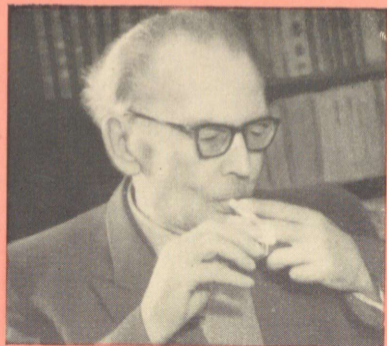


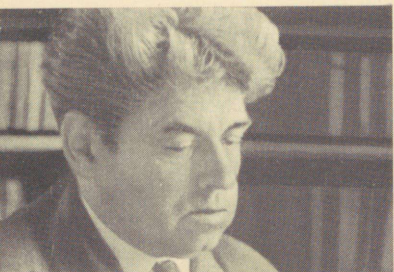
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**SOVIET
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LITERATURE**

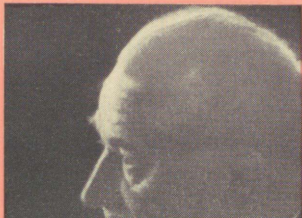
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**ASPECTS OF
ESTONIAN
LIFE**





TEN ASPECTS
OF ESTONIAN
LIFE





V. Tolli's illustrations to a book of poems by D. Vaarandi.

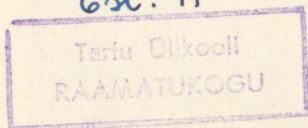


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SOVIET ESTONIAN LITERATURE

PUBLISHERS "EESTI RAAMAT" TALLINN 1967

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**ORIGINS
IN THE GREY
DAWN OF
HISTORY**

★ Bequeathed by parents to children, the love of our people for folktales, folk songs and sayings has lived on from generation to generation. The Estonian peasant, suffering under the yoke of foreign masters, expressed from time immemorial his feelings, thoughts, and yearnings in a unique folklore which was preserved orally. Our rich collection of folklore, a priceless treasury, which contains only a fraction of the once flourishing folk art of our people may be envied by other, larger nationalities. The modern, more mature art of verbal expression springs from the same vital source where the folk song and folktale originated. Although the oldest partly preserved piece of printing in our language dates back to the year 1535, the road that eventually led to literature in the modern sense was long and thorny; moreover, the development was often fettered by adverse social conditions. At long last the people's self-conscious desire, as a nation, for spiritual emancipation gave birth to such masterpieces as the national epic *Kalevipoeg* (1857–1861) compiled by Fr. R. Kreutzwald (1803–1882), and the inspiring national romantic lyric poetry of Lydia Koidula (1843–1886).

Thanks to the joint efforts of a number of writers of the last century, the people's spiritual life was at once enriched and widened. It was now possible to create more significant works which reflected truthfully the fate of the individual and of the people as a whole. That the art of writing was raised to the contemporary level is the unfading merit of Eduard Vilde (1865–1933), virtually a revolutionary in Estonian literature and a master-writer of the realist novel; likewise are we indebted to the deeply emotional elegiac poet Juhan Liiv (1864–1913). The suppressed and despised "clodhoppers" came to possess a literature that, for expressiveness, was in no way inferior to what had so far been translated or imitated from foreign models, while its subject matter and fascinating problems were closer to the people.

5 Friedebert Tuglas (born in 1886) and Gustav Suits (1883–1956), who joined the literary circles on the threshold of the new century, brought diversity into shorter prose works, lyrical poetry and essay writing with their neo-romantic methods of approach, wide international interests and a refined style, thus giving still

SMALL PEOPLES CAN BOAST OF GREAT WRITERS

more prominence to the artistic criteria. To the influence of Russian and German classical literature was now added the influence of the newest French and Finnish lyrical poetry and the Scandinavian peasant novel, particularly in the first decades of this century. Consequently, the acme of Estonian literature was reached when the five-volume monumental novel *Truth and Right* (Tõde ja Õigus, 1926–1933) was written by Anton Hansen-Tammsaare (1878–1940), synthesizing all that was best in the then existing literature and a strong native talent nurtured by a wealth of national traditions. It is a narrative of the growing class-consciousness of the peasantry and intelligentsia, with a probing for social and ethic truths as a background. The story told in this broad epic narrative evolves slowly and is interwoven with the author's paradoxical discussions and aptly selected details, embracing not only the essence of the fifty-year period covered by the novel, but also something that resounds through the ages and helps to grasp the core of our people's spiritual life. This extremely popular novel is a national work of art in the best sense of the word.

Many other names could be mentioned, names that have remained more or less within the boundaries of the Estonian lan-



guage, but have, nevertheless, marked certain peaks in our literary achievements which will be appreciated by writers of coming generations. Their works reflect the problems common to all mankind in the light of the experiences and endeavours of our people, though the local colouring may seem far removed to one not familiar with our life and conditions.

