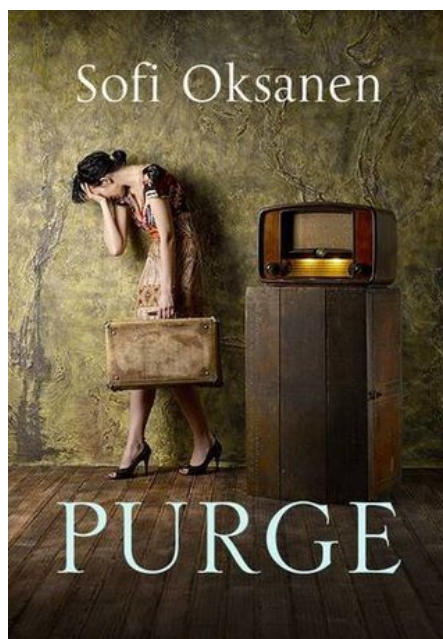




## Purge

*Sofi Oksanen , Lola Rogers (Translator)*

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# Purge

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**Purge** Sofi Oksanen , Lola Rogers (Translator)

Old Aliide Truu lives alone in a cottage in the woods, pestered by flies she wishes would leave her in peace. Her isolation is interrupted when she spies a young woman under a tree in her garden. The girl is strange; arriving in the dead of night, bruised, dirty and shoeless--why is she at Aliide's door? Overcome by curiosity the old woman decides, warily, to take her in. Zara is on the run from men who tortured, raped and sold her into slavery. Her only possession is a tattered photograph of her grandmother and another woman; in which Aliide recognizes herself and her sister. Horrified, she begins to realize that the past she has long tried to forget has finally caught up with her.

## Purge Details

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## From Reader Review Purge for online ebook

### Alexandra says

Durch meine diesjährige Autorinnenchallenge, in der ich in 13 Monaten 26 Bücher von Autorinnen mit dem Familiennamen A-Z lese (Details dazu hier), habe ich mich aus meiner bisherigen Komfortzone herausbegeben und möchte Euch nun zum relativ exotischen Buchstaben O die finnische Autorin Sofi Oksanen mit diesem Roman wärmstens ans Herz legen.

Im Jahr 1992 findet die Protagonistin Aliide auf ihrem estnischen Bauernhof ein junges geflüchtetes verletztes Mädchen namens Zara, das sich allmählich als Enkelin ihrer Schwester entpuppt. Nach und nach erhält der/die Leser\*in Einblick in das Familiendrama, das dafür verantwortlich ist, dass die Verwandten auseinandergerissen wurden und sich gar nicht kennen. Daraus webt die Autorin ein beispielloses Drama aus Terror, Angst, Schuld, Opfer -Täterumkehr und Sühne, in dem die Figuren derart vielschichtig denken handeln und fühlen, dass es eine Freude ist.

Die Geschichte kommt zwar durch die zahlreichen sprunghaften Rückblenden in unterschiedliche Jahre etwas gemächlich in Schwung, aber spätestens bei der Hälfte der Strecke hatte sie mich so gepackt, dass sie mich überhaupt nicht mehr losließ.

Zu Beginn war es für mich gruselig, dass die Zivilbevölkerung 1992 während des russischen Umbruchs in den baltischen Staaten auch extrem von Angst, Mangelwirtschaft, Terror und Vergeltungsmaßnahmen geplagt war. Fast schien es so, als würde sich die sehr bewegte Geschichte Estlands während des 2. Weltkrieges wiederholen, in der die zuvor autonome estnische Bevölkerung permanent abwechselnd von deutschen und russischen Soldaten okkupiert und drangsaliert wurde.

Nach den Rückblenden in die Jahre 1936-1952 kommt das ganze Ausmaß der Schuld der Protagonistin Aliide ans Tageslicht. Selbst als junges Mädchen ein Opfer von Vergeltungsmaßnahmen und Vergewaltigung richtet sie aus Scham, Trotz, Eifersucht, Angst und über Leichen gehenden Überlebenswillen ihre ganze Familie zu Grunde. Unglaublich was geschundene Menschen in Ausnahmesituationen ihren eigenen geliebten Verwandten antun können, dies auch noch rechtfertigen, sich als Opfer mit den Tätern verbünden und damit selbst zu einer der widerlichsten und gleichzeitig armseligsten, erbarmungswürdigsten Form von Tätern werden. Wenn im Krieg der Firnis der Zivilisation abbröckelt, ist vieles, das vorher unvorstellbar war, plötzlich möglich.

Auch die Geschichte des Jahres 1991 mit der Großnichte Zara ist ganz schön starker Tobak. Von Mädchenhändlern in Wladiwostok akquiriert und mit angeblich ehrlicher Arbeit im Westen in die Zwangsprostitution gelockt, erlebt auch dieses Familienmitglied den absoluten Horror in der Spirale der Gewalt und Unterwerfung.

Beide Frauen misstrauen, belauern und unterstützen sich gleichzeitig gegenseitig, die Stimmung des Romans ist sehr von Angst, Misstrauen, Geheimnissen, lapidarer und massiver Gewalt geprägt. Letztendlich tilgt jedoch Aliide ihre Schuld der Vergangenheit und es kommt fast so etwas wie ein furioses trauriges Ende mit vielen Leichen zustande, das aber dennoch irgendwie als positiv bezeichnet werden kann, da sowohl die letzten übriggebliebenen „Bösen“ als auch jene sterben, für die sowieso jegliche Rettung nicht mehr möglich und vergeudet ist.

