

SYNOPSIS

Liisa Louhela: *The Universe is Ours*

Original title: Kaikkeus on meidän

Publisher: WSOY, 2021

“Let them look and let them wonder. I’m not a bit ashamed.”

A powerful and touching novel about a stubborn young woman’s fate when social pressures are at odds with her own desires.

When Reeta and Tenho meet in the summer of 1938, the times are not receptive to a relationship between a woman of the majority Finnish culture and a Romani man who travels from house to house looking for a place to sleep. Hungry for adventure and charmingly unconventional, Reeta yearns for a freer life in the world beyond the hills. But in a town where the residents spend their time in prayer meetings and believe in prophecies, Reeta meets with disapproval. She defies the expectation that young women be the guardians of the nation’s morals and genetic heritage. The extreme ideologies of the era have reached the remote villages, and a man’s worth is measured by his origins.

The Universe is Ours brings a talented, distinctive voice to Finnish literature and exposes historical topics that have long been suppressed. The work delves into the common history of Finland’s most marginalized minority group and the main population, raising questions about who is accepted as a citizen and whose life is valuable.

Book review quotes:

“Telling the story in dialect brings the young woman’s joys, sorrows, passions, and pain to life. The portrayal is full of youth’s zeal and hunger for life, the furious demand for something better.”

—*ET* magazine

“Systematic xenophobia is a striking link between the political ideas of the 1930s, in which women were the custodians of pure genetic heritage, morality, and the interests of the nation, and today. Having studied the history of sciences and ideas, Louhela has a lot of universal material for her story.”

—*Kaleva* (Oulu)

“The forbidden love is depicted strongly and touchingly from the very beginning.”

—*Keskisuomalainen* (Jyväskylä)

“Louhela’s writing is exquisite but precise. The setting and everyday life of the farmhouse feels realistic, and the story moves through elegant, suspenseful scenes. You won’t want to put it down.”

—*Iso Numero* magazine

“The rebellious thinking of Reeta, the protagonist, is refreshing and makes cracks in the great, historical account of the [Finnish] homeland. Narratively, Louhela doesn’t tiptoe around. Instead, she shows us that people in the past also knew how to think, dream, and make love. ... The work is full of life, blood, and lungs filling with air.”

—*Kaltio* magazine

Synopsis translated by Christina Saarinen.