

# PER PETERSON

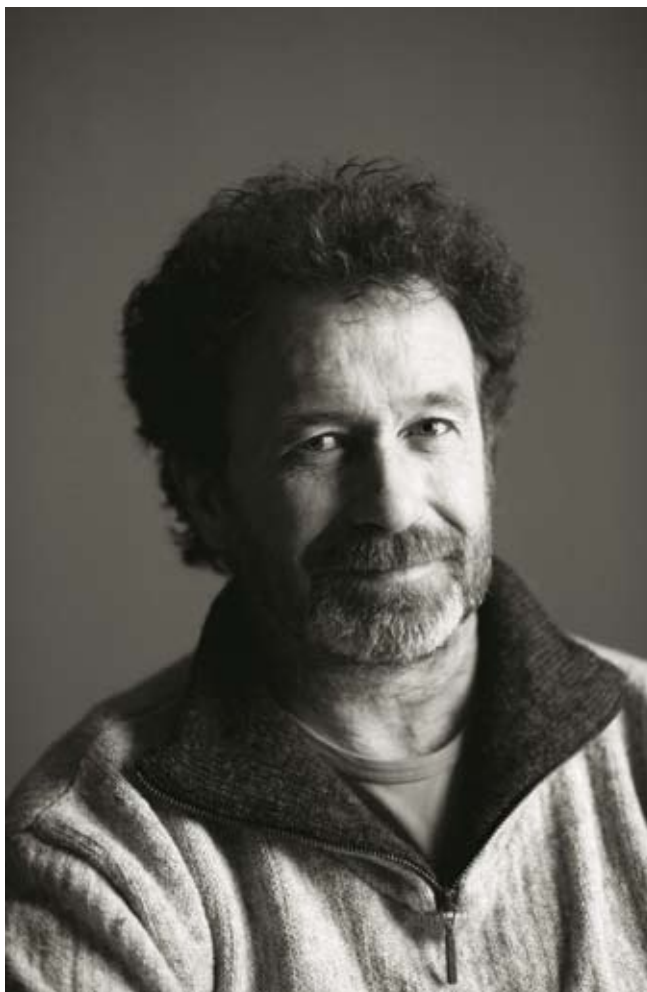


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“ *Out Stealing Horses*  
is an intensely lyrical and evocative novel  
that handles with a deft and seemingly effortless prose  
style the transition of the past into memory, and its  
shifting, unpredictable persistence ...  
a masterful achievement by one  
of Europe’s finest novelists ”

*Comment from the judges of the  
International IMPAC Dublin Award 2007*

# Per Pettersen



Per Pettersen (b. 1952) worked for several years as an unskilled labourer, a bookseller, a writer and a translator until he made his literary debut in 1987 with the short story collection *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes*, which was widely acclaimed by critics. He made his literary breakthrough in 2003 with the bestselling novel *Out Stealing Horses*. For this novel, Pettersen has received a number of literary prizes, among them the 2007 Dublin IMPAC Award and the 2006 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.

Pettersen lives on a small farm in the South-Eastern part of Norway. He has written six novels, one collection of short stories and one essay collection. His books are translated into 44 languages.

Nordic Council's Literary Prize 2009  
Brage Prize 2008  
Critics' Prize 2008

# I Curse The River of Time

(Jeg forbanner tidens elv)

First published: 2008, 240 pp

Foreign rights sold: Albanian (Shkupi), Bulgarian (Delakort), Catalan (Club Editor), Danish (Batzler & Co), Dutch (De Geus), English (Harvill Secker, UK; Graywolf, US), Faroese (Nylendi), Finnish (Otava), French (Gallimard), German (Carl Hanser), Polish (W.A.B.), Serbian (Geopoetika), Spanish (Mondadori), Swedish (Bonniers)

**1989: Communism is crumbling, and Arvid Jansen, 37, is facing his first divorce. At the same time, his mother is diagnosed with cancer.**

Over a few intense autumn days, we follow Arvid as he struggles to find a new footing in his life, while all the established patterns around him are changing at staggering speed. *I Curse the River of Time* is an honest, heartbreaking yet humorous portrayal of a complicated mother-son relationship told in Petterson's precise and beautiful prose.

Arvid Jansen first appeared in Per Petterson's short story collection *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes* (1987), and is a central character in several of Petterson's later books. *Out Stealing Horses* (2003), which won Petterson the Dublin IMPAC Prize and the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, is so far sold to more than 40 foreign publishers, and is a major bestseller in several countries.



**“Petterson is a great depicter of the sad beauty and curse of human lives.”**

SYDSVENSKAN, SWEDEN

**“Norwegian super writer has done it again ... outstanding”**

POLITIKEN, DENMARK

**“A melancholic beautiful autumnal journey, perfect from the first letter to the last full stop.”**

SYDSVENSKAN, SWEDEN

# Sample translation from I Curse The River of Time

Translated from the Norwegian by Charlotte Barslund

## Chapter 5

When one of my brothers told me that mum had headed straight for Denmark the moment the doctor told her she was ill, and that as a result of her disappearance they hadn't managed to speak to her, or discuss her condition properly, or even offer her the obligatory words of comfort, I made a swift decision and a swift telephone call, and precisely two days after she had arrived, I reached the North Jutland coastal town early one morning on the old and unfairly maligned ferry, the *Holger Danske*. I had overslept, I missed breakfast in the cafeteria and a woman was standing outside banging on the door to my cabin:

'We've docked,' she shouted, 'we've already docked, time for you to get up!' and I wondered for a brief instance if she was one of the women I had got to know in the bar the night before.

By the time the previous night was starting to ebb slowly away and turn into a damp new day, the tiny bar was jam-packed and though most of those present were men, there had been a few women as well, not so many as there would have been today, in 2006, and I had enjoyed long chats with most of them. I thought they were lovely.

