



New Finnish Grammar

Diego Marani , Judith Landry (Translator)

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One night at Trieste in September 1943 a seriously wounded soldier is found on the quay. The doctor, of a newly arrived German hospital ship, Pietri Friari gives the unconscious soldier medical assistance. His new patient has no documents or anything that can identifying him. When he regains consciousness he has lost his memory and cannot even remember what language he speaks. From a few things found on the man the doctor, who is originally from Finland, believes him to be a sailor and a fellow countryman, who somehow or other has ended up in Trieste. The doctor dedicates himself to teaching the man Finnish, beginning the reconstruction of the identity of Sampo Karjalainen, leading the missing man to return to Finland in search of his identity and his past.

New Finnish Grammar won three literary prizes in Italy in 2001: Premio Grinzane Cavour, Premio Ostia Mare and Premio Giuseppe Desi and has received critical acclaim across Europe.

New Finnish Grammar Details

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From Reader Review New Finnish Grammar for online ebook

Aditya Kelekar says

~~~ Since language is our mother, try and find yourself a woman ~~~

THIS REVIEW CONTAINS SPOILERS, READ THE BOOK FIRST!

It was on the flight during my first visit to Finland that I had first brush with Finnish, thanks to the announcements in Finn Air. Now what was that? The words that had just been spoken.. some were so long drawn out, some expressed in such a sing-song way, it was amusing to listen to them. Now, more than a year later, and having practiced some basic Finnish phrases, these lines in the novel 'New Finnish Grammar' strike a chord: "Foreigners listening to a Finn speaking have the sense that something is flying out of his mouth; the words fan out and lightly close in again; they hover in the air and then dissolve. It is pointless to try and capture them for their meaning is in their flight, it is this that you must catch using your eyes and ears. Hands are no help. This is one of the loveliest things about the Finnish language."

The story is about a person who has lost his memory at a time when the world is in the throes of WWII. Doctor Friari, a neurologist of Finnish origin nurses the patient back to health. Seeing that the patient's tag identifies him as Sampo Karjalainen, an obviously Finnish name, the doctor teaches him Finnish. However, Sampo's past and his links with his family remain untraceable. Thinking that Sampo's best chance in finding his roots lie in staying in Helsinki, Dr Friari sends him to the city. At Helsinki, Dr Friari's note helps Sampo find lodgings and food, but learning the Finnish language (for, as Dr Friari tells him, that knowing the language is a prerequisite to his getting ahead in life) and uncovering his past remain a daunting task which he must accomplish.

At Helsinki, Sampo meets Koskela, a priest, who undertakes to teach Sampo Finnish. Often during Sampo's lessons with Koskela, there are excursions to the land of Kalevala, the Finnish national epic. One story is about Kullervo, born to a mother who has been brutally held captive. Kullervo is bred on hatred, so that when he becomes physically strong, he uproots all that crosses his path, but it bring him no happiness. Indeed, his mother fears that his hatred will consume him and that is what happens. After wreaking havoc in the camp of his mother's captors, Kullervo return only to bring misery to his own family.

I couldn't help comparing that with the story from the Hindu epic of Mahabharata... of Kansa, the son of a god who is born with divine strength but who is brought up by a poor low-caste family. Early in his childhood, Kansa faces discrimination because of his low-caste ancestry. Suffering humiliation at the hands of high-caste princes embitters Kansa so much that when a prince openly admire him for his talents, he pledges his support to that prince, though it later leads him down a false path. But here the home background is different. As a child, Kansa is cared lovingly by his foster parents, so that he in turn becomes a wellspring of kindness. The stories of Kullervo and Kansa seemed to me to complement each other in a superb way.

There is no child in 'New Finnish Grammar' but Marani skillfully weaves you in the web of the Kalevala so that the lessons that Koskela has for Sampo are your own lessons too. Not for nothing does Koskela say that "children who are cradled without gentleness, raised uncaringly, dragged up harshly, will not become intelligent, will never have the gift of wisdom, will never become men, even should they grow up strong and healthy and live for a hundred years."

