



# Kestutis Kasparavičius

*Lithuanian Illustrator Candidate for the  
2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award*

## Kestutis Kasparavičius - Biography

Kestutis Kasparavicius **was born in 2 June, 1954** Aukstadvaris, Lithuania.

Aukstadvaris is situated near Vilnius and is famous for its beautiful landscape. Kestutis's parents were teachers at a primary school. He had two older brothers.

When he was in the third form he left Aukstadvaris and came to Vilnius where he began his studies at M.K.Ciurlionis School of Arts, majoring in choir conducting. After finishing school in 1972, he decided to transfer his focus from music to fine arts.

Thus, in 1972 he entered Vilnius Institute of Arts (now the Academy of Arts), the speciality of graphics design. Kestutis was not prepared professionally for such studies but his older brother Vydas, a student of the same Institute, helped him very much and taught him the intricacies of drawing. There were periods of disillusionment, apathy, and some unavoidable breaks, e.g., he had to spend two years in the Soviet Army. But finally, in 1981, he graduated from the Institute of Arts.

He started as a graphic designer at a publishing house where his talent for illustrating was noticed.

**Since 1984 he has been working as a children's books illustrator** and author and has completed **62 books**. Kestutis favorite technology is watercolour.

His works has published for **various publishers from whole world**: *Nieko Rimto*, Vilnius; *Esslinger Verlag*, Esslingen; *Coppenrath Verlag*, Munster; *Grimm Press*, Taipei; *Boyds Mills Press*, Honesdale, *Agertofts Forlag*, Copenhagen, *Papadopoulos*, Athens, *Calligram*, Paris, *Fondo de Cultura Economica*, Mexico, *Jakkajungsin Publishing*, Seoul, *Daeyeon Publishing*, Seoul, *Livraria Martins Fontes Editora*, Sao Paulo, *Editora Atica*, Sao Paulo, *Gotmer-Becht-Aramith*, Bloemendaal, *Harry N.Abrams*, New York, *Thule Ediciones*, Barcelona, *Yavneh*, Jerusalem.

Kestutis Kasparavicius books have published **into 29 languages**: Lithuanian, German, English, French, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Danish, Dutch, Finish, Estonian, Latvian, Bulgarian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Croatian, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Hebrew, Thai, Hungarian, Slovenian, Vietnamese, Romanian.

1988 Member of the Lithuanian Artists' Association.

2008 Member of IBBY Lithuanian Section.

Kestutis Kasparavicius has daughter and three sons. He lives in Vilnius.

[www.kestutiskasparavicius.com](http://www.kestutiskasparavicius.com)

<https://www.facebook.com/Kestutis.Kaspar>

## **Kęstutis Kasparavičius: a great master of children's book art**

Kęstutis Kasparavičius is the most famous Lithuanian illustrator and writer of children's books in Lithuania and abroad. The world of his illustrations is known to readers of children's books in Europe, Asia, North and South America, he travels a lot and is welcomed in many countries from Mexico to Iceland. He drew his first illustrations for children's books in 1984, and since 1989 has worked with publishers in countries like Germany, Denmark, Greece, France, Mexico, the U. S., Taiwan, South Korea and China.

He gained widespread recognition for illustrating classic works such as Hans Christian Andersen, Carlo Collodi, E. T. A. Hoffmann, G. A. Bürger and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Before Kasparavičius, hardly any books by foreign authors were illustrated, so, in this respect, the artist has considerably expanded the horizons of Lithuanian book art and the illustration of children's literature in particular. At the same time, the artist's illustrations allowed the reader to view the works of world known authors from a different angle, thereby enriching the interpretation of these works.

The subtle colours of his watercolour painting, his precise drawings, masterfully rendering detail, innovative composition, humour and elegance set Kasparavičius apart from other artists. His illustrations are bathed in a good mood, and set themselves apart with their wit and humour. Kasparavičius constructs a lyrical and poetic story in a flowing manner using a traditional narrative model, and the nonsensical story that he creates is not only pleasant, but even seems logical. And for children, this fairy tale is a story about wonderful dreams in which cats talk, dogs bake apple pies and mothers know how to fly.

The list of this talented artist includes over 60 books, spanning from world classics and contemporary authors to his own books that he has illustrated. He is also the author of 18 books that can be found in more than 20 languages. As an illustrator he has organised over 20 solo exhibitions and participated in numerous international group exhibitions.

Kasparavičius is a highly prolific artist, with a distinctive style and an exclusive, lifetime's dedication to this creative field. His individual artistic style can handle a variety of themes and genres, and perfectly bring out the gist of each illustrated text. In his illustrations of picture books, Kasparavičius creates a charming and ingenious world of childhood that children of different nations can relate to. His work fosters an optimistic outlook and love for every living creature, it sharpens the awareness of the material environment and develops aesthetic feelings.

## KĘSTUTIS KASPARAVIČIUS: master of children's dreams and precise images

An interview with the children's book author Kęstutis Kasparavičius

Subtle watercolours, precise drawing, skilfully conveyed details, ingenious composition, humour and elegance – these are the traits of most likely the best world-renowned Lithuanian illustrator, author of children's books, artist and writer Kęstutis Kasparavičius. The artist has illustrated over 50 books, and his books have been published in 22 languages; he is the author of the memorable illustrations for such classic masterpieces as Andersen's *Thumbelina*, Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio* and Bürger's *Baron Munchhausen*. It would be hard to mention all of the artist's merits and international awards. In 1993 at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, he received the UNICEF Illustrator of the Year Award for the illustrations for Lear's book *The Duck and the Kangaroo*, and in 2003 the artist received the Award for Excellence; In 1994 he won the 2nd place at the illustration competition held in Barcelona for the illustrations for Dostoyevsky's book *The Honest Thief*; in 2008 and 2010 Kasparavičius was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award by the IBBY Lithuanian Section.

Although his works have been exhibited at the Bologna Children's Book Fair Illustrators Exhibition since 1989, Kęstutis Kasparavičius himself visited the Fair for the first time only in 2010. He was there to perform an important task – to solemnly present the exhibition of illustrators from Lithuania, the 2011 Guest of Honour Country at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. The exhibition will also feature drawings and books by Kęstutis Kasparavičius and will offer an opportunity to meet the artist himself.

**Initially you studied choral conducting, how did you come to choose an artist's profession?**

Famous artists and writers who came to Aukštadvaris to fish would tell stories about Arts. My parents decided to enrol my brother to study art, and me to study music. At the time, all mothers dreamt that their children would sign like Robertino Loretti.

At school I was good at playing the piano and singing, but I disliked conducting very much. I felt uncomfortable standing in front of an enormous choir. And therefore, I followed my elder brother and entered the Art Institute. I studied design. It was the hippie era... I started skipping classes and was expelled from the Institute. My biography is far

from being ideal. I had to serve in the Soviet army for two years; after that I worked at Vievis Poultry Farm – painting workshops white with a huge brush. And inside me, there was a yearning to finish the studies at the Institute. I plucked up the courage and asked for readmission. After graduating, I worked at the centre of patent services registering trademarks. No creative work whatsoever. It was only after I quit that job that I started to draw cards.

**And what encouraged you to draw for children?**

Coincidence. An acquaintance of mine offered me to illustrate a textbook on agricultural activities, published by the publishing house *Šviesa*. I had to draw all sorts of tools, rabbit breeds, Colorado potato beetles... I later illustrated a textbook on art and craft for elementary school children and was awarded a diploma for it. Eventually, even people in Vilnius noticed a new illustrator.

**You mentioned that during the Soviet era, when creating illustrations for children, you had more freedom and less forced ideology?**

During the Soviet era it was slightly easier for authors and illustrators of children's books to escape censorship, they were allowed more in terms of form and content of fantasies. It was all as if intended for children, all merely a fairy tale, something unreal. Therefore, when illustrating, you had more creative freedom.

**From the very beginning you have created a unique style: your drawing is precise, you apply realistic drawings in a creative way.**

At the time, children's books lacked applied illustration, so I tried to fill in that gap: I drew in the German style, realistically, with lots of details, the books were educational. When a special children's book publishing house *Vyturys* was established in Vilnius, I drew

illustrations for Arvydas Každailis' book about the sea. Quite a few people liked them very much. I haven't had a single day without work ever since.

I draw from life a lot, even the smallest details. I am used to it. When I'm drawing a bear with a scarf, I check in the mirror how the scarf folds when leaning. I don't draw studies, but I do make pencil sketches – how a fold falls, or an elbow bends. Then a drawing seems to be nicer, objects look more realistic.

**During the first years of Lithuania's independence publishing of Lithuanian children's books was in stagnation. How did you manage to survive?**

As early as 1988, I found out where all the main exhibitions were held, I kept sending my illustrations to the Bratislava Illustration Biennial, Bologna Children's Book Fair, other competitions. My works were first selected for the Bologna Fair in 1989. I also received job offers then.

The first to order book illustrations was the 200-year-old publishing house *Esslinger Verlag*, followed by the *Coppenrath Verlag*, based in Münster. I worked with those publishing houses for a long time.

In 1993 I started to co-operate with a very cosmopolitan publishing house *Grimm Press* from Taiwan. Its founder Hao Kuang Tsai studied in Europe and later decided to introduce European culture and literature to Chinese children. The publishing house welcomes illustrators from all over the world. Artists are offered absolute creative freedom, because the publisher aims to present the diversity of the world. Each artist prepares one book and then a whole series is published at once. I have illustrated Weber's opera *The Freeshooter* for their series *The Illustrated Operas*. The series was later supplemented with CDs of opera recordings. Such books are perfect educational material for young adults.

By the way, the first book I illustrated for this publishing house was very serious; it was Dostoyevsky's short novel *The Honest Thief*. Initially, when I received the order, I got

surprised and scared. Still, I decided to give it a try. What a challenge! I now think those illustrations are among the best ones. The book is intended for older children. I made a deal with one publishing house to publish it also in Russian. In 1994 I won the 2nd place at the Catalonia Children's Illustration Biennial for this book. It is my most significant award.

**Your works have been selected for the International Bologna Children's Book Fair on thirteen occasions, but you yourself visited the Fair for the first time only in 2010. How does this fair differ from the fair held in Lithuania?**

The International Vilnius Book Fair is open to everyone: books are sold and presented here, readers meet the authors; it features foreign guests and a cultural programme. And the Bologna Children's Book Fair is commercial: there are few visitors, however, it features illustrators from all over the world. It is the world's leading children's book illustration fair. Here publishers look for contacts, exchange ideas, buy licences and conclude agreements. This fair is intended for artists, not writers. Some publishing houses announce they are looking for new talents. Long queues form at their stands; young people queue up with folders in their hands. Only a few lucky ones succeed.

**Have you received many offers in Bologna?**

Yes, I was actually surprised. Sometimes you keep writing to them for ages and nothing happens, and here – you just talk and get a deal.

**What are the current tendencies in children's book illustration?**

No big changes there. The thing that changes are technologies: the amount of computer generated illustrations grows; however, a lot of people still use old-fashioned drawing techniques. In recent years more works by young artists have been selected for the Bologna Fair.

**What do you think about kitsch so common in books for children? Shouldn't publishing houses contribute to the formation of good taste?**

There's plenty of kitsch everywhere, not just in Lithuania. It is possible to publish books that wouldn't be dominated by hopeless kitsch, but which, at the same time, would be attractive to the customer. I think publishing houses can afford to publish several loss-making books, which would be innovative, artistic and non-commercial.

At the Gdansk Forum, one lecturer of the Art Academy told about the survey she had conducted: teachers, parents and students had to evaluate ten illustrations, some of which were awfully kitschy, some realistic, modern, artistic, and some difficult to understand. Children were not surveyed. Teachers gave the highest marks to all the Barbie dolls and Mickeys and failed to acknowledge the more artistic illustrations, parents evaluated those illustrations a bit better, and the youth evaluated them quite well. Strange, but having the most influence on developing children's taste, teachers are the ones who admire kitsch so much.

**Have you ever had to conform to the illustration traditions of other countries, their national stylistic peculiarities?**

People in Germany like one type of illustrations and people in England prefer another type. In a lot of countries people dislike short novels in children's literature, and in Spain, quite the contrary, they are very popular. However, I have never had to conform, because there's always room for diversity next to specific features.

**And what do you think about Lithuanian illustrators – is there any common trait of their works?**

On numerous occasions my foreign colleagues or publishers have wondered how come there are such a great number of brilliant illustrators in a country as small as



Lithuania. And honestly, I really don't know how to explain this. Maybe it's because it rains so much in here. When you look at the clouded sky and hear the raindrops falling down the roof, you really don't feel like going out anywhere. You get a chance to work peacefully, think without rushing. So, we have the perfect conditions for bringing out the talent. In my opinion, the most important thing is that, once in a while, bright and exceptional personalities emerge in our country; these are very original and individual artists, not resembling any other illustrator in the world, and even less resembling their Lithuanian counterparts. Therefore, I doubt that there are any common traits characterizing our artists. The world has become so small. Sometimes illustrations done by Asian illustrators are more European than those done by Europeans themselves, and vice versa.

### **What prompted you to write texts?**

Publishers in Taiwan decided to publish a book in support of victims of the earthquake which happened in 2002. Each artist was given a flap, where he had to draw an illustration and write a text. I drew a story of a singing fellow. Birds of an unknown species bring home a fellow; they put him in a cage and are genuinely surprised that the fellow doesn't sing... They later come to understand that people only sing nicely when they are free. The publishers found my story quite amusing and they asked me if I had more of them. I lied that I did. And so I got an offer for a 64-page book consisting of 34 stories. I had no choice. The book was written and translated within a month.

I have always thought I had no talent to write books. It all happened suddenly, by coincidence. *The Silly stories* were published in Chinese. The book was a commercial success, and so the publishers asked for a sequel. I wrote *The Short Stories*. I later thought that it would be great to publish those books also in Lithuanian. I took them to two publishing house, both of them rejected the books. And in 2002, shortly after its establishment, the publishing house *Nieko rimto* bought the licences from the Chinese.

