## Tommi Parkko POEMS

# from Short memory, sea

The rim of the world, another sea. Winter is the free man's hell, the sail strains, the sun in the sea's lung. Birds fly above the boat and it moves to leeward. Dry and upright the masts boom, amber, the sun's tears, burns in my pocket and a purse heavy with gold.

Saxon or Swede! As you turn the helm and look to windward, consider the True Story of magnificent Hangethe, the Place of Anchorage.

Summer is water that does not nip one's toes.

The man who yields to the wind has no weapons, no horse, no dwelling. The beast awaits him. Soil in his teeth,

he

knows the secrets of halfway, that has no ending in these stones. Towards a woman. Towards a door that is not opened, a door that will be opened. The man takes root in the rock,

the gravestone.

Whole sentences, his words, the meadow's flowers.

A crows' nest under his arm,

Cras, Cras,

a feather, in the slow wind he becomes earth. Farth consumes.

It seldom rains here;

when rain does come, it is moderate.

The winds are temperate; they give dew,

the land

produces the best fruits from itself in profusion and all we have to do is wave a hand.

We have not bought the witch's wind. She unfastened the knots in her scarf and let the wind loose. The sails split in two.

(Islands of the

sun, whitecaps, the islet's stunted bush.)
Like horseflies on a summer's day, the wind blows through the timber, nails rip from the boards, a scythe in his calloused hands

on the shore a man finds an oar, threshes his corn with it.

\*

The sea's teeth are not clenched. In the sea there is whalebone: a warm shrieking osiery.
The sea is a gaoler, ships and wingless birds it digests in its black oil:

The noble substance is pure. Replenish this earth and subdue it. The gluttons crawl in the mud; the flesh creeps, the dice moves once in the cup, a snake in an utterly tormented skull. Snow falls on the sea. Powder beautifies the sinner.

\*

Our mother left us in the egg
the sea breaks against our shell.
This flesh is impassive and cold.
On the shore glass burns.

In the town it is spring. The sun will not melt away the merchant's stock, salt and cloth. The thin cotton of the northern winter. We hoist the sails, the fair is at the time of spawning fish. The crane raises the stone on its four toes, watchful money knows who it is procuring. In the wind the balance is lighter, at sea it obeys me. Numbers, the memory of them; Fur is an animal, does not trust speech, is a meagre following wind

Out on the open sea there is no time, we need no weathercock to tell us where the wind is blowing from. The sieve rises; the winds dash us into

the sea, and fog.

(Life is recorded in your eyes, if you only dare to look).

The sails boom and the mast gets caught in the clouds and the anchor in the sky.

On the sixth day of May in the year 1750 I came close by the widely-known Cape of Hanko. A steady head-wind compelled me to remain there for three weeks, so I had opportunity to study the region. It is said that the Cape of Hanko has a good harbour, but I would not hope for a worse one for my enemy

The daughter becomes pregnant when she sees the ship, its masts and sails. The father shuts the girl up in a locked outhouse.

Long hours of men, they row to land. Back and forth

with an infinite prayer

a breathing

the votive ships bow from the ceiling of the chapel.

The wild duck take wing,

fear explodes:

we fly with the precision of butterflies, we fly over the sea, a meadow risen into the air.

Instinct takes us to the edge of the mainland.

All the way to the passages down which footsteps echo.

The waves, the mother remembers: you were still a child and grew like a tree.

The past; a circle

in water, the seed

fell.

Night is a warehouse.

Autumn shouts to the little man in the moon: a feast!

In pigskin bottles frogs stretch their limbs,

salt lives in oakwood barrels. From sleep to horror there is not even a door, a warehouse for winter: the seaman's mouth trickles blood, his teeth protrude, icicles.

You are calm when you come home, to poverty.

From numbers you have built a house, foam-crested waves, the scum of the open sea.

Money drives your horse to death, spittle flies in the wind.

You lick the ink of the account book.

You have a black tongue.

Despair is a calm,

a heavy surface, a cup of poison.

