

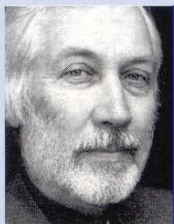
10 Estonian Poets



Juhan Viiding



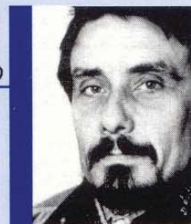
Doris Kareva



Jaan Kaplinski



Viivi Luik



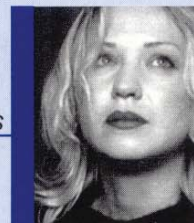
Paul-Eerik Rummo



Andres Ehin



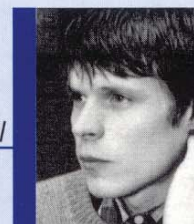
Mari Vallisoo



Triin Soomets



Ene Mihkelson



Hasso Krull

Estonian Literature Information Centre

Ten Estonian Poets



Estonian Literature Information Centre (ELIC)

General information

The Estonian Literature Information Centre provides information on Estonian literature and the literary scene in Estonia. The centre has its own database on Estonian literature in translation and in the near future is going to set up a website offering profiles of Estonian writers both in Estonian and in English. The Centre publishes information on Estonian literature in several languages. A small library of more significant Estonian books has been established for the use of foreign translators.

The Estonian Literature Information Centre aims

- To promote awareness of Estonian writing abroad, with particular emphasis on fiction, poetry, drama and children books.
- To provide the international literary world with up-to-date information on Estonian literature and the literary scene in Estonia.

Activities

The Estonian Literature Information Centre stimulates interest in Estonian literary fiction abroad by providing information. The Centre takes part in international book fairs, in co-operation with the Estonian Publishers' Association, participates in seminars and important literary events abroad. It also organises seminars and other activities in co-operation with the Estonian Writers' Union. The ELIC works in close collaboration with the *Estonian Literary Magazine*, (published by the Estonian Institute), one of the main publications to promote Estonian literature abroad.

•

The Estonian Literature Information Centre is an independent, non-profit institution established by the Estonian Writers' Union and the Estonian Publishers' Association.

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Andres Ehin

Andres Ehin (born 1940) undoubtedly found a source for his poetry in surrealism and in the works of the first Estonian practitioner in this field, Ilmar Laaban. But Ehin's development as a poet embraces many other things apart from dreamscapes and images from beyond consciousness. Like the author himself, the poet's texts are jocular, filled with Estonian humour and a contortion of puns. An impetuous imagination creates sharply sensuous imagery and an expansive grimace. The spectre of consciousness gives the texts unusual twists – the reader is often struck by the beauty of the described weirdness. Alongside free verse, Ehin used to employ strict classical forms which were subtly shifted or parodied by their realistic content. The author's oeuvre has undoubtedly been influenced by his wide-ranging work as a translator. His translations are a mix of subtle language and empathy. Ehin has also written a number of novels and film scenarios. The poetics of a trickster of indefatigable imagination contain the key concept „sudden inking“. This is the moment where an inebriate subconscious and a sober intellect eager to keep matters in check meet, so as to create unexpected texts at their interface.

rights

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I remember oblivion best
I recall previous recollections
successive memories
I see the front of fog
and the backyard of fog
better than fog itself
I find the lost in each lost account
and sometimes between lost accounts
oblivion's petticoat feeds me



an eyeless reserved seat on this earless train
driven by a noseless-buttless locomotive
elbowless passengers
put their heads on the vocal chordless rails
eyebrowless smoke stares at them
and is no longer able to rise
no land nor sky
everywhere only senseless trainism



Jaan Kaplinski

Jaan Kaplinski (born 1941) is the delineator of global unity and brotherhood, of peace and attention to detail stemming from open-mindedness. A writer of great erudition, he owes much to Uku Masing, whose disciple he was in his youth. Kaplinski's early poetry is written in billowing free verse; the absence of punctuation seems to denote a freedom from classification and from the narrowness of the western concept of culture. One of Kaplinski's most important sources of understanding is nature, which he explores as an amateur biologist. His later metamorphoses of style and subject matter include a growing concision, the use of dialect poetry, writing together with his wife, moving on to more commonplace subjects, an adulterated runic verse style, etc. These do not alter the underlying objective of Kaplinski's poetry - to perceive universal unity. Right up to the present, Kaplinski's poetry is still characterised by the overstepping of convention. His simple descriptions enable the reader to grasp far-reaching truths. Jaan Kaplinski is probably the best-known Estonian poet in the English-speaking world, and his work is widely discussed abroad.

rights

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●

Non-being pervades everything and being is full of peace.

