

Reading Estonian Literature through a German Lens. How Ivar Ivask Became a World-Renowned Literary Scholar¹

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Abstract: Ivar Ivask (1927–1992) is a cosmopolitan man who edited a quarterly world literature magazine *Books Abroad / World Literature Today* for more than 20 years; initiated the Puterbaugh Conference series; created and curated the Neustadt or the so-called small Nobel Prize for Literature. His personal archive is since 2016 held at the Estonian Cultural History Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum. The current article explores the very first steps of Ivar Ivask toward becoming a literary scholar and critic.

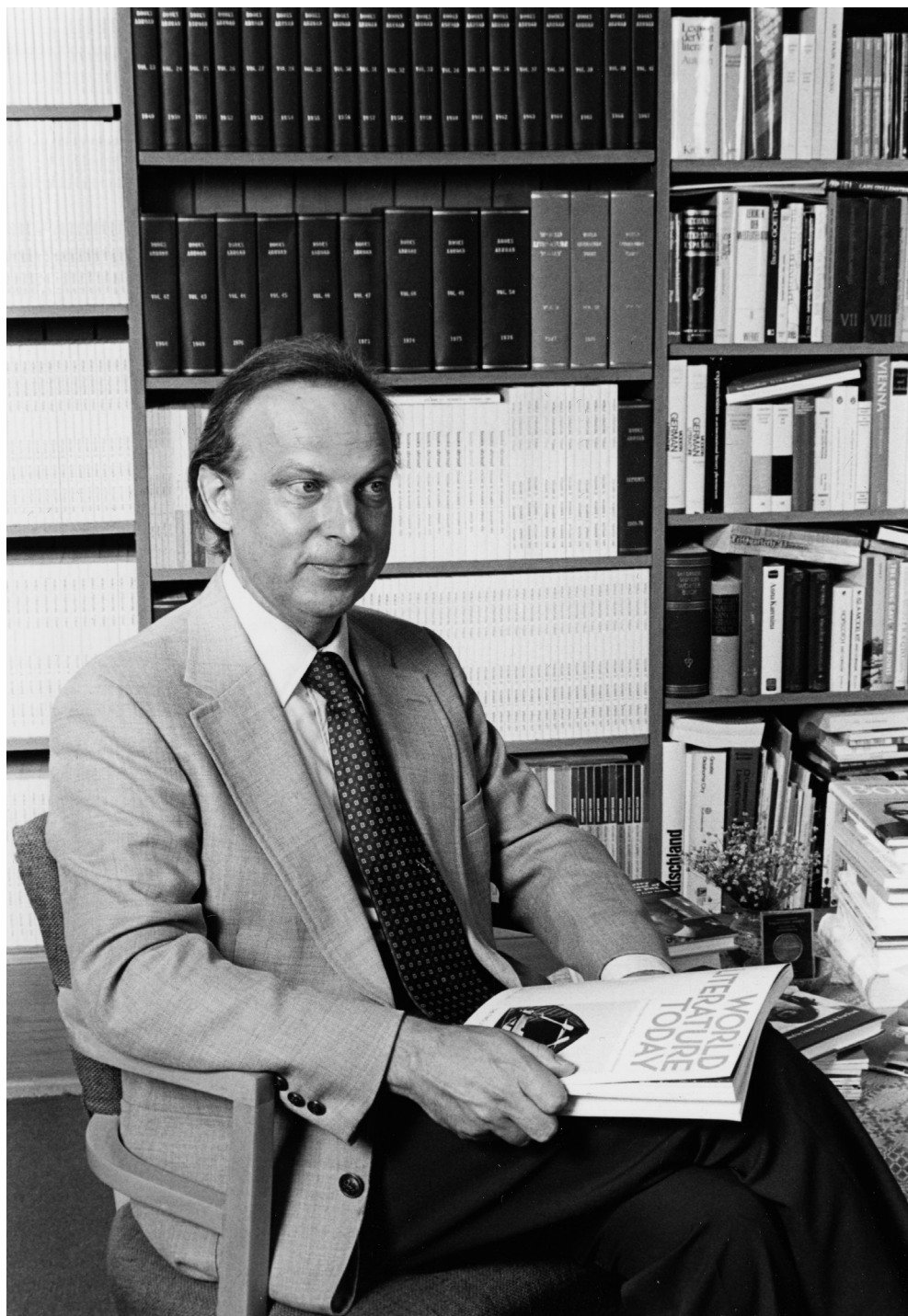
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At the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, Estonia and Latvia celebrated the 90th anniversary of the birth of the Estonian-Latvian poet and literary scholar Ivar Ivask (1927–1992), a cosmopolitan who edited the quarterly world literature magazine *Books Abroad / World Literature Today* for more than 20 years; initiated the Puterbaugh Conference series dedicated to French and Spanish writers; created and curated the Neustadt Prize for Literature, also called the small Nobel Prize for Literature. His personal archive, held since 2016 at the Estonian Cultural History Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum contains more than 500 correspondences of Ivask in several languages with writers all over the world, many of whom are world-renowned authors, and some of whom have been awarded the Nobel Prize. Ivask, born in Riga of a Latvian mother and Estonian father, and raised with German as his home language, lived and worked for most of his life in the United States of America as editor of an English-language literature magazine and a professor of German and comparative literature. He chose Estonian as one of the languages of his own poetry and the main intimate language of his diaries.

