**Publishing and translating Vesaas**

**Responses from publishers and translators to the questions:**

1. Why did you choose to publish Tarjei Vesaas?

2. What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950s and 60s have to say to a contemporary audience?

3. How have these books been received?

We asked the translators an additional question:

4. What special challenges did you face when translating Vesaas into your language?

DANISH:

Publishing Vesaas in Denmark has been one of the best experiences I’ve had as a publisher, and at the request of Gina Winje we made a short video, now on Youtube, telling the story of how I came to publish Vesaas, why I publish him, and how the sales have been (the sound is quite low, but just use headphones):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OX39ML6gZ4>

The new editions of Vesaas' works are translated by Jannie Jensen and Arild Batzer. The reviews and reception among the readers has been fantastic (many people say that *The Birds* and *The Ice Palace* are among the best books they have read) and the sales have been good. *The Birds* has sold about 4,000 copies, *The Ice Palace* about 2000, which is good for a Norwegian novel these days.

So to publish Vesaas in Denmark has been a joy and a pleasure! And it’s also great that the success in Denmark has affected the publication of his books in other languages.

Arild Batzer, Batzer & Co

FRENCH:

1-

Long before creating my publishing house, I’ve always been a reader of Scandinavian literature. *Palais de Glace* was one of my favorites, and being able to publish Tarjei Vesaas’ work was a kind of dream for me.

Since its beginnings, Cambourakis has always published not only contemporary literature but also classics from all around the world. We think that reeditions, new translations, can be as important for the readers as new works. We’ve got some kind of similar program with Greek literature, with the great author Nikos Kazantzaki, which I am very proud to publish too.  
  
  
  
  
  
At the time we started this project with Vesaas, several books were not available any more in France, several publishers had different titles. Some hadn’t been translated yet, like *Nuit de printemps*. The idea was to have all the books published by one publisher, and to promote the work as a whole, to show its importance.

2-

I don’t think the scenery and the historical context is the most important thing in this work. Vesaas’ books are about humanity in its most profound depths, and that’s something which is universal. His character, the questions the face, especially the younger characters, do speak to our current generations. Even if we have very different ways of communicating these days, the difficulties of understanding between people are the same, at the end. So yes, in Tarjei Vesaas books, reader can experiment a relation with the magnificent nature of Norway, which is very far from us but still something precious too. But the human, psychological dimension, is eternal.

3-

The project goes on, since 2013, we have published 3 books, there were new translations, it’s a long-time work. We started with *Palais de Glace*, which was one of the best known title with *Les Oiseaux*. *Palais de Glace* had good reviews in the press, and still sells well in its pocket version, it was a bit more difficult to have reviews from the press since we have published books regularly each year (the press like new things!), but I have great hopes fo our new translation of *Les Oiseaux*, which should be a great event. The book was since then published by a small press publisher, and not available in all bookshops. This new translation, available everywhere, should make the book known to a larger audience.

Best!

Frédéric Cambourakis  
Éditions Cambourakis

HEBREW:

Dear Oliver,

Thank you for your email.

Here is what our editors have to say about Tarjei Vesaas’ books:

"The simple crystal writing of Vesaas does not get old and is easy to approach also in the hectic digital current times.

His deep understanding of human nature and his beautiful way of conveying the most intimate feelings and thoughts of a human being (in particular a retarded person) are universal and always relevant. The feeling of "horror in the air" in both books is haunting.

*The Ice Palace* was not yet published. *The Birds* was received enthusiastically by the readers and sold over 2000 copies, which is a nice figure in our market."

Noga Albalach  
Editor in chief

Hakibbutz Hame'uchad-Sifriat Poalim Publishing House

1. I read *The Ice Palace* as a teenager (in Hebrew, translated from English) and *The Birds* when I was a student. Ever since I finished studying my dream has been to translate Vesaas into Hebrew, especially *The Birds*.

2. I have translated *The Birds* and *The Ice Palace*, but I don’t know if there will be more.

3. *The Ice Palace*, which was translated into Hebrew in the 70s (as I said, from English) was one of the most popular books among girls and young women for many, many years. I refer to it as “ice-exoticism." Israel is also densely populated and the motif of isolation which may well be tragic in Vesaas' books is at the same time appealing to Israeli readers.

