Leelo TUNGAL

Hans Christian Andersen Award 2018 for a Writer
Candidate for the Estonian Section of IBBY

Photo by Stina Kase

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Leelo TUNGAL

Our Leelo.

The Candididate's Contribution to Literature for Young People

Our Leelo

by Mare Müürsepp

Estonian Literary Magazine, no 2, 2016

I'll start with children's assessment. We had a group of third-grade students draft a list of who they believed were important public figures in Estonia. We used the list to make a presentation for our foreign pen-pals entitled "Famous Estonians". Tied for first place in the children's ranking were Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, a teenage world-champion freestyle skier Kelly Sildaru, and Leelo Tungal. Clearly, Tungal is not an "ordinary" children's author, but a symbolic figure.

Tungal's writings deal with children and their families and span the media of common reading materials, schoolbooks (her ABC-primer characters Adam and Anna, who have endured for decades), song repertoires, journalism, and public performances. Although the author has written many librettos and drama pieces, she has definitely enjoyed her greatest public fame at the Estonian Song Festivals, at which song authors are called to take the stage before hundreds of thousands of cheering and clapping audience members expressing delight with an intensity uncommon for Estonians. Tungal's lyrics have been used in pieces for both children's and adult choirs. Thus, she belongs to all Estonians, and her works can be found in most of our homes. She can frequently be seen speaking on behalf of children and as a patron of children's protection and family events.

However, Leelo Tungal's name is probably associated most with children's literature. Her latest thick collection of children's poems is entitled *Südasuvi* (Midsummer), and in it the author's pen has truly glided luxuriantly and liberally in a summery way. Naturally, she also includes poems about winter and other seasons: as a magazine editor (Tungal has

worked at children's magazines since 1973 and has edited her own publication, *Hea Laps,* since 1994), she knows very well that an author should write children poems about every time and topic.

Leelo Tungal earlier talked about how she got her name: in June 1947, the year she was born, the XII Estonian Song Festival was held in Tallinn, and one of the more popular choral songs performed was "Leelo". The word signifies Estonian folk singing in general, and Leelo Tungal can certainly be regarded as a folk bard. Still, whatever is topical in Estonian society at the moment can always be found echoing in her poems.

Tungal's children's poetry is upbeat: you could even say that it's hard to find any of her children's texts that don't contain something funny. This aspect fascinates children. Jokes are infectious and boost courage. Jokes often arise from unexpected associations, and it's great to re-read a story to experience a joke anew. Tungal's stories, which are built on alliteration and shifted meaning, are not always easy to understand, but once you pick up on the joke, you want to re-read the text again and again. At the same time, the poet perennially has a smile and a candidly compassionate word for those who have had a rough time in life: a child who is better understood by his or her dog than by other people, a child who has no father to take to the school's Father's Day celebration, etc. Tungal's stories often include unexpected twists. A mother and father take a break from their children and set off on a trip, but while they're away they sadly hug the kids' teddy bears. The narrator encourages a teacher to hit him ("Hit me, dear teacher / with your soft hand…"), but in the last stanza, it turns out that the narrator is a ball, with which the teacher hasn't had time to play in a long while.

In Tungal's children's stories, she calls on the reader to notice and resolve problems: she is riveted by the theme of children whose lives lack something important, such as parental care or friendship. Nevertheless, her storytelling always carries a cheerful tone.

Just like many other very talented children's writers, Leelo Tungal shouts out: "don't just lock me away in the children's room!" Luckily, her poetry collections for adults have also received very favorable reviews. She has been praised for her formulaic precision and sincerity, and she is fearlessly open: her entire life, as well as contemporary cultural history and social life, have been recorded with a genuineness that is occasionally painful.

Some of Tungal's poems have undergone odd developments since they were first penned. When she was just a schoolgirl, Tungal wrote "*Oma laulu ei leia ma üles*" (I Cannot Find My Song), a poem that carries the dreams and yearning of a young woman. A few years later, it was used as the lyrics for an exceptionally beautiful song written by the renowned composer Valter Ojakäär and performed gently, hauntingly by Heli Lääts – one of the most popular stage figures at that time. Over the last decade, however, the song is better known from the cover performed by the folk-metal band Metsatöll, in which it has a wild and aggressive character. In 2008, the Metsatöll version of "*Oma laulu ei leia ma üles*" became the theme song of the TV series *Tuulepealne maa* (Windswept Land), which deals with the Estonian nation's hardship-filled history. A young woman's secret thoughts were transformed into a piece in which the difficulty of finding her "own song" signifies the problems of national self-awareness, and the worry about the fragility of identity. Just as the TV show's title conveys Estonians' place in a windswept land, so every twist in history can force many of us to "sing another's song": to go along with a new regime. But perhaps that meaning similarly shows that in the somewhat downcast reflections of her younger days, Leelo Tungal struck an emotional chord in all Estonians.

Overall, a very clear boundary exists between Tungal's poetry for children and for adults: the door to the children's room is safely closed when the adults walk alone.

Even so, there is occasionally a sense of border violation. As a singer in a mixed choir, I've rehearsed for many Song Festivals Urmas Lattikas' song "*Väike maa*" (Little Land), the lyrics of which are a slightly truncated version of Leelo Tungal's poem "*See väike maa*" (This Little Land). The poem was published in a collection of children's poetry, defining its genre. Among the other lines carrying the spirit of the Estonian homeland is: "where the winter sun sets anew as it rises, where the school path is lined with dark ice like glass". During choir practices, we naturally sing phrases over and over, dozens of times, and I always strive to imagine (working in education, I admittedly have a lovely image of school paths frozen in my memory) what my fellow singers – those stern and businesslike representatives of respectable professions – are thinking and feeling about those words. The song rings out, reverent and sacred. Tungal has managed to convey a specific, very ordinary image from childhood memories which brings a wide array of people together.

Tungal's most important work of prose – a trilogy, the first two parts of which have

been released so far: *Seltsimees laps* (Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups) and *Samet ja saepuru* (Velvet and Sawdust) – is rooted in the attempt to bring childhood memories to life with exceptional vividness. Hopefully, the third part will soon be finished. At the core of the autobiographical series' plot is the arrest of Leelo's mother, a school director, in 1951, as part of Stalin's ideological cleansing. The author tells the entire story from her own point of view: at the beginning of the trilogy, she is a young girl just turning four years old. When discussing the book, Tungal has emphasized the fact that 150 teachers were arrested at that time. (A larger wave of deportations had taken place in 1949, when more than 20,000 people were taken from Estonia.) Since quite a number of memoirs have been published by famous Estonian cultural and public figures (as well as by lesser-known authors), one might ask what makes Tungal's story special.

On the literary level, Tungal is exceptional for her acute attention to detail and very graceful understanding of the possibilities offered by writing for children.

As the author herself has explained, she has attempted to write the story several times over the course of her life, and now, in her later years and possessing a wealth of life-experience, she has decided in favor of conveying memories through the voice of a child. Some readers have expressed doubt about whether such a young child would be capable of remembering everything that happened to and around her in such great detail. However, one must take into account the fact that Tungal was an only child and spent a great deal of time in the company of adults, who frequently forgot that she was listening and consequently allowed a thing or two not meant for children's ears to slip. One noteworthy individual was Leelo's father, who was also a teacher and an active cultural organizer in the community. In spite of the tragic situation, he managed to think of his child's needs: building an environment for her that was as safe as possible, encouraging her to see joy and continuance in life, and – just like the other family members – helping the future writer to mentally record and give consideration to that sad period.

For the most part, children's memories are what they are told. However, many people who write for a young audience can confirm that if someone consciously delves into his or her childhood memories, then new doors will start to open, as in a gallery, causing the child to recall specific situations, images, light, smells, sounds, surfaces, and objects his or her hands once touched. A skilled receiver can filter a rich picture of an era out of

the sharp scent of a black leather jacket and the manner of speech in a foreign language, being up on the shoulders of one's father or him riding a motorcycle, stirring Soviet songs playing from a radio, or stitching together a doll's fabric body. Additionally, the child's inadequate ability to interpret situations strikingly highlights the tragedy of the story: her mother is sentenced to 25 + 5 years in a prison-camp and settlement, and when the child returns from staying with relatives for a couple of weeks, she asks whether 25 + 5 years are over yet. The fear and anticipation she suffers while waiting for the return of her mother pervade *Seltsimees laps*, as she constantly imagines her mother's homecoming. One especially painful scene unfolds at the circus: a place which should be entertaining, but which only ends up magnifying her uncertainty with its strange and unaccustomed sights.

The filigreed tracing of a child's thought process imbues Tungal's novel with universal human power: it is a story about fear and the preservation of hope. At the same time, the autobiographical work broadens opportunities for understanding the rest of the author's bibliography: does the cheerfulness of her children's poetry actually convey her father's instructions on how to get by in life, to be happy and kind?

The designs of two of Tungal's children's poetry books feature poppies, and one of them, which was dedicated to her mother, is entitled *Mooni avastamine* (Discovering a Poppy). Poppies grow in abundance near Tungal's home, and the author's identification with the surrounding environment is clearly perceptible in her poetry. However, poppies also have a special significance in relation to war and peace: they prefer calcium-rich ground, which frequently develops as a consequence of intense warfare. Thus, the flower is also a symbol of peace and endurance. Leelo Tungal's works, and her personality, give us hope for that.

