Long-Awaited Retranslation of Emily of New Moon: Q&A with Finnish Translator Kaisa Ranta

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In August 2023, Art House published a long-awaited Finnish retranslation of *Emily of New Moon*. For almost a hundred years, fans have loved the original Finnish translation by I.K. Inha from 1928 and its revised and abridged version from 1961. The translator of the new edition, Kaisa Ranta, was delighted to have the chance to retranslate her childhood favourite, which is now finally available in a complete version that, like Montgomery's original, is targeted at a crossover audience of both youth and adults.

Retranslations of L.M. Montgomery's novels, predominantly the *Anne* books, have been published in several European countries, most recently Norway (2014), Germany (2021), Italy (2018–2022), Poland (2022–2023), and Sweden (2022). Finnish readers have waited impatiently for their turn to rediscover their favourite books in new versions, especially since research has shown that the old Finnish translations of both the *Anne* and *Emily* books were abridged and adapted for a younger audience rather than Montgomery's original dual audience.[1] Discussions of research on abridged Montgomery translations often give rise to questions among international audiences about whether any complete, unabridged retranslations have been published; meanwhile, Finnish readers express their wish for retranslations. In the 1990s, the need for retranslations actually came up in letters to the editor in the national newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*.[2]

Fans across Finnish Bookstagram were delighted when Art House's Spring 2023 catalogue announced that a new translation of *Emily of New Moon* was on its way.[3] The retranslation by Kaisa Ranta, called *Runotyttö* (*Poem Girl*), was published in August 2023 as a part of Art House's series of retranslated children's classics that includes L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (2001), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (2004), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (2006) and *A Little Princess* (2022), Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* (2022), and Felix Salten's *Bambi* (2023)



Translator Kaisa Ranta. Photo by Sami Perttilä. Image courtesy of Kaisa Ranta.

Emily of New Moon was originally translated into Finnish by I.K. Inha in 1928 as *Pieni Runotyttö* (*Little Poem Girl*) commissioned by the publishing house WSOY. WSOY's editor Inka Makkonen revised and modernized the translation in 1961.[4] While Inha's translation omits very little of Montgomery's original text, the language appears very old-fashioned today, and there are many clumsy translation mistakes. Makkonen's revision modernized and abridged Inha's translation in ways that Makkonen considered more suitable for younger readers. The omissions Makkonen selected include nature descriptions, intertextual references, and unconventional behaviour, and they therefore affect Montgomery's characterization of Emily as an imaginative and norm-challenging girl.[5] Despite these omissions in the translation they had access to, Finnish readers have long had a special relationship with Emily, as Suvi Ahola and Satu Koskimies's collection of reading experiences attests.[6]

I was thrilled to meet Kaisa Ranta in December 2023 to have a chat with her about her translation process and the relationship between the old and new translations. The original conversation, which I have translated, was in Finnish.

Laura Leden (LL): Why was a retranslation of *Emily of New Moon* initiated now, and why was this book chosen rather than *Anne of Green Gables*, when most other countries have begun their retranslation projects with *Anne*?

Kaisa Ranta (KR): The retranslation was initiated by the publishing house Art House, who were looking for more books to add to their series of retranslations of children's classics. *Emily of New Moon* was a perfect fit, and an up-to-date translation was clearly missing on the market. By the time I was asked to take on the translation, I had already translated many children's and YA novels for the publishing house and was just

working on my first retranslation for them, *A Little Princess*. When they asked me to translate *Emily of New Moon*, I did not hesitate to say yes to the project, because I had such fond memories of reading the book as a child.

The decision to start with *Emily* rather than with *Anne* may have been a result of the editors' personal preferences, but it is also well known that in Finland *Emily* is at least as popular as *Anne*.[7] It also happens that 2023 is the one-hundredth anniversary of *Emily of New Moon*. The editors of my translation are Iira Halttunen and Ulla Salmi, who approached the project with an incredibly warm attitude—as did Nana Sironen, Art House's publisher at the start of the project. We were all excited about the translation.

