

Aki SALMELA

Like a philosopher a poet
doesn't examine the reality but the meanings
reality forms in us.

Like a leaf of a tree a man
flies with the wind
here and there.

(2008)

KUNSTKAMMER

He was not a bad man
though he wore tennis socks
with grey shoes.
Stop me if you've heard this one before.
Don't try to peel a mandarin
who's counting his money.
What is good taste?
Is it this, or some other
reference? This is not
an academic study.
This is sincere.
And now for something completely different.
Don't litter! Smoking kills.
Don't feed the lion.
You can only say no twice.
Ten little elephants
marched down the street. Sunny,
with northeast winds to 15 mph.
Good evening. Tonight
thy shall not cry. Would you like to buy
a slightly used syntax?
Wearily thou closed thy eyes.
If you lend me twenty bucks
I'll pay you back next week.
Would you buy a used car from this guy?
Life is a dream.
With which potatoes?
It's getting so dark here,
soon you can't see what you're talking about.
The die is cast.
The socks are on the radiator.
Mutters, cries.
The candles in the candelabrum
are melting. The angels
got stuck in the middle.
We apologize for the inconvenience.
You have three new messages.
Me Tarzan, you Jane?
Would you go out with me some day
next week? Is it genuine?
In this sentence I admit
some influence of Charles Bernstein.
An obvious plagiarism! The blessing is given.
Thanks for coming! Please come again.
Maybe you'll drive a Moskvich one day.
Panem et circenses.
Greetings for everyone.
Does it come in bigger sizes?
I didn't mean it literally!
What do you mean?

Blueberries, strawberries.
Just say "Bud".
COMMERCIAL SPACE TO LET
That's the whole moral.

(2004)

Elegy II

A dog glides in to the centre of the image.
Its muzzle opens and out flops "Woof!"
The word floats slowly away and the dog turns into a sheep.
The sheep turns into a woollen mitten.
A hand glides into the mitten.
The mitten goes into a fist.
The fist opens and out jumps the dog.
The dog's muzzle opens and out flops a "baa!"
The dog turns into a sewing needle.
The sewing needle unpicks the mitten out of which comes the hand of a skeleton.
The hand shakes its finger and glides away.
The dog glides in to the centre of the scene.
Its muzzle opens and out pours woollen yarn.
The dog empties into a stack of yarn.
In the middle of the yarn a bomb forms.
The fuse is burning.
The picture explodes into a starry sky.
Out of the stars forms a profile of Dante.
Dante's nose grows by a light year.
Dante's mouth opens and out jumps the dog.
The dog's muzzle opens and out flops *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*.
The dog falls out of view.
The stars go out one by one.

(2004)

A cigarette

How pleasant it would be to find at the bottom of one's mind a beautiful insect that is unaware of its species. How pleasant it would be to find at the outskirts of one's thoughts a small comet with traces of water and orchards. Occasionally beauty rests at the bottom of an empty wallet like the final reminder of evanescence. One examines it for a moment, then suddenly remembers what it all means, and puts the wallet away. All that remains is this unnoticeable instant, and soon even it wants its share of attention. Now it has its moment--and then even that has passed.

This is how I see life, but you might of course say I'm seriously mistaken. I'd love to hear that when the night knocks on my window like a gloomy bird that has made up its mind to enter my room. I know that bird, and what it has to say. I will not open the window, but I open this language like an old, darkened box of cigarettes. It might be unkind not to offer you one, so I offer this one to you.

(2005)

Fish

This fish is delicious but rather ugly, and that's why it resembles life as it lies on the steel table of the kitchen so permanently stripped of its own element. Its eyes still have the clear transparency of the sea, the deep converted heaven that still might pass for us as a mystery.

