

5

ways into Finnish books for
children and young readers

From board books for babies to iPad apps

FILI No subjects are off limits in Finnish children's and young adult books. In recent years, we've seen tremendously fun books on the tribulations of family life and the effects of empowering communities. The works published last year included a portrayal of the interactions between mankind and the natural world, featuring brilliant graphic illustrations (*Auringon lapsia* – “Children of the Sun”, Teos 2011), as well as a collection of modern-day fables about strange creatures and the cosmos (*Kuningattaren viitta ja muita kiperiä kysymyksiä* – “The Queen's Cloak and Other Knotty Issues”, Tammi 2011), both of which are irresistible to adults and children alike. There were also many attractive, practical non-fiction books published in 2011 on subjects such as evolution (*Evoluutio* – “Evolution”, Avain 2011) and being mad about horses (*Tikkumäen talli* – “Star Hill Stables”, Otava 2011). Other recent books have addressed issues like social displacement and the breakdown of society, or the sorrow that affects an entire family when a young boy is dying of cancer (*Surunappi* – “The Sad Button”, Lasten Keskus 2009). Another is a father's story of how life can go on after the suicide of a child (*Älä yritä unohtaa* – “Don't Try to Forget”, Prometheus kustannus 2010). More than 1,000 new children's and young adult book titles are published every year in Finland, if you include works translated from other languages. That means there is more literature published in Finland for children and young people than for adults.

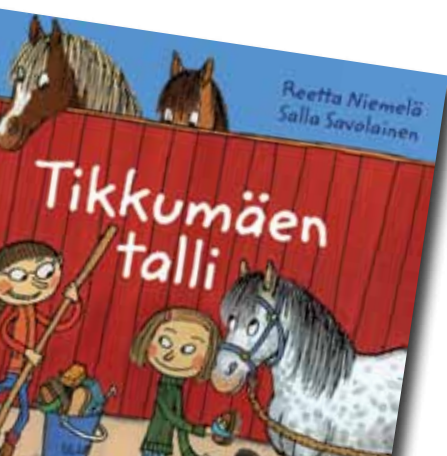
The popularity of social media in children's and young adult literature is just as evident in Finland as elsewhere. There have been young adult books featuring online and virtual lives for years now, and some books even emulate social media features in their structure. In the just-finished *Pirunmeri* (“Devil's

Sea”) project from WSOY, anyone at all could go online and contribute a short bit to a collective novel, which was also released as an edited, printed book. *Taro maan ytimessä* (“Taro at the Centre of the Earth”, WSOY 2010), a book written by Timo Parvela and illustrated by Jussi Kaakinen, was released as an app for the iPad and rocketed up the bestseller chart at Apple's App Store. This tale of an exciting journey undertaken by a boy and a bear was selected for inclusion in the “New and Noteworthy” list, following in the footsteps of the hugely popular Angry Birds game by Rovio Entertainment, also from Finland.

Isän poika (“Papa's Boy”, Lasten Keskus 2010) by Jukka and Leevi Lemmetty is also listed at the App Store and even has its own fan page on Facebook. This story about the efforts of a ballet-dancing boy mouse to establish his own identity has been made into an animated short film, which was shown at the Jaipur and Clermont-Ferrand international film festivals in early 2012.

Authors who are well-acquainted with the world of social media are carrying on and renewing a long-standing tradition based on storytelling, which is part and parcel of the Finnish language and culture. For example, the *Kalevala* – the Finnish national epic – morphs into a fantasy that appeals to boys and girls in Timo Parvela's *Sammon vartijat* (“Guardians of the Sampo”, Tammi 2007–2009) trilogy.

In Finland, even babies have stories read to them. Everyone born here receives their first book as a gift from the Finnish government. “Story crafting” is a very popular way of nourishing children's interest in literature, and





Taro at the Centre of the Earth, illustration by Jussi Kaakinen



it is also a subject of academic research. The idea behind story crafting is to give children – and adults, too – opportunities to express their own ideas. The person who is the storyteller makes up a story on the spot and tells it, while a scribe writes down the story word-for-word and then reads it back, while the storyteller may still modify his or her story. Story crafting is telling stories – properly listening and paying attention to another person, perhaps with a new twist. According to researcher Liisa Karlsson, this Finnish innovation is already being employed on every continent all over the world. Finnish parents and children spend a lot of time together with books. Once again, Finland achieved stellar results in the latest PISA survey of reading skills among 15-year-old school students in OECD countries.

One factor that increases the diversity of Finnish children's and young adult books is of course that there are books published here in three languages: Finnish, Finland-Swedish and Sámi. Tove Jansson's sweet, wisely philosophical Moomin characters form the sturdy foundation of Finland-Swedish children's books. **Vesta-Linnéa och monsternamman** ("Vesta-Linnéa and Monster Mom") by Tove Appelgren and Salla Savolainen was published in 2001, launching a new era in Finland-Swedish children's literature. While only a handful of original books in Swedish were published in Finland in the late 20th century, a few dozen new Swedish-language titles came out in 2011 alone.



Finnish books are attracting more interest from all over the world. In the last two years, there were a total of 140 new translations of Finnish children's and young adult books in 49 languages.

In the introduction to the Chinese translation of Riitta Jalonen and Kristiina Louhi's **Tyttö ja naakkapuu** ("Girl under the Jackdaw Tree", Tammi 2004–2006) trilogy of picture books, professor and author Mei Zihan remarks that these books will also touch the soul of Chinese readers, because they are written for "literature children".

"Literature children are not satisfied with just the laughs that stories provide. They also know how to seek out emotions in stories; they can understand the image of mankind created by the author and can appreciate the author's narrative style and the structure of the text. They enjoy literature and are capable of finding the spirit of the book in addition to the story. True children's literature belongs to all age groups; it is for all romantic spirits and lost souls."

We hope you'll enjoy discovering these fresh, new Finnish stories for children and young people!

Hannele Jyrkkä, Tiia Strandén and Tiina Lehtoranta
FILI – Finnish Literature Exchange



There's no place like home!

– Cosy scenes meet everyday life in Finnish picture books

For a good decade or so now, Finnish children's literature has been characterised by plenty of wordplay, slapstick and comedy-of-errors humour. Fortunately, it's still possible to settle down with a story despite all the emphasis on achievements, success and efficiency in today's lifestyles. The best of these "little books of quiet" give children as well as those reading the books aloud to them a chance to take a breather from all the rushing about and other demands on their time. Books also increase children's self-awareness and social skills, often with long-lasting results. In quiet books, the illustrations are often foregrounded: wide-open landscapes can spread out in the form of broad, restful fields of colour. Illustrations can also depict internal landscapes and assist readers in interpreting their own private thoughts.

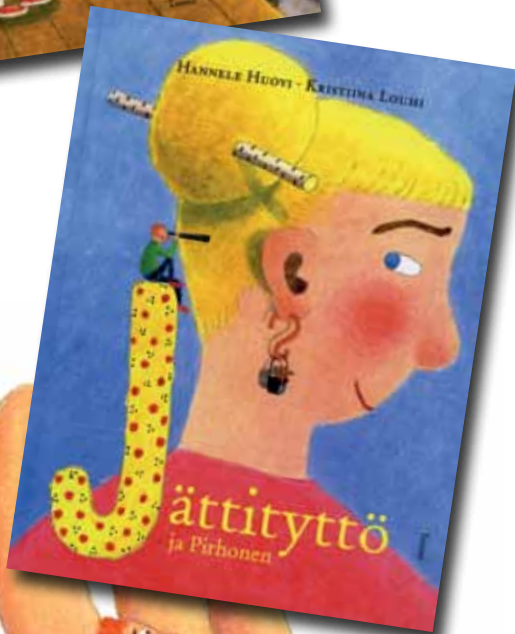
The collaborative partnership between illustrator Kristiina Louhi (b. 1950) and author Riitta Jalonen (b. 1954) means that these two kindred spirits instinctively know when to allow the text or illustrations to come to the fore. The first title in their trilogy about a young girl, entitled *Tyttö ja naakkapuu* ("Girl under the Jackdaw Tree", Tammi 2004), is an excellent example of how Finnish children's

literature is brave enough to address even powerful feelings that can often seem difficult for adults, doing so in a way that is sensitive and nuanced. The later books in the series, *Minä, äiti ja tunturihärkki* (Tammi 2005, *Tundra Mouse Mountain*, WingedChariot Press, 2006) and *Revontulilumi* ("Northern Lights on Snow", Tammi 2006), which can also be read on their own, tell about a school-aged girl's extended grieving process after the sudden death of her father. Over the course of the trilogy, the girl's relationship with her mother changes and her own new identity develops further. Riitta Jalonen's writing is rich in emotion and experience, and Kristiina Louhi's evocative illustrations, drawn in pastels, reinforce the effect of the text.

