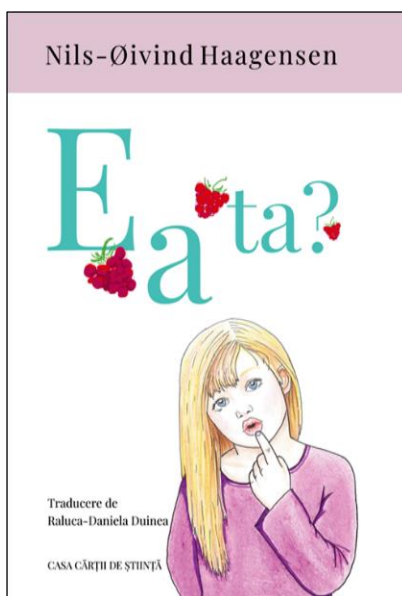


BOOKS

**Nils-Øivind Haagenen, *E a ta?* (*Er hun din? / Is She Yours?*),
translated from Norwegian by Raluca-Daniela Duinea,
Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023, 232 p.**

Nils-Øivind Haagenen is a Norwegian poet, writer, journalist and the head of Flamme Publishing House. He debuted as a poet in 1998 with the volume *Hender og hukommelse* (*Hands and Memories*) and as a novelist in 2001 with *Det radioaktive* (*The Radioactive*). In 2013 he was nominated for Nordisk råds litteraturpris (Nordic Council Literature Prize) for the volume of poetry *God morgen og god natt* (*Good Morning and Good Night*, 2012). Among his latest publications are the novels *Dette norske livet* (*This Norwegian Life*, 2019) and *Sangria i parken* (*Sangria in the Park*, 2021).

The novel *Er hun din?* (*Is She Yours?*) was published in 2016 at Oktober Publishing House in Norway and in 2023 it was translated into Romanian by Raluca-



Daniela Duinea, being Haagenen's first translation published in Romania at Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, the *Nordica* Collection, in Cluj-Napoca, with financial support from NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad).

This novel is built upon two different worlds. One is represented by the six-year-old girl, Eira, her attitude and her funny dialogues, while the other is represented by Are, a forty-three-year-old adult invited to Malin's birthday party, an old friend, who is also Eira's mother. The party takes place on an island in a summer house, by the sea. Although this setting suggests a rather relaxed atmosphere and although the story seems simple at a first sight, the novel presents two major and actual themes: abortion and the concept of reshaping of



the human body and soul through literary theory and philosophy. The idea of abortion is presented here, in the sense that Janne's parents constrained her to abort Are's child. His parents-in-law see the child as an obstacle in Janne's life who cannot concentrate on her career and on her future plans. Thus, in spite of Are's disapproval regarding the abortion of his own baby, Janne follows the advice of her parents and aborts the child.

Nils-Øivind Haagensen's writing style is unique in the sense that most of the time there are no writing borders between the dialogues and the narration in the book. Moreover, it is worth noting that the replies are not marked by the traditional lines of dialogues, thus giving the impression of a set of *invisible* replies, which in some cases became indirectly part of the narration. Thus, the direct speech often seems to be intertwined with the narration in a very subtle manner. The dialogue alternates with Are's reflections, the narrator using a poetic and descriptive language. The surrounding nature, including the fiord, the birch trees, the grass, the sky, the birds, the mountains, the sand, all seem to understand and accept his inner torment and struggle. Nature is sometimes personified as a witness or a reliable friend to whom you can confess: "he envies the grass because it concentrates on one thing: to grow and become grass" (p. 76).

Another important aspect is the fact that the novel presents Are's existential life problems and struggles mirrored through his dialogues with Eira, his own thoughts and his conversations with the other adults. Eira's funny replies and her simple and naive attitude seem to release the tension from the adult's life, which is why they become good friends.

The novel is structured in three chapters. The first part of the novel presents in a unique way the funny and sincere conversation between Are, often called the man or the adult man, and Eira, the little girl. Questions like: "Are you funny?", "Are you a man of active sympathies?", "Do you like spinach?", "Are you a childish adult?", "How many hairs do you have on your head?", together with the narrator's reference to the video game Pac-Man and its association with everyday life, as well as life seen as a *game over* are only a few aspects debated and presented in the first part of the novel.

The second section opens with the morning after Malin's birthday party. The action from this part takes place both on the beach where Are and Eira with her towel with raspberry print take a bath in the fiord and in the summer house. The second part ends with Harry Nilsson's *The Moonbeam Song* sung by Are to Eira before she goes to sleep.

