

Andrei Ivanov, born in Estonia in 1971, knows, in his own words, “all the ups and downs of a Soviet education”, as he grew up in “a typical proletarian Russian family”. Although he sees himself as part of the Russian literary tradition, he identifies Estonia as his home country and his creative point of departure. After graduating from the Tallinn Pedagogical University (now Tallinn University), where he wrote his thesis on the language of Vladimir Nabokov, Ivanov briefly worked as a teacher, moved to Scandinavia and explored Denmark for a number of years, studied several languages, and wrote his first novel. His Russian-language novels *Hanuman’s Journey to Lolland* (2009), *Bizarre* (2013), and *Confession of a Lunatic* (2015) recount his experiences in Scandinavia.

Hanuman’s Journey to Lolland was shortlisted for the Russian Booker Prize (2012) and won the Cultural Endowment of Estonia’s Prize for Russian-Language Literature (2010). It was first published in Russian in Tallinn in 2009; was released in Moscow in 2010; was translated into Estonian (2012), German (2012) and French (2016); and was staged at Thalia Theater (Hamburg, 2014) by Ene-Liis Semper and Tiit Ojasoo of Theater NO99.

The Harbin Moths (2013) is a sweeping historical oeuvre which won the prestigious literary prize NOS in Russia and was also shortlisted for the Russian Booker Prize. In the novel, Ivanov delves into Estonia’s interwar history; more specifically, into the lives of the local Russian intelligentsia and members of the Russian Fascist Party. It covers roughly twenty years, starting with the exodus of refugees from Russia in 1919 and throughout the 1920s, and ending with Soviet expansion in the Baltic states in 1940.

Andrei Ivanov lives in Tallinn and is married with one child.

<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/andrei-ivanov>

Jackdaw on a Snowdrift

Crack! The night drained dry by sleeplessness. The din of plumbing in my head. A March morning, blue-gray tinged pink. Crack! All the soot of night is in me. Flowers, post office, bank, food. The day looms. She wanted to give me a picture of Father. Crack! What a nightmare.

A mechanical rook on every street. Ice picks and spades scraping. Gravel wormholes in the snow. Granules grinding underfoot. My legs grow longer with every step. My body sprouts eyes. A heap of some kind drags into view. It unfolds into a market. She wanted me to have . . . Awful!

Coins in my pocket. The snow melting, dripping as the day breaks out of its brittle shell and flows into spring. Out of the frozen ground and the endless darkness of February. Crack! On every street. The picture of Father.

That February was like old age, it seemed that nothing would follow. Three weeks out of town. Buried alive. Really naked. Really passionate. Red-blooded. Day,

night. Night, day. We rubbed until we blistered. The neighbor was outside in quilted vest, grunting as he chopped wood. Grrr! Wooden bear of banality. Grrr!

There were not enough clothes in the house to keep us warm. We hid under piles of blankets. The mattress lay on the trash right beside the stove. In the den of depravity. We were close until it hurt. Not more than a minute apart. She drew smiley faces on me, letters, flowers, words, profanities, hangman's gallows . . . She moved the pen across me. She breathed on it. She rolled it in her hands, like a cavewoman. She scratched me . . . *Love me tender!* She kissed me. She wrote . . . *Kill me softly!* She sunk her teeth into my neck. And again she wrote . . . songs by Nina Simone . . . *Spit on my grave!* She licked the words off and wrote again:

Bien places bien chosis
quelques mots font une poesie

For two weeks I felt like I was wrapped in barbed wire. Even when she waved good-bye, *vi ses!* Crack! Several days later I woke to feel the words she wrote still crawling all over me.

That picture.

I didn't go to the funeral. I hadn't seen him for ten years. She wanted me to have . . . And I never forgave. I could never forgive him. I forgave everyone else. Everyone. I forgave the cops, the guards, the medic who smiled callously as he stitched me up and said: "You got yourself into this mess—now bear it!" I forgave the cons who mugged me for my best clothes, whining with a sorry smile: "I'm being sent down soon, sent dooown . . ." I forgave my cellmates, I forgave everyone, all those crooks and bitches, rats and snitches. But not him!

Hello, Grandma. She kissed me. Her hands were shaking. She can hardly see any more. She used to make buckwheat porridge for Grandfather every morning. Like clockwork. She couldn't stand it herself. She didn't eat it. He died. She started eating it. He died, she carried on making it, and then she began to eat it. That's beyond religion.

