

The Fly, the Cockroach and the Spider



The Fly, the Cockroach and the Spider_____

author **Anton Hansen Tammsaare**

director and dramatiser **Leino Rei**

designer and composer **Kaspar Jancis**

lighting designer Madis Kirkmann

sound technicians **Aigar Vals &**

Mait Visnapuu

CAST

Getter Meresmaa or

Taavi Tõnisson

Premiere 1st September 2024.

The World in Miniature

Maarja Vaino

Head of the Tallinn Literary Centre

A miniature is a short, concise small form of prose, which is characterised by emphatically lyrical mood. This form that has also been called artificial fairy tale, was enjoying its heyday in the early 20th century – miniatures were written, for example, by the much-loved Eino Leino in Finland, the scandalous Oscar Wilde in Britain, and Friedebert Tuglas and A.H. Tammsaare in Estonia.

Tammsaare's first artificial fairy tales were published in 1909. It was a time when he had begun his law studies at the University of Tartu and had close relations with the Young Estonia group. It is believed that a certain Romanticist mood prevailing in his miniatures is primarily the influence of Young Estonians.

On the other hand, however, Tammsaare was searching for his “writer-self” at the time. He experimented with playwriting, but discontented, destroyed the sketches. Short stories and novellas had a better fate, these also made it to print. There is even a poem by Tammsaare surviving from that time, titled “To a Young Maiden”. In his university years, Tammsaare had several romantic encounters, some of which are clearly reflected in the theme choices for his miniatures: *Innocent Love*, *Love*, *The Boy and the Butterfly*, *The Nixie*, etc.



With the miniatures, Tammsaare moved away from the naturalism of his earlier work and began exploring the more irrational realms of human nature. Love is one of those elusive phenomena defying rational analysis that captivated Tammsaare. But in the complexity of human relationships, there are many other incomprehensible nuances besides love; to understand them, Tammsaare turned to nature. While studying law at the university, he also used every opportunity to attend lectures on psychology and natural sciences as well. In his childhood, as a little herd boy, the future writer's favourite pastime was to observe closely the behaviour and mutual relationships of insects, birds and animals.

It is no wonder, therefore, that some miniatures, where Tammsaare has taken insects or birds as characters, seem unexpectedly harsh or even cruel. Yet this is how nature revealed itself to the author – following the laws of life. It is especially evident in the story *The Raven and Her Young Ones*, where the mother raven lets only that young one survive that promises to carry life forward in its turn.

The theme choices of the miniatures also reflect Tammsaare's law studies, especially in the story *The Fly, the Cockroach and the Spider*, which speaks a good deal about laws and agreements. The language of the miniatures imitates the style of the Old Testament, which is after all one of the oldest "books of law". What interested Tammsaare more precisely was how the laws of nature and the inner world and inner order of the human soul itself function alongside man-made laws. Which will prevail – acts of law or conscience?

But what is conscience? No one knows where it lies or why it arises. Yet it is one of the cornerstones of the human society remaining cultured. After all, laws can be effective only by force of conscience.

Tammsaare wrote his miniatures before the novels *Truth and Justice* and *The Master of Kõrboja* that brought him fame. And yet we can already find the future novel-Tammsaare in his artificial fairy tales. His miniatures carry many important keywords that he later began to explore in his novels. The most telling ones are *Truth and Love*, but also for example *The Bard* and *The Kannel Player*. Music has a significant role in Tammsaare's work. Miniature is, after all, a musical genre as well: a lively short piece of music. Creating a special mood in the miniatures was certainly one of Tammsaare's intentions.

The miniatures are small-scale variations on the same motifs that later become central themes in Tammsaare's novels. They are like drops of water reflecting the world.

What Does It Feel Like to Be a Fly?

Lennart Lennuk

Biologist in the Estonian Museum of Natural History

We are all familiar with the characters chosen by Tammsaare, although probably not in the best sense. In 20th century literature it is quite rare to depict such tiny animals as characters. But this miniature by Tammsaare shows us the world of the fly, the cockroach and the spider from a very peculiar angle. What led the author to those characters and why did he assign precisely these character traits to them? It certainly demonstrates Tammsaare's mischievous imagination, but also Estonians' long-standing relationship with bugs.

