

The History of Exile Estonian Literature and Literary Archives

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In January 2009, a rather voluminous piece of literary history spanning 800 pages was presented in Tallinn – “Estonian Literature in Exile in the 20th Century”.¹ The first 250 pages of this book provide an overview of the prose, followed by overviews of memoirs, drama, poetry, children’s literature and literature in translation. At the end there are overviews of reprints, literary criticism and literary studies. Parts of the book are reprints – all chapters except the most voluminous one on prose have previously been published as fascicles since 1993.²

The publication of this book denotes the reception of Estonian émigré literature on metalevel and provides the reader with interpretations and explanations.

The length of the journey which separated émigré literature from disavowal and led to a joint restoration of Estonian literature is illustrated by two recollections.

It was 1982 when the head of the Estonian Society for the Development of Friendly Ties Abroad (*Välismaaga Sõprussidemete Arendamise Eesti Ühing*) asked me if literature which was written in Estonian in Sweden or elsewhere, is Estonian literature. I stuttered my response – in this culturally clean “lawful space” of Soviet state security I felt a bit like a mouse being tossed around by a cat – that at least the work of authors whose creative work began in Estonia was Estonian literature. I wasn’t being questioned, I was being tested.

I asked myself where the literature belonged, which was written by authors whose creative work began abroad.

I had always thought of it as Estonian émigré literature, meaning, not as pieces of literary creation but more as forbidden fruit resembling the golden apples which grew on strange trees in

¹ Kruuspere, Piret (toim) *Eesti kirjandus paguluses XX sajandil*. Tallinn: Eesti TA Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 2008.

² Kepp, Õne Merilai Aarne. *Eesti pagulaskirjandus: Luule*. Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 1994.

/Eesti pagulaskirjandus/Tonts, Ülo. Memuaristika; Rebane, Hilve. Tõlkekirjandus; Teder, Eerik. Kordustrukid. Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 1996.

Kruuspere, Piret. *Eesti paguluses: Näitekirjandus*. Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 1993.

fairy tales. Unfortunately, these strange trees grew in the neighbour's garden and the road there was blocked and the gate shut.

People living in Soviet Estonia hardly knew anything about Estonian émigré literature. For a period of roughly ten years, there were virtually no contacts between the refugees and the homeland barring radiowaves. Despite the lack of vital source materials, the émigrés were able to start academic research work and ensure publishing opportunities in times when works of those who had gone into exile were closed up in restricted access fonds according to instructions and stored at the Estonian Literary Museum or other archives. The staff at these institutions intentionally decided to leave a lot of collected materials be without systematising them, in order to avoid drawing any attention to them.

During the time of liberalisation after Stalin's reign, literary scholars and staff at the Literary Museum (or rather some of the staff) tried to get an overview of how Estonian literature and culture had developed and how the intellectuals who had fled hoping to return before long carried on their work. They attempted to complete émigré Estonian books, collect letters and photographs, first and foremost those that had been left behind in the homeland: documents, manuscripts, memories. The need for information was even more acute among the refugees. Working in conditions where they lacked access to most of the source materials needed, the émigré researchers began to look for contacts in order to obtain copies of printed matter and archival material, which had been left behind in the homeland. There were several obstacles involved when exchanging materials through the post: the drawing up of permits, difficulties involved in copying, visiting the special department, etc. The Soviet censorship with its hundred Argos-eyes never slept, but occasionally dozed off and was at times outwitted. Mainly printed matter was copied and sent abroad, such as issues of pre-war journals and the like. The dispatching of manuscripts was more complicated (if permission had to be obtained) and more hazardous (if sent without a permit). The older the material which had to be sent was, the easier: the sending of copies of 19th century materials was much less of a hassle than sending copies of materials from the 20th century.

At times, much trouble could also come from sending Soviet publications. One of the explanations to the domination of archives-centred research during the decades following the war is the isolation from the theoretical developments in the rest of the world. Meanwhile, much

archival material was secret. It was often quite impossible to use contemporary thought in literary studies and the importance placed on source research also contained a compensatory aspect.