Mare Müürsepp (1958) is a researcher of children's literature, a teacher and an author. She is actively involved in issues concerning child-raising and early education, and has published textbooks and scholarly works.

Translated by Adam Cullen

Leelo Tungal Biography

Already multiple generations of Estonian readers are familiar with Leelo Tungal foremost through her spirited children's poems, which climax in creative ways and are speckled with plays on words. In addition to more than fifty children's books, Tungal has published 12 poetry collections for adults, as well as collection of short stories and young-adult novels. Her novels *Seltsimees laps ja suured inimesed* (Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups, 2008) and *Samet ja saepuru* (Velvet and Sawdust, 2009), which are based on memories from her childhood, have likewise received lively feedback.

Tungal, who received an education in Estonian philology from Tartu University, made her debut at the age of 18 in the so-called "cassette generation" – during the "golden sixties" – with the poetry collection titled *Kummaliselt kiivitajad kurtsid* (The Lapwings Oddly Complained, 1966). Tungal's early works are characterized by a bright sense of nature rich in nuances; Elo Lindsalu highlights the joyful eroticism of Tungal's poems, which she says stick out for their catchy optimism that contrasts with the predominately gloomy spirits of Estonian women's poetry. Lindsalu likewise states that, driven by general simplification of the poetic technique, "Leelo Tungal's fastidiousness of form incites genuine admiration. Two crowns of sonnets in classic Shakespearian sonnet form – *Avamine* (Opening) and *Muusika aed* (The Music Garden) are especially effective and rare (*Eesti Päevaleht*, 20.09.2002).

Angsts and hopes, as well as a sensitive and immediate sharing in social changes all arise in Tungal's poems published in the late 80s. In the early 90s, hesitations and sometimes dark moods are expressed in her poetry collections, which bear the characteristic titles *Ainus kangelastegu on naeratus* (The Only Heroic Act is a Smile, 1991) and *Ei nime, ei hinda*

(No Name, No Price, 1993). In the 2000s, Tungal has moved towards a more distanced perspective and an analytic tone; both of her selections published in the 2000s – *Käsi on valge ja süsi on must* (The Hand is White and Coal is Black, 2002) and *Täisminevik* (Full Past, 2007) also include new material.

The prose work *Seltsimees Laps ja suured inimesed. Veel üks jutustus õnnelikust lapsepõlvest* (Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups. One More Story of a Happy Childhood, 2008), which was nominated for a Cultural Endowment of Estonia Prize and brought the author a Harju County Pearl Award for Culture, speaks of the writer's early childhood during the first half of the 1950s, during which her schoolteacher mother was arrested and sent to work in a forced-labor camp in Siberia as a political prisoner for 25+5 years. Sorrowful humor against the backdrop of traumatic events, as well as a child's point of view that is presented amusingly and with great immersion are brought out in the book. The same characterizes the book's sequel, titled *Samet ja saepuru* (Velvet and Sawdust, 2009).

As a diverse author, Tungal has also written ABCs book and school textbooks; has created several opera libretti as well as lyrics for cantatas and songs; and has likewise translated poetry for adults and children alike (primarily from Russian and Finnish, but also Bulgarian and Polish).

Since 1994, Tungal works also as an Editor-in-Chief of children's magazine Hea Laps (Good Child). She was married to composer Raimo Kangro, has three daughters and two grandchildren. She lives in Ruila, Estonia.

Text by Maarja Kangro

Interview

Leelo Tungal through the Horrors towards the Book

Interviewd by Rebekka Lotman

Postimees 29.03. 2008

Leelo Tungal is like a cartoon character, a tiny sun whose purpose is to make children have fun. She writes them poetry, but not that kind which sole intention is to force them to learn something, but one that is fun to read. She is the editor in chief of the popular children's magazine Hea Laps. Now, Leelo has written down her own childhood in *Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups. One More Story of a Happy Childhood*

There isn't a child in Estonia that hasn't heard of "the crimes of communism" or "mass deportation". It doesn't matter how powerful words we use, children hardly understand their meaning. ***Comrade Kid*** doesn't use big words.

Leelo is a kid once again, a small person who lives in a time where men in black coats take her mother away and on top of that she is called a 'freak'. The story is written in such an enticing way that it can be seen as a crime thriller for children. Why was the schoolteacher taken away (relatives are suspicious that perhaps she wasn't so innocent after all) and will her mother ever return. These will becomes clear at the end.

What's your deal with kids? Besides the fact that we have all been one.

I suppose that inner child is holding on tight! All jokes aside, doesn't it seem strange that nowadays, when there are more child protection agencies in Estonia and the rest of the world than ever before, children feel lonelier than ever before?

A bigger and bigger emphasis is placed on papers and formalities, as if we have to prove to some god of numbers that everything is legal and proper… But children don't care about number gods or legal punctuality, they need attention and love. Even when they put on a façade of complete apathy, indifference…

You yourself grew up in a family of teachers.

Yes, I did grow up in a family of teachers and though I lament not having any brothers or sisters, I encountered all sorts of pedagogical problems. Both my mother and father were these salt of the earth type teachers who cared very much about their students, sometimes it seemed to me that they cared about their students more than of me, but it wasn't the case of course…

But often times a problematic student required more attention than a girl who grew up in a loving home, so I had to learn to share my parents with others. Evidently, there's a drop of teacher's blood in me and I find children to be fascinating. Childhood is an extremely important time in a person's life!

***Comrade Kid* does not pass judgements, there are no right or wrong sides. How were you able to clear your childhood memories of information and insight you learned later I life?**

I believe that there are judgments in between the lines. But a child is like a white sheet of paper: they are not angry at people who haven't done any harm to them or their loved ones. Bad and shocking experiences creates fears which make a child act at times in ways grownups deem strange.

The fear of black men, which is discussed in the book, lived in me for a long time; there might be a speck of that to this day: I am not startled by the sight of a military uniform, but my mind can't relax at the sight of their insignia…

The writing process was difficult, because as I was writing the story down, I could feel the child in me who had been greatly hurt, but was still tough like a dandelion and fought for her life to live, and at the same time I had to suppress the adult who wanted to protect the titular character and expose the wickedness.

What source materials did you use?

I had my mother's correspondence with home which she took with her when she returned from the prison camp. Those same faded blue enveopes with guidelines and addresses in Russian which we had in our home at the time started to take on a new meaning. In January of 1952 mother wrote, – in Russian of course, which she diligently started to learn in the camp – that she cannot receive letters written in Estonian, but we can write her in Russian every week.

However, she was only allowed to send her next letter in the fall… I can imagine how she must have felt as she looked at my drawings of children carrying red flags and Christmas trees decorated with communist five-pointed stars.

I am very glad that the book designer Urmas Viik was able to use the motifs in those drawings to create a half dreamlike, half historical mood. Even the color scheme reminds me of a time when everything had to be socialist and patriotic …

The book starts with a child's guilt (that her mother was taken away), which persists throughout the story. Please talk about children's feeling of guilt.

Yes, the mother's last words before stepping into the prison car are: "Be a good kid, then mommy will come back soon!" Of course mommy couldn't imagine that an honest and innocent person can be punished by a twenty five plus five year sentence to Siberia; she probably hoped, that it would be easier for my dad for those few days she is away if I tried to be good kid.

But I have too much time and too many thoughts to haze myself for being a 'bad kid' – I wasn't a prankster, but there were a few acts of a naughty child here and there.

After all, a child is a part of everything that happens in a family – nowadays there are probably children whose heart aches and who blame themselves for their parents' divorce.

They want nothing else than for things to go back to how they were, but it is too much!

Can they free themselves from this guilt in the long run or will it make the suffering child aggressive, uncaring, and self-centered or will it make them into a hopeless pessimist – this mostly depends on the adults that surround the child.

The subtitle *One More Story of a Happy Childhood* may sound ironic since it is about growing up without a mother whom the powers at be had taken away and so forth. What makes a childhood a happy one?

The irony in the subtitle is obvious, of course. A happy childhood was talked about a lot in the Soviet era, they even sold Happy Childhood cookies in the store and at school concerts the children sang to Uncle Lenin: "We have the most blessed life in the world – your wish is fulfilled in us!" A sixth of the world sang that song and in many places, they took this notion of a blessed life to heart, but the Estonian mocking-smirking mentality didn't allow for these slogans to be taken seriously.

When propaganda speech came on the radio (and later television), my father, who rarely used curse words, would turn it off and say: "All is shit that this cripple sings!"

At the same time, there is a grain of truth in the subtitle, because a child who lives in the poorest of conditions can still be happy when they feel like they are cared for and loved. Along with my father, I was surrounded by a lot of good people – adults as well as children and there wasn't time to be bored. Longing on the other hand…

Those mothers who took their young children with them to the prison camps felt great pains, because even though some prison camps had daycares, the prisoners were not often allowed to see their children and of course the children would forget their mother tongue and be brainwashed.

My mother recalled a small boy who had a beautiful name, Räni, and whose young mother fell into depression because visiting her child at daycare, he would call her fascist and spit on her. A mother who is political prisoner didn't belong to the picture of happy childhood that the teachers were painting for the child.

You create a space with your words where the reader can easily step in, where everything – the smells, the details, the colors – are in place. How do you remember all of it?

I think that memories of fears and love created some strange portal through which I traveled to my childhood as I wrote the book and I could remember huge chunks of certain days. But it was not easy, there was a subconscious alertness which made me anxious and fearful as if it could all repeat itself again.