## How are your texts and illustrations born?

The moment you open a book drawn by Stasys Eidrigevičius, you know it's Eidrigevičius, a great artist with a strong personality. And I considered myself to be an applied artist, trying to adjust to the ideas of the author. I had utmost respect for the text. But I was left with a lot of unrealized ideas. When I started writing, I could finally realize them.

Illustrations are often born in my mind before the text. I never submit the text for editing before I finish the illustrations.

There are plenty of writing artists abroad. More of them are appearing in Lithuania as well, such as: Laisvydė Šalčiūtė, Rimvydas Kepežinskas, Sigutė Ach. There can't be anything better than a combination of two talents in one person. Sometimes an author of children's books who doesn't draw illustrations himself fails to think of everything. How do you draw a mosquito trying to chat to an elephant?

You can even create text based on illustrations. I didn't write texts at the time when I drew *The Lazyland*, requested by the German publishers. I created illustrations based on the folklore of various countries, and topics favoured by old masters of painting. I left a little space in each flap. The writer later wrote the text based on the drawings. *The Lazyland* was published in eight countries: Mexico, the Netherlands, Greece, Korea ...in each country the text was written by a local author. The Lithuanian text was written by Vytautas V. Landsbergis.

**When creating illustrations for children's books, do you think it is important to take into consideration the particular age of the reader?**

My books do not conform to the standards. I try to make the book interesting to all, a young reader, a seventeen-year-old, as well as their mom and dad. There are a lot of

grown-ups in the world who like reading books for children. Some of them even collect such books. I am one of them.

The standard book has to contain 32 pages, come in hardcover; the text has to comprise 30 per cent of the book, with the remaining 70 per cent taken by illustrations, to make one story. Otherwise, the costs of production rise, and the book doesn't sell that well. I have always failed to fit into that canon.

### **Do you have a favourite fairy tale or children's book author?**

It's Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio*, a favourite book of Federico Fellini. You discover something new each time you read it. And I prefer fairy tales by Hauff, Hoffmann and Andersen to the boring Brothers Grimm.

### **What else, besides the plot of the story you're illustrating, inspires you? Where from do you draw the energy, optimism and fantasies?**

I haven't figured out yet the mechanism within me that produces it all. It keeps running, powered by everything that surrounds me. It is important that the mechanism doesn't blow out, better not to overheat it either. Therefore, I'm trying not to rush it too much. Everything has its time. I even tend to slow down that little engine inside me. The things that best slow down the pace to me are music, a view from the window, raindrops falling down the roof, snowflakes, falling leaves in autumn, mist and silent people.

### **A certain English spirit can be sensed in your drawings.**

I admire English illustrations. I especially like Beatrix Potter, considered by many to be the originator of picture books. My illustrations are dominated by the colours of an English town: I have never been to England, but have looked through many albums. I hope to go there someday.

**You have been travelling quite a lot recently, meeting children and drawing together with them. What does direct communication with readers mean to you?**

I had worked in a studio for a long time, withdrawn from the world almost completely. But three years ago I changed my lifestyle. I have travelled through the whole of Lithuania with a publishing house. We pass through small towns, talk to kids, we draw elephants and giraffes. When I started writing texts, quite a few people started to invite me to meetings. Strange, but no one takes an interest in you unless you're a writer. But I keep telling everyone that I am first of all an artist, not a writer. It takes me six months to draw a book, whereas writing the text only takes one month. And all the glory goes to the writer. Obviously, I get to do less when travelling. But what difference does it make if I draw fifty-two books or less? After I started publishing my books abroad, I tend to spend a lot of time keeping up the correspondence. I have gained a lot of new friends and acquaintances. I have no regrets that I'm no longer that prolific.

**What book are you planning to illustrate now?**

I am about to finish a new book *Little Winter*, which will already be the eighth book written by me. It's a bright, white little book. And sometime in the future I would like to go back to illustrating the classics.

*Interview conducted by the cultural journalist and graphic artist Jolanta Sereikaitė*

2010

## DO BOOKS LIKE TO READ?

By Ingrida Korsakaitė

The poster of the Baltic Book Fair held in Vilnius in early 2003 was adorned with three comical little human figures, personifying books, with the national flags of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in their hands. It is unlikely that many people knew that those were the drawings of Kęstutis Kasparavičius, who is currently working mainly with foreign publishing houses, even though those little human figures with their distinctive style of personification call to mind some of this artist's heroes. There are also similar human figures in his latest book, *Silly Stories*, which has been published in Chinese (Taipei: Grimm Press, 2003). These miniature stories were written by the artist himself, and so the illustrations here have truly grown out of the witty text.

A talent for telling funny stories is totally characteristic of Kasparavičius. Even earlier, the texts of some picture books were inspired by his illustrations. He eagerly explains his drawings and wittily gives meaning to details that are perhaps not even noticeable at first glance. Each of these details is important to him, helps to more fully develop the theme, defines the characters being portrayed and the circumstances of the action, and creates the atmosphere of one epoch or another. Kasparavičius is meticulously attentive to reality. By consulting, as always, various encyclopedias and specialized literature as well as, more recently, the Internet he thoroughly studies the natural, geographical, and historical setting of the text to be illustrated and only then begins to draw. For example, when illustrating *Familie Bär auf grosser Weihnachtsfahrt* (Esslinger, 1999), he was interested in the various species of bear living in different regions of the world, starting with polar and ending with spectacled Andean. His illustrations often contain many authentic details. It is no accident that one of the books he illustrated, recently published in the United States, about a Dominican monk, Brother Martin de Porres, who lived in Peru four hundred years ago and was canonized as a saint in the twentieth century, was classified as nonfiction at the 2003 Bologna Children's Book Fair Exhibition. Indeed, when illustrating this book, Kasparavičius was intensely interested in the rules, way of life, and style of dress of monastic orders. For the pictures of the monks, his oldest son and this son's mulatto friend posed for him. These illustrations are unified by their warm brownish color as well as the austere forms of massive brick buildings and wooden furniture whose stability and peacefulness are enlivened by the personified mice scampering about the monastery.

When Kasparavičius appeared at the Bologna Book Fair for the first time with the illustrations to the German book *Münchhausen* (Esslinger, 1991), he immediately attracted atten-

tion. Later, his work was selected many more times for inclusion in catalogs of the best illustrations exhibited at this fair (of the many illustrators of children's books only about 80 artists are included). In 1993, in Bologna, he received the UNICEF award for Illustrator of the Year. He was commissioned to create the cover for *Le grand livre de contes* (Ravensburger, 1996), published by UNICEF. In addition, like the other award winners, he illustrated one of the stories in this book.

During the 1990's Kasparavičius also won other awards: in 1990, the Golden Pen of Belgrade for the picture book *Naujieji Metai* (Vilnius: Vyturys), inspired by a poem by Janina Degutytė, and in 1994, Second Diploma at the Premi Internacional Catalonia D'Il·lustració in Barcelona for the illustrations to Dostoevsky's *The Honest Thief*. He has participated six times in the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava (BIB).

Kasparavičius' work can be divided into two periods. The first, which began in 1983, covers the publication in Lithuania of books with his illustrations. The second – the period of collaboration with foreign publishers – began in 1989.

The first book to be published in Germany with Kasparavičius' illustrations, *Kleine Wesen* (Esslinger, 1989), by Joachim Ringelnatz, is still in many respects similar to the Lithuanian poetry books he was illustrating at the same time. Here, too, we find tiny wooden huts with thatched roofs, a village well with a sweep, personified trees with short legs, and expressive gray cats. These drawings contain obvious Lithuanian elements reflecting the patriotic élan at that time of the movement for national rebirth. The small figures depicted on the cover of the book, dressed in national costume and dancing, are reminiscent of Lithuanian ethnographic ensembles; on the title page, the wings of the fish-airplane are emblazoned with the emblem of the Pillars of Gediminas; on the endpapers, among the fantastic eggs, a Lithuanian tricolor is fluttering.

Kasparavičius is excellent at depicting animals. He not only conveys, in a lively manner and usually with personification, their appearance and movement but also captures their distinctive expressions. Indeed, Kasparavičius' cats are not to be confused with anything: so well defined and expressively mimicked is their enigmatic character.

The artist's ability to portray animals found ample expression when he illustrated *Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten* (Esslinger, 1990), with a verse text by James Krüss, and a children's adaptation of *Reineke Fuchs* (Coppentrath Verlag, 1997). Kasparavičius has successfully collaborated with both of these publishing houses.

The animals personified in the illustrations of *Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten* do not wear clothing. Their musical instruments help personify them, and the cat and the dog stand upright. These illustrations are rather traditional; they do not have much of the creative fantasy charac-

teristic of Kasparavičius. This work, among the first drawings created for German publishers, was probably still rather dependent on the wishes of the client and relied on established iconography. The later illustrations for *Reineke Fuchs* are far more interesting. Here, the artist shows himself a true master illustrator of the beast fable by picturesquely humanizing the appearance, adventures, and surroundings of the animals. Especially impressive are the scenes of mass gatherings of wild and domestic animals.

When Kasparavičius started working for foreign publishers, his style of drawing changed. Instead of linear modeling, which creates a luxuriant but more stylized form, the illustrator undertook tonal modeling, which presents a more realistic illusion of the image being drawn. He uses lines only to convey fur, feathers, and various other textures.

To the animal genre one may jokingly assign two Christmas picture books, both from Esslinger, by Kęstutis Kasparavičius and Paul Maar: *Weihnachten bei Familie Bär* and *Familie Bär auf grosser Weihnachtsfahrt*. The illustrations were created first, and then Maar created the text. One book depicts a fantastic balloon journey by European brown bears and the celebration of Christmas on visits to bears in various regions of the world. The illustrations are often comical, with local customs and exotic elements adapted to Christmas (for example, in Australia Santa Claus bounds over on a kangaroo whose pouch contains the Christmas presents). The artist admirably conveys the coziness of a family's holiday gathering and, on a level suitable for children, touches upon the important problem of globalization, the positive aspects of the interaction and growing closeness of the different countries of the world. Another book, no less appealingly, tells with warm humor how various animals celebrate Christmas.

Of all the characters he has imagined, for several years Kasparavičius liked to draw ducks most of all. The scene of the ducks' skating rink among the illustrations of the book *Weihnachten bei Familie Bär* enchants with the variety of movements and poses of the anthropomorphic birds – from a graceful pirouette to a comical fall. A pair of skating ducks also adorns the cover of *Die Enten laufen Schlittschuh und andere Gedichte*, by Christian Morgenstern (Esslinger, 1991). The illustration from this book with skating birds was used on a UNICEF greeting card. In the book *Die Ente und das Känguruh*, by the father of nonsense literature, Edward Lear (Esslinger, 1992), a group of foppish ducklings illustrates one limerick, while two drawings expressively tell about a sincere friendship between a duck and a kangaroo and their journey together beneath the clouds. In the illustrations of this picture book the artist absorbed the spirit of nonsense. The aesthetic of nonsense, which originated in folklore and was first used in children's literature in England in the nineteenth century, is also close to Kasparavičius' own fanciful imagination. In Lear's book, relying on the poet's self-caricature, he created a comical picture of the potbellied author of these poems. Incidentally, Lear illustrated

his verses himself; he comically deformed human figures and made them similar to birds (he began his career as an artist by creating realistic ornithological pictures). In Kasparavičius' illustrations for Lear's poetry there is no lack of the absurd: in the writer's disheveled beard birds incubate their children, birds' eggs become overgrown with hair, a cat incubates kittens, and on the endpapers people that have turned into birds dart about – as well as birds that have turned into people.

The artist displayed talent in developing the aesthetic of nonsense in the illustrations of three Esslinger picture books: *Schlaraffenland* (1994), *Ostereier* (1995), and *Lisas Reise* (1996). These books all belong to one series; for two of them the text was inspired by Kasparavičius' drawings. In the pictures in *Schlaraffenland* sausages and sweets as well as clothes and shoes grow on trees, there are a castle made of cake and gingerbread houses, and eggs and baked chickens fly into one's mouth of their own accord. In that country people and cats eat until they are full and quench their thirst from wells of milk. There, one can take a nap on a cloud and go for a walk without getting out of bed.

Occasionally depicted in Kasparavičius' earlier illustrations, personified eggs are the main characters in the book *Ostereier*. An obviously cultivated nonsense mechanism reveals itself on the book cover, on which the familiar image of the Easter Rabbit with a basket of colored eggs is drawn beside a huge personified egg carrying on his back a basket full of little rabbits. In the illustrations the colored eggs play soccer in a flowerpot of Easter grass, picnic in the countryside, even sail to southern climes, act on the stage, get into all kinds of mischief in the kitchen, and make merry on the holiday table of the bear family. The eggs are depicted as comical little oval people with short arms and legs, their feet shod in identical booties. The same sort of shoes are also worn by the characters in many of Kasparavičius' other illustrations. On the endpapers of the book, the original form of the egg is given the most varied shapes. Freely arranged on a white background, and without losing their outlines, they become anything that the artist wants – a clock, a cactus, a balloon, a teakettle, even the flattened wheels of a bicycle.

Similar but less colorful are the endpapers of the book *Kleine Wesen*, but not even one drawing of a transformed egg repeats itself. Other books illustrated by the artist are also adorned with decorative endpapers which usually depict individual objects connected with the content of the book. In the book *Lisas Reise* they are pillows of various colors and sizes, on one of which a sleeping girl is flying. Kasparavičius' illustrations and Paul Maar's poems tell about dreams in which she visits nonexistent countries. In one of those countries, everything has an angular, geometrical form; in another, everything is round. There is also plenty of nonsense, absurdity, and silliness in two other countries. In one, where everything is backwards,



one's torso and legs rise above one's head, a horse holds a plow pulled by a plowman, in summer people go skiing and a snowman goes fishing. The country where everything is painted red was, for the artist, associated with the Soviet Union. Here, one looks at the world through red glasses, even the colors of white clouds and of fir trees are brazenly changed, and the cucumbers, which alone remain green, are imprisoned behind barbed wire.

