastanud peldikust mingi vanamees-teispoonsus-skeleti luge-

mas kohustuslikku tualetikirjandust. WC-raamatud olid igal pool seadusega ettenähtult alati olemas, aga keegi ju ei võtnud neid ometigi kunagi kätte! Nüüd oli Katjal tunne, et ta sureb täna košmaarset surma kuskil pargipingil, mille kõrval võsas jubedates Lossimägede varemetes peab oma koosolekut kohalik vargakomitee! Nii jube tundus talle ilmutis! Nii uskumatu see rüve ja ebaseaduslik tegevus, peldikus eesti raamatu lugemine, et käes rippuv äsja kondiitriärist ostetud maasikatorдик kukkus potsuga maha.

Aga kõik rahunes, elu ootamatult kuum puljong jahtus, kui Katerina hiljem võõra tuppa palus ja vaarikapunastes pükstes Gogol väriseva galantsusega oma kriiksuvast portsigartšikust naistele paberosse pakkus. Katja teadis, et Katerinas oli alati mingit tabamatut ja peidetud stiili olnud, ilmselt tema baltliku päritolu tõttu. Kui sõbranna kõrval oli, tundus talle olukord isegi põnev, nii huvitavat meest ta tööl kunagi ei näinud, isegi arvutimees ei küündinud Gogolini, kuigi käis ka ebaharilikult riides ja rääkis arusaamatult. Katja vaatas suure imetusega, kuidas Katerina tõi magamistoast enda kõige kallima nardisalvi ja määris sellega vanamehe jalgu. Kogu tuba lõhnas nüüd tugevalt nagu kirikus. Katja uuris salvikarpi ja vakatas hämmastusest, see maksis peaaegu ta aastapalga. Kui Katerina kummardas, said isegi ta juuksed salviga kokku, aga ta ei hoolinud sellest. Katjale tundus korraks, et sõbranna isegi pühkis juustega ilmutise pruuni mädanevaid jalgu. Lõpuks kreemitas naine sisse ka Gogoli näo, et ilmselt surimaski võtmisest jäänud väikeseid haavakesi ravida.

„Miks sa talle küll nii kallist salvi määrid?“ küsis Katja kohe Katerinalt, kui nad korraks kõõgis kahekesi jäid. „Elada ju niuke vanamehega ei saa, ta ei teeni midagi... Kas sa mõnda kaugsõiduautojuhti ei taha? Võiksin korraldada, olen ju rääkinud...“

Katerina istus köögilaua taha ja hakkas nutma.

„Vaata, ta on siin ju ainult korra, kõik need teised mehed on aga kogu aeg,“ ohkas ta, kui sai jälle rääkida, „mul hakkas tast lihtsalt kahju, ta on ju muidugi täiesti nemo-dnõi-parasiit-unitaas, aga Griša kadus ja ma ei suuda jälle hakata kuskilt...“

„No aga sa ei saa ju sellisega elada, Katerinake,“ ütles Katja, kelle nagu valgustas nüüd viimseni sisemine naiselik hämmastuslamp, „selle salvi raha eest saaksid sa tavalist meest oma kolmsada päeva toita! Ta ei ole ju mingi Kristus! Ja meie ei ole juudinaised! Pealegi, kui tulevad inspektorid ja näevad teda lugemas, siis ei suuda sind ju keegi enam kaitsta, sa oled ju estonka, tahad, et sind viiakse ka sinna vanasse metroosse surema või...“

„Metroosse?...“ hüüdis Katerina. „Ma olen kogu elu ausalt tsaaririiki teeninud, ma ei ole kunagi isegi ajalehte tualetis lugenud...“

Ta nuttis nagu prostituut või jaamapianist. Kuidas oleks küll tema ellu vaja olnud Grigorit, ühte igapäevaste olukordade aranžirovtšikut, kes ütles mis hea ja halb ja mis on elu mõte, annaks õige tooni ja võtaks klaverikaane vahelt alati täpselt sobiva rahasumma! Nüüd oli kogu elu jälle segamini nagu Prantsuse bulvar Pihkvas pärast avamispidustusi.

Katja üritas korra mõelda asjalikult nagu tehases, kui töömehed jälle halama tulid, et pole seda ja teist. Siis lasi ta tavaliselt neil kõik oma tööriistad ette näidata ning mehed mõistsid, et midagi juurde nõuda ei ole tegelikult alust ja neile on kõik tingimused tööraseamiseks loodud. Katja üritas kuidagi formuleerida oma tekkivat seisukohta:

„Kindlasti on mingi koht, kus tal on ohutum ja parem. Ega sinu juures ka ei ole viga, kommunaalkorteriga ei anna su



elamist ju võrreldagi. Aga, kuule, Katerinake, järsku viime ta muuseumi?“

Katerina oli püsti tõusnud, ta silmad läikisid kummaliselt, nagu oleks maja viimane öölamp tiiki visatud.

„Jah!“ ütles ta murtud häälel pärast minutilist vaikust.

Nüüd naised rahunesid ja läksid tuppa tagasi. Gogol oli jälle vetsu läinud, kogu laual olev sai oli rullitud väikesteks kuulikes- teks. Sõbrannad hakkasid vaikselt vajalikke asju kokku panema.

# *The Gogol Disco*

**Paavo Matsin**

*Translated from Estonian by Adam Cullen*

## **Cutlets for Gogol**

Katerina had been crying over Grigory's disappearance the entire day, alone downstairs. She finally calmed down, went back to work around midnight in spite of Opiatovich having forbidden her to do so, discovered that the bar door was open, and found Gogol sleeping in the moonlight in a park at the intersection of Koidu and Tartu streets. She returned to the bar for a short while to clean up, then borrowed a wheelbarrow from the yard of the courthouse opposite – the rare ethnically-Estonian caretaker mostly used it to collect fallen shards of red shingle. Then, she purposefully wheeled the unusually and conspicuously dressed Gogol back to her home. Late-night smokers loitering outside the nightclub catcalled at her and the wheelbarrow, but Katerina was accustomed to troublesome customers and paid them no attention. Gogol had to be brought to a safe place. The horrendous cobblestones that the new tsardom had pounded into place during its very first days jiggled the wheelbarrow, so Katerina removed her soft rose-patterned shawl and positioned it under the moaning Gogol's back.