In the development of modern prose August Jakobson (1904–1963) occupies a prominent position. He is the author of about 25 bulky prose works written in the bourgeois period alone. Not less important is Mait Metsanurk (1879–1957), the creator of tens of novels and short stories with a wealth of problems; and the humourist Oskar Luts (1887–1953), the depicor of the fate of the "little people"; also Peet Vallak (1893–1959), the author of some grotesque and artistically mature character novelettes; and August Mälk (b. 1900), who has so well described the life and views of the inhabitants of our seaside villages, and many other writers.

The fact that during the first half of the century our lyric poetry advanced farther than our epical poetry has been discussed again and again in literary reviews. This development brought forth a whole pleiad of authors, each with a strong individual style and a



In Tallinn, the literary Wednesdays arranged in the Writers' House enjoy great popularity.

**A GALAXY
OF BRILLIANT
POETS**

truly artistic nature. Marie Under (b. 1883) evolved from impressionist profusion of sensations through the medium of social protest to philosophical truths and a deep understanding of life, interweaving her lyrical ballads with talented meditation poetry born from a strong inner tension; the spontaneous and virile Juhan Sütiste (1899–1945), is often referred to as the Bard of the Working People; the intellectual Johannes Semper (b. 1892), who introduced certain traditions of Romantic culture into Estonian poetry and essay writing; Johannes Barbarus (1890–1946), who paid tribute to constructivist tendencies and is known in literature as an oppositionist; the master of the epigram, August Alle (1890–1952); and the many-sided and contradictory, although deeply sensitive Henrik Visnapuu (1890–1951). Altogether the list of our poets, including the numerous younger poets of the late thirties who were widely known in Estonia before the revolutionary events of 1940, would be quite long. It is to be regretted that so little of our classical poetry has found its way into other languages.

August Kitzberg (1855–1927) and Hugo Raudsepp (1883–1952) are significant names in Estonian dramaturgy. The first enthralled the reader with his popular outlook, vital problematics and monumental characters, the latter mostly with his lush comicality as a background for representing topical relations and current truths. Especially rich and many-sided is the development of Estonian literature in this century. A multitude of engrossing works gives evidence of this, as well as the advent of a whole galaxy of new authors, and the general development of a literature rich in quests and nuances.

In the first decades of this century critical realism and neo-romantic trends developed side by side. They all reflected a striving to enrich Estonian literature, setting before the reader new attitudes and aesthetic convictions. In connection with the revolutionary movement of the stormy year 1905, the militant poetry of tens of literary newcomers from among the toilers (H. Pöögelmann, J. Lilienbach et al.) advanced as a peculiar form of people's art. In spite of suppression it became, nevertheless, a substantial predecessor of socialist literature.

**A DIP INTO
HISTORY**

The basically impressionist literary groupings "Noor-Eesti" (1905–1915) and "Siuru" (1917–1919) were followed by the defiant expressionist grouping "Tarapita" (1921–1922), which loudly proclaimed its democratic truths. In 1922 the Union of Estonian Writers was founded. Owing to its wide organizational work and publishing activity, as well as its literary periodical "Looming" (Creation), published since 1923 up to the present day, it became the guidepost of our literary thought. The growth of the total volume of literary production, the diversification of the

August Jakobson,
People's Writer of
the Estonian SSR.



NO IVORY TOWERS

manner of treatment and the creation of real masterpieces all bears witness to the indisputable vitality of 20th century Estonian literature. Moreover it is also important to stress the fact that the best achievements of Estonian literature have a direct bearing on its popular essence, on the democratic and humanist traditions of the people, which its best representatives have always upheld. It is not the groundless art of the chosen few, not "Art for Art's sake", but a literature which reflects the life and strivings of the masses and makes dear to us the literary inheritance of L. Koidula, J. Liiv, E. Vilde, A. H. Tammsaare, J. Sütiste and tens of other novellists and poets.

- 9 That, in its turn, explains why, when speaking of the essence of our literature and sketching an outline of Soviet Estonian literature, we should keep in mind its coherence, its dependence on the progressive aspirations reflected in the whole course of the previous development of our people's intellectual creative work.



Friedebert Tuglas, People's Writer of the Estonian SSR, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR.

- ★ The Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic is still young: only twenty-five years separate us from the year 1940, when the bourgeois government was overthrown. Nor has this quarter century passed in conditions of peaceful construction and unhindered creation. The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet peoples, in which thousands of progressive-minded Estonians took part, fighting against fascist barbarity, was a severe test for our culture and literature. Neither have the post-war years passed smoothly or without "growing-pains". Our literature has had no idyllic moments of satisfaction with itself or the world. However, the knowledge that no honest citizen has the right to remain a passive by-stander in big social controversies has given our writers the strength and the will to devote their talent entirely to the service of social progress; for genuinely human art does not acknowledge the happiness of a single individual separate from or opposed to the welfare of the people as a whole.
- 10

**IN THE
INTERESTS
OF SOCIAL
PROGRESS**

Casting a bird's-eye view over the road traversed by Soviet Estonian literature, several distinct stages can be discerned. The first was very short-lived, lasting only a year, from the establishment of Soviet Estonia to the outbreak of the war in 1941. During that period lyrical poetry and the short story prevailed, the shorter genres being the most operative and also the most direct way of reacting emotionally to the revolutionary events. Many writers who were already known in bourgeois Estonia (A. Jakobson, J. Sütiste, A. Hint, J. Barbarus, J. Semper, J. Kärner, A. Alle et al.), whose works up to that time had been stimulated by a protest against the unjust organization of society and abstract democratic ideals, now saw in the actual revolutionary change a solution to the doubts and dead-end moods that had tormented them. It is not to be wondered that an optimistic pathos began to resound in the fiction of that time. Even some notes of revolutionary romanticism penetrated into our basically realistic literary production of that period.