In the nonsense books discussed here, illustrations extend across an entire spread; there is relatively little text, and a great deal of all kinds of expressive detail that is interesting to browse through. Despite the abundance of things depicted, most of these compositions create an impression of space because of their low center of vision. A bright mood is created by the light hues of drawings filled in with transparent watercolors.

Kasparavičius illustrated three adapted books in the Coppenrath Kinderklassiker series: the above-mentioned *Reineke Fuchs* (1997), *Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi (1993), and *Der Nussknacker*, by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1998). The artist himself was dissatisfied with the layout and illustrations of the last story, which has often been superbly illustrated by others. Planned by the publishers as a Christmas gift, the book was, at their request, supposed to be as ornate as possible, but it turned out rather overloaded with holiday trappings. When working on *Pinocchio*, which also has a rich tradition of illustration, Kasparavičius met with success. This was determined, first of all, by the lively and attractive picture that the illustrator created of a little wooden person. No less lively and effective are the other characters in the illustrations, especially the good-for-nothing bums – the fox and the cat. In each spread of this book there is a full-page picture illustrating the story and a small fragmentary vignette. According to the artist, *Pinocchio* is an immortal book because the temptation to go astray lies in eternal wait for every person, as it does for the wooden boy of the fairytale.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, having achieved fame as an illustrator of children's books, Kasparavičius began to collaborate with Asian publishers and, during the first year of the twenty-first century, with American ones. Boyds Mills Press (Honesdale, PA, USA) published, with illustrations by the Lithuanian artist, the above-mentioned book *The Pied Piper of Peru*, by Ann Tompert, about a Dominican monk who became a saint and will soon publish another book by the same author about *St. Valentine*. Kasparavičius filled the illustrations of *The Little Match Girl*, by Hans Christian Andersen (Boyds Mills Press, 2002) with the shimmer of falling snowflakes and the light of Christmas candles and highlighted the blessed vision of the freezing girl before she dies. Full of similar idyllic Christmas spirit and Victorian atmosphere is yet another book illustrated by Kasparavičius – *The Last Chimney of Christmas Eve*, by Linda Oatman High (Boyds Mills Press, 2001). These are beautifully published, sensitively illustrated picture books.

Several Chinese children's books that Kasparavičius illustrated for the Taiwanese publishing house Grimm Press stand out for the diverse national color of their drawings. In the illustrations to *The Honest Thief*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1994), the artist somewhat caricatured the characteristics, everyday life, and human relationships of provincial czarist Russia. When illustrating the literary collection *Fairy Tales*, by Isaac Bashevis Singer (1998), he had a good sense of the national Jewish character and of the spirit of Litvak folklore and beliefs, and he imbued the illustrations to *Der Freischütz*, by Carl Maria von Weber (2000), with the features of German Romanticism.

This same Taiwanese publishing house also published Kasparavičius' *Silly Stories*, mentioned at the beginning of this article. This book is, as it were, an anthology of the artist's favorite motifs. Here, we find what we saw earlier: elegant little ducks, a smartly dressed gray cat, a little stuffed bear traveling in a gloomy forest, a crowd of eggs running on short legs, wine bottles sipping wine, a knife, spoon, and fork in a warlike mood, other household artefacts that have come to life, and many more of the most amazing things. The cover of the book, a few literary miniatures, and several pages at the beginning and end are adorned with drawings of personified books. On the cover there is a paradoxical picture, characteristic of the artist, of books reading books. Some of these books have Kasparavičius' autograph and have become, for him, an *alter ego* of sorts. In one of the miniatures and its illustrations the artist's worktable – always covered with books, pencils, brushes, and paints – has been humorously personified. According to the author, his table stands still all day and patiently waits until he finishes his work. It does not even need to be tied down to keep it from running away.

Kasparavičius' extensive creative ties to foreign publishers have not affected his settled and self-contained way of life. Modern means of communication and the Internet allow him to make and maintain useful contacts with foreign publishers. In a secluded suburb of Vilnius, on Karačiūnai Street, where he has built a spacious and comfortable home in which he lives with his family, the artist creates children's books that later spread throughout the whole wide world – like birds.

*A Conductor with a Brush:*  
Children's Book Illustration by  
*Kęstutis Kasparavičius*

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*Translation and editing:*

**Olga Lempert, Joseph Everatt**

*Design:*

**Lina Bastienė**



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## Early work: The search for his own style, 1984–1991

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What formed and affected the young artist, just after completing his design studies in Lithuania? Kasparavičius began his creative path in the 1980s in Lithuania, which was then still under Soviet rule. Both daily life and artistic life were very different to what they were in West European countries. Artistic life was very isolated and self-contained, with the style of Socialist Realism forced on it, as it was in all socialist states, under the constant control of committees and other specially established institutions. Children's book illustration was slightly less ideologically controlled, as it was seen as a form of applied art in order to illustrate writing. It was a less prestigious and marginal creative field, which in fact offered artists more freedom.

The famous artist couple Birutė Žilytė (b. 1930) and Algirdas Steponavičius (1927–1996), who were awarded Golden Apples at the Bratislava Book Fair for their work, were active in children's book illustration. The books they illustrated influenced most artists of the time. Another notable figure working in the field of graphics for children was the young illustrator Stasys Eidrigėvičius (b. 1949), who later also became famous for his posters. His work is characterised by its surrealist style of expression, enriched with nonsense, emphasising the solitary world of a child. Several books with his illustrations came out in Lithuania, granting a new vocabulary to the entire field of children's book illustration at that time.

The work of the GDR-based artist Klaus Ensikat (b. 1937), who won gold medals in Moscow (1975), Bratislava (1979) and Barcelona (1984), was well-known in Lithuania. This renowned German graphic artist and illustrator of children's books was published in magazines, and his illustrated works were printed in Lithuania as well. His incredibly impressive illustrations, precise pen and ink drawings, and subdued watercolours, combined reality and magic, beauty and horror, with the general mood of 19th-century etchings. The environment in Lithuania at the time and the work of Ensikat probably had an impact on Kasparavičius as he was searching for an individual style. This is particularly clear in his first books: *Įdomiųjų darbų pamokos* (Crafty Art Lessons, Šviesa, 1984) by Liudmila Vasiljeva-Gagnus, *Žilo šilo darbininkai* (Grey Forest Workers, Šviesa, 1985) by Anzelmas Matutis, and *Ko verkė plekšnytė* (The Little Flounder, Vyturys, 1985) by Aloyzas Každailis. In these works, he used a pen to make graphic sketches, and painted them with watercolours.

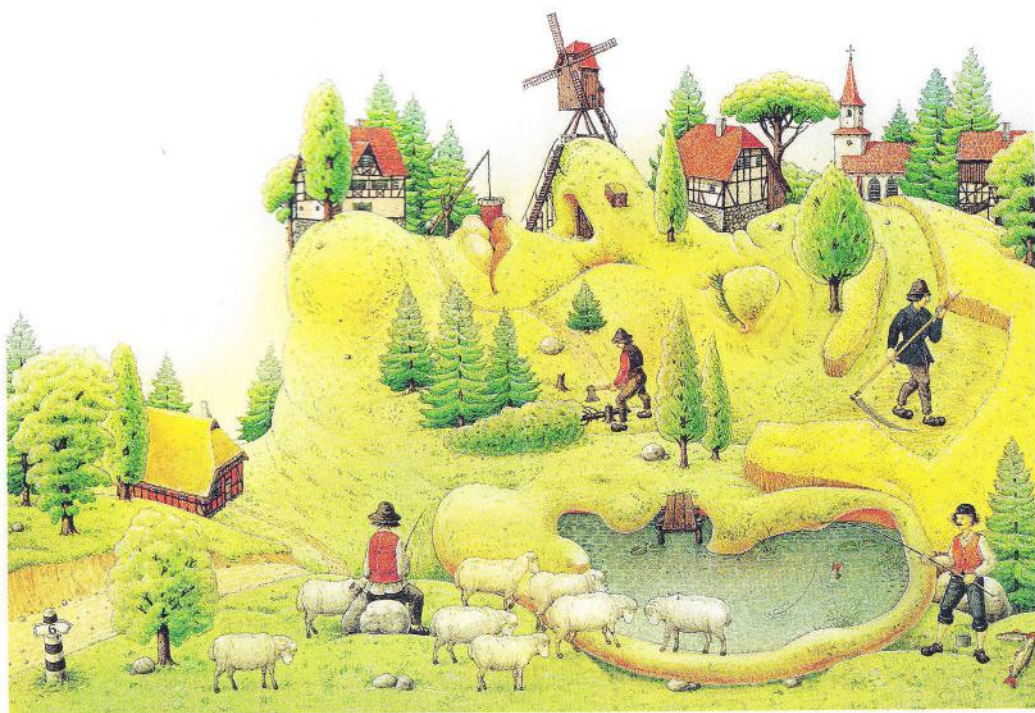
Printing quality in Lithuania was poor at that time, particularly the colours, which evoked a dim museum-quality world. Realising which colours could be printed

best, artists switched to working within the capabilities of the existing printing machines. Kasparavičius' early work was nearly monochrome, with a small colour range and strong graphic lines.

There was already one specialised children's book publisher in Vilnius called Vyturys, for which he did his first commissioned work, illustrating books of poetry for children by famous Lithuanian writers: *Tik trys vilkiukai* (Only Three Whelps) by Vytautas Petkevičius (1986), and *Naujiejį metai* (New Year) by Janina Degutytė (1987). The illustrations to these books were shown at the Book Art Triennial, and won diplomas. Thanks to this debut, Kasparavičius eventually won a bigger and much more important commission, illustrating the book *Baronas Miunchauzenas* (The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen, Vyturys, 1987). Baron Münchhausen's adventures, adapted for children, had been translated from Russian and printed with graphic illustrations by Gustav Doré, by Vaga Publishers in 1967, but when the need arose for a translation from the German, it was decided to use new illustrations as well. Kasparavičius made 45 illustrations, through which we can observe the young artist still learning from art history, with traceable quotes from certain works of art or canonical scenes reproduced from Doré. But Kasparavičius' own compositions are full of movement and action, and also feature some traits of the nonsensical style that later became typical of his work. The colour range is sombre, the draughtsmanship scrupulously precise, and the painting is done in watercolour.

The 1980s saw another notable work by Kasparavičius, *Lietuviškos pasakos* (Lithuanian Fairy Tales, Vyturys, 1989), a collection of tales by Oscar Milosz, a French citizen of Lithuanian origin. Being entrusted to illustrate this prestigious publication was a very important job for the young artist. The somewhat grim character of the illustrations was determined by the tales themselves, steeped as they are in a 19th-century mood. The boundless imagination that is characteristic of Kasparavičius' work was limited by the layout of the book itself, and by the format of the illustrations, into which he needed to fit the entire story of the tale. Although the illustrations are dark and rather gloomy, we can still see the artist's characteristic ability to convey the mood of the story. His usual accuracy, imagination, surrealist thinking combined with nonsense, and occasional self-portraits, shine through these images.

The small book of poetry by Kasparavičius' father *Toj pirkelėj seneliukas* (The Little Old Man in the Hut, Vyturys, 1989), can be considered his farewell to this style. Both the poetry and the illustrations express the artist's home and his country background, exuding nostalgia and limitless warmth. This book can be seen as a gateway to a new phase in his work. In 1990, Kasparavičius won the Golden Pen of Belgrade for his illustrations to *Naujiejį metai* by Janina Degutytė. This was the beginning of his work with publishers abroad. That year was important in Lithuanian history as well, as independence was restored on 11 March 1990.



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Ducks on Skates

This great emotional leap left a mark on his work, and shaped his unique artistic style; it began to change more visibly when he started working with publishers from the German town of Esslingen. His first assignments for a foreign publisher were *Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten* (The Bremen Musicians, Esslinger, 1990) and a better-quality reprint of *Münchhausen* (Esslinger, 1991), for which he designed a new cover. Most of the illustrations for that book are now in the Bodenwerder Münchhausen Museum in Germany, and in the former Latvian house of the baron's first wife Jacobine von Dunten (Minhauzena Muzejs, Dantes Muiža).

The fairy tale *Die Enten laufen Schlittschuh* (Ducks on Skates, Esslinger, 1991) by Christian Morgenstern is a testament to the important changes in the artist's style. He completely abandoned graphic lines, moving on to pencil and watercolour, and anthropomorphising the duck characters he depicts. This book also specifically features touches of surrealism, such as an illustration of a human face-hill. He implemented this idea, as well as the newly discovered grace of the ice skaters, in later illustrations, including in his own book *Drebantis riteris* (The Shaking Knight, Nieko rimto, 2015).

## The main stylistic directions: Mature work, 1992–2002

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During this period, Kasparavičius' work developed in three main stylistic directions, and three main groups of illustrations can be defined: those based on the aesthetics of nonsense, those accompanying classics of children's literature, and those filled with the aesthetics of realism.

### The nonsense aesthetic

The full use of the aesthetics of nonsense and its features in his illustrations has become one of Kasparavičius' most recognisable traits. This was best revealed in his illustrations to Edward Lear's *Die Ente und das Kanguruh* (The Duck and the Kangaroo, Esslinger, 1992). The artwork for this book won a UNICEF diploma at the 1993 Bologna Children's Book Fair, earning the artist the title of Illustrator of the Year. The literary text of the book let the very nature of the illustrations shine out, by freeing fantasy and allowing them to benefit from unexpected ideas in composition and artistic expression. The watercolour images are characterised by a soaring, powerful imagination, humour and perfect technique. In illustrating the book, the artist seemed to have discovered the soaring character of flight. This is best seen in the flying ducks picture used in the endpapers; he later created special endpapers for every book he illustrated.