You drink it in a steady hand. Molten gold in his lungs, the poor man dies.

A floating island, as long as it drifts on the water moving from place to place, is considered an ownerless object by those who live on the shores of that lake, along which it floats, or who on the same lake own a fixed island

unless the floating island stops at some particular village or inside the boundaries of a farm. The owner of the island is considered to be the one who joins it to his shore in such away that it can no longer break free of it.

You lost some good wind. A wretch steals a coin or two from your purse. The sea rots, the calm sea. You rush up on deck in pursuit of

evaporating salt. You can't take hold of it any more.

You can't take hold of it any more Gone.

Your boat rocks, you don't hear laughter from a mouth that is parched by its tongue

You sell the load at a ridiculous price; the sun melts the gilt-covered, the captain's hat and icepick.

\*

In damp soil
earthworms scurry on the
shovel blade
The old house's stone steps support
the floor
The bees have
abandoned their nest behind panels
Ten, eleven pouches of tobacco
My father is
reading the books I brought
We are building a new wall

\*

Do you think the white stain on the map is good land?

When Livingstone walked Africa from west to east his footprint stamped the black soil like ink he did not return to Scotland alive

We live on maps
There is enough room to walk on
top of them, until one day
we fall through the paper into the
hollow we didn't notice
It is our fate

\*

In autumn a grindstone licked smoother than a cow's tongue The street on which great men walk is always composed of the same cobblestones They do not grow less

In the parish hard to identify from under decomposed leaves, a bird pecks a worm And I am carried away by my own life, its perseverance

\*

I am far from home This country's language makes my metaphors stutter Behind weapons I am safe like a migrant bird

\*

1

You are a believer You don't believe a word you preach You drink coffee, shake hands with relatives. You lock the door of the chapel In the mirror you look for an eye on the floor You write a sermon of which the languidly devout congregation remember the beginning and the end Judas is not the only disciple who will burn in hell For the congregation a cross is enough, glasses to read the letters, They don't miss the God who has vanished from the altar Your head peers around like a weathervane turning in the wind as you go home

2

Chance is shaped like a cross
The nail is the victim's best friend
With a hammer the new year is nailed
into the deep sky
Near the roots of mountains that live
in a partial
eternity like carrots

3

'...You may answer an unimportant question by writing a tick in the box You cannot influence the questions: Why do people suffer? Do you know what must be done? Answer in four words without using the devil...'

\*

Be genuine!
Put up a pedestal and get on it
Walk on the open sea!
Be the equal of common whales

### from **Smooth talk**

The land is a harbour struck by flowing water, struck by sun, under clouds, where it rains, where an everyday thought hangs like a ship.

The land is an invoice that is seen, approved and kept.

The land does not exist. It is a story told by a fraudulent explorer. It is the stretched scale of maps, a thirsty currency.

The houses stand in their rubber boots until they sink in the water.

1

I will receive all this if I do not hope or fear.

A city made of clay, steel and glass. All this I can give, it is given to me and I will give it to whom I want.

The city is ready, the rain does not spray in its streets. Behind the tree no murderer, rapist or robber waits. Each well is covered by an iron lid, a lock.

And the city shines in the darkness, and no one understands this.

2

Water flows in the aural canals, the blood vessels, the ventricle in the stomach, the sinuses, the petroleum springs, the well. In the darkness all the subtleties of light.

I have unlocked the lid and built a body of flowing water.

The city builds a pipeline, a sewer, a reservoir, an intake, a water tower and sells bottled water. The rain permeates the city, in the well, the source, the river, the sea floods the streets.

When the moon is on its back one should mend boots, repair the roof, be prepared for flooding, buy life-jackets, make the dikes and embankments watertight.

What masters the water masters the world.

### from The Pelican

"So long as a man rides his hobby-horse peaceably and quietly along the King's highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him,—pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?"

Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy

[2-6]

I

It was that time, the bear was lowered from the mouth of heaven, a yellow helmet, on it a red cross and a bird,
the ropes went from the groin to the shoulders
from the tops of the trees deep into the stomach.

