



# Ekkoland

*Per Petterson*

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## **Ekkoland** Per Petterson

Arvid fra novellesamlingen *Aske i munnen, sand i skoa* (1987) er blitt tolv år gammel og tilbringer sommeren hos besteforeldrene i Danmark. Familien bor noen uker i en bitteliten leilighet over bestemorens melkeutsalg i en by nord på Jylland. Det er tidlig sekstital, og Arvid hjelper bestefar med å kjøre melkeflaskene rundt med varesykkel om morgenen. Arvid er en gutt som tar verden inn over seg, og det er mye han lur på. Dette er forfatterens første roman.

## **Ekkoland Details**

Date : Published 2008 by Oktober (first published 1989)

ISBN : 9788249505852

Author : Per Petterson

Format : Paperback 139 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Denmark

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## From Reader Review Ekkoland for online ebook

### Emily says

So I started this short read a few weeks ago, as some light reading when I needed a break from my summer reading, Conrad Black's history of Canada. I was speeding through it, and I had to remind myself to slow down and savour it. It's not that often one has the opportunity to read a book that takes place in the summer dunes of north Jutland. I really made an effort to take it in. It wasn't until the end that Petterson named Skagen and it's hard to get an exact date but my guess is the early '60s.

Petterson makes something of a big deal about the relationship between our main character, Arvid's mother, and her parents, but then he never fleshes it out. I'm not sure what was going on there. I understand Ekkoland was actually Petterson's first published book and that it's actually take 25+ years to be translated to English. I'm curious if as a more mature writer he would address that relationship differently now. All in all, this was a beautiful novel about growing up in Scandinavia.

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### Robert Hutchinson says

Similar to 'To Siberia' but much less of a novel - it almost feels like reading an early draft version. The descriptions of the Danish coast experienced over a lazy summer stand out for me. There isn't much of a story and none of the characters particularly jump out. It's an average read that can easily be completed in a day - I suppose it's a must read for Per Petterson fans. Take away the ridiculous chapter titles!

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### Torkild says

Åh nej - jeg har hørt/læst alt af Per Petterson. Elsker hans bøger - men denne her; den er speciel. Jeg er vild med Arvids mor - hun er en sej kvinde.

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### Lisa says

Ekkoland is Per Petterson's first novel, published in 1989 in Norway, but not translated into English until now. It is the story of a twelve year old boy confronting adolescence and all the emotional and hormonal turbulence that goes with it, exacerbated by unexplained tensions within his family.

Petterson doesn't write long books, but this one is shorter still at only 132 pages. Yet it has a powerful impact on the reader, partly because of what we recognise as Petterson's trademark spare prose on display here in his first novel, but also because of the preoccupation with death and alienation. Arvid is on a beachside holiday with his family in Denmark, staying with his grandparents, but it is no idyll. There is friction of long standing between his mother and grandmother, and his father is drawn into it because he failed to offer the support that was needed when it was needed – and it's too late now.

This author doesn't make things explicit in his almost plotless books, but careful reading between the lines can bring some strands together. Arvid's mother 'went away' without explanation as a young woman; and Arvid is noticeably not Norwegian in appearance. His Italian colouring provokes comment almost straight away when he meets and makes friends with Mogens, who turns out to be as much interested in Arvid's

older sister Gry as he is in Arvid. Perhaps the Italian genes are from the Neapolitan ancestor who in 1874 migrated to Norway, and perhaps they are not. What matters to Arvid is that they make him different, and different to his sister too, who has blonde hair and brown skin. Sometimes he embraces this difference, declaring to the stranger on the ferry that he's Italian, and he sings the Italian song Come Prima about first love that is his mother's constant refrain, but he doesn't understand the words because he doesn't know Italian. Sometimes he yearns to belong.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/09/19/e...>

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## Paul Fulcher says

*No one could hurt him, no one could reach him, he could go wherever he wanted.*

2.5 stars for this early coming-of-age novel - but 5 for the author's oeuvre and my review will focus as much on Echoland in the context of the wider work as it does on it as a standalone piece.

Per Petterson is one of my absolute favourite authors and this is his 8th book to be translated into English - all of which I have read. However it was his first novel and second book after the story collection Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes - to be written in the original Norwegian, and as with that book it is an early work as not as stylistically developed as his later masterpieces from To Siberia on, notably the IFFP and Impac winning Out Stealing Horses.