The latest picture book by the duo, *Aatos ja Sofia* ("Aidan and Sophie", Tammi 2010), is another intense story that will touch the hearts of readers of all ages. It tells of a young boy who is utterly devoted to his playmate. Aidan is a young thinker with an old man's head on his shoulders, while his friend Sophie is much more practical, with a more straightforward approach to life. Again in this



Northern Lights on Snow, illustration by Kristiina Louhi



book, Jalonen's writing focuses on individual moments, creating an impressionistic narrative. The whirlwind of feelings inside Aidan's head leads him to observe signs of affection among those close to him:

As Grandad puts his arm up on the back of the sofa behind Grandma's back, Aidan sits up. They might give each other a smooch soon. Mum and Dad do that on the sofa a lot. You can never guess ahead of time when it's going to happen.

Louhi's illustrations contain just the right amount of Finnish affection for nature, with birch trees, wooden duckboard paths and lakeside scenery, without seeming calculated.

Jättityttö ja Pirhonen ("The Giant Girl and Her Tiny Friend", Tammi 2011, illustrated by Kristiina Louhi) is the latest picture book by Hannele Huovi (b. 1949), another eminent writer for children and young people. It is a story with hidden depths about a happy encounter between two very different people. This story undoubtedly presented a challenge to the illustrator: how do you depict the interaction between a giant girl and a teeny-tiny man in a personal way, delighting in their differences in size? Tyyne's tears are a deluge to Pertti. Tyyne needs a magnifying glass to see the little fellow properly. Pertti is interested in stars and the universe, but meeting Tyyne is surely the biggest experience he's ever had!

In recent years, Kristiina Louhi has simplified her illustration style even further. She uses big, bold forms and fields of colour, often letting the colours speak for themselves. Her finest pictures are bold yet spare images that have an almost hypnotic effect on the viewer.

Finnish book illustration has traditionally been a female-dominated endeavour, but the field also includes some men with strong voices. The father-and-son team of Esko-Pekka and Nikolai Tiitinen (b. 1956 and 1988 respectively) created *Kyyhkyn kysymys* (Tammi 2010, **Drops of Life**, Cuento de Luz 2011), a book that takes aim at today's rushed, self-centred way of life. It is a well-grounded morality tale for readers of all ages. The illustrated book is an adaptation of a play entitled *Drops of Life*, which has been performed in over 70 countries all over the world as part of the Environment Online nature protection campaign (www.enotreeplay.net). The book is a natural continuation of Esko-Pekka Tiitinen's own personal project to awaken young readers' social conscience.

In the story, a sandstorm blows a dove far away from her home in the South. The dove meets a wise owl and asks him for help. Helping each other, they embark on a challenging journey. They encounter a whale who is heading in the same direction with a message to help people in need. The animals take seeds along with them and plant the seeds in barren areas. Thus life can continue.

Drops of Life tells about environmental destruction, the suffering of animals and the importance of water for all living beings with an almost Biblical intensity. The text contains many quotable lines that can be applied to different situations in life:

"The strong can give strength to the weak if the wind is favourable."

"Those who help others are kind. And those who realise when others need help are wise."

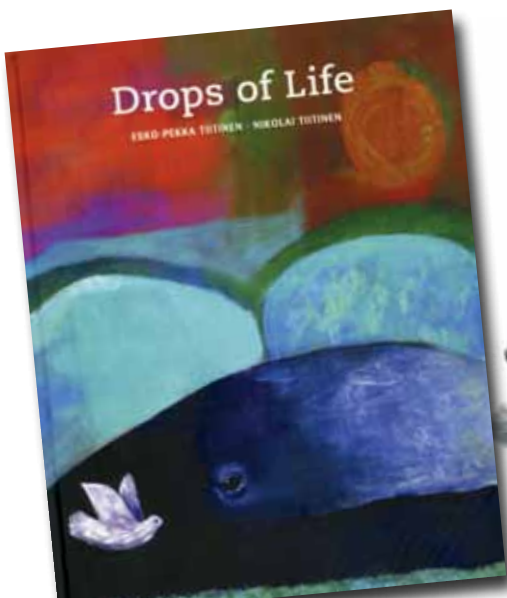
"The will is strong when it is the right size for the one who holds it."

Nikolai Tiitinen's multimedia illustrations are a refreshing sight for weary eyes. The complex, naturalistic interplay of colours is a gorgeous expression of hope and the importance of shared global responsibility.

Isän poika ("Papa's Boy", Lasten Keskus 2010) is a picture book by another father-and-son team, Jukka (b. 1951) and Leevi Lemmetty (b. 1976). It is a highly original book, both in its subject matter and illustration. The story tells of some parents' unrealistic expectations of their child. This topic is particularly relevant in our era of efficiency, when educators often lose their sense of proportion for placing reasonable demands on the younger generation. Without overstating its case, the book also addresses themes of tolerance and appreciating difference.

A family of mice live inside a grand piano in a toy shop. The little boy mouse does not want to follow in his father's footsteps as a boxing champion, dreaming instead of a career as a ballet dancer. The father mouse finds it difficult to hide his disappointment until one day the son displays his talent and saves his father from certain death in the paws of a cat. The boy makes a "smashing debut", and his father finally understands it's time for his son to realise his own dreams. Leevi Lemmetty has condensed the text down to its bare essentials, just 14 double-page spreads, and the illustrations – done jointly by father and son – add much more: nuances, moods and suspenseful excitement.

This illustrated book is based on a short film that is part of a broader international project and has also been released as an iPad app.



Finland continues to produce a large number of picture books that focus on everyday subjects familiar to children. One could justifiably use the term “emotional skills books” to describe these stories about ordinary family events. They serve to remind children and parents alike of an important matter – namely, that it’s essential in good family relationships that everyone can express their feelings freely and be heard as a unique individual.

The idyllic image of mothers has been shaken up in a number of children’s books in recent years. The first book of this type to turn the traditional view of mums on its head was *Ainon äiti on vihainen* (“*Annie’s Mum is Angry*”, Weilin & Göös 1986) by Kristiina Louhi. Louhi dared to depict a mother suffering from a headache as being nasty and absolutely exhausted by her duties to her family. Tove Appelgren (b. 1969) and Salla Savolainen’s (b. 1962) series of books about Vesta-Linnéa (Söderströms 2001–) depicts both a mother and her daughter being honest about their feelings, brave enough to show their emotions and able to talk about them constructively. It is an excellent example of the benefits of the series format in storytelling. Readers become better acquainted with Vesta-Linnéa’s bohemian blended family in each book. Tove Appelgren reserves many details for the illustrations. The latest book in the series, *Vesta-Linnéas svartaste tanke* (“*Vesta-Linnéa’s Darkest Thought*”, Söderströms 2008), is about jealousy and bickering between siblings. The darker tone of this book lets children imagine audacious fantasies about their own funeral, with everyone mourning their death:

Oh, look how lovely her little white coffin is there among the big, dark gravestones in the cemetery, underneath the lush maple trees. She’s lying in her coffin, cold and alone, as dead as the dried-up frog over by the pond, as stiff as a young fox that got run over on a country road, and soon she’ll be worm food, just like the rotten apple in that old storybook she always read here in the countryside.