Sampo's hunt for tracking his family give us a peek into Helsinki as it was in the early 1940s -- war ravaged

and grieving. Doctor Friari's recollections of his times in the city parallels Sampo's tale, and there we get a glimpse of the destruction that Civil War brought to Finland.

The novel's translation in English by Judith Landry seems to be beautifully done. (I say that even though I have not read the original Italian work.)

Of the three persons (the other two friends in Sampo's life are Doctor Friari and Koskela) with whom Sampo spends time to develop a friendship, the one with Ilma (a nurse in the hospital that Sampo lives) is the shortest: only one evening's meeting to really speak of. And yet, it is this meeting that should lead to something that keeps you going. Ilma has understood Sampo for what he is and wants to start a journey together. When Sampo says "let's sing all night" and Ilma joins, a spark is ignited. And when Ilma takes him to her tree of happy memories, you can't but get a feeling that the two are coursing down an evergreen road.

It is in discussion with Ilma again (or rather in the course of Sampo's reading of her letters) that the importance of a past comes up. Sampo had earlier declared it his purpose of hoping to recover some fragments of his past; Ilma says she is content to live a life free of the "ballast of memory". Are these divergent views then? I would think Sampo's obsession about trying to find his past goes beyond just satisfying his curiosity of discovering it. The past is also his link to find out what were his talents and skills, for without them how can he pride himself to be a man? It is then a nod to his self-esteem that he goes about his identity search till the point that he finds it a futile exercise.

And, again, it is Ilma's letters that make your heart heavy. That a soul could place so much trust and confidence in a new friend by just one evening's meeting speaks of Sampo's quiet charm and poise. You wish you could go back in time, and push Sampo to reply. Well, I don't know about you, but I would.

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## **Antonomasia says**

Feb 2014.

[4.5] A powerful little book (under 200 pages), intelligent, emotional and contemplative all at once in a very Continental way, that would have been best read in a few long sittings rather than in countless snippets between watching Olympic events on TV or whilst half asleep.

I've had this for about three years, vacillating: although I very much wanted to read another book about Finland, would an Italian author really give anywhere near so true a sense of the country as a local would?

Like *Lolita*, *New Finnish Grammar* begins with a professional's "introduction" outlining the protagonist's fate, so none of the following is as spoilery as it may sound. A man is found unconscious and badly beaten in Trieste in 1943, wearing a Finnish naval jacket name-tagged Sampo Karjaleinen. He is taken aboard a German hospital ship, where he is found to have amnesia and to be speechless, and is attentively cared for by a doctor, himself originally a Finn and who begins to (re)teach the man their presumed shared language before sending him (back) to Finland. There he is taken under the wing of a military chaplain with shamanic sympathies, who teaches him Finnish and folklore. The man's real name was Massimiliano Brodar; perhaps this is a reference to Kafka's friend and literary executor Max Brod, except that the role is reversed. Brod didn't follow Kafka's instructions, and here - although the doctor has already, with the very best of intentions, messed with Karjaleinen / Brodar's words and realises his terrible mistake - Brodar's papers are re-written as the novel to make them coherent and expressive.

