



The Maid Silja: The History of the Last Offshoot of an Old Family Tree

Frans Emil Sillanpää , Alexander Matson (Translator)

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The history of the last offshoot of an old family tree, a girl called Silja, who struggles to survive in the agrarian Finland of the first half of the 20th century.

The Maid Silja: The History of the Last Offshoot of an Old Family Tree Details

Date : Published April 1st 2007 by Cherokee Publishing Company (GA) (first published 1931)

ISBN : 9780877972808

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Format : Paperback 313 pages

Genre : European Literature, Finnish Literature, Classics, Fiction, Nobel Prize

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From Reader Review The Maid Silja: The History of the Last Offshoot of an Old Family Tree for online ebook

Julie Kofoed says

3.5 stars

S Cearley says

The Nobel committee said in 1939 that Sillanpää won expressly for this book. It was....it was an uninspiring book. I don't see how I'm supposed to harbor any compassion for the main character, a girl named Silja who starts out in her pre-teen years as semi-well off but then her father dies, the farm is lost, and she leads a life of being a farm maid at one farm then another. Then she dies.

It sounds harsh to describe a plot so flatly but there is no connection to the main character, no sympathy or empathy, so everything feels dull and listless.

Michael Pennington says

Revisiting my Finnish literature. Life's circle.

Roxana says

I've started this book three hours ago, and I'm already through the half of it. It's an enjoyable reading, as a fan of Scandinavian literature, i can say that this book gives you a good opportunity to observe and contemplate the life of the finnish people at the end of the 19th century. It also takes you on a journey where you'll be smiling (imagining the young Silja running outside in the sun), going sad (there are some sad deaths throughout the book) and overall enjoying the descriptions about the Finnish scenery and life there in general.

Nihils says

Es lohnt sich doch immer mal wieder, (im übertragenen Sinne) den elterlichen Dachboden zu durchwühlen. So geschehen vor etlichen Jahren, fiel mir dereinst *Silja, die Magd* vom finnischen Literatur-Nobelpreisträger Frans Eemil Sillanpää in die Hände. Nach zig weiteren Lenzen schaffte ich es dieser Tage endlich, mich dem erdverbunden betitelten Werk zu widmen.

Es dauerte nur wenige Seiten, bis mich vor allem die heuer freilich altertümlich anmutende Sprache konkret eingenommen hatte. Denn interessanterweise bleibt trotzdem alle Zugänglichkeit erhalten, wodurch ein wundervoller Lesefluss entsteht. Ein paar Seiten weiter, fiel mir dann auch bald auf, woran mich das Buch schon bald nach Beginn der Lektüre erinnerte: Frühes 20. Jahrhundert, Skandinavien, Bauernmilieu?

Natürlich, Knut Hamsun's unerreichtes Meisterwerk *Segen der Erde!*

Ähnlich wie sein weitaus bekannteres Bruderstück aus Norwegen weiß *Silja, die Magd* mit einem existentialistischen Blick auf das einfache, nicht notwendigerweise romantisierte Leben zu ergreifen, auch wenn Sillanpää's Motive freilich andere sind. Der eher dem linken politischen Flügel zugeneigte Finne stellt die Rolle der Magd mit all ihrem Leid und ihren Entbehrungen in den Vordergrund. Der Bauernstand wird als ambivalentes Konstrukt gezeichnet, das sich nicht als Spielball von Natur, Bürgertum und Krieg (hier: Finnischer Bürgerkrieg, 1918) erkennen will und in seinem Mangel an Reflexion dazu neigt, seine eigene Degeneration voranzutreiben.

Was hier Ursache des Verfalls ist, ist die Unzulänglichkeit des Menschen selbst, nicht die große Stadt, welche einer vermeintlichen Reinheit des bäuerlichen Lebens gegenübersteht. Es gibt keine Reinheit bei Sillanpää, sodass sogar die Liebe kein Heilung mit sich führt. Im Gegenteil.

Fern jeder Verklärung und mit subtiler Gesellschaftskritik ist *Silja, die Magd* ein irgendwie typisch skandinavisches Werk, das mit seiner wundervollen Sprache begeistert und mit seinem Realismus fesselt. Sillanpää schlägt sich, wenn überhaupt - und das ist gut so - auf die Seite seiner Charaktere, nicht auf die einer bestimmten Klasse oder politischen Gruppierung. Dies lässt den Leser ungemein nahe an die handelnden Personen rücken und das bäuerliche Umfeld erstaunlich authentisch miterleben.

Silja, die Magd ist ein tolles Buch aus der wohl großartigsten Epoche skandinavischer Literatur. Für mich ist es zudem ein sehr frühes Highlight des noch jungen Jahres 2017 und der Beginn eines ganz gewiss anhaltenden Interesses an Silanpää's Gesamtwerk.

Shawn Bird says

Read this in Finland as an exchange student. It seemed to me that it revealed a lot about the essential character of the Finns and the land they love. Interesting history and story.

Sally says

"The summer-morning death of Silja, that lonely figure left to her own resources, may thus be seen as the end of a long chain of events that we can regard as beginning thirty years earlier, when Silja's father, Kustaa, inherited the Salmelus farm."

So begins this novel, which then takes us back through the events of young Silja's sad life: her father's marriage to a woman of unfortunate family, plus his own weak character cause the loss of the family farm. Further events find the girl working as a maidservant on a succession of farms, until while working for a kindly professor, she falls in love. The beautifully written account of Silja's emotions that midsummer is perhaps the loveliest part of this novel.

Towards the end, as war breaks out between the Red and White factions, I felt my interest beginning to wane slightly, but nonetheless a great novel.