The current article wishes to explore the very first steps of Ivar Ivask toward becoming a literary scholar and critic. It is also of interest how his engagement with Estonian literature was motivated and curated, and what were his principles and

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Ivar Ivask as the Editor-in-Chief of *World Literature Today*. Photo: Estonian Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum: EKM EKLA B-211: 64.

grounds of understanding and reading Estonian literature as well as literature in general. Interestingly enough, having studied German literature and art history in Marburg in Germany (1946–1949), and defended his master's thesis on the poet Gottfried Benn in 1950, Ivask wrote and published his first scholarly review in 1951 in the Estonian diaspora literary magazine *Tulimuld*, not on German or Austrian literary criticism, but on the role of Estonian literary criticism.

The fact of becoming a public literary figure and starting to engage with Estonian and other contemporary literatures is also a question of chance and coincidence, as Ivask hints in his memoirs-within-diaries (Ivask 1956–1963). However, this is only partly true. I would like to argue that this is also due to Ivar Ivask's boldness in making contacts and starting dialogues with authors whose work he admired. Writing and thinking about poetry and literature was for him self-evidently bound to personal contacts, learning first-hand, and exposing his thoughts and critique to the authors whose work he discussed. Thus the aim of the present discussion is also to elaborate on the factors that helped Ivar Ivask become who he later was.

Guided by coincidence and role models

In 1960 Ivar Ivask recalls in his diaries how his path as a literary critic and especially as an Estonian literary critic began (Ivask 1956–1963, 125–126). After fleeing with his family to Germany in 1944, Ivask studied at the Estonian High School in Wiesbaden for about two years and graduated in 1946. In his diary excerpt Ivask recalls how a schoolmate, Eetla Ein, gave him the poetry collection *Sunday* (*Pühapäev*, 1946) by the Estonian author Bernard Kangro, published the same year in Swedish exile. The occasion for Ivask remembering this is the 50th birthday of Bernard Kangro (1910–1994), whose collected poems *Timeless Memory* (*Ajatu mälestus*, Kangro 1960) Ivar Ivask was publishing at the time. In a sense, Ivask hints that he is publishing Kangro's collected poems due to the coincidence that he had come across his poetry book during his school years.² It is also noteworthy that Ivask's education was primarily in German: in Riga he briefly attended an Estonian school in 1939 and later, in emigration, studied at an Estonian school in Wiesbaden in 1944–1946 (Olesk 2007, 6). Only due to Bernard Kangro's poetic influence and admiration of his poetry does Ivask turn to Estonian literature, and he asks at the beginning of 1951 whether Kangro could help him to acquire some Estonian books (Ivask 1956–1963, 125).

2 The notion of coincidence or chance (Germ. Zufall) seems to be relevant for Ivar Ivask. In his letter to Russian poet Boris Pasternak Ivask writes: "Wir sind beide darüber einverstanden, dass es keine Zufälle—oder nur Zufälle—im Leben gibt" (Ivask 1959, 2/1–2/2).

Bernard Kangro, who since 1950 had been editor-in-chief of the Estonian diaspora literary magazine *Tulimuld* (published in Sweden), had urged Ivar Ivask in 1951 to write about the situation of contemporary Estonian poetry, its translations and status within the larger European context after Ivask had critiqued the situation of Estonian literature in general. Ivask takes up Kangro's challenge, but he does not write about the role and situation of Estonian poetry as Kangro suggests (Ivask 1956–1963, 125). Instead, he elaborates on the role of Estonian literary criticism in the diaspora. In parallel to his doctoral studies in German literature at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and his work on the literary criticism of the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Ivask publishes an article titled "Thoughts on the tasks of Estonian literary criticism" ("Mõtteid eesti kirjanduskriitika ülesannetest") in *Tulimuld* 4/1951. The first article in *Tulimuld* is soon followed by several other articles on Estonian, Spanish, and German literatures.