For my own benefit, as much as anything, his fiction is as follows, with the dates of English translations following:

1987 Aske i munnen, sand i skoa (short stories), translated as Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes (2011) by Don Bartlett

1989 Ekkoland, translated as Echoland (2016) by Don Bartlett

1992 Det er greit for meg translated as It's Fine By Me (2011) by Don Bartlett

1996 Til Sibir translated as To Siberia (1998) by Anne Born

2002 I kjølvannet translated as In the Wake (2002) by Anne Born

2003 Ut og stjele heste translated as Out Stealing Horses (2005) by Anne Born

2008 Jeg forbanner tidens elv translated as I Curse the River of Time (2010) by Charlotte Barslund

2012 Jeg nekter translated as I Refuse (2014) by Don Bartlett

The 2004 non-fiction Månen over Porten (which could be rendered 'The Moon over the Gate'), is as yet untranslated into English, but contains Petterson's observations about reading and writing novels, where he discusses his favourite authors such as Simone De Beauvoir (reading, aged 17, her Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter was a key moment for him), Ernest Hemingway, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Karen Blixen, Kjell Askildsen, Grace Paley, John Fante, Raymond Carver, Ola Bauer, Aksel Sandemose and Paul Bowles.

One recurring character in Petterson's work is 'Arvid Jansen':

He's not my alter ego, he's my stunt man. Things happen to him that could have happened to me, but didn't. He has my mentality.

(Source: <https://amp.theguardian.com/culture/2...>)

An Arvid character features, albeit not always with an identical history, as a 6yo in *Ashes in My Mouth*, *Sand in My Shoes*, turning 12 years old in this novel, aged c.13 in *It's Fine By Me* (although the story is told from the perspective of Arvid's friend), aged 37 but looking back to his late teens in *I Curse the River of Time* and aged 43 in *In The Wake*. (He is absent from *To Siberia*, albeit this is based on Petterson's mother who has a similar background to Arvid's, *Out Stealing Horses*, and *I Refuse*).

*Echoland* was written in October 1989. Reading it in April 1990 his mother told him 'Well, I hope the next one won't be that childish,' which were the last words she spoke to him, as a week later she, and Petterson's father, brother and nephew all died in the Scandinavian Star ferry disaster, while travelling from Oslo to Frederikshavn in Jutland, Denmark, his mother's family hometown. In *In The Wake*, Arvid suffers a similar tragedy.

*Echoland* also opens and closes with a, less tragic, family ferry journey from Oslo, where Arvid's family live, to Jutland, where they visit his maternal grandparents each summer.

The title is taken from a poem Poul la Cour (a Danish wind turbine pioneer):

"Aa Ekkoland hvor Luften/ har gemte Spor, har Svar,/ rughvide Land, min Barndoms hvasse Sted/ svimmelt af Luft og Jord"

"Oh Echoland, where the air / has hidden traces, has answers, rye-white land, my childhood's happy abode / giddy with earth and air"

Arvid's mother's line is descended from Bruno, a Neopolitan engineer, who worked his way North across Europe, ending up in Denmark where he helped build, the Limfjordsbroen railway pontoon bridge from Alborg to Limfjordsbroen in the late 1860s, then marrying a local girl. And his legacy lives on in Arvid's look and temperament:

*In each generation after him there was one Italian, and when Arvid thought about him he saw an open, tanned face with dark curls above it, and that's how Arvid himself looked, and what he didn't know about Bruno, he made up.*

*And he thought, you don't have to be Norwegian, you can be something else, somewhere else other than Oslo. You can be an Italian in Denmark. You can leave your own skin and be whoever you like and no one can get near you.*

This is largely a coming-of-age novel, but family tensions and secrets are hinted at in the tension between Arvid's mother and grandmother, some suggestions of an illegitimate pregnancy in his mother's youth (perhaps Arvid or his 14 yo sister Gry being the result) as well as the tragedy of the 'Italian' in the previous generation, his uncle Jasper, adored by Arvid's mother, but who died ('at the same age as Jesus', his mother points out) in a boating accident. There are certainly the hidden traces of the poem in the air - but few answers.

And for Arvid himself, he makes friends with Mogens, 18 months older, in a Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn type of relationship, but Mogens actually seems more interested in Gry, who is suddenly, this summer, turning into a young woman. (*Her hair was a yellow flag, her shorts were green and her long legs brown with light-coloured down. She was his sister Gry and yet so unfamiliar, he didn't know her.*) Arvid himself has two

awkward encounters with a young woman who he first spies on petting with her boyfriend, and who later returns on her own and flirts with him.