4. Translating Nynorsk into Hebrew works very well because Hebrew has several linguistic registers, some of which are both extremely poetic and easy to understand. So it was quite easy to transfer the atmosphere, although there were always words and expressions connected to the Norwegian landscape that barely exist in my language. But with a little creativity it is possible to find reasonable solutions.

Dana Caspi, translator into Hebrew

JAPANESE:

1. Why did you choose to publish books by Tarjei Vesaas?  
About a few years ago, I read the Takashi Fukuda's old Japanese Translation of *Is-slottet* by chance.  
I was immediately attracted by the mysterious and metaphorical story, concise and beautiful style, and the high purity of literary quality.  
The old Japanese edition of *Is-slottet* was very difficult to obtain at that time. Also it was the only book of Japanese translation of Vesaas's works.  
I thought I would like to read, publish and spread more Vesaas's works in Japanese.  
Therefore I wrote and submitted a proposal of "Tarjei Vesaas Collection'' to my boss.  
In Japan, the name of Tarjei Vesaas is as yet inadequately known, however, mainly *Is-slottet* and *Fuglane* has been mentioned as classic masterpieces in some literary books.  
My plan was fortunately approved and I started to prepare toward realization.

After a while I luckily could get acquainted with two excellent Nynorsk translators, Chie Asada and Anne Lande Peters.

Furthermore, in the process of translation, we could get advice by Guri Vesaas directly.

There have been a series of miraculous fortunate accidents.

2.What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950’s have to say to a modern audience?  
Vesaas's works would give us many profound and shimmering insights for human existence through the beautiful and metaphorical stories.  
Which are like human psychology, life and death, love and solitude, individual and community, humans and nature, and so on.   
I think Vesaas's works have universal and invariant values for all modern audiences of the world.  
  
  
3. How was the reception of the books? (Sales, reviews, etc)?

I believe that Vesaas’s works will be read fervently and widely by Japanese general readers and critics.

We are eagerly preparing for translation, editing, design, sales and marketing, and so on for the success of this translation project.

※In addition to *Is-slottet* and *Fuglane*, we will publish Japanese translation of *Vindane* as lineup of "Tarjei Vesaas Collection".

All the best,

Koudai

Koudai Ito

editorial department

Kokushokankokai Inc.

Tokyo, Japan

1. Why did you choose to translate Tarjei Vesaas?

Vesaas is one of my all time favourites, although it wasn’t me who decided to translate him into Japanese. That assignment came tumbling into my lap!

Our editor, Ito-san, from Kokushokan Publishing House, had read a translation of *The Ice Palac*e from 1972 and was so enthralled by the book that he contacted my colleague Chie Asada to ask if she would do a new translation. Chie asked if they had anything against her sharing the job with me, and when this question reached me it was like a dream – I couldn’t possibly say no.

2. Which of Vesaas’ books have you translated?

Just *The Ice Palace*. We are just starting with *The Birds*, and after that we will be translating his short story collection *Vindene* (The Winds).

3. What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950s have to say to a contemporary audience?

There’s so much more to Vesaas than rural Norway in the 1950s. Vesaas writes about the human condition in a way that moves you deeply, he touches our innermost feelings. He depicts alienation, our longing for intimacy and our need to be part of something bigger. He depicts the great joy of experiencing this intimacy and the intense pain of losing it. Vesaas requires calm and plenty of time from the reader. In our hectic everyday lives, where it can feel like you’re getting lost in the hustle and bustle, Vesaas offers a welcome respite and a sense of reality. You then have Vesaas' magical descriptions of the countryside which draw the reader into an almost religious experience of nature. All of these elements are appealing, regardless of the reader’s age or nationality.