Die Figuren sind alle sehr komplex und vielschichtig gezeichnet. Kaum einer ist nur gut oder böse, Opfer oder Täter, sondern es werden menschliche Abgründe in Extremsituationen dargestellt. Gleichzeitig wird sehr viel Geschichte aus diesem kleinen baltischen Staat namens Estland vermittelt, von dem ich bisher auf

jeden Fall viel zu wenig wusste. So, nun beiße ich mir aber auf die Zunge und höre auf zu schwärmen und zu spoilern, damit Ihr Euch von der Geschichte überraschen lassen könnt, und glaubt mir, da gibt es noch so einige unerwartete Wendungen und Überraschungen.

**Fazit:** Eine absolute Leseempfehlung von mir für diesen packenden, brutal realistischen, preisgekrönten Frauen-Roman. Er erfordert aber zu Beginn ein bisschen Durchhaltevermögen, also bitte nicht zu schnell aufgeben.

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## Viv JM says

Purge is a very unsettling read indeed. It tells the story of two women of different generations, against a backdrop of the Soviet occupation of Estonia. Each woman has secrets to hide, and these are slowly revealed over the course of the book. There is a strong undercurrent of violence and fear, though the violence is rarely explicitly described. And there are flies - *so many flies*. I am not sure what that is all about but read the book and you'll see what I mean!!

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## Fionnuala says

The main character in this fictional account of recent Estonian history is by turns heroic, blind, idealistic, stupid, endearing, despicable, faithful, disloyal, good, evil. And yet the author manages to make us love her in spite of everything. Oksanen also creates a very coherent story out of what at first appears to be no more than a series of horrifying fragments. A story that unfortunately resonates with a lot of truth. These things happened and are still happening. Will the Horror mankind is capable of ever be purged?

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## Jim Fonseca says

What a great book! And first of all thanks to 7Jane of Finland and Jim of New Hampshire who recommended Finnish authors and works to me.

This is a psychological thriller set in rural Estonia. There are only two major characters. The first is an elderly woman who, as we learn her story, is the textbook definition of a survivor She been through WW II, starvation, rape, torture, a dead husband and lost family. Her only remaining family members, a sister and a niece, were exiled to far eastern Russia, thousands of miles away, because the sister was suspected of aiding and sheltering her husband, an anti-Soviet freedom fighter.

The older woman had been secretly in love with her brother-in-law for years and now with the sister exiled, maybe she can finally have him to herself if he's still alive and if he takes the risk of reappearing. These events happened during the Soviet occupation of Estonia, then the German occupation, and then the Soviets again, and each time the political domination changed there were retaliations and round-ups of traitors and freedom-fighters. The retaliation continues today because some villagers remember the older lady cooperating with one side or the other and they harass her by killing her dog, throwing rocks at her house and setting fires. She lives in constant fear for her safety.

Times are still tough. These rural folks are almost in a subsistence life, raising chickens and growing and canning most of what they have to eat. Enter the second character, a young woman running away from sex slavery, being chased by two goons. Believe me, the young woman has come to the right place for protection because you want this elderly lady on your side! She pulls no punches. The elderly lady and the young woman are loaded with secrets and while the young woman lives with her they begin a back-and-forth dance of how much they can reveal to each other. (view spoiler)

There's a surprising twist at the end by which we learn that this novel of hardship, survival and resilience turns out to be just as much a novel about obsessive love.

This novel, *Purge*, is the author's best known and most awarded work. Sofi Oksanen grew up in central Finland to a Finnish father and an Estonian mother. Although set in Estonia, dreams of Helsinki, Finland, only 50 miles away across the Gulf of Finland, dominate the economy and the thoughts of the locals. This is a great book. I'm putting it on my favorites.

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## Cristina says

Aliide y Zara son dos supervivientes. En el caso de Aliide en la Estonia de los años 40 y 50 bajo el dominio comunista. Y en el de Zara, en la Estonia de los 90 como rusa fugitiva de una red de trata de blancas en la que cayó en busca de un futuro mejor en su huida a Occidente. A ambas mujeres les une un vínculo que prefiero no desvelar. Parece que no hay mensaje optimista en esta novela: por mucho que pasen los años, la miseria y la violencia contra los más débiles persisten.

Sirviéndose del thriller, Oksanen consigue construir unos personajes difíciles de olvidar por su complejidad y retratar la dureza de la vida bajo el régimen comunista que incluye el uso de la violencia sin escrúpulos contra aquellos que considera sus enemigos políticos y especialmente, en este caso, contra las mujeres. No obstante, la autora nos regala ciertas dosis de oxígeno y se agradecen las referencias a la preparación de conservas en la cocina de Aliide descritas al detalle, que en ocasiones funcionan como símbolos del estado de ánimo que se está viviendo, o las escenas referentes al enamoramiento entre Ingel y Hans.

Para concluir, como las protagonistas de esta novela son mujeres, agrego a la autora, Sofi Oksanen a Ágota Kristóf y a Herta Müller para conformar mi trío personal de autoras destacadas capaces de reflejar con una dureza sin paliativos los horrores de los regímenes totalitarios del Este de Europa después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

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## Antonomasia says

Yes, it really is that good.