Portrait illustration deserves a separate mention. The portrait may be considered a typical image of the writer-creator-artist. It is a human character that has achieved such perfection as an artist that anything his hands create comes alive and continues living a life independent of its creator. It is a portrait both of the writer and the artist, in whose house-shaped hat an independent life is going on, and the ladders and other depicted pathways (doors, windows, stairwells) become mechanisms and openings for transitioning into the secondary world of fantasy, and back again. This can also be interpreted as a reference to a child's rich, lively and quick imagination, comparable only to the talent of an inspired artist. In other words, a world of rare beauty and poetry is created within the head, and filled with rich fantasy and endless creative power.

The portrayal of animals is one of Kasparavičius' favourite and most successful ways of depicting character. He manages to embody the grace of a duck, the satiety of a kangaroo, the jumpiness of eggs, and copious other human qualities transferred on to animals. His ability to create unique characters, to direct situations, and to think through compositions, right down to the smallest detail, allows all the



figures to obey his brush and draw the reader's attention. He knows very well what children like: every single detail is extremely important.

Kasparavičius' illustrations are marked by humour and irony, as well as an ability to constantly change the register of moods in the images, which are always full of optimism and kindness.

*Schlaraffenland* (The Land of the Lazy, Esslinger, 1994) is the first book for which the artist created illustrations without any text, that is, based on his own imagined story. They can be called multi-story or multi-action. He found an excellent way of containing them, as though he were the conductor of the action, managing a vast number of characters all doing something in harmony: taking, lifting, carrying, running, etc. The illustrations show a burst of creativity by the artist: the absence of a text released him from depending on a story, and allowed his imagination to run free.

Another trait is apparent in his work: dictating a story through the images. The book *Ostereier* (Easter Eggs, Esslinger, 1995) is interesting because three texts were written by different authors, based on the artwork by Kasparavičius, including one he wrote himself.

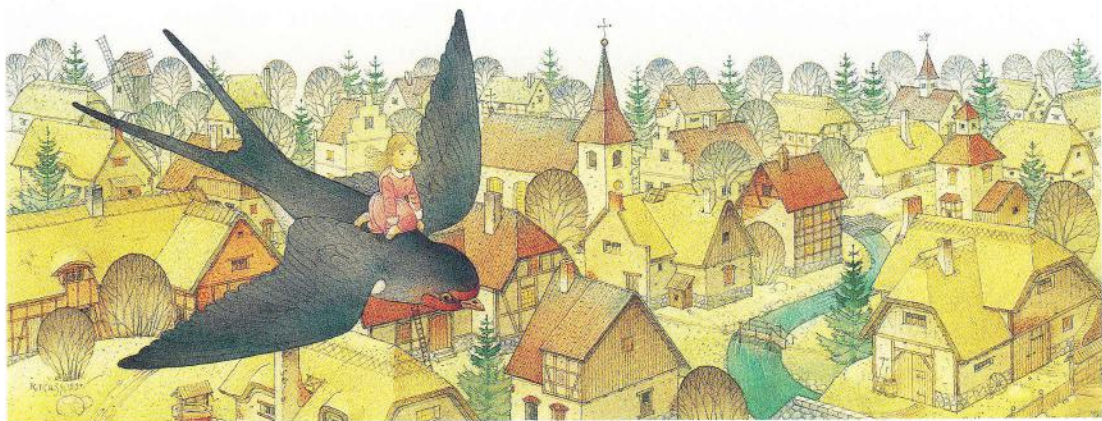
In book *Lisas Reise* (Lisa's Journey, Esslinger, 1996) the artist discovers another compositional trick that is typical of nonsense aesthetics, upside-down images, which he used many times in his later books. He finds a playful and creative way to convey an interesting and unexpected encounter between two worlds, round and angular.

He later created three illustrated books about Christmas: *Weihnachten bei Familie Bär* (The Bear Family's Christmas, Esslinger, 1997), *Familie Bär auf grosser Weihnachtsfahrt* (The Bear Family's World Tour Christmas, Esslinger, 1999), and *The Last Chimney of Christmas Eve* by Linda Oatman High (Boyd's Mills Press, 2001). Kasparavičius has the ability to evoke the warm and festive mood in anticipating Christmas, and to depict a true Christmas miracle in his images.

## Classic literature

His illustrations of children's classics have made Kasparavičius a famous artist in many countries. His well-illustrated classic works opened the way to the broader recognition of his work. Naturally, this was at first a great test of his abilities, for in the event of failure, doubt would have been cast on his talent. His illustrations of the classics are characterised by a combination of two realities: mundane and realistic storytelling, and the fantastic world of fairy tales.

Italians are now able to judge the illustrations to this fantastic novelette *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi (Coppensrath Verlag, 1993) for themselves. Just as in the text itself, fantastic elements in the illustrations come under the constant constraints of a realistic environment. The artist manages to combine two layers of depiction, when

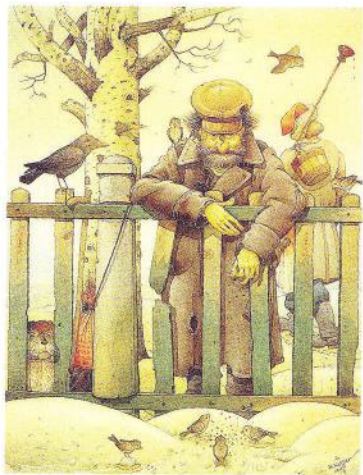


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## Thumbelina

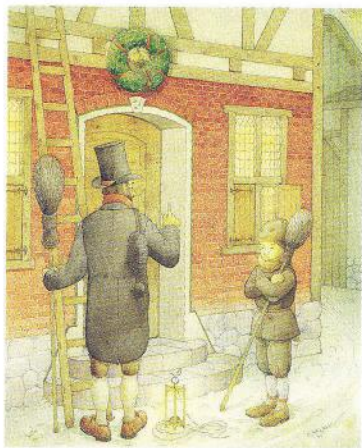
he adds to a realistic and mundane narrative a secondary, fairy-tale image world. In these fairy-tale spaces, *The Island of Hardworking Bees* or *The Idlers' Paradise*, the artist's creativity is freed and he is happiest. The illustrations, like the text, are filled with merriment and colourful fairy-tale humour. Although Kasparavičius keeps close to the narrative, the interpretations of the characters he has created are his own. Note the portraits of the Cat and the Fox, marked with a satirised character that children recognise so well.

Hoffmann's best-known creation has been published in many lavish illustrated editions, with illustrations by the author himself, and by famous artists such as Maurice Sendak (1928–2012) and Roberto Innocenti (b. 1940). In this exhibition, you will encounter Kasparavičius' version of *Der Nussknacker* (*The Nutcracker*, Coppentrath Verlag, 1998). He has managed to unite the three zones in which the narrative takes place: the realistic or mundane, the *dramatic* where the Nutcracker battles the seven-headed mouse, and the *fairy tale*, the journey to the Doll Kingdom. The artist feels most at home in the fairy-tale environment, drawing a landscape with a romantic bent: a lollipop field, an almond and raisin gate, an orange stream, an almond milk lake, a gingerbread village, and a marzipan castle. This is Kasparavičius' home ground as an artist. He is obviously most comfortable illustrating a fantasy world, helping children



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The Honest Thief



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The Last Chimney of Christmas Eve

to escape the limitations of their existence, and making connections with a world outside the home, the world of the imagination.

In well-known fairy tale *Coliukė* (Thumbelina, Nieko rimto, 2005) Kasparavičius has managed perfectly to tell the miracle of the tale through contrasts: Thumbelina's beauty, her gentle and aromatic surroundings, a sort of flower herbarium, as opposed to the dark and bleak underground home of the mole characters. The change of proportionate sizes is also an often-used tool in the artist's later work, in his own tales and illustrations.

## Towards realism

The realistic vein in Kasparavičius' work has to do with his illustrating the book *The Honest Thief* by Dostoyevsky (Grimm Press, 1994). The narrative space, realistic as it was, limited the artist's imagination; so instead, he dived into period features, interiors, clothing and objects. This is particularly clear in *The Honest Thief*, where a particular emphasis is put on describing the faces and clothes of the characters, their squalid living conditions, the cruel natural conditions, and the poor country. These illustrations won a second place diploma at the 1994 Barcelona Premi International Catalonia d'Il·lustració.

This realistic direction in his work can be observed in later books commissioned by US publishers as well. The books *Brother Martin* (Boyd's Mills Press, 2002), *Brother Bartholomew and the Apple Grove* (Boyd's Mills Press, 2003) and *Saint Valentine* (Boyd's Mills Press, 2004) are educational books depicting the lives of saints.

Realistic descriptions and the real world of the book put limitations on the artist's fantasies, so he later disposed of this entire limiting factor by becoming an author himself.

## An imagination freed: Artist and writer, 2003-2016

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Why does an illustrator start writing? Primarily in order to free himself from another person's text, and to gain full creative freedom. This is the main reason why illustrators usually seek to create a picture book of their own. When first offered the opportunity by Grimm Press to write the text for his illustrations, Kasparavičius discovered in himself a talent for writing. Interestingly enough, he later created new texts for all the illustrations he had made! This is how his own books were born: *Meškelionė* (The Bears' Journey, Baltos lankos, 2010), *Tinginių šalis* (The Land of the Lazy, Nieko rimto, 2015), and others. This period in his work is notable for his characteristically visual thinking. Some of the composition schemes and motifs he discovered, and other tried-and-tested illustration "tricks", are continued and developed in his own writing. Among others, we will discover a "corner-man", a case of swapped human and animal sizes (proportions) in the parrot story, and Rabbit Marcus the Great, who cannot fit anywhere.

In 12 years, the artist has created 15 illustrated books for children. Filled with elements of nonsense and the absurd, the short stories deal with daily life, the reality surrounding us, exotic and faraway lands, dreams, and other themes. It could be said that Kasparavičius can make a story out of anything, out of his immediate environment, as if collecting the life stories of objects into a sort of encyclopedia of living things. The illustrations are characterised by anthropomorphism, subtle humour, and an autobiographical quality. What is shown in the illustrations is often based on the artist's own living space and property. The reverse is also true: some of his illustrations let us reconstruct his hobbies, his appearance, and the things that surround him.

This was when Kasparavičius' work began to win recognition and acclaim in Lithuania. In 2008, he won the Children's Literature Award, reflecting the multitude of accolades that his books have received. In 2005, he received a Vilnius Book Fair diploma for illustrating Aurelija Čeredėjevaitė's book *Tinginė ragana* (The Lazy Witch, Kronta, 2004). In 2006, he won a Vilnius Book Fair diploma for the illustrations to the book *Trumpos istorijos* (Short Stories, Nieko rimto, 2006). The 2005 Lithuanian edition of Hans Christian Andersen's *Coliukė* (Thumbelina) and *Povandeninė istorija* (An Underwater Story, Nieko rimto, 2014) were voted Most Beautiful Children's Books in Lithuania. *Kvailos istorijos* (Silly Stories, Nieko rimto, 2005), *Dingęs paveikslas* (The Missing Picture, Nieko rimto, 2007), *Sodininkas Florencijus* (Florentius the Gardener, Nieko rimto, 2008), *Kiškis Morkus Didysis*



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The Missing Picture



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The White Elephant

(Rabbit Marcus the Great, Nieko rimto, 2009) and *Sapnų katytė* (Dream Kitty, Nieko rimto, 2013) became Lithuanian Children's Books of the Year.

His books have also featured in global children's book honour lists and have been awarded special prizes. In 2008 the book *Dingęs paveikslas* (The Missing Picture, Nieko rimto, 2007) was named one of the world's 100 most beautifully illustrated children's books (CJ Picture Book Festival, Korea). In 2012 *Mažoji žiema* (The Little Winter, Nieko rimto, 2010) was put on the IBBY Honour List (International Board on Books for Young People). In 2013 *Sapnų Katytė* (Dream Kitty, Nieko rimto, 2013) was put on The White Ravens list (Internationale Jugendbibliothek, München, 2013). In 2010 *Baltasis Dramblys* (The White Elephant, Nieko rimto, 2009) received the Baltic Sea Region Jānis Baltvilks International Prize in Children's Literature and Book Art in Riga, Latvia. In 2011 *Trumpos istorijos* (Thule Ediciones, 2009) won the Atrapallibres Award for Children's Literature in Barcelona, Spain. And in 2013, Kasparavičius was awarded the Premio Vittoria Samarelli, Associazione Giuseppe Acerbi, Castel Goffredo (Italy) for the books *Braškių diena* (Strawberry Day, Nieko rimto, 2007), *Dingęs paveikslas* (The Missing Picture, Comma22, 2010) and *Sodininkas Florencijus* (Florentius the Gardener, Comma22, 2010).

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This is the first retrospective to present 30 years of his creative work.



Abb. aus: Pinocchio

## Schlaraffenland fürs Auge

### Märchenhafte Illustrationen aus Litauen

„Schlaraffenland“ ist nur einer der zahlreichen Titel, die der litauische Künstler Kestutis Kasparavičius illustrierte. So meisterhaft seine Bücher, so unaussprechlich sein Name – die Bilder signiert Kasparavičius daher der Einfachheit halber mit „K. Kaspar“.



Abb. aus: Paul Maar: Lisas Reise, Esslinger 1996.

Ostereier, Weihnachtsmänner, essbare Fantasiewelten, sprechende Tiere. Mit Liebe zum Detail schuf der Litauer farbenfrohe, bizarr anmutende Kosmen voller Frohsinn und Unbekümmertheit, die sogar ohne Text verständlich wären. „Kasparavičius' Schlaraffenland“ (Esslinger 1994) besticht genauso wie „Kasparavičius' Ostereier“ (Esslinger 1995), durch die verrückten Gestalten: Lustige Kollegen in ungewöhnlichen Kostümen lassen Hieronymus Bosch's dämonische Monster grüßen.

