



Estonia: A Ramble Through the Periphery

Alexander Theroux

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“Seeing Estonia ? disrobing her ? was my focus.”

Any journey with Alexander Theroux is an education. Possessed of a razor-sharp and hyperliterate mind, he stands beside Thomas Pynchon as one of the sharpest cultural commentators of our time. So when he decided to accompany his wife ? the artist Sarah Son-Theroux ? on her Fulbright Scholarship to Estonia, it occasioned this penetrating examination of a country that, for many, seems alien and distanced from the modern world.

For Theroux, the country and its people become a puzzle. His fascination with their language, manners, and legacy of occupation and subordination lead him to a revelatory examination of Estonia’s peculiar place in European history. All the while, his trademark acrobatic allusions, quotations, and digressions ? which take us from *Hamlet* through Jean Cocteau to *Married... with Children* ? render his travels as much internal and psychological as they are external and physical. Through these obsessive references to Western culture, we come to appreciate how insular the country has become, yet also marvel at its fierce individuality and preternatural beauty ? such is the skill of Theroux’s gaze.

This travelogue of his nine months abroad also brims with anecdotes of Theroux’s encounters with Estonian people and ? in some of its most bitterly comedic episodes ? his fellow Americans whom he at times feels more alienated from than the frosty, humorless Europeans.

Estonia: A Ramble Through the Periphery is as biting and satirical as it is witty and urbane; as curious and lyrical as it is brash and irreverent. It marks a new highlight in an already stellar career and a book that continues Fantagraphics’ exceptional line of prose works.

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