A young man pulled his reflection toward him and entered the barber's. A man in a heavy coat stopped by the flower shop. The mannequin's head fell off and rolled away, losing its hat; the clumsy shopkeeper ducked under the counter. A firecracker whistled and banged. The ducks and doves tore away from the ground. A bang. A fleeting glimpse. Disarray.

She no longer turns her head in my direction. She just sits and talks. An empty window in front of her. A window that contains sky and a sallow sun. The sky is like ice. The sun is a hole pierced in it with a pick.

Up and down rivers for the whole of the war. Grain to Archangelsk. People from Leningrad. Smashing ice in winter. The barge likes to sit on water. The ice held it. It had to be smashed. Aged seventeen. With an ice pick. Crack! Ferapontovo. Kabachino. Arkhangelsk. Yaroslavl. They wove baskets. They sawed logs. In winter there was absolutely nothing to do. They had to eat something . . . By five she was looking after the youngest one. At three in the morning Mother would go to mow hay. The collective farm . . . Mother woke me . . . I sat there and dozed off . . . After the war . . .

As she tells the story, her hands take a picture of Father out of an envelope, an enlarged photograph . . . the last one.

A broad somber face. Coarse gray hair. A thick neck. A disdainful smile, topsyturvy. Bags under his eyes. A tie. A yellow shirt.

Something stirred inside. A hair quivered and my breathing halted. I wanted to shatter into tiny pieces like a Christmas tree decoration.

He was dancing with Mum near the Christmas tree. How old was I then? I got up and went up to them. Still nameless. That splinter is lodged so deep in the past . . . He looked at me and made a nasty face. I recoiled. I remember, I remember . . . The very earliest memory. Maybe that is why words are like droplets of water, words are like sparks . . . Maybe that is why I can't forgive, because words, understanding, reason don't go that far back . . . Everything that a person uses to forgive came later . . . Maybe that's why I am here right now, inside these simple and solidly crafted sentences, amid a soul stripped by pain.

She reaches out to give me the envelope. She shoves it in my direction. She can't see me. I don't want to take it. I want to be invisible. Not just to her eyes, I want to slide out of her thoughts too, become a specter, a dream, an illusion.

The last one . . . He had the photograph taken for his passport . . . because he had to. And then . . .

I take it from her. The light is getting dimmer. The sun disintegrates into a heap of indeterminate anxieties.

I have to go . . .

A sigh . . .

If you have to . . .

The three of us were coming back from the cinema. It was a late winter evening, crisp like a brittle plank of wood. The crunch of snow deafened us. The frost stung us. The low streetlights were reluctant to shine. We were walking very slowly. I lagged behind. Father was recovering from a heavy binge, he hadn't drunk anything for a week. He restrained himself. He was quiet. With a tormented look in his eyes. He just walked along. Then he said in a quiet voice that he had liked the film . . . it was a good film. Mother was happy too. They had both liked the film so much! They got emotional. It was disgusting. I tasted sulphur in my mouth. Through gritted teeth I said that the film had been total junk, boring, that I had wanted to leave, that films were for children . . .

I just wanted to ruin their blissful mood. A normal family went to the cinema. But I knew about his women . . . he met them right under our window. I threw an egg at one of them once.

A bus. Closely spaced lampposts. A wall. Gray like a copper's uniform. A bridge bogged down in its own dankness, struggling to arch its belly upward, water pouring off it like water off a wet dog's coat. A jumble of ads. Something whizzed past. Lamplight cut into steps.

Erika . . .

We bought a Christmas tree a day before the holidays; Granny drank tea and ate pastries by candlelight, we watched her. We bought the tree and drank beer on the bridge, we poured more over ourselves than we drank, we poured it and laughed . . . I was seventeen, she was fifteen.

Erika . . .

I hugged her on one of those bridges.

Which one? This one or the next one? Everything had shifted . . . time devours everything . . . streets, bridges, towns . . . it swallows up people first of all. But I can still look into the black box of my memory, and remember . . . the smell of your hair, the taste of your lips, the pain of your bites, the brightness of your eyes, and the faked moans.

You always faked it—you never really felt any pain—no, you just didn't want to go all the way

Your skirt spins as you turn, top lip curled upward, eyes half-closed, pale dimpled cheeks, teeth bared in laughter . . .