It was a tight squeeze for anyone wanting to get a drink. And given that many of us did want to drink, we stood packed like sardines carefully holding our

cigarettes vertically between the fingers on one hand while pressing a beer or whisky glass to our chest with the other, manoeuvring the glass very slowly up past the shirt collar and the chin to swallow every precious mouthful. Eventually these amounted to a not inconsiderable number.

There was a man there I didn't like. I didn't like his face when he looked at me. It was as if he knew something about me that I was unaware of, but which he had instantly spotted, as if I was standing there naked, warts and all with no control over what he saw. But what he saw and what he knew made him feel superior to me and strangely he somehow seemed perfectly entitled to it. That was how it felt. Of course, it couldn't possibly be true, I had never seen him before, I was certain of that, he knew nothing about my life. Unless he knew the woman I was still married to. That was a thought. And not a very pleasant one at that. But irrespective of what I felt, his eyes seemed aloof and condescending every time he turned in my direction and he turned often. It made me uneasy, I couldn't concentrate and once when he forced his way past me to get to the gents or go down to his cabin, perhaps, to fetch something he might have left down there, he bumped into my shoulder in a way I found provocative. It also hurt a bit and some of the beer in my almost full glass sloshed over my newly purchased

shirt, which I was immensely pleased with. Yes, it was packed and accidents could easily happen, but I was convinced he collided with me on purpose and it made me feel intimidated. I don't know why, but I started to feel scared, to fear for my life actually. So I put down my beer on the corner of a table and got out.

First I headed for the deck to clear my head, I'd downed several pints; three at least and perhaps more; it was dark along the railings when I pushed the heavy door open and stepped outside. Life boats hung suspended above my head floating like Zeppelins in the vanishing light from the corridor I had left behind. The door slammed shut behind me with an ominous bang. I could hear the roar from the sea and the howling wind that swept along the boat on its way across the waves. They weren't high, but it wasn't calm either, it was October after all and it was cold. *Holger Danske* rocked softly from side to side in the black night, where only the white foam on the crest of the waves seemed close to the ship and my cigarette glowed. It tasted vile. I wondered if I was going to throw up, but my body was strong enough to resist the power of the sea, there was no way I was going to be sick and so I flicked the cigarette across the railing, out into the wind, which flung it against the hull where it burst into sparks before vanishing into the dark. With cautious steps I retreated until I felt the cold wall against my back and I leaned against it, I stood there staring until my night vision kicked in and my eyes were able to take in the vast, restless surface out there. We had passed Færder lighthouse, there was open sea to both sides and it suddenly hit me that the man from the bar might come out here, and if he did, that would be the end of me. He was bigger than me, and stronger, surely, and could toss me overboard like a twig if he felt like it and then I would be gone forever and no one would ever know. The thought grew so powerful that I had to leave the deck though I have stood like this, looking out over the sea into the night from the deck of a ship many

times before; there is great serenity to be found in it and I have needed that from time to time, I don't mind admitting that, and perhaps this time more than ever. But the mood was ruined and with considerable effort I pushed open the heavy door, which the wind with all its might kept pressed against the doorframe, and I went back into the corridor and down the stairs to my cabin, a two-person cabin I had made certain I had the exclusive use of.

I had barely sat down on the bed to take off my shoes when there was a knock on the door. He must have been right behind me. For a moment I froze with fear (as it's so appropriately termed), and then I got up without making a sound. I had no idea what to do. I stood there listening when a second knock followed, a sharp, dry sound, and I instinctively knew what to do. I clenched my right fist and skipped the few steps over to the door, tore it open with a crash and just lashed out. The corridor was in semi-darkness, and I couldn't really see his face, but still I managed to hit him on his jaw, right below his ear and he collided with the wall opposite with a thud. More from the shock than the force of my blow. But as I slammed the door shut and quickly locked it, I felt a stinging pain in my knuckles, clearly the force of my blow couldn't have been that feeble. I stood there holding my breath as I listened out, but I could hear no sound from the corridor. I stayed put, but the silence continued, so I laid down on my bed and kept listening until I couldn't manage to stay awake any longer and I nodded off. In the morning I was woken by a woman hammering on my door:

'We've docked,' she shouted, 'we've already docked, time for you to get up!' And it seemed as if everything that had happened only a few hours earlier had all been a dream I was already starting to forget. But my hand was still sore and it was difficult to clench and relax it completely.

Now I was walking across the berth, half-shivering against the wind. I felt slightly nauseous. I was a bit light-headed. I was wearing my old reefer jacket and had a bag a bit like a ditty-bag slung over my shoulder as I continued up the winding Lodsgade (which held so many memories), past Bar Sinatra which was where Færgetroen used to be when I was a boy and for years afterwards and stopped outside the window of a small off-licence right next to what used to be the Colosseum Cinema on the long Danmarksgade. I often used to go to the Colosseum when I was a boy, my mum and I watched *Mutiny on the Bounty* there, with Marlon Brando in the lead as Fletcher Christian. She was a big fan of Brando, his subdued acting style, inarticulate and yet so eloquent and she also liked the young Paul Newman a great deal, especially in *The Hustler*, they both possessed a certain something, an explosive quality, whereas James Dean though sweet enough was a bit too whiny, to be honest, rather immature in fact, he was spineless, she thought, and would quickly be forgotten. Montgomery Clift was undeniable the greatest; in *From Here to Eternity*, in *The Misfits*; his vulnerability, his eyes, his dignity. There was a bond between my mum and Montgomery Clift which was plain for all to see and that could have been because he resembled someone who had been in her life before my dad entered it, someone she had been in love with, or it could even be because he was like her, because they were soul mates, kindred spirits somehow.