At home, she started making cutlets, more to soothe her nerves than out of hunger in the early-morning gloaming. Katerina had placed high hopes in Grigory – he had promised her the Sun and the Moon, had even moved his bags into her place, but had now disappeared all the same, and in such a hurry that he

hadn't even flushed the downstairs toilet! Grigory had spent an oddly large amount of time in the bathroom in general, and even brought a mug with him, as if he wanted to drink the flush-water! Good Lord! Maybe he'd actually had some strange disease? Or bloody pee? It was too bad that everything went the way it did, of course... but positive that at least *some* kind of male soul had entered the house again! Furthermore, Katerina felt an inexplicable fondness for the taciturn prophet – Gogol had eaten his meals at the Romaan Book-Bar ravenously and had uttered words that pierced straight to her heart; long-awaited answers to her great questions. And he never spoke in those awful threefold idioms! Katerina felt an inexplicable thrill and dignity. For some reason, a pop song kept coming to mind, one about a beautiful woman who lived in a riverside house, beneath which a crystal-clear stream started flowing one fine day. She was also reminded of the gospels – in the end, only women were left at the foot of the Redeemer's cross, because all the men fled!

The cutlets turned out fantastically. The great Gogol ate sedately and in silence – like an old engraving come to life that all of a sudden, seen by a late-night bathroom-goer in the wrong light, appears to be moving. When the woman offered him wine, the stranger pointed to the kettle and had her top off the glass with warm water. Katerina remarked that the man had the strange habit of moulding his bread into little balls. What's more, all the windows and mirrors in the apartment had to be covered. When they arrived and the woman gave the shivering Gogol a dress shirt that Grigory had left behind, the prophet stared out into the darkness of night for a long while and muttered something about his last dwelling, which vehicles turned around in front of, so the windows of the room were always covered in mud. Gogol tugged at the window shade and Katerina granted his strange wish, closing all of them. Thus, when the

bloodied and clearly deranged Grigory came, it was a neighbour who called the psych ward on him, and all Katerina could do was watch from the balcony above as the man, from whom she had hoped so much, was taken away in a blue van. The woman started to feel cold, so she went back inside to sit and doze off next to Gogol, who was fast asleep, having not the slightest clue of how to move on with her shattered life. After a while, Katerina awoke and felt Gogol – his hands were as cold as ice and his face was covered in small scratches probably caused by the making of his death mask; tiny wounds, which the woman hoped to disinfect in the morning with a good Yugoslavian spikenard. Her visitor woke up once that night, too, and – in a kind of somnambulant state – wanted to clamber upstairs, where he claimed the home chapel was! Gogol howled in his sleep a couple of times, calling out for his servant, but apparently exhausted himself and fell back into a deep sleep. After breakfast, Gogol wanted to spend the day in the toilet, as he was used to doing, and Katerina did not deny him that small oddity – where else was the dead man supposed to be, anyway? She even brought him a few ballpoint pens and some scraps of notebook paper. A couple of Estonian-language literary works – *Rise and Shine* by some older author named Jaan Kaus and a thick book titled *Tartu Title Track* by the Estonian-Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Berk Vakri – were also perched on a birch wood shelf there, but not for reading. As the imperial decree prescribed for literature written by Estonians, at least two works from the list were always to be kept in areas meant for hygiene maintenance. Luckily, Gogol said they were too difficult for him... Katerina didn't want any problems. She lived a quiet life and always abided by all state laws – they were so instilled into her that she even mentally weighed her homemade cutlets using the state gram-measure and, it goes without saying,

adhered to the ‘blue decrees’, which regulated one’s relationships with remnants and representatives of the former statehood.

Katerina had invited a guest to come over the next evening. Her girlfriends really were her sole joy in this life. The closest of them, Katya, worked as the director of two factories located relatively far from each other, so she called on her soul-sister frequently, if only for the purely practical intention of having somewhere to stay the night. However, Katerina’s ecstatic anticipation of the visit had dissipated with the unexpected development. She hadn’t told Katya anything about Gogol yet and intended to serve the news-bomb on a cart that she could ‘wheel in’, so to say, but as always, something in the kitchen burned at the busiest moment. Katya had been left alone in the entryway and her shrill scream rang out immediately, since she had discovered the skeletal old man from beyond the grave reading mandatory toilet literature in the bathroom. Toilet books were always stocked everywhere as required by law, but no one ever *picked them up*! Now, Katya felt like she was going to die a gruesome death today, somewhere on a park bench, beside which a committee of local thieves gathered in the bushes growing on the eerie ruins of Castle Hill! That was how horrible the phantom appeared! The disgusting and illegal act – reading an Estonian book in the toilet – was so unbelievable that the strawberry cake she had just bought from a confectionery store slipped from her grasp and hit the ground with a *plop*.

But everyone calmed down and life’s unexpectedly hot broth cooled when Katerina later asked the stranger to come out and Gogol, clad in raspberry-red pants, offered the women *papirosi* from his squeaky cigarette case with trembling gallantry. Katya knew that Katerina had always possessed a kind of hidden, elusive style; probably as a result of her Baltic heritage. With her

girlfriend by her side, the situation seemed even exciting – Katya had never seen such a fascinating man at work; even the IT guy wasn't on par with Gogol, although he also dressed unusually and spoke gibberish. Katya stared in wide-eyed wonder as Katerina took her most treasured spikenard from the bedroom and rubbed it on the old man's legs. The whole room smelled pungently like a church. Katya inspected the ointment's box and was incredulously speechless – it cost almost her yearly salary. Katerina's hair even brushed across the ointment when she leaned over Gogol, but the woman didn't care. To Katya, it briefly appeared as if her girlfriend was even wiping the phantom's brown, rotting feet with her hair. Lastly, Katerina also applied the cream to Gogol's face, apparently to treat the small cuts made by his death mask.