When I was younger I was amazed how my grandma, who often could not remember where she put her glasses five minutes ago, could recall the tiniest details about her wedding dress, which she wore fifty years ago. Now my own reading glasses like to hide from me, but I can clearly remember when, as I child, I marveled at the glass mustard jars, I remember the sharp scent of greenhouse tomatoes and Postman Kaarel's voice from children's radioplay.

At the same time, I couldn't just rely on childhood memories. One amusing example is that I used to call my father's motorcycle a Harley Davidson, but fifty years later I found out from one of his former students, Johannes Pirita, that in fact my dad's moped was actually a Triumph and he ironically called that constantly in disrepair vehicle a Harley Davidson. So some jokes you might not get till a half a century later!

Has being a child changed? Did children in your time have remain unseen with their thoughts and feelings?

„Child speaks when hen goes to pee" was an often used phrase and interrupting adult conversations was seen as bad. But children not being able to speak up, was only the case in small number of homes. Incessant chatter at school or in town could of course cause trouble.

The saying goes that children are small – ears are wide and it's not like anyone wanted to raise Pavlik Morozovs. At the same time, children were active participants in all events: they ran around freely at weddings, confimation day celebrations and midsummer bonfires and no one worried that the fathers passing kvass around would turn the children into alcoholics. Plenty of pranks got pulled and I'm sure many boys got punished for their bad deeds, and someone being forced to stand in the corner was a common occurrence at school.

It may seem very old fashioned, but I don't think putting boundaries on a child means they are demeaned or abused, but it teaches them to take others into consideration and to feel confident within their boundaries. And breaking the rules is all the sweeter when you can clearly see them.

You have started writing this book three times, you started the latest version, which is the one that ended up being published, ten years ago.

Yes, in hindsight I'm glad that the version I wrote when I was attending university did not end up becoming anything: first of all, the "melting" in the sixties wasn't as promising as it seemed for the youth back then – the story would've been heavily censored, if published at all – and secondly, I didn't have enough life experience back then.

I think, when writing about children, it doesn't hurt to have seen the world through the eyes of a mother or father. The second version came about during our national awakening, it was full of pathos, which was all sincere, but hard to understand for anyone who wasn't part of the Baltic Chain.

Why did you have to get this story out there?

What made writing this book so important, was that I really wanted current and future children to know that Estonia was not just populated by bushwhackers and communists in the fifties, but also regular hard working men and women who, despite everything, tried their best to raise their children right.

The children of my generation where given only Estonian names: Sirje, Tiiu, Malle, Toomas, Tõnu, Jüri, Jaan, and for the most part folk clothing constituted children's formal attire, perhaps not stylistically pure, but at least relatives of Muhu and Mustjala dresses.

There isn't any hate for that era in your book.

My story might seem unusual, but I found out during my research, that from 1950-1952 over six hundred teachers were laid off in Estonia and over a hundred and fifty of them were sent to prison camps like my mother.

You can't carry hate in your heart, it will eat a person up from the inside and break

them, though much can be learned from memories. There are plenty of human stories in the great warring times which children will listen to, their head tilted like a beach dog and which they will remember in their own way...

How many more books will be released and when?

At first, I thought that everything that needed to be said would fit in a single book. Now it seems I will be lucky if three books will be enough. The second book, *Comrade Kid and Dad* is halfway done right now. Writing requires time and quiet, which is hard to find in the modern, brash lifestyle.

Translated by Chris Reintal

Books by Leelo Tungal submitted to the Jury:

1. Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups.
   One More Story of a Happy Childhood
   (Seltsimees laps ja suured inimesed)

2. Midsummer. Poetry for Children from 1972-2012
   (Südasuvi: luulet lastele 1972-2012)

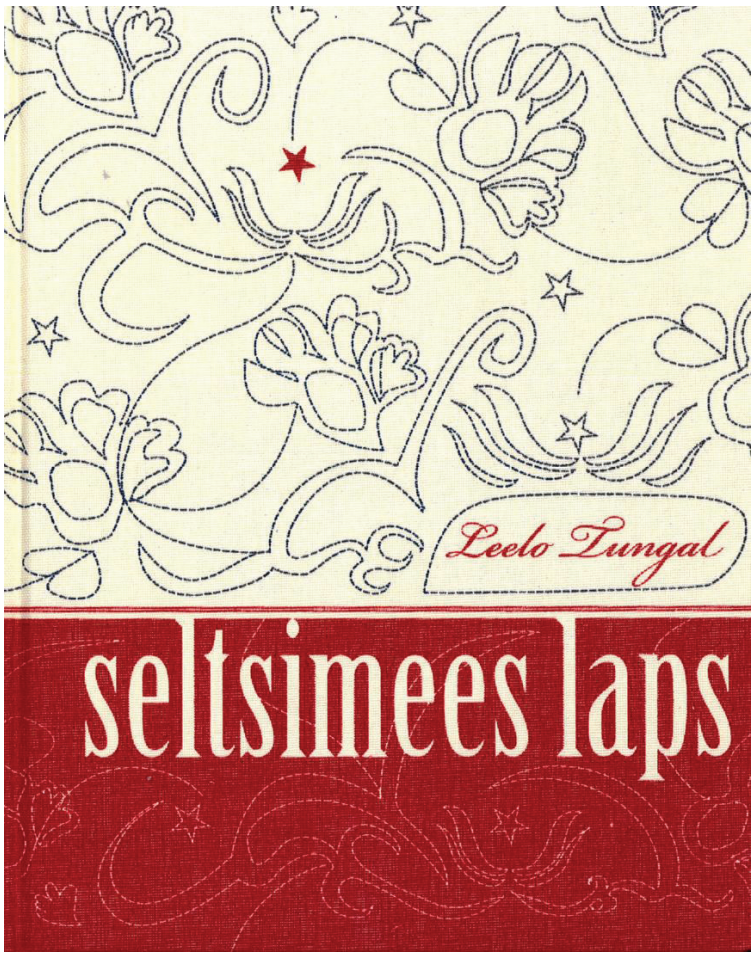
3. Kristiina, the Middle One
   (Kristiina, see keskmine)

4. Children of Maimetsa
   (Maimetsa laste lood)

5. Barbara and Dogs
   (Barbara ja koerad)

Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups.

One More Story of a Happy Childhood



Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups. One More Story of a Happy Childhood

Designed and illustrated by Urmas Viik

Tallinn, Tänapäev, 2008, 2016. 215 pp

ISBN 978-9985-62-624-5

This is an autobiographical novel, a story of a child - four-year-old Leelo - living in Soviet Estonia during the Stalin era. The story begins in 1951, when Leelo's mother, who works as a schoolmistress, is arrested and sent to work in a forced-labor camp in Siberia as a political prisoner for 25+5 years. When her mother is taken away, the child feels guilty, thinking that she has not been a good enough child. Leelo longs for her mother, but needs to learn to live without her. Sorrowful humor against the backdrop of traumatic events, as well as a child's point of view that is presented amusingly and with great immersion are brought out in the book. The same characterizes the book's sequel, titled Samet ja saepuru ehk seltsimees laps ja kirjatähed (Velvet and Sawdust or Comrade Child and Letters).

2010 IBBY Honor List

2008 Harju County Pearl Award for Culture

It Would Be Nice to Be a Good Kid

Excerpt

Some kids are born good and exemplary. A good and exemplary kid's knee-high stockings are never wrinkled at her ankle, hairbands don't unlace themselves, there are no dark lines between the toes, and their sandals won't end up on the wrong feet. An exemplary kid is not afraid of the dark, thunder, chicken hawks, bulls, or men in uniforms. An exemplar kid does not laugh when her mouth is full of soup, doesn't play with her porridge, or use the potty at the last second. Nothing ever happens to her that would cause shame or sadness.

It would be nice to be an exemplary kid.

If I were a good and exemplary kid, mommy wouldn't have left me, that's for sure. Sure, she had forgiven me plenty of times, but finally she had enough. All sorts of things always happen to me that good and proper kids have no clue about.

When I help mommy dry the dishes, the prettiest and fanciest cup or plate will inevitably slip through my fingers and fall to the ground right after it had been properly cleaned, rinsed, and dried. When there is just one tiny puddle on a road, then I'll end up stepping into it; when there are two armed men in long overcoats at the doorway, I'll stumble on one of their big boots; and when there is a giant pile of papers and books in the middle of the room, I'll fall right into it. And mommy starts to tear up as she watches me.

"Lock that little brat up somewhere!" shouted the man in the black leather jacket and pointed his thick finger at me.

Mommy picked me up and held me tight. Her eyes glistened with tears and I started crying. Actually, I did hurt my stomach on a sharp edge of a book when I fell, but that little pain wasn't half as bad as the ugly man's ugly voice. Brat is an ugly word and he obviously meant me – horrible! Grownups are allowed to do anything: complete strangers are pulling out our desk drawers and throwing them on the floor, but mommy doesn't say one bad word, just sighs. If, at the end of the day, I leave my toys on the ground, if I go through mommy and daddy's drawers, or if I draw a couple pictures in some boring books, then there is no end to the trouble that I'm in!

The man in the black coat stood like a righteous man, one hand in his pocket and the other pointing at me: "Take that freak out of here!"