Tulimuld 1/1952 publishes Ivask's second article "Critical thoughts" ("Kriitilisi mõtisklusi") on the Estonian novel and poetry. In *Tulimuld* 2/1952 Ivask discusses Spanish poetry, specifically, the poetry of Jorge Guillén, and publishes some examples of his own translations of Guillén's poetry into Estonian. A few months later, "Some proposals for introducing Estonia" ("Ettepanekuid Eesti tutvustamiseks") is published in *Tulimuld* 5/1952. In 1954, Ivask writes on the situation of German and European novel through three consecutive issues of *Tulimuld* (3–5) and publishes more translations of Jorge Guillén's poetry into Estonian.

In 1955, Ivask presents his translations of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca in another Estonian diaspora journal, *Vaba Eesti* (2/1955) issued in Sweden. The following year, an article on the vitality of the European novel in Austria is published in *Tulimuld* 6/1956. While so far Ivask had written about Estonian, German, Austrian and Spanish literatures in Estonian, his first book reviews in English were published in 1956 in the quarterly literary magazine *Books Abroad*, the magazine of which he would become the editor-in-chief twelve years later. In *Books Abroad* 2/1956, Ivask publishes a review of Bernard Kangro's novel *Peipsi* and in *Books Abroad* 3/1956, a review of Osip Mandelshtam's collected poems *Собрание сочинении* (Tarvas 2006).

Based on Ivar Ivask's very first steps as a literary critic and scholar, one can clearly appreciate the wide scope of his knowledge about different European languages and literatures, since he writes on German (and Austrian), Spanish, Russian and Estonian literatures, while also acting as a mediator, a "translator" between languages and cultures. His interest is not so much derived from the field of study; rather, he follows his own passions, his love for poetry and for certain authors. Thus it is essential to understand that Ivar Ivask was first of all a poet before becoming a

literary critic and scholar. In his self-written short biography (Ivask, n.d.) as well as in his diary in 1967 (Ivask 2007, 31) and a later article, “Home within language and literature” (Ivask [1989] 2010) he describes how, similarly to Boris Pasternak he discovered Rilke’s poetry books in his father’s library at the age of 15 and how Rilke was a real discovery for him; how Rilke’s poetry inspired him and changed his life. Ivask wrote his first poems in German and already in 1945 published his first poetry book, *Seelenwege. Aus ersten Gedichten*.

In 1967 Ivask retrospectively recalls that before his studies in Marburg from 1946 to 1949, and before he had met Professor Werner Milch, he had had only two real discoveries or poetic mentors: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) in Riga 1942/1943, and Paul Valéry (1871–1945) in Wetzlar in the autumn of 1945 (Ivask 2007, 31). Ivask was an idealist and he aimed high; he wanted to learn from the best. One can also argue that his love towards (German-Austrian) poetry urged him to become a critic and a scholar. His love of poetry also spurred him to make contact with contemporary poets whom he admired. In a retrospective essay on Austrian writer Heimito von Doderer (1896–1966) with whom he corresponded for over 10 years, Ivask states that for him it is one and the same thing to write about and write to an author (Ivask 1972, 104). This means that if Ivask was fond of someone’s oeuvre, he didn’t hesitate to make direct contact with the author and express his admiration and respect. Sharing his reviews with reviewed authors also facilitated direct contacts and friendships with them. Besides his admiration of known talents, the Estonian literary scholar Jaan Undusk (2016, 545) has also underlined Ivask’s affection and intuition towards rising literary stars: “He liked to be around those who were to be exploded into world literature.”³

During his studies in Marburg, Ivask was strongly influenced by his professor of German literature, Werner Milch (1903–1950), who introduced Ivask to the principles of comparative literature studies and literary criticism. “The first real teacher for me was Werner Milch at Marburg University. Respect and love were balanced in this relationship” (Ivask 2007, 31). Werner Milch had a respectful but also to some extent skeptical view towards German literary thought and that felt fresh and inspiring to Ivask. “He was a masterful teacher, intense, personal in his talks and he always kept the interest of the listeners” (32).