The same Mogens reappears in *I Curse The River of Time* - written 19 years later and with the characters 25 years older - when Arvid meets him, but initially fails to recognise him, on the ubiquitous ferry crossing from Oslo to Jutland, seeing him only as:

*a man there I did not like. I did not like his face when he looked at me. It was as if he knew something about my person that I was not aware of, which for him was clear as day, as if I were standing there naked, with no control over what he saw, nor could I see in his eyes what he saw in mine.*

Arvid also loses himself in a world inspired by the books he reads - *Klit-Per*, *Pelle the Conqueror*, *Terje Vigen* from Nordic literature and *Huckleberry Finn* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* more widely. When he points out to Mogens the spot where *Terje Vigen* landed, he gets a blank look, and while his father has an extensive library, his actual reading is much less extensive:

*But he and Arvid had looked over the bookcase and knew they couldn't talk about what was there, the conversation would be over before it started, and he had to travel alone.*

*He did travel alone and he went wherever he wanted: he skied across Greenland, sailed on the GJOA through the North-west Passage, stood two years before the mast in the storms around Cape Horn, saw the English pounding away at the fortifications around Sevastopol with bullets whizzing round their heads and the young count who was not yet famous shouted: Get under cover, you young fool! He lay in the grass on the banks of the Mississippi and saw Huck Finn get on board the raft with the fish they were going to fry on the fire, and with Martin Eden he walked into the bourgeois houses of San Francisco afraid his broad shoulders would knock over all the porcelain over when he turned round, and he didn't even know how to eat with a knife and fork like they did but decided he would learn everything that they knew and more. And he rowed with Terje Vigen from Norway to Denmark because his wife and children were starving and he made land right here, with aching hands and fingers that couldn't be straightened after all those freezing hours grasping the oars. He must have been exhausted, and his back stiff as a board, but pleased too as he rowed back with what he came for. And then he strayed into the English blockade and everything was lost.*

'Who was he then?'

'Who?'

'Terje Vigen!'

'Forget it' Arvid said.

Overall, an early work and not as sophisticated as his later brilliant novels. Best read, as it has been translated, after the later works to add to the picture of Arvid Jansen's life and Per Petterson's development as a novelist.

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## **Cathy Austin says**

Summer in Denmark is the setting. Beautiful sea, wide skies, beach, bikes, what's not to like?

If you are just twelve, a boy unsettled with his family, confused about changes with his feelings and body, it's maybe not so great.

Arvid and his mom, dad and sister go by boat to stay with his mom's parents for a holiday. This seems like

an annual thing but there are underlying currents of tension between the adults, angers long buried, secrets and all this spills over making Arvid act out, and recklessly so.

Beautiful imagery, language, complicated characters.

Newly translated in 2016, but published in 1989, Echoland is still very much a theme that speaks to each of us.

Pettersen is an engaging writer, so much so that while I was reading the book outside in our garden with the wind rustling the leaves of our maple tree, the images of the sea, gulls, boats, sand and brilliant sunshine so made me want to shut my eyes and enjoy the scene, maybe stretch out and take a short nap. Savour the moment.

I love this passage, page 20, 'Arvid and Mogens raced along the road by the beach. Arvid on his second-hand Swithun and Mogens on his standard black Danish boneshaker with the laughably small luggage rack. They stopped at the old kiosk and each bought a Giant Eskimo and pedalled on with one hand holding the ice cream and the other pointing to the sky, which was fine because the bikes themselves knew where they were going.'

As for Arvid's youthful angst, we all get it. The troubles in his family add a dangerous element to the mix, as we find out at the end.

A thoughtful read, one to skim back through and re-visit a couple of scenes and pages.

Poignant. Moving. A very, very good book.

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## **Jim says**

The Irish Times said "Its interest to his admirers is in revealing Pettersen's development." As this is the first Pettersen book I've read, I am now sure it was not the best place to start. It's very well written but it doesn't possess loads of clarity - as intended. Still I look forward to 'Out Stealing Horses' - I feel better prepared now.

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## **Andy Weston says**

It has been a while since I have read Per Pettersen, I have certainly missed him and have read all the previous translations. My only problem with several of his books are that they are too short, and Echoland is indeed that, but having said that it is up there with his very best. I was surprised to read it was written more than 30 years ago, and yet bears those similar trademarks and pillars of his more recent work (Out Stealing Horses, To Siberia, In The Wake).

It is the story of a 12 year old boy's summer holiday on the Danish coast. He is a Norwegian of Italian descent and arrives with his family by yacht. It is easy to identify with, as many of us will have had similar holidays when we were 12 – and in that respect it is a coming of age story, a memorable and significant two weeks in a young boy's life.