“Why on Earth are you rubbing him with such expensive ointment?” Katya asked Katerina as soon as they were alone in the kitchen for a moment. “You can't live with an old man like him, you know – he won't bring home the bacon... Wouldn't you like some long-distance trucker? I could arrange it; I've told you before...”

Katerina sat down at the kitchen table and started to cry.

“Look, he's only going to be here a little while, but all those other men are around all the time,” she sighed when she regained her composure. “I just started to feel sorry for him – he is a totally *nemodny-parasite-unitaz*<sup>1</sup>, of course, but Grisha disappeared and I don't have it in me to start again with...”

“Yeah, but you really can't live with somebody like him, Katerinka,” Katya said, her face now fully illuminated by an inner lamp of feminine astonishment. “You could feed an ordinary

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<sup>1</sup> “unfashionable-[...]-toilet” (Russian)

man for a good 300 days with the money from that ointment! He's no Christ now is he! And we're not Jewish women! And on top of that, if the inspectors come and see him reading, then no one will be able to protect you anymore – *you're an Estonka*. Do you want to be hauled off to the old metro to die, too?"

"The metro?..." Katerina exclaimed. "I've served the tsardom honestly my whole life, I've never even read newspapers in the toilet..."

She cried like a prostitute or a train-station pianist. How, oh how she needed a Grigory in her life; a little *aranzhirovchik*<sup>2</sup> of everyday affairs, who would tell her what is good and what is bad and what the point of life is, give things the right tone and always pull a suitable sum of money out from under the piano cover! Now her entire life was a mess again, like France Boulevard in Pskov after the opening ceremony.

Katya tried to think businesslike for a moment, just like she did at the factory whenever the workmen came to gripe again about not having this or that. She would usually have all of them display their tools to her, and they'd realise there was actually no basis for demanding anything extra and that all the right conditions for drudgery had been established. Katya attempted to formulate her developing viewpoint:

"There has got to be some place that's safer and better for him. There's nothing wrong with your place either, of course, but you can't even compare your apartment to a communal one. But listen, Katerinka – what if we maybe take him to the museum?"

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<sup>2</sup> "organizer" (Russian)

Katerina shot to her feet, her eyes glinting strangely like a house's last night light tossed into a pond.

"Yes!" she exclaimed after a minute-long silence, her voice cracking.

The women composed themselves and returned to the living room. Gogol had gone into the toilet again, and all the bread that had been on the table was packed into little balls. The two friends began quietly packing what they would need.





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## Osvalds Zebris

### *Gaiļu kalna ēnā*

In the Shadow of Rooster Hill

Publishing House: **Dienas grāmata**

### Biography

Osvalds Zebris, born in 1975, is a Latvian writer and journalist, holding a master's degree in economics. Zebris has worked in public relations and communications for Hill+Knowlton and McCann, and as an editor for various newspapers and magazines. He is also the author of three novels. Zebris' first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Brīvība tiklos* brought him instant popularity among readers and won him a Latvian Literature Award in 2010 for the best debut. *Gaiļu kalna ēnā* (*In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*, nominated for the Latvian Literature Award in 2015) was written and published for the historical novel series, *We. Latvia. The 20th Century*, focusing on the Latvian experience during 1905 in the Russian Empire. The novel *Koka nama ļaudis* tells the story of a strange wooden house in one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Riga. The wooden house is a breathing character in the story, influencing people living in it and initiating various mysteries. Zebris is a member of the Latvian Writers' Union.

### Synopsis

It is 1905 in Riga – the Russian Tsar is slowly losing power over his vast empire, and the city is being rocked by worker riots, violence and pogroms. Revolution is in the air. Pitting brother against brother, the chaos forces people to choose a side. Among this upheaval, a former schoolteacher becomes involved in the revolution, but soon realizes that war will take much more than he is willing to give. The following year, a dramatic kidnapping of three children has Riga's police on edge. Who did it? What was their motive? The answer will shatter the lives of two families, as they struggle to understand who is guilty in a revolution where all sides are victims. Osvalds Zebris weaves a powerful tale of a country's desire to become free against the backdrop of the 1905 Revolution in Tsarist Russia, an event that gave birth to some of the most dramatic events in the 20th century.

## Pirmā diena: pestīšana

Salīcis, drukns vecis platiem soļiem snāj no Dinaburgas sliežu ceļa<sup>1</sup> puses. Palielo galvu nošķiebis, smagi un nevienādi elsdams, viņš šķērso krāšņo jaunās stacijas laukumu, tad ielu – ciets, daudzu gājēju pieblīvēts sniegs čīkst zem brūno puszābaku zolēm. Vīrs apstājas, paceļ nogurušās un dziļi iekritušās acis uz pēcpusdienas krēslā mirdzošajiem *Bellevue* viesnīcas<sup>2</sup> logiem un, galvu nodūris, turpina steidzīgo gājienu pa Marijas ielu. Dažas spītīgas brūnu matu sprogas laužas ārā pie cepures maliņas, tās šūpojas gājēja satraukto soļu ritmā, biezās ūsas no ātrās elpas padegunē sasalušas. Uz Elizabetes un Suvarova ielas<sup>3</sup> stūra pulciņos drūzmējas cilvēki, daži bezrūpīgi smejas, citi rimti izgriežas no Vērmaņa parka; vairāk dzird vīriešu balsis – dāmas salā ierāvušās kažokādās un mēteļu apkaklēs. Pirmsziemassvētku noskaņa ir jūtama Rīgā arī šogad, lai gan daudzos aizvien vēl mājā drūmas domas – rūgtums, ko nesis aizejošais 1906. gads, kā etiķi sagājis vīns ļaužu cerības apvērsis dziļā vilšanās sajūtā. Šodienas *Balss* raksta: “Tik daudz ienaida, posta un drūmu, draudošu mākoņu visā mūsu apkārtnē, ka negribas ticēt nekādam priecam vēstij. Un arī no nākotnes mums nespīd pretim nekāds cerības stars.”

