

**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  
Hange the, 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 crow's nest under his arm,  
Cras, Cras,  
a feather, in the slow wind he becomes earth.  
Earth 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.  
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 *Lyhyt muisti, meri.* ( 1997)

## 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 *Sileäksi puhuttu* [Smooth Talk] 2004.

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 whirl 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.





[13]

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,



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 roof-tree  
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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