The collecting of source materials, which had remained in Estonia was difficult. In 1958 and 1960, the Institute of Language and Literature arranged literary expeditions for scholars during which émigré authors' previous places of residence were photographed and information about the parts of their materials, which had remained in Estonia was collected. They tried to collect letters that the authors had sent to the homeland and specific photos, but distrust and readiness to help existed side by side. It wasn't rare for people to bring the museum a photo of Marie Under, which had been received in a letter. When handing over personal letters they were much more careful – at times the messages wouldn't be uncomplicated, a letter which might have been honest on the part of the sender could cause harm the collector as well as the person handing the letter over to the museum. Oskar Kruus has emphasised that he was the first to systematically collect émigré authors' materials, which caused him some hardships.

A private collector had right of ownership in relation to the collected material, rights, which he often took upon himself. The émigrés tried to obtain information about the background of enquirers; the difficult communication contained a multi-layered filter.

If the first post-war decade was full of attempts at wiping émigré authors off the face of Estonian cultural history, the 1960s couldn't do without them any longer. Writers who had begun their writing in the Estonian Republic were simply made into Soviet authors, since Estonia was incorporated together with its authors and its literary scholars as far as the Soviets were concerned. The end of the 1950s when the friendship society was established was a time when a new Soviet cultural policy was formed.

During the long period of Soviet occupation there were changes in the attitude towards émigré literature which followed along the lines of ideological alteration: from the time of Stalin's regime with its closing off of all émigré works into special fonds, to their distribution into permitted and forbidden literature. The limit for what was allowed changed constantly. For most of the readers, even the permitted works were practically unknown.

My second recollection is from 1989 (perhaps 1990 as well). Suddenly, lecturers could speak about the literature, writers and readers which up until then had been forbidden, and let libraries

and others know some of what constituted Estonianness in exile. In the land of the blind, even a half-blind will suffice as guide. “What does DP mean?”, one potential lecturer asks another. Both have a certain lead – they have previously read more than ten books published in exile and now voraciously read as many as they can.

Since 1958, when Marie Under’s “Collected Poems” were published in the ESSR, followed by Gustav Suits’s “Poems”, it was actually possible write a few things about the works of émigré authors under the watchful eye of the censorship using mandatory phrases: it was impossible to write the history of Estonian literature without authors like Marie Under, Gustav Suits, August Gailit, Bernard Kangro and Henrik Visnapuu. Works of writers who had made their debut in exile were mentioned more seldom (Kalju Lepik, Arno Vihalemm). One can without exaggeration state that the diligently censored manuscript of “A History of Estonian Literature” (*Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu*) reflects a literary paradigm from which had been banished a large part of the literature as well as many authors who were all willfully ignored.

The émigré culture can also be studied without using manuscripts as sources. However, when the authors of works have passed away during the long interruption of cultural ties, they are often replaced by archives that help to shed light upon and comment people and the times. Books are duplicated in print, but there is only one manuscript. When the relationship between the occupied Estonia and the rest of the world took its first trembling steps in the mid-1950s, the first questions were often: “What happened to the archives? Are they still there?” In the wake of war, there is always destruction and orphaning of archives.

The continuity and preservation of Estonian cultural history during the occupation was crucially influenced by the great flight in 1944. It was often impossible to bring all papers when taking flight. During struggles for power, archival records are always in precarious situations or – if they end up in the claws of a violent foreign occupant – unprotected. Apart from the threats from fire and water, much archival material was threatened by relocation to Germany with retreating forces. This mainly applies to archives of the state, organisational archives and archives of political character, but cultural historical archives also come under threat. The less they come under attack, the less ensured is their protection. Jaan Roos has described the destruction of archival records during the war (see “*Akadeemia*” no. 2, 1989), but all indices are bound to be incomplete, since there are no lists over objects in private possession. Papers, which

had been filed away and those left behind at home were out of reach for the refugees, and oftentimes they were inaccessible in occupied Estonia as well, as Soviet security controlled their usage. For a long time, the fate of the archives they had left behind was unknown to the refugees. Thankfully, apart from those that were destroyed by fire, the majority of them were preserved.