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1 1860. gadā, pēc Rīgas–Dinaburgas dzelzceļa izbūves, ierīkoja arī šā dzelzceļa galapunktu Rīgā. Toreizējā nelielā divstāvu mūra ēka ar diviem peroniem bija Rīgas Centrālās dzelzceļa stacijas priekštece.

2 Tagad Raiņa bulvāra un Marijas ielas stūris.

3 Tagad Krišjāņa Barona iela.

Šķērsojis Aleksandra bulvāri, iebraucējs apstājas pie pazemes sētiņas, kas apņem pareizticīgo katedrāles varenos sānus, un vēro Ziemassvētku tirdziņa kņadu Esplanādes laukumā. Viņa apgērbs ir par plānu, uz vakaru sals kļūst aizvien bargāks, nācējs nodreb un pārlaiž uzmanīgu skatu ļaužu pulciņiem plašajā tirgus placī. Iegājis pa pavērtajiem vārtiņiem, viņš paraugās pa labi uz zvanu torni un, krustu nepārmetis, kā ēna aizslīd gar katedrāles sienu. No spoži izgaismotās jarmarkas puses viņu neredz – vīrieša tumšais stāvs ir teju izzudis vienā no katedrāles sānu nišām. Vairāki pajūgi nupat jau atkal pietur, kungi pasniedz cimdotas rokas dāmām, izceļ no kamanām dažāda vecuma bērneļus, tie skriešiem metas uz izrotātās egles un saldumu galdu pusi. Mazie spridzīgi smejas, spieto ap smaržīgajām vafelēm un ar spožām lentēm izrotātajām būdām, kur elektrisko spuldžu gaismā mirdz rotaļu lāču un leļļu melnās acis. Uzzibsnī arī ārpus gaismas loka stāvošā veča skatiens, tas cieši pavada atnācējus līdz pat nomaļākai pārdotavai, kur tie pie laimes akas sastopas vēl ar kādiem. Vērīgās acis pamana krietni apdilušu savulaik sarkanīgu koka zirgu un maza auguma karuseļa vīru, kurš, sagaidījis divus pēdējos pasažierus, sāk lēnu riņķa gājienu, tad pieliek soli, meitene skanīgi iesmejas, sīks cimdiņš māj, zirgi uzņem ātrumu, večuka velteņi pāriet vieglā skrējienā.

Vērotājs skaita minūtes, saliec un atliec pelēkajos dūraiņos sastingušos pirkstus, aptausta naudas aploksni iekšskabatā un pamana vēl kādu bērnu. Puikam ir gadi seši septiņi, mazā roka uz karuseļa pusi velk garā, melnā mētelī tērptu kungu, kura apgarotajā, bālajā sejā jūtama atturīga nepatika pret skaļo kņadu cilvēku pārpilnajā placī. Ap viņa plānajām lūpām paceļas viegla elpas migliņa, veča lūpas atkārtο elegantā kunga lūpu kustības: “Bet tikai īsu brīdi, Paulīt.”

Virš Rīgas turpina vilkties tumšzila krēsla, un pilsētai raksturīgie trokšņi decembra debesu klusumā izceļas tikpat asi, kā spoži izgaismotā Esplanāde gail aklajā nakts acs dobumā. “Bērnī. Ziemassvētkos... tikai daži laimīgi mazie,” viņš čukst, dziļajā nišā ierāvies, vērotāju sakrata dobjs un sauss kāss, viņš nedaudz pieliecas un vēlreiz pārbauda iekškabatu – viss ir savā vietā. Nomierinājies tas atkal atgriežas pie gaismās mirguļojošā laukuma, piemiegtās acis atrod karuseli un eleganto kungu, kurš tobrīd ieinteresēti vēro trūcīgi, bet silti ģērbtu jaunkundzi ar pagalam nemierīgu zēnu pie rokas. Sieviete izliekas kungu nemanām, mazais izraujas no kalsnās rokas un droši diebji uz smieklu zvaigzni, izsaucienus un nīrbošu roku mājienus. Puskrēslā stāvošais vīrietis ar prieku atskārš, ka šovakar ir pamatīgi vērīgs, nogurušās acis gluži vai ieguvušās spēju attēlu palielināt, līdz sīkām detaļām sasmalcināt. Viņš pārļaiž cimdu smaidā atplaukušajai mutei, tad augšup, garām paltajam degunam, acīm, pierēm, paceļ jēreni augstāk un atspiežas pret baznīcas akmeņiem. Spējš atvieglojums, ilgi gaidītā pestīšana – vaina paliks tepat cietajā sniegā, taps iemīta līdz pat pavasarim, kad pēcpusdienas saulē tā izzudīs pavisam. Beidzot viss noskaidrots, ilgas šaubu moka atkāpušās, viņš atkal ir drošs par sevi un nu ir gatavs tikties ar savu vajātāju. Piepeši smaidā iesīlūšās acis sastingst, tumšās skropstas tikko manāmi notrīs, viņš aiztur elpu, kļūst bālāks, platie arāju dzimtas pleci sakrītas.

– Mamm, tu? – vecis atraujas no sienas, pa sānu vārtniem iziet laukumā un, meiteni cieši vērodams, itin kā pret savu gribu tuvojas karuselim.

– Eu, raugi, kur sprendzies, – kāds viņam uzsauc, platais cilvēks no pustumsas spraucas cauri kņadai, garām kļiņģeru apaļajiem sāniem, kūpošām glāzēm un resnai, spiedzīgi smejošai jaunuvei, kas rāda uz viņu ar salā pietūkušu, sarkanu pirkstu.