4. What special challenges did you face when translating Vesaas into your language?

It was hard translating a novel set during the Norwegian winter, which has so many specific words relating to snow and ice, many of which have no equivalent in Japan. Things like how *skaresnø* (snow-crust) with a little *nysnø* (fresh snow) on top is perfect for skiing, or how if you’re wearing ice-skates then the *stålis* (black ice) will no longer be the same if there’s fresh snow on it, are intuitively common to Norwegians because we have grown up with it. It was a challenge to find the right words to enable Japanese readers to imagine a Norwegian landscape and weather, and get the same feelings that a Norwegian reader would. Towards the end of *The Ice Palace* Vesaas writes: “*Søndagsmorgenen var skarp*” (the Sunday morning was sharp). Norwegian readers understand this intuitively, but what was it that was actually sharp? Was it the sun? Or the air? Or was it the whole experience of the spring morning that was sharp? It was also difficult to translate sentences where he hints in one direction. At first glance a sentence will seem quite simple, but when you start translating it will dawn on you that this hinting works in a Norwegian context, but becomes quite vague in Japanese. Let me give an example. When the men are discussing where the missing girl Unn could be, one of them says: “*Men vegen tenker eg på. Bilane som kan vera både det og det*.” What is meant by *vegen* (the road) here? The text continues: "*Vondt og stilt litt, i denne mumlinga frå mann til mann*…". So I can clearly imagine it – these taciturn men talking, and all the repressed emotions lying beneath their few simple words. A Norwegian reader might guess at a number of scary possibilities, and imagine how the road could be both one thing or the other. But in Japan, it will probably make the reader think of just one thing – kidnapping – because kidnapping is what’s so often feared and hinted at in this way. Chie and I talked at length about this. Is that what we want? Do we want the reader to think solely about kidnapping?

The Japanese use onomatopoeia (i.e., words that mimic the sounds they represent) a lot more than we do in Norway. These words speak on an intuitive level, and choosing an incorrect onomatopoeic symbol can give the wrong impression. Chie and I had a lot of fun figuring out if the sun was so hot it was KIRAKIRA or GIRAGIRA or if the booming sound of the ice was DOOOON or GOOOON.

Anne Lande Peters

Translator into Japanese

CHINESE:

Lovely to learn that a seminar will be held in Vinje on Tarjei Vesaas' work in the coming month.    
Here are some information for your reference.

1&2 The reason we have chosen Tarjei Vesaas' work is because of a scheme launched by China International Broadcasting Publishing House which aims at introducing contemporary Nordic literature to Chinese readers. This is a series project involving more than 80-100 copies of books written by Nordic writers in the past century. Writers are carefully selected by Ms Shi Qine, senior lecturer, professor of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Tarjei Vesaas, being a leading and influential Norwegian writer in Nordic countries, is selected as one of the well-known writers along with other writers and his major work *The Ice Palace* is translated into Chinese by myself which has been published in June 2020.

3. The story of *The Ice Palace* took place in the rural area of Norway in 1950's, we appreciate the pure, innocent, and sincere quality of the local villagers, the infinite patience yet self-control of Siss' parents, the considerate and selfless love performed by Unn's old aunt, the empathy of Siss' teenage friends .... Today, when PTSD is frequently mentioned around the world, we are very interested to notice that even in half a century ago, under the description of Vesaas, a group of people from a small town of Norway had already performed psychological rehabilitation to their loved ones when encountering PTSD involuntarily---helping Siss to go out of the shadow--- physically and mentally. This is something we would like to share with our Chinese readers especially when living in a world with too much stress nowadays. We understand loyalty and faithfulness are highly valued in a friendship, however, when encountering unexpected disasters, while the burden is becoming unbearable as Siss experienced, we should learn to let go of the negative emotion, to set one free from the guilty and grief. At all events, life goes on....

4. Vesaas' language is beautifully simple yet poetic, full of metaphors. Fortunately, under the help of the rich chinese language culture, it allows me to translate Vesaas' work in a more precisely way ---- not only the likeness in form, but being able to touch his spiritual world as possible as I could.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to approach Tarjei Vesaas' spiritual world through his work.

Thanks and kind regards

Yingbing Zhang

Chinese Translator of *The Ice Palace*

LATVIAN:

It is wonderful to hear about the seminar. Vesaas' authorship deserves all the attention it can get. It's been a while since my translation came out, but I'll try to recall what I was thinking at the time.

