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Paavo Matsin – Estonia

Gogoli disko (2015)

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 tülikate 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 haletuses 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 mees- hing 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 elluürganud 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 ümberpöoret, 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 äravii-davat 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 pastapliiat-sit 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 serverida nii-öelda koos sisselükatava serverimislauaga, aga nagu ikka, läks kõõgis just kõige kiiremal hetkel midagi kõrbema. Katja jäi esikusse üksinda ja kohe kuulduski tema karjatus, sest ta oli avastanud peldikust mingi vanamees-teispoonsus-skeleti lugemas 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 maasikatordik kukkus potsuga maha.

Aga kõik rahunes, elu ootamatult kuum puljong jahtus, kui Katerina hiljem võõra tuppä palus ja vaarikapunastes pükstes Gogol väriseva galantsusega oma kriiksvast 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 imestusega, 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 köögis kahekesi jäid. „Elada ju nihukese 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 korraks, kõik need teised meed on aga kogu aeg,“ ohkas ta, kui sai jälle rääkida, „mul hakkas tast lihtsalt kahju, ta on ju muidugi täiesti nemednõi-parasiit-unitaas, aga Griša kadus ja ma ei suuda jälle hakata kuskilt...“

„No aga sa ei saa ju sellisega elada, Katerinake,“ ütles Katja, kelle nägu 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 ütleks 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 korraks 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 tööraseks 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 kuu-likesteks. Sõbrannad hakkasid vaikselt vajalikke asju kokku panema.

The Gogol Disco

Paavo Matsin

Translated from the 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**, of course, but Grisha disappeared and I don't have it in me to start again with...”

* “unfashionable-[...] -toilet” (Russian)

“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 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*** 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?”

** “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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