Kāds viegli parausta plecus, cits pasmaida sirmā bārdā, sak, cilvēks ir un paliek ērms, ķēms no zvēra, bet citam pat šāda sīka pagrūstišanās ievēl dziļas rievās šaurajā pierē – kauns, plītnieki pašā Rīgas sirdī, tādā svētā laikā. Bet, kamēr pilsēta ievēl plaušās dzestro gaisu, pamet rotaļīgu skatienu augšup spožajās zvaigznēs, piemin izsmēķi vai noglāsta jauniegūtas draudzenes mēteļmuguru, vecis platiem soļiem tuvojas karuseļim. Viņš apmet loku, iebrien nelielā kupenā smaidošo zirdziņu ēnas pusē un pastiepj spēcīgās rokas. Karuselis griežas lēni, un viņš saudzīgi nocēļ bērnus vienu pēc otra. Vispirms mazais Paulītis, tad nadzīgais rezgalis un visbeidzot – viņa. Spēcīgās rokas nodreb, mamma siltās acis izbrīnā viņu uzlūko, bet lūpas nepaspēj izdvest ne skaņas. Spalgi iekliegties pagūst tikai vidējais puika, taču karuseļa otrā pusē spiedienu neviens nesadzird. Sieviete iespējami strupi rauga atcirst melnajā mētelī tērptajam švītīgajam kungam, kuram pēkšņi šis vakara izgājiens rādās noslēpumu pilns, īsti nesaprotami, acumirkli neapverami daudzsoļš.

– Paulīti, mēs tūliņ iesim pie tētas, tūliņ es jums... – vecis aizelšas, viņš abus puikas paņēmis pie vienas rokas, pie otras meitene. Mudīgi rauj bērnus pāri Totlēbena bulvārim,<sup>4</sup> pagriežas pa labi, un brīdī, kad no laukuma atskan vakara murdoņai neraksturīgi saucieni, savādā četrrotne jau nogriežas uz Nikolaja ielu,<sup>5</sup> tad vēlreiz pa kreisi un pa Troņmantnieka bulvāri<sup>6</sup> mēro labu gabalu pretējā virzienā – līdz pat novakares krēslā grimstošajam Bastejkalnam. Paulītis iešņukstas, otrs puika sparīgi rausta roku, meitene atgriež mazo galvu atpakaļ:

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<sup>4</sup> Tagad Kalpaka bulvāris.

<sup>5</sup> Tagad Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela.

<sup>6</sup> Tagad Raiņa bulvāris.

– Ū, uz šejieni, palīgā, – viņa sauc aizvilkdamās, taču smalkā balss izplēn pilsētas sirdspukstos, balsīs, važoņu izsaucienos, slāpētos smieklos. Pirms svētkiem ļaudis steidz noslēgt ilgi atliktus rēķinus un darījumus, satikties uz īsu sarunu, lai tad varētu mierīgu sirdi nodoties Ziemassvētku rosībai.

Savādaiss svešinieks nervozi iesmejas, velk mazos uz priekšu, vēlreiz pa kreisi, uz Aleksandra bulvāri, un tad jau viņi nonāk pie spoži izgaismotās *Imperiāla* viesnīcas<sup>7</sup> sāniem. Pie augstajām divviru durvīm stāv šveicars tumši zilā tērpā, zeltītajās pogās atspīd dzeltenīga elektrisko spuldžu gaisma, ko greznaiss nams vēlīgi izlej no platajiem vestibila logiem. Meitenei – viņu sauc Laimdota – šķiet, ka durvju uzraugs tūlīņ ņems nejauko veci aiz krāgas, sauks pēc gorodovoja un viņa būs glābta, taču šveicars steidzas pie nule piebraukušām kamanām, lai paņemtu brūnā papīrā iesaiņotas pakas un pasniegtu baltu cimdu lapsu astēs dziļi iegrimušai dāmai. Vecis raujas iekšā pa platajām divviru durvīm, viņi pieklūp pie viesnīcnieka galda; pa labi dzird biljarda bumbu paukšķus, uzvēdī cigāru un cep-ta ēdiena smarža – puspagrabā iekārtojies restorāns, viena no Rīgas greznākajām izklaides rotām. Vakaros te ņirb apaļi zelta desmitnieki un papīra divdesmitpiecnieki – šo vietu iecienījuši pirmie tikko pie rocības tikušie latvieši, kuriem gribas aizgūtnēm tērēt, rādīt zobus vāciešiem un krieviem.

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7 Ēka Brīvības bulvārī 21.

# *In the Shadow of Rooster Hill*

**Osvalds Zebris**

*Translated from Latvian by Jayde Thomas Will*

## **The First Day: Redemption**

A stooping, thickset old man strode with wide steps from the side of the Dvinsk railway track. His somewhat large head bent downwards, panting heavily and irregularly, he crossed the splendid square of the new station, then the street – the hard snow, packed down by the many passers-by, crunched under the soles of his brown boots. The man stopped, raised his tired and sunken eyes toward the windows of the Bellevue Hotel glittering in the afternoon twilight and, with his head lowered, continued his hurried walk along Maria Street. A few spiteful locks of brown hair pushed out from under the edges of his hat, they rocked to the rhythm of his nervous step, his thick moustache frozen under his nose. People in groups thronged the area where Elizabeth Street and Suvarov Street met, some laughing in a carefree manner, while others were tranquilly leaving Vērmāne Park; one could hear more men's voices than those of the ladies, who were wrapped up in their furs with their coat collars pulled up against the cold. The mood before Christmas could be felt in Riga this year as well, even though gloomy thoughts still dwelt in many – a bitterness that was brought by the last days of 1906, like wine that has turned into vinegar, with peoples' hopes having turned into a deep feeling of disillusionment. Today's issue of the daily newspaper *The Voice* read: "So much hatred, misery and bleak, ominous clouds all

around, that no one can ever believe in good news. And we have no ray of hope shining upon us from the future.”