At the cinema I also saw two of the Danish films in the *Father of Four* series and I saw the Swedish film *Rasmus på Loffen*, with Danish subtitles and with Åke Grönberg playing the part of the vagabond, but I was much younger then.

The off-licence hadn't yet opened and I had no urgent need for the stuff on their shelves, not after my night on the ferry, but I glanced at it anyway and then three bottles in the window display made me stop, three different bottles all containing the French spirit,

Calvados, three different varieties, would you believe it, and it suddenly struck me that I had never tasted Calvados. I decided that I might be able to afford the middle one (which would surely be good enough for me), if I walked to the cottage rather than take a taxi as had been my original plan. I did have my own car, but it was in a garage in Norway with a broken drive shaft and it might already have been repaired, but I hadn't got my act together to pick it up yet. So at home I would walk or take the bus whenever I needed to go somewhere. It suited me very well, in fact, because I could and did sleep on the bus. Frequently. I slept as much as I could. There was nothing I liked better. But I was here now and all I could afford was one of the three Calvados bottles and so I would have to walk. That's just how I am. I didn't feel like walking, I was tired, I couldn't remember the last time I was so tired, I was so tired that it almost felt good and I weighed up the pros and cons, as they say, waited ten minutes until the shop opened and then I went inside to buy the bottle in the middle and it was handed to me in a brown paper bag. A bit like they do in the movies, I thought, because I'm Norwegian and we never get spirits in brown paper bags in Norway; we get them in discreet plastic bags from the state monopoly outlets, which everyone instantly recognises anyway and I liked the feeling of being in a film, I could use it, it would keep me going. I could be a man in a film, I could be me and at the same time watch myself from my seat in the cinema do the things you do in films, which are different from real life, though at the time I wouldn't have been able to tell you exactly what those differences were, but it was probably going to make it easier to walk the long way to the cottage, if I imagined I was a man in a film. I really did think so.

# Out Stealing Horses

(Ut og stjæle hester)

**First published:** 2003, 247 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Albanian (Shkupi), Arabic (Dar Al-Muna), Bengali (Sandesh), Bosnian (Connectum), Brazilian Portuguese (Verus Editora), Bulgarian (Delakort), Chinese (Complex: jia-xi books, Simplified: Commercial Press), Croatian (Fidipid), Czech (Euromedia Group), Danish (Batzer & Co.), Dutch (De Geus), English (Harvill Secker, UK/ Graywolf, US), Estonian (Pegasus), Faroese (Forlaget Sprotin), Finnish (Otava), French (Gallimard), Georgian (Nectar), German (Carl Hanser Verlag), Greek (Livani), Hebrew (Keter), Hindi (Rajkamal Prakashtan), Hungarian (Scolar Kiadó), Icelandic (Bjartur), Italian (Mauri Spagnol), Japanese (Hakus uisha), Korean (Media 2.0), Latvian (Zvaigzne), Lithuanian (Tyto Alba), Malayalam (DC Books), Marathi (A&A), Polish (WAB), Portuguese (Casa das Letras), Romanian (Editura Univers), Russian (Text), Serbian (Geopoetika), Slovak (Slovart Publishing Ltd.), Slovene (Litera), Spanish (Ediciones B), Swedish (Albert Bonniers Förlag), Turkish (Metis), Urdu (Rajkamal Prakashtan)

In 1948, fifteen-year-old Trond spends a summer in the country with his father. The unexpected events that come to pass alter his life forever.

An early morning adventure out stealing horses, leaves Trond confused when his friend Jon suffers a sudden breakdown. Behind this scene, he will discover, lies a personal tragedy: the first incident in the gradual destruction of the two boys' families.

As an old man, living in a remote part of Norway, Trond chances upon a character from that fateful summer who stirs up painful memories and forces him to look back at his past.

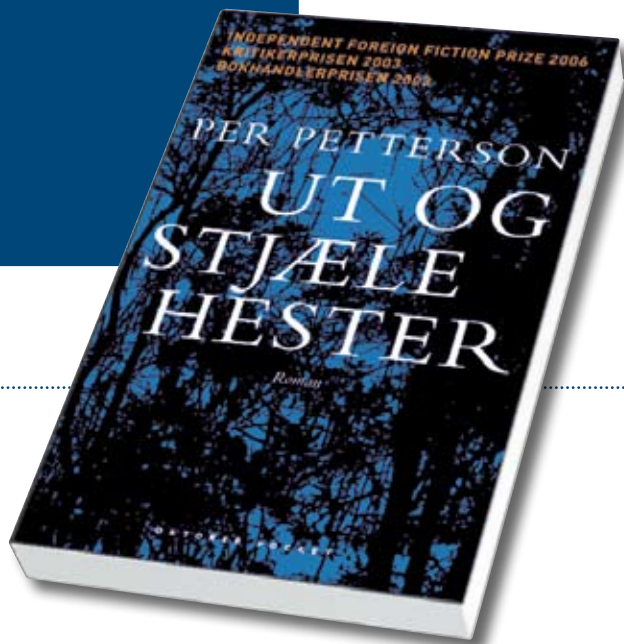
*Out Stealing Horses* is a poignant and moving tale of a changing perspective on the world, from youthful innocence to the difficult acceptance of betrayal, and of nostalgia for a simpler way of life.

“ This short yet spacious and powerful book – in such contrast to the well-larded garrulity of the bulbous American novel of today – reminds us of the careful and apropos writing of J. M. Coetzee, W. G. Sebald and Uwe Timm. Petterson’s kinship with Knut Hamsun, which he has himself acknowledged, is palpable ... But nothing should suggest that his superb novel is so embedded in its sources as to be less than a gripping account of such originality as to expand the reader’s own experience of life. ”

THOMAS MCGUANE, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

International Dublin IMPAC Award 2007  
 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2006  
 Norwegian Critics' Prize 2003 and  
 the Booksellers' Prize 2003

More than 750.000  
 copies sold world wide



“*Out Stealing Horses* is tinged with an autumnal sense of loss and the self-examination of an old man looking back on his life. Beckett’s *Malone Dies* is a clear influence, but Petterson is triumphantly his own man. This book is a minor masterpiece of death and delusion in a Nordic land.”