And I have been tired of books about the Second World War and the Eastern Bloc these last fifteen years, I nearly always avoid fiction where the plot appears to focus on women as victims, and I wasn't keen on the title, sounding as it does like a bulimia memoir from the "Painful Lives" section at WH Smith.

Not only did *Purge*, within its first few pages of bloody excellent writing, kick squarely through these barriers; by half-way through it even had me wanting to read more about women's experiences in Eastern

Europe during the twentieth century - this time as an adult rather than a child and teenager bored beyond tears by family stories and endless documentaries and novels about the era.

Incidentally, *Puhdistus*, the original Finnish title, is a word that can not only be used of purges like Stalin's, or cleansing oneself after trauma; it also means housework or cleaning.

In the hands of a lesser writer (or translator) this plot would have seemed hackneyed - and a trivialisation of real people's experiences that were similar to those of the characters. But *Purge* is vivid, very involving and - aside from one or two of the most horrific scenes - incredibly readable, and difficult to put down. Which is quite a feat where there is also such intensity of expression and the characters are often in oppressive environments.

Oksanen is a master of mundane detail: little oddities occur which seem truer than fiction (such as narrowly missing being hit by a car resulting only in a broken fingernail). She can create suspense even when you know what the outcome will be. Her application of the psychology of trauma is impressive throughout the book, especially in matching this with such good writing as a protagonist dissociates during abusive interrogation scenes. Also in creating the character of Aliide, to many a shameful collaborator, but also a triumph of individual survival instinct and adaptation to environment.

The very end of the story surprised me somewhat and got me going over circumstances and motivation with a focus that I would rarely give to fictional characters. These people had become so real that I didn't just accept the words on the page as given.

I ignored several recommendations of this book for months but am now very glad I picked it up. Few 400 page novels leave me wishing for a sequel as I'm finishing them: these are characters I didn't want to part company with.

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## Praj says

I have an affinity to books where the characters outshine the storyline. Such volumes craft a distinct memory that never seems to fade for years creating an imaginary bond with those characters; experiencing their pain and suffrage through your smallest nerves. Zara and Aliide will never die away from my mind as long as I will remember.

'Purge' is not a book about bulimia or anorexia. It is a metaphor for all those sinister culpabilities that an individual buries within his/her heart until the moment of truth where it all erupts like smoldering lava destroying every possibility of tranquility. Oksanen puts forth a riveting account of human lives that are trapped in a web of uncouth circumstances and repelling emotions making the cost of survival nauseating and demeaning.

Set in the early 1990s, the book is structured into five parts each going back and forth in time connecting the lives of the two women. Estonia a few years shy to reclaiming its independence (the last Russian troops left on August 31, 1994) was under the communist rule of the Soviet. Poverty, unemployment raked throughout the country's landscape creating a spate of thefts and squalor. Aliide Truu, an elderly woman spent her days preserving candied fruits and cultivating her modest vegetable farm whilst waiting for the weekly visits from her daughter Talvi. The nights were frightening to Aliide as it went by trying to evade the local hooligans from stoning and robbing her tattered home. On one such night, there was a shadow lurking on Aliide's front yard. It was a hapless young woman, battered, abused, writhing in fear and pain. She was a Russian who spoke broken Estonian and her name was Zara. The sudden intrusion of a stranger in Aliide's life was about

to open her convoluted past, resurfacing the buried disgrace and guilt.

**Zara:-** Zara lived a recluse and impoverished life with her grandmother and mother. Her grandmother Ingel rarely speaks, so does her mother Linda. Her desire to bring financial security to her family leads her into a network of prostitution and sexual slavery.

*"Over the past year she had forgotten all the normal ways of being with people -- how to get to know a person, how to have a conversation -- and she couldn't think of a segue to break the silence."*

Terrified with the unfortunate events Zara finally escapes from her pimps and finds shelter in Aliide's home. Zara coming to Aliide is not a mere concurrence. The photograph that Zara carried when she left her home was the thread that connected Aliide and Zara, revealing a torrent of uncultivated relations.

Zara's characterization throws a light on the tedious circumstances that Eastern Europe endured in the early 1990s. The political pandemonium and deteriorating economical landscapes led to vast immigration and impecunious survival. The silence that prevailed over Ingel or Linda was suffocating making you wonder about the immense torture that a human heart endures, coercing it to find refuge in a vacuumed world. The packed suitcases, the trembling with slightest clatter portrayed the acute fear that thrives within the victims of war.

**Aliide:-** Aliide could never comprehend the jealousy she nurtured for her elder sister for marrying her bashful love-Hans. All through her life she was the 'black sheep'; the ugly duckling failing to be a swan. Her life in the 1940s was propelled in a vortex of wrecked dreams, war, deportation and the sudden disappearance of her parents. What distressed Aliide was losing her only love Hans to her elder sister. Thus, began an inundation of sheer vengeance and wrong doings in order to pacify the agitated broken soul. The entry of Zara into her life created a flutter, throwing Aliide into a muddle of endless shame and remorse which she had buried long ago.

Aliide resembles the many, who out of fallacious sentiments step into untoward verdicts and regretting it forever. Aliide loved her sister dearly, but the ignominy that engulfed her soul restricted her from making amends and ending her solitude.

Oksanen has an incredible quality of cautiously peeling the human mind-set exposing every layer of reckless choices and heartfelt redemptions.

It is a common occurrence to see a translated script losing its strength and significance; Purge banishes all these fears with Lola Rogers doing an excellent job, restoring Oksanen's depiction of Estonian spirit and history.