1. Why did you choose to translate Tarjei Vesaas?

Vesaas isn’t entirely unknown in Latvia. The older generation read *The Great Cycle*, *The Black Horses*, *The Birds* and *The Bridge*s, writes Snorre Karkkonen Svensson in the afterword to the translation. These translations were published during the post-war years, and loneliness and isolation were themes which perhaps resonated with Latvians – with a view to life in the Soviet Union – not that it was in any way political, at least not critical of the Soviet regime as it would have been banned. But I don’t know, I can only surmise. For me – who you might say is from a (slightly) younger generation – Vesaas was unknown before I came to Norway. (At least I don't recall any of his books having made an impression because I read everything I came across, so it's not entirely impossible that I read his work without realising who it was.) But I did became totally engrossed by his books while doing Nordic studies at UiB (2003). I was thrilled by how he managed to put being human into writing. That sense of being timeless and placeless.

2. Which of Vesaas’ books have you translated?

*The Ice Palace* (2013).

3. What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950s have to say to a contemporary audience?

I think the descriptions of rural Norway are easy to identify with, they provide a somewhat reassuring background for the human emotions. You feel completely naked within it. There’s no subculture to switch to hide. There’s a life-force and necessity in the interplay of nature, village and people, which I think many of those living in modern Latvia have experienced and longed for, or dream of achieving in their hectic everyday lives. Some travel to India, while others find it in literature.

4. What special challenges did you face when translating Vesaas into your language?

It would have been tempting to say that the Nynorsk presented a challenge, but it actually didn’t. It was challenging in that most of the Norwegian books translated into Latvian are translated from Bokmål, so that’s what I had the most experience with. But I have always been fascinated by Nynorsk. And while I worked systematically with *The Ice Palace* I understood why, one reason being that many Nynorsk constructions are closer to Latvian than Bokmål. This could be because Nynorsk seems older. The sentence structure feels closer to the way that the grammatical case is constructed, the way people feel the language and experience the world.

Inga Bërzina

Translator into Latvian

LITHUANIAN

1. Why did you choose to translate Tarjei Vesaas?

Both the choice of book, *The Ice Palace,* and me as a translator were the publisher's decisions. The publisher chose this novel because it is a timeless classic, and I was of course very happy to contribute since Tarjei Vesaas is one of my favourite authors.

2. Which books by Vesaas have you translated?

Just *The Ice Palace*.

3. What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950s have to say to a contemporary audience?

I feel that the events depicted in Vesaas' writing take place more in a person's soul than in any specific place or period. There are spectacular depictions of the surrounding environment, but they are interwoven with the protagonist’s intense emotions. This might explain why his stories are so universal and continue to be relevant.

4. What special challenges did you find when translating Vesaas into your language?

In *The Ice Palace*, Vesaas’ style is typified by a special combination of things: He is depicting a shocking and tragic story, but has made it into something extremely subtle and reserved without being too sentimental. The power of Vesaas’ narrative actually dwells between the lines and not in them. That balance between what's sensitive and what’s reserved was quite a challenging thing to achieve.

Juste Nepaite, translator into Lithuanian

SPANISH:

Why did you choose to publish books by Tarjei Vesaas?

When I read *The Ice Palace* I inmediately fell in love with the story and its main characters. I discovered in Tarjei Vesaas an author that was unfairly forgotten in Spain. He knew how to conjugate the landscape as an extension to the feelings of Siss and how to build a story with not many words, as the most important in *The Ice Palace* is what’s not written. Only great authors can do this.

What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950’s have to say to a modern audience?

For me the best thing in *The Ice Palace*is that, although it’s obvious it has an historic and geographical setting, Vesaas uses them to transfer an universal message: the emotional travel of a girl that has to face the death for the first time in her life. By making this, Vesaas reaches the perfect combination of a local atmosphere that can be exotic to some Spanish readers with feelings that any person in the world can feel identified with.

How was the reception of the books? (Sales, reviews, etc)?

The reception has been awesome. Not only Spanish readers, but also Latinamerican readers, have loved *The Ice Palace*, highlighting its subtlety.

Link  <https://trotalibros.com/libro/el-palacio-de-hielo/>

Jan Arimany.