THE GUARDIAN (UK)

“Deeply atmospheric... a stunning novel.”

DAILY TELEGRAPH (UK)

“a true gem, compact yet radiant.”

THE INDEPENDENT (UK)

“Petterson has ... tied psychological episodes to their expression in nature in an unusually successful way. The novel not only deals with large existential questions such as love and betrayal, truth and death, it also transmits a compelling, poetic picture of life and its transitory nature. The reader is given wisdom and the power of sight. *Out Stealing Horses* is both a reflective novel about a father and a poetic tribute to the nature of Northern Europe.”

NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG (SWITZERLAND)

# Excerpt from Out Stealing Horses

Translated from the Norwegian by Anne Born

We were going out stealing horses. That was what he said, standing at the door to the cabin where I was spending the summer with my father. I was fifteen. It was 1948 and one of the first days of July. Three years earlier the Germans had left, but I can't remember that we talked about them any longer. At least my father did not. He never said anything about the war.

Jon came often to our door, at all hours, wanting me to go out with him: shooting hares, walking through the forest in the pale moonlight right up to the top of the ridge when it was perfectly quiet, fishing for trout in the river, balancing on the shining yellow logs that still sailed the current close to our cabin long after the clearing of the river was done. It was risky, but I never said no and never said anything to my father about what we were up to. We could see a stretch of the river from the kitchen window, but it was not there that we did our balancing acts. We always started further down, nearly a kilometre, and sometimes we went so far and so fast on the logs that it took us an hour to walk back through the forest when at last we had scrambled onto the bank, soaking wet and shivering.

Jon wanted no company but mine. He had two younger brothers, the twins Lars and Odd, but he and I were the same age. I do not know who he was with for the rest of the year, when I was in Oslo. He never talked about that, and I never told him what I did in the city.

He never knocked, just came quietly up the path from the river where his little boat was tied up, and waited at the door until I became aware that he was there. It never took long. Even in the morning early when I was still asleep, I might feel a restlessness far into my dream, as if I needed to pee and struggled to wake up before it was too late, and then when I opened my eyes and knew it wasn't *that*, I went directly to the door and opened it, and there he was. He smiled his little smile and squinted as he always did.

'Are you coming?' he said. 'We're going out stealing horses.'

It turned out that *we* meant only him and me as usual, and if I had not gone with him he would have gone alone, and that would have been no fun. Besides, it was hard to steal horses alone. Impossible, in fact.

'Have you been waiting long?' I said.

'I just got here.'

That's what he always said, and I never knew if it was true. I stood on the doorstep in only my underpants and looked over his shoulder. It was already light. There were wisps of mist on the river, and it was a little cold. It would soon warm up, but now I felt goose pimples spread over my thighs and stomach. Yet I stood there looking down to the river, watching it coming from round the bend a little further up, shining and soft from under the mist, and flow past. I knew it by heart. I had dreamt about it all winter.

‘Which horses?’ I said.

‘Barkald’s horses. He keeps them in the paddock in the forest, behind the farm.’

‘I know. Come inside while I get dressed.’

‘I’ll wait here,’ he said.

He never would come inside, maybe because of my father. He never spoke to my father. Never said hello to him. Just looked down when they passed each other on the way to the shop. Then my father would stop and turn round to look at him and say:

‘Wasn’t that Jon?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘What’s wrong with him?’ said my father every time, as if embarrassed, and each time I said:

‘I don’t know.’

And in fact I did not, and I never thought to ask. Now Jon stood on the doorstep that was only a flagstone, gazing down at the river while I fetched my clothes from the back of one of the tree-trunk chairs, and pulled them on as quickly as I could. I did not like him having to stand there waiting, even though the door was open so he could see me the whole time.

Clearly I ought to have understood there was something special about that July morning, something to do with the fog on the river and the mist over the ridge perhaps, something about the white light in the sky, something in the way Jon said what he had to say or the way he moved or stood there stock still at the door. But I was only fifteen, and the only thing I noticed was that he did not carry the gun he always had with him in case a hare should cross our path, and that was not so strange, it would only have been in the way rustling horses. We weren’t going to shoot the horses, after all. As far as I could see, he was the same as he always was: calm and intense at one and the same time with his eyes squinting, concentrating on what we were going to do, with no sign of impatience. That suited me well, for it

was no secret that compared with him I was a slowcoach in most of our exploits. He had years of training behind him. The only thing I was good at was riding logs down the river, I had a built-in balance, a natural talent, Jon thought, though that was not how he would have put it.

What he had taught me was to be reckless, taught me that if I let myself go, did not slow myself down by thinking so much beforehand I could achieve many things I would never have dreamt possible.

‘OK. Ready, steady, go,’ I said.

We set off together down the path to the river. It was very early. The sun came gliding over the ridge with its fan of light and gave to everything a brand-new colour, and what was left of the fog above the water melted and disappeared. I felt the instant warmth through my sweater and closed my eyes and walked on without once missing my footing until I knew we had got to the bank. Then I opened my eyes and clambered down the stream-washed boulders and into the stern of the little boat. Jon pushed off and jumped in, picked up the oars and rowed with short, hard strokes straight into the stream, let the boat drift a stretch and rowed again until we reached the opposite shore about fifty metres further down. Far enough for the boat not to be seen from the cottage.

