

About the author:

LENA ELTANG was born in 1964 in Leningrad. In 1988, she left the USSR and lived in Paris, London, and Copenhagen. She has been residing in Lithuania since 1991. A journalist and translator, she also became known as a poet after the publication of two collections of poems in 2003 and 2004, and as a short-prose writer when her works were included in the *Five Names* anthology. *Blackberry Shoot*, Lena's first novel, created a stir on the Russian literary scene, became a finalist for the National Bestseller Prize and the Andrei Bely Prize, and was hailed by literary critics as "the best Russian novel in years." Since then, Eltang published several novels and has become a finalist and winner of the most prestigious awards. Lena completed her latest novel, *Radin*, in 2021.

*Selected Bibliography*

2022 — **Radin**, *novel*

2014 — **Cartagena**, *novel*

2011 — **The Other Drums**, *novel*

2008 — **The Stone Maples**, *novel*

2006 — **Blackberry Shoot**, *novel*

Awards

Longlisted for the **Big Book Award** 2022

Longlisted for the **Yasnaya Polyana Prize** 2022

Shortlisted for the **Big Book Award** 2012

Finalist of the **Russian Literary Prize** 2011

Winner of the **New Literature Award** 2009

Shortlisted for the **National Bestseller Prize** 2006

Finalist of **Andrei Bely Prize** 2006



Ripol
Novel, 2014

Alpina NF Prose
Novel, 2023
424 pp

Translation rights sold
Albanian Fan Noli
Arabic AS Publishers
Armenian Oracle
Latvian Agdads Mansards
Bulgarian Labirynth
Slovenian Mladinska Knjiga

**Complete English
translation
available**

Cartagena

The Gardener Is Gone

Mystery thriller

From the prize-winning author of *Blackberry Shoot* and *The Stone Maples*, comes a mesmerizing tale of unwanted love, unperformed vengeance and myths coming alive.

The story takes place on the Italian coast, in an old hotel on a hill above a fishing village in Calabria. Once a family estate, Briatico has survived the death of its owners, fires, sales, a period as a casino, and is now rented out as an expensive retirement home. The book unfolds in three time layers.

Present: We meet Marcus, a successful writer who stops in the village on his way to the provincial capital, where his book is being published. Circumstances force him to stay longer, giving him the chance to revisit events from his past.

Ten years earlier, Marcus loses his girlfriend, an artist, in Briatico's abandoned park. They enter the chapel to sketch its frescoes. Marcus leaves to fetch wine, and when he returns, he finds the chapel burned down, firefighters clearing the ashes. Because his girlfriend often spoke of a dramatic exit with nothing but ashes left behind, Marcus takes the fire as her eccentric farewell. He camps on the beach for days waiting for her, then returns to England heartbroken and starts writing a novel to make sense of these events.

Some years later Marcus returns to Briatico, posing as a pianist to get a job, in order to finish his book. There he meets Petra, a law student, also working in the hotel under false pretenses, and the two become involved in a complicated love affair.

Petra is secretly investigating the murder of her brother, which police dismiss as a crime of passion. Petra refuses to accept it — she knows her brother had discovered compromising information about someone in Briatico and had tried to blackmail them. Shortly before his death, her brother sent her a postcard claiming they would soon be "filthy rich." A rare stamp, *The Sicilian Error*, once kept in a secret safe by the estate's late owner Stefania, has gone missing after Stefania's death. Petra believes the stamp is the motive.

She finds that her brother stumbled upon the corpse of Averici, the former hotel manager, murdered on the Briatico grounds during a theatre performance. In Averici's pocket, he found a postcard with a square torn out where a stamp had been — the very same he sent to his sister. He also glimpsed the killer leaving the scene, then went to meet the person he had threatened to expose, and got himself killed.

Petra is convinced the stamp is the key, but she does not understand why Averici had it or who else had knowledge of the stamp. Every resident is under suspicion — and none seem to be who they say they are.

Another death follows: a resident of the hotel, a seasoned captain, is found drowned in a lagoon. Petra searches his room for clues but finds nothing. Briatico already has a history of suspicious deaths: the former stableman was found dead the year before, after Stefania herself had died in a riding accident. The inheritance poses another question — Stefania's estranged son was supposed to inherit the estate, but her will was repeatedly altered, and in the end,

everything was left to a Greek monastery she had visited as a pilgrim.

The local police commissioner and his young sergeant investigate, but the Averici case stalls, Petra's brother's case is pretty much dismissed, and the drowned captain is ruled an accident.

As Petra and Marcus pursue their own investigation, they discover parts of the online diary of someone claiming to be Briatico's heir: apparently Stefania's illegitimate grandchild. A quarter-century earlier, Stefania's son was disowned for a scandalous affair with an English maid; the grandchild, briefly of interest to Stefania, was later sent off to boarding school.