Crossing Alexander Boulevard, the old man stopped near a low-lying fence that encircled the impressive walls of the Orthodox cathedral and watched the bustle of the Christmas market on Esplanade Square. His clothing was too thin, and as evening approached the cold became ever more severe; he was shivering and quickly scanning the crowds of people in the broad market square. After going through the gates that were slightly open, he looked to the right to the bell tower and, without making the sign of the cross, slid along the cathedral wall like a shadow. He wasn't seen from the side of the brightly lit-up annual market – the man's dark figure had almost vanished in one of the cathedral's wall naves. Several carts had already stopped again, the gentlemen offered their gloved hands to the ladies, and lifted children of various ages from the sleigh. The children rushed off in the direction of the dolled-up Christmas tree and tables laden with candy. The little ones laughed cheerfully, and swarmed around the sweet-smelling waffles and huts decorated with shiny ribbons where the black eyes of teddy bears and dolls twinkled in the glow of the electric bulbs. The old man's stagnant eyes also lit up for a moment, they closely followed those who had come to the shop that was farthest away, where they met at the well of fortune to fish out prizes with a few others. His observant eyes discerned a shabby, faded red wooden horse and a man of short stature in charge of the carousel who began to walk slowly in a circle while waiting for the last two passengers. Afterwards, he walked faster, a small girl burst out laughing, a small glove beckoned, the horses gathered speed, and the old man's felt boots broke into a light trot.

The observer counted the minutes, clenched and flexed his fingers frozen numb in the grey mittens, felt an envelope with



money in his inside pocket and then noticed another child. The boy was six or seven years of age, his small hand pulling a man dressed in a long black coat to the carousel. The man's enlightened, pale face showed a restrained dislike of being in a square filled with the loud din of people. The light fog of breath rose up around his thin lips, and the lips of the old man repeated the movement of the elegant gentleman's lips: "But just for a short moment, Pauls."

A dark blue twilight continued to drag itself above Riga, and the characteristic noise of the city in the silent clouds of December stood out so sharply, like the brightly-lit Esplanade glowing in the blind eye socket of the night. "Children. At Christmas... only a few happy little ones," he whispered to himself, shrinking into the deep nave. A deep, dry cough shook him as he bent over slightly and once again checked his inside pocket – everything was in its place. Having calmed himself, the old man once again focused on the square glimmering in the light, his squinting eyes finding the carousel and the elegant gentleman, who at that moment was observing with interest a young woman who was dressed poorly, but warmly, with a fidgety boy holding her hand. The woman pretended she did not notice the man, the boy broke away from her thin hand and bravely ran toward the laughter, bells, shouting, and flickering gestures of hands. The man standing in the twilight realized with pleasure that tonight he was very alert, his tired eyes almost gained the ability to zoom in, to reduce the scene to the finest details. He passed his hand slowly over his mouth, which had burst out in a smile, then up, past his long nose, the eyes, the brow, and raised his sheepskin cap higher and leaned against the stone wall of the church. The sudden relief, the long-awaited redemption – the guilt would stay right in the hard snow, it would be pressed into it until spring came and then disappear completely in the

afternoon sun. Finally everything was cleared up, the protracted torment of uncertainty had receded, and he was once again sure of himself and now was ready to meet his tormentor. Suddenly, his eyes that were warmed by a smile, froze. The dark eyelashes quivering ever so slightly, he held his breath, grew paler, and the broad shoulders of this country boy drooped.

“Mommy, is that you?” Observing a girl that had just come onto the square, the old man whispered and broke away from the wall. Emerging from the side gates, he approached the carousel as if moving against his own wishes.

“Hey, watch where you’re going!” someone shouted at him. The old man could not care less and so carried on through the bustle, past the sides of large pretzels, steaming glasses and a rotund young woman with a high-pitched laugh who pointed a finger, red and swollen from the cold, at him. Someone lightly shrugged his shoulders, while another smiled in his grey beard; ah yes, a person is and remains a strange, freakish beast, but for another even that kind of jostling leaves deep wrinkles in their narrow forehead – the shame, revellers right in the heart of Riga, at such a holy time. But while the city drew the cool air into its lungs, threw a playful glance up to the glimmering stars, stamped out cigarette butts and caressed the back of a newly-acquired sweetheart, the old man approached the carousel with wide steps. He went around, waded into the small snowdrift towards the shadow of smiling horses and stretched out his strong arms. The carousel was turning slowly, and he carefully lifted the children off one by one. Starting with little Pauls, then the nimble troublemaker, and finally her. The old man’s strong arms were shaking – the mother’s warm eyes glanced at him in astonishment, but not a sound emanated from her lips. It was only the middle boy that made a high-

pitched scream, however no one heard the screaming on the other side of the carousel. The woman was giving snappy answers to the smartly-dressed man in the black overcoat, for whom this evening's walk suddenly appeared to be full of mystery, quite incomprehensible and immensely promising.

"Pauls, we'll go over to Daddy's now, now I'll..." the old man said, running out of breath. He held both boys with one hand, and the girl with the other. He hurriedly pulled the boys across Totleben Boulevard, turned to the right, and, at that moment when shouting, uncharacteristic of the evening groaning, rang from the square, this peculiar group of four was already turning off onto Nikolai Street, then once more turned to the left and went a good way along Crown Prince Boulevard in the opposite direction – all the way to Bastion Hill, which was sinking into the evening twilight. Little Pauls started whimpering, the other boy energetically trying to pull his arm away, while the girl kept turning her head back:

"Hey! Over here! Help!" she shouted ardently, however the thin voice died in the heartbeat of the city, in the voices, among the shouts of the cart drivers, in the muffled laughter. Before the holidays, people hurried to settle long-postponed scores and transactions, and meet for a brief chat so they could devote themselves to the bustle of Christmas with a certain peace of mind.