The third part is built upon two narrative perspectives which seem to be two different narrative worlds, one of Are and the other one of Eira. They both have their own story to tell: Are, with his heart full of suffering, doubts and unanswered questions and Eira, the sincere little girl who seems to resonate more with Are than with Olivia, a girl of the same age as her. Are is the only adult at the party who fully understands Eira's curiosity and her funny questions. Suddenly, things take a completely different direction when Gunn, a friend of Are, finds out that his boyfriend Ove has been hospitalised and found to have suffered a stroke. She tells Are about it and they go directly to the hospital. In the meantime, Eira is looking after Are, wondering if he left without saying

goodbye to her. While Are is at the hospital with Gunn, old and unpleasant memories come into his mind, regarding Janne, his ex-fiancée, about when she came and aborted their child. Among the special features of the novel, the permanent remembering of the past is often emphasised by the narrator. Are is strongly anchored in the past. Almost everything makes him recall past events related to Janne and his feelings for her and for their unborn baby girl. When Are returns from the hospital to the summer house, Eira keeps asking him funny and sometimes personal things, for instance if he has any children. To this question Are's answer is that he does have a child and an entire life story to tell. Another important aspect regarding the structure of the novel is that the narrator uses the frame story technique from the moment Are opens a word document entitled "Cordelia", which is a manuscript of his untold life story. In this manuscript he makes various references to philosophers and theoreticians, thus trying to reshape his past the way he wanted to look by using literary theory and deep philosophical thoughts. Thus, he mentions Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Harold Bloom's *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*, Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the American writer John Rawls and many references to William Shakespeare and his plays *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*. Meanwhile, Eira wants to continue her dialogue with Are and asks him other funny and at the same time interesting questions: "Have you ever had long hair?", "Do you like the lightning and the thunder?". At the same time, he receives messages from Gunn who announces him that Ove's health condition has worsened and they will spend

the summer at the hospital. It is interesting to observe the manner in which the third-person narrator builds up the events, in the sense that he generally uses the dialogues with Eira as a way of escaping from everyday struggles, from Are's existential problems, from his compunction about his unborn child. Eira is seen as a hope, her questions being as a breath of fresh air which fill the empty spaces among the other events and sometimes unwanted life situations described in each of these three parts of the novel. In the end, Eira is very sad because Are has to go home, but she knows he will come back one day.

Written in a modern and at the same time poetic style, Nils-Øivind Haagen's novel, *Is She Yours?* sets the emphasis on a series of themes and existential questions, such as: abortion, love, suffering, the loss and the longing for the unborn child, the role of the parents in a child's life, making right decisions, the role of a child in an adult's life, and many others. In addition, the Norwegian author uses intertextuality, making references to different philosophers, writers, journalists, musicians and artist, such as: Søren Kierkegaard, Walt Whitman, James Joyce, Stieg Larsson, a Swedish journalist and writer, Helena Bonham Carter, a British actress, Carlos Garaicoa, a contemporary Cuban artist, Jahn Teigen, a Norwegian singer and actor, Wenche Myhre, a Norwegian singer.

The little girl from the front cover of the Romanian edition is illustrated with great talent by Mihaela Maria Coman who captures the most important features of Eira, her curiosity, sincerity and intelligence. Raluca-Daniela Duinea, the translator of this novel, is lecturer at the Fac-

ulty of Letters, Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. She is specialised in Norwegian concrete poetry, with a special focus on Jan Erik Vold's literary work. In 2018 she published her PhD thesis in a book format, entitled *The Poetry of Jan Erik Vold and the Norwegian Lyric Modernism in the 1960s*, and in 2023 the translation of Vold's selected poems, collected in the first Norwegian-Romanian bilingual anthology, *Briskeby blues*.

Therefore, right from the beginning, in the *Translator's Note*, Raluca Duinea provided the Romanian readers a few important details regarding the aspect of the novel and the specific writing style of the Norwegian writer. In addition, she also explained and translated specific words and phrases from English, Danish and

Swedish in order to make clear the message of the novel. Raluca Duinea stayed true to Haagensen's unique writing style, skilfully rendering the visual images, the various figures of speech, as well as Eira's language and attitude typical for a six-year-old child and Are's philosophical thoughts which form the poetic and descriptive parts of the novel. Thanks to Duinea's translation, Romanian readers now have the chance to get a glimpse of Norwegian life, as illustrated by Haagensen's memorable characters.

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