Your translation of Laozi can be right or wrong —

an open book

speaks today like an open butterfly and in the pollen

movement meets immobility in the same way.

The spring breeze flows through our hair and clothes.

If I speak, it is because the consolation is so much more

than ourselves waiting for it: waters breaking in from

everywhere,

the tent-roof taking flight in the clear night of Lapland,

necklaces falling shattered: phrases, life and wisdom.

So this is it, this is you. The eyes are melting

in the white clouds, it is love, love that cuts us

from squared paper and lets the fire warm us

and the rain come through us until between the earth and us

the last borderlines vanish. This is love: the leaves of trees

and the light like ourselves full of evidence of the infinite.

We shall be and we shall be what is not,

we shall remain what belongs to no one.

●

What woke us

was indeed nothing

but a dancing pea

in a turning cathedral

a little turning

girl blowing

dandelion-paratroopers

into every wind

and walls looking

toward her through

walls and the voice

returning to the beginning



Doris Kareva (born 1958) is seen as the most outstanding cartographer of the loving soul in Estonian poetry. Her first collections were marked by a rhymed and rhythmical voice, transcending disappointment. Later came meditative prose poetry and dynamic free verse that sometimes grew into euphonic labyrinths. She has a remarkable talent for recalling or refinding etymological connections within the language and of using them with emotional precision. Her quest for harmony continues at all levels of life, finally on the illuminating, sacral plane. Kareva avoids the clichés of love poetry with her mildly ironic distancing coupled with extreme sincerity. The experience conveyed is ethically demanding, uniting shades of many different realities in its thirst to evolve. The background is that of antiquity, mysticism and many of the best examples of women's poetry. Kareva has herself translated poetry by Anna Ahmatova and Emily Dickinson. An unusually wide public has closely followed her spiritual journey for more than twenty years. She has had imitators, but no real successors.

Doris Kareva

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Rainbow-coloured confusion bears us
from the hush of the womb to the swoon of death.
I thought that love was a feeling,
now I see it is more — a mode of existence.

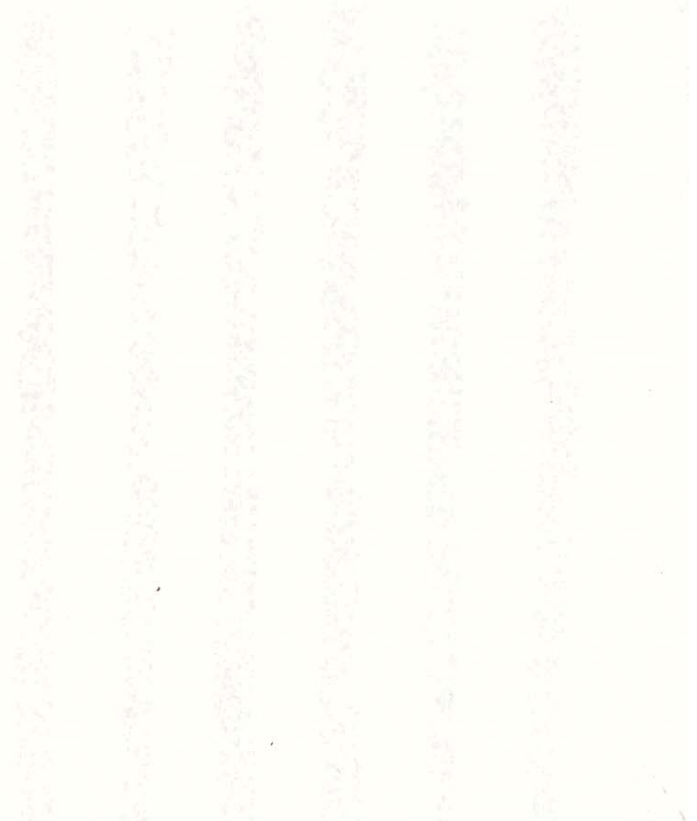
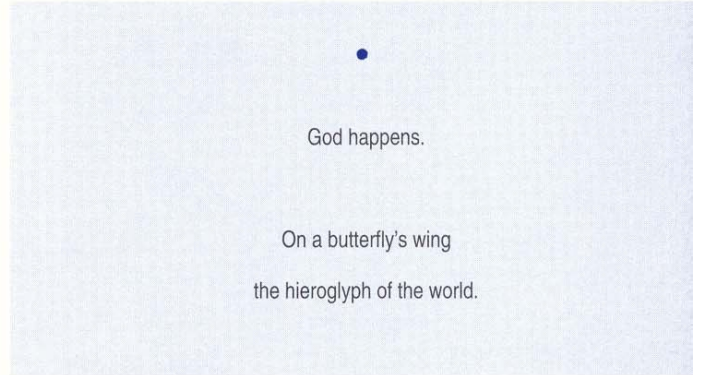
I cling to you like flesh to pain
gripped by fear of inevitable numbness.
I suspect that what has no foothold here on earth
becomes a stairway through oblivion to heaven.