You don't have to have read the *Kalevala*, have a certain amount of fascination with the linguistics of the stranger European languages and with Finland to read this... but it helps. (And in order to understand the opening scenes of rather a good film *The Cuckoo* set in Finland at the same time, I'd already read about the complicated Continuation War involving Finns, Russians and Germans.) In *New Finnish Grammar* there is quite a bit of conversation about the Finnish national epic, where the stories are well explained - an amnesiac is being told about it after all - but, not knowing it was there, I was really happy to have timed reading *New Finnish Grammar* less than a year after the poem. The ideas about its characters here were mostly a close match for those in the OUP introduction to the *Kalevala* and what I'd got from reading it; sometimes they were more beautifully expressed than in the translated epic. When I was a kid / teenager, I loved reading the Encyclopaedia Britannica articles about the history of languages. (Furthering this interest never really got off the ground because rather like visitors being the best incentive to expend limited energy and focus on tidying, I need the motivation of foreign travel for serious language learning post-school, and my health has been too poor... If a magic wand were waved and I was made perfectly healthy, travel, language learning, sports, restaurants and music lessons would crowd my spare hours to make up for lost time.) I was always most fascinated to read about non-Romance, non-Teutonic languages, and the languages of Northern and Eastern Europe, unusual ones like the Finno-Ugric family or obscure extinct ones like Tocharian. This blurred with an interest in the social and religious history of pre-Christian times in those bits of Europe which weren't in the well-known mythologies (Classical or Norse). And on reflection, I'm not sure I've seen anyone actually put that semi-mystical sense of ancient-ness and such fine detail about language in one place quite like this before - it felt perfectly natural to me as I'd sort of always seen it that way. This book could perhaps be less enjoyable if you don't joyfully geek out at the mention of types of noun case and verb forms which don't exist in English, wondering how different the world might be understood through Finnish.

- *The sounds of our language were around us, in nature, in the woods, in the pull of the sea, in the call of the wild, in the sound of the falling snow. All we did was to bend them to our needs.*
- *If we have two distinct words for east in Finnish, it is so as to avoid having to use the same word both for dawn, and for the direction from which the Slav invasions come.*
- *The Finn does not like the idea of a subject carrying out an action; no one in this world carries out anything; rather everything comes about of its own accord, because it must, and we are just one of the many things that might have come about. In the Finnish sentence the words are grouped around the verb like moons around a planet, and whichever one is nearest to the verb becomes the subject. In European languages the sentence is a straight line; in Finnish it is a circle, within which something happens.*

All presented as the idiosyncratic musings of one man, and wouldn't necessarily stand up to scientific dissection, but if you have sympathy with this sort of thing, it is lovely.

What do Finnish people think of all this? That was what counted. Using a lazy search for *diego marani suomi*, I found a few articles to stick in Google Translate. (The most useful ones are [here](#) and [here](#).) It sounds as though Marani has got the essence of the place right, though small details about how people regard historical figures (Mannerheim) could be questioned and there are some inaccuracies in actual Finnish phrases. The second piece says that the characters' voices are not sufficiently differentiated - this was the same in the English translation and was most noticeable in a set of directly quoted letters in the penultimate chapter. The doctor / "editor"'s own style could have made everything else sound similar - but not, plausibly, those.

Perhaps obviously from the plot, *New Finnish Grammar* is also a meditation on memory (specifically factual / intellectual recall from before his injury - Karjaleinen does not suffer from two of the other most distressing aspects of memory problems: his basic civilised social conduct is unaffected, and he is able to lay down new memories without difficulty) - and on how essential nationality and language are to a person's sense of identity. (Because I read the book in such a fragmented way, and because memory is a frequent subject in literary fiction - though rarely written about in such a lovely way - I sometimes found it a tad repetitive in the

middle.) These reflections were always beautifully expressed; earlier in the book I understood what was meant whilst wanting to quibble, then later the characters arrived at similar conclusions.

*New Finnish Grammar* is a beautiful and romantic account of terrible things; whilst it's not fantasy you couldn't quite call it realistic. In the more specific sense of romantic love, the narrative's attitude seems very Italian (or French), like nothing Nordic I've ever read.

Background knowledge did help, but given that I acquired most of that from reading easily accessible general encyclopaedias (old ones or Wiki), and that the novel explains things quite well, it's not really that obscure, or essential to enjoying the Marani's book.

In the past week or two I've been looking bookwise mostly at recent European fiction, and suddenly there are quotes from Nick Lezard everywhere (on this book, plenty of those I've been browsing, and some others I've had for a while and haven't read). I've rarely read his column ... presumably this is the sort of stuff he specialises in.

