

INTE 2014

## The Finland of poetry revisited four snapshots

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### Abstract

A poem is a condensation of signs and a method characteristic of every human being for investigating a shared reality. Accordingly, a human being also lives and exists poetically in this common world. This being so, the primacy of the mother tongue refers to the lived language, which mediates the possibility for us of carving out our own unique imprint on existence. Similarly, the native land signifies a milieu where a human being takes on a reality amidst other objects, surrounded by them and as one of them. Poetry creates harmony between past and present.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Sakarya University

*Keywords:* Lived poetry; national self-understanding; philosophy of literature; aesthetics

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### 1. Motto

"Our home area, the place in this land which our being is tied to with unbreakable roots, the sphere of being for our childhood and youth, the eternal dwelling place of our heart, the most beautiful and precious on earth, beautiful even in its ruggedness, and all the more beautiful for its ruggedness, and the object of our longing if we have left it, – it is the natural circle of our life outside of which we always somehow feel cut adrift from life." (Hollo, 1931.)

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## 2. To Begin With

Poetry does not simply mean melodiousness and rhythm. If lyric poetry means that a person expresses their worldly pain through song accompanied on a lyre, then poetry denotes something entirely different. Poetry is every person's individual way of looking at a world that is communally shared. The aspect of uniqueness is also essential: moments do not return as such, and nobody experiences any situation twice in exactly the same way. In poetry a person carves out their own mark in the centre of a common reality with an outline already formed long ago. This is precisely why the landscape of one's home feels so precious. It is the archetype of all other landscapes, which are merely reflections of it. The home radiates its warm glow all the days of a human life. It puts the humanity into humanity.

## 3. Poem

### 3.1. *A glimpse from afar: Yrjö Kokko*

The same thing can be described in reality through several different narratives. To the tellers of these tales, each in their own age, the tales are equally true. The essential point here is the view of culture as a tallying of what has gone before. Perhaps it can be seen as the idea of some kind of collective settlement, a national reckoning. Yrjö Kokko pondered this same question in post-war Finland. His thoughts were published in a fine travel book, *The Islands of Good Will*, which appeared in 1953 during the period of reconstruction. Kokko takes a look at his native land from far away, the Canary Isles, and writes in the following touching way: "Is one's native land then a period when a person is born, where he has grown up, and which will die along with him? Perhaps your native land is just the earth and soil where you were born, the local area which, compared to infinity, is no bigger than the grave where you will be buried when you die. But isn't your native land the people who speak your language, the people you have shared joys and sorrows with, common destinies? But, as we know, the generations depart. New generations do not think or feel in the same way. Opinions change just as circumstances do. When our own generation dies, does our own nation also die then?" (Kokko, 1953.)

In addition to the nation's shared settling of accounts, there is also another individual and very personal view opening up on the past. A private person can also go to an existential confession and try to clothe his own yesteryears in some kind of self-comprehending linguistic garb.

### 3.2. *Aleksis Kivi: a full-length portrait*

At the end of Jari Halonen's film *The Life of Aleksis Kivi* (2001), the writer Kivi climbs up high onto a hill, almost a mountain, a kind of metaphysical point: from there it is possible to look into the far distance, into the remotest past and into the shimmering future, lying at the furthest extreme. The time has come to weigh up the old and the new, as well as that which is here and now.

From where he stands on high Kivi sees the sparkling waters and the forests glowing in their summer green. High above all this there stretches the vault of the eternal blue sky. The words of his poem "Suomenmaa" (1878) ring in our ears:

"A land of hills and valleys,  
What are you, my beauty?  
Your glow of summer days,  
Your lustre of northern fires,  
This delight of winter, summer,  
What is this lovely land? [...]"  
(SR 1, 1990.)

The full-length portrait is nearing completion. Why can a particular place or landscape feel so close that even the thought of losing it hurts? Is the place beautiful in itself or is it the feeling, the loving of it, that gives it beauty? One answer to this can be found in the work quoted in the motto above, *Self-education and the Skill of Living*. It was written by Juho Hollo, philosopher and professor of adult education. His ideas continue to stir the heart: "We like beauty, it pleases us, fills our being with a powerful sense of inner bliss. Is beauty perhaps created by love? Or is beauty the subject and cause of our love? Or is it mostly a matter of love creating beauty and beauty inspiring love?" (Hollo, 1931.)

In order to describe, we need our own mother tongue, its expressive power and resilience. Otherwise the words are mute – lacking the immediacy of lived truth.

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