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Writing Sample

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Includes poems from Short memory, sea, Smooth talk, and The Pelican.
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.
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
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 *Lyhyt muisti, meri.* 1997.

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
ergously 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.

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

(IM' 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 DISQUETED

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
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.

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.

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.

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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