If you press your ear close enough, you might hear the sea whispering from under its huge scales, and you might almost make out the quiet message that has risen with it from the heavy deep of the sea. All deep waters are dark, it might whisper if it had any part in this language, but as it hasn't, it is content to sigh. And how lightly the sea sighs from the scales of the dead fish, like a sincere joy that life never fully understands itself in any one of its participants. And how lightly the sea whispers in the scales of the dead fish like a nereid of a pleasure we cannot hope to grasp. And how lightly the sea whispers in the scales of the dead fish, like the waves that bring and take this thinking, and all of us who are subdued by it.

And what else might the sea whisper from the scales of the dead fish, if this fish wasn't a dinner for you who so restlessly wait at your set table, staring at the sea tossing hungrily in the attractive moonlight.

(2005)

Translated from the Finnish by the author with Ciaran O'Driscoll

Limbo

I heard the heavy sound of a gunshot, but nothing happened. I turned the pistol barrel from my chest and looked at it. It looked back as if it had no idea what all the fuss was about. It might have come straight from the factory, the innocent gleam of newness. I felt my chest. It was wet and sticky, I found the hole the bullet had broken next to my nipple. The broken bone gave easily in, it felt final.

I heard the heavy sound of a gunshot, but nothing happened. I turned the pistol barrel slowly to the floor and looked around me. Room looked back as if it had no idea what all the fuss was about. Everything was neat and tidy, as if cleaned before a journey. I pressed a finger through the bullet hole and felt slowly from side to side. Inside it was warm, soft and quiet. How quickly everything happens, I thought.

I heard the heavy sound of a gunshot, but nothing happened. I put the pistol on the table and looked in the mirror. It looked back as if it had no idea what all the fuss was about. A young and solemn man, just the type Caesar had a reasonable fear of. The clean white shirt looked like the Japanese flag, the red spot grew slowly wider. Funny thing I didn't feel much anything, I thought.

I heard the heavy sound of a gunshot, but nothing happened. I went to the window and looked at the wintry city. It looked back as if it had no idea what all the fuss was about. All was gray and immobile, even the light coming through the clouds was half dark. I pressed my face to the window-pane, and breathed deeply. Not a spot appeared. How quickly everything happens, I thought.

I heard the heavy sound of a gunshot, but nothing happened. I threw a jacket on my shoulders and went out to the crowd at the street. It looked back as if it had no idea what all the fuss was about. Gray and busy faces, even the smile filtered through the boredom was half unconscious. I took a couple of steps across the sidewalk. Funny thing no one paid any attention, I thought, it felt consoling.

(2005)

The Last Poets*for Arkadii Dragomoshenko*

One day, and the sun still being nothing
but a gold-plated coin in the evening's pawnshop,
how much will you be able to redeem with this light?
You dress up in the same old beggars,
then leave once more for the same old office,
the scent of a woman's warmth on your father-tongue.
And yearning will not be the more bearable,
not newer the way to surprise oneself in the middle of thoughts,
in the middle of, as if, understanding. And the light,
and the reason for light - however,
come night, you go on being your own separate self,
independent of everything you depend upon.
You are a spider in your wide short-iron web
that, come night, you are forced to stuff back into your self,
no insect there to salvage your long-lastingness.
In un-nuanced tones the hollow trees speak
the wind playing them for a tune of time,
and this will not be an established critique
against established practices.
With just one red lace he tied us,
two particles explodable with each other,
into a small and slender parcel.
I will not call such a thing a poem,
nor a silence. And I am not
the silence breathed, here and now, into this,
a person you'd encounter when spelling something out.
All that will always be slightly displaced,
this here still here but moving already
toward a place we will never catch up with.
This is why real poetry is as impossible
as it is necessary.
We are at a distance of an approximation from a consoling house
its clean walls calling one to inhabit it,
to call it "home". This longed-for
forest is about to stand up on its branches
moving toward that abandoned scenery.
Tremble, Tyrant! Language not able to discern
trees from forest, the rumble from march, and then a sudden
erratic boulder that will stop up your delicate path.
Could it be described as psychological realism?
A political statement? Boldness does not leave
traces for us to follow. That's why it, too,
is a matter of faith, like state, like poem.
When the evening finally arrives, it's bourgeoisly clean
if a bit yellowed by age, its ears
gnawed up by mice, and so very small
is the eternity it carries in its arms that there's no tomorrow.
What is the meaning of this moon?
Of these stars moved by the tongue of a certain love?