Tove Appelgren has worked as a director and theatre manager, and she writes wonderfully dramatic stories that are further enriched by Salla Savolainen’s visual solutions.

Collage techniques have made a comeback in Finnish children’s book illustration in the wake of the interest in retro styles from the 1960s and ’70s. It even looks as though many illustrators have been inspired by use of computers as an auxiliary tool to enhance handcrafted, unique artwork for children’s books.



The many expressive possibilities offered by collage are exemplified in *Jellona Suuri* (“*Lion the Great*”, WSOY 2010), a picture book by Anne Vasko (b. 1969). It tells of a stuffed toy lion’s struggle for identity when it notices a little boy is starting to become interested in more functional toys and games. This book deals with big themes in a naïve style: the briefness of childhood, pressures concerning appearances, and popular ideals of being tough and coping with things. The topic of recycling is handled in a fun way in the illustrations as well as the plot: familiar Finnish fabric prints, embroidery and knitted fabrics appear in patchwork patterns, and the lion ends up as the beloved stuffed toy of the boy’s little sister!

Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen

Ph.D., university lecturer, researcher and reviewer, specialising in children’s and young people’s literature

You're having a laugh!

– On the nature of humour

Humour has a long pedigree in Finnish literature for children and young people. Many of the best-loved children's classics are humorous in tone. Among the works that have captivated children and adults alike from one generation to the next are the children's rhymes by Kirsi Kunnas (b. 1924) with their skilled wordplay, and the tolerant world of the Moomins, created by Tove Jansson (1914–2001). Humorous children's literature is also part of a broader Nordic tradition that includes the works of Astrid Lindgren of Sweden and the Norwegian writer Thorbjørn Egner.

Recent Finnish children's literature derives humour from situations, absurd ingredients, clever illustration and wordplay. The younger the target audience for a book, the more important it is to amuse children and adults as well. Picture books by authors such as Markus Majaluoma, Mauri Kunnas and the duo of Aino Havukainen and Sami Toivonen stand up to repeated readings aloud.



Hilda Goes on a Trip, illustration by Markus Majaluoma

Markus Majaluoma's (b. 1961) visual world combines diffuse colours, a pinch of nostalgia and jolly original characters to charm little and not-so-little readers. His small-format "Hilda" series is perfect for those who are new to storybooks. In *Hilda kulta, maailma on avara* ("Hilda Goes on a Trip", WSOY 2011), the latest title in the series, Jack and little Hilda – with her ever-present pacifier in her mouth – embark on a long journey together, and there is a very funny four-legged means of transport waiting at their destination. The slightly longer stories in Majaluoma's madcap "Dad" series tell about the shared adventures of a father and his three children, where the younger generation and their harried dad don't always follow the same line of reasoning.

The fast-paced Tatu and Patu books by Aino Havukainen (b. 1968) and Sami Toivonen (b. 1971) are a brilliantly fun read with a look that's bang up to date. Tatu and Patu are two boys from Oddsville who made their first appearance as minor characters in another series, but now these popular brothers have taken centre stage in nine books of their own. In *Tatun ja Patun avarusseikkailu* ("Tatu and Patu's Adventures in Outer Space", Otava 2011) their game expands into a fantastic adventure. Grown-ups will enjoy the hilarious references to



Supernatural Things that Go Bump in the Night and Other Mysteries, illustration by Mauri Kunnas

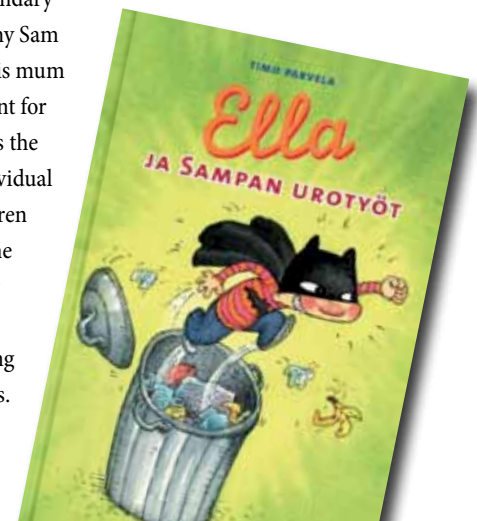


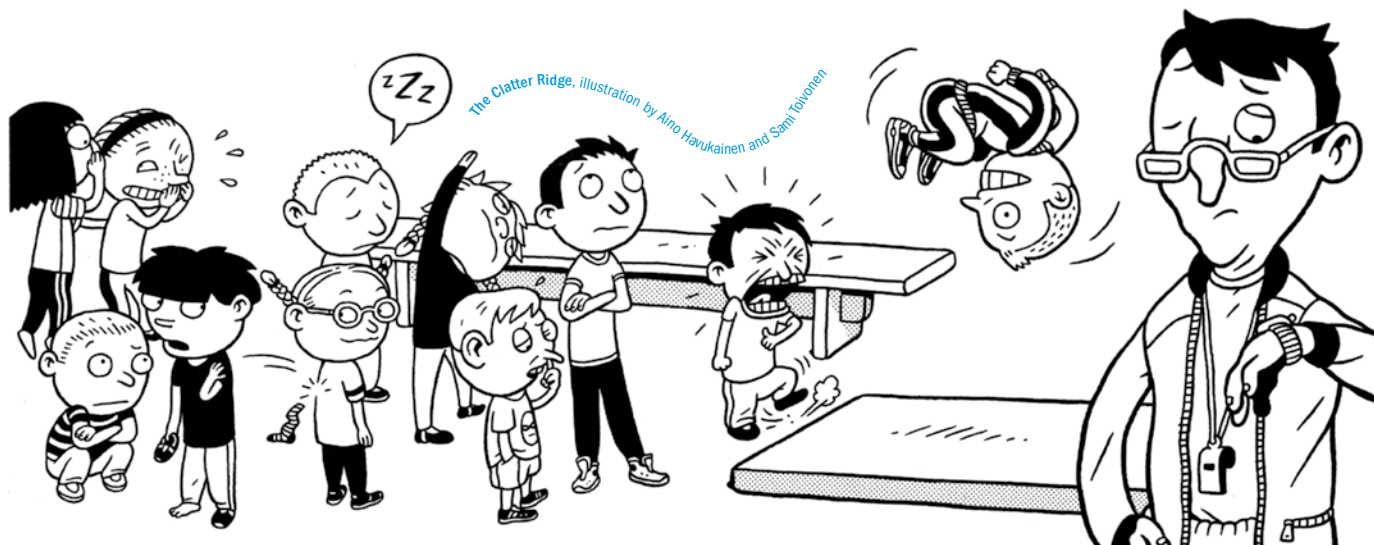
sci-fi classics, while kids will be fascinated by “Bananas, the Intergalactic Adventure Shuttle” – a space shuttle our protagonists construct from a banana crate. Sharp-eyed readers will enjoy spotting the countless fun details in the illustrations.

The large-format picture books by Mauri Kunnas (b. 1950) boast lavish, colourfully illustrated pages packed with joyous details, and every single character is sure to raise a smile. Kunnas draws on a variety of sources including folk traditions, history, science and literature, so the resulting works contain a great deal of material in a fun package for the whole family to enjoy. His latest title, *Kummallisuuksien käsikirja* (“**Supernatural Things that Go Bump in the Night and Other Mysteries**”, Otava 2011), is a sort of reference book about all kinds of creepy creatures, places and phenomena. Kunnas’ much-loved children’s picture book series include the Pawchester Tales as well as stories about Doghill, Mr Clutterbuck and three animal friends called Ricky, Rocky and Ringo. His books on Christmas themes enjoy tremendous popularity.

Many books intended to get children reading on their own rely on humour. Publishers of children’s books often have their own series for

beginning readers, many of which are penned by experienced, award-winning children’s authors and illustrators. The Multicoloured Rooster series of easy readers is an offshoot of the “Ella” books by Timo Parvela (b. 1964). These are stories about Ella and her Year Two classmates and their crazy hijinks – which always end up involving their poor teacher somehow. In *Ella ja Sampan urotyöt* (“**The Labours of Ella and Sam**”, Tammi 2011), Tuukka, the class genius, decides to take inspiration from the legendary labours of Hercules, so that shy Sam has a chance to mature and his mum will allow him to go to an event for Batman fans. Parvela portrays the group’s activities and the individual characteristics of all the children with great verve. There is some witty repartee, and one funny scene follows another. These books are also ideal for reading aloud at fun family storytimes.