**ABREAST OF
THE TIMES**

The Earth Turns East (Maakera pöördub itta) — these significant words formed the title of a new poem by Juhan Sütiste. Many poets of the older as well as of the younger generation welcomed and supported the socialist changes and the union with the family of the Soviet peoples, and clearly expressed their understanding of the historic events. In shorter prose works there now prevailed the striving to depict, by means of colourful episodes, the historic struggle of the people for social emancipation, the sudden changes in the conscience of people, the abandoning of old truths and the acceptance of new convictions. The works of August Jakobson, Mart Raud, Aadu Hint, Peet Vallak and other prose writers serve as examples of a wider outlook on contemporary life and a keen perception of what was then most vital. The hero of the shorter prose works is no longer an individual detached from reality; he is a man in his time, fettered or guided by the concepts of his class, the criterion of which is the inevitable process of historical development. Major works dating from this period are but few. Moreover, the better part of these either drew their subject matter from past history, or their writing had been more or less completed before this time; consequently they can hardly be expected to reflect the vital changes that took place during that period. Still, one author should be mentioned here: Juhan Madarik (civilian name Johannes Lauristin, 1899—1941), who was forced to pass in jail nearly fifteen out of the twenty-two years of the existence of bourgeois Estonia. At that time he finished writing his interesting historical novel *The Republic* (Vabariik), or rather its first volume. Only some notes and sketches pertaining to the following volumes have survived: the novel was left unfi-

nished – the author died a tragic death in the war at the end of August, 1941.

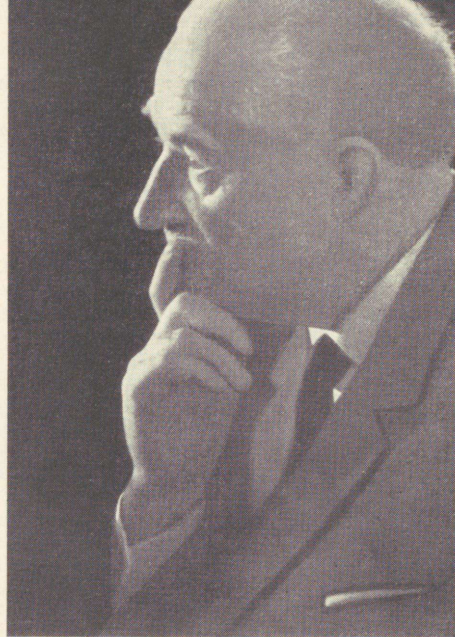
The war years constitute the second stage in the development of Soviet Estonian literature. The first steps towards creating the literature of a Socialist society had only just been taken; some reckoning with yesterday's conceptions had been settled and optimistic plans for the future had been laid. Now the ruthless reality of war accelerated the course of events. There was no time for a gradual transition from old-world truths to new ones. Quick decisions had to be taken: the battle line was rapidly nearing Estonia.

Traditions of anti-fascist struggle were long existent in Estonian democratic literature. In the thirties, such authors as E. Vilde, J. Semper, G. Suits, J. Barbarus, A. Alle and others had often voiced condemning statements about fascism. The more reason

Aadu Hint, People's Writer of the Estonian SSR.



Rudolf Sirge, Honoured
Writer of the Estonian
SSR.



**AGE-OLD
FOES OF THE
ESTONIAN
PEOPLE**

there was now to appeal to the Estonian people's age-old hatred of the ideology of "Drang nach Osten", to recall the centuries of distress and misery under the yoke of German feudal landlords, to call the people to armed struggle.

- Juhan Sütiste, Mart Raud, Eduard Männik and other Estonian writers fought, weapon in hand, against the invaders. Many writers dedicated their publicistic writings and poetry to the cause of the struggle. But the fierce onslaught of the enemy forced them to withdraw from their native land. After the occupation of Estonia by the Germans, scores of progressive authors continued to write in the Soviet rear and in the ranks of the active forces. A deep hatred of the fascist occupiers permeates the war-time works of J. Barbarus, A. Alle, J. Kärner, J. Semper, A. Hint, E. Hiir, A. Jakobson, E. Kippel, M. Raud, P. Rummo,

E. Männik, A. Kaal, M. Nurme, D. Vaarandi and others, whose themes are Soviet patriotism, their unbounded longing for home, and the history of past struggles.

Of the writers who remained in Estonia, the short-story writer J. Ruven and one of our most prominent dramatists E. Tammlaan were killed by the fascists, while others suffered hardships and humiliation in jail. Both J. Sütiste and A. Antson, whose health was undermined during their imprisonment, died soon after liberation. Another serious loss to Estonian literature was the death of E. Kippel, the author of a number of historical novels. He died in besieged Leningrad, and his novel about the historic events of 1940 was left unfinished.