Then we climbed up the slope, Jon first with me at his heels, and walked along the barbed wire fence by the meadow where the grass stood tall under a light veil of mist, and would soon be mowed and hung on racks to dry in the sun. It was like walking up to your hips in water, with no resistance, as in a dream. I often dreamt about water then, I was friends with water.

It was Barkald’s field, and we had come this way many times, up between the fields to the road that led to the shop, to buy magazines or sweets or other things we had the money for; one øre, two øre and sometimes five øre coins jingling in our pockets every step we took, or we went to Jon’s house in

the other direction where his mother greeted us so enthusiastically when we walked in you would have thought I was the Crown Prince or something, and his father dived into the local paper or vanished out to the barn on some errand that just could not wait. There was something there I did not understand. But it did not worry me. He could stay in the barn as far as I was concerned. I didn't give a damn. Whatever happened, I was going home at summer's end.

Barkald's farm was on the far side of the road behind some fields where he grew oats and barley every other year, close up to the forest with the barn at an angle, and in the forest he kept four horses in a large area he had fenced in with barbed wire, from tree to tree at two heights. It was his forest, and there was a lot of it. He was the biggest landowner in the district. Neither of us could stand the man, but I am not sure why. He had never done anything to us or uttered an unfriendly word that I had ever heard. But he had a big farm, and Jon was the son of a smallholder. Almost everyone was a smallholder alongside the river in this valley only a few kilometres from the Swedish border, and most of them still lived off the produce of their farms and the milk they delivered to the dairy, and as lumberjacks in the logging season, for Barkald in his forest, or elsewhere, and in the one owned by a rich bastard from Bærum; thousands and thousands of parcels of land to the north and the west. There wasn't much money about, as far as I could make out. Maybe Barkald had some, but Jon's father had none, and my father certainly did not have any, not that I knew about, anyhow. So how he had scraped together enough to buy the cabin where we stayed that summer is still a mystery. Frankly, I never had a clear idea what my father did to earn a living; to keep his life going, and mine, among others, because it often seemed to change from one thing to another, but there were always numerous tools involved, and small machines, and sometimes

a great deal of planning and thinking with pencil in hand and journeys to all kinds of places around the country, places where I had never been and never knew what they looked like, but he was no longer on any other man's payroll. Often he had a great deal to do, at other times less, but still, he had managed to save enough money, and when we went there for the first time the year before, he walked round looking things over and smiling a secret smile and patting the trees, and sitting on a big stone on the river bank, his chin in his hand, looking out over the water as if he were among old friends. But of course it could not have been so: could it?

Jon and I left the meadow path and walked down the road, and although we had been this way many times before it was different now. We were out stealing horses and we knew it showed. We were criminals. That changes people, it changes something in their faces and gives them a particular way of walking no-one can do anything about. And stealing horses, that was the worst thing of all. We knew about the law west of Pecos, we had read the cowboy magazines, and although maybe we could say that we were east of Pecos, it was so far east that you might just as well say it the other way round, as it depended on which way you chose to look at the world, but with that law there was no mercy. If you were caught, it was straight up in a tree with a rope round your neck; rough hemp against the tender flesh, someone whacked the horse on its rump and it flew out from under your legs, and then you ran for your life in bottomless air while that very life flashed past in review with fainter and fainter images until they were empty of your own self and of all you had seen, and then filled with fog, and finally turned black. Just fifteen, was your last thought, that wasn't much, and all for a horse, and then everything was too late. Barkald's house sat heavy and grey at the edge of the forest, and it seemed more threatening than ever.

The windows were dark so early in the morning, but maybe he was standing there looking down the road and could see the way we were walking and *knew*.

But it was too late to turn round now. We walked stiff-legged a couple of hundred metres down the gravel road, until the house disappeared round a bend, then up another path across another field that was Barkald's too, and into the forest. At first the wood was thick and dark among the spruce trunks with no underbrush at all, only deep green moss like a huge carpet that was soft to walk on, for the light never wholly found its way in here, and we walked along the path one in front of the other and felt it yield each time we put a foot down. Jon first with me at his heels on worn gym shoes. Then we turned off in a curve, still to the right, the space and the light above us gradually expanding until suddenly we saw the two strands of barbed wire glinting, and we were there. We looked in at a clearing where all the spruce had been felled and the sapling pine and birch trees were standing strangely tall and solitary with no shelter at their backs, and some of them had not survived the wind from the north and had fallen full length with their roots in the air. Between the spruce stumps the grass was growing lush and thick, and behind some bushes further on we saw the horses, only their rumps visible, tails swishing horse flies. We smelled the horse droppings and the wet boggy moss and the sweet, sharp, all-pervading odour of something greater than ourselves and beyond our comprehension; of the forest, which just went on and on to the north and into Sweden and over to Finland and further on the whole way to Siberia, and you could get lost in this forest and a hundred people go searching for weeks without a chance of finding you, and why should that be so bad, I wondered, to get lost here? But I did not know then how serious that thought was. Jon bent down and crawled between the two rows of barbed wire with his hand pressing down

on the lower one, and I lay on the ground and rolled underneath the lower one, and we came through without a tear in either trousers or sweaters. We got warily to our feet and walked through the grass towards the horses. 'That birch over there,' said Jon, pointing. 'Climb into it.' A big birch tree stood apart, not far from the horses, with strong branches, the lowest of them three metres off the ground. Without hesitation I walked softly over to the tree. The horses raised their heads and turned them towards me as I approached, but they stayed where they were, still munching, without shifting. Jon walked around them in a semicircle from the other side. I kicked off my shoes, put both hands behind the birch and found a firm foothold in a crack in the bark, then placed my other foot flat against the trunk, and so climbed up monkey-wise until I could get my left hand around the branch, and I leaned over and took hold with my right hand and let my feet slide off the rough trunk, and then I hug by my hands for a moment before hoisting myself up, and sat there with feet dangling. I could do things like that in those days. 'OK,' I called quietly. 'Ready.' Jon squatted in front of the horses and talked to them in a low voice, and they stood quite still with their heads towards him and their ears pushed forward, listening to what was almost a whisper. Anyway, I could not hear what he said from where I sat on the branch, but when I had called 'OK' he sprang up, shouting: 'Hoi!' and stretched out his arms, and the horses wheeled round and started to run. Not very fast, but not very slow either, and two stampeded to the left and two came straight for my tree.