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## Jake Rideout says

I'm always a little nervous when I pick up a translated novel, because I've read a lot of bad translations in my day. Thanks to authors like Henning Mankell, Steig Larsson, and Ninni Holmqvist, there are more and more great translations coming from previously overlooked parts of the world. This is one of them. Oksanen is a new Finnish-Estonian novelist, and this is not the last you'll hear of her. Purge tells the story of two women: Aliide Truu, who lives alone in the Estonian countryside, and Zara, a girl whom Aliide finds in her backyard one morning. Through their cryptic conversations and heartbreaking memories, Oksanen slowly spins a tale of a changing Estonia, and the women who have lived there. On the jacket copy it says, "Purge is a fiercely

compelling and damning novel about the corrosive effects of shame, and life in a time and place where to survive is to be implicated." It is also a beautifully written story of redemption, which I highly recommend to book groups everywhere.

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## João Carlos says

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1714205/v...>

**"Puhdistus/A Purga"** (2012) - filme realizado por **Antti Jokinen**

Espectacular trailer...

Em 1992 a Estónia liberta-se do domínio da União Soviética, que entrara em colapso em 1989; Aliide Truu é uma senhora idosa que vive reclusa na sua casa numa aldeia despovoada na Estónia Ocidental, ocupa o seu tempo a ouvir rádio e a fazer compotas de frutos silvestres e outros produtos agrícolas e frutícolas; Zara é uma jovem que “aparece” no jardim de Aliide, uma desconhecida, desorientada, coberta de lama, esfarrapada, desmazelada, com uma lanterna e um mapa; uma rapariga russa que falava estónio. Aliide pergunta-lhe: **”- Mas afinal de onde és para teres vindo aqui parar?”**.

Este é um dos eixos da narrativa – mas há múltiplas subtramas em **”A Purga”** - num enredo com várias histórias paralelas, que evoluem no presente e no passado, entre os anos de 1930 e a década de 1990, na Estónia Ocidental, em Tallin, em Vladivostok, na Rússia e em Berlim, na Alemanha.

Aliide e Zara são duas mulheres lutadoras e inesquecíveis, duas sobreviventes, independentemente das circunstâncias e das adversidades, das contrariedades e dos infortúnios, dissociando-se dos acontecimentos traumáticos de um passado, dominado pelas paixões, pelas traições e pela vingança; as duas empenham-se em sobreviver, ambas vivem e viveram no medo e na vergonha, corajosas e resolutas, lutam contra os seus opressores, contra o abuso e a traição, contra a violência psicológica, física e sexual; fazendo sempre que indispensável justiça pelas próprias mãos.

**Sofi Oksanen** (n. 1977) constrói o romance sem ordem cronológica, ora avançando ora recuando no tempo e no espaço, por vezes, justapondo o enredo, num realismo e numa verossimilhança assustadora, mas, nunca descurando algum nível metafórico e simbólico, numa ligação com o leitor verdadeiramente intuitiva e dinâmica. A forma e o método como descreve as “imagens” e os “acontecimentos”, agrupando cenários paralelos no espaço e no tempo é magistral, tudo se unifica numa conjuntura coerente, criando uma leitura emocionalmente angustiante, repleta de tensão dramática, mas irresistível e fascinante, como um excepcional thriller.

**”A Purga”** é um romance intenso, com uma notável componente histórica, sobre temáticas actuais e relevantes, em relação a sistemas políticos, económicos e sociais dominados pelas fragilidades individuais e colectivas – daí o seu desmembramento e o seu colapso – com personagens inolvidáveis, homens e mulheres, que matam para viver e para sobreviver; numa narrativa que se ramifica, abrangendo duas gerações da história da Estónia; sobre o período da Segunda Guerra Mundial, da ocupação alemã e da ocupação e anexação soviética, das deportações estalinistas para a Sibéria, do desastre de Chernobyl, da resistência armada e dos “Irmãos da Floresta” e dos anos tumultuosos após a ruptura definitiva e com o colapso dramático da URSS (União das Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas), do surgimento das máfias russas ligadas ao tráfico sexual e ao estupro.

Altamente recomendável...

**Sofi Oksanen** (n. 1977)



## Alta says

Purge by Sofi Oksanen (Trans. from the Finnish by Lola Rogers. Black Cat, 2010)

Having grown up in a communist country, I am skeptical when it comes to successful novels about communism written by writers who haven't experienced it firsthand. That's why even before I checked to see if Sofi Oksanen has grown up in Estonia, where her novel takes place, I suspected she hasn't. It turns out she is Estonian on her mother's side, but born in Finland. This is not to say that Oksanen's novel isn't good: it is a very well written, suspenseful novel—but written for a Western audience and with a somewhat Western sensibility (in the same way the movie *The Lives of Others* about East Germany under communism was directed by a young German with training in Hollywood). Still, for someone who grew up in Finland--where many intellectuals are still attracted by leftist utopias--Oksanen's desire to reveal the horrors of communism are commendable.

Purge moves between two periods: the one when the communists took power in Estonia after WWII, which coincided with the Soviet takeover (1946-the early fifties); and the post-communist years (1991-1992) when Estonia conquered its independence and began its transition toward a free market. The character making the connection between the two eras is an elderly, widowed woman, Aliide, who becomes the accidental host of a Russian young girl in need of help, Zara. The girl is hiding from two men who forced her into prostitution after she left Vladivostok (Russia) to work in West Germany in 1991.