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### **Jessica says**

I recently finished a Booker Award finalist, *Snowdrops* by A. D. Miller. On the surface these two novels would seem to have little in common (other than they both take place in snowy regions), but in fact they're similar in that they both are most of all about place: Finland in this case; Moscow in Miller's novel. Place (as well as the Finnish language in this novel) is the central character and any story line is secondary to the place(s) described. Miller's novel has more narrative pull than this one, but it's not necessarily the better novel. This one is more original. That said, I needed more story line, more narrative drive; I wanted to be caught up in the novel more than I was.

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### **Zozetta says**

ἦνας ἦντρας που χῆνει τη μνῆμη και τη γλῶσσα του μετῶ απῶ ἦνα βαρῶ τραυματισμῶ κατῶ τη διῶρκεια του δεῶτερου παγκῶσμιοι πῶλεμου. ἦνας ενοχικῶς Φινλανδῶς γιατρῶς που πληρῶνει κρῶματα που δεν του ανῶκουν και βασανῶζεται απῶ τη νοσταλγῶα για τον τῶπο του, τον στῶλνει στη Φινλανδῶα πιστεῶοντας πῶς εῶναι συμπατριῶτης του εξαιτῶας κῶποιων ενδεῶξεων. ἦνας λουθηρανῶς πῶστορας και ταυτῶχρονα ἦνας απῶ τους τελευτῶους σαμῶνους που προσπαθεῶ να του διδῶξει τη φινλανδικῶ γλῶσσα και μῶσα απῶ αυτῶν τη κουλτῶρα ενῶς λαοῶ. Τῶλος, μια νοσοκῶμα που πιστεῶει πῶς ο ἦνθρωπος επιβῶνει μῶνο αν ἦχει την πολυτῶλεια ῶ την επιλογῶ του να ξεχνῶ.

ἦνα βιβλῶο ῶκπληξη για μῶνα. Μου τρῶβηξε το ενδιαφῶρον το πρωτῶτυπο του θῶματος αρχικῶ και ῶτσι ξεκῶνησα να διαβῶζῶ τις πρῶτες σελῶδες αν και δεν ῶξερα τῶποτα για τον συγγραφῶα. Δεν μπῶρεσα να το αφῶσω απῶ τα χῶρια μου αν και ῶκανα συχνῶ διαλεῶμματα για να σκεφτῶ τα θῶματα που πραγματεῶεται. Η μνῶμη, η γλῶσσα και ῶτι αυτῶ κουβαλῶ, η πατρῶδα, η ταυτῶτητα ενῶς ανθρῶπου και η ικανῶτητῶ του ῶ η ῶλλειψη ικανῶτητας να σχετῶζεται με τον κῶσμο, με το παρῶν και να χτῶζει ἦναν καινορῶγιο αληθινῶ (;) εαυτῶ ῶταν αυτῶ λεῶψουν. Πολλῶ αναπῶντητα ερωτηματικῶ αλλῶ αυτῶ εῶναι ακριβῶς τα στοιχεῶα που μου αρῶσουν σε ἦνα βιβλῶο.

ἴνα βιβλὸ το ὁποῖο εἶναι ἐκὸλα προσβῆσιμο μίας καὶ ὁ λῆγος μπορεῖ νὰ περιγράφεῖ σαν λιτῆς καὶ ἡ ἀφ᾽ ἡγήση γραμμικῇ. ἴνα βιβλὸ ἔχει τῶσο υψηλῆς λογοτεχνικῆς ἀξίας με τὴν κλασσικῇ ἡννοία, ἴμως ἴνα βιβλὸ πού ἔχει νὰ σου δῶσει καὶ τοῦ ὁποῦ οἱ ἰδῆς, υποψιζομαι, θὰ στριφογυρνοῦν γιὰ πολὺ καιρὸ στο μυαλὸ μου.

