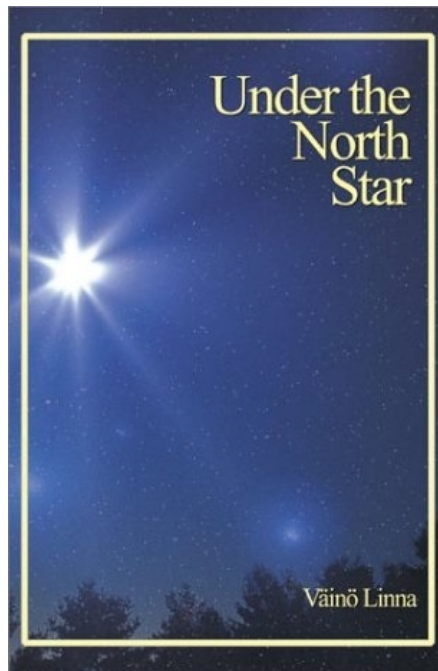




Under the North Star

Väinö Linna , Richard Impola (Translator)

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Linna's Under the North Star, widely considered the most significant work of Finnish literature published during Finland's independence, is the first volume of an epic trilogy of the same title.

This first part of this historical work, which encompasses Finnish history from the 1880s to the 1950s, depicts the turn of the 20th century (1884-1907). It gives a voice to hitherto silent actors on the stage of history as it offers a comprehensive account of the social and economic realities reflected in the hopes, dreams, and experiences of Jussi and Alma Koskela and their children in the rural village of Pentti's Corners in south central Finland.

Under the North Star Details

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Author : Väinö Linna , Richard Impola (Translator)

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From Reader Review Under the North Star for online ebook

Chris says

Really captures not only the essence of Finnishness (the culture) but also the politics of the place as played out in one village during what was essentially feudalism, and the political/socialist/union revolution that occurred at the turn of the 20th century. The characters were not perfect in their eccentricities and what they illustrated.

What got short shrift was the greater role working-class women played - universal suffrage resulted in several women members of parliament. That is in part due to the perspective taken to dissect a particular village (reminded me a bit of William Hinton's nonfiction masterpiece in China, Fanshen, and also Jeff Bursey's *Mirros on which dust has fallen* in that way), one where the lone socialist political representative is a man, which was more common. But I'm not sure the women in general had to be quite so weepy. But that's not to say they weren't strong, interesting characters on the whole.

[The whole design of this book made it look quite hokey, a shame. The work itself far surpassed my expectations.]

Erika says

"Läs den här, den handlar om varifrån Finland kommit", sa min pojkvän. Så jag läste den till sist, efter att den stått och tittat uppmanande på mig från bokhyllan i minst ett decennium.

Och jo, från de här människorna har vi kommit, vi finländare med demokrati och gratis utbildning. Från människor som de här, som levde i ett ståndssamhälle där det var skillnad på folk och folk men där positionen inte alltid var avgörande för en människas karaktär, mod eller intelligens. Så som det alltid är. Jag läser och lär mig mycket om torparnas situation (så pass att jag börjar fråga ut min mamma om huruvida det funnits torpare i hennes hemby) och fascineras av hur Vänö Linna gjuter liv i sina personer. De är kantiga och knepiga, man ömsom beundrar dem och ömsom skakar på huvudet åt dem. Jag uppskattar att han inte skapat goda och onda, däremot mångdimensionella personer som ofta sitter fast i en position de inte riktigt valt åt sig själv.

Lite mer givmild med historisk bakgrund och årtal hade han kunnat vara i synnerhet under bokens första halva – då kändes det stundvis som om jag skulle ha behövt en bredvidläsningsguide (eller åtminstone gymnasietidens bok om Finlands historia) för att orientera mig. Personerna är många, men de som tar större utrymme i berättelsen börjar leva framför mina ögon, det känns som om de funnits – finns – på riktigt.