The Clatter Ridge series by Tuula Kallioniemi (b. 1951) is also set in a school. This collection was originally published between 1997 and 2001, with illustrations by Sami Toivonen and Aino Havukainen. After a ten-year hiatus, the series made a long-awaited comeback, with a new illustrator in Jii Roikonen (b. 1970) and new pupils in the desks. In *Kaahailua ja kepposia* (“**Joyrides and Jokes**”, Otava 2011) Clatter Ridge Primary School is still a friendly village school with a diverse group of pupils of different ages together in one classroom. The dialogue and action bounce along, and the text is pitched at the right level for beginning readers.

Contemporary children’s books from Finland depict a wide variety of family models. In the Ricky Rapper (“Risto Rappääjä” in Finnish) books by the sisters Sinikka and Tiina Nopola (b. 1953 and 1955), Ricky lives with his slightly odd but highly responsible auntie Serena. Other characters include their neighbour Nelly, whose blonde hair resembles noodles; another neighbour, the bachelor Lennart Lindberg; and Freezer Fran, Ricky’s other aunt who occasionally comes to visit. In the latest instalment in the series, *Risto Rappääjä saa isän* (“**Ricky Rapper Gets a Dad**”, Tammi 2011) Serena decides Ricky needs a father figure in his life so he doesn’t become too much of a sissy. Mishaps and sticky situations arise when Mr Lindberg attempts to play the part of a sporty role model. The illustrations by Sami Toivonen and Aino Havukainen are full of witty details that enrich the story even further.

Siri Kolu’s (b. 1972) Finlandia Junior prize-winning novel *Me Rosvolat* (“**Me and the Robbers**”, Otava 2010) and its sequel *Me Rosvolat ja konnakaaroke* (“**The Robbers and the Bandit Karaoke**”, Otava 2011) are both bursting with adventure. Maisie, a ten-year-old girl, is kidnapped by a family of highway robbers. Once she

recovers from her initial shock, Maisie even starts to enjoy being together with the Robbers, a close-knit family who live outside the confines of society. The shortcomings of her own family become more apparent. The merry robbers’ lives are unpredictable and topsy-turvy, and they focus on enjoying things like eating loads of sweets. The summertime adventure in the second book gets under way when Maisie is kidnapped – or rescued, depending on your point of view – from violin camp. Both books feature spot illustrations by Tuuli Juusela (b. 1978).

Another series that exuberantly breaks free from the shackles of realism are the amusing Emilia’s Diary books, written by Paula Noronen (b. 1974) and illustrated by Pauliina Mäkelä (b. 1980). These stories seamlessly blend absurd elements with the joys and sorrows of a schoolgirl’s life. At the start of the series, 11-year-old Emilia acquires superpowers from the Great Guinea Pig. In the tradition of all true superheroes, her task is to help those weaker than herself. In the fifth book in the series, *Supermarsu ja kutistuva koulu* (“**Superguinea and the Shrinking School**”, Gummerus 2011) a new headteacher arrives at Emilia’s school, and at first he seems cool. He even showers them with marshmallows





Dad, Let's Go to the Forest, illustration by Martius Majelloma

and organises a space flight. But then things start to disappear: first the music class disappears, then the school kitchen. Someone needs to save the school before it vanishes completely. Emilia, who is still a kid after all, is tempted to use her superpowers to acquire an awesome games console for herself.

In their respective debut children's books, Leena Parkkinen (b. 1979) and Tuuve Aro (b. 1973) each chose to write about a family in which one parent had died, although in both books the loss is mentioned only in passing. The main emphasis is on getting by. In Parkkinen's novel for children, *Miss Milky Ray* (Teos 2011), a girl called Mercedes finds a cow by the name of Semi-Skimmed Tetra Rex Hytönen who needs help to win a bovine beauty pageant. The lonely girl and the undersized cow become friends and lend each other support. Camilla Pentti's (b. 1979) naïve illustration style is a good match for the subtle narrative that is a well-observed representation of how children think.

Tuuve Aro's *Korson purppuraruusu* ("The Purple Rose of Korso", WSOY 2011) takes its inspiration from the Woody Allen film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, in which a character steps off the screen and towards the audience. In Aro's book, Tallulah, a wild jungle girl, leaps into the Helsinki suburb of Korso and restores laughter to the life of a boy called Topi, thereby giving Topi's self-esteem a boost. Film fans reading this book will find lots of humorous references to cinematic classics. As she says goodbye to Topi, Tallulah declares, "We'll always have Korso." Sanna Mander's illustrations in bold orange and black evoke a fun retro vibe.

The use of humour in books for young adult audiences helps readers to deal with increasingly complex life and relationship difficulties. In Antti Halmes's (b. 1972) novel *Metalliveljet* ("Metal Brothers",

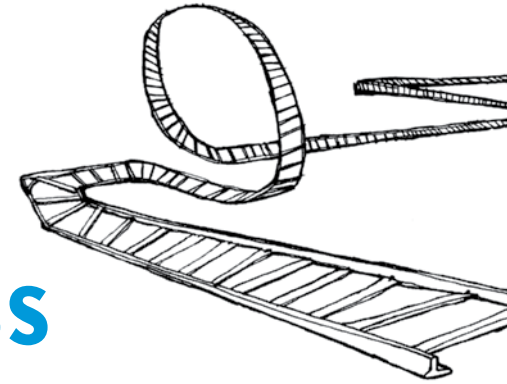
Otava 2009), Harri and Ville forge a friendship based on their shared taste in music and trash-talking. The lads spend a summer in Oslo, start a heavy-metal band and have to face off against a gang of racists. Light-hearted banter keeps the mood upbeat, even in some tough situations. In *Metalliveljet ja megabeibit* ("Metal Brothers and Megabebes", Otava 2011) the band is on a "creative hiatus" while the pals focus on making moronic videos. There are some thorny points that encroach on the humour, like when the boys' friendship is put to the test by girls and unexpected fame.

When *Suorin mutka ikinä* ("The Straightest Bend Ever", Tammi 2011) by Kari Levola (b. 1957) was reviewed in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's largest-circulation daily broadsheet newspaper, in December 2011, the headline quipped, "The funniest collection of stories ever?" These mini-short stories employ young narrators to relate entertaining and touching tales of school bullying, idiotic adults, dreams and love. The reviewer remarked that "the humour arises when the youngsters' ready wit and thoroughly infallible logic are analysed and dismantled." Levola's book is one indication that there is power in humour, which we can use to deal with even serious subjects – without neglecting the importance of laughter.

Ilona Lindh

M.A., freelance editor

On sore spots and expanding your consciousness



– Realism and alternative realities in young adult books

Finnish realist literature for young adults is undergoing a period of transition. The lifespan of a book has become shorter, and many authors feel they need to respond more rapidly to the constantly changing objects of teenagers' attention. There is a belief that teens who are enthusiastic users of social media and ever more choosy in their reading preferences want to read about more up-to-date topics. Then again, the best writers are distinguished by their ability to deal with issues that are universal to young people – sore spots that are ever-present, independent of time and place.