LL: What was your relationship with the *Emily* books before you started the retranslation process? How well acquainted with them were you?

KR: I had read the 1960s revised Finnish translation of *Emily of New Moon* several times when I was a child and the English original once in my twenties. As well as the general vibe of the book, I remembered in particular Emily's inspiring, dreamy personality and her tendency to become outraged about unfair treatment or social norms. When I took on the retranslation, I had not read the *Emily* books in a long time, and it was like getting reacquainted with a childhood friend. Reading the book as an adult with the perspective of a translator allowed me to view the text with new eyes. My childhood experience was still there, but I also discovered so many new dimensions.

LL: What part did the previous translations by Inha and Makkonen play in your translation process?

KR: I did not look at the previous translations until I was quite far into my own process. I wanted to avoid being influenced too much. I did, however, read your and Vappu Kannas's research about omissions in the old translations.[8] Later in my process, I used Inha's old translation to check how he had interpreted some details of the milieu, for example furniture and household items, as he had the advantage of being a contemporary of Montgomery. I also checked Inha's versions of poems such as "The Fringed Gentian" included in the novel, to see if the previous translations could help me improve my own versions, and, out of pure interest, I analyzed the logic behind his interpretation of Montgomery's nomenclature, but I wanted to make my own choices. As for character names, I decided to keep all the names in their original form instead of domesticating some, as Inha did. In Inha's translation, *Emily* was called *Emilia*, which was a more common name in Finland in his time, but, in my translation, she remained *Emily*, as there is less need for such domestication today. Similarly, I kept the form *Elizabeth* instead of using the domesticated *Elisabet*. However, for *New Moon*, I chose *Uusikuu*, which is more in keeping with Finnish grammar than Inha's anglified *Uusi kuu*. One thing I wonder whether I would have translated differently had I not read the book as a child is "the flash," which I could not imagine as anything else than Inha's *leimahdus*, even though there are other possible synonyms.[9]

LL: Did you consult any translations into other languages when running into challenging sections?

KR: I considered consulting other translations when figuring out a translation for "Wyther Grange," which was one of the most challenging names to translate, but, in the end, I did not have time for that kind of check. I was satisfied with my solution, *Marrasmantu*, which I found by looking for an old-fashioned word for a property (*mantu*) in a Finnish dictionary and then combined it with *marras*, which is a word associated with dying and the month of November (*marraskuu*).

LL: Why did you choose the title *Runotyttö* (*Poem Girl*), echoing Inha's *Pieni runotyttö* (*Little Poem Girl*), instead of the more faithful *Uudenkuun Emily* (*Emily of New Moon*)?

KR: The title was decided early on when the publisher's catalogue was to be released in the fall of 2022. Both the publisher Nana Sironen and I agreed that we should keep *Runotyttö* for practical reasons, as this name is so strongly associated with Emily in Finland. We also agreed we should drop Inha's adjective *pieni* (*little*), as Emily, who is eleven to thirteen years old in the book, is not, in fact, a little girl.

LL: Would you consider your translation polemical in relation to Inha's translation and Makkonen's abridgement?