It turns out that Zara didn't stumble by accident in Aliide's home: she had her address from her grandmother, a woman of Estonian origin, who, before the girl left for Germany, revealed that she had a sister in Estonia (who is, of course, Aliide). And so, we plunge into Aliide's past and find out how, after having been tortured and raped by the new communist authorities (a fate her sister, and apparently, her seven-year old niece, i.e., Zara's mother, have also endured) she is forced to become a collaborator (a common practice in communism). Eventually, she marries a communist (whose surprising past is revealed at the end of the novel in an appendix of "top secret" files). After her sister and her daughter (Zara's future mother) are sent to Siberia, Aliide and her husband move into the freed house, which also serves (unbeknown to Aliide's husband) as a hiding place for Aliide's brother-in-law, with whom she is secretly in love.

Although Zara knows who Aliide is, she is unaware of her (and her own family's) past; on the other hand, Aliide doesn't know until the end that Zara is her relative, but knows that they have in common a history of surviving male violence. The ending is surprising and, although cathartic, not very plausible. I won't give it away, but I'll say that it involves a gun (there is no way an old babushka could have owned a gun during communism). There are some other details that bother me, but very likely, they are only noticeable by people like me (the same way the inauthentic details in *The Lives of Others* were only noticed by people who grew up under communism). Nevertheless, the novel is a great read, its best parts being those that describe Aliide in her kitchen, or those dealing with (her) fear. Fear, that feeling specific to dictatorships, is something Oksanen understands and knows how to convey. A good lesson in history, *Purge* is a novel definitely worth reading.

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## João Reis says

3,5 estrelas arredondadas para 4, porque sou boa pessoa.

A trama está bem urdida. Conquanto não seja originalíssima, a história foi bem concebida e a estrutura delineada com eficácia. Gostei bastante da história que decorre durante a guerra e o pós-guerra, mas não gostei da dos anos 90, após o fim da União Soviética. A questão da prostituição e do tráfico humano pareceu-me reverberar a falso e forçar demasiado a tentativa de chamar a atenção para o sofrimento e opressão femininos (que são factuais e percorrem a narrativa e a história daquela região, claro, mas que surgem como extenuantes dado o passado familiar de Zara). No entanto, a trama em redor das irmãs e do marido (no fundo, uma história de ciúmes, inveja e amor não correspondido) e da situação política local durante as décadas de 40 e 50 compensa essa parte mais débil. Por outro lado, não me parece merecer tantos prémios e elogios, porém, já se sabe como surge o hype nos dias de hoje. Uma leitura rápida.

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### **Agnieszka says**

I don't have to like people I'm reading about but I like to understand them. Their behaviors and motivations. I like them multidimensional. I may disagree with them, despise sometimes, hate even. But I like when they make me uncomfortable, when they prove me how lucky I'm not being them or how wrong I was in my assumptions.

*Purge* is dense and suffocating reading, full of secrets, resentments and lies. Sofi Oksanen has created a very ambiguous and unsettling protagonists and while it is pretty natural to sympathize with Zara, young runaway from abusive partner, yet character of Allida arouses mixed feelings. Allida Truu, only her name evokes something true, is much more complex and complicated character and her history is long and twisted like history of her native Estonia. She is victim and culprit. She is vulnerable and predatory, innocent and snaky, good and evil. And both, Aliide and Zara, are survivors.

Novel spans some decades from Estonian's history, from wartime through Soviet system to post-war reality and regain independence. With visceral and raw prose Oksanen perfectly rendered atmosphere of oppression and danger and vividly described choking fear when one has to live with the consequences of their choices, when every single day is a struggle, both with the real enemy and own conscience, when a way to purge if only possible leads through daily purgatory.

4.5/5

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### **Megan says**

This book is bigger and stronger than it looks. I'm not sure how to do it justice, or even how to describe its place in the genre spectrum: feminist, literary, historical crime fiction, maybe, although that's still all over the spectrum. *Purge* most poignantly draws attention to the very clear thread between sexual violence and military occupation. It connects big picture violence (war and occupation) with more personal conflict and interpersonal tragedy (who betrays whom, and how, and why; how it becomes so easy for people to use one another). The inhumanity, the dehumanization, present in this book is very, very crushing. And it's additionally difficult, thinking about current world affairs and knowing that things like this are happening now, still.

It's a very dark read, but not exploitative, despite the exploitation the major characters suffer. The main character, Aliide, is complicated, and not knowing what to think of her, not being able to place her in just one box of victim, villain, selfless, selfish, is partly what kept me turning the pages.

## Daisy says

Flies: a recurring theme. I mean presence. Character?

Interesting to grow to dislike the main character, Aliide, the more I read. The very end though has me stumped. Am I stupid? Did I miss something or is that last section unnecessary?

I didn't learn that much even though I've never read anything about Estonia before. I have read lots of Russian and Soviet stuff so some of that "tension" is familiar, all that not-knowing-who-you-can-trust stuff. I did love the details like horseradish in pickles and marigold salve, things that Ingel and Aliide make.

Is Aliide's love of Hans obsessive or heroic? Is what she did to Ingel evil and selfish or heroic (I just thought of that)?

I only noticed the word "purge" once and it had to do with cleaning a face. Wait, I should maybe look at that more closely.

The parallels between Aliide and Zara (A to Z) are interesting. I read in other reviews about how shame is a theme. Yup, it is. Shame and loyalty and saving yourself and saving others.