The diary, however, shows the heir is now in Briatico, seeking revenge, carefully observing the events and very much aware of the missing stamp. Petra begins to suspect Marcus, who often hangs around at the library with Virga, the reserved librarian — the timing aligns, and since the diary is written in English, he seems the only plausible author. Tired of the fruitless investigation and taunting suspicions turning the relationship sour, Marcus flees the hotel, leaving the mystery unsolved.

Ten years later (present): As Marcus returns, he finds Briatico abandoned, its cypress grove cut down. Locals say the hotel has closed down, leaving them out of jobs. Stranded for six days, Marcus revisits old memories, talks with villagers — fishermen, shopkeepers, the innkeeper, the retired commissioner, the red-haired postal girl on her scooter, café owners — and sees more clearly what he missed before. He befriends Penichella, an old clochard and a graveyard keeper, ridiculed as half-mad for dreaming of sailing on his rusted boat to Cartagena, where his grandchild supposedly lives. From him, Marcus learns the truth of the chapel fire: local children, led by Petra's brother, locked his girlfriend inside as a prank, while she accidentally set the fire by lighting a cigarette near the resin spilled by restorers, which ignited the deadly blaze.

He also discovers the full diary — piecing together old notes with new information, Marcus re-enacts the captain's drowning, follows the chain of events, and finally unravels the mysteries: why he and Petra failed to solve the case all those years ago, what happened to the stamp, who killed Petra's brother, and who roams the rooms of now-abandoned Briatico. He also learns Penichella does not need to go to Cartagena to find his grandchild, but never gets a chance to tell him — when he returns, delayed, the boat is gone. Has he sailed away after all?

Nor does Petra ever learn the truth — Marcus is stunned to meet her again at the police station, now as the new chief of police. She is thirty-two and has returned to replace the retired commissioner. She still believes Marcus is the heir of Briatico and guilty, but has no proof. He faces a choice: tell Petra the truth and clear himself of suspicion, or keep her in the dark so as not to destroy her family and career. He chooses not to tell — with Penichella gone, all secrets will now remain untold.

Shortlisted for the **Big Book Literary Award 2012**Finalist of the **Russian Literary Prize 2011****Eksmo**

Novel, 2011

640 pp

Translation rights
All rights availableEnglish sample
available

The Other Drums

In *The Other Drums*, Lena Eltang's brilliant third novel, the national prize-winning author completes the theme of escape and freedom in a work that has prompted comparisons to such classics as *De Profundis* and *Invitation to a Beheading*.

The novel begins with the arrest of 34-year-old Kostas Kairis, a Lithuanian citizen, in his house in Lisbon, Portugal. Kostas is not the original owner of the house; his step-aunt Zoe inherited the ancient mansion after the suicide of her husband, a scion of a noble Portuguese family. Zoe included Kostas in her will at the last moment, just a few days before her early death from cancer at the age of 44, leaving virtually nothing to her own daughter. The aunt's will burdens Kostas with mortgage payments to the bank and prohibits him from reselling the property.

An idle intellectual, Kostas pays the bills by selling the Braga family furniture and jewelry and subletting the house to shadowy business operations. First, his childhood friend Ljutas installs cameras in the mansion to shoot porn movies. The built-in surveillance appliances come in handy for blackmailing Kostas' chance lover, who offers a share of her husband's settlement if they catch him with his pants down on a set-up date with a call girl. Kostas watches in awe as the date unravels and a stranger shoots the prostitute with the Braga family gun.

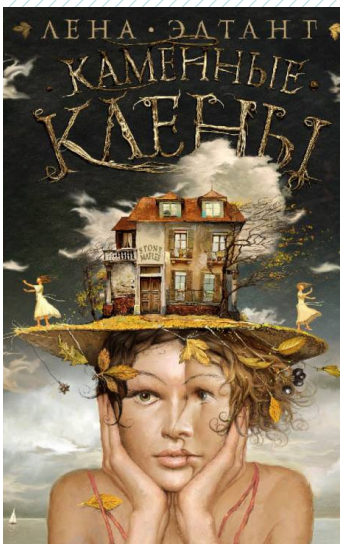
The blackmailers turn the evidence of the dead body against Kostas, and when the police arrest him several weeks later on murder charges, he feels relieved — he will not hesitate to reveal the identities of the real murderers.

His experience in jail is a rude awakening for Kostas. He is held in solitary confinement as a murderer; interrogations and meetings with a lawyer are only occasional, and the guards often forget to bring him his meals. Yet he is allowed to use his laptop — a real treasure for an undereducated historian turned writer.