"Be a good kid and go in the other room!" said mommy, giving an angry look to the man. "Everything will be fine! Sometimes there are misunderstandings…"

She took me into the bedroom and turned on the ceiling lamp. Mommy knew that I was afraid of the dark. It was still daytime, but it already felt really dark. Through the lace curtains peeked in the bare white willow which sometimes made the mean joke of putting his wrinkly face right against the glass.

"Look through some books or put your blocks together!" said mommy and shut the door behind her.

"Sign it!" I heard a hoarse voice on the other side of the door. "And put the date too: April twelfth nineteen fifty-one!"

It was weird – how could mommy listen to that horrible man and leave me to be sad by myself in the bedroom? It seemed like things were serious: no matter what it takes, I will become a good kid.

Who even wants to be a bad kid? Not me, that's for sure, I always try to do good things and I only have good intentions, but unfortunately half of what I do goes wrong.

One of my morning's bad deeds was visible to all: it was the door between the living room and the kitchen which I had filled up with princess drawings using a dry pen. I wanted to make it pretty, but the door was bumpier than it had seemed and my princesses ended up looking like cave monsters, and when I tried to wash them off with the kitchen

rag, it only got worse… The door looked like it had been used as target practice for inkwells and pink pudding. So of course mommy got mad at me and scolded me for a long time. Though her calling my drawings pigs in a pen didn't seem very nice of her – would the pigs even know how to draw? Mommy got even madder when she saw that Sirka and Tuiam had been wrestling in the bedroom and knocked over a chair and badly wrinkled up mommy and daddy's bedspread. I had completely forgotten that they aren't allowed in the same room together when they're in heat. And who could've guessed that Tuiam could jump onto the bed with his crooked legs!

"Let's hope that the size difference between a dachshund and a hound dog counts for something," sighed mom under her breath, though it as clear from her face that we would talk more about the door and dog wedding later.

But go figure! The armed men visiting us made mommy forget all about the purple spotted door as well as the dog wedding.

A stack of my bedtime story books as well as my box of blocks were on the night stand. It was fun playing with the blocks up until I figured out how to put them together. Of course, at first a dog's head would end up on a chicken's body or a horse's fluffy tail on a cow's butt. When I finally managed to put the big-headed dog together all by myself for the first time, it was a victorious feeling: I felt like a good and exemplary kid! I quickly realized that if I turn of the blocks row by row, I can make a new picture twice as fast, which was another great discovery. But how many times would I feel like putting the same pictures together anyway… I could of course get praise from visiting aunts for putting the pictures together quickly, but my gut told me that the man in the black creaky coat couldn't care less about a picture of a cow or rooster. I had to show him some other way that I shouldn't be called 'little brat', but rather 'our songbird', 'little philosopher', 'bundle of joy' or 'one exceptionally smart child'. Well, of course often times 'bad kid', but that's with a different tone than 'little brat'. I sat on mommy and daddy's bed, my feet dangling, and thought about what I should do next.

There was the noise of voices from the other room: the strange man talked loudly and with an angry tone and mommy answered calmly, but with a higher pitched voice than usual. Mommy is a soprano of course and can sing in such a high voice that I get

goosebumps! I just can't manage to make that kind of high-pitched sound.

Yes, I could use singing to show the 'bratty' man that there lives a little songbird in this house, not some freak! Singing was something that always made grownups feel better and I knew a lot of songs – I didn't know the whole things, but I did remember the beginnings of mommy's songs.

"*Where is my garden in blooms,*

where is my lovely apple tree?

My friend, I can feel.

You are waiting for me!" I sang first. It was a beautiful and wistful song, and made me sad. Daddy's songs are much more cheerful. For example this:

"*I was drinking champagne,*

on my lap, a pretty maid!"

Or the other one: "*There was samovar humming,*

remember, my darling?

Nata-acha, Nata-acha, you are so far away!"

I liked the *Nata-aa-aacha*-part the most and it felt good to sing it from the top of my lungs.

Suddenly the door slammed open, the doorknob banged against the wall, and the man in the black coat stormed in. He grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me so hard that water came out of my eyes and nose.

"You damned Contra brat! Shut your mouth or we'll take you with us too! Damned Kulak sprout!" yelled the man and I could see that all his teeth were rotten. The black coat creaked and stank. The man was as ugly as Death on the cover of the *Nightingale* book, and the worst part was that when he let go of me, he shouted something into the other room IN RUSSIAN! That was it! That only meant something bad, the worst! I did not understand anything the man said, but I knew what Russian sounded like: that's what the men in black who took grandma Mari away spoke… It happened a long time ago and I don't really remember grandma or the men's faces, but I do remember what they sounded

like. Those men in black often came to scare me in my dreams – they made me so scared, that the only cure was to sleep in between mommy and daddy. Grownups called them 'deporters', but for me they were men in black, and now they had shown up again! From a distance they looked like normal, men with guns, like daddy's hunting buddies, but after a while it became clear that they were men in black.

I didn't scream on purpose, I promise! I wanted to escape from the bed, from the room, from the world in which at any moment men in black can show up both in my dreams and in real life, from this small, thoroughly shaken body… Why can't people just turn into a voice and fly away as a voice?

I woke up in my own bed with a strange, medicine taste in my mouth. At the foot of the bed, on the badger skin rug, was a large suitcase that mommy had just finished packing. The bad dream was gone… but at the same time it wasn't, because I could hear the strange language being spoken in the other room. But mommy was near me now and daddy had even come home in the meantime, so there was nothing to fear.

Then they dressed me in dry stockings and pants, because I had peed my pants at some point, which is embarrassing, but there is nothing to do: what's done is done. Daddy brought me my coat and hat from the hallway, but mommy wanted to dress me herself. "It might be the last time," she said and she even brought me my muff from the closet. Mommy and I had the same exact one with frizzy grey bear skin. My muff was much smaller and there wasn't a wallet in its pocket.

"Completely ridiculous!" raged daddy. "There is no talking to this investigator like a normal person! You'll see, there has been a stupid mix up! You'll be back home tomorrow!"

Mommy only answered him once we had reached the big road where there was a strange car waiting, which looked like a truck, but instead of there being a bed in the back, there was something like a dark green house.

"Yes, of course it is absurd!" said mommy as she eyed the car and shook her head. "A car with a cell, bars on the windows! Who have they mixed me up with? If I am not back by tomorrow, call the education department and tell them what happened."

The men in black walked behind us, guns over their shoulders, and did not say a word.

Even the man in the leather coat, he just mumbled quietly under his breath: "Dammit!" There were so many people seeing mommy off that hugging and shaking hands took a long time. The lady next door, Armiida, had tears streaming down her freckled cheeks and mommy told her, in her usual cheerful voice: "No point in crying, this isn't a funeral! Why, already tomorrow we might come to the barn with our jug asking for milk!" Armiida started sobbing in response and didn't stop until uncle Artur put his arm around her shoulder and sternly told her: "Stop howling, woman!"

Mommy hugged me and daddy the longest.

"Be a good kid!" she shouted to me when she had climbed up the iron ladder to the cell door. "Be a good kid and then mommy will come back real soon! Maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day… What's most important is that you be a good kid and listen to daddy, right!"

We stood there for a long time watching the car drive off. The sun set behind the big trees next to the schoolhouse and there was the nice smell of gasoline and maple syrup in the air.

"Mommy left the syrup boiling on the stove," I suddenly remembered. Daddy didn't respond, just turned his head.

It was obvious: who wants to talk to the worst kid in the world! The kind of kid who scribbles on doors, lets the dogs inside, screams, and on top of that pees her pants! I'm lucky that daddy didn't go with the men in black and leave me completely alone!

There is one thing though: how did the black men know that the worst kid in the world was mommy's? And how can I show them when I finally – tomorrow for example – become a good and exemplary kid? The moms of good and exemplary girls don't ever leave them, especially with the men in black…

Let's Play Housewife

Of course grownups are smart and skillful, that is obvious. They know how to read books, play instruments, mow hay, dig the ground, and make a fire in the stove. They can quickly tie shoes and headbands and they're fast at buttoning and unbuttoning. Sometimes

their speech is so complicated that I can't understand what they're talking about even though they are clearly speaking in Estonian. You can even memorize some of the words, like 'detain', 'enkavedee'*, and 'amnesty', which sound fancy, but it remains unclear what they mean. I sometimes like to say the strange words; sometimes I whisper them to myself, sometimes I say them out loud. "Enkavedee ja enkavedee, juhhaidii, juhhaidaa" can be easily sung to the *V*ändra metsas** melody. When I sung my discovery to mommy and daddy, they both laughed until they cried. It was a fun laugh, not an insulting one like that one time when I fell into the tub in the kitchen when walking backwards. Yes, yes, sometimes grownups can laugh in a very mean way – even when they are your mom or dad and call you their bundle of joy! You try being a bundle of joy when you are laying down in soapy water in between giant bundles of wet tablecloths! At first I laughed along too — I don't really know way, maybe out of politeness – but then my eyes started to sting from the soap and I started crying…

Prr, that splashing around was an ugly memory! I remembered it, because when we returned from accompanying mommy, the kitchen floor was as wet as it was that winter when daddy saved me from the wash tub, but much dirtier. In between the large muddy boot prints were a bunch of dog paw prints… Sirka and Tuiam had come back inside from their wedding trip and were now wrestling in the living room.

"Damn, this is the last thing we needed!" shouted daddy as he pulled Tuiam from Sirka and brought him into the cold room.