I mean truth. Or beauty, if you will.
I cling to you like fruit to the tree.
I know that those filled with another life,
are lost for words in this one.



I dreamt that I heard Satan speak —
but in your voice. In his slow descent
into rack and ruin, he gave me
a glass vessel with a warning: Behold.

Here is death.





Hasso Krull

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•

I don't ask anybody why I waver
on the brinks of warfare and of extinction. The green telephone
warbles – proclaimer of the spring. „Hello!“ Snow,
the sun, lemons. I did what I did for
our relationship.

Long ago, I abandoned hope
but not hopelessness.

Glorious patterns coruscate. Very quietly.
The floor glimmers through the carpets – transparent,
cold, and cosmic. It's there where I'll
finally fall. Through the carpets, free from disease
and from self-awareness.

Free from nature.

(Nature is free from naturalness:
artificial, salon-like.)

Snow. You. My mighty fortress.
I rest beneath you. In the spring
I'll rot (and the ravens
are sure to harvest me, the tiny birds
to devour me); in the summer I'll reek,
I'll smell, I'll blossom. Come on,
touch me. How soft and
rotted I am. How
young.

Snow:
don't leave me alone
in the sunlight.

•

HERMAN'S THIRD DREAM

I love you, floor. I want you, floor. I
press myself against your meek sleek body but
you're cold and hard to me. I can only imagine
your breasts' gentle contours. I can't cover
you with my hands, I can't cover you with my
body.

Ah, I suffer for you, floor. Ah, I die
for you, floor.



Viivi Luik (born 1946) came to poetry as a very young woman. Her frank, open nature poetry has, over the years, become a more introverted dotted line of mystical allusions. These changes were occasioned by the difficulties the poet had in adjusting from rural to urban life. In her later poetry, she retreated from cryptic free verse into the strictures of rhyme and rhythm. The sharp divisions between town and country also began to fall away. The choice of subject matter became more everyday. With the harshening of Russification policies, coded elements of opposition appear in her poetry. The highlight of this process occurred during the 1980s. Her parables were adopted by the public at large. Politics in poetic guise – Biblical imagery and especially the determined holding together of a small people, close to the soil are codes which have had significant impact during times of repression and national awakening in Estonia. Latterly, the author has become well known as the author of historical novels and essays of her own stamp. Luik has a rare ability to examine essentials. It is as if she sets out allegories as they emerge straight from the hearts of the nation.

Viivi Luik

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•

WING SHADOW

Say it: „Verdant fir, you dark celestial angel.”

Say it poignantly. Unmockingly. With grace.

Words infuse the air with white enchanted circles.

Don't observe the manner of your voice or face.

Stars that never tarnish, pious Christmas light
lay their curses on a land already damned.

All too clear the end, the start not yet in sight.

Nations scattered at the slightest gust of wind.

'Til death's magic mountain rises and explodes,
wear the century like a dark engagement ring.

All is possible. This too, that heaven's host
may rally from its ashes without warning.

•

Across the empty page moves a human hand,
skin, flesh, fingernails and bones.

But held by three fingers, slanted toward the good
and evil of the world, is the pencil, firm and true.

Outside howls the wind or the city or history.

The gazing eyes have become inscrutable.

The heart beats against the chest ceaselessly,
but the mouth is mute and cannot explain

why every moment contains a special misery

felt by everything that breathes. The hand writes.

And the time will come when this dark pain

will rise from the page and bring us back to life.



Ene Mihkelson

In the works of **Ene Mihkelson** (born 1944), a crystalline trellis of thought emerges, together with its many component parts. The author, who by nature tends to debate matters, has herself said that „writing is an adventure in words“. Mihkelson's use of language attempts to tackle and explain the mechanisms which govern the occurring of things. The complex nature of the task in hand seems to lead to the realm of the difficult, the hermetic and the primeval. An unceasing mental tension dissipates such an impression. The alteration of free verse, the illuminatory inner rhymes, jerky angularities and pauses are, little by little, revealed to the reader. If we are to speak of difficulty, we can say that this lies concealed in a longer process of confession and the next turn can reveal a lightness of straightforward description. The result is a text, linked to psychoanalytical prose, into which a note of societal critique has crept during later collections. The term „antipoetry“ could also be employed here – the author shuns pathos, cheap effects and artistic thrills. When Ene Mihkelson uses quotations, these are in profound dislocation. Ene Mihkelson is the messenger of individuality in Estonian poetry, a national genre which maybe relies too heavily on tradition.