The odd stranger smiled nervously, dragged the little ones to the front, and once again to the left, onto Alexander Boulevard, and then they were already coming to the shiny, well-lit facade of the Imperial Hotel. The doorman in a dark blue uniform stood next to the high double door, the gilded buttons of the uniform reflecting the light bulbs' yellow glow, which the luxurious building generously poured out through the broad windows of the lobby. To the little girl – whose name was Laimdota

– it seemed that the door guard would take the bad old man by his collar at once, call for the police, and she would be rescued, but instead the doorman hurried to the sleighs that had just arrived in order to take packages wrapped in brown paper and offer a white glove to a lady submerged in her foxtail coat. The old man rushed inside through the wide double door and to the reception desk; to the right one could hear the pop of billiard balls, as the smell of cigars and hot food wafted in – there was a restaurant that was situated on the basement floor, one of Riga’s most luxurious entertainment spots. In the evenings, it was the round gold 10 ruble coins that sparkled along with the 25 ruble notes. The first Latvians that had just gained the means favoured this place, those who wanted to eagerly spend and bare their teeth to the Germans and Russians.

# Translation rights

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Lithuania 2009 - **Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė**

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**Albania:** Fan Noli

**Bulgaria:** Bulgarian Translator's Union – Panorama

**Czech Republic:** Nakladatelstvi Dauohin

**FYROM:** Goten

**Italy:** H2O Editrice

**Latvia:** SIA Apgads ATENA

**UK:** Noir Press

Estonia 2010 - **Tiit Aleksejev**

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**Bulgaria:** Avangard

**Czech Republic:** Dauphin

**Estonia:** Varrak

**Finland:** Sammako

**FYROM:** Goten

**Hungary:** Gondolat Kiadó

**Italy:** Atmosphere Libri

**Latvia:** Mansard

Latvia 2011 - **Inga Žolude**

---

**Bulgaria:** Publishing House Balkani-93 Ltd

**Czech Republic:** Dauphin

**FYROM:** Goten

**Hungary:** Noran Libro

**Italy:** Del Vecchio Editore

**Poland:** Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jezioranskiego

Lithuania 2012 - **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**

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**Hungary:** Typotex Publishing

**Latvia:** Jumava

Estonia 2013 - **Meelis Friedenthal**

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**Albania:** Fan Noli

**Bulgaria:** Nauka i Izkustvo

**Croatia:** Fraktura

**Czech Republic:** Dybbuk

**FYROM:** Goten

**Hungary:** Scholar Kiado

**Italy:** Iperborea

**Latvia:** Mansards

**Norway:** Bokbyen Forlag

**Netherlands:** Van Genneep

**UK:** Pushkin Press

Latvia 2014 - **Janis Jonevs**

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**Bulgaria:** Izida

**Croatia:** V.B.Z. Publishing

**France:** Gaia Editions

**Estonia:** Randvelt

**FYROM:** Goten

**Hungary:** Vince Publishing

**Norway:** Bokbyen Forlag

**Poland:** Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jezioranskiego

**Serbia:** Čigoja štampa

**Slovenia:** Miš založba, Janez Miš s.p.

**Turkey:** Bence Kitap  
**UK:** Wrecking Ball Press

Lithuania 2015 - **Undinė Radzevičiūtė**

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**Estonia:** Varrak  
**Hungary:** Typotex Kiado  
**Italy:** Mim Edizioni  
**Latvia:** Apgads Mansards  
**Poland :** Kolegium Europy Wschodniej

Estonia 2016 - **Paavo Matsin**

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**Bulgaria:** Paradox Act Ltd.  
**Denmark:** Jensen & Dalgaard  
**Finland:** Savukeidas Publishing  
**Hungary:** Gondolat Kiadói Kőr Kft.  
**Latvia:** Janis Roze Publishers Ltd

Latvia 2017 - **Osvalds Zebris**

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**Albania:** Botime Pegi  
**Bulgaria:** Paradox Act  
**Croatia:** Sandorf Publishing  
**FYROM:** Magor Publishing house  
**Hungary:** L'Harmattan Kiado  
**Italy:** Mim Edizioni  
**Serbia:** Arete  
**UK:** Jantar Publishing

# National Juries

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Lithuania 2009 - **Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: LWU - Lietuvos Rasytoju Sajunca Lithuanian Writers' Union

President:

**Vytautas Martinkus**, prose writer, literary critic, Lithuanian Writers' Union

Jury members:

**Lolita Varanaviciene**, Lithuanian Publishers' Association

**Valentinas Sventickas**, literary critic, Lithuanian Writers' Union

**Viktorija Daujotyte-Pakeriene**, literary critic, Lithuanian Writers' Union

**Regimantas Tamosaitis**, Lithuanian Writers' Union

Estonia 2010 - **Tiit Aleksejev**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Estonian Publishers' Association

President:

**Märt Väljataga**, Estonian book reviewer and translator, Estonian Literature Centre

Jury members:

**Sirje-Mai Pihlak**, Resellers Association.

**Karl Martin Sinijärv**, Estonian Writers' association.

**Tauno Vahter**, Publishers Association



## Latvia 2011 - **Inga Žolude**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: The Writers' Union of Latvia

President:

**Ieva Kolmane**, editor, translator, literary critic, elected President of the Writers' Union of Latvia

Jury members:

**Peteris Jankavs**, translator, Director of Atena Publishers.

**Ingmara Balode**, poet, translator, literary critic, editor, representative of the literature and philosophy portal, and of the publishers.