"Alright, sweetie," he said sternly as he put his hand on my shoulder. "We have to play housewife until mommy comes back. Let's try and get everything fixed up by tomorrow, OK!"

The first thing we did was wash the kitchen floor, then we put the books back on the shelves and the papers in the desk drawers in the living room. The cold room's dresser needed some work too – the man in the black coat had pulled out all the bedsheets and tablecloths -, but daddy thought that there was no rush with that and he just put the pile of clothes on the table, so that Tuiam wouldn't be able to tear at them.

The cold room was a room where mommy kept the dishes and clothes which we didn't need that often. There isn't a stove in that room, so we can't live there during the winter.

Actually, it is cold in every room and I have to wear wool socks except in the summer. A fire burns all day in the stove, I could take my socks off there, but who would feel like fussing with them all the time! Long striped carpets run along the kitchen and living room, in the bedroom we have badger skin rugs in front of the beds, trophies from daddy's and Tuiam's hunting trips. It's especially cold by the windows, I pretend that's where North Pole is. In the fall we put up the double hung windows, mommy stuffs all the cracks with cotton, and also tapes paper over them, but when I put my hand on the paper, I could feel how the cold air blows in.

The bathroom is even colder, but I don't go there: I have my own little potty under the bed. Mommy puts on a hat and a scarf when going to the bathroom, but daddy shouts when coming from there: "Here comes the frost resistant son of the greatest Russian plantbreeder Mitchurin!" or "Here comes courageos Amerind Eagle Chillbutt!"

Mommy usually responds by saying that she can't wait until everything will be back to normal and we move back into our apartment.

Our apartment is in the schoolhouse; it is warm and white! The stoves are white and shiny, the walls are bright, and the windows are big and the bathroom is so good, that even kids can use it. But aunt Ljudmila lives in our apartment now. Aunt Ljudmila took mommy's place as the school principal because she is better at leading the school to a bright Stalinistik future. That is because aunt Ljudmila came from Siberia, the place where they took grandma Mari. When listening to the grownups talk, I thought that onece grandma Mari comes back from Siberia, maybe she'll become the new principal. Mommy smiled sadly and said that grandma Mari is definitely coming back, that is for sure, but people her age don't become school principals – she was already eighty-four when she was deported and her hearing was already quite bad and who knows if she can even hear or see now.… "Grandma was already quite tough to survive a long train ride in the livestock wagon and to work in the fields in the kolkhoz in Šadrino like she said in her letter!"

I followed daddy around as we cleaned, but my thoughts still drifted to mommy.

"Daddy, are those black men who mommy left with the same as the ones who took grandma Mari away?"

"No, why do you think that?" said daddy, becoming upset. "They were completely different! And anyway, mommy is going to come back soon, don't worry, alright! Try to understand: grandma Mari was taken to Siberia because she owned a large farm. It wasn't just her that was deported, a lot of Estonians who had farms or factories or fancy houses were taken to the cold country. That is frowned upon right now, but mommy has taught children all her life and she doesn't have property or any wealth at all. When the important men in charge see her, they'll immediately say "Sorry, sorry, this was a huge mistake! We'll bring you home right away!" Mommy will come home and she'll get sad when she sees that everything is a mess!"

"Like a mess," Daddy repeated the saying. That sounds good!

"I'm hungry!"

Daddy also remembered that he hadn't eaten anything since this morning. He brought the milk jug from the cold room and cut several slices of bread and spread syrup from the saucepan on them.

"I haven't a clue what mommy had in mind with this maple syrup, she'll deal with it tomorrow herself!" he said as if apologizing. "But we can have some taste. We don't have anything else…"

Daddy and I both love sweets, but it was a tough time for sugar, so that is why mommy was boiling maple syrup. It takes a lot of work to get maple sap: first daddy and I drilled holes into several big maple trees and daddy whittled spouts out of sticks which we hammered into the holes. Daddy cut deep grooves into the spouts and the maple sap oozed along those grooves into the sprat tins we hung to the wooden spouts. Every evening, when daddy came home from school, we checked all the trees and emptied the tins into a big bucket. Maple sap has a pleasant taste – a little bit like a snow, but sweeter. And when mommy boils it for several hours on the stove, then the whole kitchen has a really good smell, as if a snowdrift had melted there and buttercups had started to grow. That's because all the water evaporates, and a sugary syrup is left in the saucepan. There is so little left in the saucepan that it is hard to believe that at the beginning it was filled to the brim with sap! That little syrup is sweet and elastic like honey, but somewhat lighter.

"Do you want a one-handed slice or a two-handed one?" asked daddy with a clever expression. "Do you know that old story where the master asks his servant which one he wants: one- or two-handed slice? The servant immediately answered greedily that he wants the two-handed slice of course – that will definitely be many times bigger! But go figure: the master cut him an oh-so thin slice of bread that it was almost see-through. "There – this is a slice of bread you have to hold with two hands, otherwise it'll break in half!" said the master and cut himself an oh-so thick slice of bread. "This is a one-handed slice: it won't fall apart even if you hold it with one hand!"

I felt a little bad for the servant, but I laughed a few ha-ha's along with daddy; all the slices he cut were fat, one-handed slices and the syrup left a sweet taste in my mouth.

It was much easier to be a good kid with daddy than it was with mommy: she would have scolded me for those few drops of syrup I spilled on the tablecloth, but daddy didn't even notice the drop of syrup or the milk droplets that spilled on my sweater, instead he said: "My grandma told me that story. She had all sorts of stories!"

"Tell me another of your grandma's stories!" I begged, but instead daddy looked at the clock and was startled: "Oh, you should've been in bed a while ago! What would mommy say when she finds out I was telling you old stories all night!"

That's so typical of grownups: just when things start to get interesting, they decide to send you to bed! In that way, daddy was just as stubborn as mommy, he mumbled in response to my begging: "Kids and wives can cry all they want – all my money goes to booze!"

And when I was startled, "are you going to start drinking after I go to sleep?" daddy only laughed: "That was something my grandma said! She was the daughter of the owner of Rannamõisa tavern, it is an expression she heard all the time as a kid!"

I tried to be clever and make daddy think about his grandma, so that I could delay going to bed, but he remained determined: "Wash your hands and face, put on your night shirt! Don't you remember that mommy told you to be a good kid?"

Well, what else is there to do …

As he helped me put on my night shirt, daddy said: "If you are a good kid, then tomorrow we will go to Jõgisoo to grandpa's birthday!"

"But…"

"No butts!" daddy lifted me into bed. "Get under your covers right away, head on the pillow, and fall asleep!"

"But is a good kid supposed to go to sleep with boots?" I asked really fast, so that daddy couldn't interrupt.

"Oh boy!" boggled daddy when he looked at my feet. "You have boots on! Oh boy!"

He took my shoes off and brought them to the stove: "They'll be nice and warm in the morning!"

And as he gave me my good-night kiss, daddy said, a little bit embarrassed, "Listen, be a good kid and don't tell mommy about the shoes."

I nodded generously. It was definitely much better to be a good kid with daddy than with mommy!

Translated by Chris Reintal

*NKVD – The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, organization known for its political repression during the era of Joseph Stalin. NKVD was heading by the Soviet secret police officials, it's the predecessor of the KGB.

** Vändra metsas – famous Estonian song

Beach Dog

Review

Doris Kareva

Sirp 19.09.2008

Comrade kid is a very different from the kid we met in startling *Seitsmes rahukevad,* although they both share the same sensitivity to words.

I can not recall a more memorable time than now in Estonian literature, both in the theater and the reading rooms. I would like to start with a recollection of my own. When I was four, I got permission to skip my afternoon nap on the condition that I read *Väike Illimar* for my great-grandmother for an hour instead. I would have preferred something more exciting like Bornhöe's *Würst Gabriel ehk Pirita kloostri wiimased päevad*, Luts' *Kevad*, or Anna Haava's retellings in *Greeka muinaskangelasi*, but if it has to be Illimar, then so be it.

I didn't feel much of a connection at the time to jolly, preachy children's books, but *Väike Illimar* seemed especially unrealistically nostalgic as if Tuglas had never been a child at all. My great-grandparents, however, seemed to enjoy the book. That only deepened my belief that, for some reason, adults don't write anything legitimate on purpose or, alternatively, they really had forgotten what it was like to be a four-year-old. Of course this was due to me not being well-read, but it might also have had to do with the fact that *Seltsimees Laps* (Comrade Kid) hadn't been published yet.

The book covers a period of a little girl's life. It starts with her mother being taken away and ends with a court ruling which was the traditional 25+5. Within this time, which feels like a hundred years to a child, or at least seven, a lot happens.