It unfolds in time jumps and flashbacks which are cleverly built, but makes it hard for me to remember when stuff happened now that I'm trying to reconstruct it here.

I liked this story a lot. Amy Henry gave it to me. I passed it on to Lisa Hayden. And then I missed it so much I bought it again.

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## Aubrey says

4.5/5

It's a rare occasion when the title for a book reveals itself as evidence of not a whim or facile plucking of a simplistic keyword, but of cold and careful analysis of the very viscera of the work. Even more of a feat when considering that the book is a translation, and that the title could have easily been ruined by the commercial gauging of the US market. The original title of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was *Män som hatar kvinnor*. Translated literally, Men Who Hate Women, a title which retained would have harnessed the rabidly popular heights the book achieved much more effectively, in my mind.

Ah well. No use crying over wasted potential.

The word purge speaks of both physical and political, bodily cleansing and cultural expulsion, as well as the forcible expunging of sin and impurities. That is the theme here, played out against the gigantic backdrop of history and the smaller curtains of men and their hate for women. Flies, communism, and psychological warfare, fully sunken into the culture of Estonia, its neighboring countries, and the minds of two women.

And yet, for all that, not a hint of sentiment in the descriptions of bucolic mentalities at work in the soil, old world superstitions acted out in herb and blood, bowel-gutting atrocities conducted as so much bureaucratic

machinations and generating paperwork as such. If there's preserves to be made, the preserves are made. If there's plants to be picked during a certain hour to ensure health and wellness, the plants are picked. If there's a devil with a gigantic hairy cock to be tattooed on a female victim of human trafficking, likewise. Instead, the pages are subsumed in the fragility of the minds carrying the story forward, the stutterings and stops of the finest clockwork that eventually manage to click back into a forward surge, but not without a few screws sacrificed in the bargaining for survival. Poe comes to mind, but with a little more concrete horror and much less internal fuss.

The novel itself has a penchant for laying traps for those eager to speed through on the lines of a well-oiled plot. If the depictions of events horrifying in both their content and their systematic conductance don't work, there's the timeline jumping all around the passage of fifty odd years in the words of multiple narrators to contend with. And of course, the unreliability of them all, but with each of them in their own personal crucible of body and mind, you can hardly blame them. Save, perhaps, for overseer of all this, an omniscience that despite many stirrings up the story with a well placed poke (or many, enough to flay the "interrogated" mind and set it to brokenly tumble through the night forevermore) manages to miss so much. Put a soul through enough purging, and it'll insanely clasp the surviving obsessions to its emaciated breast all the tighter.

A final note. I don't usually take the cover into consideration, but the one of my particular edition does not do the story justice. It wouldn't even take much to fix it up, really. Just a hint of maggots squirming under the wholesome bread, a fly or two needling its shit-stained legs on redly ripe apples. The subtler, and consequently more horrifically shocking for the noticing reader, the better.

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## **Bjorn says**

World War II and the cold war gave birth to the modern spy thriller, where everything was about uncovering secrets and false loyalties. In *Purge*, Oksanen seems to bury it once and for all, while at the same time reminding her readers that there are always going to be those who remember where the bodies are buried. The wars are over here, democracy and freedom have won the day, the KGB archives are opened, the oppressed are getting back what they lost and all the old lies are going to be uncovered... well, the ones the winners want uncovered, that is. It's not going to be easy. There's going to be deaths, both new and old, before it's over.

It's early 90s in newly independent Estonia, where the old woman Aliide has lived alone in her little cottage for years. As an old Soviet functionary she's despised and feared by her neighbours - a witch who may still have some sort of powers left. Children write insults on her door and throw rocks at her house, but nobody dares do anything more than that to drive her out. There's the big history, the collective one; 45 years of occupation and oppression can't not leave traces in a country that ceased to exist for decades and now has to be reinvented from the bits of history they can bear to remember.

Then one day, Aliide finds a young woman in her yard. Zara comes from Vladivostok and speaks the slightly archaic and accented Estonian of one born in exile. What she's doing in this part of the world is obvious from her outfit, make-up and skittishness; she's running from men in a big black car. That's the big history, the collective one: so many Balts were sent East by Stalin in the 40s and 50s, so many East European and Asian women are sent West nowadays to work in the thriving European sex trade.

*Everything was repeating. Even though the ruble had been exchanged for the kroon, though there weren't as many fighter planes flying overhead, though the officer's wives had lowered their voices, though the anthem of independence blared from the speakers on Pikk Hermann every day, there was always a new leather boot, there was always a new boot, the same or different, always tramping in the same way across your throat.*

But we know that, right? Dictatorship bad, democracy good, trafficking bad, etc. What makes Purge a great, entertaining, and uneasy bitches' brew of a novel is the way it interweaves the personal history with the big one, how they affect each other, and what exactly it is we build this bright new freedom on. How did these particular women end up on this particular farm of all places, what did they bring, and what's buried there? As Aliide and Zara sit there waiting for the big black car to inevitably find them Oksanen takes us back and forth through their history, tracing them from a young naive girl in the 30s through the shifting loyalties of the war, the Soviet years with its paranoia and secrets, on into the 90s. History is written by the victors, it's said, but of course losers write their history as well, why they were right, why their day will come, and what definitely didn't happen no matter what the other side may say. And in both Aliide's and Zara's life - and in the Soviet and Estonian records - there's so much that hasn't happened (can't have happened, mustn't have happened).

