

Lake Onega and Other Poems

LEEVI LEHTO (born in 1951 and living in Helsinki), is a Finnish poet, translator, and programmer. Since he made his poetic debut in 1967, he has published six volumes of poetry, a novel, *Janajevin unet* (*Yanayev's Dreams*, 1991), and an experimental prose work, *Päivä* (*Day*, 2004). He has been active in leftist politics (during the 70s) and worked as a corporate executive in communications industry (during the 90s). He is also known for his experiments in digital writing, such as the Google Poem Generator. His translations, some forty books in all, range from mystery writing to philosophy, sociology, and poetry, including work by Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, George Orwell, Stephen King, Ian McEwan, Arthur C. Danto, Mickey Spillane, Alexander Dubcek, Josef Skvorecky, Walter Benjamin, John Keats, John Ashbery, and Charles Bernstein. He is currently working on a new Finnish translation of *Ulysses* by James Joyce. He teaches poetry at the Critical Academy (Kriittinen korkeakoulu) in Helsinki, and is Chairman of the Planning Group for the yearly Helsinki Poetics Conference, member of the Planning Group for the yearly Kuopio Sound Poetry Seminar, responsible for the "poEsa" series of poetry books in Finnish (*Nihil Interit* and *Kirja kerrallaan*), member of the Editorial Council of *Sibila*, a Brazilian magazine of poetry, and Contributing Editor for the Electronic Poetry Center (EPC). Beside English, his work has been translated into Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Portuguese, Russian, and Farsi. For more information, see www.leevilehto.net.

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LEEVI LEHTO



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Author's Note

This selection traces the development of my later poetry—from the poems of the early Nineties with their influences from Finnish Fifties Modernism, and, I suspect, from early New York School writing, to the metrical experimentation of my “Dantean-Dadaistic” suite of sonnets, *Lake Onega* (1997), and to my more procedurally oriented recent work.

The translations are either by myself, or by me in collaboration with others (acknowledged for in the “Notes”). There may be an element of Second Language English in at least some of them—if so, the reader is asked not to see it as altogether inadvertent. The translations of sonnets in the *Lake Onega* suite are often more properly seen as adaptations, or improvisations—in keeping with methods used to produce the originals (again, see the “Notes” for examples). The “Coupons Will Remember” suite, as well as the final Google poem, were originally written in English.

I wish to thank my co-translators C. B. Hall and Tommi Nuopponen, as well as Fredrik Hertzberg and Alan Prohm for useful hints and suggestions regarding the language. A special thank to Anselm Hollo for an earlier translation of “Juanita And Aspects” which was used as a basis for my translation here, and to Charles Bernstein, Marjorie Perloff, and Kenneth Goldsmith for encouragement, inspiration, and support.

Helsinki, January 2006

Leevi Lehto

www.leevilehto.net

Poems From Early Nineties

[Untitled]

An empty screen,
 the rooftops' sheet-metal nights;
and the sky's tepidness!
 Thus
I wanted to fly, slowly, that I might be anywhere
 at once.

[Untitled]

Conceived a sentence. Memorized it. Forgot.

Here, in the world, thus,
signing it.

[Untitled]

The sky's freezing puddles, all along the shores
trees upended.
I am on my way toward a speaking point, against which
prying
one gets things right side upside down.

[Untitled]

A girl in a turquoise skirt climbing the stairs against the white wall pushes a long popsicle into her red mouth. She brings to my mind words which I understand but whose language I don't know. I'd like to explain why I find it sad that this is not a dream. A dream it is not that I'd like to explain why it's sad. Sad is that I'd like to explain how a girl, pushing popsicle into her mouth red, is climbing against a wall, white, in a skirt turquoise.

I understand, I'd like to explain, but I don't have the words.
Perhaps I have died.

Perhaps.

A Sliced Guitar

On the restaurant's table the prayer meeting of the
Windsor chairs, overturned, legs toward heaven,

a house-sized pen which in the city of sleep
writes on my retina;

a crack between the thighs of the moon, the chafing shoe
of midnight, the hepatomas of words,

life-long verses. The cuticle of thinking.
The hairs of memory. The window's knife-thrust,

a brief history of sleep, the tooth decay of Time and
the brass rail of inevitability,

death's customer discount, a sliced guitar and
the eyelashes of light, and

death's customer discount, a sliced guitar and
the eyelashes of light

[Untitled]

Nine straight storm-nights I slept, hatless,
hanging from my feet
from your whimsical womb
O fate!
The dry fire of your arms' longing
burned and cleansed me
and I dove,
a bird,
wings closing in
five, fifteen
 in-closing years
you rained salty sparks
a pant of seasons settled
 with delay
it became sleepless
I became
a ventriloquist fish
swimming in a tumult of instants.

Books And Gents

October's night.

Une nuit d'octobre, sombre.

October's proper dark night, one of

ceux qui allumée par les étoiles, à present
turned out, really. In this light we can see that

dans cette lumière les gens, et les bouquins, continuent
happening we really cannot
savoir. Excepté pour

their eyes: twins

qui regardent la nuit, la lumière, les ténèbres, en nous
rappelant

that our plans never really come true, meaning, to us,

qu'il n'y avait vraiment personne à éteindre cette lumière,
that these twins always are the same in that
pour eux, aussi, toujours, il faut deux places séparées.

Words Arrive By Night

I've said about this many times before.
In every toilet of the house there is a light on.
Bridges flow east.
Words arrive by night without knocking.

This happened in a faraway country nearby.
I've said about this many times before.
In every toilet of the house there is a light on.
Bridges flow east.

In countryside the trees had not broken into run
yet.
This happened in a faraway country nearby.
I've said about this many times before.
In every toilet of the house there is a light on.

The President himself was utterly paralysed.
In countryside the trees had not broken into run
yet.
This happened in a faraway country nearby.
I've said about this many times before:

in every toilet of the house there is a light on,
bridges flow east, and
words arrive by night without knocking.

Fantasy

in a story now. The car came out of the drizzle with full lights and tires on, braked, then slid sideways—yet whoever he she once forced time on this its arbitrarily narrow line lit by occasional fireworks only. The city in that night: endlessly tall doors that kept opening. There is a stain of blood on the man's raincoat. Was. A woman looks out of a window, inside and out at the same time. That woman is you. The window is a mirror from which the woman ascends wearing high black heels from the passenger door in a newspaper ad, walks into a room with the name of the bedroom, and there is no difference in reality. Signifying made-up countenance seen in profile. Thinking of the Southern beaches with their sunshine. Unnecessarily. Namely, I see under her skirt. And the shot cracked in silence like a blow of whip. The houses themselves suddenly stood straight in attention like trees, or doors. Doormen. Thinking of their counters. By now he has forgotten their cover names even, each one of them. Whereas I have not lost my Dick Tracy hat: now you all know what it is the question of. The network of the agents representing the requirements of high style, all their underground liaisons up to the over-ground, unworldly beauty: codes o codes! he thinks, wiping sweat, taking a step to grasp the phone. The cigar left in the ashtray would soon start smouldering. Had there been others beside them in this scene? There had been this moment back then like in the works of a certain School of Painting the woman inclining her reddened head her painted lips a bit apart being a way of saying, being her way of whispering and with this abstaining from saying a word about that in the silken embroideries of her panties you'd find patterned the eyelashes of Helen of Troy at this arbitrarily short moment of time to incline one's head is senselessness orgasm orchid blooming in its glory in the darkness deep inside the shot. Death. Afterwards they smoked. From this you'll see there had in reality