«...Ἐρχῆμαστε στο φῶς σε ἴναν καὶ μ᾽νο τ᾽πο καὶ μ᾽νο σ᾽αὐτ᾽ν ἀν᾽κουμε. Ὁ κοσμοπολῆτης πού πηδ᾽ ἀπ᾽ τὴ μίᾳ ταυτῆτητα στὴν ἄλλῃ ἴπως ὁ ἀκροβῆτης ἀπ᾽ σκοινὶ σε σκοινί, ἀργῇ ἢ γρηγορὰ θὰ κ᾽νέι λῆθος σε κ᾽ποία ἀπ᾽ τὶς λαβῆς τοῦ, καὶ τ᾽τε θὰ βρεθεῖ καταγῆς, καθηλωμῆνος κι ἐκεῖνος ἀπ᾽ τὴν ἀν᾽μνηση ἐν᾽ς σκονισμῆνου δρῆμου με τρᾶ-τ᾽σσερα σπιτῆκια. Ἀκ᾽μὴ κι ἐκεῖνος πού μίᾳ ζῶ ἰσχυρῆζεται πῶς δὲν ἔχει πατρῶδα, ἴταν πλησιῆζει ἡ ἴρα τοῦ θανῆτου ἀκοῖ το ξαφνικῇ κ᾽λῆσμα τοῦ τ᾽πού ἴπου ξεκ᾽νησαν ἴλα, ἴπου ξ᾽ρεῖ ἴτι τὸν περιμ᾽νουν. Ἐκεῖ καὶ μ᾽νο ἐκεῖ τὰ π᾽ντα μ᾽νουν π᾽ντα ἀναλλοῶτα, κ᾽θε μυρῶδι, κ᾽θε χρῆμα, κ᾽θε θ᾽ρυβὸς στὴ γν᾽ριμὴ θ᾽ση τοῦ. Καὶ μᾶζ᾽ μ᾽αὐτ᾽ ἐξαφ᾽νῆζεται κ᾽θε π᾽νος. Γιὰτ᾽ ἴταν ἡ ἀρχῇ καὶ τὸ τ᾽λὸς συναντιοῦνται, εἶναι σαν νὰ μὴν ἔχει συμβεῖ τ᾽ποτᾶ. ἴλα ἴταν ἴνα ἴνειρο μ᾽σα σ᾽ ἴνα ἴλλο ἴνειρο, κι ἴσως ὁ ἴνθρωπος νὰ εἶναι πλάσμῆνος νὰ ζεῖ μ᾽σα σ᾽αὐτ᾽.»

ΥΓ Στὰ plus γιὰ μ᾽νά, ἡ κ᾽ποία γν᾽ση πού ἀπ᾽κτησᾶ γ᾽ρῶ ἀπ᾽ τὴν κουλτοῦρα αὐτοῦ τοῦ τ᾽σο ἴγνωστου σε μ᾽νά λαοῦ. Ὁμολογῇ πῶς μετ᾽ τὴν ἀν᾽γνωση αὐτοῦ τοῦ βιβλῶου ἴρχισᾶ νὰ καταλαβαῖνῶ κ᾽ποία πρ᾽γμᾶτα , ἴπως π.χ. τὴ στ᾽ση αὐτ᾽ς τῆς χ᾽ρας στο Β᾽ Παγκ᾽σμιο Π᾽λεμο καὶ τ᾽ρα στὴν Εὐρωπᾶκ᾽ ἴνωση, λ᾽γο περισσ᾽τερο.

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## Emma Glaisher says

Didn't actually finish it, so my partner briefed me on the denouement. Good ending to a desperately tedious book. I wanted to like it. I love language, I'm interested in grammar, anyone with amnesia is potentially an interesting story. But... Sorry. I kept losing the will to live.

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## Doug says

More like a 2.5 ... the prose (even in translation) is very good, but the plot (and plodding climax) never lives up to the intriguing premise. Mainly I was bored and should have abandoned this early on, as I was sorely tempted to do. Might have worked much better as a short story than a bloated 187 pages.