Milch’s attitude of personal engagement would be characteristic of Ivask’s approach as well. It is noteworthy that Ivask contacts the Spanish poet Jorge Guillén (on whose poetry he had published an essay in Estonian in 1952) in the summer of

3 Quotes from Estonian and German are translated by the author of the article.

the same year (Ivask 1952c). Similarly, in 1957 when Ivask's article on Heimito von Doderer's novel *The Demons* (*Die Dämonen*) is published in *Books Abroad* (4/1957), he makes contact with the author and meets him personally in Munich on 20 August 1957 (Ivask 1972, Tarvas 1997). Personal correspondence is established with Boris Pasternak in 1959, shortly before Pasternak's death in 1960 (Sergeeva-Klyatis 2018, Ivask 1959).

Looking closely into Ivar Ivask's first steps as a literary critic, one can notice the importance of literary as well as scholarly role models. Ivar Ivask himself has also drawn attention to or retrospectively interpreted the importance of chance and coincidence in his life and life choices. In his diary he recalls how his later wife Astrid was the one who took him to Werner Milch's lectures, and Werner Milch was the one who inspired him to read Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Gottfried Benn, about whom Ivask later wrote his doctoral dissertation (Ivask 2007, 29). Thus it is also relevant to keep in mind that Ivask's career as a literary critic within Estonian literature and on international English-speaking platforms began parallel to his writing of his doctoral thesis on the Austrian *fin-de-siècle* author Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929). One could ask whether and to what extent Ivask's view of literature, especially Estonian literature was formed through his thorough academic work with literature in the German language.

Call for European-ness

It is noteworthy that Ivask writes his doctoral thesis (1950–1953) on Hugo von Hofmannsthal's literary criticism—"Hofmannsthal als Kritiker der deutschen Literatur" (Ivask 1953)—whereas today Hofmannsthal is not mainly regarded as a critic, but rather as a literary author. This choice of dissertation topic could already have been hinting at Ivask's special interest in the role of critics. Taking a closer look at the 462-page manuscript of Ivask's doctoral thesis, one could argue that Ivask was above all interested in Hofmannsthal's self-awareness as a writer and critic, but also in his methodology of writing literary criticism. Titles of the dissertation chapters such as "Methodological grounds of Hofmannsthal's literary criticism" ("Die methodischen Grundlagen von Hofmannsthals Literaturkritik") or "Critical achievement of Hofmannsthal" ("Die kritische Leistung Hofmannsthals") give an idea of Ivask's research interests.

Ivask underlines two major ideas within Hofmannsthal's literary criticism: 1) the importance of Europe and the idea of European literature and 2) the concept of a poet-critic. For Hofmannsthal, European literature is one organic sphere, and Ivask argues that his literary criticism could also be described as European: "Hofmannsthals Kritik ist europäisch ausgerichtet" (170). Furthermore, Ivask

claims with Hofmannsthal that the idea of Europe can best be encountered within European literature: “Die geistige Idee Europa manifestiert sich am schönsten in den europäischen Literaturen. Hier wird wahrhaftig „Europa als einheitliches Civilisationsgebiet“ sichtbar” (169).

Ivask concludes:

One can say that Hofmannsthal’s idea of Europe was not one of a closed cultural circle, but rather of a cultural circle opened to the rest of the world. [...] The role model for his aspiration in world literature was Goethe and the Great German Century with its interest in creative-cultural translations, adaptations and mimicking. (Ivask 1953, 171)

Similar ideas of the European-ness of literary critics that Ivask researches based on Hofmannsthal’s work also acquire relevance for himself. His first published article in *Tulimuld*, “Thoughts on the tasks of Estonian literary criticism” (Ivask [1951] 2003) begins with a quote, a motto from René Wellek, which is in many ways a programmatic text:

The study of comparative literature in this sense will make high demands on the linguistic proficiencies of our scholars. It asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve. Yet literature is one, as art and humanity are one; and in this conception lies the future of historical literary studies (René Wellek). (Ivask [1951] 2003, 9)

Ivask argues with Wellek that small national literatures cannot be considered separately, but need to be seen in larger, European contexts. At the same time he also states that the first and most important role of the diaspora is to preserve the nation. According to Ivask, the Estonians should be proud of their talented and world-rank novelists and poets (of poets, Ivask names Juhan Liiv, Gustav Suits, Marie Under, Betti Alver, Uku Masing, Bernard Kangro and of novelists—Eduard Vilde, A. H. Tammsaare, Friedebert Tuglas, August Gailit, Karl Ristikivi), but at the same time there would be no point in analyzing and seeing them only within an Estonian literary context (Ivask [1951] 2003, 9). The role of a scholarly critic is to put such authors into a comparative perspective, in order to open up the full spectrum of their possibilities.