**Janis Oga**, editor, Director of the Latvian Literature Centre

**Dace Sparane**, poet, literary critic, Director of "Dienas Gramata Publishers."

## Lithuania 2012 - **Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**

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President:

**Laimantas Jonušys**, critic, translator - Lithuanian Writers' Union; Lithuanian Association of Literary Translators

Jury Members:

**Rimantas Kmita**, poet, critic, literary scholar (Institute of the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuanian Writers' Union);

**Antanas A. Jonynas**, poet, chairman of the Lithuanian Writers' Union;

**Eugenijus Ališanka**, poet, critic, editor of Lithuanian Writers' Union magazine "the Vilnius review".

**Lolita Varanavičienė**, Lithuanian Publishers' Association

## Estonia 2013 - **Meelis Friedenthal**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Estonian Publishers Association

President:

**Tiit Aleksejev**, Estonian Writers Union

Jury Members:

**Piret Viires**, Estonian Writers Union

**Karl Martin Sinijärv**, Estonian Writers Union

**Maarja Kaaristo**, Estonian Publishers Association

**Tauno Vahter**, Estonian Publishers Association

## Latvia 2014 - **Jānis Jonevs**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Writer's Union of Latvia

President:

**Ieva Kolmane**, Member of the LWU Board, literature critic and translator

Jury members:

**Ieva Balode**, Project Manager of the International Writers' and Translators' House at Ventspils

**Janis Oga**, Director of the Latvian Literature Centre and Publishing House "Mansards"

**Renate Punka**, President of Latvian Publishers' Association; Director of Janis Roze Publishers; translator

**Inga Žolude**, the winner of the EUPL 2011; prose writer, columnist, currently PhD student for a doctoral degree in English literature.

## Lithuania 2015 - **Undinė Radzevičiūtė**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Lithuanian Writers' Union President

President:

**Laimantas Jonušys**, critic, translator, Lithuanian Writers' Union

Jury members:

**Rimantas Kmita**, poet, critic, literary scholar (Institute of the Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuanian Writers' Union)

**Antanas A. Jonynas**, poet, chairman of the Lithuanian Writers' Union

**Eugenijus Ališanka**, poet, critic, editor of Lithuanian Writers' Union magazine "the Vilnius review"

**Aida Dobkevičiūtė**, Executive Director of Lithuanian Publishers Association

**Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**, EUPL winner 2012

## Estonia 2016 - **Paavo Matsin**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Estonian Publishers Association

President:

**Karl Martin Sinijärv**, Chairman of the Estonian Writers' Union

Jury members:

**Kerti Tergem**, Estonian Literature Centre

**Tauno Vahter**, Estonian Publishers' Association/Publishing house Tänapäev

**Piret Viires**, Estonian Writer's Union  
**Toomas Väljataga**, Estonian Publishers' Association/Estonian  
Language Foundation

Latvia 2017 - **Osvalds Zebris**

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Organisation coordinating the jury: Latvian Writers' Union

President:

**Arno Jundze**, chairman of the Latvian Writers Union, writer,  
journalist and literary scientist

Jury members:

**Ieva Kolmane**, Member of the Latvian Writers' Union Board,  
literary critic & translator

**Inga Žolude**, the winner of the EUPL 2011; prose writer,  
columnist, critic, teacher of creative writing

**Renate Punka**, President of Latvian Publishers' Association;  
Director of Janis Roze Publishers; translator

**Bārbala Simsone**, literary scientist, Head of Department for  
Latvian Language and Literature publishing house Zvaigzne  
ABC Publishers

# European Union Prize for Literature

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The aim of the European Union Prize for Literature is to put the spotlight on the creativity and diverse wealth of Europe's contemporary literature in the field of fiction, to promote the circulation of literature within Europe and encourage greater interest in non-national literary works.

The works of the selected winners (one winning author per country participating in the Prize on a rotation basis) will reach a wider and international audience, and touch readers beyond national and linguistic borders.

The Prize is financed by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union whose three main objectives are: to promote cross-border mobility of those working in the cultural sector; to encourage the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output; and to foster intercultural dialogue.

## Selection process

The winning authors are selected by qualified juries set up in each of the countries participating.

The new emerging talents are selected on the basis of criteria stipulated by the European Commission and fulfil in particular the following requirements:

- Be a citizen of one of the selected countries
- To have published between 2 and 4 books of fiction
- The winning books must have been published in the last 18 months before the Prize

## Juries

Jury members are appointed by national members of EIBF, EWC and FEP. National juries are composed by a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 members.

The jury reports are delivered in the national language, and in English or French translation, justifying the jury's choice and providing relevant information on the winner and his/her work.

**The European Commission, DG Education and Culture**

[www.ec.europa.eu/culture](http://www.ec.europa.eu/culture)

The European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL)

is part of Creative Europe, the EU framework programme for support to the culture and audiovisual sectors.

More information:

<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/>

Creative Europe Desks for information and advice are set up in all countries participating in the programme, including in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands.

Contact details:

[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/contact\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/contact_en)

**The Consortium**

The European and International Booksellers Federation

[www.europeanbooksellers.eu](http://www.europeanbooksellers.eu)

The European Writers' Council

[www.europeanwriters.eu](http://www.europeanwriters.eu)

The Federation of European Publishers

[www.fep-fee.eu](http://www.fep-fee.eu)

The European Union Prize for Literature

[www.euprizeliterature.eu](http://www.euprizeliterature.eu)





2009 – Lithuania  
**Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė**  
*Kvėpavimas į marmurą*



2010 – Estonia  
**Tiit Aleksejev**  
*Palveränd*



2011 – Latvia  
**Inga Žolude**  
*Mierinājums Ādama kokam*



2012 – Lithuania  
**Giedra Radvilavičiūtė**  
*Šiņnakt aš miegošiu prie sienos*



2013 – Estonia  
**Meelis Friedenthal**  
*Mesilased*



2014 – Latvia  
**Jānis Jonevs**  
*Jelgava '94 (2013)*



2015 – Lithuania  
**Undinė Radzevičiūtė**  
*Žuvys ir drakonai*



2016 – Estonia  
**Paavo Matsin**  
*Gogoli disko*



2017 – Latvia  
**Osvalds Zebris**  
*Gaiļu kalna ēnā*