I haven't really lived through those years, yet each page pulsates with recognition. And it does so on several levels at the same time. First and foremost, I recognize the child. My inner-child recognizes its own kind. And the world where big and small are the same size, near and far at the same distance, but right and wrong clearly separate. After a little girl and her father get a seat on the bus at the last second thanks to the father's diplomatic flattery and a hint that they were going to grandma's birthday, the girl pulls on her father's sleeve and asks if they weren't actually going to grandpa's birthday. *"Mothers are always more important and are taken into consideration more,"* her father whispers. The girl will probably remember this and accept her father's explanation, after all, they did get on the bus. But when her aunt Anna ends up using a stranger's toilet due to her urgent needs, but claims that the child really needed to pee, the girl angrily shouts, *"Why are you lying about me?"* Nevertheless, the girl is ready to adapt to situations, like bravely standing twice in the long sugar line. *"I was proud that I had taken (won?) two bags of sugar from life – one for aunt Maali and the other for aunt Tiiu –, but I still did feel sorry for the woman in the striped beret (who went to get a baby carriage and missed out on the sugar)."*

At this point I would like to quote Joel Sang: *"don't think / that you can freely milk a child / and make fools out of them / soon they'll be mature."*

A child's self-centeredness is obvious, but so is their natural nobility, drive to be good, to gain recognition for the right reasons, to be just, and helpful. So what if sometimes things work out differently. When the Ingrian girl Maiu has difficulty learning the Estonian alphabet, some silly *'Aabehdeh, effgeh … and* üü *at the end'*, preschooler Leelo immediately offers up a much more melodic and pneumatic *"Habede, mägede, jõgede, vägede hü-üd!"* (*'It would have been correct to use 'habemete' instead of 'habede', but I think you are allowed to change words in songs to make it sound better'* Where do those opinions, those beliefs come from? Where do children even come from?)

Comrade kid is a very different from the kid we met in startling *Seitsmes rahukevad,* although they both share the same sensitivity to words. These two points of view complement each other as insights into a complicated time when there was a turbulent mixing of different value systems. Afterwards, when everything has settled down, even my memories become insightful, which makes the immediate impression even more impactful.

One of the most memorable parts of *Seltsimees laps* is when the Man in Black comes into the house knowing that there was just an almost five year old girl, and proceeds to search for evidence in the photo albums. The brave and also terrified child snatches the small pink marble album from him and escapes with it. The Man in Black in pursuit of course. This showcases both the frightfulness of the era as well as the realistic portrayal of the child's world and her desperate heroism. The Man in Black couldn't be allowed to see those pictures of when she was an infant where even her bellybutton is visible. (Interesting, if nowadays children with rate.ee still have that same fear?) In any case the chapter ends with the child safely in her father's lap: *'I knew that laugh and I could imitate it. That's how the old Native American laughed on a moonlit night near the lion's den when he noticed the white man's tracks: hh-hh-hh….'.*

The episode where the students, due to a Tarzan cry, have to come to school with their 'birthers', as the Russian headmistress puts it, is both a great deal of fun and a telling tale. The same chapter also features a rare passage about the mystical moment when the thus far completely separate letters melt together and, suddenly, reading makes sense. The desire to learn is one of 'the little songbird's' most striking qualities: a sharp tendency to be attentive, remember, a desire to learn more, and willingness to teach others. When father tells her that the conductor on the bus is the same as a captain on a ship, the little girl immediately commits the new word to memory. *'Mommy called those sorts of people ticket-ladies, but that word doesn't sound half as fancy as conductor'*. Uncle Kopli, who attentively listened to Voice of America and to whom the little girl promised she wouldn't tell anyone about the defense force uniform under his bedsheets, sums it up like this: '*This child is like a beach dog – she just stares at you wide-eyed and remembers everything'.*

Seltsimees laps is a unique book that is quite difficult to categorize, it doesn't really conform to genres. Above all else, it is a memoir written with a pleasant melancholy humor in the best children's literature lens, but with a very dark and painful background. *'Sleep was creeping up on me, again with these old people's tales: deportation, prison camps, Russians… I let out a wide yawn and didn't cover my mouth on purpose; maybe the grownups will get it, that it is time to pick a more fun topic. Yeah right!'* This contradiction, even present in the title, is emphasized by Urmas Viik's congenial design which both resonates and reminisces.

I don't know how many preschool-aged children would pick out this book among the more colorful ones, perhaps it speaks more to adults. But still, I lament that there once was a little girl who searched from book to book for genuine emotions, nobility, heroism, and above all else genuine life was unable to read this book. In any case, it is important to recall again and again, and during the most difficult moments, repeat the dad's words like a mantra: *'Staighten your back and put on a kind-and-cheerful face'*.

Because that is what is needed for Estonia and the world to survive and keep on with dignity.

Translated by Chris Reintal

Short Overviews of Books by Estonian Authors

Review

by Janika Kronberg

Estonian Literary Magazine, no 30, 2010

http://elm.estinst.ee/issue/30/short-overviews-books-estonian-authors/

Leelo Tungal (1947) has been 'a writer since her school days' - she debuted in newspapers in 1958, published her first collection of poems in 1966 and is mostly known as a poet and an author of children's books, but also as a playwright. She has written prose for small children and humorous stories about schoolgirls of the 1980s for teenagers. Today, it seems that memoirs have capped Tungal's long literary career, as two already published volumes enjoy continuing popularity (and the third volume will be published soon). Even now, Tungal has remained true to her main target group. The main hero of her books is a child of four or five years, suggesting that (at least some of) her readers might be from the same age group. But the most appreciative readers are still the adults who are searching for their own lost past.

Comrade Kid ... is, actually, not a true memoir, although it presents real events from the author's life. The book is written as if seen through the eyes of a first-person child narrator, but this is still a clearly composed and outlined story (as indicated in the title). Estonian readers do not doubt the authenticity of these memories, because they know that the described events truly took place when the author was a child. The child from the books – Leelo – lives in the country near Tallinn (just as the author did). Her mother

is the headmistress of a seven-year middle school. The story begins in 1951, when the mother is jailed as a bourgeois nationalist and she is given the traditional sentence of 25+5 years (25 years of labour camp and five years of exile in Siberia). Two years earlier, Leelo's grandmother Mari – an 84-year-old mistress of a farm and a mother of 14 children, who had been declared an enemy of the Soviet state as an owner of a large farm – had already been deported to Siberia. When her mother is taken away as well, the four-year-old child feels guilty, thinking that she has not been a good enough child.

Tungal's mother has written her own memoirs and recalled the charges she had been sentenced for: 'At the interrogations: Why had I not been fired during the German occupation? Why had I taught the Estonian national anthem at school (I was a music teacher)? Why had I, when starting to work as a teacher in 1930, signed a paper promising to be honest and true to the Estonian state? Why had my brother been an officer in the Estonian army? Why had my parents had a large farm? And so on and so on. I had been saddled with guilt since my very birth' (Estonian Life Stories, Vol. 1, 2000).

The title of Tungal's book refers to two paradoxes of the time, connected with the word 'comrade' and, even more, with the subtitle One More Story of a Happy Childhood. The latter is heavily ironic, which might not be so easily understood by people who followed the life in the annexed Estonia of the Stalin era from afar. People have also forgotten that Soviet children were obliged to be happy, since theirs was the happiest childhood in the world. To oppose this would have been treasonous towards the Soviet state.

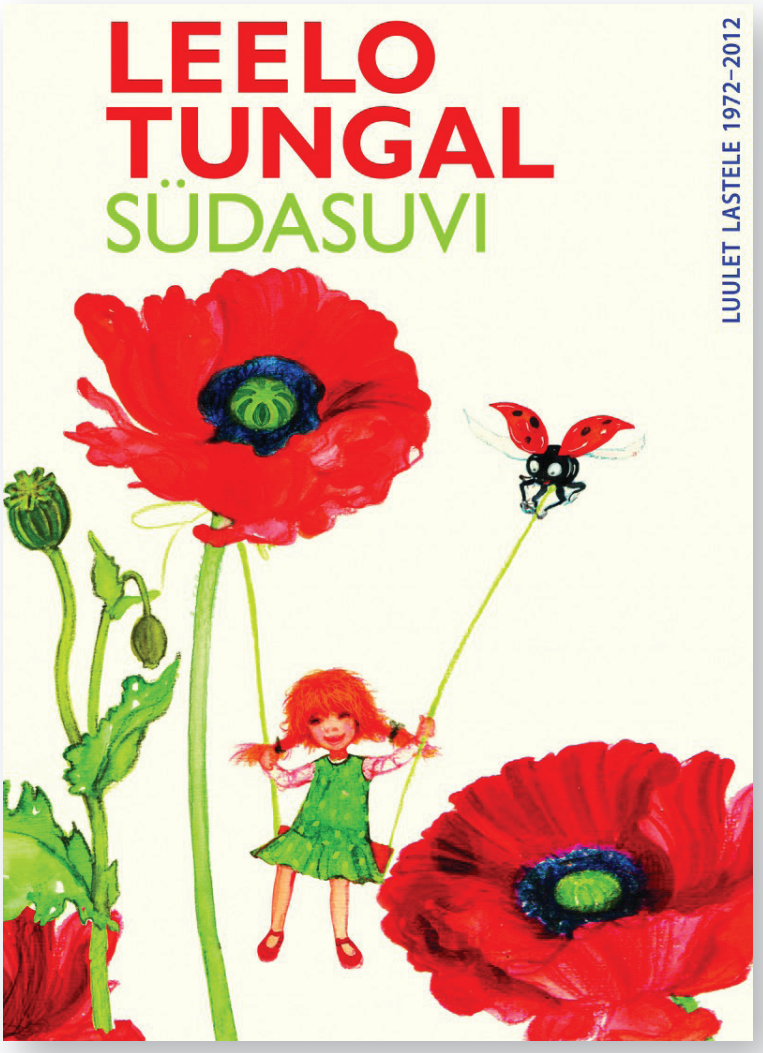
The description of both tragic and comic events in the life of a child who has been left motherless continues in the second book. Little Leelo goes to Tallinn and visits a circus with her aunt (referred to in the title of the book). The first book carries the theme of living without a mother, while the second one describes hope and expectation and ends with the arrival of the first letter from the mother. A number of other events take place in between. Leelo's father is offered the same position of school headmaster that her mother had had. At first, it seems to be a good offer, but then it is explained to him that, in order to get the position, he must divorce his jailed wife, give the child of the public enemy, meaning Leelo, to an orphanage, and join the Communist Party. The adults of the family recall the words of

the grandfather: 'There have never been robbers, murderers or communists in our family.' The child has altogether different concerns: living in the orphanage, will she have to eat the chicken skin in the chicken soup? The experience of the child brings another dimension into the narrative – depressing events, narrated through the 'needle's eye' of a child's viewpoint, acquire new meanings, and the limitation of the child's understanding creates a comic effect. For example, Aunt Anne declares that poplars are the Russians' favourite trees and even the name of the place where they grow comes from the Russians – Pioneers' Park. But the child thinks that Pioneers' Park is something thrilling because, any minute, a group of pioneers with a red flag could come marching out from behind the bushes to a fanfare. Of course, there are matters that are not talked about and the children are not burdened with secrets. 'There was no sense in asking the adults about the forest brothers; they only answered "Let's drop the subject" or "You misheard, we were talking about forest fairies..."'