They are all indoor creatures: part of nature but adapted to living alongside humans – synanthropes. The fly, the cockroach as well as the spider are all despised in one way or another, as we unfortunately tend to give meaning to nature through our own experiences. And so, the author has depicted the fly as a creature in distress: have we not all been waken from deep thought or sleep by the anxious buzzing of an early-spring fly. Yet apart from the annoying buzzing, a fly causes no great harm. By the way, a man of nature once domesticated a fly, gave it a name and right away found it much easier to live with it, as the fly became a full-fledged roommate. So, here's a thought – let us try to understand even the most peculiar and annoying creatures, and we'll feel much better.



The spider is one of the most mysterious characters in Tammsaare's tale – it speaks little and weaves a plot that is hidden from us. The spider is like karma – quiet but controlling the game. A mostly silent character that makes sure that justice will prevail. Spiders in the real world are also quiet and patient creatures that act only when there is need for it.

The cockroach, running its errands in the dark, might indeed come across as a character with dubious intentions. And as revealed in the story, cockroaches in their multitude were in the past truly a nuisance for those around them. But whether the cockroach is a good character or a bad one is again a matter of judging from a human perspective. No creature in this world is malicious, everyone is simply trying to live their life the best they can. Just the way that a cockroach, for example, has learned to live its life may not always be to our liking.

In nature, things are not always as clear-cut as in the minds of humans.

The rules of nature are more universal than those of humans, just as Tammsaare's cockroach's rules are more flexible than ours. Yet we tend to draw a clear line between good and bad, passing judgement on creatures that we do not fully understand, even though on closer inspection they may be completely different from what we had thought. Every living being has a right to life, but the fact that one eats the other is a law of nature that keeps the circle of life functioning.

Even the tiniest bugs have their own universe – their *umwelt*. They all perceive this world in their own way, which is certainly very different from the way we experience it. For a fly, for example, time passes completely differently than for humans. If we were sitting in the cinema with a fly, a film consisting of twenty-five separate frames shown per second that we experience as a smoothly moving image, would be a slow viewing of a picture gallery for the fly. And while humans communicate with words, flies do that by sounds created with their wings. Therefore, the buzzing of the fly in Tammsaare's miniature may convey a deeply meaningful monologue.

We can only imagine what the *umwelt* of one or another tiny bug is like, but unfortunately, we only know how to do that through a filter of our humanness. We can imagine what it would feel like to fly around in the room and taste gigantic sugar cubes with our feet. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to let go of our human perceptions. Still, it is exciting to play with such thoughts, as it allows us to explore the plentiful and wholly different facets of that world.

Even though we will probably never know what it actually feels like to be a fly, a cockroach or a spider, we can recognise Tammsaare's fly, cockroach and spider in people around us as well as in ourselves. But let us not forget that humans are also animals and part of nature.

Theatre and Caravan? Caravan and Theatre? Caravan Theatre!

Entertainment has historically been the profession of wanderers. Long ago in the Middle Ages, musicians, storytellers, mimes, jugglers and other performers used to travel from town to town, village to village to earn a living and find new audiences.

Puppet theatre has also been historically a travelling theatre form. Performers moved from one fairground, market or town square to another. They did not need much to put on a performance: puppeteers had their puppets and some pieces of scenery. All this fit easily onto a handcart or wagon, which, with some luck, would be pulled by a donkey or a pony. The Industrial Revolution that broke out in the 18th century brought along improved communications, and the rapidly developing road, canal and railway network and finally also steamboats opened up a possibility of transporting more bulky productions. This paved the way for the birth of caravan theatres: all that was needed for living as well as performing was packed



into a carriage that took the performers from place to place. Companies had usually at least two caravans – one for living and sleeping, and another for transporting equipment for the shows. There were also caravans that, after unloading, turned into part of the stage.

Actors and theatre groups travelling around Europe contributed greatly to the exchange of ideas and culture; thanks to them, fresh ideas and new genres moved across Europe. It is therefore no wonder that travelling theatre groups constantly got in the way of the authorities. They were required to present a special permit, which was oftentimes a confirmation by the mayor or village headman of their previous location, stating that the group's moral compass was in working order. Later, in the 20th century, moral values fell into the background and importance was placed on the travelling theatre's ideological mindset.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of travelling

theatre companies in the history of world theatre. Since the beginning of time, this form has demanded imaginative, visual thinking from the performers, but also technical prowess and logistic capability. Today there are also many groups that have no permanent theatre hall; when staging new productions, they must always consider how to best adjust them into various performance spaces. Rearrangements brought on by Covid have made many theatres turn their eyes toward smaller forms, which could be performed with smaller groups, would not demand large financial investments and would be mobile. This search has once again led to caravan theatre. Today, various solutions are used in Europe, such as old caravans remodelled into mini theatre halls, customised solutions on trailers, or even gypsy-caravan-style old-fashioned theatres on wheels.