This is what Pettersen does so well. During the two weeks much of Arvid's time is spent cycling around the coast and with a slightly older friend that he meets, Mogen. One time when they are at the almost deserted beach they see a young couple cavorting in what they think is privacy, this is a sexual awakening for young Arvid. He smokes for the first time. Death plays a role also, his uncle his recently died, and the death of his brother after living for just a few weeks plays heavily on his mind. His new friend is athletic and confident, Arvid is less so, with a shyness and perhaps degree of almost autism. As with Out Stealing Horses and his other work there are stand-out and memorable scenes for the reader as they are for the young person that have a powerful effect: meeting the bull in the field, fishing with Mogen, and meeting the girl on the beach for example.

Arvid reads as much as he can during his vacation. Pelle The Conqueror features highly – it also is a

beautiful story, and another wonderful insight into Scandinavian history (either of the two movies I recommend as well as the book).

This novella is powerful stuff and shows how much an author can cram into 100 or so pages, though I think twice that would have made it even more so.

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### **Kimbofo says**

*Echoland*, published last year, is Per Petterson's eighth novel. Like the bulk of Petterson's work (you can read all my reviews here), the story is framed around a character named Arvid, who has a Norwegian father and a Danish mother, and is said to be loosely based on the author himself.

Arvid has appeared in various incarnations in previous novels — from a six-year-old boy to a 43-year-old man — but in this one he is on the cusp of becoming a teenager.

There's no real plot; the story is essentially a series of vignettes following Arvid's day-to-day adventures on the Danish coast, where his working class family is spending the summer with Arvid's maternal grandparents.

Here, in the small fishing community where Arvid's mother grew up, there is a sense of troubled family history bubbling just beneath the surface. At times the tension between Arvid's mother and his deeply religious grandmother boils over into protestations and tears, none of which Arvid, a quiet bookish boy, fully understands, and his confusion is mirrored by his own uneasy passage between boyhood and adolescence.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

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### **Lynn says**

As usual with Per Petterson not a lot really happens and you have to read between the lines quite a lot. This is his debut novel published originally in 1989 but only just recently published in English.

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### **Albertine67 says**

I like Petterson's work a lot, and this, his first novel, has now been translated. It's a slight work in comparison to his later stuff, but it introduces many of the themes and landscapes that feature in that work. It's promising, and worth reading, but not the best introduction to his work.

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### **Paul says**

This short early piece by Petterson has only recently been made available to the Anglophone world. It reveals that the novelist's style and themes were already firmly established some three decades ago.

'Echoland' is rugged and poetic in the estimable Don Bartlett's translation. It's a coming-of-age piece about a twelve year-old boy and his experiences while holidaying with his grandparents in coastal Denmark. The

relationships are all highly believable and touching. At its core is the changed dynamic between the protagonist and his friend when the friend begins to date the protagonist's sister. Surrounding this are his changing perceptions of the members of his family. The entire novella has the ring of truth about it and transports the older reader back to his own youth.

I read this novel while on holiday myself, and I suppose, you'd have to describe it as an ideal, none too taxing holiday read. And it lays the ground for weightier novels Petterson would come to write, later in his career.

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### **Val says**

This is one of the most delightful evocations of childhood I have read. Arvid is an imaginative boy, who identifies with the heroes of the books he reads and an uncle who died in a boating accident. The story is set the summer of his twelfth birthday, when the family have travelled from Norway to Jutland to stay with his maternal grandparents. He swims, explores, goes for rides on his bicycle and makes a friend, with whom he goes fishing and boating.

The book is not all sweetness and light, as there are some darker family undercurrents which Arvid does not fully understand and which are not examined in depth. Gry, Arvid's elder sister, was born illegitimate, although her parents later married, and the religious grandparents disapproved. A younger brother died as a baby. Arvid cannot deal with this darker side of life at his age, nor can he deal with his growing awareness of sex.

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### **Fiona says**

I have to admit that I didn't enjoy this as much as other books I've read by Per Petterson. It seemed to be big on the feeling of nostalgia for family holidays in Denmark that I found hard to relate to, on a number of levels. However, there was still a sense of the spare, precise prose that drew me to Petterson's writing in his brilliant book 'Out Stealing Horses'. At the very least, it was useful to read, if only to experience Petterson's first book, and the earliest story featuring the character Arvid Jansen, who is a recurring character in Petterson's writing.

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### **Dar says**

The coastal landscape comes alive in this set of linked stories about a 12-year-old boy who wakes up to the secrets and hypocrisy of his somber family. The images and feelings are vivid in a way I felt was true to childhood and early adolescence. I thought I knew where the story was going. I felt the ending was a cop-out.

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