

Aki Ollikainen



LAURA MALMIVAARA

(b. 1973) won the appreciated Helsingin Sanomat Prize for a first book with his novel *Nälkävuosi* (A Year of Famine). The book was a nominee for the Finlandia Prize and the Tulenkantajat Prize. Ollikainen is a professional photographer. He has studied social policy and has worked as a reporter in Kolari in Northern Finland. In 2012 Ollikainen moved to a writers residence in Sammatti in Southern Finland with his family. Currently he is working on a new novel.

Praise for Ollikainen's first novel *A Year of Famine*:

"One of the most significant and elegant novels of this spring. — Ollikainen makes comparisons with the present times as well with his meritorious historical description. Ollikainen brings his gloomy topic alive with his beautiful and exact language." – NADJA NOWAK AND SEppo PUTTONEN, YLE KULTTUURI

"A Year of Famine is a confidently written and touching historical novel. A structurally and linguistically interesting literary debut." – HELENA RUUSKA, HELSINGIN SANOMAT

"The topic of the debut novel is big, the book small but strong. — A Year of Famine has received so much praise, that the book can be expected to appear on many shortlists for literary awards at the end of the year." – RISTO LÖF, SAVON SANOMAT / KESKISUOMALAINEN

"I'm pretty confident in claiming already at this point that A Year of Famine is the best debut novel of the year. The question is, of how many years." – JUSSI AURÉN, SATAKUNNAN KANSA

"A compact and straightforward debut paints a touching picture of the period, in the countryside as well as in the city. The victims of the famine and the miniatures of the 'better people' are exceptionally vivid." – JUHANI RUOTSALO, DEMOKRAATTI

"A Year of Famine is compact regarding pages and expression, but the world it depicts is big and wide." – JUHO HAKKARAINEN, KALEVA

"Where do these ready-made debut writers come from?" – SINIKKA VIIRRET, KAINUUN SANOMAT

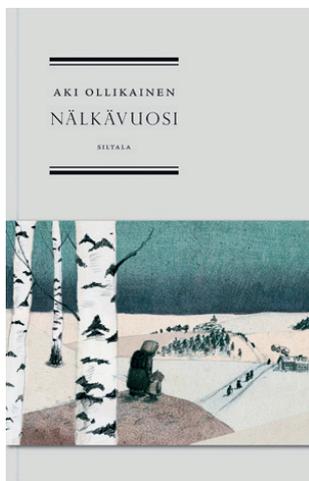
"As a first book A Year of Famine is no promise but a lot more, a heavyweight evidence. It almost forces the reader to empathy but doesn't content with swarming the emotions." – ERKKI KANERVA, TURUN SANOMAT

"Ollikainen's characters are living people turning to beasts by hunger. The narration is tangible, poetic, and compact. There are no extra words in a historical novel of 141 pages." – NINNI LEHTNIEMI, OLIVIA

SILTALA

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"Nälkävuosi"



AWARDS FOR *WHITE HUNGER*:

Best Finnish Debut Novel 2012
 Finnish Book Blogger's Best Book 2012
 Bookseller's Best Book Medal 2012
 Bookstore's Prize for Bestselling Debut Novel 2012
 Shortlisted for Finlandia-prize for the Best Finnish Novel 2012
 Shortlisted for Tulenkantajat-prize for the Best Finnish Fiction 2012

FINLAND, 1867. It is winter, and food is in short supply. Great numbers of tenant farmers depart to go on long journeys to beg for food, and in Helsinki, the capital, the Senate considers emergency aid measures.

The setting of Aki Ollikainen's debut novel is grim, and the plot points of the story are bleak, nearly without exception. This densely structured novel intertwines two parallel stories about a remote Finland, which at the time was still a part of the Russian empire. Historical writing is realised in the form of humane emotions in Ollikainen's sensitively written debut.

The impoverished rural population live entirely hand-to-mouth, but the younger officials in the capital are fretting in their heated city apartments over different problems. Is the location of the railway designed as a means of emergency aid really a source of help or a curse, a breeding ground for infectious diseases and death or a friendly gesture towards those who have so few of the necessities for life? The Renqvist brothers – Teo, a doctor and Lars, a deputy chief accountant – are also worrying about the tribulations central to their own lives, not least of which are love and children: simply put, life and its continuation.

Only one of Marja and Juhani's children is still alive when the family embark on their journey to look for food, and neither of the parents survives until spring. First, Marja is forced to leave her husband behind to waste away at home, and soon their eldest daughter Matalaena's strength gives out. Marja can never reach the destination of her dreams, the metropolis of St. Petersburg, which she imagines would be able to provide riches and abundance for all.

Marja's fighting spirit leads her to seek out food and shelter for her child in houses and cottages. Sex, that primal instinct, has not been suppressed as a possible source of help, and Marja has to grit her teeth and give it a try: the poor cannot afford to complain. In dire situations, our basest animal urges leap to the fore. When a person has nothing left to lose, humanity gets trodden underfoot as an unnecessary burden. Crusts of bread are hidden away and thin gruel is reluctantly prepared for the children.

There is some light to brighten the relentless drudgery: in Marja's unsteady mind and her restless dreams on cold nights, she still finds Juhani and sees her little Matalaena. Out of the endless winter light comes the colour of hunger and death – and its oppressive light is spread far and wide.

This fully formed, bittersweet novel – the first by Aki Ollikainen – tells its brutal story with a warmth that is not inconsistent with historical events. His precise expressiveness makes itself heard via the complex range of emotions and pressure of conflicts in the book. And when the paths of the gentlemen from the city cross those of the wandering beggars, humanity emerges as the winner. There is light – dawn breaks, really and truly.

Nina Paavolainen, *translation Ruth Urbom*

"As a debut novel, *White Hunger* is not a promise but a lot more, a heavyweight proof."
 – ERKKI KANERVA, TURUN SANOMAT

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