You were by the side of the highway, the land opened up before you its shipwrecked tale: asphalt and grass, a stone's helplessness, a ploughed acidic field.

The stone was newborn, and the fontanelle, the voice bounced on the bones of the skull, the mill ground salt, in the grains of the wheat an abyss, an abyss for disputes and thundering.

On the road that led to the edge the elks and the birds confronted one another, you saw it all and it was good,
stone and flesh intertwined like milk round coffee,
you can isolate the limit! Your axis round everything,
the stars, the child's skin smelt fresh.

#### II

You have not been given your voice, you and three others.
You were too late, the alarm clock stopped, the train left, you read the book by chance, the round form, the sounds had already been assigned.
Not good enough for you the noise, the whir of the cypress or the swishings of the whale.

You have not received a voice from anyone, no rattle of tongue or creature though you asked and asked.

YOUR FRIENDS TOOK THE BOOM OF THE THUNDER,
THE TINKLING OF THE WATERFALL AND THE CRY OF THE PELICAN.

you listen your ears hopeful, starry bright, there is nothing yet: do not turn your back on a world that does not give you your voice. The police band accompanies two thousand dachshunds into town, coffee pots drift on the tide noses outstretched.

My illness is not a medicine, but one must dive into the river all the same.

I wait for the darkness that on my eyelids is like a paper margin, the air's victory over the land,

a rainbow sucks the water of the river to rain it down elsewhere. The word is mist and pouring rain in the library. I wear out the wooden walls and the newspapers with my open eyes. It is all from the sky, the frogs,

the slow steps of the ice to the airplane and the programming that is called maturity.

[6]

And we talk about the light and the fog, we look at the forest.

(On the shore were the immense waves of great ships.)

The beams of the stairs creak when we go up to the tower. We talk ever more vigorously of how the wind has blown here,

what the weather is like.

The stones, we have completely forgotten them.

DID YOU KNOW THAT WHEN EARTHWORMS DIE THE SOIL BECOMES POISONOUS?

Now it would be right

that you are the spring and the screwed-on sun with worn threads, and all the other important things.

THE SUMMER DAY REMAINED UNFINISHED, SOMEONE CAME.

[9]

In a city built inside a pot there is no dancing, RISE FROM PITCH AND MOLTEN LEAD, BE A STRAIGHT-BACKED SAINT. The black steps rustle down to the shore, the ribs of the houses MELT INTO THE RIVER.

Old age is a habit rooted in the body, the icons bear the pure colours of God. The black and the grey are from man, from bone. The other colours are from flowers, shield bugs and stones The sky is perforated by urine, the snow by Tycho Brahe's toenail. In a city built inside a pot there is no dancing, do not talk to me of Mary or of virgins. Your unicorn is the beluga whale and the relics are tsarist bonds and Kafka. You must threaten the relics with fire and spike to have your will.

In the synagogue's attic are the remains of a creature, and pigeons, THE CITY'S DREAM UNDER THE TOURIST MAP.

You will soon call the castle home, it is the backbone of everything.

I

WE WHO LIVE IN THE END TIMES, WE LIE ON THE RIVER BED, THE WAVES ARE BREAKING, ROBERT SCOTT'S EXPEDITION

(THE MULES ALREADY EATEN ON THE OUTWARD JOURNEY) WANDERS AROUND ON YOUR BACK,

OPTIMISTICALLY,

THE SUN DAMS US UP ON THE BOTTOM, THE CONCRETE IS BRUTAL WATER ON BARE SKIN, THE ROOF MUST BE BROKEN SO THAT DEATH MAY BE EASIER.

### II

In the ice there are bubbles, mirrors, lenses superimposed, overlapping and crosswise. Red oozes through my body, the light.

The flat-breasted ice, the skeleton in the tent.

This is ether day.
Ice become feeling, the even light is distorted,
I sense the moon, but its glow is in Me.

(For the love of God, take care of our dear ones!)

III

You are overwhelmed by the waves,

Plunge ever deeper under your surface.