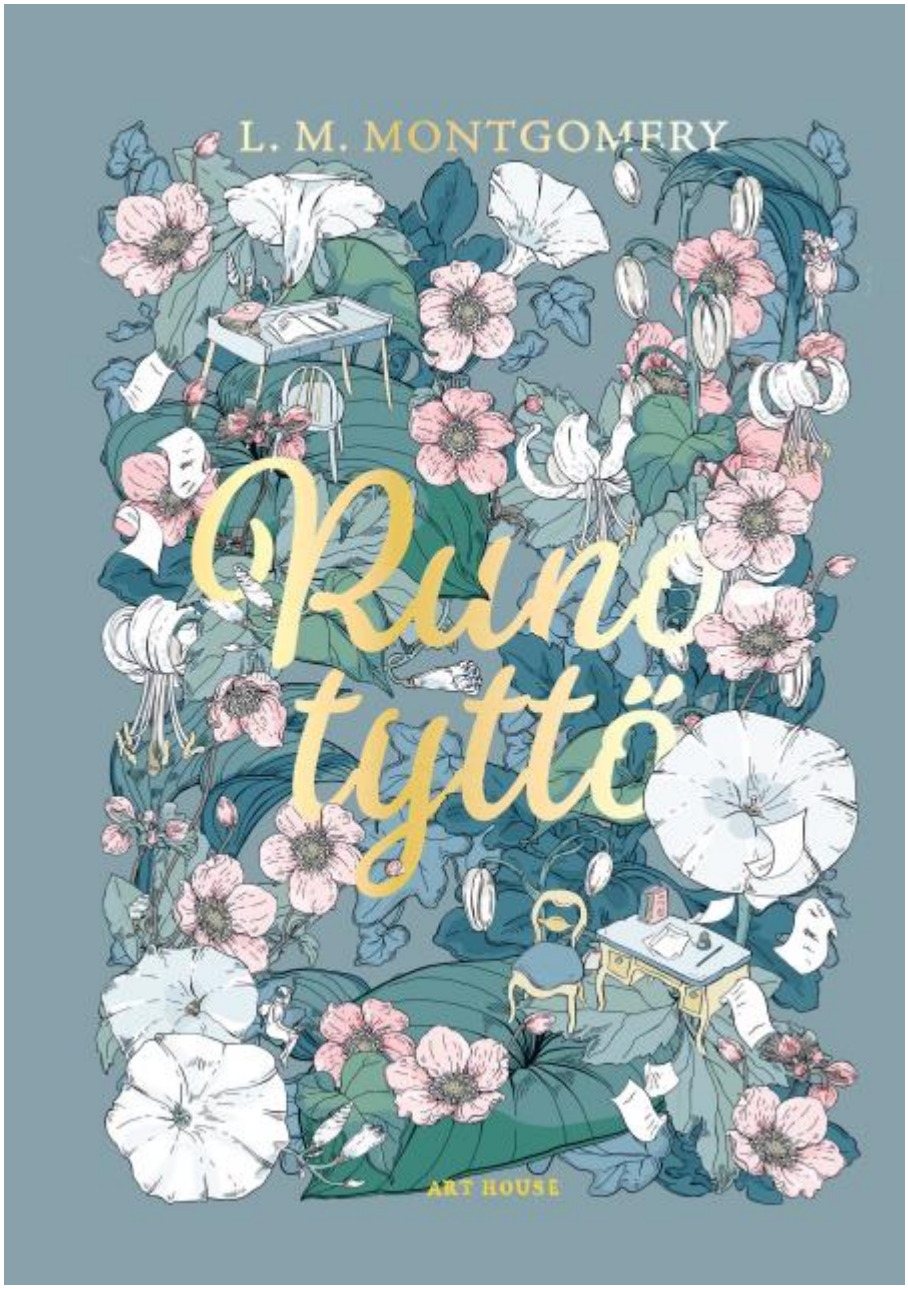
KR: My starting point was literary, not polemical. My goal was to create a work of art in service to Montgomery, not to make a translation that would differ as much as possible from the old ones. Most importantly, I wanted to make an unabridged translation. As Inha's translation will soon be one hundred years old and Makkonen's revised version more than sixty years old, there was a need for a new, modern interpretation of the text. The field of translation has become more professional, norms have changed, and we have a much wider range of information sources today.

LL: Did the readers' strong relationship to the book and to its previous translations affect your translation process? Were you worried about readers' reaction to things that are different in your translation compared to the previous versions?

KR: You are shielded from reader response when translating and can thus make your own choices. The reactions come when the translation has been published, and then it is too late to change anything. People will always have different opinions, and the old translations are still available for those who prefer them. I hope my translation, too, will stand the test of time for at least fifty years.

