

Jukka Koskelainen:

## Where does the circle begin? Rewriting the origin myth

Nowadays we hear over and over again that we are living in a time after truth. This refers to what the supreme leaders are saying in the west and the east (although there still are people who look only into the west). I have lived in Venezuela in the first decade and experienced it all before. There the supreme leader molded the world to his will and held Mao and Soviet Unions as his heroes.

The supreme leaders are often called populists. A populist is a politician who claims to be the only representative of the "people", the true and authentic people, that has been betrayed by the corrupt elite. This implies that there is a unity called people, a homogenous group, whose true essence can be found. This is, of course, pure phantasy, as we always live, inevitably, in a plural world full of different points of view.

So what makes people want to belong to a unity, to merge into a fictitious, greater circle? Certainly, the so called Enlightenment project over, when it comes to the population of the west in general. That means that this goal didn't come true: the goal that all the people would base their decisions on reason and peaceful discussion.

But haven't artists spoken against reason and Enlightenment time and again? Isn't it often claimed that the *raison d'être* of poetry is that it is not based on rational thinking, because it speaks the language of myths and dreams and legends? At least I have spoken such words in my younger years. Then it was common to us poets to complain that people don't read poetry because it is too difficult, and we were eager to explain that poetry just feels difficult, because it is not a rational discourse, and it appeals to subconscious levels where you just don't put things in a logical order.

So now we have a bunch of people, who don't put things in a logical order and who don't think rationally. They prefer the mythical dimension, prefer to choose to merge into an absurd unity, where there is little individual thinking. (Of course there are social reasons for this, but is not my theme). But they don't like poetry, or they like it only if it's nationalistic, kitschy or simple.

So how do I resolve this enigma. I'll try it with poetry. I haven't written much poetry myself lately, maybe for the reasons that I mentioned above. But there has to be other dimension in poetry, which speaks to the present post-Enlightenment times.

I'll begin with Hando Runnel and Artuur Alliksaar. The first translation that I published was a poem by Runnel. Alliksaar was one of my first influence. Theirs was a "codified" poetry with hidden messages. The poetry itself, was openly against totality-thinking, because it was something totally different than the official heroic kitsch. This poetry was widely read in Estonia if you compare to the present number of readers.

Then we had poetry that reacted to excessively commercial culture by twisting and deconstructing language, in order to create a critical consciousness that wouldn't fall into the capitalistic trap. Very few people read such poetry. Maybe we can locate a part of Hasso Krull's poetry in this category. But then Krull published an epic – or pseudoepic– work called *Meter ja Demeter*. It begins in the end, in a great flood, and it ends in a flood. This time perspective interests me. Krull uses a lot of mythology, but the time perspective guarantees a moving perspective.

Going in a circle means to cross all ages and all occurrences. "To cross" – that's my essential word here. To go through. The imagist poetry looked at the surfaces of things, so that one is in a place and in a moment of time. The "crossing poetry" helps to understand our age and any age. It is critical, but not in the sense of rejecting modern times, as many poets did, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, two modernist poets par excellence, who both had understanding for fascist ideas. This is an alliance that cannot be done away easily with the explication "many great artists are unbearable characters, but that doesn't diminish their art". Something more grave is at stake. That's why writing poetry is hard. It is not enough to criticize our age. Any populist can do that. Eliot and Pound can do that. Both populist leaders and poets have resorted to the origin myth: that we belong to an unity, that we have to go back to the unity and reject the diversity of our age as well as the inner conflicts in our nations and in our heads with regression. Poetry has often been regressive.

It is not enough to use fragmented style or mythological style. We have to cross, go through the fragments, our own age and the myths. You can use jazz and improvisation, as Hasso Krull has done.