Of these quiet bridges
over to a brass that will wake up as a trumpet?

We won't give a shit. And in a double measure, the time
will mishandle us. Taking a piece from there,
another from here--then calling that "a truth."

We will not make ourselves guilty for such
futile wordmongering.

We will move about in the heart of truth
so everything we say will be pure lying,
or, safely, something lie-like.

It's like the Hungarian Rhapsody,
all of them together,

rolling swiftly away from under everything uttered by it like a multi-language
landslide that will tuck up this childlike city.

From this on, everything is archaeology;
or palaeontology, if you are holding your predecessor's skull in your hand
or cross-examining it for the sense of your doings.

The task of poetry is to dazzle the eyes to see
what perhaps did not have anything to see in it,
what perhaps has now. These conditions
against an unconditioned reader, the attentiveness of whom
may be the only stable purchase for our boat.

Should you for a moment confuse sorrow with morrow,
rashes with ashes, and terminals with germinability;
something in the midst of the morrow will germinate your image
here.

As if, like laughter, serious play would be the only
sensible occupation and job for a cultivated person
in this world of circus-games grown routine.

In this refrigerator of a rancid commodity where
even the light is not of our own.

This has nothing to do with social criticism,
let me repeat, and praise;
there's nothing to do here; socializing (in dream) with criticism.
We will depart

like balloons. Farewell! With style!

Our chubby bellies full of self-important knowledge,
attained rubbish, and a few gilded silverware items
dropping down through our memories when we turn back to look at
the scenery plated by the setting sun.

(2004)

Translated from the Finnish by Leevi Lehto

Chess

There are only white squares on the chess board. I do not see the opponent, the room is dim, the other end of the board is beyond eyeshot. A vague sadness squeezes the heart, like a gambler's hand. I see that I cannot win, at most I can play for time, but for how long? Ten years? Thirty? I guard the king from the attacks of oblivion.

(2008)

Stone

Think about a stone. It is small, almost round
and heavy for its size. It is gray.

Think about the stone on the palm of your hand, how it weighs
in the middle of your palm as a balance weight.

You probably cannot help but think of a window,
clear, integrated, dark window,
in which this stone could pierce
a hole of its size.

Think of a frozen moment: the stone is in the air,
the window reflects the image of the approaching stone
like a small blink of light, which brings
its small consolation in to the dark.

You probably cannot help but think of the window
as it shatters into pieces as the stone
hits it with the right force
at the right angle, and releases

us of its weight.

(2008)

Scent of morning

Say what you may about life, but life's nothing that's been said. The sun sets in a sepia tinted setting where together a man and a woman walk out of the picture. At the start of the romantic's tale the candles are lit, the girl stoops to hear better. Lonely stones roll from the horizon's laughter, farewell to the continuity we are so much in love with. Just for a second you could see from his face what he'd look like in twenty years.

Lonely stones

I don't want to disappoint anyone, but this isn't a story and it has nothing to say. I watched a little girl trying to reach an unripe apple on an old apple tree. They used to load up unnecessarily heavy burdens. Yesterday's birds, for example, aren't today's. Aspens grow in spite of their convictions and yet there's still something ingenious about puzzle pictures. He considered putting another coat of paint on the kitchen ceiling. Time, progress, and good taste. The man breathed in her laughter. It's what's called love. That's how sentences turn to stone. The light's playing on the house's bleached face. Two pigeons on the window sill of space, and a marble angel. The whisper came again: the secret of lasagne is nutmeg. The carpet beater was beating carpets on a steel rack. Something made a move. A stuffy moment, a man in his black swivel-chair. The heralds of spring. Imagine all that somewhere else. Smoke rose from his nostrils like steam from the sewers. It's what's called love. I watched a little dog scampering around a girl. A thread always stuck out from somewhere, likely to unravel the whole cloth. And I raised my hat, bent to enter it, and vanished.