In seiner Heimat Litauen sind bislang weniger Bilderbücher von Kasparavičius herausgegeben worden, als im Ausland; außer in Europa sind sie in Mexiko, Brasilien, Japan und Taiwan erhältlich. Sein Talent ist mittlerweile international anerkannt und unter den zahlreichen Preisen finden sich der *Golden Pen of Belgrade* von 1990 und die Auszeichnung als *Illustrator des Jahres* 1993 in Bologna. Acht mal stellte Kasparavičius bislang auf der Kinder- und Jugendbuchmesse in Bologna aus. Dort entdeckten auch deutsche Verleger seine Werke und besuchten ihn darauf zu Hause. Bereits seit 1989 besteht die Zusammenarbeit mit Esslinger, 1991 folgte Coppenrath. In beiden Verlagen erschienen in den letzten Jahren wertvoll ausgestattete Bilderbücher, bei denen schon das Vorsatzpapier wovon in eine bunte Welt der kleinen Figuren einführt. Alle Bücher sind deutsche Originalausgaben. Zumeist schicken die Verlage den Text, welchen Kasparavičius dann illustriert. So wurde James Krüss' Version der „Bremer Stadtmusikanten“ (Esslinger 1994) von

dem Litauer ganz 'norddeutsch' ins Bild gesetzt, mit reetgedecktem Bauernhaus aus Fachwerk und Backstein. Und in seiner Interpretation des „Pinocchio“ (Coppenrath 1993) ist dieser weniger ein rotzfreches, denn ein aufgewecktes Kerlchen, das immer schon das Zeug zum braven Jungen hatte. Vielleicht gefiel Kasparavičius als Vater von drei Jungen die Geschichte von Collodi deshalb so gut.

In einem fast altertümlich realistischen Stil stellt der Illustrator die Interieurs der Bilder exakt dar, lässt mit genauen Konturen und dichten Schraffuren anmutige Figuren entstehen und koloriert minutiös in buntem Aquarell. In Kasparavičius' Spielzeugwelt passen seine knubbelnasigen Menschenfiguren, die mit ihren genau abgezeichneten Proportionen an steife hölzerne Puppen erinnern. In allen Geschichten tauchen Tiere auf. Diese begeistern Kinder wohl deshalb, weil ihre prallen Glieder sie wie Stofftiere aussehen lassen. In „Weihnachten bei Familie Bär und anderen Tierfamilien“ (Esslinger 1997/Arena TB 2001) bringt der Weihnachtsmann nicht nur den Bären die Geschenke, sondern auch Enten, Mäusen, Hasen, Seehunden und anderen Tierfamilien, die mit den Vorbereitungen für das große Fest beschäftigt sind. Viele kleine Details der Bilder bereichern das Hauptgeschehen, das Paul Maar, mit dem Kasparavičius während der Entstehungsphase einen regen Briefwechsel pflegte, in Verse fasste. Im zweiten Weihnachtsband „Familie Bär auf großer Weihnachtsfahrt“ (Esslinger 1999/Arena TB 2002) fliegt Familie Bär mit dem Heißluftballon um die Welt, um ihre Verwandten zu besuchen, die Eisbären am Pol, die Waschbären in Nordamerika, die Koalabären in Australien und die Pandabären in China. Kasparavičius' fröhliche Weihnachtsillustrationen schmücken auch eine Reihe von Adventskalendern. Mit 24 Türchen sind nicht nur Szenen aus den Bären Geschichten zu haben. Auch ein mit buntem Holzspielzeug dekorierter Tannenbaum, ein von beschäftigten Weihnachtsmännern bevölkerter Stern und ein mit Geschenken beladener Weihnachtszug sind ab Herbst wieder im Handel, um heitere adventliche Stimmung zu verbreiten.

1954 in der Nähe des litauischen Dorfes Aukstadvaris geboren, verbrachte Kaspara-

vičius seine Kindheit in einem alten Fürstenhof, wo die Schule untergebracht war, an der sein Vater als Lehrer arbeitete.

Die nostalgisch wirkenden Zeichnungen scheinen noch immer ein wenig inspiriert von der damaligen Idylle. Eigentlich, meint der Bilderbuchmaler, sei er erst im dritten Anlauf Künstler geworden. Während der Gymnasialzeit wurde er als Chordirigent ausgebildet, um dann an der Kunstakademie in Vilnius Design zu studieren. Erst danach begann er, Kinderbücher zu illustrieren. Er mache mit seiner Kunst nicht nur andere glücklich, sondern vor allem sich selbst, findet Kasparavičius. Die Bilder zu den Geschichten entstehen zuerst mit viel Denkarbeit im Kopf, das Malen danach ist nur noch Freude für ihn. Am liebsten zeichnet er zusammen mit seinem jüngsten Sohn Gabrielius (9). Der freischaffende Illustrator lebt mit seiner Familie etwa 15 km von der litauischen Hauptstadt Vilnius entfernt. Nur ganz selten fährt er in die Stadt, er fühlt sich in seinem Haus am Waldrand wohl. Bei Tischlerarbeiten und klassischer Musik entspannt sich Kasparavičius. Früher spielte er selbst Klavier, und nun träumt er davon, sich irgendwann wieder eines kaufen zu können. Mögen viele seiner Bilderbücher und Adventskalender ihre Liebhaber finden, um ihm diesen Wunsch zu erfüllen.

Juliane Saeger

Foto: Esslinger

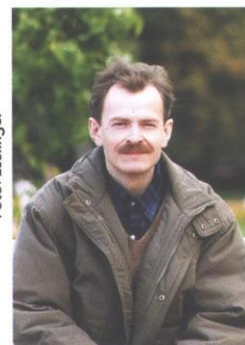


Abb. aus: Familie Bär auf großer Weihnachtsfahrt

Weitere Bilderbücher und Adventskalender bei Esslinger Verlag J.F. Schreiber und bei Coppenrath.

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*KUD Sodobnost International, Ljubljana;*  
*Liaoning Children's Publishing House, Liaoning;*  
*Liels un Mazs, Riga;*  
*Livraria Martins Fontes Editora, Sao Paulo;*  
*Mir I Obrazovanije, Moscow;*  
*Montessori Korea Co, Seoul;*  
*Nanjing University Press Co., Ltd.;*  
*Navchalna Kniga Bohdan, Ternopil;*  
*New Buds Publishing, Tianjin;*  
*Nieko Rimto, Vilnius;*  
*OM Publishers, Moscow;*  
*Open Books, Seoul;*  
*Papadopoulos, Athens;*  
*Petergailis, Riga;*  
*Pikarski, Tel Aviv;*  
*Sangsang School Publishing Co. Ltd.;*  
*Shenyang Fangzhou Culture Media, Shenyang;*  
*Sunbeam, Hong Kong;*  
*Verlag Urachhaus, Stuttgart;*  
*Zvaigzne ABC Publishers, Riga;*

### Five of the most important titles by Kęstutis Kasparavičius

1. *Sodininkas Florencijus* [Florencijus the Gardener]. Text Kęstutis Kasparavičius. Vilnius: Nieko rimto, 2007. Print.
2. Pinocchio. Text Carlo Collodi. Münster: Copenrath, 2018 [new german edition]. Print.
3. *Dingęs paveikslas* [The Missing Picture]. Text Kęstutis Kasparavičius. Vilnius: Nieko rimto, 2007. Print
4. *Tinginių šalis* [Lazy land]. Text Kęstutis Kasparavičius. Vilnius: Nieko rimto, 2015. Print.
5. *Kaimynė už kampo* [The Neighbour around the Corner]. Text Kęstutis Kasparavičius. Vilnius: Nieko rimto, 2016. Print.

## Kęstutis Kasparavičius Awards

1. Golden Pen award, Belgrade, 1990, for the Book „New Year“, Text by Janina Degutytė;
2. UNICEF award “Illustrator of the Year”, Bologna Children`s BookFair, 1993, for the Book „Duck and Kangaroo“, Text by Edward Lear;
3. II Diploma “Premi International Catalonia d`Il·lustracio”, Barcelona, 1994, for the Book „The Honest Thief“, text by Fiodor Dostoevsky;
4. Award for Excellence, Bologna Children`s BookFair, 2003, for the Book „The Pied Piper of Peru“, Text by A. Tompert;
5. „Silly Stories“ – Book of the Year for Children, Vilnius, 2005, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
6. Diploma, Tallin Illustrations Triennial, 2006, for the Book „Short Stories“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
7. Diploma, Vilnius BookFair 2007, for the Book „Short Stories“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
8. „The Missing Picture“ – Book of the Year for Smallest Readers, Vilnius, 2007, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
9. „Florentius the Gardener“ – Laureate of the Children`s Book of the Year Competencion, Vilnius, 2008, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
10. Salonul International de Carte pentru Copii, Chisinau, Moldova, 2008, for the Book „Florentius the Gardener“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
11. Children`s Literature Award by the Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania, 2008;
12. „The Hare Marcus the Great“ – Laureate of the Children`s Book of the Year Competencion, Vilnius, 2009, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
13. Baltic Sea Region Jānis Baltvilks International Prize in Children's Literature and BookArt, Riga, 2010, for the Book „The White Elephant“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
14. Golden Sign by Lithuanian Artists' Association, 2010;
15. Atrapallibres Award for Children`s Literature, Barcelona, 2011, for the Book „Short Stories“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
16. IBBY Honor List, 2012, for the Book „The Little Winter“, text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;

17. „The Dream Cat“ – Laureate of the Children’s Book of the Year Competencion, Vilnius, 2012, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
18. The White Ravens list, Internationale Jugendbibliothek, München, 2013, for the Book „The Dream Cat“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
19. Premio Vittoria Samarelli, Associazione Giuseppe Acerbi, Castel Goffredo, 2013, for the Book „Strawberyy Day“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
20. The most beautiful Lithuanian children’s book, 2013, for the Book „Underwater Story“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
21. Nami Concours, 2015(Korea), short list, for the Book „The Shaky Knight“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
22. "Außergewöhnliches Buch 2015", 15. Internationalen Literaturfestival in Berlin, for the Book „Pinocchio“, Text by Carlo Collodi;
23. Nami Concours, 2017 (Korea), short list, for the Book „The Neighbour around the Corner“, Text by Kęstutis Kasparavičius;
24. Nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, 2008, 2010 and 2018;
25. Nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (ALMA), 2005–2006, 2012–2019;

# Pinocchio

Carlo Collodi • Kęstutis Kasparavičius



COPPENRATHS KINDERKLASSIKER



# 곰 아저씨네 크리스마스 여행

케스투티스 카스파라비치우스 글·그림 | 김영선 옮김



# The Wild Donkey and the Lion



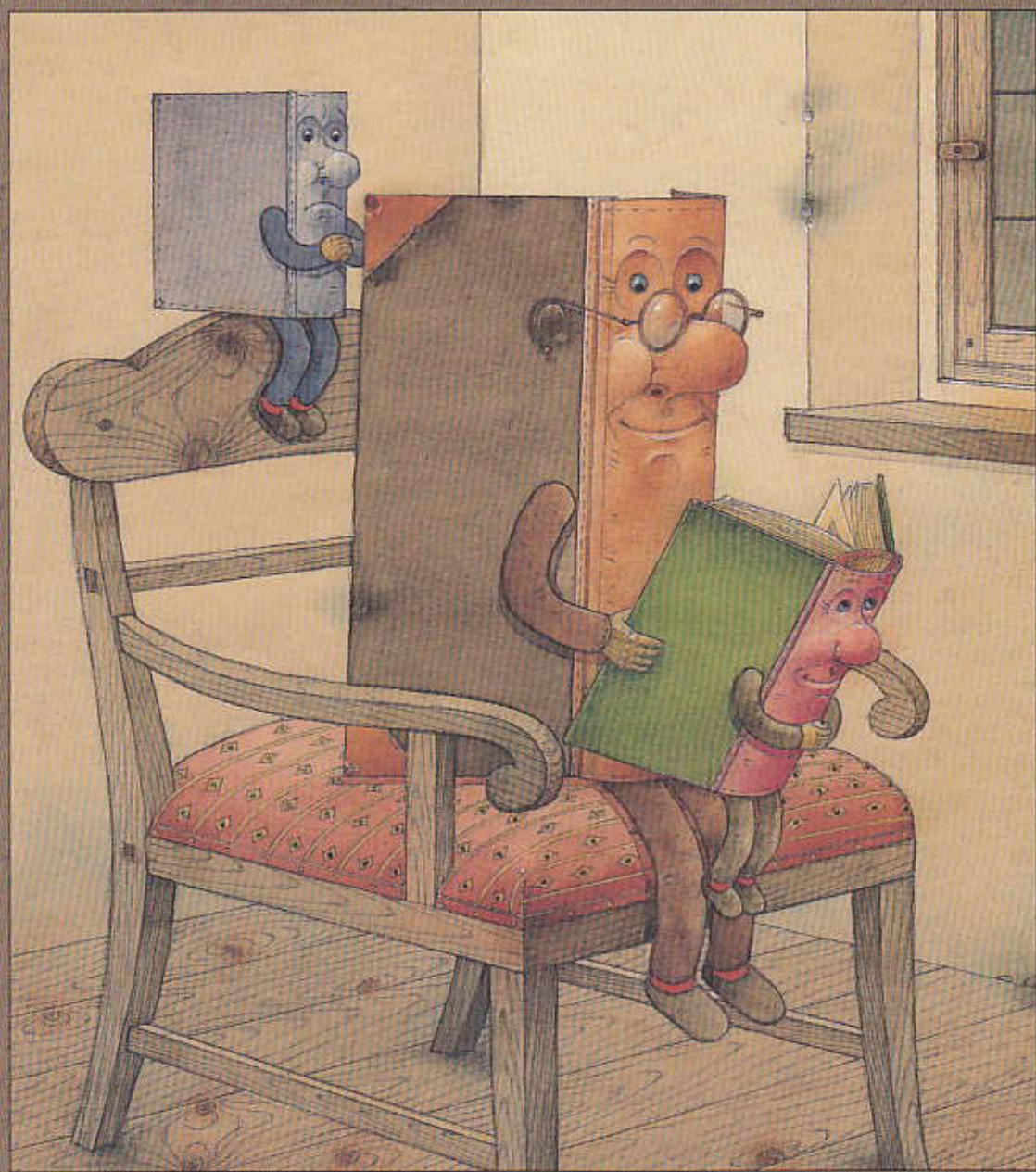
written by Scudder Smith | illustrated by Kestutis Kasparavicius