These stories of the time remembered by a child remind us of a book by another modern Estonian writer, Viivi Luik, The Seventh Spring of Peace, translated into several languages, which also depicts Stalin's regime as seen by a child. Tungal's half-autobiographical trilogy gives a vivid portrayal of this era. The story stretches over quite a large number of pages, and this is both one of the strengths and one of the weaknesses of this mosaic.

Midsummer.

Poetry for Children from 1972-2012



Midsummer. Poetry for Children from 1972-2012

Illustrated by Kirke Kangro

Tammerraamat 2012, 528 p

ISBN 978-9949-482-53-5

Warm and joyful collection of poetry.

Midsummer!

Midsummer, oh, midsummer,
shield your eyes as it blossoms so bright!
Dreams taste of strawberry and honey
as they last till the morning light.

The sun, pouring molten gold,
douses you as you awake…
Oh, if only midsummer
wouldn't pass at this rate!

The swallow that hatched in May
already swoops and soars this day.
The gray-haired dandelion yearns
for its golden youth in turn…

The One-Day Butterfly

Did you know there is a butterfly
that lives for one day, then dies?
Yet, there is no other way
and this brings it no pain or strife,
for just think: that bug's birthday
lasts its entire life!

A Good Day

On a good day, your teeth don't ache,
and no angry dogs are lying in wait.
Mom and dad aren't grumpy,
and your apples aren't even lumpy.
On a good day, you help out your mom
and she finds the time to sing you a song.
On a good day, you get lots of treats,
and are carried to bed to have dreams oh-so sweet…
On a good day, there's no: "Keep good hygiene!"
and your parents won't ask if your ears are both clean,
even though they're probably as brown as a bear…
Why, oh why are those days so rare?

Morning

A ray of sunlight creeps
like a mouse across the sheets,
and then the blanket and toes
until it rests on a sleepy nose.
Morning has come
with new games and fun.
Though the world's not quite
the same as it was last night:
buttons button up
more easily, and snap-p-p,
your stockings come up
up just like that-t-t,
your feet know the way
to their slippers, left and right,
while your teeth in the mirror
are quite a fine sight.
Even sticks fall in line
to be letters much faster…
And what's more, half the world
seems much clearer than ever!

Translated by Adam Cullen

Midsummer Is Here

Review

Krista Kumberg

Postimees 12.07.201216

Yes, Midsummer is here. It is dedicated to her daughters and granddaughter, thanks to whom her works of poetry came to being, said the author at the book's presentation. The title and cover art promise warm and sunny content with images arising of greenery, beautiful blossoms, sweet fruits, forests and meadows, and a cultivated garden. It brings to mind a childhood-like carefree and happy summertime. The feeling passes but isn't forgotten.

This book is a brick in the foundation of Estonian children's poetry both in its appearance as well as content. Between the covers you'll find four decades worth of Leelo Tungal's poetry. You'll encounter both old, familiar rhymes as well as fresh new ones. None of them have a 'date of birth'. The reader won't find out which ones are a beginner's first few attempts and, alternatively, which ones were typed up on a computer keyboard. It might frustrate the more curious (so do some investigation), but it won't bother children. It isn't hard to guess that a poem about a child who can't survive without their cell phone or one about a cat hunting a computer mouse are more recent. Other telltale signs of a poem's age stick out, but there is no difference in quality.

Taking the Child's Side

The book is well put together, cohesive, and well-flowing. The 431 poems form eleven themes. They are for the most part about how a child grows and cycle of seasons. The

verses accompany the child from the sandbox to school, they are suitable for celebrations, or just for fun and for the most part they all have subtext and inventive, witty rhymes which free them from the ordinary.

Tungal's work is familiar to us all. We don't always even notice how often a poem or song lyric is written by her. I personally had an eureka moment with 'Lullaby', which can be heard every night at a quarter to nine on Vikerraadio radio station.

Reading and mulling over the fruits of forty years of work by this generous creator warmed my heart. Tungal always takes the child's side. Even when she wants to teach them, scold them about a character flaw or deplorable behavior, she is still on their side. At the same time there is no sign of flattery that everything a child does and thinks is right and exemplary and there is no need to listen to old dopes. Tungla's poetry has a good balance between the voice of a former child and one of a current adult who doesn't vindicate but understands.

With a jocular josh the poet directs the reader to the idea she is trying to express. She understands the character and desires of children – how they want to be good, but sometimes things turn out the wrong way and cause trouble. Or how a child has a need to make themselves seen and heard and get their fair share of their parents' time and affection. Some desires, like longing for one's dog, can be oh so immense, and when the wish comes true, the joy can be overwhelming. There is a temptation to say that Tungal believes children to be better people than adults. They often have more kindness and caring in their heart than an adult , who is hiding behind a shield of life experience.

A Message for Adults

A considerable amount of Leelo Tungal's children's poetry carries a message for adults. For those adults who have forgotten what it is like to be a child. "The Old Fun Preschool" as well as the poems about the boys and girls in the past are explicitly signaling those people. Joining them are poems in which a child is saddened by how little time is spent together with the family. The child wishes for a machine that would do all the work, so mom and dad could be together. The child is astonished by how many numbers an adult can fit in their head, yet they don't know the name of the kid next door.

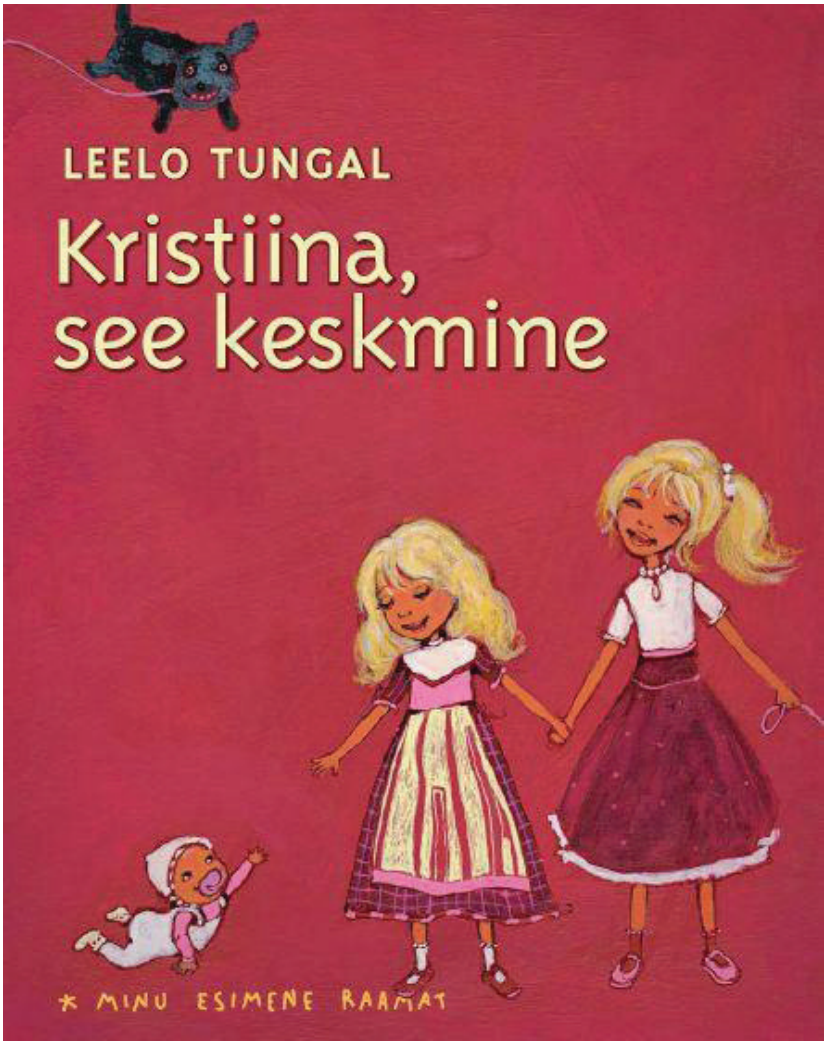
At first glance Tungal's poetry is fun to the core and full of tricks. But only at first glance. Here you'll meet a child's aching heart and wounded soul. "That Girl" paints a picture of a child who is sad among the noisy crowd at school. In another, during the merry Christmas season, a child worries about other children who don't have it as good as her. Often the melancholy is associated with the father being far away or parents diminishing the child's worries and deep desires because they just don't understand. However, sadness never wins out. The child is always comforted by their dog or their father's voice through the telephone or some silly proposal.