We need more comprehensive critical essays on the best authors and main issues of our literature, we need biographies. Not only good translations, but also simultaneous critical articles that elaborate on our literature and compare it to other literatures can help to build a European name to our literature. (Ivask [1951] 2003, 16)

Ivask elaborates on the difference between literary criticism and studies of literary history. Whereas literary historical studies concentrate on the past, critics need to show the position and role of a text in the contemporary context. Scholarly critics need to widen their perspective and also take a comparative view, the position of an author or a text within a bigger framework. For Ivask the framework is first and foremost European; he clearly states that despite the fact that Estonian literature has a very short history of its own, we need to see it within a (Western) European cultural context which is more than 3000 years old (Ivask [1951] 2003, 10).

Such an approach and the understanding of European literature obviously demands very high and broad philological skills, as Ivask asserted in the above quotation from Wellek. One needs to know languages, and Ivask himself obviously knew several European languages. He was able to read and write about Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Finnish, German, Spanish, French, Italian, and Greek literatures.

In his second article "Critical thoughts" Ivask continues to elaborate on the need of being in contact with European contexts and developments (Ivask 1952a). This time Ivask talks specifically about the relationships of the Estonian and the European novel, and above all he addresses Estonian diaspora authors. Rhetorically he asks why there are no great narratives about the tragic fate of the Estonian nation that would lift it above the dimension of plain realistic and reportage style:

The fate paths of our nation would give excellent subject for big novels, as well as for religious interpretations like the ones of Graham Greene or Georges Bernanos, as for existentialist expressions like by Franz Kafka or Albert Camus, and even for surrealist-demonic writings like the ones of young German authors like Hans Erich Nossack and Jürgen Rausch. Do we really have only realistic pictures "like it used to be" to offer (as E. Howard Harris summarizes about our prose in diaspora in his Estonian literary history overview)? (Ivask 1952a, 35)

Already six years after the end of World War II, Ivask encourages Estonian writers to write different, in many senses European novels about the tragic fate of Estonians. With the help of Werner Milch, whose views and values Ivask admires and shares, he draws attention to the shift in the European novel that has taken place within the last 200 years, where the question of "what happens?" is slowly replaced by the question "how did the human react to what had happened?" (Ivask 1952a, 34). Thus Ivask urges Estonian writers to be more open and in contact with other European literatures, to read more in different languages, develop the philological skills in order to be able to feel the pulse of literature.

In "Critical thoughts" Ivask concludes: "[. . .] not only do the foreign readers respect vital Estonian writing that is in lively contact with contemporary European

literature and thought, but we must also do this for ourselves" (36). For Ivask this is one of the core preconditions for mental survival and development.

The European-ness that Ivask underlines and values is not only applicable to Estonian literature, but also in more general terms. While writing about the Spanish poet Jorge Guillén, Ivask also compares his poetry to other European authors:

Guillén does not represent only one -ism, but the very best of European poetry. He uses the past and present lyric forms and techniques with the same sovereignty. Thus he belongs to the poetry classics of our century, next to names like Paul Valéry, Saint-John Perse, Boris Pasternak, T. S. Eliot, Rainer Maria Rilke, Eugenio Montale ja Konstantinos Kavafis. (Ivask 1952b, 98)

Once again, best poets need to be compared and set next to other best poets; national and language barriers should be crossed.

(Creative) tension between poetry and criticism

Being in dialogue with other European literatures is not the only precondition or standard Ivask sets for good literature and literary criticism. Derived from his analyses on Hofmannsthal, we can also see that Ivask valued his simultaneous combination of being a poet and a critic. "Hofmannsthal's work encounters us from the beginning in double roles—in his own poetic production and his literary criticism. In 1891, eight of his critical articles were published together with his first poetic drama "Gestern" and with some other known poems" (Ivask 1953, 442).