Kęstutis Kasparavičius  
**TRAPASTE ZGODBE**





# *Kęstutis Kasparavičius*



**BUDALASTE PRIČE**

KASPARAVIČIUS,

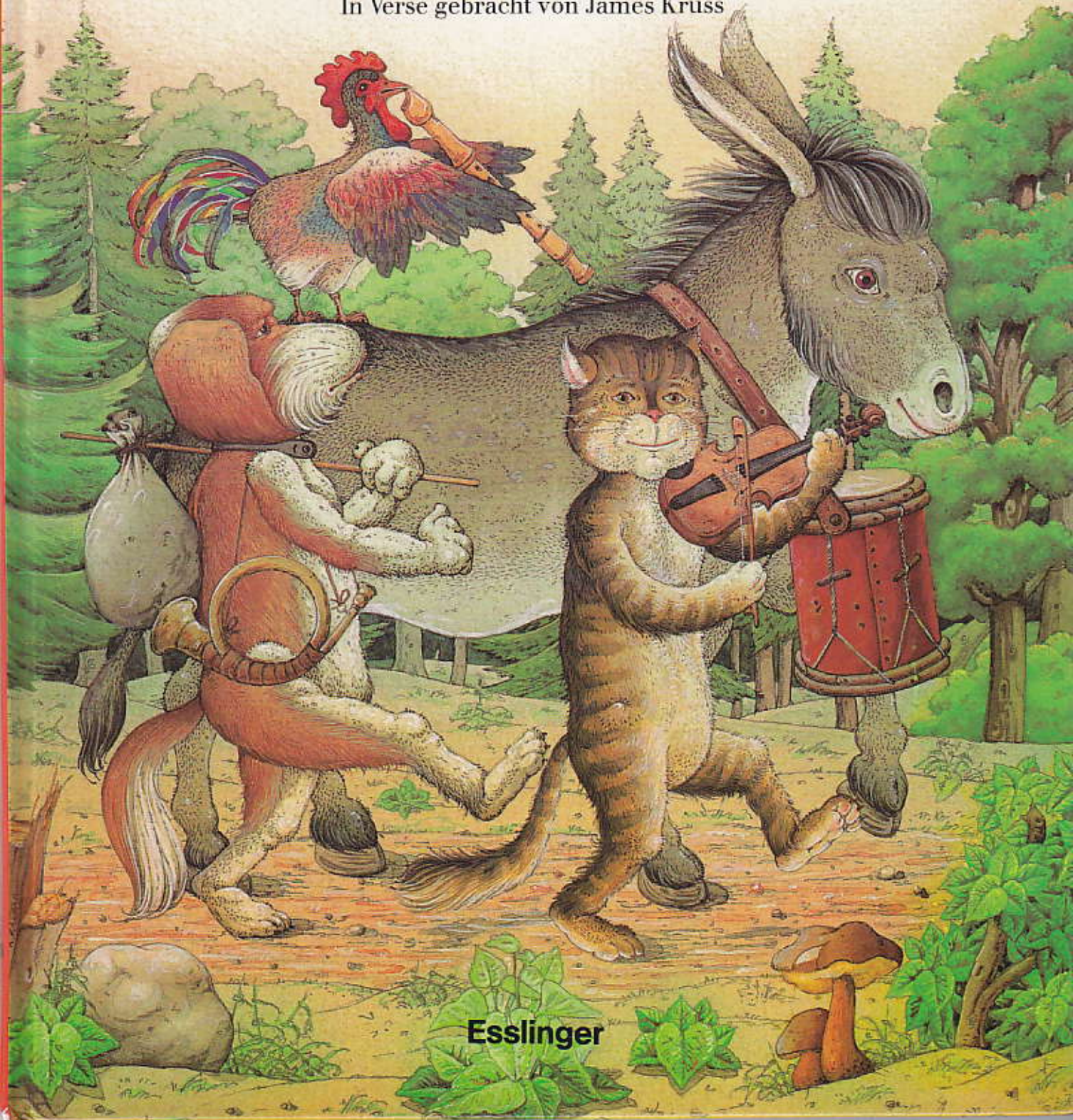
OSTEREIER



Esslinger

# Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten

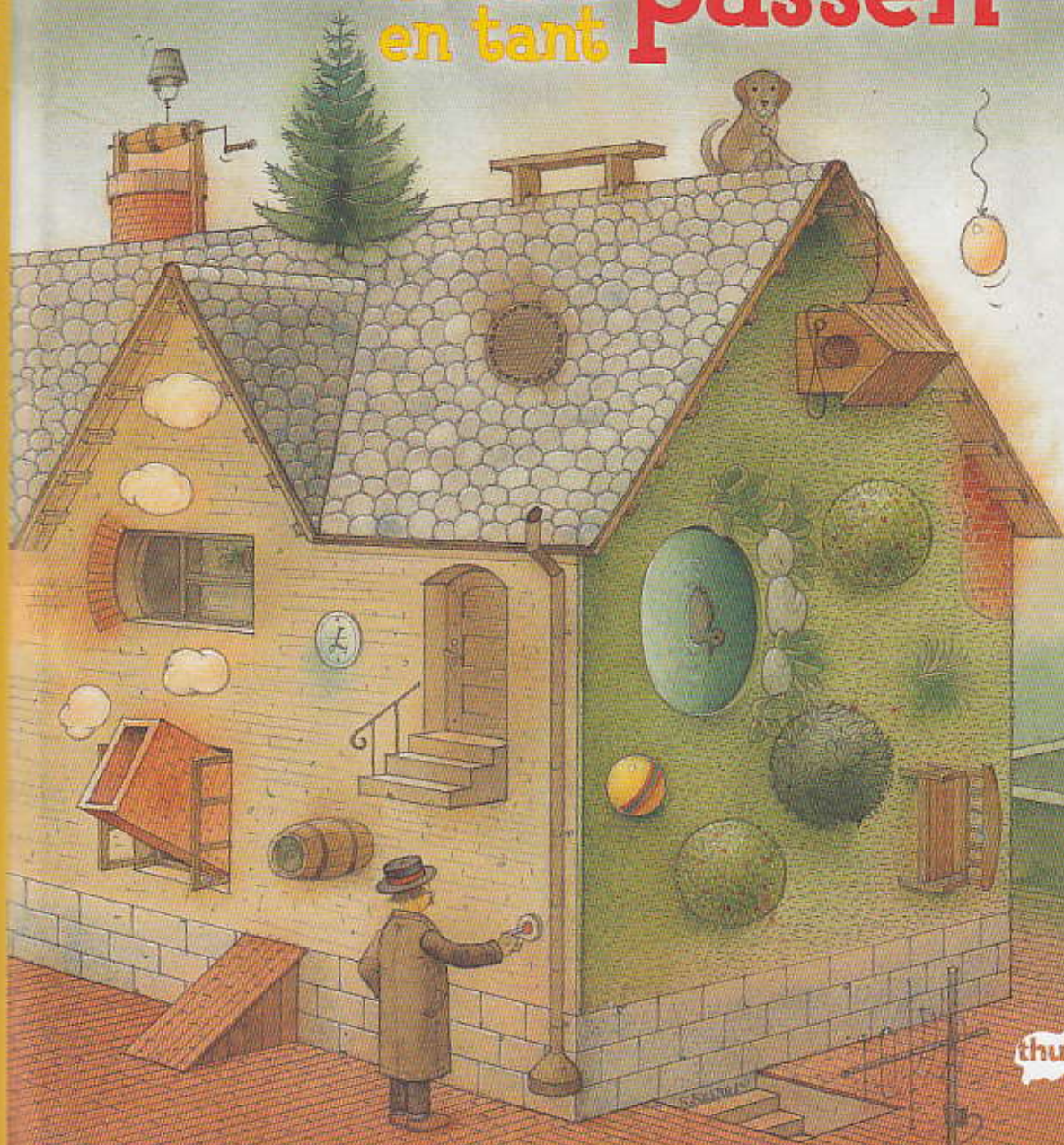
Illustriert von Kestutis Kasparavičius  
In Verse gebracht von James Krüss