Tomi says

Monella tapaa mahdollon kirja lukea. Linna on tällä (ja vielä enemmän Tuntemattomalla sotilaalla) lyönyt lukkoon niin monia suomalaisen kansallisen itseymmärryksen perusasioita, että on mahdollonta - näin 60 vuotta kirjan julkaisun jälkeen - lukiessa tietää mikä on Linnaa, mikä on kansallista mytologiaa ja mikä on kirjan kirjoitushetkeä. Teksti on loistavaa, "skaala on mieletön" ja kliseet kliseiden päälle naurattavat melkein koko ajan. Pitänee trilogian jälkeen lukea jotain kontekstivaa kritiikkiä, koska kyse on niin paljon isommasta asiasta kuin kirjasta: Pohjantähden lukeminen on kuin Kalevalaa tavaisi.

Siis: jos haluaa ymmärtää suomalaisten myyttejä, tämä kannattaa lukea. Mutta ei siitä syystä, että kirja itse paljastaisi suomalaisuuden perusolemuksen, vaan ymmärrystä saa sitä kautta miten kirja rakentaa myyttejä - ja miten suomalaiset ovat kirjan myytit ottaneet omakseen.

Peony says

I have to join the choir of praise - I loved it, it was magnificent! Times of big social change (turn of the century) in Russian ruled Finland, presented in everyday life of the microcosmos of Pentinkulma village, full of great authentic characters. I especially loved Linna's clear carefully composed sentences full of meaning, no gimmicks.

Toma says

A great classic. The trilogy is easy to read and flows great. Portrayal of the life in a small village in Finland in the end of 19th century really brings the characters to life. Reader goes through a rollercoaster of emotions from anger to shame to sadness to joy living the events with the main characters. The trilogy captures the Finnish mentality very well and if one for some weird reason wishes to understand Finns, reading this trilogy is a good start.

I read the original Finnish version.

Annasnova says

This one was an uphill battle and I would have given up the book half-way if it wasn't this month's bookclub pick. The narrative is slow and dreary. Though I enjoyed reading about Halme's transformation and Akseli's coming-of-age story. It reminded me of Tolstoy's novels we had to read in high-school, with their detailed descriptions of peasant life and struggle.

At the same time, reading classics like this does make you feel more aware of a country's history and culture - especially when it's Finland's 100th birthday. Not to mention the bonus points I plan on collecting when discussing this book with Finns!

Tiia says

Aivan vallattoman hyvä äänikirja, kun lukijana on Veikko Sinisalo. Mies hykerteli, lauloi ja kirosi hahmojen mukana. Niin todentuntuinen ja mielenkiintoinen kuva Suomesta 1900-luvun alussa, että minäkin ensimmäistä kertaa sisäistän jotain kotimaani historiasta.

Calzean says

A book about life in South Central Finland, 1880-1907, at a time when Finland was ruled by Russia. This is not a book with a plot, dramatic turns or sensations. It is a book about life in a small village.

The characters are mostly tenant farmers with few rights. The gentry keenly protect their rights of property and control. But things are slowly changing. Socialism and tenant rights are being debated.

The characters are good hard-working, dour Finns. Humour and alcohol are used sparingly.

The main character Jussi, is a hard-hard-working Finn, with no time for fun. He is miserly with his money but knows the importance of being frugal. The last third of the book focuses on his son, Akesli and his growing into a man, angry with the treatment his father and others have endured, and of his love of Elina.

The selfishness of the property owners, especially the vicar and his wasteful wife was a highlight of the first half of the book.

Anna-Maija Tähkävuori says

Täällä Pohjantähden alla on yhteiskunnallinen monumentti talonpoikaisesta vapaustaistelusta, kansalaissodasta, tasa-arvon oikeutuksesta, ihmiskohtaloista itsenäisyyttään etsivässä, kehittyvässä Suomessa.