Tiia says

Harvoin olen kokenut hiljaisuuden kirjassa näin voimakkaana. Voisin arvella, että loppuratkaisun kertominen

alkuun oli harkittua, jotta kirjassa ei olisi turhia jännitteitä vaan se pysyisi juuri tällaisena, jotta Silja kokonaisteoksena omaisi samat laadut kuin Silja henkilönä. Samaa tunnelmaa ruokkivat myös ennakoivat lauseet pitkin tarinaa.

Ihan erikoisen tyyni kirja, vaikka (sisällis)sotakuvaustakin oli verevöittämissä.

Voisin kuvitella, että tämä olisi kirja jota lukisin ääneen vanhuksille palvelutalossa (en ole koskaan ollut lukemassa, mutta ehkä joskus vielä). Tyyli on siveää ja siistiä ja sanat soljuvat kepeästi, mutta silti koskettavat.

William Romsek says

Story of a young peasant girl/woman of rural Finland in the early 1900s. I really have a soft spot for realistic stories of peasant life and this one is a fine example.

Susanna Natti says

I discovered this book when I read a review tucked into the pages of a book about learning Finnish. The review was by Timothy Crouse, author of *The Boys on the Bus*, and I wish I had not misplaced it, because he was able to articulate the beautiful thrall that this book had on me in a way that I cannot. In brief, the story is about a Finnish girl born just before the turn of the last century and her short life, which includes her being orphaned at 12, having to become a servant for various households, her short-lived and innocent involvement in the events of the revolution in Finland in 1919, and her death from tuberculosis. The plot isn't the star though - it's Silanpää's writing. His writing is deceptively simple, and it almost seems as though he's done a sleight of hand when, frequently, at the end of a paragraph of simple declarative and modest sentences, I found myself taking a sharp breath in as I grasped the entire picture of the scene he has sketched out. If I could compare it to anything, I might choose the quick figure sketches that Toulouse Lautrec is famous for - a sureness of line and the capturing of a moment.

Cheryl says

I am surprised that I have never heard of this book by the Nobel Prize winner in Literature of 1939. It was a difficult book to read at the start because it is obviously a translation from Finnish. It took me a while to get accustomed to the rhythm and style of the writing translated into English, and then I found myself really enjoying the story. *The Maid Silja* is a rather depressing story of the downfall of the Salmelus family who suffer one tragedy after another until, in the end, Silja dies alone in poverty. The story is beautifully written.

Sillanpää offers this at the end as a message of the tragic story:

"So ends the tale of the last flourishing of an old family tree that happened to end at that time; they are always ending. But these 'trees' are not like the trees of the forest. There is no real death for a family; if we could look unhindered through time, we should see 'branches' of every of every family still alive...In the widest sense of all we are all members of the same family and can therefore respect each other's struggles in all time. You too, the farthest reader in point of time of this narrative, may respect our battles. This natural stress of battle is only a sign, the meaning and significance of which we are permitted, indeed constantly

compelled, to study."

Paul Goina says

This is the first book I have read by a Finnish author. It was interesting for me (as a Romanian) to find out about 'country-life' in Finland.

The book is very thoughtful, you can actually feel the whole atmosphere, there are described a lot of feelings I also experienced in my lifetime. Key element - the connection between nature and human.

In the first half of the book, it is presented the life of Kusta, Silja's father - a little bit of his childhood and then as a grown up with his wife after he gets in charge of his parent's big farm. He loves his wife, the farm, his legacy, but mostly his children.

The second half of the novel focuses on Silja's life after her father's death; she moves to several locations, never losing her love for life, nature, kindness... She sort of feels like she connects to the surrounding universe in the same way her father did.

Elisabeth says

If you want romance and a happy ending don't read this: we are told on Page 1 that Silja dies young. But if you want to learn what life was like in Scandinavia a century or two ago, do read it. The farms, forests, lakes and flowers of Finland are beautifully described. I learned much about Finnish social customs and farm life (hard, but didn't sound unbearable even for hired hands male or female). The book has a dreamy quality. For the first 150 pages or more, there is no clue as to what year it is set in: I assumed 18th or 19th century.

Suddenly we learn it's 1917 and Finland is part of the Russian Empire; but, although Bolsheviks appear and cause some trouble, the Revolution doesn't play a large part in the story. It's the story of a young woman on her own from a young age (after the death of her loving father), who possesses a certain nobility, never whines or gives up, and might even be said to die happy. I salute all the real Siljas.

Peony says

I loved the melancholic beauty of this book. I wished all good things for Silja during the entire book, even if the reader knows right from the start her life is not going to be about lasting happiness, but more about giving things up, one by one. Sometimes, no matter how kind a soul you are or how hard you work, you won't be rewarded/get what you "deserve". The parts that took place during the Finnish civil war (first years of independency of Finland and Russian revolution) were fascinating and showed events from the perspective of ordinary people. I might have given 5 stars without some repetitions and some unnecessary sentences of foreshadowing.

Javier de la Peña Ontanaya says

Esta novela narra la historia de Silja, una chica que queda huérfana de padre y madre en una localidad rural de Finlandia, poco antes de que estalle la guerra civil en el país y el conflicto entre bolcheviques y blancos. Silja pasará toda su (corta) vida trabajando en distintas casas como sirvienta. En una de ellas conoce a Armas, un joven del que se enamora pero que será enviado al frente y caído en combate.

Un libro breve, de apenas 200 páginas, pero bastante insulso. La historia de la sirvienta Silja es aburrida, cae en lo monótono de idas y venidas de casas, amos y otros sirvientes. Tampoco aparece prácticamente nada —hasta casi el final— del contexto histórico de la novela, la guerra civil finlandesa, que era uno de los atractivos para mí en esta novela. Sillanpää ganó el Nobel de Literatura en 1939, pero en cuanto a esta historia, me ha dejado frío.