Retrospectively we can see that Ivask himself worked all his life in a fruitful but also exhausting tension of being a poet and a scholar-critic (as well as a mediator and curator). When he retired from his duties as the editor-in-chief of the magazine *World Literature Today* in 1991, he wrote in his diaries that he retired mainly so that he and his wife Astrid could be who they really are, namely: "Astrid Ivask, poet, Ivar Ivask, poet and painter." He elaborates:

Many people, even friends have preferred to see us instead as Mr. and Mrs. World Literature Today, as the distributors of the Neustadt prize, and myself as a professor-literary scholar. Since we have fulfilled those roles quite convincingly, the opinion has spread that we would be poets *beside other things*, and not first and foremost. (Ivask 2007, 79)

Although at the end of his career as the editor-in-chief, Ivask experienced the tension of being a poet, scholar, and critic as exhausting, and he was quite happy to leave his position and be able to retire, he also highly valued the combination of being a poet and a scholar. In order to understand his credo of literary criticism, it

is highly important to acknowledge that Ivask was, if not by preference, then primarily a poet before becoming a critic. Thus he valued and understood criticism that was written by poets. Ivask claims that for him, writing about and to a poet is one and the same; writing poetry and writing criticism are similarly connected. The experience of writing poetry strengthens the understanding and touch of literature.

When writing about Hofmannsthal, Ivask defines him as a poet-critic (*Dichterkritiker*) and his criticism as a "poetic science" (*dichterische Wissenschaft*):

Hofmannsthal is a turning point in the history of German criticism in general: while the great old traditions flow together in him and thus are united in a new way, his criticism can be characterized, as we have seen, as the beginning of a new literary-critical tradition in German literature. [...] Hofmannsthal is thus maybe the first "poet-critic" with rank in the modern European literature. A long time before T. S. Eliot, for example, could develop his critical essays, Hofmannsthal had already found his followers, the poet-critics Rudolf Alexander Schröder and Rudolf Borhard. This was because his criticism was a "poetic science", an art in and of itself as any true literary criticism would be, that would not want to be deprived of the freedom of a higher synopsis of literary phenomena, while not wanting to sacrifice this freedom to a pedantic counting of syllables and adjectives. (Ivask 1953, 443)

Ivask elaborates further that Hofmannsthal's literary criticism never limited itself to an analysis of the concrete literary work, but always also provided new ways of understanding and regarding literary history or literary criticism. This means that taking a literary piece out of its historical and cultural context was never the only possible way for Hofmannsthal, as Ivask concludes. Similarly to Hofmannsthal, Ivask's own literary analyses reached out towards bigger frameworks and more universal conclusions. However, he also tried to reach from one national literature to another national literature. Jüri Talvet has described Ivar Ivask as a builder of bridges. Not all bridges that are built via writings will be taken into use immediately, but if they are already built, they can also be adapted later. "The awakening can happen suddenly" (Talvet 2010, 13).

Thus writing about literature is not something distant and impersonal for Ivask. Every engagement is a personal act, a dialogue with the author via his own writing.

Conclusion

Despite his Estonian-Latvian background, Ivar Ivask was educated mostly in the German language, and his university education was focused on literatures in the German language. Since he lived most of his life in exile, in Germany and in the

United States of America, it could have been more than possible for him not to engage himself with his heritage and Estonian (and Latvian) literatures. But to the contrary, due to his multi-cultural background, forced migration to Germany and his inspiring teacher(s) in Marburg and within poetry, Ivask became open-minded towards different cultures and languages. After and during his university studies he critically engaged himself with Estonian diaspora literature. Ivask explained that partly due to his admiration for Bernard Kangro's poetry, which he had come across by coincidence, he also engaged himself with the possibilities of Estonian literature and literary criticism in the diaspora. His knowledge of several languages, the "personal touch" that he learned from his professor Werner Milch, and the courage to make direct contact with authors whose work he admired, translated, or reviewed, made him a builder of bridges between different cultures.

Interestingly enough, although Ivask was educated in Germany and in German literature, his first published articles depicted Estonian literature and literary criticism. Thus his approach to Estonian literature and Estonian literary criticism was strongly influenced by the topics and ideas he studied for his doctoral thesis on the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Similarly to Hofmannsthal, whose literary criticism was driven by a claim of European-ness, Ivask also strongly sympathized with this approach. In his words, Estonian literature and literary criticism would only have possibilities for survival if it engaged with other contemporary European literatures and looked away from national-centeredness.