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## Skorofido Skorofido says

Ρ᾽μα.

Λ᾽ω, λ᾽εῖς, λ᾽εῖ. Λ᾽ομεν, λ᾽ετε, λ᾽ουσι.

Ουσιαστικῇ τριτῇκλιτο.

Ὁ πατ᾽ρ, τοῦ πατρῆς, τῶ πατρῇ, τὸν πατ᾽ρα, ὦ π᾽τερ. Οἱ πατ᾽ρες, τῶν πατ᾽ρων, τοῖς πατ᾽ρσι, τοὺς πατ᾽ρας, ὦ πατ᾽ρες!

Ἀρχαιοελληνικῇ γραμματικῇ. Κι ἀν δυσκολεῖτηκα στο Γυμ᾽σιο νὰ προσθῶσῶ καὶ π᾽μπτὴ πτ᾽ση στο λεξιλ᾽γιο μου, φαντ᾽σου τ᾽ρα νὰ ἔχεις νὰ διαχειριστεῖς δεκαπ᾽ντε πτ᾽σεις στὴν

καθημερινότητ? σου. Η ?χρηστη πληροφορ?α του βιβλ?ου: η φινλανδικ? γλ?σσα ?χει δεκαπ?ντε πτ?σεις. Αυτ?ς και μ?νο ο λ?γος αρκε? για να μην περ?σω ο?τε ?ξω απ? π?ρτα φροντιστηρ?ου φινλανδικ?v.

Συνιστ? ψυχραιμ?α αδ?λφια! Δεν πρ?κειται για εγχειρ?διο γραμματικ?ς ? συντακτικο?. Πρ?κειται για ?να βαθ? αντιπολεμικ? βιβλ?ο που πραγματε?εται φιλοσοφικ? και υπαρξιακ? ζητ?ματα ?πως η απ?λεια μν?μης, το παρελθ?v και το παρ?v, η ?ννοια της πατρ?δας, το συλλογικ? γ?γνεσθαι, οι εθνικ? μ?θοι και η παντοδυναμ?α μιας γλ?σσας.

Η υπ?θεση ε?ναι μεγαλει?δης στην απλ?τητ? της. Εν μ?σω Δευτ?ρου Παγκοσμ?ου Πολ?μου, ο φινλανδικ?ς καταγωγ?ς Γερμαν?ς γιατρ?ς Π?τρι Φρ?αρι, βρ?σκεται αμαν?τι μ? ?ναν ‘ασθεν? – φ?ντασμα’. ?ναν ασθεν? βαρι? τραυματισμ?vο στο κεφ?λι που ?ταν ανακτ? τις αισθ?σεις του, ?χι απλ?ς ?χει αμνησ?α, αλλ? ?χει ξεχ?σει ακ?μα και τη μητρικ? του γλ?σσα. Μ?νο ?να ?νομα στο αμπ?χον? του, Σ?μπο Κ?ργιαλα?νεν (φτου σκουληκομυρμηγκ?τρυπα!) μαρτυρ? κ?τι απ? την ταυτ?τητ? του. Το παιδικ? τρα?μα του γιατρο? που ακ?μα αιμορραγε?, τον οδηγ? στο συμπ?ρασμα πως ο ασθεν?ς του ε?ναι Φινλανδ?ς. Γιατ?; Γιατ? κατ? β?θος ?τσι γουστ?ρει. Τον στ?λνει σο?μπιτο λοιπ?v στη Φινλανδ?α, ?χι με συνταγ?ς για φ?ρμακα αλλ? με συμβουλ?ς γραμματικ?ς. Πιστε?ει πως ε?ν ξαναμ?θει με π?θος τη μητρικ? του φινλανδικ? γλ?σσα, ο Σ?μπο θα ανακτ?σει τη χαμ?vη του μν?μη. Απρ?σμενος δ?σκαλος, ?νας λουθηραν?ς στρατιωτικ?ς ιερ?ας, ο Κοσκ?λα και μια μικρ? ν?τα στο μελαγχολικ? σκοτ?δι, η ?λμα, η ερωτευμ?vη νοσοκ?μα.