Kostas begins by writing a letter to his Estonian wife, from whom he separated over fifteen years earlier. What begins as an explanatory letter grows during nine weeks of imprisonment into powerful confessional prose, permeated with guilt, melancholy, and fear of loss.

As Kostas speaks of people he once knew, loved, hated, befriended, betrayed, dreamt of, and never came to understand, the reader of Kostas' "diary" becomes a spectator of a street puppet show, in which the director — with a wave of his wand or the sound of the other drums — exchanges roles with the cast. The tension and passion grow with every page, until one day Kostas begins to suspect that the door to his cell is not real either, throws it open — and walks out.

In her immaculate poetic diction and with profound encyclopedic knowledge, Lena Eltang creates a unique mosaic of a novel about guilt and memory, one that makes us all its voluntary prisoners.

Winner of the **New Literature Award 2009**

AST
Novel, 2008
Alpina NF Prose
Novel, 2024
414 pp

Translation rights sold
Latvian Janis Roze
Lithuanian Vaga

The Stone Maples

A stunning family drama, told with the precision of Nabokov and the hypnotic intensity of Joyce.

Red-haired Sasha Saunley runs a Bed and Breakfast called The Stone Maples in the tiny, remote village of Wishguard, somewhere on the moors of Wales. Not only is she considered strange, she is also rumored to be a witch. Such a rumor is not entirely groundless, as she has refused to speak since the next-door teenagers killed her dogs, Hugin and Munin.

All the more so, The Stone Maples long ago became a substitute for her five-o'clock meetings with the second cousins of her late father. Sasha's younger stepsister, Edna, disappears under obscure circumstances — while in the courtyard, a hummock appears with an epitaph for the «Younger One».

The possible crime of the Welsh witch becomes the pretext for a bet, and Llewellyn, a Londoner, arrives at The Stone Maples to investigate what is purported to be a murder.

Sasha's journal falls into his hands — the passionate, poetic, and witty confession of an enigmatic woman. Her love-hate relationship with her younger

stepsister, knotty affairs with the locals, envy and betrayal, fantasies, myth, and legend — all this enchants Llewellyn. When he is about to admit his loss of the bet, he discovers another of Sasha's journals, containing completely different entries. Why does she need two journals, and, more important, which of them is truth and which is fiction?

Told through the journals and letters of Sasha, her stepmother, her younger stepsister Edna Alexandrina, Llewellyn, and Tabitha, the London girl in love with him, this entrancing family drama reveals one shocking mystery after another. The most significant puzzle is broached at the very end.

The Stone Maples is a breathtakingly deep and atmospheric novel inhabited by lovable and vivid characters. Masterly use of cultural layers, the delicacy of literary allusion reminiscent of Joyce and Nabokov, and an eerily prophetic gaze at reality — these are the trademarks of Lena Eltang, one of the most unique authors writing in Russian today.

**English sample
available**

Shortlisted for the **National Bestseller Prize 2006**

Finalist of **Andrei Bely Award 2006**



Amphora

Novel, 2006
396 pp

Translation rights
All rights available

Blackberry Shoot

Umberto Eco meets Dostoyevsky in this spellbinding debut novel, unanimously hailed by critics as “the best Russian novel in recent years.”

British historian Theo Forge finds a letter written by a monk in the 15th century. The letter tells the story of some artifacts so threatening to the Vatican that the monk was sent to Malta to hide and guard them. Forge assumes the artifacts represent six of the alchemic elements and becomes obsessed with the idea of finding the treasures.

The group of six people setting out to Malta is picturesque: Forge himself; his fiancée Nadia, a London lawyer; red-haired archaeologist Fiona; a Macedonian graduate student, Fiona's lover; French antiquarian Eugene Levas; and an Austrian doctor, York. Each harbors a secret from the past that sparks the decision to embark on this nearly absurd journey. The adventure of the cryptologists turns into a thriller as members of the quest begin to die, one by one.

The escalating Maltese drama is witnessed not only by the police but also by a young man of heavenly beauty and encyclopedic erudition — Moras.

He suffers from an unnamed mental illness sometimes interpreted as permanent genius. Moras, a Lithuanian language student, is kept in an expensive mental hospital in Barcelona. During a remission, he is discharged and goes to Malta to serve as a compassionate pimp, a bellboy, and good company for everyone in the group.

The structure of the novel is complex and multi-voiced, incorporating fragments of the archaeologists' diaries, personal letters, and emails. Yet the major part of the novel is Moras' journal, which the reader follows, spellbound, because, in fact, the novel is all about Moras.

In addition to being a specific account of the puzzling events, his journal is a poetic revelation, a metaphor, and above all — the central cryptogram to decode.