Väinö Linnan laatima "lyhyt oppimäärä Suomen historiasta" kertoo novellein myös olennaisen arktisessa maassa, kahden valtion valtapyrkimysten välissä, kehittyneestä hiljaisesta kansanluonteesta.

Ehkä ulkomaalainen näkee vielä suomalaisuudessa Koskelan Jussin alistuneisuutta ja jäyhyyttä - suolla kuokkineen. Mutta näistä lähtökohdista tietoisuuden kehitys ja nuoren kansankunnan henkinen kasvu lienevät vertaansa vailla.

Kun Goodreads lokakuun listallaan suositteli Under the North Stars teosta englannin kielisenä käännöksenä luettavakseni, yllätyin, jopa liikutuin. Täydellinen osuma.

Teoksella oli lapsuuden kodissani erityinen merkitys:

Väinö Linnan sanoin Täällä pohjan tähden alla kertoo myös tavallaan Veikko-isäni tarinan torpan pojasta - köyhyyden, raadannan läpi sisulla - lakimieheksi ja vaikuttajaksi.

Koskelan perheen kansallinen selviytymistarina etenee ensin hitaasti laajeten, sitten harppauksin.

Eläytymällä hiljaisuuden maailmaan pääsee pitkälle - ehkei sanoma kuitenkaan täysin välity toisessa kulttuurissa. Tai romaani avautuu tässä ajassa viihdykettä etsivälle pelkkänä synkkyytenä.

Harvan kansakunnan vaiheita on käsitelty yhtä toden tuntuisesti, tunneherkästi ja kattavasti. Jo sen vuoksi trilogia kannattaisi rehtiä läpi. Myös siksi että kirjan sisällä lyö aidosti sydän.

Kaarna says

Tämä on Perkeet-lukuhaasteen ensimmäisen kohdan (Omassa hyllyssä pisimpään lojunut, tai muu yhtä luotaantyöntävä, tiiliskivi) ensimmäinen kolmasosa. Aion lukea nyt välissä muuta ja palata sitten tämän projektin pariin. Uskoisin, että nämä kolme nidettä ovat hyllyssäni pisimpään asunut tiiliskivi, jota en ole lukenut. Voi olla, että Ilias ja Odyseia kilpailevat paikasta, mutta valitsin nyt tämän.

Lähdin lukemaan tätä vähän sellaisella "no nyt luetaan suomalaista historiallista mieskirjallisuutta". Ja olihan

se sellaista, mutta oli se myös mielenkiintoista luettavaa. Pidin siitä, miten metonymioita käytettiin proosassakin, tai siis että asioita saatettiin päätökseen niin että kerrottiin yksityiskohta, jonka lukija edellisen tiedon perusteella tiesi merkitsevän suurempaa kokonaisuutta. Hahmot jäivät aika pintapuolisiksi, mutta niin kai näissä monia hahmoja sisältävissä sukupolviromaaneissa yleensä käy? En tiedä, en ole lukenut tällaisia oikein.

Seuraavissa osissa saankin sitten nauttia sodista. Toivottavasti enemmän kotirintaman näkökulmasta, mutta en tosiaan yhtään tiedä, mitä näissä tapahtuu. Tai no, uskon, että Suomen historian mukaan suunnilleen mennään, mutta mahdollisia näkökulmia on aika monia. Pidin siitä, että tässä näkökulma oli pääasiassa torppareiden.

Annamariah says

The first part of Väinö Linna's trilogy begins the tale of a Finnish village from the 1880s to the 1950s. It is an exemplary historical novel in the sense that it tells about all the major events of the Finnish history during that time from the point of view of the people experiencing them. Even though I have read about all those things at school, I understand them better after reading this book.

The main characters of the trilogy are Jussi Koskela and his family, who are crofters or tenant farmers of the local vicarage. The story is not only told from their point of view, though. The cast of characters is large, including a lot of villagers, among them other tenant farmers, the vicar and his family, the village tailor, and some of the landowners. Some of the people are nicer than others, some are clever, others rather silly, but all of them are realistic, and many rather stereotypically Finnish, like the men who are almost incapable of showing their emotions or talking about them.