Caravan theatres improvise with form as well as content, experimenting with various theatre types, looking for a symbiosis of verbal, puppet, object, material and multimedia theatre. It is now once again a time when theatre groups in caravans travel from town to town, village to village, at festivals, on town squares and fairgrounds, bringing to the audience a very unique and distinctive art of theatre.





TECHNICAL TEAM OF THE PRODUCTION

Head of the production department Anni Rajas

Head of technical department Revo Koplus

Head of the performance department Airike Vipp

Scenery and props made by Annika Aedma, Kári Arason, Andres Josing,

Madli Liiva, Krista Norden, Margus Tamme, Evelin Vassar

Sewists Tiiu Peterson, Ursula Goldstein

Stage and prop manager Elise Holter

Dresser Kristel Hansen

Make-up artist Triin Klaas

Lights technician Madis Kirkmann

Sound technician Mait Visnapuu ja Aigar Vals

Stage technician Kaspar Erik Lind

Programme compiled by Sirlen Rekkor, translated by Liisa Luhakivi

Programme designed by Helmi-Elfriede Arrak

PRODUCTION MUSIC WAS RECORDED BY ENSEMBLE COMPRISED OF

Eno Kollom, Henry Tiisma, Nestor Ljutjuk, Kaspar Uljas

CONSTRUCTION AND TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS OF THE CARAVAN THEATRE

Revo Koplus, Kári Arason, Madis Kirkmann, Mait Visnapuu, Aigar Vals,

Andres Josing, Margus Tamme

EXTERNAL DESIGN OF THE CARAVAN THEATRE

Helmi-Elfriede Arrak

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head designer Rosita Raud / head of the performance department
Airike Vipp / marketing manager Piia-Berta Piir-Kuusmik / communication
manager Helena Läks / museum manager Iti Niinemets / head of the
production department Anni Rajas / head of technical department
Revo Koplus / administration manager Ahto Paju / festival manager
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Helle Laas, Getter Meresmaa, Jevgeni Moissejenko, Hardi Möller,
Mart Müürisepp, Laura Nõlvak, Katri Pekri, Steffi Pähn, Karl Sakrits,
Doris Tislar, Tiina Tõnis, Taavi Tõnisson, Joosep Uus, Risto Vaidla
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Elise Holter, Liisi Tegelman, Reet Loderaud, Liisa-Lii Tamme
head of lights department Madis Kirkmann / lights technicians
Targo Miilimaa, Triin Rahn / head of sound and video department
Mait Visnapuu / video and sound technicians Aigar Vals, Mikk Mengel
video, lights and sound technician Erik Pello / head dresser Kristel Hansen
dresser Tiina Salmus / head of stage technicians Janek Saareli
stage technicians Kaspar Erik Lind, Mikk-Artur Ostrov, Oliver Puju,
Steffi Viita, Martin Reinart, Tanel Riik / puppet makers Annika Aedma,
Evelin Vassar /prop maker-set designer Madli Liiva / set designer
Krista Norden / decoration makers Kari Arason, Andres Josing,
Mihkel Niinemets / sewists Ursula Goldstein, Tiiu Peterson
puppet technician Margus Tamme / prop manager-supplier Riho Tammert
sales manager Anneli Albert / sales administrators Karmen Mägi,
Viivi Palm / acting service manager Jane Kütson / performance attendants
Mari Akkermann, Viia Mänd, Eha Simson, Edith Horm, Signe Kamp,
Madli Rätšnik, Tiia Sander, Tiina Tüرنpuu, Helle Veskimägi,
Rebecca Rätšnik, Elizabeth Teng, Elis Listra, Hiie Kalaus, Viivi Palm,
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café manager Lili Tiks / cook Heli Kann / café workers
Alissija-Elisabet Jevtjukova, Heidi-Lii Kärner, Niina Lõhmus,
Triinu Saaremägi, Eliisa Madeleine Ots, Marta Leena Sildvee
museum curator Gerli Mägi / curators of education programmes
Laura Linna, Liisa Luhakivi, Karmen-Eliise Kiidron / cleaners Illar Kask,
Ilona Avdejeva, Kif Tamme, Svetlana Fortõgina, Joosep Pedajas



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