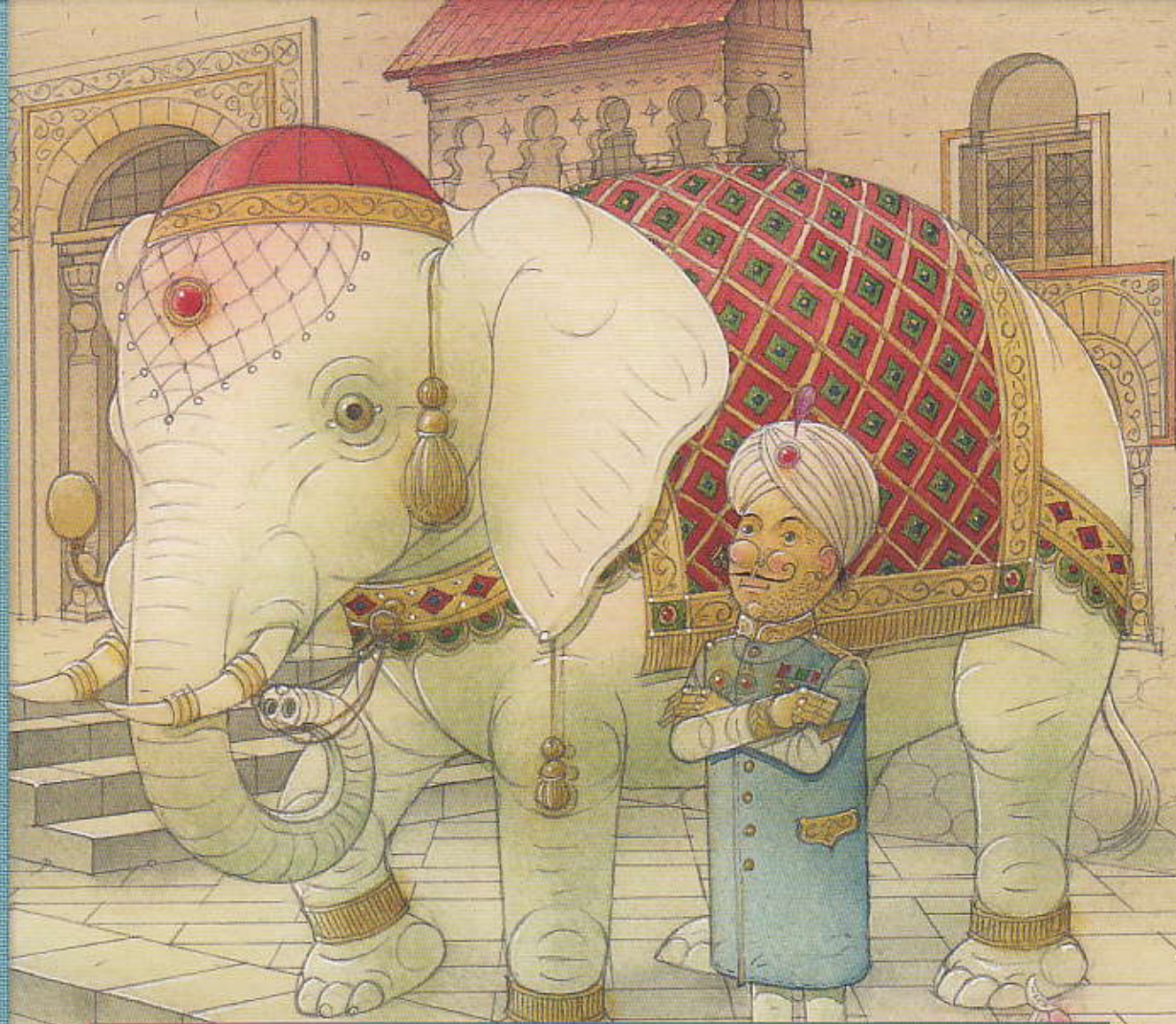
Esslinger

KESTUTIS KASPARAVIČIUS



# Coses que de tant en tant **passen**



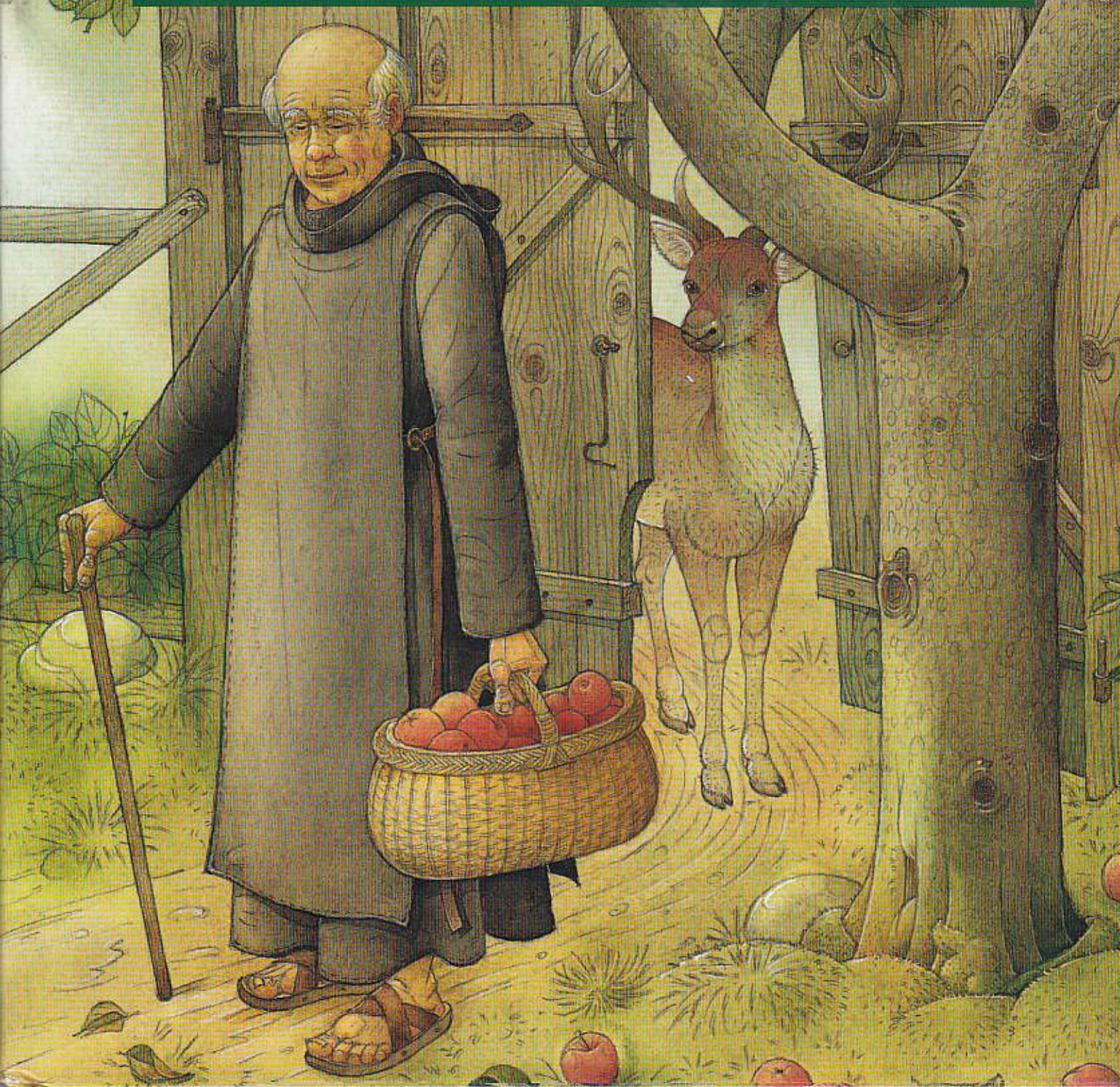
thule



Kęstutis Kasparavičius  
**DER WEISSE ELEFANT**

 Brother   
Bartholomew  
and the APPLE GROVE

Jan Cheripko • Kestutis Kasparavicius



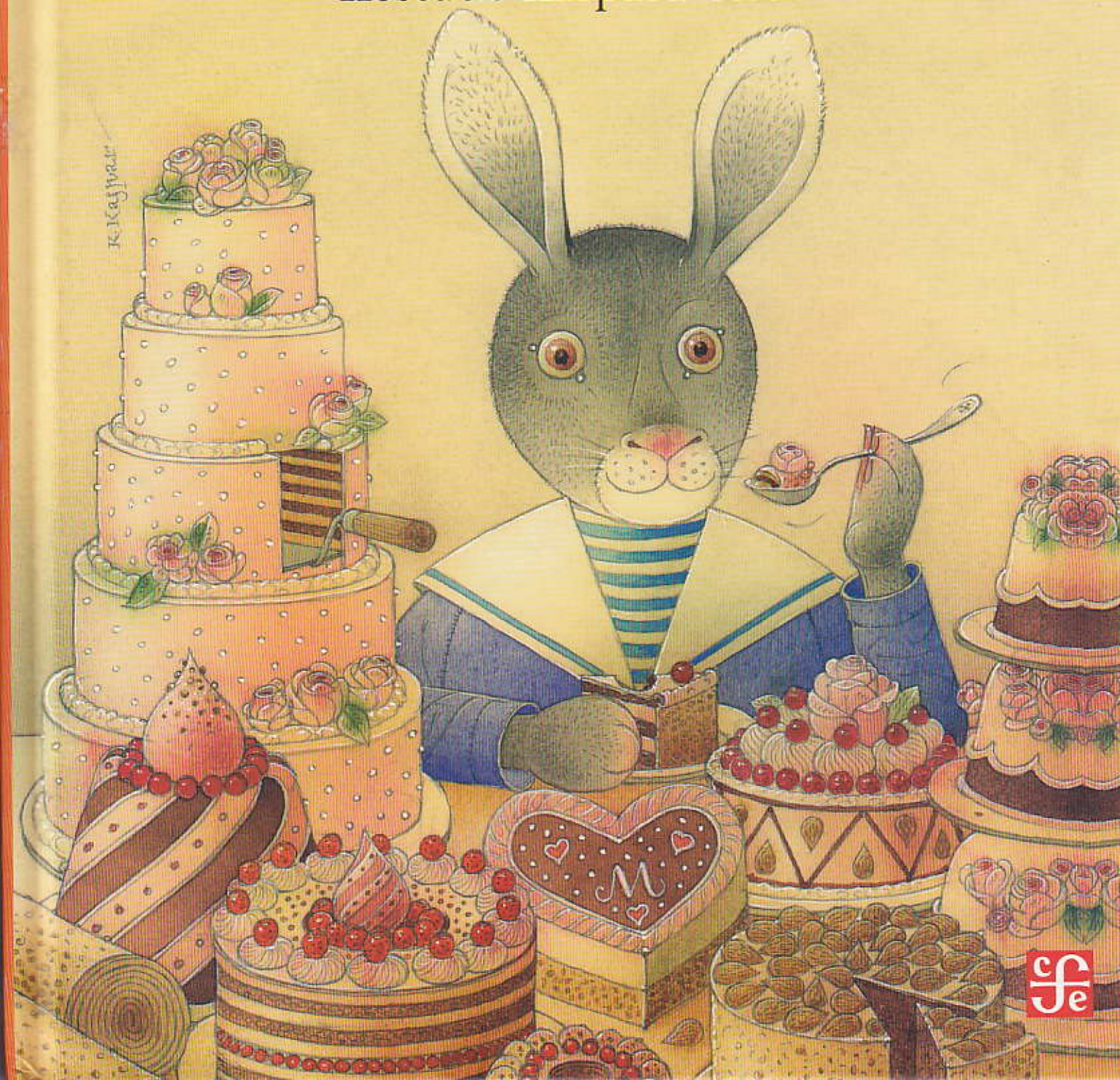
Кястутіс КАСПАРАВІЧЮС

САДІВНИК  
ФЛОРЕНЦІЮС



# ZANAFORIUS EL GRANDE

Kestutis Kasparavičius







# REINEKE FUCHS

Neu erzählt von Anne Jüssen  
Mit Bildern von Kęstutis Kasparavičius



COPPENRATHs  
KINDERKLASSIKER



# 硬碰硬，看誰贏

出自 韓非子 繪圖 卡思特提斯



# ZEMŪDENS STĀSTIS



Ķēstutis  
Kasparavičs

ARTIST'S SIGNATURE

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# Christian Morgenstern

## *Die Enten laufen Schlittschuh*

### und andere Gedichte

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Illustriert von Kestutis Kasparavičius

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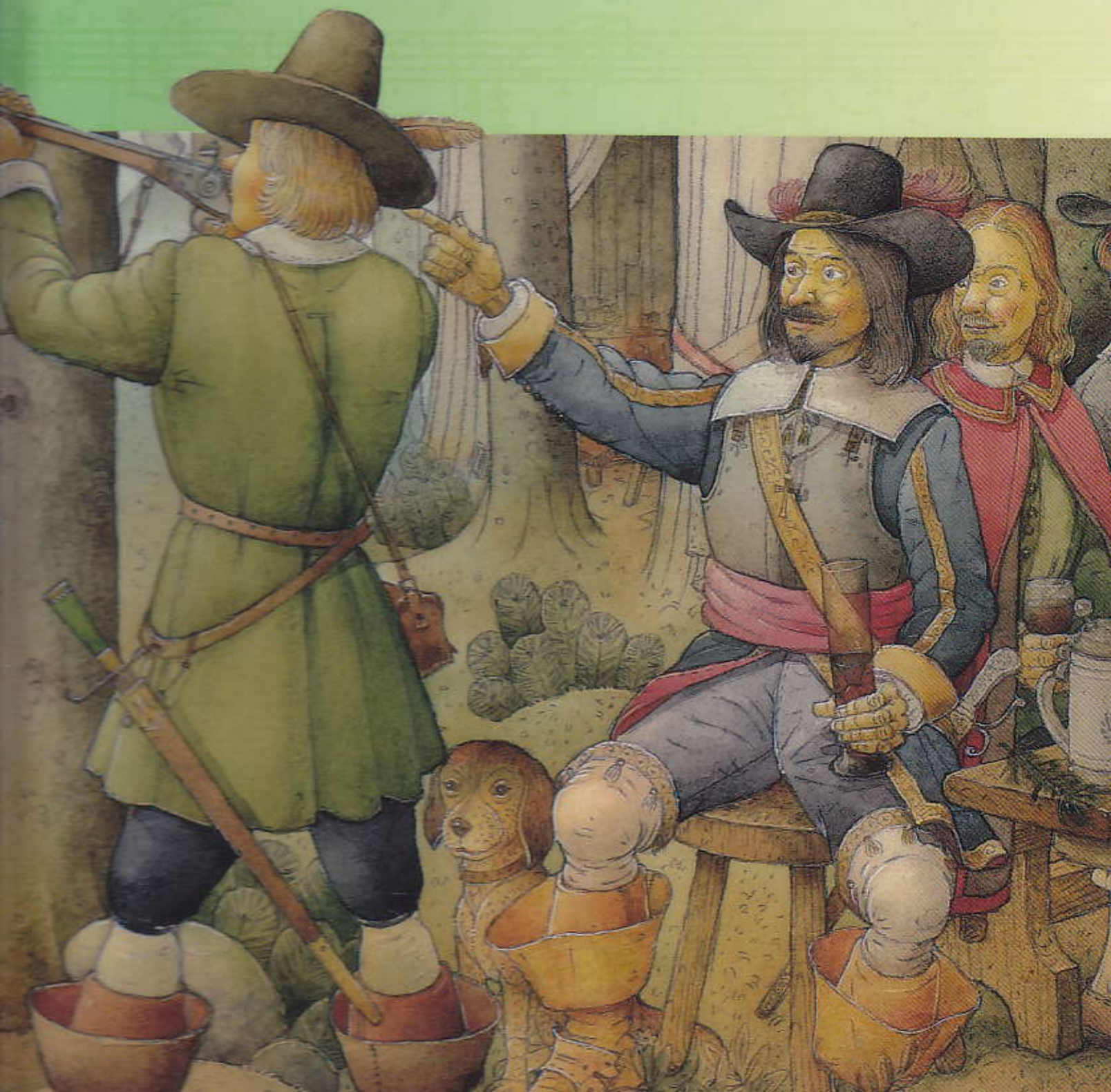
Esslinger im ÖBV