Compared to the second part of the trilogy, the first book is maybe a bit slow at times, but I heartily recommend reading it anyway. The book spans the time of about 25 years and its main focus is on the growing tension between tenant farmers and landowners, universal suffrage, the rise of socialism, and Finland's slow journey towards independence. Even though many of the events are not exactly happy, Linna's writing is not without humour.

Natalia says

I have never been a fan of historical novels. I did not really expect much from this book. Nevertheless, I decided to give it a try and - to my amazement - I found myself consumed by it. Despite the political and historical background, the book is interesting and easy to read. The characters are realized splendidly. They are real, believable. At one point Akseli Koskela said to himself: "Darned childish man. (...) Letting people know his feeling...". Finnish people do not show their emotion, but the book is soaked in them as well as in Finnishness, I could really feel it (Richard Impola is a great translator!). I cannot say the novel succeeded in helping me understand Finns, though. They are completely different from Polish people. I consider myself an extreme introvert but still. It seems to me that Finns prefer sitting and thinking to acting.

The book is an absorbing and funny (!) read not only for people interested in Finland or/and history but to all who like a good literature.

Mark Patton says

I picked this up in order to get a taste of Finnish literature before we travel to Finland this summer. Reading *Under the North Star* is certainly a painless way to learn some Finnish history while enjoying an engaging story. I will likely pick up the two subsequent books in the trilogy.

Tesa Fiona says

Things the book and I agree about Finns and Finland:

1. Thou shall not show your emotions. Happiness is the most dangerous display of all.
2. Thou shall not boast about your success nor your grandiose future plan. If one wants to boast, let that thing happen only in your head and bed conversation and throughout your hardworking result.
3. A Finn does not simply welcome a strange visitor warmly. Because everyone are strangers, even your neighbors. Tips: be annoyed when you're being visited, and make sure it's shown on your face.
4. You should do good. Not because you want to, but because it is the right thing to do.
5. Finland is a land consisted by the combination of lakes, woods and more lakes and extra woods.
6. You should be working hard. Because.. because you're a Finn. Is there any better explanation?
7. A true blood Finn knows not how to small talk.

Ok, seriously. The list is just a stereotype brought up in the first chapters of the book.

The plain book cover, the invisible soul of the protagonist, and the welcoming scene at the swamp; all this opening successfully introduced the ordinary and simplicity Finnish nature of this book. Love how Linna welcomed readers with his decent description of the drawbacks-tendency of the characters emotions and the exploration of complicated Finns minds. Plus the effortless stunning Linna's writing style: it is calm, subtle yet extremely engaging reader's interest.

The trifling life of unknown character in somewhere nowhere in Finland was surprisingly a comfortable read, perhaps as a result of Linna's calm and stable writing style. The main issue of this book, which is the tenancies, brought up gradually into scenes that explored Finnish political situation at that time. The exploration was getting broader and broader and made contact with the religious, morality, and of course, romance in the drama of the characters. Can't deny, but the richness of the characters was one of the best part of the book. Linna seemed so familiar with all his characters, he carefully explored them one by one with an apt proportion. But as for me, none of them is interesting enough to fall for.

Towards the end, as the author began to develop Akseli-Elina romance, (for me, I am not a fan of romance, that's why) the story lost its spark. However, I do think it was necessary, remembering this is a trilogy series.

So, what do I think?

Feels like I'm studying Finnish history and Finns' mind throughout the story.

Elina says

Odotukset olivat ehkä hieman turhan korkealla, sillä petyin heti kirjan alkumetreillä, mikä latisti lukukokemusta. Pidin kuitenkin paljon kirjan loppupuolesta, ja se tulikin luettua yhdeltä istumalta. Onneksi minulla on jo seuraava osa valmiina odottamassa :)