Purge is reminiscent of Ian McEwan's Atonement in some ways: a masterful character drama based on our ability - our need - to sometimes lie to ourselves, re-tell the story not just to justify our own actions but to make heroes of the people who may just have been victims. To be able to live with ourselves. But unlike McEwan, Oksanen dares to give the screw another turn, in both cold fury and compassion, and explore the darker sides of what the cultivation of victimhood can lead to, the righteousness, the elective blindness.

The title refers to deportation, to expulsion. To exorcism of old demons, to witch trials. To catharsis and self-delusion. To cleansing (and we know what meaning the 90s gave to that word). To execution. All of it will finally come to the surface in that little cottage on the edge of an Estonian forest, where the ground is still poisoned since Chernobyl (since 1946, since 1942, since 1917, since Adam and Eve) and Aliide has spent decades filling her dark cellar with preserved goods. When the big history and the small ones collide, something's going to explode. And then, once again, someone's going to have to clean up the blood, hide the bodies, and pick a winner.

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## **nettebuecherkiste says**

Estland 1992: Die Bäuerin Aliide findet vor ihrem Haus eine ohnmächtige junge Frau, die offensichtlich vor irgendjemandem auf der Flucht ist. Als sie zu sich kommt, nimmt Aliide die junge Frau namens Zara erst einmal mit ins Haus und versorgt sie. Erst nach und nach gibt sie Preis, in welcher Lage sie sich befindet. Ein altes Foto, das Zara von ihrer Großmutter hat, weckt in Aliide Erinnerungen an die Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit, als sie noch mit ihrer Schwester und deren Mann Hans auf dem Hof lebte.

Ich habe relativ lange gebraucht, um einen richtigen Zugang zu Sofi Oksanens bekanntestem Roman zu finden. Das mag vor allem an der undurchsichtigen Protagonistin Aliide liegen, die im Verlauf des Buches nicht unbedingt sympathischer wird. Die Geschichte spielt sich zunächst im Jahr 1992, also kurz nach dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion, ab und springt dann in der Zeit zurück zum 2. Weltkrieg und dem Beginn der Sowjetherrschaft. Bis etwa zur Hälfte des Buchs liest sich das etwas zäh, doch dann beginnt ein häufigerer Wechsel zwischen den beiden Zeitstellungen, in dessen Zuge die Geschichte an Fahrt aufnimmt und mich nun auch fesseln konnte. Sprachlich zeichnet sich das Buch durch einige ungewöhnliche Metaphern und Wortkombinationen aus und ist das Buch gut lesbar. Inhaltlich ist das Buch hart, sehr hart. Zaras Schicksal als Zwangsprostituierte wird schonungslos beschrieben – Triggerwarnung.

Die unnahbare Aliide wird im Verlauf zu einer unsympathischen, doch in ihrer Obsession um ihren Schwager Hans zunehmend faszinierenden Charakter, der zum Schluss angesichts ihrer Konsequenz eine merkwürdige Art von Respekt beim Leser hinterlässt. Sind Aliide und ihre Schwester frühe Opfer des Sowjetsystems in Estland, ist Zara ein Spätopfer, der Roman zeigt glaubhaft, welche Typen das System hervorbrachte und wie es auch nach seinem Ende die Vernichtung des Lebens eines Menschen zur Folge

haben konnte. Ich werde gerne mehr von Sofi Oksanen lesen.

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## Anachronist says

### Synopsis:

You can call this book a tale of two sisters and indeed, it reminded me of all these folk songs about sibling rivalry. Ingel and Aliide, two Estonian peasant girls, had a very bad luck of falling for the same German boy. Ingel was very pretty, even beautiful, and whatever she did, she did it always better than other girls. Aliide was less pretty and less gifted, completely overshadowed by her perfect sister. The boy in question, Hans Pekk, chose Ingel. They married, were very happy and soon they had a little baby girl, Linda. Despite that fact Aliide never stopped loving Hans; her torment made her slowly ruin her own life and the life of her closest relatives, with a little help from the Russian communists who were simply great at ruining people's lives whenever they went.

The novel starts when elderly and widowed Aliide, living alone in a half-deserted village, finds a strange girl near her house. The girl needs help very badly – she is hungry, filthy and it is obvious she's been beaten regularly. In spite of her initial fear Aliide empathizes with her too much to ignore her; she invites her inside, gives her a bath, some fresh clothes and food. The girl is called Zara and it seems she is running from the Mafia men. Gradually, as the story unfurls, you find out it was hardly by accident that Zara wandered to Aliide's house; she sought out that woman because they are actually related. Still at first Zara tells a lot of lies only later revealing a very disturbing and sad truth about herself and her situation. It makes Aliide reminisce about the difficult times under the Soviet rule – ironically nothing changed. Her own youth was full of horrible experiences as well, similar to those of young Zara,. Will these two women help each other? Will they understand each other's decisions? Will they become family again?

### My impressions:

I was very deeply moved by this book; as a result my review is much more personal and a bit different than usual. I felt connected to it on more than one level.

Believe me or not but it was a book which kept me awake at night and gave me nightmares (a very rare occurrence). It was a book that reminded me of some simple truths, namely that life is a bitch and sometimes you simply cannot do anything about it. One stupid decision might ruin your future and sometimes no decision is needed at all because, no matter what you do your life will be ruined anyway – it's your fate, karma, politics, war, or other stupid circumstances completely beyond your control. It was a book that made me want to howl with rage and cry.