Next to being influenced by his studies in German literature—by professor Werner Milch and by his work on Hofmannsthal—Ivask's understanding of literary criticism was also strongly formed by the fact that he was first of all a poet before becoming a scholar. Prior to his studies in German literature in Marburg he had already written and (self-)published his first German poetry book in 1945. Ivask was a poet and thus valued criticism with a poetic touch. He himself was, similarly to Hofmannsthal in his dissertation, a poet-critic with rank.

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Lugedes eesti kirjandust läbi saksa kirjanduse prisma ehk kuidas Ivask Ivaskist sai tuntud kirjandusteadlane

Aija Sakova

Märksõnad: kirjanduskriitika, eesti kirjandus, diasporaa, poeet-kriitik, euroopalikkus

2017. aasta lõpus ja 2018. aasta alguses tähistati nii Eestis kui ka Lätis eesti-läti päritolu kirjandusteadlase ja luuletaja Ivar Ivaski (1927–1992) 90. sünniaastapäeva. Ivask oli kosmopoliitne mees, kes töötas üle kahekümne aasta oma elust maailmakirjandusalase ajakirja Books Abroad / World Literature Today peatoimetajana, mille juurde ta asutas Neustadti kirjandusauhinna, mida kutsuti hellitavalt ka väikseks Nobeliks.

Saanud hariduse Saksamaal Marburgi Ülikoolis saksa kirjanduse, võrdleva kirjandusteaduse ja kunstiajaloo alal, kujunes Ivaskist paradoksaalselt siiski ka eesti kirjanduse uurija ja mõtestaja. Ivaski magistritöö oli Saksa luuletajast Gottfried Bennist (1950) ja doktoritöö Austria kirjanikust ning kriitikust Hugo von Hofmannstahlist (1953). Kuna Ivaski esimesed kirjandusteaduslikud uurimused ilmusid 1951. aastal Bernard Kangro välja antud väliseesti ajakirjas Tulimuld, siis on loogiline järeldada, et Ivaski arusaam eesti kirjandusest ning kirjanduskriitika ülesannetest paguluses oli oluliselt mõjutatud saksa kirjanduse alastest õpingutest ja uurimistöödest.

Ivaski 1950. aastatel esimesel poolel ilmunud artiklid olid kuni 1954. aastani vaid eestikeelsed ja ilmusid väliseesti ajakirjades Tulimuld ning Vaba Eesti. Need käsitlesid võrdsetl eesti kirjandust ja kirjanduskriitikat ning saksa, austria ja hispaania kirjandust. Ivaski eesti kirjandusele ning kirjanduskriitikale esitatud nõudmistest on näha paralleele tema uurimusega Hugo von Hofmannstahlist, milles Ivask rõhutab Hofmannstahli euroopalikku ehk mitte kitsalt ühele rahvuskirjandusele keskenduvat kirjanduskäsitlust. Ka eesti kirjanduskriitikalt ootab Ivask oma artiklites seda, et see vaatlaks eesti autoreid maailmakirjanduse kontekstis, mitte ei jääks kinni kitsalt eesti kirjanduse sisestesse uurimustesse. Laiema, võrdleva kirjandusliku pildi vajalikkus on Ivaski hinnangul eesti kirjanduse ellujäämise eeltingimus.

Nii Ivaski kirjatöodes kui ka tema tegevuses kirjade kirjutaja ja kirjavahetuste algatajana on tunda tema ihalust eeskujude järele. Ivask ei karda võtta ühendust autoritega, kelle loomingut ta imetleb ja arvustab. Nii loob ta kirjanduslikke võrgustikke üle maailma. Kirjandusteadlane ja luuletaja Jüri Talvet on kirjeldanud Ivaskit kui sildade loojat. Kuid Ivask oli ka poeet-kriitik, nii nagu ta ise kirjeldab Hugo von Hofmannstahli.

Aija Sakova on õppinud saksa ja eesti kirjandust Tartu Ülikoolis (PhD 2014), Konstanzi, Berliini Humboldti ja Viini ülikoolides. Tema uurimistöö on keskendunud mäletamise poetikale ja moraalsele tunnistamisele saksa autori Christa Wolfi ja eesti kirjaniku Ene Mihkelsoni romaanides. Tema raamat „Väljakaevamine ja mäletamine“ („Ausgraben und Erinnern“) ilmus V&R unipress kirjastuses Saksamaal, Göttingenis. Viimastel aastatel on Sakova tegelenud eesti-läti päritolu kirjandusteadlaste ja luuletaja Ivar Ivaski pärandi uurimisega.

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