'Be prepared,' Jon called and shot three fingers up in the air in a boy scout salute.

Brage Prize 2000

# In the Wake

(I kjølvannet)

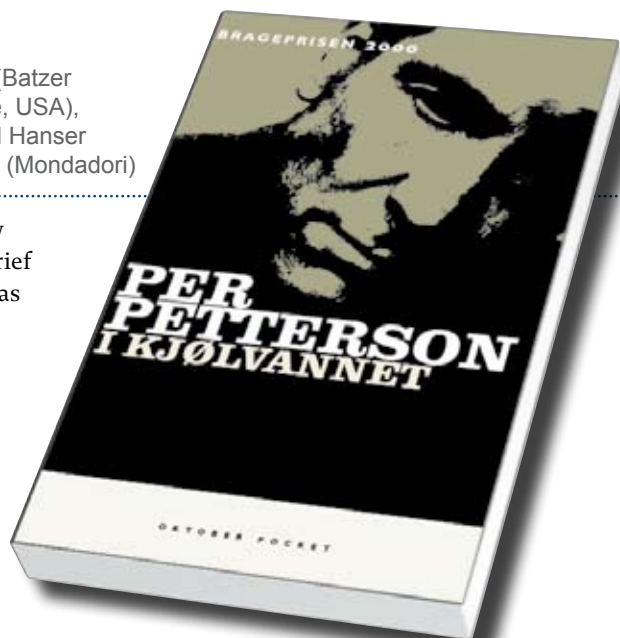
**First published:** 2000, 190 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Arabic (Ogarit), Bengali (Sandesh), Danish (Batzer & Co.), Dutch (De Geus), English (Harvill, London/Thomas Dunne, USA), Faroese (Forlaget Sprotin), French (Éditions Circé), German (Carl Hanser Verlag), Korean (Dongyang Book), Romanian (Pandora), Spanish (Mondadori)

Arvid has lost his parents and his two younger brothers in a ferry accident. The novel he is writing about his father is stalled, the grief and guilt he feels at having survived are too overwhelming. It is as though Arvid has become dislocated from the flow of life.

His only human contact is with his Kurdish neighbour, and a woman whom he glimpses in the flat across the street, whose face seems to mirror his own loneliness and loss. Then slowly, the memories begin to return: of his childhood, of his father, of his two younger brothers. He begins to write again.

Poignant, restrained, and at times unbearably moving, *In the Wake* is informed by terrible tragedy, and by man's sense of the beauty of the natural world, at times our only source of solace.



“**Masterfully written . . . this novel is both timely and timeless. A beautifully enlightening treatise on grief and identity disguised as a novel. Highly recommended.**”

LIBRARY JOURNAL (USA)

“**a novel of the highest calibre ... a delicately structured piece of writing ... impeccably imagined and at times grotesquely comic.**”

THE TELEGRAPH (UK)

“**full of astonishing moments; a novel that is, when all is said and done, something of a masterpiece.**”

SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY

“**Per Petterson is a contemporary master.**”

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG (GERMANY)

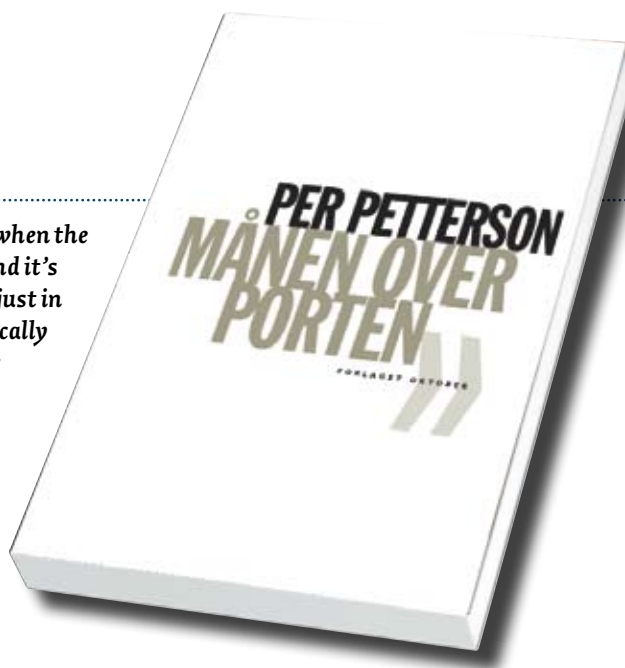
# The Moon over the Gate

(Månen over porten)

First published: 2004, 190 pp

Foreign rights sold: English (Harvill Secker)

**S**ometimes I go out walking at night. Not only in the summer when the light comes down from the sky the whole day and night too and it's easy to see for a great distance even well after midnight, and not just in winter either, when the snow lies thick, oozing light from a vertically opposite direction, from the ground up, like the discotheque floor in London where I once danced (but that's a long time ago now). If it is cold enough it makes you want to dance, it's true; to hear the dry grating sound when your boots meet the snow with each bounce you make. The sound of tap shoes on the country road on a January night! It's a good thing then to have your cap on, a good thing that no-one can see you blushing.