She lived in a big building, opposite a park which used to be a cemetery. There was a grocer's in that building. We went there to drink juice. Cumbersome glass cones: yellow-orange, clear-birch, red-tomato. There was a phone booth by the machine-building factory, if you pushed a two-kopek coin in you could chat forever. She wanted me to call every day, to talk, talk endlessly . . . I stood and talked, shivering in the cold . . .

We drank moonshine which I bartered with Gleb (his gran distilled it from jelly beans in the storeroom). Gleb drew pictures of the party bosses, Granny pretended they were hers, she came home from work with orders: slogans, medals, all sorts of junk to be drawn Gleb drew, she paid him pocket money, we went to the cinema to see *Stunts*, *Tootsie*, some science-fiction trash *Moon Rainbow* . . . Gleb watched the Kalamaja saunas through his binoculars, he shot at the winos with an air rifle, drank moonshine, and drew Lenin, Marx, and best of all, Engels the cartoon coypu. He would trade moonshine for respect, even friendship. We drank in the attic above my house, smoking through the little window, creaking on stools; we drank in the entranceways and urinated through the chink in the storeroom door; we drank in the park, looking over our shoulders in case the marines came to hassle us . . . We drank on the roof of the Jaan Tomp Palace of Culture on hot summer days and ended up getting heatstroke—or maybe we just drank too much . . . Erika and I drank under the awning of the shed on the factory grounds, near the fence where pilferers had stashed things in the long grass . . .

I remember everythingthe scenes you caused, the lying, the tears I remember all your bites and all your quirks I remember your lithe legs in my hands I remember those mornings, filled with tears, when I tried to run from the stifling farce, struggling with a grimace turned to stone like a mask I remember your stupid diary . . . which you *forgot* . . . *oh, I left my diary at your place . . . hey don't read it, don't read it whatever you do* . . . Kosten, Chirik, those golden boys, the "brother-in-the-army" who didn't existyou made up your diary and left it at my place, so that I would read it and feel bad, you wrote all sorts of horrible stuff, to make me worry . . . You wrote about that time you and Lenka were with some older guys, and first Lenka French-kissed him and then she went into the other room with him and we stayed there and drank wine smoked listened to Kino and first he talked about St. Petersburg then put Mode on then he made a move on me groped me all over licked my ear all over and slobbered on my hair and then said hey listen to what a good time they're having in there they're really getting into it and Lenka's cool and fine and a great girl but you're kind of

weird and is it just today or are you always sad like this what do you mean sad I'm not sad at all just it's the wrong time of the month and anyway I'm not ready yet . . . and when will you be ready if you said you're already over sixteen . . . and not sixteen at all just fourteen . . . shit but why the hell did you lie and how old is Lenka . . . the same age . . . Dyma! . . . hey Dyma! . . . listen up . . . they'll really do you for an underage girl these days! . . . then I ran out into the corridor managed to grab the cigarettes and I was off!

Lies, all lies—I remember everything down to the very last word—everything, you hear!

I'll probably burn that diary . . .

I probably made an awful mistake . . .

What's going to happen now? What have I gone and done!!!

My parents are going to kill me!

You recorded voices in the landing over my tape of Akvarium's *Children of December*: you, Lenka, and some cretins who said *yeah* and *know what I mean* and *like* every other word, who spat, shuffled and laughed . . . I'd like to find that cassette now and listen closely to you babbling on the landing. Transport myself . . . immerse myself . . .

How you tormented me! . . . you left me writhing . . . left me hanging there, trigger cocked . . . I would listen to your voices, so I could get closer . . . that cassette is now worth more to me than the music ever was! Any insignificant detail which made up that world, disfigured and disassembled for the next performance, they all have meaning: the landing with the crisscross cold, the snuffling echo, the rustling of your pink jacket, your banana bag, puffed-up shoes, come here now! . . . The rickety back door with the handle broken off (and plywood in place of glass). . . . We hid in the laundry in the mornings—where the blue liquid in the bath had frozen—and waited until Father went out. The door of our flat banged, the keys turned, boots descended with a hollow echo, a cough from his throat, in bed with you until one in the afternoon . . .

In those days, it was enough to move to another part of town for everything to break off, completely and forever.