INTELLECTUAL LIFE AT A STAND-STILL

While intellectual life was almost entirely suppressed in Estonia under the Nazi occupation, the writers who had been evacuated to the Soviet rear continued to work untiringly. Several collections of writings were published: *The Victory Will Be Ours* (Võit jääb meile), *On the War Paths* (Võitluse radadel), *For Your Sake, My Native Land* (Sinu eest, isamaa), six issues of the almanac *The War Bugle* (Sõjasarv), anthologies of verse by J. Barbarus, J. Kärner, E. Hiir, J. Semper, M. Raud and A. Alle, and prose works by A. Jakobson, P. Rummo and P. Keerdo. Very many works of shorter literary genres in Estonian can be found in the newspapers and leaflets printed in the army and in the rear during the war; and the radio was also an important means of communicating topics of the day.

It is important to note that a number of new authors were now added to the ranks of our writers – young men who had taken part in the battles of the Great Patriotic War. In the main these writers are the pillars of Soviet Estonia's literature today: J. Smuul, P. Kuusberg, V. Gross, U. Laht, E. Rannet, H. Sergo, I. Sikemäe, R. Parve, A. Saar, H. Suislepp, M. Kesamäe, R. Vaidlo, V. Beekman, H. Väli.

- ★ The war ended in 1945. The guns ceased to roar, but our writers were faced with new and even more complicated duties. German occupation had devastated the land, the people were confronted with the serious task of healing the wounds of war and of restoring the culture and economy of the nation. Besides, many progressive-minded people had been destroyed by the fascists, their antagonistic propaganda had sown disbelief into others, and this did not vanish overnight. Some persons were hostile to every measure that the Soviet authorities introduced to normalize the life of the people. Writers, who did not want to



**Juhan Smuul, People's Writer of the Estonian SSR,
winner of the Lenin Prize in 1961.**

stand aloof while the people's fate was being moulded, became chroniclers of the epoch as well as militant propagandists.

The Estonian writers who returned home in the wake of the Soviet army, and those who had survived the hardships of war in the native country, now all together took up the urgent tasks of the day. Among these were such Men of Letters as F. Tuglas, R. Sirge, K. Merilaas, E. Krusten, H. Raudsepp, M. Metsanurk, O. Luts, O. Tooming, A. Sang, and others. Not all their endeavours, however, advanced smoothly, without greater or smaller setbacks; but their sincere efforts to comprehend the new and to link their fate with the fate of the people were evident.

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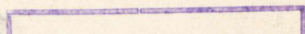
In the years that immediately followed the war, the theme of war prevailed in our literature (short stories by E. Männik, the



Debora Vaarandi, Honoured Writer
of the Estonian SSR.

QUESTS AND PROBING

- poetry of J. Smuul, D. Vaarandi, R. Parve, A. Kaal and many others), but at the same time new subjects, contemporary attitudes and quests were also gaining ground. This was most directly expressed in the dramas of August Jakobson and in the short stories written by Rudolf Sirge and some other authors. In the more extensive prose works of that period E. Krusten, R. Roht and O. Luts strove to create panoramic cross-sections of the controversies that had recently existed in the Estonian countryside. However, they lack a substantial ideological and artistic synthesis, which prevents these writer from rising above the stage of merely depicting more or less casual episodes and
- 16



illustrating what was already known. Neither does the prolific dramatist Hugo Raudsepp succeed in embracing the spirit of the present in his post-war dramas *Rats* (*Rotid*), *The Proprietors of Tillereinu* (*Tillereinu peremehed*). In spite of good intentions his work fails to reach its pre-war level.

Problem number one, which excited many writers at the end of the forties were the issues connected with the further development of the Estonian village. The problem of socialist large-scale agriculture, the formation of collective farms rises to the fore. This problem is discussed in the prose works of Hans Leberecht (1910–1960) and Rudolf Sirge (b. 1904), by Johannes Semper and August Jakobson in the drama, and by a number of authors in philosophical lyrics. At the beginning of the fifties another

Paul Kuusberg, Honoured Writer of the Estonian SSR.



extensive range of subjects is added to the already existing ones, namely the fight which awakens a decisively negative attitude towards those who plan to destroy "World communism" and threaten the world's first socialist country with the atomic weapon. In our literature this theme runs parallel with the poetization of peaceful creative labour and with reminiscences of the past revolutionary struggle for liberation, and appeals for vigilance against any internal or external enemy.

The literature circulated during this period is to some extent contradictory, with an undercurrent of restlessness, and is inclined to be publicistic. The impending danger of war again impels to write "armed" verses. (One is reminded of J. Barbarus' *Armed Verses*, a collection of war-time poetry.) The contradictions, however, are not so much due to the subject matter nor to the ideological tendencies of the literary works, as to their publicistic function, which does not always sufficiently consider the specific means of expression pertaining to fiction.