*The Moon over the Gate* is a collection of literary and highly personal essays on reading, becoming an author, and the struggle to continue being an author. Petterson shares his own, personal experiences with literature, from when he was a young boy discovering Simone de Beauvoir by chance on a bookshelf in the library, to the present. He describes what it's like to meet an author you really admire, and what it's like to travel a long way to visit an author who is already dead.

With honesty and enthusiasm, Petterson shares his thoughts on some of his favourite authors: Ernest Hemingway, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, Karen Blixen, Grace Paley, John Fante, Raymond Carver, Kjell Askildsen, Aksel Sandemose, Paul Bowles and others.

**“The author balances nicely between the personal and the literary ... In this book Petterson demonstrates why it is so infinitely important that writers write about literature as well. Few can persuade me like Petterson to drop everything and read *An African Farm* by Karen Blixen, not to mention to snatch my wife’s copy of *Simone de Beauvoir* ... *The Moon over the Gate* tells us what we should read for the next five years. Not by lecturing. Not because we must, but because we want to.”**

NRK KULTURNYTT

# To Siberia

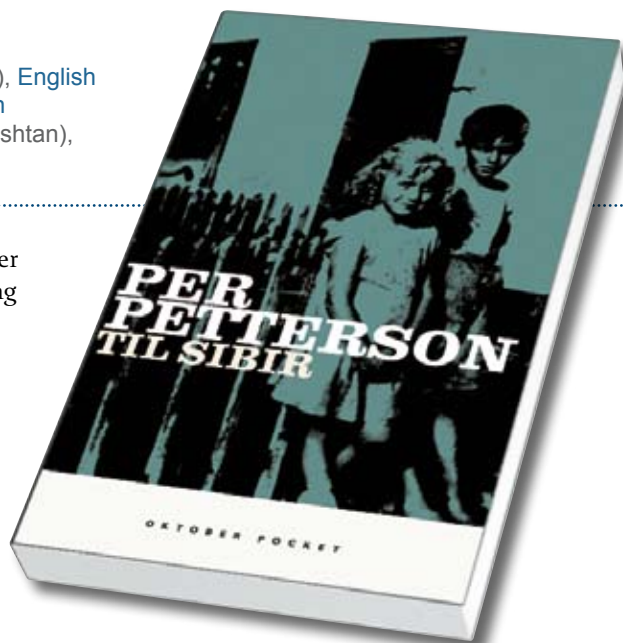
(Til Sibir)

**First published:** 1996, 217 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Danish (Batzler & Co), Dutch (De Geus), English (Harvill, UK/Graywolf, USA), French (Éditions Circé), German (Carl Hanser Verlag), Hebrew (Keter), Hindi (Rajkamal Prakashtan), Romanian (Pandora), Russian (Limbus)

In the bitter cold of Danish Jutland, where the sea freezes over and the Nazis have yet to invade, a young girl dreams of going on a great journey to Siberia, while her brother Jesper yearns for the warmer climes of Morocco. Jesper is the most important person in the young girl's life, but he leaves the country, and the girl herself moves to Oslo, where she wanders the streets without knowing anyone.

The reader experiences everything through the girl's eyes, and takes part in her love for her brother, and in the tension that lies between great dreams and losses just as great. With his distinct and dense prose Per Petterson has created an uncommonly moving portrait of a woman.



**“One of the last decade’s most moving novels.”**

THE GUARDIAN (UK)

**“wonderfully unpretentious, very tender and very endearing.”**

DIE ZEIT (GERMANY)

**“This is well-written and well-told, excellently conceived and composed. This is realism to get high on.”**

KULTURNYT (DENMARK).

**“Norwegian Per Petterson’s *To Siberia* deserves a place among the great novels that describe the occupation.”**

KRISTELIGT DAGBLAD (DENMARK)

**“It is all of it beautifully and simply portrayed, a series of masterly narrated, precise passages revealing not the slightest unsteadiness of hand. Read it – and read it again, for there is warmth behind the modest exterior.”**

FYENS STIFTSTIDENDE (DENMARK)

# It's Fine by Me

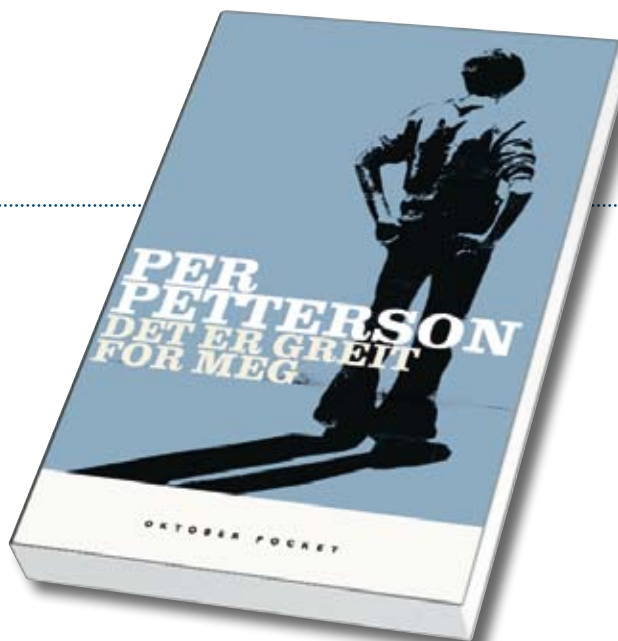
(Det er greit for meg)

**First published:** 1992, 214 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Danish (Batzer & Co), English (Harvill Secker)

18-year-old Audun struggles to find his way through life. He is torn between expectations from others and the urge to get away from it all, but his real dream is to be a writer like Jack London's hero 'Martin Eden'.

*It's Fine by Me* is the story about an absent father, about challenging traditional values, and about the daily struggle to maintain dignity and coping with everyday life within a family in the early 70s.