世界音樂童話繪本

# 魔彈射手

韋伯作品

圖／卡思特提斯 原著／德國民間故事 譯寫／林世仁





*Kęstutis Kasparavičius*  
**MAŁA ZIMA.**

VL

Kęstutis Kasparavičius

# El quadre desaparegut



thule

Kestutis Kasparavičius

# Weihnachten bei Familie Bär

... und anderen Tierfamilien

Mit lustigen Versen von Paul Maar



Esslinger  
atelier




*The* LAST CHIMNEY  
*of*  
CHRISTMAS EVE

by Linda Oatman High



Illustrated by Kestutis Kasparavicius



Paul Maar

# Lisas Reise

Mit Bildern von Kestutis Kasparavičius

Esslinger

Kęstutis Kasparavičius

Die Reise ins  
SCHLARAFFENLAND



Urachhaus



♥ Kęstutis Kasparavičius ♥  
DAS VERSCHWUNDENE  
BILD

世界童书大师想象之旅



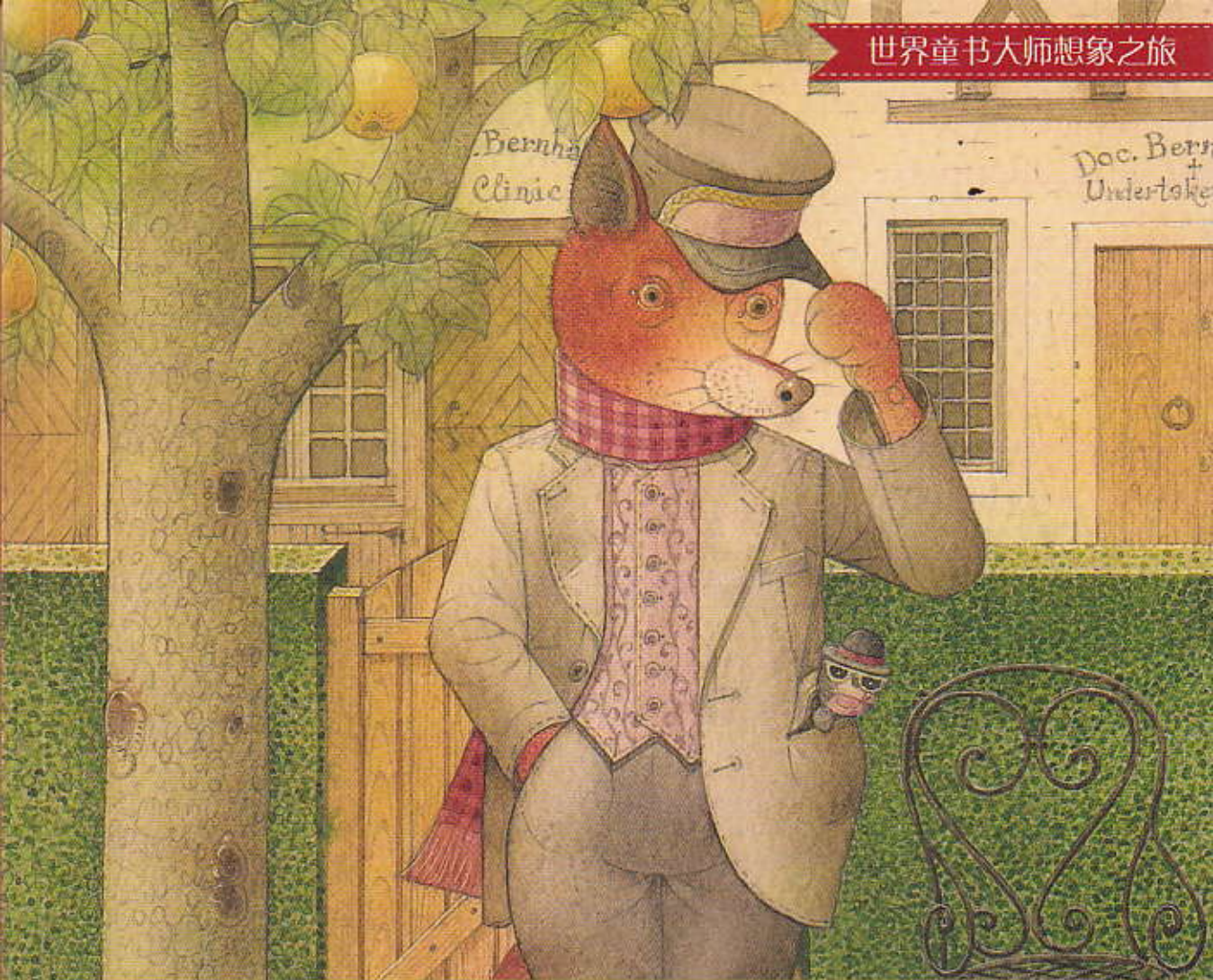
[立陶宛]卡斯特提斯·卡斯帕维舍斯/著绘

董全正/译

# 大兔子麦吉斯

北方联合出版传媒(集团)股份有限公司  
辽宁少年儿童出版社

世界童书大师想象之旅



[立陶宛]卡斯特提斯·卡斯帕维舍斯/著绘

赵焱/译

# 消失的名画

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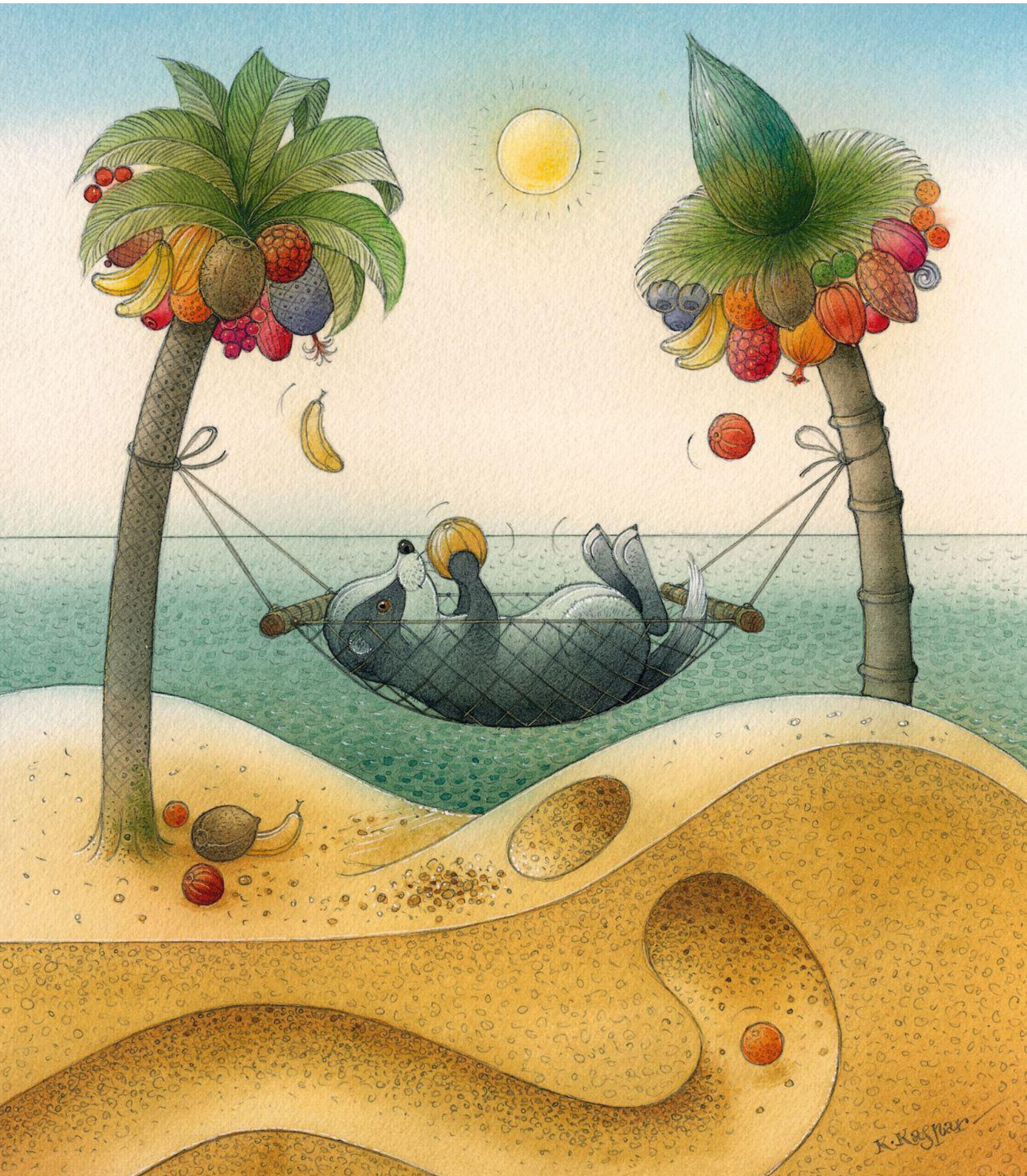






K. KASHAN







K. Kaspar

























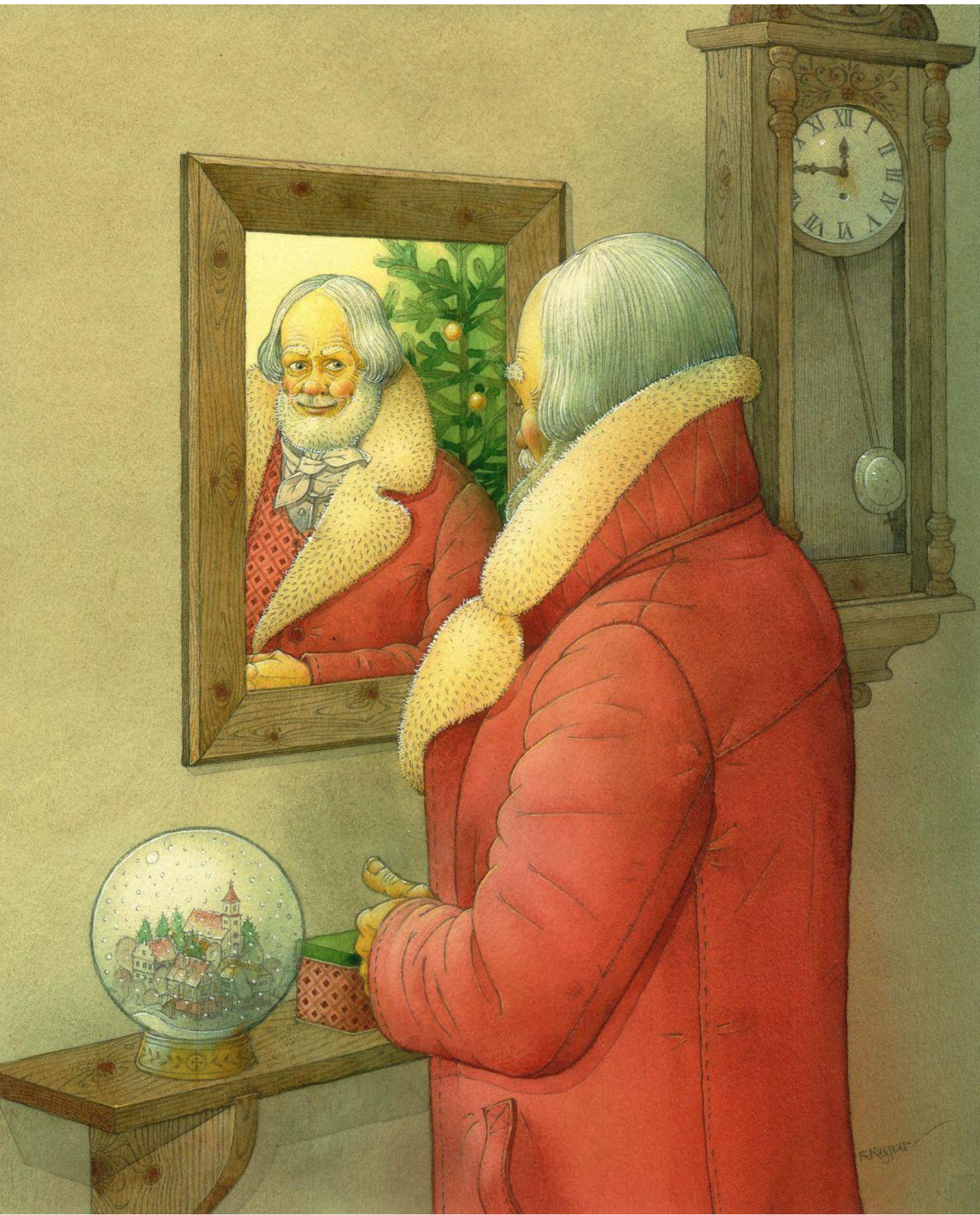








K. Kasper





И. Кайнар









































Kasper





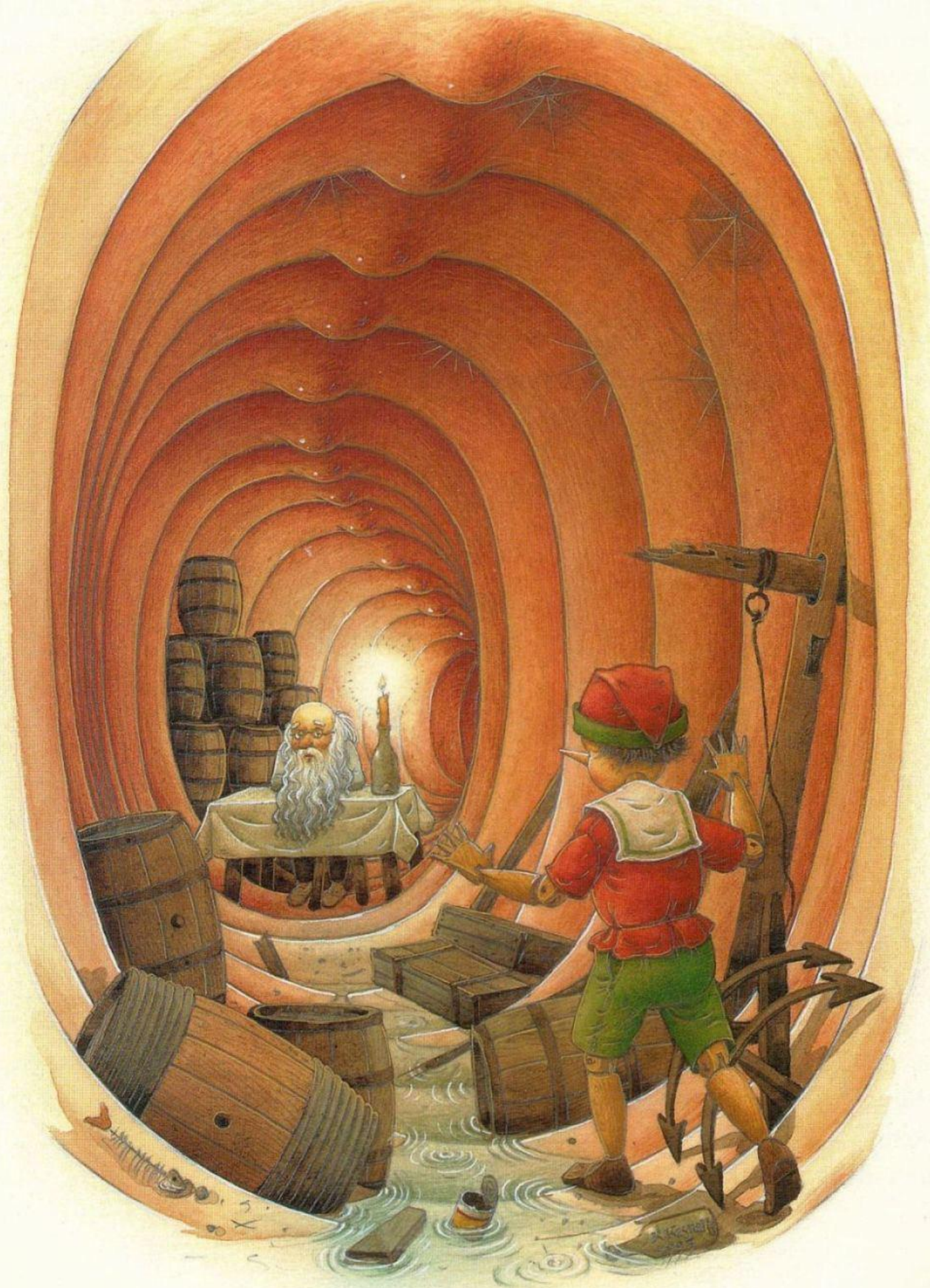








K. Kaspar  
2002





Krasnar  
1993





K. K. K. K. K.  
1993