It was a book that portrayed love at its cruelest and most beautiful. It made me pet my dog for hours because animals, seen from some aspects, are far better than humans – they never judge you by appearances and, as long as you treat them well, they will pay you back with love and lasting attachment. It was a book which, like ancient tragedies, was able to trigger a haunting catharsis, a purge promised in the title. Have you read or seen "Atonement"? Compared to this one, "Atonement" seemed to me just like a child's prattle, nothing more. Because sometimes you can't atone for your sins, no matter what you do.

It was a book I couldn't stop reading even though I had more pressing tasks at hand. I got sucked into it and, although I was very uncomfortable from time to time, I didn't want to leave till the last word.

### Final verdict:

Heartrending. Incredibly sad and wise. Hauntingly beautiful. The plot and the characters are like an accident waiting to happen – you can't divert your eyes even though nobody forces you to watch. Easily the best book I've read this year; still hardly a novel which will leave you warm and fuzzy inside.

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### **rameau says**

I'm still raw after reading this. Not because of the gruesome bits of the plot, but because for the first time in a really long while I read a Finnish book by a Finnish author, and I don't know what to think. Too many times the pretentiousness has kept me away from domestic literary, but this time I'm glad I gave this book a chance.

Zara is the catalyst that brings life to a dormant life and allows Aliide finally let go of her past - some of it at least. The reader is walked through two different paths of shame by two different kind of survivors and through them the author opens a window to the recent European history - not just to war, but what came after. History that's still relevant today.

The younger woman remains a distant character, much like a faceless place holder to all her fellow sufferers, whereas the older woman is painted with all the colours of the spectrum. Aliide is dislikeable throughout the novel from her youth to old age even if she refuses to be a victim of her circumstances. She earns the reader's understanding, but not forgiveness, because even in her death she is wrong. What the final part of the book adds, is pity for the (view spoiler)

The story might be true and close to the author in ways I can't imagine, but I still find it odd for Finnish authors to write about foreigners. And get paid to do it. That's why I initially passed this book. I was wrong.

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### **Amalia Gavea says**

***"The silence has been peculiar that year-expectant, yet at the same time like the aftermath of a storm".***

Once in a while, there are books that leave you powerless. Books that rise beyond any attempt of reviewing, that intimidate you and make you feel that whatever words you may use, they are bound to be mundane, detrimental, inadequate. Sofi Oksanen's *Purge* is such a book.

I have it as my personal principle to make no judgement regarding historical events. Human History is made of endless conflicts, wars and oppression. It has always been thus, it will never change. All hope and eulogies that man remembers the sins of the past to avoid repeating them are extinguished. Therefore, this is my inadequate attempt to write a review focusing on language, feelings and characters. To make a judgement regarding whose fault is what is not my place.

There is an outstanding opening sequence where we witness the battle between Aliide and a fly. Flies are constantly present in the book. What do they stand for? Perhaps, the dirt that fills Aliide and Zara's lives. Perhaps they are a symbolism for the dream that is impossible to fulfill or the horror that is impossible to kill. Perhaps, the constant buzzing in an echo of the constant buzzing in Aliide's heart, her unreproccated feelings for Hans. Flies, onions and soil are vivid images in the book. This is a novel that doesn't rely heavily on dialogue, but on images and musings of the troubled souls of the two women that are the focus of the story.

The headings before each chapter give an almost fairy-tale quality in the narration. But it is a dark, twisted, hellish tale. The language is raw, ferocious like the heart of Aliide, but beautiful in its bleakness. There are many raw descriptions of violent sexual nature, and this is exactly why *Purge* has such an impact on the reader. They are not there to shock for the sake of it, nor for the sake of sexposition. Their purpose is to make us understand the humiliation of girls like Zara, the falsehood of great dreams that are born under the despair of oppression.

It is hard to focus on any other character than Aliide. She is the heart of the story, our eyes to everything that unfolds. I cannot place her as a good or a bad character, she is a human being, full of conflicts and fears, and hopes that are always thwarted. Her love is an obsession that causes pain. Personally, I don't believe that Hans deserved her adoration. I don't see him as someone worthy of the sacrifice, he is not likeable at all. His diary reveals his ingratitude towards Aliide's efforts. Ingel is a character devoid of soul, she is the princess that does everything right and is always loved unconditionally. Still, I wonder whether we are meant to see her that way, since our only source is Aliide, a quite unreliable narrator.

Zara is the representation of the present, while Aliide is the past. However, Oksanen shows that nothing has changed. The oppression, persecution and exploitation of the women remain the same throughout the decades. It doesn't matter what the political situation is, it doesn't matter what your nationality is, you are in danger because you are a woman, because others see you as weak, vulnerable and vile.

It is impossible to choose the most powerful scenes. I believe that we have a novel where every chapter matters, every moment is a small storm leading to the catharsis of the end, the moment when freedom becomes tangible, however briefly or tragically.

This is one of the rare cases where I watched the film adaptation before I read the book, so I knew what to expect. Despite this, I was shocked, there were moments when I quickly skipped over to the next page. *Purge* is a novel that everyone should read. It contains every horror that mankind has created, war, violence, exploitation, hatred, despair. It also contains love. Love as a source of hope, love as a destructive force. Only I refrain from passing a quick judgement for Aliide. Who knows what one would do in her place...

***"The crows were screaming like lunatics in the yard."***

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