Δεν ε?ναι απ? τα βιβλ?α που διαβ?ζεις μονορο?φι. Ο?τε ε?ναι απ? τα βιβλ?α που αγωνι?ς για το τι θα γ?νει παρακ?τω. ?σα – ?σα ο γιατρ?ς Φρ?αρι απ? τις πρ?τες σελ?δες του βιβλ?ου μας προετοιμ?ζει πως ο ?ρωας μας δεν ε?χε και τ?σο καλ? τ?λος. Μην περιμ?vετε να σας πω και το τ?λος του. Ε?παμε πως ε?μαι spoiler skorofido αλλ? και τα spoiler ?χουν τα ?ρια τους. Ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο ας το πο?με ημερολογιακ?v (οι σημει?σεις του Σ?μπο) που διακ?πτεται απ? κ?ποιες μεταγεν?στερες σκ?ψεις του ιατρο? και με εμβ?λιμες μια – δυο επιστολ?ς της νοσοκ?μας. ?να βιβλ?ο στο οπο?ο κυριαρχε? μια βαρι? μελαγχολικ? ατμ?σφαιρα που αισθ?vεσαι να περπατ?ς στις λ?σπες του ανοιξι?τικου Ελσ?vκι ? μια μο?χλα που μπουκ?vει τα ρουθον?ια σου απ? το σκευοφυλ?κιο της εκκλησ?ας.

Οι γν?σεις του συγγραφ?α π?vω στην επιστ?μη της γλ?σσας ε?ναι εμφαν?στατες και προσωπικ?ς τις λ?τρεψα. Ε?ναι η γλ?σσα που επηρε?ζει τις σκ?ψεις μας, ε?ναι η γλ?σσα που μας διαμορφ?vει, ε?ναι η γλ?σσα που δημιουργε? την ταυτ?τητ? μας; (Πως τα λ?ω το ?τιμο σ?μερα!)

?να αποσπασματ?κι απ? τα πολλ? περ? γλ?σσας...

«Αντ?γραψα τα λ?για του Porilaisten marssi σχεδ?v χωρ?ς να τα καταλαβα?vω, σαν να ?ταν η μυστικ? συνταγ? κ?ποιου μαγικ? φ?λτρου, και γι’αυτ? μου φ?vηκαν ακ?μα πιο γοητευτικ?. Απ? ?λες τις λ?ξεις που ε?χα αποτυπ?σει με το μολ?βι στο τετρ?διο, αναρωτι?μουν ποιες ?ταν αυτ?ς που λ?γο πριν ε?χαν κ?vει τους στρατι?τες να κλ?ψουν. Το ?τι ?ταν πολεμικ?ς λ?ξεις ?ταν ολοφ?vερο. Υπ?ρχαν κ?τι μεγ?λες, γεμ?τες απανωτ? φων?εντα, με τα διαλυτικ? για κρ?vος και το h σαν τελαμ?vα περασμ?vη χιαστ?. ?λλες, πολ? σ?ντομες, ακρωτηριασμ?vες απ? αποστρ?φους, κουνο?σαν τα κολοβωμ?vα τους μ?λη στην ?δεια γραμμ?. Μερικ? κεφ?λα?α γρ?μματα υποδ?λωναν τ?πους δι?σημων μαχ?v που δεν τους ?ξερα. Αναγν?ρισα τη λ?ξη που υποδηλ?vει τη σημα?α, κι ?ταν αλ?θεια πως αν?μιζε πλαταγ?ζοντας αν?μεσα στα χε?λη.»