Years later, archives received manuscripts from rather strange places. In 1979, *VEKSA* (The Society for the Development of Cultural Ties with Estonians Abroad) handed over a bundle of records of Elmar Õuna's, which was followed by Õuna's manuscripts through the publishing house Eesti Raamat. All of a sudden, a part of Andrus Saareste's archives turned up through the Academy of Sciences. The first émigré author's archives to be handed over to the Literary Museum were those of Arno Vihalemm, which were given to the museum in 1991.

From 1990, Enn Nõu began to give copies of records from his voluminous home archive, which a year later were followed by boxes with the original records. The same year, Helga Suits-Kangro gave the Tartu Museum of Art – the house where Gustav Suits had once lived and to which she was tied through childhood memories – a part of the family archives, in order to open a Gustav Suits room. Gustav Suits's archives were then yet to return home. Among Mart Lepik's records at the Estonian Literary Museum's Cultural Historical Archives there is a letter (fond 315, m 156:22), in which Lepik swore to Otto Aleksander Webermann that he would see to that Gustav Suits's manuscripts, a large part of which he saw burn in the summer of 1941 when he helped put out the fire in Suits's home at Tiigi St., would be carefully stored in the free world.

After negotiations with Helga Kangro and inspections of the museum storage and the objects stored there, 24 boxes of Aino and Gustav Suits's archival records arrived at the Literary Museum in 1993. Correspondence from Gustav Suits's youth which had been extensively quoted by Aino Suits and used in Bernard Kangro's publication of Aino Suits's "*Gustav Suitsu noorus*" (The Youth of Gustav Suits) and H. Kangro's "*Aino ja Gustavi loo*" (The Story of Aino and Gustav) was still missing. Helga Suits-Kangro also gave family correspondence to the museum in 1996, but the missing letters were delivered to the Literary Museum together with Aino Suits's diaries by Aino and Gustav Suits's granddaughter Marit Kangro in 1999, after Helga Kangro's death. Mart Lepik's wish had finally been fulfilled.

The attempts at writing a monograph in Estonia over some author who had gone into exile were very questionable. Still, there were researchers who focused on individual émigré authors.

The research inevitably focused on the authors' earlier pre-war works (i.e. Endel Nirk in the monograph over Karl Ristikivi, "*Teeline ja tähed*" (Traveller and Stars)). Work was often left half-finished (e.g. Erna Siirak's monograph on Marie Under). Erna Siirak collected materials for the writing of a monograph on Marie Under, Nigol Andresen for one on Gustav Suits and Aarne Vinkel collected materials on August Mälk.

Now, when the archives of Marie Under, Gustav Suits, Nigol Andresen, Herbert Salu, Rudolf Põldmäe and others have reached the Estonian Cultural Historical Archives from different places in the world, including Estonia, we can see how the lack of archival records and inaccessibility of printed matter impeded the work. On the other hand, literary scholars exchanged copies and went to great lengths to send information without having an overview of the primary sources near them.

Dealing with the history of literature in the information block was a thorny and foolish business indeed. The archives of Herbert Salu as well as Nigol Andresen, Erna Siirak and others contain huge amounts of articles featured in "*Eesti Kirjandus*", "*Tulimuld*" and other publications, as well as copies of entire annual volumes which reflect the painstaking search for information which had to be done piece by piece instead of, as would have happened in a normal situation, simply using the publications at the library or at home. Among the monographs on émigré authors written in Estonia, Harald Peep's monograph on Henrik Visnapuu and Aarne Vinkel's short monograph on August Mälk are worthy of mention.

