

Laima Vince: “The Ghost in Hannah’s Parlor”

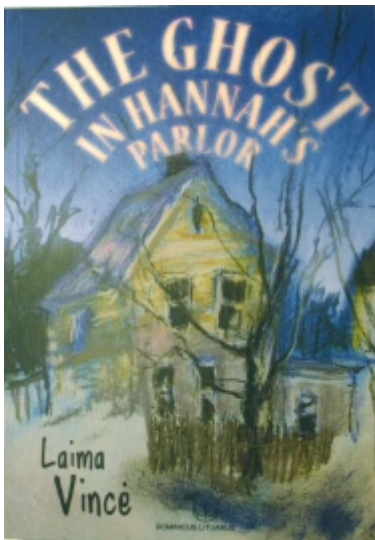
ON APRIL 11, 2012 • (3 COMMENTS)

Islands pull on people. Ferociously sometimes. People are compelled to live on them; sometimes they convince themselves that they can leave, yet the island draws them back again. I know this because it’s happened to me. Fellow writers Michael Steinberg and Twain Braden have also experienced the ensnaring quality of the island, leaving “the Rock” in their wake, only to have it reel them back. Of all those who have felt the island’s gravitational pull, Laima Vince’s orbit has the longest radius; after living on Peaks Island for ten years with her three children, she returned to Lithuania as a Fulbright lecturer to Vilnius University, where she had studied and translated poetry years earlier as a student.

Vince brought her own award-winning skills as a poet and translator to her scholarship in war-torn Lithuania, publishing several books, including “Lenin’s Head on a Platter” in 2008 with the Lithuanian Writers’ Union Press. But it was Laima’s tie to Peaks Island that led her to write “The Ghost in Hannah’s Parlor.” This YA novel starts one night in November on Captains Island when a nine-year-old named Hannah goes downstairs for a glass of water. The adventure begins when Hannah meets the ghost of Hilda De Witt Rose, a turn-of-the-century opera star who lives in a rose in Hannah’s parlor wallpaper along with an entire ghost cast of the opera Carmen.



Author Laima Vince (Sruoginis)



Laima still spends as many months of the year as possible on Peaks Island and I caught up with her one day where all islanders do – on the ferry. “I call it Captains Island, but it’s inspired by Peaks – the neighborhood, the history of opera on the island, the path to the school. Islanders will recognize all of these things.”

Opera? On Peaks Island? Didn’t she mean the history of opera in Portland? When Vince’s characters go back to 1910 with the help of their ghost, they move through an island world difficult to imagine when walking the streets today, an island peppered with more than a dozen hotels, several grocery stores, and notably, multiple theaters and ferry landings, and an amusement park. “Writing this book made me interested in learning more of the history of the island. It’s so fascinating.”

As the recipient of a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and former Director of the Stonecoast Summer Writers’ Conference at the University of Southern Maine, it’s clear that Laima’s accomplishments have astonishing breadth. From poetry to the oral history of holocaust survivors to YA novels, Vince has demonstrated her love for writing and that Peaks Island still has a hold on her.



Gem Theater and historic hotel on Peaks Island, both now gone