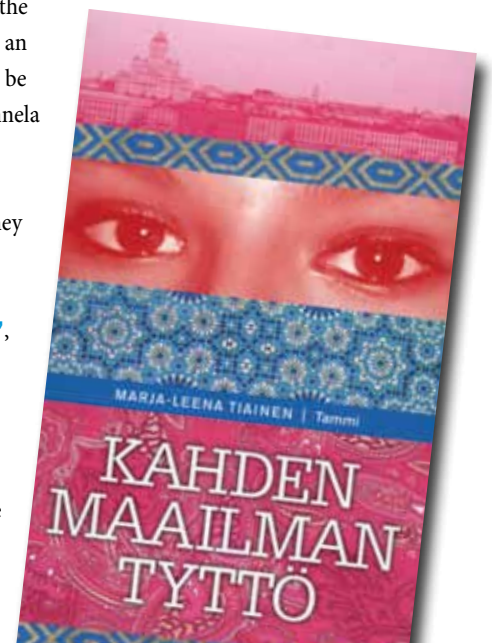
There was a trend, which almost crossed over into mannerism, in Swedish young adult novels in the 1990s to shy away from happy situations and portray the dark undertones and misfortunes of young people – violence, death and desperation. However, that trend did not take hold as such in Finnish writing. One of the hardest-hitting books from Finland in recent years is *Taivaan tuuliin* (“*Blown Away*”, Otava 2007) by Terhi Rannela (b. 1980). Its origins lie in the 9/11 attacks in 2001, which prompted the young writer to respond to the new sense of insecurity that extended to a place as far away from those attacks as Finland.

It just so happened that this novel was published shortly before a major school shooting tragedy in Finland, which occurred in the town of Jokela, 50 km from Helsinki. In that attack, an 18-year-old student shot eight people to death in the school building and then killed himself. Terhi Rannela's novel is a typical coming-of-age story that follows the life of Aura, a girl who is fed up with school, as she grows from a child into a young adult. Following the death of Aura's mother

in an accident, her father's inability to see his daughter's grief and distress, and her resulting susceptibility to the manipulations of an older man, Aura returns to her former school to take part in a Finnish Independence Day celebration with a ticking bomb in her rucksack. The ending is left open: it is up to the reader to play out the conclusion of the novel in their imagination.

Rannela's unsettling novel garnered little attention in the literary press in Finland. In Germany, however, it got the critics talking. The book became a popular source for discussion in schools, and people have been particularly interested in the psychology of Henri, the adult male who manipulates a girl. Unlike in Finland, German commentators raised questions about whether the writer should be concerned that an unbalanced young reader might be influenced by the book. But Rannela believes that authors writing for young people cannot address serious, difficult topics unless they also face up to that fear.

Kahden maailman tyttö (“*The Girl from Two Worlds*”, Tammi 2011) is an influential novel by Marja-Leena Tiainen (b. 1951) about Tara, a 17-year-old Kurdish girl from Turkey growing up in Finland. Violence





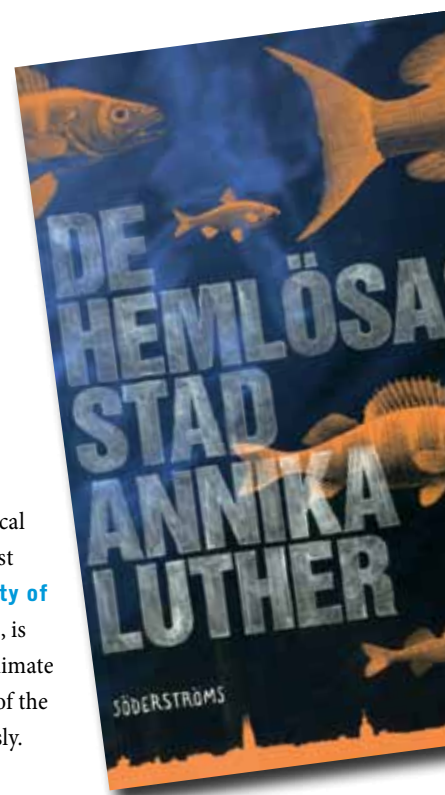
The School of Possibilities, illustrations by Jami Komen

committed by men in the name of honour is not questioned in the Muslim community, and Tara's own life comes under threat as she tries to balance the conflicts between her father's authority, her family's traditions and her own dreams. Tiainen's book was published at nearly the same time as *Layla*, a novel for adults by prominent Finnish author Jari Tervo, who depicts the same issue with slightly different emphases and from a more male-oriented perspective.

In the 21st century, discussions of books for children and young people are largely limited to specialist publications aimed at adults, along with blogs and online discussion forums. The decision in 2011 to give Finland's most prestigious award for books in this category, the €30,000 Finlandia Junior Prize, to Vilja-Tuulia Huotarinen (b. 1977) for her novel *Valoa valoa valoa* ("Light Light Light", Karisto 2011) became something of a "hot potato" in online discussions. Some adults thought this novel about the sexuality of its two 14-year-old main characters and the description of one girl's self-harming was too daring for a young readership. Huotarinen's work is evidence of the change that is under way in the thematic focal points of literature for older teens and adults. Reviews have expressed thanks for Huotarinen's book. Mothers and daughters are reading it together as an empowering shared experience and as a cross-over novel that appeals to readers beyond its target audience and trusts its readers' own insight and intuition. *Valoa valoa valoa* is also an excellent example of a young adult novel set in the recent past that opens up a traumatic event: the effects of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster on the coastal city of Turku in Finland.

Futuristic dystopias have become more common in the wake of the fantasy literature boom in Finland as well. *Viima* (WSOY 2006, *The School of Possibilities*, Sourcebooks 2010) and *Usva* ("Mist", WSOY 2009) by Seita Parkkola (b. 1971) are usually categorised as both magic realism and urban fantasy. Through the young characters in her novels, Parkkola presents a bleak vision of a world being destroyed, declining parental authority and even outright child neglect. But her books never sink into despair: the children and youths create their own society and generate power through co-operation.

Annika Luther (b. 1958) is a Finland-Swedish author who has consistently raised young readers' awareness of the significance of globalisation, climate change, environmental destruction and ethical responsibility on mankind. Her latest novel, *De hemlösa stad* ("The City of the Homeless", Söderströms 2011), is set in the year 2050. As a result of climate change and natural disasters, most of the Earth was flooded 15 years previously.





Helsinki was engulfed and lost its status as the capital of Finland. The city has been settled mainly by Chinese and Indian people who come up with new ways of making a living following the catastrophe. The “original residents” remaining in the city are severe alcoholics. Fifteen-year-old Lilja was evacuated with her family 400 km north of Helsinki when Lilja was just a baby. Lilja is accustomed to living under the close observation and strict controls of the authorities.

She becomes interested in her family’s past and decides to track down her aunt, who stayed behind in Helsinki. Little by little, the mysteries of the past open up. Luther’s novel is about getting by and adapting to the bleak conditions on the margins, where life can continue following a natural catastrophe. The central messages of tolerance and appreciation for multiculturalism in Luther’s work are evident in the mutual love and care that transcend cultural boundaries and nationalities in the novel.

Searching for your roots – both spiritual and biological – is also a key theme in a novel by Sari Peltoniemi (b. 1963) entitled *Kuulen kutsun metsänpeittoon* (“I Hear the Call of the Forest”, Tammi 2011). Peltoniemi’s young adult books typically contain a creative mixture of everyday life and mysticism: miracles and magic spells exist among the usual tribulations of adolescence. Interestingly, Peltoniemi portrays one of the most cruelly treated linguistic and cultural minority groups in Finland: the Skolt Sámi. Is Jouni’s mother, a Skolt Sámi who rejected her family, a nature spirit or even a harpy? Jouni experiences strange sensations, sees visions and finally ends up under a forest spell.

People have been concerned in recent years about children and young people becoming disconnected from the natural environment in Finland as well. Sari Peltoniemi’s novel portrays the Finnish forest as a

calming, even meditative place that sharpens the senses.

Since the days of Tove Jansson’s Moomins, trolls have tended to be sidelined from Finnish children’s and young adult books. But the secretive underground-dwelling figures familiar from folk tales are making a comeback. In her collection of stories entitled *Lymyvuoren peikot* (“The Trolls of Skulk Mountain”, Tammi 2011, illustrated by Christel Rönns), Eija Timonen (b. 1954) takes a daring dive into the underground empire of the trolls – and into the human subconscious.