When I was seventeen I slashed my wrists. Sloppily and spitefully. Before taking out the blade (which was not easy: it had gotten stuck between the casing of the

razor head and the screw), I inspected the razor at length; I held it like Father did, testing it against my cheeks and my neck, sitting on the little chair with no back, on a quilt folded in four. I had the following items laid out in front of me: a pipe, pipe brushes and an awl, aftershave, cotton wool, a soap dish with the remains of a piece of soap broken in two, a brush with a tuft of hair jutting out drunkenly defiant from a faded green stump, tweezers, and a case which looked a lot like a box of technical drawing instruments. I looked in his mirror and found myself touchingly arrogant. I took pleasure in imagining him, and Mother's face . . . I wanted them to feel vile.

I visited my grandma and granddad in Valga several times a year. They lived on Kuperyanov Street. Andres lived there, on Roosa Street. He was a little younger than me. He often used to say that he wasn't Estonian, but Finnish, and that he had been born in Siberia. He read poems in German and sang songs by Boney M in broken English. He had an old Vesna tape recorder. I would come with my Elektronika record player, and he would start copying greedily—but it always ended in tears, he never had enough tapes.

There was an old manor house on the outskirts of town. The windows had been smashed, the roof had caved in, the staircases had broken spines, the cellar was full of water. In the evenings we would climb up a ladder and through a window, drag the ladder in after us, crawl along the sagging floor to one of the holes, descend the ladder into the cellar, and sit smoking on a huge cupboard which stood half-submerged in black water. We would sit there quietly while somewhere something gurgled mysteriously . . . Andres said there were fish there. I didn't believe him. But something surfaced with a splash now and again, followed by silence. When I lit a match, the water shimmered . . . but nothing. We smoked, listening to the rats squeaking and rustling . . . then something would fall with a thud . . . and everything froze still again, as if the surroundings were listening in on us.

He worked at the fish-processing factory in Latvia. He worked at the market. He was a shuttle trader between Riga and Vilnius. He just kept on selling his wares. He spent years sitting in a kiosk . . . he ate junk, drank junk . . . this life made him mad with rage. He had no friends. The neighborhood boys teased him for his long thin features, his hunched back, his crooked teeth and the tic in his eye. He had no father. They teased him for that as well. They said his father was Pram Man, an old drunk who fixed prams, gathered bottles to exchange at the bottle bank, cadged kopecks. When they walked past Andres the boys would say: "Look there goes Son of Pram Man!" He didn't want anything to do with other people. He beat up Pram Man, nearly killed him. Got a suspended sentence. He yelled at his parents. He just kept on selling his wares at the market. That's where he got

married. The whole bazaar partied. Slyanchev Bryag brandy, Palinka, Slivovitsa. He beat his wife. He got a dog. He beat the dog. He made moonshine, drank himself delirious. They had a baby. He beat the baby. He ended up alone. He drank and drank. He died. That's it. No more him.

When Father got ill (something wrong with his blood), I wished he would die. He was ill—and I was waiting for him to die. But he lived. Granddad came, brought him some tablets and vodka. He told him to take the tablets with the vodka and just walk and walk . . . Father took the tablets and vodka, and he just walked and walked, all around the hospital corridors, that's how he survived.

There were birds somewhere. They were hidden under the boughs of the fir trees. All you could hear was their chirping. The firs were completely motionless. People were sliding, stumbling around. Cars were driving slowly past. All in silence. The chirping drowned everything else out. Whoosh . . .

“Goats know that they're going to be slaughtered,” Grandfather said. “When you pick up the knife, they go quiet. But rabbits don't know. Rabbits don't feel anything.”

“A pig sometimes starts howling the night before,” the woman next door said. “It cries like a baby . . .”

Morphology of wounds inflicted to the skin of the head region using both sharp and blunt objects: the aim of the study was to observe the dynamics of the morphological changes to a wound resulting from the impact of sharp and blunt objects. The experiments were conducted at an ambient temperature of 33 degrees Celsius, on twenty rabbits each weighing two to three kilograms. The following experimental method was used: after shaving the crown and posterior region of the head, the rabbit was fixed to the table, and wounds were inflicted on the areas of the head referred to using sharp and blunt objects. The wounds were left open. The animals were killed with an air embolism at intervals of three, four, five, and seven days. After making the incision the edges of the wound underwent morphological, histochemical and histological examination.

“Granddad, kill me! Leave the goat alone! Slaughter me!”

“What's wrong with you?! What's wrong with him?!”

“What an impressionable boy....”

A strange eerie silence. The sky was moving from left to right. Jackdaw on a snowdrift.

<https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/jackdaw-on-a-snowdrift>

in Russian <https://tvz.org.ee/index.php?page=452>