I've never realised that the topic of Leelo Tungal's work is nature. But it is. This collection doesn't contain the praise of beautiful, static moments, but rather has an active relationship with forests and meadows, rain and sunshine, critters and crawlers, and animals. The author finds the connection between child and nature to be good and natural. A child-city connection is a bit worrisome and saddening. Having their own pet or being able to admire nature's wondrous handiwork, to splash in a muddy puddle, and to stuff their mouth with freshly picked berries – that is what brings joy to a child. We feel sorry for a city child when the only butterfly they see is a moth. If no one can take them away from the asphalt, even for a short while, then the situation is quite bad.

Tungal's work is understanding, supportive, comforting, and helpful. It is as warm and bright as midsummer, even the poems about winter.

Translated by Chris Reintal

Kristiina, the Middle One



Kristiina, the Middle One

Illustrated by Kirke Kangro

Tallinn, Tänapäev, 2008, 168p

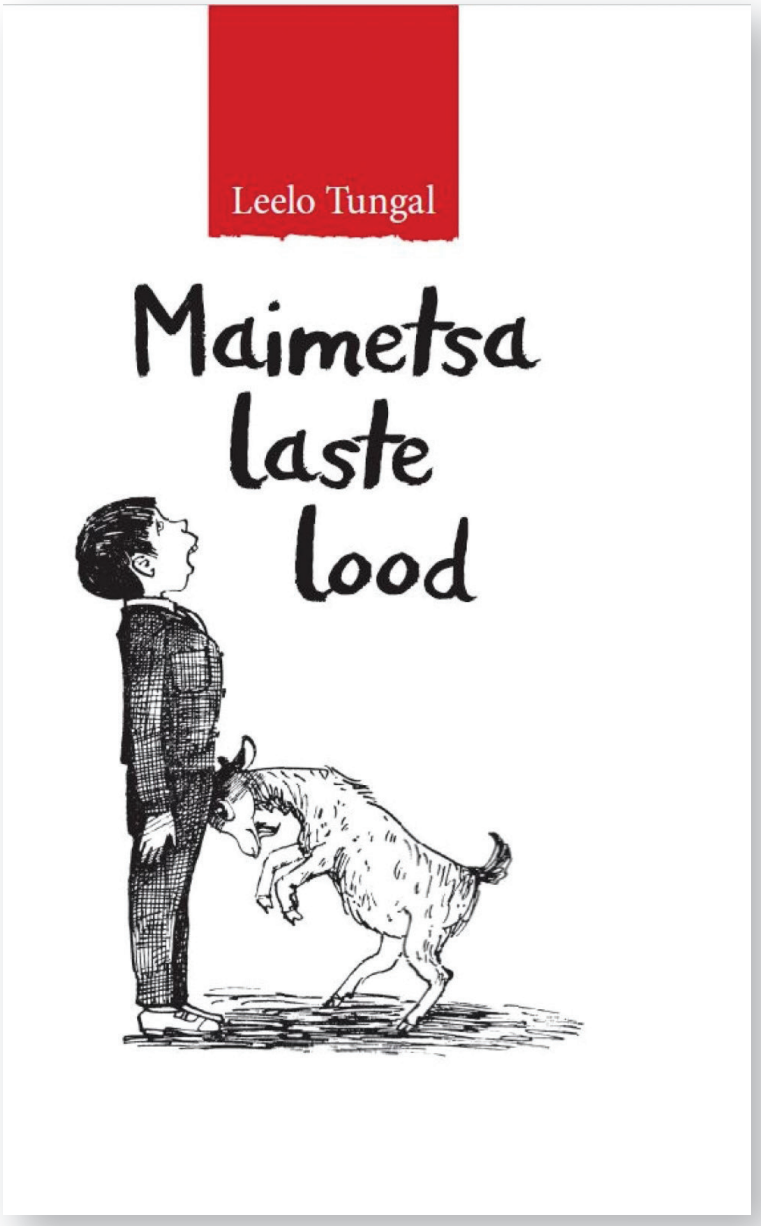
ISBN 978-9985-62-660-3

A humorous story about a slightly eccentric family in the 1980's. The family consists of a father, a mother, and three daughters: the schoolgirl Helen, 6-year-old Kristiina, and baby Imbi. They have a dog called Lassie, and often get visits from Gran and Grandpa, as well as Grandma from the country. The story tells of a time when not every home had a telephone – let alone a mobile, when you had to get a permit to buy a car, and when they wrote with a fountain-pen and ink at school. They celebrated Women's Day instead of Mother's Day, and New Year's instead of Christmas. Kristiina is a cool and enterprising girl, and so interesting things keep happening to her. On one occasion, a bottle of ink breaks and Kristiina smears ink all over herself; another time, she hangs her house key round the wrong dog's neck, and the dog runs off with it; yet another time, at the tests for music school, she teaches the evaluators how to really beat out a rhythm.

The book is full of warmth and love. The illustrator, Kirke Kangro, is Leelo Tungal's daughter, and is, by the way, that middle daughter, who inspired the author to write the book.

Awards: 1992 Nukits Competition, 2nd placeand ordinary, and leaves the forest in order to experience something different.

Children of Maimetsa



Children of Maimetsa

Illustrated by Asta Vender

Tänapäev 2015, 264 p

ISBN 978-9949-2782-4-4

This is a collection of stories of children living in a small town Maimetsa during the 1980's.

In the *Half a Dog* tells a story of Olav and his English setter Leedi. Olav owns only half of his dog, the other half belongs to his uncle Kaupo. When uncle decides to sell the dog, Olav and Leedi escape and take shelter at the empty schoolhouse. Soon they realize that the school is not empty, but there are two thieves lurking around.

Colorful Butterfly Summer tells a story of a new student Tiina. Tiina has had compicated family life. She is raised by single mother who has a drinking problem and the girl spends a lot of her time at the neighbor's apartment where she able to study and read. Things change when the family moves to Maimetsa and Tiina finds new friends.

Santa's Daughter is a story of Pille, her friend Madis, whose wallet mysteriously diappears, and a new student Tõnis, who is hunting for a treasure under the schoolhouse.

Mõtle midagi välja, Madis! tells a story of Madis, who has lost his grandfather.

The stories have been previously published as separate books.

Barbara and Dogs

Barbara and Dogs

Illustrated by Edgar Valter

Tammerraamat 2016, 168p

ISBN 978-9949-5656-2-7

The book contains two stories of a girl named Barbara. In *Barbara and Summer Dogs* we meet Barbara, who loves dogs and longs to have her own dog. Her parents and her older sister don't understand her wish and Barbara decides to run away from their summerhouse. When she gets lost in the forest, she meets summer dogs.

The story of *Barbara and Autumn Dogs* takes place in the city. It's fall, Barbara is back at home and has her own puppy Tondu. One day a stranger comes to her on the street and takes Tondu away. With a help of a neigbor, Barbara is able to get her puppy back, but now her friend's dog has disappeared. Children start to look for the dogthief.

Both stories were prevously published as separate books. *Barbara and Summer Dogs* received A. H. Tammsaare Literary Award in 1992 when it was published.

Bibliography, Translations, Prizes

Honors and Awards

2010–2014, 2017 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award candidate

2015 Ferdinand Johann Wiedemann Languge Prize

2014 The Merit Award "With Children and For Children" of the Ombudsman for Children, for the lifetime achievement

2013 Good Children's Book (*Carrot Works as a Carrot*)

2012 Bench named after Helmes, Feliks and Leelo Tungal in Ruila

2010 IBBY Honour List (*Comrade Kid and the Grown-Ups*)

2009/ Autumn Good Children's Book (*The Tilk Family Goes to the Song Festival*)

2008 „Harjumaa Kultuuripärl", Harju County Pearl Award for Culture

2007 Muhv Award

2007 Karl Eduard Sööt Children's Poetry Award (*Latvian Ice Cream*)

2006 Nukits Competition, 3rd place (*Felix the Hedgehog and Kerli the Elf, Felix the Hedgehog and the Criminal Zoo, Felix the Hedgehog and the Troublesome Autumn*)

2005 Republic of Estonia Order of the White Star, IV Class

2000 Estonian Children's Literature Center and Tänapäev Publishing Youth Story Competition, places 2–4 (*Pain for the Crow*)

1999 J. Oro Prize for Children's Literature

2000 Karl Eduard Sööt Children's Poetry Award (*It Sure is Good!*)

1997 Annual Children's Literature Award of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (*We Spook! We Haunt!*)

1995 Karl Eduard Sööt Children's Poetry Award (*Happy Birthday!*)

1994 Nukits Competition, 2nd place (*Barbara and the Summer Dogs*)

1992 A. H. Tammsaare Literary Award (*Barbara and the Summer Dogs*)

1992 Nukits Competition, 2nd place (*Kristiina, the Middle One*)

1986 Viru County Children's Book Award (*Colorful Butterfly Summer*)

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