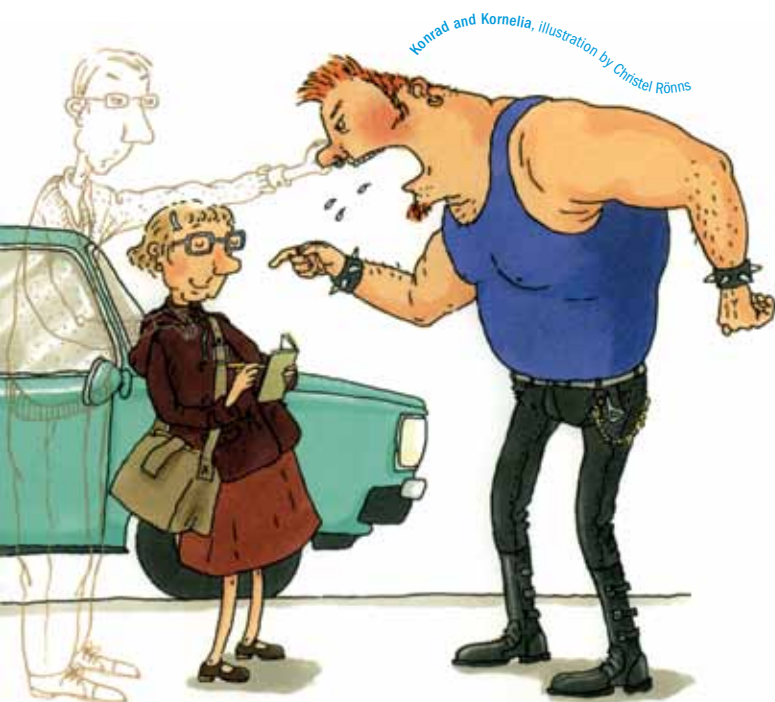
Underfors (“Underfors”, Söderströms 2010) a young adult novel by Maria Turtschaninoff (b. 1977), is an excellent example of how Finnish authors’ skill and inventiveness bring something sharp and original to the international fantasy genre. Irmelin Sandman Lilius (b. 1936), the *grande dame* of Finland-Swedish fantasy literature for children and young people, has gained a worthy successor in Turtschaninoff, who skilfully gets the reader entwined in her intense story. She is well-versed in the traditions of the fantasy genre, but is also brave enough to reshape it. Alva, a teenage girl, learns about her biological parents, who are not from this world. She is led to Underfors, an underground kingdom located beneath the streets of Helsinki, where she hears that she is actually a descendant of the Shadow King. This book is teeming with trolls, water-sprites, kelpies, elves and sorceresses, all of which possess a charisma typical of the genre. Next to the trendy stories about relationships between vampires and humans that have appeared in recent years, *Underfors* is a refreshingly different coming-of-age story. Despite the delicate tendrils of its narrative, it keeps the reader engrossed right up to the ultimately tranquil ending.

Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen

Ph.D., university lecturer, researcher and reviewer

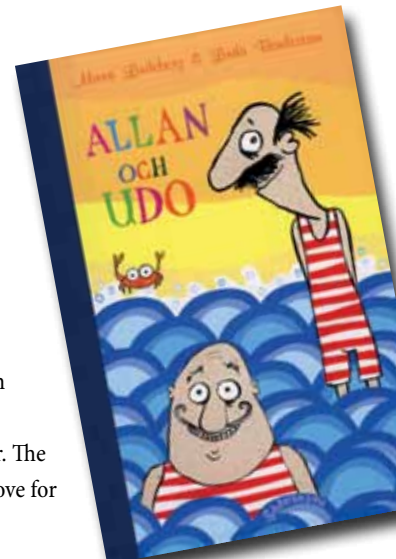
Anarchy and idyll in Finland-Swedish picture books

The playful Finland-Swedish picture books published in the past decade permit readers' minds to delve much deeper than the apparent simplicity of a picture book. Accompanied by worlds of colourful images that tickle the imagination, they portray everything from same-sex love to conflicts between parents and children. Authors and illustrators consciously construct a child's perspective on life while not shying away from addressing adult issues. It is striking how often intergenerational encounters are emphasised, and a number of books highlight strong relationships between children and the elderly.



Love and relationships are recurring themes in Finland-Swedish picture books in the 21st century. A surprising number of books are about adult love, though they are always addressed to children. For example, *Businnan blir kär* (“**Businnan Falls in Love**”, Söderströms 2011) by Annika Sandelin (b. 1972) and Linda Bondestam (b. 1977) offers up a passionate romance including an elopement and unexpected pregnancy starring two cuddly animals, while *Konrad och Kornelia* (“**Konrad and Kornelia**”, Schildts 2010) by Katarina von Numers-Ekman (b. 1972) and Christel Rönns (b. 1960) spins a clever love triangle between two lonely pensioners. In this story, it ends up being a tale of “two’s company, three’s a crowd” when Kornelia’s imaginary friend Bengtsson, who has been her companion since childhood, suddenly finds himself surplus to requirements.

These books about adult love often address the ups and downs of being in a couple. Minna Lindeberg (b. 1968) and Linda Bondestam’s insightful relationship drama *Allan och Udo* (“**Allan and Udo**”, Söderströms 2011) provides a fresh perspective on how difficult – and how wonderful – it can be to grow old together. The story is about two elderly men and their love for



one another. When Allan and Udo share “the same dream, the way an apartment building shares electricity” one magical Christmas night, grumpy old Udo Bismarck gets his old butterfly wings back. But even though it’s lovely to dream and fly together, it’s just as important – if not more so – to Allan and Udo to be able to land together.

The brilliantly colourful *Den förträfflige herr Glad* (“**The Distinguished Mr Glad**”, Söderströms

2004) by Malin Kivelä (b. 1974) and Linda Bondestam features another

apparently mismatched couple. Mr Glad has – just as his name indicates – an unshakably positive attitude towards life and his fellow citizens. Thanks to his perseverance and rich baked goodies such as “meringue sausages”, “pork puffs” and “cream flings” from Kurt’s Bakery, love begins to blossom between the *bon vivant* Mr Glad and Miss Lemon, a newly arrived, prickly loner.



While children are virtually absent from the pages of the picture books mentioned thus far – in fact, one could say that the caricatured adults serve as proxy children – many Finland-Swedish picture books deal specifically with intergenerational encounters. In *Dunderlunds bästa bokstav* (“**Dunderlund’s Best Letter**”, PQR 2009) by Åsa Lind (b. 1958) and Sara Lundberg (b. 1971) a brief, unremarkable

encounter by the letterboxes sparks a friendship between Frida, an outspoken girl, and Dunderlund, an old loner. Frida is just learning to read and wants to know what Dunderlund’s “best” letter is. That becomes something for the old man to ponder. This book provides a firm relationship to words and letters beyond the didactic approach of ordinary ABC books. Readers can think about their own “best” letter and are encouraged to believe that there is a poet inside every one of us.

A more unruly relationship is portrayed with real accuracy in *Soffpotatisen* (“**The Couch**





Potato”, Söderströms 2005) by Kasper (b. 1974) and Nora Strömman (b. 1980), which recognises that parents and children often want very different things. As in the popular *Vesta-Linnéa* series (Söderströms 2001–) by Tove Appelgren and Salla Savolainen, the plot centres around arguing and making up again. In the Strömmans’ book Elmer wants to play, while his dad wants to relax. Books about everyday topics like

boisterous children and tired, boring parents have a high recognition factor. This book in particular, with its colourful, distinctly retro illustrations, offers a few surprising twists here and there.

It’s not that great a leap from books that portray encounters and power struggles between children and adults to picture books where the authors take great pains to position themselves on the side of the children.

Lasse ensam hemma (“**Lasse Home Alone**”, Söderströms 2007) is a pan-Scandinavian picture book that also embodies a child’s perspective. It cleverly portrays a small child’s concept of time as being determined by his emotions, and his fear of being abandoned. Lasse stays at home while his mum goes out to do the shopping. She’s been away for ages, Lasse thinks, and he is unable to stop himself thinking that something terrible might have happened. However, the clock in the background reveals that it is only a matter of 20 minutes. Under this simple exterior, a complex story is created based on children’s unconditional need for security and reassurance.