You expect rain but see a window in which lights are flashing.

Your name breaks in two

when I summon you on the threshold,
your family, that pool, remains outside.

# [14]

The machine is silence: I have not studied its moving parts nor can I say anything about the machine's importance but I acquired it.

The wasp doesn't understand the window, even though its legs are in the glass. It picks up speed and leaps once more transparent,

A HARSH WIND MACHINE, BURNISHED

THE AIR GIVES WAY.

THE MACHINE SEEKS UNDER THE SCALES OF THE PINE CONE THINGS THAT ARE HALF-MADE: A RIB CAGE, NEW MACHINES, DRAWINGS OF BRIDGES, AND A FULLY TRAINED DOG.

THE RAIN IS GIRLS INVITING

(I'm already so old)

TO A GAME OF BOULES. I ALSO EXPECT THAT ONE OF THEM WILL BRING ME INERTIA.

[19]

Of the trains and the immense deeds in the Borderlands I have nothing to report, but of a nose, I overtake a sleigh which has woodchips as its load, tar. Soil and diesel, my father is mending the tractor, removing the detachable parts, I am leaving for the city.

AFTER THIS HE RETIRED TO REST, AND IT IS MOST CERTAIN HE WAS SO LITTLE DISQUIETED as to fall into a sound sleep: for his breathing, which, on account of his corpulence, WAS RATHER HEAVY AND SONOROUS, WAS HEARD BY THE ATTENDANTS.

A large nose has come to the city. The nose's soldiers are meticulous. They are killing at the border, at this moment odours that cannot change into my memories, they are listening to the EMPTY RHETORIC, FINDING HEROES AND DEEDS THAT FIT THEM.

[22]

I have been promised a storm, in the wind whistle flags and pennants, blue rhinoceroses and crocodiles. En route
I see people, lions, eagles and quails,
BLOODY BOARDS, GEESE, SPIDERS,
silent fish that inhabit the waves
STARFISH FROM THE SEA, AND CREATURES invisible to the eye.

WE FOLLOW THE BADLY-PAINTED BANNERS until they have faded into curtains.

You talk about crop patterns, genuine and fake,

The union of geometry and falsehood.

This is the centre of people and animals,

The paths of identified voices.

You will pick out of this narrative whatever is most important: for a letter is one thing, a history another; it is one thing writing to a friend, another thing writing to the public.

The oceans and skies of numerous latitudes, or the roaming in search of weather

#### IS YOUR STORY

of the person for whom clouds are more important than fabrics, YOU DON'T GET THROUGH THE CIRCLES AND PATTERNS.

In these expanses outside the paper a muddy field, A MATHEMATICAL NARRATIVE, A WEDGE AT THE HEART OF THINGS.

### [35]

To you belong the columns, the rooftree and the ideas carried down from heaven, to me THE PILASTERS AND ORNAMENTS.

From the burning victim you take the bones, the pelvis and the smoke, THE BLOOD, FLESH, CARTILAGE AND MUSCLES ARE MINE.

The fleshless corpses stand in position like a banana republic's ARMIES IN RED-BRICK WAREHOUSES, the columns are decaying into the park.

The smoke and ideas are in aluminum casks, they ferment, soon the pressure is dangerously high.

#### [36]

I do not fear God, the sea, warships fire, being thrown overboard in distress, large birds, the inertia of princes, cities, or any man or matter, reprisals and arrest do not scare me. My assurance compensates for the losses, the risks, the bad luck, the difficulties and all evil. But not even that can compensate for the mean customs man and my not knowing what I want.

### [39]

There is no longer anyone here, the border is obsolete, like everywhere else the boys come to the shore on their mopeds,, the girls go rowing in a green boat, the ducks do what they always do in spring, their image remains on the water's surface.

When the last child, bird and flower disappear, hope will too. I sit on the beach, think about the lapsed border, the severed nerve-end, the house whose wall has fallen. The riders come to the shore, of the borders there is nothing to tell, I blow all speech away.

translated from the Finnish by David McDuff

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