Trotalibros Editorial

SWEDISH:

1. Why did you choose to translate Tarjei Vesaas?

The publisher wanted to publish *The Birds* as part of a series of classics, and asked me to re-translate the novel. The first Swedish translation had become slightly outdated.

2. Which books by Vesaas have you translated?

Only *The Birds*.

3. What do his stories from rural Norway in the 1950s have to say to a contemporary audience?

Great literature always has something to say to us, no matter when and where it was written. *The Birds* is one such piece of great literature.

4. What special challenges did you find when translating Vesaas into your language?

Nearly everything in the novel presented difficulties, but I think the translation was acceptable in the end.

Staffan Söderblom

Translator into Swedish

GERMAN

1. I never understood why Vesaas had become so forgotten about in Germany. While several of his books did exist in translation, nobody was familiar with his work anymore. When the ideal translator, Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel, said yes it was clear that I would republish Vesaas’ work.
2. These stories set by Vesaas in 1950s Norway are universal. With a little variation they could be set almost anywhere. That’s why they are so timeless and relevant wherever they are read. Themes about friendship, loneliness, lack of language, belonging, the contrast between the outer and inner world – are topics that move and affect almost everyone all over the world.
3. The reception here in Germany was phenomenal. Both of the published books (*The Birds* and *The Ice Palace*) have become bestsellers for the publisher, and have now both sold more than 10,000 copies, which are gigantic numbers for a small publisher like mine. The criticism overall has been brilliant, Vesaas has found an entire readership of his own. Overall his novels have been a stroke of luck for my publishing company.

Sebastian Guggolz

Publisher Guggolz Verlag  
  
  
Ha! small questions for large topics.

1. I was already familiar with Vesaas’ work, of course, I knew he had been forgotten in Germany but had Guggolz-Verlag not come to me (and later on Kleinheinrich Verlag) I wouldn’t have had the idea for suggesting that the author be re-translated.  
     
   In other words: It all happened exclusively, for Germany’s part, thanks to NORLA's Frankfurt initiative(s), obviously. Otherwise Sebastian Guggolz may well have started the project, but it would perhaps have been at a much later date.
2. *The Ice Palace* and *The Birds* for Guggolz Verlag, Berlin (both published).  
   *The Seed*, is scheduled to be the next release (then *Spring Night*?)  
     
   For Kleinheinrich Verlag, Münster- not yet published:  
   The Boat in the Evening  
   *Selected Short Stories* (chosen by Jon Fosse with the help of Guri Vesaas)  
   *Selected Poems* (chosen by Jon Fosse with the help of Guri Vesaas)
3. It is also interesting reading about the living conditions, which give the books a kind of documentary value. But I think this aspect is quickly forgotten about since everything is subordinate to the depiction of the characters. The nature, work, landscape and agriculture all serves to highlight the characters’ external living conditions and their internal states of mind.  
     
   This is more prominent in the later and almost surreal short stories and, for example, in some parts of *The Boat in the Evening* where the external and the internal worlds almost coincide.
4. I find the vocabulary the most difficult thing to recreate. It was very hard finding out what certain expressions mean (The National Library's glossaries contain many of these words, usually with a single reference to where they were used, which is often the very same sentence you are struggling with...).  
     
   Nynorsk (totally fine) – Telemark-regionalisms (less easy to understand) – Vinje-localisms (even worse) – Vesaas-isms (no words at all) ... There would also be the problem of finding the appropriate expressions for tools, plants, everyday things ... You’ll always be anxious that you have misunderstood something.  
     
   But the most demanding and ultimately the most crucial thing is bringing out the Vesaas tone, the right tenderness, the restraint, the out-of-respect-and-not-too-clear yet crystalline precise observations. There are always two wrong directions lurking: it can either become too complicated and old-fashioned (as with all the older German translations of Vesaas that I've so far seen), or it can become too banal when the translator shies away from the powerful, mysterious, surreal situations and inner states. It is about producing something very strong using light words and means. "The right tone" requires great expertise from the translator; to steer clear of embellishments and fine words, to be poetic without using poetic techniques, to drop all the clever inversions (tricks with syntax) and write the sentences in a straight forward manner – to bring out it’s magical intensity.

I think I'm only just beginning to answer these questions – but that’s all I have for now.

Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel

Translator into German