The simplification of current truths, which prevailed in those years, tended to ignore the true nature of literature as an art; as a result of which the illustratively rhetorical element began to restrict the power of emotional expression.

THE FIRST SWALLOWS ARRIVE

Yet, at the beginning of the fifties, side by side with vulgar-sociological literature, some artistically mature works were born, works that were based on a profound understanding of the life of the people and on the best traditions of our intellectual creative work: these were the first volume of *The Windswept Coast* (Tuuline rand) by Aadu Hint (b. in 1910) and some short stories from the cycle *Letters from the Village of the Benighted* (Kirjad Sõgedate külast) by Juhan Smuul (b. 1922). In 1950 Osvald Tooming (b. 1914) published two topical novels teeming with problems: a development novel *The Years of the Brown Plague* (Pruuni katku aastail) and a work about life in post-war Estonia *Green Gold* (Roheline kuld).

The mid-fifties are marked by a considerable rise of the novel in Estonian literature. If lyrics and the short story predominated in 1940-1941, and the war years added a strong vein of poetry, while the drama held the first place for a decade or so after the war (A. Jakobson, A. Hint, J. Semper, H. Raudsepp et al.), then finally in the mid-fifties the novel took the lead.

STEADILY ON THE UP-GRADE

Today the range is still wider and richer in nuances and all genres in Estonian literature seem to be developing steadily, nor do any of them lag behind. By giving full scope to the creative mind, the great changes in the social life of the Soviet land have secured for literature far-reaching perspectives and a fertile soil, have made possible a deeper and wider representation of life.

August Sang,
a popular poet
and translator
of verse.



- ★ Let us for once give a few figures which, of course, can never reflect the essential value of literature, but which will speak eloquently of its spread and popularity. The reading interests of our people, a million strong, are illustrated by the fact that the average edition of a book of verse is 6,000 copies, prose works are printed in more than 30,000 copies, drama works usually come out in 3,000 copies per title. The
- 19 circulation of genuine masterpieces is still wider. We can assert without exaggeration that in Estonia books have become a vital necessity to everybody. This shows the rise in the people's cultural level and creates superb prospects for writers.

**IN VERY
SMALL
NUMBERS**

Not only the present but also the past of our literature is well represented: the classics of Estonian literature have been republished repeatedly in large editions, so that masterpieces of past generations are more accessible now than ever before. In this connection we can refer the reader to some data that was made public about 30 years ago, according to which a long crisis on the book-market of bourgeois Estonia reduced the average edition of verse anthologies to a couple of hundred copies, and that of novels to a few thousand.

★ As regards the general trends of Soviet Estonian literature in respect to the various genres, the most interesting and exten-

**Ardi Liives,
a popular
playwright.**



**FOUR-
VOLUME
HISTORICAL
NOVEL
FASCINATES
READERS**

sive reflection of the life and strivings of our people is undoubtedly given by our modern prose works. These are an extension and expansion of old democratic and realistic traditions in the light of present-day conceptions, which continually enrich our literature with priceless works of art in the form of novels and short stories.

The novels by Osvald Tooming, who tackles ethical problems, Hans Leberecht's novels treating of decisive events in contemporary society, innumerable shorter prose works expressing the world outlook of scores of writers have all found a worthy place in the history of our literature. We cannot but appreciate the fact that the works of some Soviet Estonian prose writers have been translated into other languages. Aadu Hint with his four-volume novel *The Windswept Coast* (1951-1965), which depicts the life and fate of our island fishermen in this century, rises from a peculiar milieu and somewhat local subject-matter to a high level of philosophical truths, which fascinate ever wider circles of readers. With humorous descriptions and a deep understanding of contemporary life, Juhan Smuul has been equally successful in lyrical poetry, prose and drama, and he carries the reader away from his customary train of thought, making him observe and ponder on the deeper processes hidden behind the trivialities of everyday life. Juhan Smuul's cycle *Letters from the Village of the Benighted*, published in book form in 1955, his *Icy Book* (1959), *The Sea of Japan*, December (1963), as well as his travel notes and publicistic writings all reveal the restless and seeking spirit of a masterwriter. Rudolf Sirge's novel *The Land and the People* (*Maa ja rahvas*, 1956) is the first prose work in our literature to delve deep into the revolutionary events of 1940 in the Estonian countryside. The book is not only a chronicle of the fate of a small nation, although even so it would have a lasting value; it is an interpretation of history and its natural development in a synthesis of the truths of life and art. In the novel the character and fate of a well-to-do peasant-farmer, Peeter of Logina, serve to express most vividly the clash and the historical inevitability of two epochs.

Many of the outstanding works of our monumental prose have grown out of the fertile soil of the immediate and remote past of the Estonian people, in particular the decisive social struggle of this century. So the storm of the people's uprising in 1905 inspired Aadu Hint to write *The Windswept Coast*, and gave impetus to the birth of another great novel *The Hearts of the Young* (*Noorte südamed*, 1954-1956) by Erni Krusten. The foundation of Soviet Estonia was another landmark which no interpreter of the relations and events in our modern world

could pass by. Time and again our novelists turn their scrutinizing gaze towards the dynamic events that evolved in Estonia in the summer of 1940, once and for all resolving the struggle for social rights which had lasted for centuries (Johannes Semper's *Red Carnations* (Punased nelgid, 1955), Rudolf Sirge's *The Land and the People*, Paul Kuusberg's *Stone Walls* (Müürid, 1957), Mait Metsanurk's *The Summer Solstice* (Suvine pööripäev, 1957), and others.