The thoroughly censored manuscript of the 5-volume „*Eesti kirjanduse ajalugu*“ (The History of Estonian Literature) reflects a literary paradigm which on the surface appears neutral: „From the autumn of 1944, August Gailit lived abroad,“ or „Adson left for Sweden in September 1944 together with Under“ or „in the autumn of 1944, the poet Visnapuu also left“, etc. This delusive neutrality hides a strong ideologisation throughout, and leaves out a large part of the history of Estonian literature. This missing gap has now finally been filled by the recently published „*Eesti kirjandus paguluses*“ (Estonian Literature in Exile).

The preparations for writing a history of émigré literature saw the light of day 23 years ago, in 1987, in connection with the conference held for Karl Ristikivi's 75th birthday. It was the end times of the Soviet occupation, all kinds of information was welcome.

There were many in Estonia who did all they could next to the hangers-on and collaborators. Outside of Estonia there was no compulsion from a foreign power and enough people, and yet much still had to be done from the beginning. In 1946 Bernard Kangro wrote to Gustav Suits³:

“during these days I have contemplated an old thought: the gathering of information and material pertaining to cultural history under one heading [as] Estonian émigré literature in Sweden. The chapter nevertheless exists, if someone one day writes it it is our duty to continue the systematic collecting of archival records (documents, letters, photos, manuscripts, press clippings, memories, etc.)”

The Estonian Writers' Union in Exile (*Väliseesti Kirjanike Liit*) had already been established in 1945. Henrik Visnapuu organised the Society for Estonian Exile Literature (*Väliseesti Kirjanduse Selts*). During a long period of time, the cultural life outside of Estonia was much more active and focused than that in Estonia.

The flow of Estonian émigré archives is closely connected to the return of émigré literature, with the end of the unnatural process of dividing national literature into two halves and with the restoration of Estonian literature as a historical whole, whose evident guarantee was the restoration of Estonia's continuity as a nation, the regaining of independence.

Just before Christmas 1993, boxes containing the more important part of Asta Willmann's archives arrived at the Cultural History Archives from the United States. The archive has later received additional records which were left behind. At the same time Imant Rebane's archives were also received. A year earlier in 1992, Hellar Grabbi gave Frieda Drewerg's (Reed Morn's) papers to the museum. In 1994 and 1995, the archives of Herbert Salu, Helmi and Bernhard Mäelo, Ants Oras, some of O. A. Webermann's records as well as the archives of Peeter Lindsaar, Gert Helbemäe and Johannes Aavik (partially mixed in with Bernard Kangro's personal archives) were added to the Estonian Writers' Cooperative's large fonds.

³ Annuk, Eve (toim) Kaasteelised Bernard Kangro ja Gustav Suitsu kirjavahetus 1944 -1955 Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Tartu, 2001, lk 45.

1996 surpassed the previous years – some ten times more archival records were received than in the years before. Next were Bernard Kangro’s archives which were sent by Maria Kangro in 1995-1996, vast in terms of both contents and meaning. In 1997, Valev Uibopuu’s fonds were completed from Lund in 1997.

The homecoming of Marie Under’s and Artur Adson’s archives in 1996 was of particular importance. Those of Adson’s and Under’s records that remained in Estonia were given to the Literary Museum in 1946 and were supplemented by Friedebert Tuglas in 1968, a smaller part arrived at the museum with Tuglas’s archives in 1973. They contain nearly all the drafts for Under’s earlier collections, ample letters and unpublished material. The collection reflected the brightest moments in Estonian literature. Under and Adson’s bountiful exile archives points to the violent break, the continuance and the final return. Without their archival records, Sirje Kiin’s voluminous thousand-page monograph on Marie Under would not have been published.⁴ Now, after almost twenty years, the flow of archival materials is so plentiful that the list would become much longer. The history of literature is a generalisation, it does not necessarily need the use of archival materials. But it does need the existence of previous individual studies.

Thanks to the arrival of exile archives in Estonia, many treatises and publications about the works of many different authors have been and will continue to be published.

⁴ Kiin, Sirje .Marie Under : elu, luuletaja identiteet ja teoste vastuvõtt. Tänapäev, Tallinn, 2009.