LL: Inha made his translation with both children and grown women in mind, while Makkonen adapted Inha's text more specifically for younger readers.[10] What kind of target audience did you have in mind for your retranslation?

KR: I wanted my translation to be read by both children and adults, men and women, faithful fans and new readers. I find Montgomery's dual audience liberating. I could use long sentences and difficult words as Montgomery does without worrying about whether a child would understand everything. There are different levels in the book. The surface level of the story interests children, while adults pay attention, for example, to the narrator's subtle social criticism. It is refreshing that the adult narrator never invalidates the child's viewpoint. I hope parents will read the book together with their children. It was a joy and a pleasant challenge to translate such a good book that has everything from beautiful language to characters that come alive.



Book cover of *Runotyttö*. Art House 2023. Just like Ranta's translation, the cover designed by Satu Kontinen attracts a dual audience and highlights Emily's writing and love of nature. Image courtesy of Art House.

LL: The editors had a huge influence on the old translations. Here in Finland in the 1960s, Makkonen rewrote and abridged Inha's translation, and in Sweden in the 1950s, in Stina Hergin's Swedish translation, the editor Ingrid Schaar had the final say in everything from name choices to omissions.11 Have practices changed since those days? What was the editors' role in your translation process?

KR: I felt that my editors trusted my judgment, as they knew my process from previous projects. My translation strategies were not questioned. The role of the editors nowadays is more to improve the flow of the text. For example, they edited word order and clarified sentences that were difficult to understand and provided alternative solutions for sections where I had left question marks.

LL: Do you have any more Montgomery translations in the works?

KR: Yes, I am already working on *Emily Climbs*, which will be released in 2024, as will my translation of *Emily's Quest*.12

LL: We are looking forward to getting to experience more new versions of Montgomery's beloved books! The new *Runotyttö* has already created lots of buzz on Finnish Bookstagram.

Kaisa Ranta has been translating literature from English and German into Finnish since 2013. She has an M.A. in Finnish language from the University of Helsinki, Finland. She enjoys translating various genres of literature, and her dearest favourites to translate are all kinds of children's and YA novels and adult speculative fiction. She talks about her life and translations on her Instagram account @kaisaranta81 (in Finnish).

Laura Leden earned a Ph.D. in Swedish translation studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her thesis examines adaptation in translations of girls' books. She is a regular participant at the L.M. Montgomery Institute's biennial international conferences. She has written several articles on the adaptation of girlhood in translations of Montgomery's works, most recently published in the *Journal of L.M. Montgomery Studies* (2021). She has created the Instagram account @lmmontgomerynordic, where she posts about Nordic Montgomery translations.

- 1 Leden, "For Children" 125–27.
- 2 The newspaper clippings are found in the publishing house WSOY's archives stored at the National Archives of Finland.
- 3 Art House, *Art House* 6.
- 4 The revision is not officially credited to Makkonen, but archival research strongly indicates that she was the one who did the revision. See Kannas, "Kuka" 55; Leden, *Adaption* 95–96.
- 5 Leden, "For Children." See also Leden, "Emily Byrd Starr," "Girls' Classics," and "Reading" for similar omissions in the Swedish translations.
- 6 Ahola and Koskimies, *Uuden kuun*.
- 7 Ahola and Koskimies; Kannas, "'Emily.'"
- 8 Kannas, "Kuka"; Leden, *Adaption*.
- 9 *Leimahdus* has a narrower sense than the English "flash": it is mostly used in the context of a flash of lightning or swiftly igniting fire, and, in the abstract sense, it is stylistically elevated. Since Finnish has no articles, choosing a poetical, somewhat rare word is one way to emphasize the importance of *the* flash and make it stand out from other kinds of flashes in the book.
- 10 Leden, *Adaption* 93–96.
- 11 Leden, *Adaption* 91–92; "Reading."
- 12 Upon publication of this interview, Ranta's translation of *Emily Climbs* has already been published and her version of *Emily's Quest* is expected to be released in Spring 2025.

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