Themes of the late war and life in Estonia during the grim years of Nazi occupation enter the novel, where a vast panorama of circumstances are depicted and characters are tempered in the whirlwinds of that militant epoch (Hans Leberecht's *Soldiers Homeward Bound* (Sõdurid lähevad koju, 1957), Paul Kuusberg's *Enn Kalm's Two Selves* (Enn Kalmu kaks mina, 1961), Lilli Promet's *A Manless Village* (Meesteta küla, 1962), Luise Vaher's *The Front-Line Nurse* (Rindeõde, 1965), and others. The reader is carried away first and foremost by the authors' striving to disclose from different angles the struggle of the Estonians in the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet peoples, as well as by the unsimplified representation of the warfare between different world outlooks.

During the last decade the development of the Soviet Estonian novel on themes connected with the immediate present is especially noteworthy. As regards its artistic force and social function such outstanding cultivators of the modern novel as Paul Kuusberg and Villem Gross have raised it to a high level. Paul Kuusberg's latest novel *The Case of Andres Lapeteus* (Andres Lapeteuse juhtum, 1963), Villem Gross' novels *Unfinished One-family House for Sale* (Müüa pooleliolev individuaalelamu, 1962) and *Deskmates* (Pingingabrid, 1964), as well as some longer prose works by Osvald Tooming, Väino Ilus, Leo Metsar and others, all freely discourse with the reader on many exciting issues related to various conceptions of life, and have therefore inspired lively discussions and debates everywhere. There is no need to enumerate all the popular novels included in the latest literary production, suffice it to point out a phenomenon that speaks for itself of the vitality of these new works. In libraries, schools and clubs all over the Republic, mass discussions of our new literary works take place, which proves that the connections between life and literature are sound and strong, and confirms once more that the Estonian reader thinks highly of his writers and their work.

- 22 Among the shorter prose works of our day many can be found that are thrilling and thought-provoking, the durability of which in time cannot be compared with the transitory success of the quondam literature that was written merely for entertainment, or



Kersti Merilaas, a well-known Estonian poetess.

**THOUGHT-
PROVOKING
WORKS IN
VARIOUS
GENRES**

23

the esoteric literary creation of the "chosen few". Rudolf Sirge's novels, close to life and earth, Juhan Smuul's colourful pieces of prose, Eduard Männik's psychological short stories *People on the Scales of a Balance* (Inimesed vaekausil), Lilli Promet's sparkling impressionistic works, Erni Krusten's and Osvald Tooming's writings on ethical problems — all these diverse literary compositions have helped the reader to extend his range of vision, and they offer, besides, genuine artistic enjoyment. Even the old master Friedebert Tuglas has published some new pieces of short prose: *The Imperial Cook* (Keiserlik kokk), *The Last Greeting* (Viimne tervitus), which give evidence of his unflinching interest in everything human. Some promising authors of the younger generation (Einar Maasik, Endel Ten-