rights

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Yes still this sense that those rare
soulbirds who really hear and know
touch as well as flight
must be sheltered from night's harshness
All souls suffer a body Sadness limits
them no less than the soulless who
always distinguish cause from ef-
fect They preach fundamentals
the four compass points while from the birdsouls
feather after feather falls in flight
until finally the air cannot carry them



Someday there will no longer be a living soul and people
are of glass They describe circles that enclose
you as well You ask but no one answers Does not know
or feel Your language I would let kill me if you could
see I am still alive



Paul-Eerik Rummo

Paul-Eerik Rummo (born 1942) is a symbolic figure from the Estonian poetry of the 1960s. His early writing was lyrical and revealed a vastly inquiring mind. The universal quality of his thoughts stem from their gently tragic, self-ironic and playful framing. By making good use of the new associative style and uniting it with folksong and „Soothsayer” traits, Rummo became „our Paul-Eerik”, the hero. The collection „Sender’s address and other poems” (1972) (Saatja aadress ja teisi luuletusi) was Rummo’s attempt to distance himself from this rôle. Colloquial, demythifying and socially acute, this collection was censored and remained unpublished until 1989. This led to deep disillusionment in the uncompromising author, and he remained silent for over a decade, never producing a new collection since. Instead he has established himself as a brilliant translator, rendering into Estonian works by Donne, Pushkin, T. S. Eliot, Thomas, Montale, and others. Rummo has also written drama and essays and has had the post of Estonian Minister of Culture. The present anthology has omitted poems of a more epic style. The image of the warmth of bees is to be found constantly in Paul-Eerik Rummo’s poetry, denoting a small but tightly-knit nation, a meaningful sum of human fates, with still further layers of meaning.

rights

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•

Now grant me God the strength to run through the rains
of chance,
and to recognize necessity among the many
who by force fake her face

suffering nests in the memory
not even a dog can chew through the chain of heredity
but it's quite a different matter to run right here through
the rains of chance
but it's quite a different matter to run right here through
the rains of chance
necessity, give me your hand

necessity, here is my hand
I gave you the other one already to be born
necessity, give me your hand

•

CROONING

I am so fleeting
sighed the girl to the sea
oh, what can I do
you are eternal

I am transparent like you
sighed the girl to the window
oh, what can I do
my heart's in full view

I open like you
sighed the girl to the door
oh, what can I do
the sun steps in

I am so small
sighed the girl to the sun
oh, what can I do
you are so large

I am so foolish
sighed the girl to the wise man
oh, what can I do
everyone is so wise



Triin Soomets

Triin Soomets (born 1969) has never tried to be innovative in form, language or subject-matter. On the surface of her text one can see decadent, expressionist images, mannerist denomination, almost intentional clichés, and (self-) parody. For post-Plathian womanhood, simple wildness will no longer do. The playful style that dislocates emotions, rhymes and theatrical situations, highlights the truth of the indifference of words. How elaborately to write, whether to be bisexual, whether the events described are real or not – none of this of any importance. All that life manages to be constitutes the primary material – and no more. The image rises out of the result: the writer's hand is rarely seen, although the process of writing is conscious. The enigma of Soomets still remains to be explained. Her recurrent images – body, metals, wounds, roses, rings – seem to be inlaid and worked with the precision of a goldsmith.

r i g h t s

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•

Rain, rain soaks into me.

All my glasses have shattered.

The stars sparkle on my naked heart,
a bird startles my gaze.

This then is my song:

at this second when I want to be, I cease to be,
my balance is in a passer-by's wandering thoughts,
in a young man's mood.

My support is empty, a star-reflecting glass, yet full
of unknown meaning.

When I speak, speed and distance laugh: we agree.

•

And I am there.

And I turn the other cheek.

And I know.

And I remember.

And I agree.

Two wise hands

my body remembers

even before

they acted. The word was
clear.

The rest was
chaos.