“a sensible, brittle, and razor sharp description of a boy’s universe.”

THE TIMES (UK)

“You have to find your own way after reading through this book. The text gnaws you, pushes you forward. Great literature does that.”

VG (NORWAY)

“Petterson is a great stylist and portrays his characters with an unsentimental tenderness and understanding which can make anything beautiful.”

BØRSEN (DENMARK)

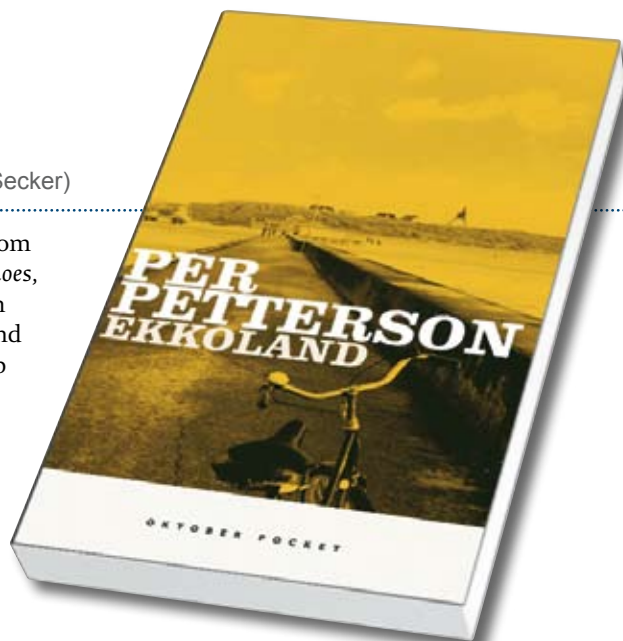
# Echoland

(Ekkoland)

**First published:** 1989, 140 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Danish (Batzter & Co), English (Harvill Secker)

*Echoland* is Per Petterson's first novel. Arvid, who we know from the collection of short stories *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes*, is now twelve years old, and he is spending the summer with his grandparents in Denmark. Mum, dad, Gry and Arvid spend a few weeks living in the tiny flat above grandma's milk shop in a town in the north of Jylland. It is the early sixties, the milk comes in bottles, and every morning Arvid helps his granddad distribute it on a bicycle. Arvid is a kid who lets the world worry him, and there is so much that he wonders about. How come grandma often cries behind the closed doors to her small chamber? What happened between mum and dad before he and Gry were born? And why does Arvid, more than anyone else in the family, need to think about Bruno Angelini, the baker's son from Naples who is one of his ancestors?



# Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes

(Aske i munnen, sand i skoa)

**First published:** 1986, 126 pp

**Foreign rights sold:** Danish (Batzter & Co), English (Harvill Secker)

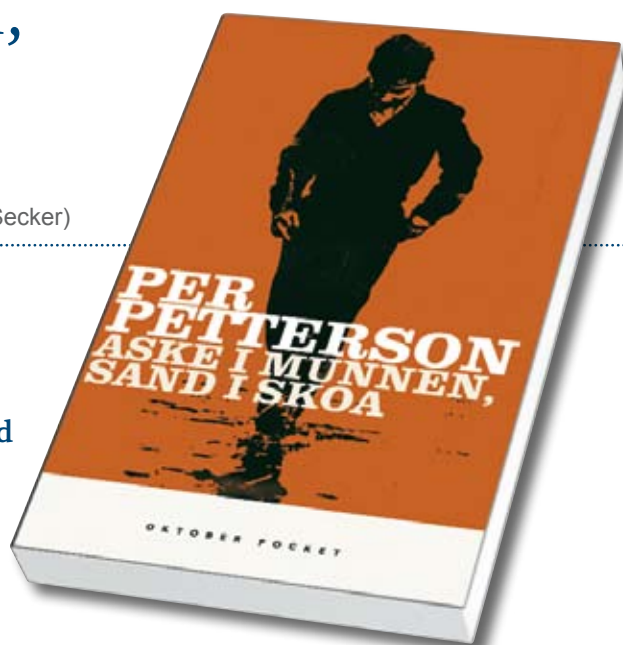
In Petterson's debut from 1987, we meet six-year-old Arvid, who lives at Veitvet in Oslo. He has a father who works in a shoe factory and a Danish mother. The short stories centre around the relationship between Arvid and his father.

**“Wow, Per Petterson has really written some good stories. I think it is easier to write about lions than beetles. I think it is easier to describe war than peace. But here the writer has managed to portray the everyday life of a boy growing up, small rifts from the age where a shiny day in June can seem like a dramatic film.”**

OLA BAUER, KLASSEKAMPEN (NORWAY)

**“With a never-faltering language, vigilant sense of the human mind, and quite a bit of understanding humour. A wreath of short stories, adorned with fresh and well deserved laurels.”**

AFTENPOSTEN (NORWAY)



**“These short stories are so good that one can only hope more are on the way... This is well thought through and well written. What more can one demand?”**

VG (NORWAY)

# Prizes and Awards

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2009

- The Nordic Council's Literary Prize

2008

- The Critics' Prize
- The Brage Prize for Best Novel

2007

- International Dublin IMPAC Literary Award

2006

- Independent Foreign Fiction Prize
- Le Prix Littéraire Européen Madeleine Zepter
- Le Prix Mille Pages
- Nominated to Le Prix Médicis

2003

- The Critics' Prize
- The Booksellers' Prize

2000

- The Brage Prize for Best Novel

“ It has to be said, on the evidence of these few novels, that Per Petterson is a profoundly gifted novelist. ”

RICHARD FORD

“ I was completely taken with *Out Stealing Horses* from the first page. I found it powerful yet so quietly done I could hear myself breathe and I finished with an exhalation of awe. ”

AMY TAN

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