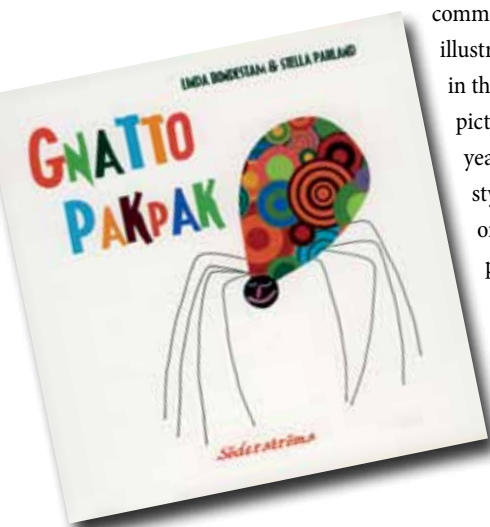
In evocative black and white, **Mörkerboken** (“**The Book of the Dark**”, Söderströms 2009) by Hannele Mikaela Taivassalo (b. 1974) and Lena Frölander-Ulf (b. 1976) also hints at cracks in an idyll. This modern, topsy-turvy tale is about Princess Little, who chooses to reject her wealth and venture out into the unknown to find a new way of life. With some help from fairy-tale archetypes, the authors





create a story about fear, confinement and release. Worry penetrates the thick walls of the castle, and the princess, who had never understood being afraid, is now plagued by a fear of all the unknown things outside. “What do you do when you’ve got so much gold to watch over that you haven’t got time to think about anything else?” Princess Little grows tired of being afraid and decides to head out into the dark, dangerous forest.

So Finland-Swedish picture books do not shy away from going on detours in their stories. Playful experimentation with form is also common. Linda Bondestam, an illustrator who has been prominent in the field of Finland-Swedish picture books for a number of years, has a distinctive collage style that combines colourful, orderly compositions with pure chaos. Together with her trusted collaborator Stella Parland (b. 1974), Bondestam has produced works including the



brilliant **Gnatto Pakpak** (Söderströms 2010), a point-and-say book in sturdy cardboard that’s full of improbable creepy-crawlies you’ll never encounter under a microscope. This delightful little book is a modern bestiary which shows that reality is no match for the imagination.

Min bror Lev (“**My Brother Lev**”, Söderströms 2007) by Mikaela Sundström (b. 1971) and Linda Bondestam proves that Finland-Swedish picture book authors are guardians of a poetic, multifaceted language. In this dreamlike book written in lyrical prose, readers can share in a young girl’s musings on life, the universe and her beloved older brother Lev.

Children’s books that dare to show the cracks in the idyll have the power to touch readers very deeply. That’s why it’s important to have room for both anarchy and idylls between the covers. By daring to take their readership seriously in this way, Finland-Swedish authors and illustrators of picture books create something for both young readers and adults who read with them. No matter how old readers are or what they have experienced in life, 21st-century Finland-Swedish picture books provide food for thought and encourage repeated readings together.

Maria Lassén-Seger

Ph.D., literary critic specialising in children’s books

The many faces of love



Love stories have a long history in Finnish children's literature. One of the best-loved classics over the years has been *Pessi ja Illusia* ("Pessi and Illusia", WSOY 1944), a fantasy tale by Yrjö Kokko about the love of a gnome for a little fairy in a forest. In Finnish children's and young adult books in the 21st century, love comes in a variety of forms and tones.

Recent picture books portray a mother's love and affection for her small child as an enjoyable, secure basic state that little readers can easily relate to – even when the illustrations depict a mother monkey or bird with her young. This state of happiness doesn't even require any events – it is pleasing just as it is. Love is reciprocal: a mother's love for her child, and the child's love for his or her mother.

But life doesn't always continue in a state of happiness, and when children are old enough to go to nursery, there are picture books that also serve up crises, fears and threats. Many children's books tell stories of getting through something: love is at risk, and sometimes it is even false. Characters must compete and overcome obstacles to achieve it.

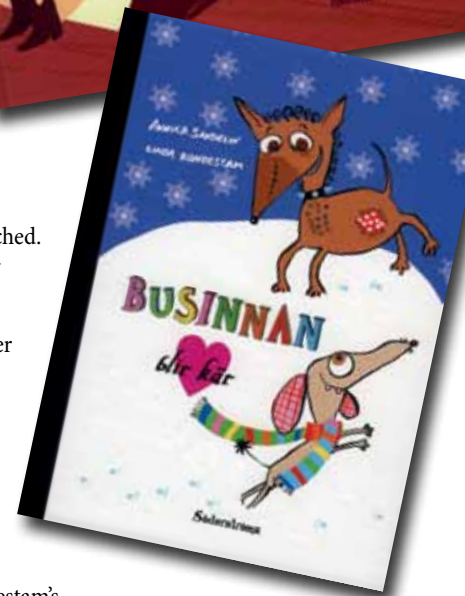
In books for teens, the family may present a bundle of problems to be sorted out in a variety of ways. These books can help young readers work through the challenges in their own lives. There is plenty of humour and attitude to be found as well.

The notion of love at first sight has not gained much of a foothold in Finnish children's books. Perhaps authors avoid it for pedagogical reasons. It's not sensible to fall head over heels in love! Sometimes it does happen, though – even in picture books. Annika Sandelin and Linda Bondestam's book *Businnan blir kär* ("Businnan Falls in Love",

Söderströms 2011) was made to charm readers of all ages.

Petra's pet, a stuffed dog called Businna who was "adopted" from the street, picks up a surprising scent from a mutt named Rackham. The cloth hounds run away and enjoy a brief romance, resulting in a baby. This story is a straightforward depiction of a fling. Businna and Rackham's love has no strings attached. But Businna quickly grows tired of the vagabond life Rackham has to offer and returns home to spend her pregnancy being pampered by the other toys living in the nursery.

The baby arrives – a toy puppy called Valpinna – and is accepted without fuss as a member of the extended family. A slice of life that's present in Linda Bondestam's illustrations as well! The happy mess in the nursery is a good match for the carefree exuberance of the text.



Meanwhile, a love story about a little toy crocodile is set in an ordinary Finnish forest in *Rakastunut krokotili* (“**The Crocodile in Love**”, Tammi 2011) by Hannu Hirvonen (b. 1965) and Pia Sakki (b. 1966). It was shortlisted for the Finlandia Junior Prize in 2011. Like his famous namesake, Romeo the crocodile feels in love even before he meets his sweetheart. A hedgehog and bear express their philosophical views on the poetry-reciting crocodile’s concerns about love, and emotions are conveyed by that protector of all lovers – the moon.

The lives of children from divorced families are addressed in Maisa Tonteri (b. 1944) and Virpi Talvitie’s (b. 1961) book *Okko Oravan kaksi pesää* (“**Okko Squirrel Has Two Nests**”, Lasten Keskus 2011). The feuding Squirrel parents decide that the best thing to do is split up, and the other forest animals also think that’s preferable to the constant arguing. Okko scurries easily through the forest between his two homes, but a scary little pine marten lurks along Okko’s route. The animal community in the forest come to protect Okko and realise that together – collectively – is a very good way to live indeed.

For many children, transferring a familiar situation into the world of forest animals helps them to work through their problems. Virpi Talvitie’s illustrations also help. The soft, inviting surfaces skilfully rendered in pastels and watercolours make a difficult subject easier to deal with.