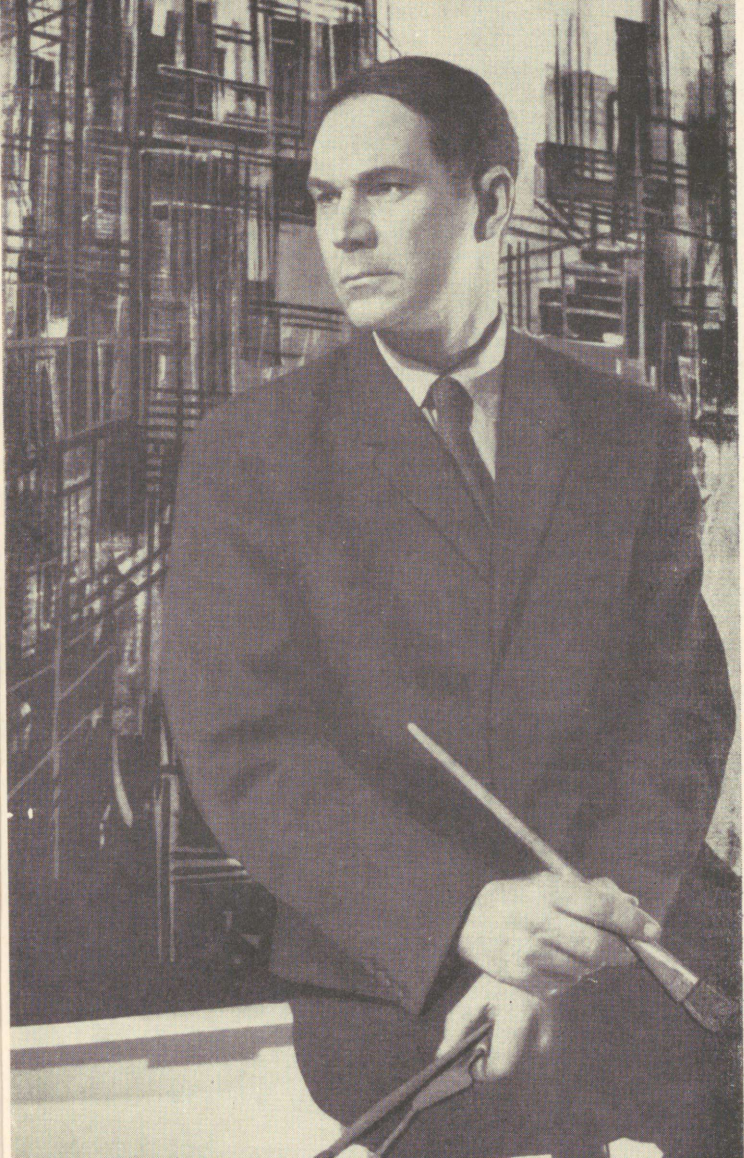


E. Okas' illustration to A. Hint's novel „The Windswept Coast“, Part IV. Brush-drawing.

Professor Evald Okas, People's Artist of the USSR, is the author of numerous book illustrations.

nov, Arvo Valton, Mart Kalda, Mati Unt, et al.) each with a characteristically individual approach, have shown that they are capable prose writers from whom much can be expected.

- ★ In Soviet Estonian literature, dramaturgy occupies a significant and unique position. The demands made by numerous professional theatres and amateur drama clubs have even stimulated many people to write plays, although their specific field lies in some other genre. Of the writers of the older generation
- 24 Johannes Semper, Aadu Hint, Mart Raud, Paul Rummo, Erni Krusten have all reacted to topical problems and given memorable pieces of dramatic writing. However, of greater importance



**PLAY-
WRITING
ALWAYS
ON A HIGH
LEVEL**

in the history of our literature is the work of our professional playwrights.

One of the most prominent writers of Soviet Estonia, August Jakobson, wrote altogether sixteen exclusively contemporary plays in the post-war period. He not only depicted life in our Republic, but also glanced now and again at the way of life of other peoples. With satire and irony he attacked obscurantism and the attempts of the imperialists to obstruct the inevitable course of history. Such of his works as *Life in the Citadel* (Elu tsitadellis, 1946), *A Battle without a Front-Line* (Võitlus rindejooneta, 1946), and *The Old Oak* (Vana tamm, 1954), are a profound analysis of Man and his epoch. The dramatic chronicle *Storm Knots* (Tormisõlmed, 1957-1961) consisting of six plays, which finished Jakobson's life-work, gives a wide cross-section of the fates of human beings and the struggle for social emancipation in twentieth century Estonia on a vivid background of historical events. These are dramas for reading rather than staging, with a strong inclination to generalization and a marked publicistic tendency. It is evident that a forceful idea-content and the analysis of the principal social-philosophical problems of the present day are the strong points of August Jakobson's dramas.

Among our contemporary playwrights the greatest master is Egon Rannet (b. 1911). A strong plot and a wide range of problems characterize his plays, which have already found their way far beyond the borders of Estonia. *The Prodigal Son* (Kadunud poeg, 1958) and *The Poachers* (Salakütid, 1960) stand out among his other plays because of their gripping and fascinating characters, in which the relations and convictions of the present day find dramatic expression.

Juhan Smuul's play *Lea* (1959) has been staged repeatedly. Through problems connected with human relationships and attitudes to religion, it leads the spectator to serious philosophical deliberations. Johannes Semper's three dramas have as their main theme the shifts and changes in mentality that took place either during the hardships of war or immediately after. Aadu Hint's plays are devoted to the life of the coastal fishermen, so near the writer's heart. Speaking of these and numerous other pieces of play-writing we can truthfully say that the problem underlying them all is essentially the same: the vital problem of man's attitude to life.

**YOUNGER
GENERATION
SETS THE
PACE**

The most prolific and original of the dramatists of the younger generation is Ardi Liives (b. 1929), the last ten years of whose literary activities have resulted in the same number of plays. *New Year's Eve* (Uusaasta öö, 1958), *On This Side of the Horizon* (Siinpool horisonti, 1961) and *The stair-*

Vive Tolli, Honoured Artist of the Estonian SSR, has illustrated a great number of books.



case (Trepp, 1964) have become the most popular of his plays, owing to the interesting psychological solutions found in them. Other authors, e. g. Ralf Parve, a satirist, also Villem Gross, Liidia Kompus, et al. have likewise contributed their share to the drama literature of today.

- ★ Undoubtedly the emotionality of literature belongs more intrinsically to poetry than to prose or drama. Poetry expresses directly the most intimate reveries and the most subtle shades of emotion; it may affect us as a pathetic militant song, or it may fade away in wistful yearning, all of which forms the emotional atmosphere of our everyday life. The traditions of earlier Estonian poetry having already been discussed, all that remains now is to outline the essence of our modern lyrical and lyric-epical verse, so as to give some idea of the achievements in this literary genre.