Mari Vallisoo

The unifying force of the poetry of **Mari Vallisoo** (born 1950) can be regarded as a tendency to mythologise. From collection to collection myth makes its presence felt, myth which an observant person carries within him. The possibility of realising the myth is the biggest question of his life. The problem comes to a head against a backdrop of urban anonymity. The church bells reach even those high rise blocks, neighbours come and go like migratory birds and the room is filled with a satiety of magical images. Vallisoo's poetry has been characterised as pendular motion and the image is a precise one. Objects and events are crystallised in the movement between the magical and the mundane, attaining now the one, now the other nuance. They come together at the dynamic centre. Such a manner does of course contain extreme moments of standstill – hermetic depression and vanishing into fairy tale. Vallisoo has a very subtle use of imagery, helped along by quotations from folk poetry, poems in the dialect of Kodavere and balladic treatment. The experience of *durée* which she puts into words is many-layered. There you can find critique of sources and light irony. She links that which has been with that which is in a truly Estonian fashion, using binding magic spells.

rights

Rights: Mari Vallisoo, Jaama 179-7, 50705 Tartu, Estonia

•

SPRING TIME

Birches smell on the hills.
One would like to bring them inside.
Then serious rooms
would have at last some spring in them.

Let's go together, sisters and brothers,
out the door and the gate!
Let's all take along
a sharp saw, too.

Oh, that brother of mine is still too little.
I'm a big girl, I'll go without a brother.

We'll let the treetops grow.
So that birds can fly over them.

•

POTATOES

Where were you? Your clothes
are sooty, and you know
the washer is broken!

I came through middle ages,
there in fires
I roasted some potatoes.
Try one. A witch
sent a letter. Where
is it now, that letter?
Maybe I lost it.

Ah how hot they are!
Let them cool down a little.



Juhan Viiding

Juhan Viiding (1948–1995) was the „messenger of the free spirit”, giving striking expression to the paradoxes of an era of stagnation time. He revolutionized poetic language (in the Kristevan sense). His early poetry, written under the pseudonym of Jüri Üdi, was permeated by constant rôle play and jest, in accordance with his profession as an actor. The literary theorist Hasso Krull describes one of Üdi's poems as a series of denials, a process of deconstruction that feeds on proverbs, adages, slang, current phrases and other similar material. Viiding's poetry, consisting as it does of idiomatic dislocations and allusion, is almost impossible to render into other languages. There is one further difficulty: the poet, apparently so eager to jest and pun, actually felt a deeply tragic dislocation. In his later poems, Viiding openly rose to a sacral level. The earlier declarative, indicative style was replaced by a painful quest for perfection. This frame of mind appeared to be permanent – Viiding did not go along with the patriotic enthusiasm of the late 1980s. He enlivened the Estonians' original passion for word play and the laconic rephrasing of older works in a modern guise, adopting an absurdist, tragic, purifying form in order to do so.

rights

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•
So what is a poet's poetry then?

It is: to think of life

and something else.

And then what is man's lot

in this big wide world?

Not to send himself to sleep.

Keep this in mind.

•
THE ROAD

This road that is used by torch-bearers,
all eaters-and-drinkers, Torturers and Hangmen
have tried their hardest to destroy.

They couldn't. The road is the other way.

Lilies-of-the-valley in a pink cream jug
and much more that did not hurt me,
when touched.

I have a lethal dose inside me.

I have pulled up my anchor.

•
In the cage of your heart there is silence
and a thousand-year-old bird
it can speak, however, it loves you
and so never utters a word

Traducta

Traducta is a major literary translation grant funded by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (Eesti Kultuurkapital). The Traducta grant has been established in order to encourage the translation of Estonian authors into foreign languages and facilitate the publication of Estonian literature abroad.

It is estimated that the grant shall be of at least an equivalent magnitude to the normal translation fee expected of a professional translator for the translation of a literary work in his/her particular country. This means that a translator should be able to approach a publisher with a translation project, where (if necessary) the translator would be able to waive his/her fee - conditional of course upon receiving the grant - if the publisher agrees to publish the book.

The grant also covers accommodation in Estonia if the translator so requires, as well as the cost of a return air ticket.

Any translator of Estonian is eligible to apply for the Traducta grant. There is no special application form, rather the translator should send in a written application describing his/her translation project and enclosing a copy of the contract with a publisher to publish the translated work. The translator should also include a CV and a list of previous published translations. The Cultural Endowment would appreciate an estimation of the royalty that the translator would normally expect for the translation. (If the translator has already translated part of the book, a suitable excerpt may also be included with the application.)

Applications for this grant should be sent to the offices of the Cultural Endowment. The Traducta grant is issued at the sole discretion of the Cultural Endowment, which alone shall choose the recipient, and shall decide the value of the grant bearing in mind the size and difficulty of the book to be translated.

The deadlines for applications for the Traducta grant are four times a year: 20th February, May, August and November and they should be sent to the following address:

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