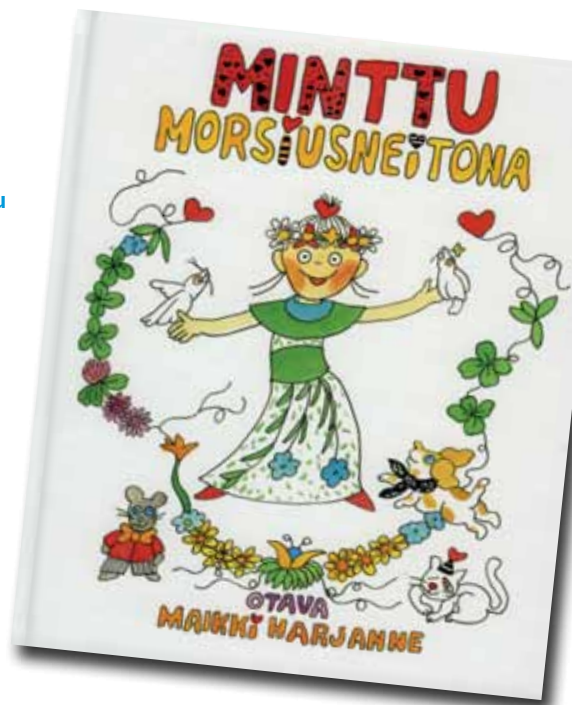
In *Minttu morsiusneitona* (“**Minttu the Bridesmaid**”, Otava 2011), a picture book by Maikki Harjanne (b. 1944), the antics of a much-loved character who serves as a bridesmaid provide a humorous perspective on love. Minttu’s Australian uncle comes to Finland to get married to his bride Aino, whom he met on the internet.

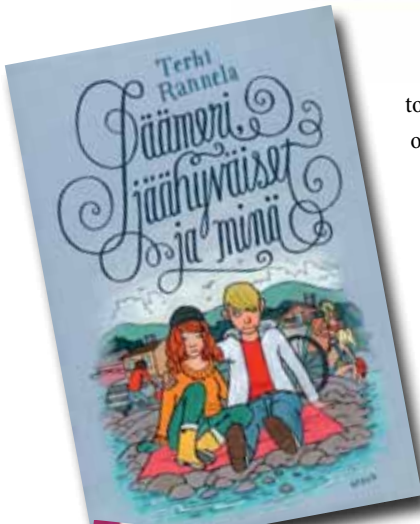
Maikki Harjanne depicts the subject with a contemporary feel, where wedding traditions are observed just as a fun game. The informal hand-drawn illustrations are designed to appeal to children.

Taivaallinen suurperhe (“**A Heavenly Extended Family**”, Otava 2011) by Marjatta Levanto (b. 1944) and Julia Vuori (b. 1968) is

an ambitious art book that illustrates love with the power of mythology. This title, which was shortlisted for the Finlandia Junior Prize last year, presents legends and myths from all over the world. Love is not likely to succeed without some assistance. It requires protectors, such as archangels or goddesses, and little gods of love to help them – such as Krishna from India or Eros from Greece. Some myths emphasise the randomness of love, though others maintain it is eternal.

This book’s liberal, multicultural approach makes it suitable for open-ended discussions about good and evil, beauty and ugliness. The heavy material is lightened by Julia Vuori’s cute little dragon characters with their own personalities. She has also painted some stately scenes of ancient treasures from various cultures





to give the books wide-ranging material a sense of structure.

Terhi Rannela structures her books as travel journals, with the same characters adventuring from one book to the next, but with different narrators. The ties among the travelling companions grow stronger with their shared experiences. Events are sprinkled with plenty of quotes from pop music and clothing adverts. Informal text messages are used as a stylistic device.

Kerttu and Mira, two girls in a lesbian relationship, are at the core of *Amsterdam, Anne F. ja minä* (“*Amsterdam, Anne F. and Me*”, Otava 2008) by Rannela. Women’s love is addressed in a number of contexts. The characters in Rannela’s *Goa, Ganesha ja minä* (“*Goa, Ganesha and Me*”, Otava 2009) experience extreme emotions, poverty and beauty. In *Jäämeri, jäähyväiset ja minä* (“*Farewells, the Arctic Sea and Me*”, Otava 2010) the narrator is Ilari, a boy who uses a wheelchair. Terhi Rannela juxtaposes life’s difficulties with playful yet sometimes dangerous love. Her

characters’ relationships with their parents in this series are portrayed as friendly and secure. Divorced parents are introduced to stepfamilies, and relationships become clarified through crises; characters live in the present, in a fleeting moment.

In *Sello ja Pallo* (“*Cello and Ball*”, Tammi 2009), Lauri Törhönen’s (b. 1947) young adult novel that was awarded the Topelius Prize, Mikael literally falls at Aino’s feet while she is performing on her cello at the funeral of Mikael’s father. Mikael falls in love. The football-mad boy is devoted to the cello-playing girl. Two very different cultures collide. This story by Törhönen, who made his name as a film director and screenwriter, has a number of flashbacks and brief scenes, and the narrative pace is relaxed. A film version of this story, set in Helsinki, is being planned.

The standalone sequel, *Kontrapunkti & Voittomaali* (“*Counterpoint and the Winning Point*”, Tammi 2011) focuses on Mikael and Aino as they grow up and their love grows deeper – a fine subject for books about love for big and little readers alike.

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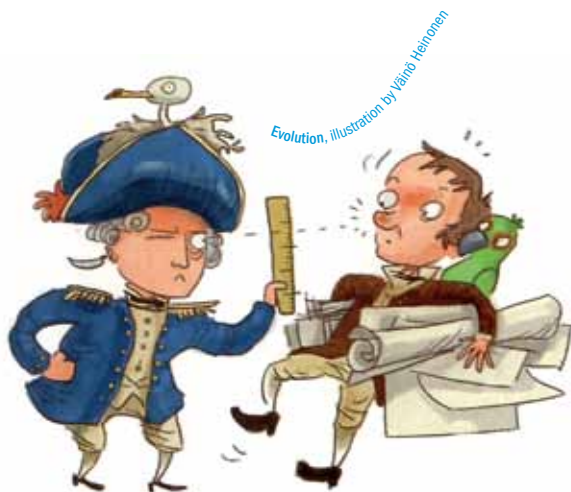
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Most widely translated authors,

1977–2011: Tove Jansson's books have been translated into 44 languages (281 translations in all) * Mauri Kunnas has been translated into 30 languages (184 translations in all) * Timo Parvela has been translated into 16 languages (28 translations in all).

Most widely translated authors,

2010–2011: Tove Jansson (15 translations) * Mauri Kunnas (13) * Timo Parvela (13) * Aino Havukainen & Sami Toivonen (12) * Markus Majaluoma (11) * Riikka Jäntti (5) * Tove Appelgren (4) * Seita Parkkola (4) * Esko-Pekka Tiitinen (4).

Top languages for translations,

2010–2011: Polish and Swedish (11 books each) * Chinese (10) * Japanese (9) * Danish (8) * Norwegian and Russian (7 each) * English, German and Faeroese (5 each).

Recent translation successes

around the world: Rights for Aino Havukainen and Sami Toivonen's "Tatu and Patu" books have been sold to 16 countries (for example Adriano Salani Editore, Bjartur, Clavis, Éditions Glénat, Jumava, Juvenile & Children's

Publishing House, Kaisei-sha, MD Media, Nieko rimto, Pegasus, Thienemann, Tiden / Rabén & Sjögren and Vodnikova Založba).

* Siri Kolu's *Me Rosvolat* ("Me and the Robbers") was sold to 10 countries in a single year. The total now stands at 11 and the sequel, *Me Rosvolat ja konna-karaoke* ("The Robbers and the Bandit Karaoke") has been sold to Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden (Bonnier Carlsen, Gottmer and Heyne / Random House) * The 14 books in Kristiina Louhi's Tomppa (Tommy) series were sold to South Korea (Sewon Books) in 2011. * Timo Parvela's *Keinulauta* ("Seesaw") has been sold to 11 countries (for example Hanser, Ogi Publishers, Kodansha and Turbine) and *Ella* series into 6 languages (Hanser, Mangschou, Nasza księgarnia and Pongrác). * Tove Appelgren and Salla Savolainen's *Vesta-Linnéa* books have been sold to 10 countries. The latest sales were to India and Russia (A&A Trust, MD Media). * Esko-Pekka Tiitinen and Nikolai Tiitinen's book *Kyyhkyn kysymys* has been translated into Catalan, English and Spanish (*Drops of Life*, Cuento de Luz, 2011) and into Corean (Junglegym Books, 2012).

For more information: Translation database, www.finlit.fi/fili