27

One of our outstanding masters of modern poetry is undoubtedly Debora Vaarandi (b. 1916), who began her more extensive



P. Ulas' illustration
to the novel "Toomas
Nipernaadi"
by A. Gailit. Litho-
graph.

**PROBLEMS
OF THE
PRESENT DAY
IN POETRY**

literary activities in the rear of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War. After the war she fascinated her readers with collections of poetry rich in emotional experiences. In her verse anthologies *A Dreamer at the Window* (Unistaja akna, 1959) and *The Bread of Rannalageda* (Rannalageda leib, 1965), she has successfully synthesized personal experiences and the social truths of our day. In her poetry, masterly landscape pictures of the native countryside are closely associated with philosophical conceptions, while a keen interest in everything living and original inspires the poetess to observe life with wide-open eyes.

Translations of D. Vaarandi's verses are known all over the Soviet Union. The same can be said of the virile songs about maritime people by Juhan Smuul, Johannes Semper's civic and social poetry, Uno Laht's books of satirical verse, and Mart Raud's lyrical poems, while the characteristically individual poetical works of Kersti Merilaas and August Sang are rightly included among the best part of contemporary Estonian poetry. And there must be some truth in the assertion that the highest virtue of our contemporary poetry is the abundance of gifted and original poets with a wide range of abilities, who stand more or less on the same level. The variety of lyrical individualities is the best guarantee for comprehensive poetical thought. Some talented beginners who have oftentimes surprised the reading public with their original cast of mind and emotional approach, may be considered a worthy reserve for our lyrical poets.

Towards the end of the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties intellectualism gained ground in poetry. True enough, trenchant meditation poetry had up to that time been contributed by Johannes Semper, Paul Rummo, Uno Laht and Ralf Parve. But now there began to resound in our lyrics the thoughts and opinions of Jaan Kross, Vladimir Beekman, Ain Kaalep and some younger authors, who had remained unnoticed up to that time.

Ellen Niit's first collection *The Earth Is Full of Findings* (Maa on täis leidmist, 1960) is overflowing with the joy of exploration. A real sensation was created by twelve young poets who made their debut with collections of verse published in 1962, 1963 and 1964. Of these twelve, Paul-Erik Rummo (b. 1942), Mats Traat (b. 1936) and Rudolf Rimmel (b. 1937) have since produced other works of merit. The fact that the first editions of their books of poetry, which were published in sets of 6,000 to 8,000 copies each, were sold out in a couple of days, should give a good idea of how our readers love poetry.

The more reason there is to assert that the total volume and circulation of contemporary Soviet Estonian poetry is unprecedented in the history of our culture. To name all our poets

**BOOKS OF
POETRY ARE
BEST-
SELLERS**

here is unnecessary. However, the popularity of such a fastidious literary genre as poetry attests to the high cultural standard of the readers. Estonian literature of former times never won such a wide circle of readers.



There is still much that is interesting and original in our literature, as for example our juvenile literature and books for tiny tots. These are issued in huge editions with scores of new authors participating alongside those already mentioned. And there are the colourful books of travel, the best representatives of which are Juhan Smuul, Aira Kaal, Ralf Parve, Lilli Promet, Lennart Meri, et al., all of whom have won the recognition of the public at large. Or take the essays of Endel Nirk and numerous feature stories, not to mention many, many others. That is why we can say without exaggeration that our small nation with a population of only a million has a rich literature. The rate at which our literature has developed during the last few years confirms the belief that the temporary "growing pains" have for the most part been overcome, while year by year there is a steady increase of such works as will live through the ages.

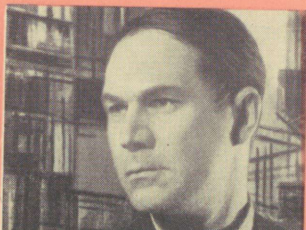
In conclusion let us give some additional data for the sake of concreteness. In bourgeois Estonia the average edition of a work of literature comprised 1,400 copies; now the average is 13,000. Between 1940 and 1965, 1,262 works of Estonian literature (the total number of copies reaching 16,735,700) were published, among which 325 works (5,244,000 copies) were written by authors of the pre-Soviet period, and 937 works (11,491,700 copies) by Soviet Estonian authors. Estonian literature has been translated into many languages of the peoples of the Soviet Union and other foreign languages. Altogether about 650 works of Estonian literature have been translated into 35 different languages.

At the same time the literature of other nations has been translated into Estonian. Some of these are works of modern writers from far-distant lands, while others belong to epochs far back in the history of nations. Between 1940 and 1965, 1,172 works of literature of the peoples of the Soviet Union (with a total of 14,078,200 copies) and 677 works by foreign authors (13,546,900 copies) were translated into Estonian. Let us hope that these dry figures will give some idea of the wealth of reading matter on our book-market, how intense is the literary life in contemporary Estonia, and what part a good book plays in the life of our people.

**TRANSLATIONS ARE
EQUALLY
POPULAR**



TEN ASPECTS
OF ESTONIAN
LIFE



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ASPECTS OF
ESTONIAN
LIFE

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