Translated from the Finnish by Herbert Lomas

Obsession, II

We are all born mad. Some remain so.

— Samuel Beckett

Have you ever used any of the following drugs? Is alcohol a problem for you? Do you live in your parents' household? Do you have unemployment insurance? Have you become unemployed through a strike or a lockout? If elsewhere, where? Does your spouse receive an allowance for taking care of the children at home? Have you replied truthfully to these questions? Do you have anything to do? Do you see that park? Do you not agree that it resembles a lampshade? Can we stay here? Who the fuck is Aki Salmela? Do you consider that narcissism? Would you apply the word 'perspicacious' to yourself? Do you talk to yourself if no one's listening? Do you sing in the shower? Do you have a favourite star in the sky? Are you sensitive to beauty where beauty does not exist? How can we be sure it is not sheer delusion? So who cares? Coffee or tea? Did you feel anything? Shall we do it all over again?

An hour in St Petersburg

Purposeful purposelessness.
— John Cage

21:15

A day and night long as a saint's hair

21:18

all day I thought about doing this
and now I've finally arrived here, with you,
I'm considering going elsewhere, I'm considering
a caucasian beerhall, chicken kebabs, speech
released from people by the crystallised night,

October's lapping
on the windowsill,

it's the *leitmotiv* of this atmosphere so dear to me
in the wagnerian sense, I've
put a record on

Brian Eno: Music for Airports

why am I telling you all this?
surely I do have a reason
just as trees have their reason
their grain hidden from man

tonight I want language full of events
full of free thoughts on
the advancing staves of emotion

21:25

we're language-producing animals
we're perfectly justified in saying
this distinguishes us from the animals
I pop open
a bottle of Austrian beer

Gösser

GUT BESSER GÖSSER

I won't say more
about globalisation

I think
I feel some distant memory
stirring somewhere,
in the recesses of my cells?
in the waves of my brains?

approaching
the tip of my tongue

21:38

<p>I'll leave it unwritten, won't write about the woman who</p>	21:44
<p>tonight in the vastnesses of Russia many a men will die violently, more than a hundred, killed by themselves or by somebody else, rashly, mostly with a kitchen knife or empty bottle, rarely though increasingly nowadays with a gun and deliberately</p>	
<p>the number's said to be triple the figure in the us of america and it's 43 times that in france this is statistics</p>	21:50
<p>they've nothing to say about human suffering</p>	
<p>a body is a body is a body is a mind, is a sorrow, is delight is an empty bottle devoid of beer green</p>	21:52
<p>I think of passing time that it's an abstraction and nothing real therefore</p>	
<p>but evening advances into night</p>	21:53
<p>the pendulum of day and night swings over our life's abyss</p>	
<p>no, no I'm not going to eschew pathos its seductive dark confusing loops</p>	
<p>I'll traverse the whole register scarcely budging from my place</p>	21:57
<p>night long, life short lights go on, electric flowers trembling blue harebells in the apartment block windows</p>	22:00
<p>in the main evening newscast of the day:</p>	
<p>NORD OST</p>	
<p>broadcast live terrorists hostages policemen army media relatives, tearful, exclusive interviews specialists - an inexhaustible natural resource - the odd curious passer-by defying the cold night</p>	22:05
<p>entertainment?</p>	
<p>the heavy breathing of the news anchor rises as thought bubbles into the frosty night</p>	22:06

normalno

the president's face
tight, keeping it straight

how to describe a world
that expands explosively
in every direction?

they caught the assassin
a nice-looking fellow

22:11

if the world's unpredictable and you can't say anything for certain
this sentence too is devoid of meaning
hooray!
useless art!
partisan or non-partisan
minutes thicken towards their end
or as an old man of a hundred
would say:
it all happened so quickly.

St Petersburg, 25 October 2002

Translated from the Finnish by Herbert Lomas