... κι επειδ? το Porilaisten marssi, κλασικ? πολεμικ? φινλανδικ? εμβατ?ριο, στα αυτι? του Σ?μπο ακο?γεται ως ερωτικ? θαρρε?ς κ?λεσμα, το ?ψαξα, το βρ?κα και σας το χαρ?ζω.



Στα μέσον, οι εκτενές σε κ?ποια σημεία αναφορές στη φινλανδική μυθολογία και στο δικ? τους «ομηρικ? ?πος». Εκεί με τον Β?ιναμο?νεν και τον Β?πουνεν και την παρθ?να της Π?χγιολα, το ?χασα εντέλ?ς, αλλά? χαλ?λι...  
?να επιπλ?ον «συν» η ιστορικ? σύγκριση φινλανδικ? λουθηρανισμ? και ελληνικ?ς ορθοδοξ?ας... το λες και μ?νι θεολογικ? μανιφ?στο...

Το λ?τρεψα αυτ? το βιβλ?ο, αν και φαντ?ζομαι πως σε πολλο?ς θα π?σει βαρ? στο στομ?χι...  
8,5/10 με ?λη μου την αγ?πη

<http://skorofido.blogspot.gr/2016/07/...>

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### MTK says

?νας στοχασμ?ς για το πως η γλ?σσα, η πατρ?δα και η προσωπικ? ταυτ?τητα λειτουργο?ν σαν συγκοινωνο?ντα δοχε?α στην ψυχ? εν?ς ανθρ?που.

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### rameau says

This reads more like a man's desperate attempt to make sense of a language, a culture, and a history behind them that is wholly different from his own, than it reads like a novel about an amnesiac man searching for an identity through a new language.

I appreciated the historical accuracy, but can only hope that the misspelled Finnish words are the translator's fault rather than the original author's. As I said in one of my status updates, it's good for linguistic laughs.

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### Neil says

*'You use words nicely, too,' she said. 'Now that you know it better, what is it that you most like about our language?'*

*'What do I like about it most?'*

*'Yes. A word, a phrase ...'*

*'Well, I know this may strike you as strange, but what I like is the abessive!'* I answered hesitantly.

*'The abessive? But that's a case, a declension!'* she shot back in amusement.

*'Yes, a declension for things we haven't got: koskenkorvatta, toivatta, no koskenkorva, no hope, both are declined in the abessive. It's beautiful, it's like poetry! And also very useful, because there are more things we haven't got than that we have. All the best words in this world should be declined in the abessive!'*

What a beautiful, sad book about loss, about the insanity of war, about the importance of love. And about the

importance of language.

A man is found barely alive after a terrible act of violence. He begins to re-build his life under the guidance of a doctor who only has a name label found in his jacket to go on. The name is Finnish and so is the doctor, so, because the man's trauma has stolen even his language, he begins to teach him Finnish to help him regain his memory and identity. Language is a mystery for a long time, but our hero moves to Finland and grows in his understanding. He befriends a priest who helps his understanding grow.

War happens. Love starts to happen. A sad story evolves.

It's not complicated. It's not fancy. But it is beautiful.

*In European languages the sentence is a straight line; in Finnish it is a circle, within which something happens.*

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## **Jim Elkins says**

### How to Write About Translation in a Monolingual Book

This book has a really tremendous idea: a man is badly injured; he can't remember who he is, and he has lost his capacity for language. His doctor decides the man is Finnish, because he has a Finnish name embroidered inside his shirt collar. The doctor is passionately Finnish himself, and some of the book is taken up the doctor's lessons in Finnish language and culture. The patient imagines that the words he is learning have resonance somewhere deep within his injured brain. Even though each word and idea is unfamiliar, the man assumes that he is slowly reconnecting to his fundamental identity. It turns out, in the end, that the man was Italian. He never learns that, but he does finally realize he is probably not Finnish. At that point, however, it's too late: his identity is broken in an unusual and interesting way -- he is entirely convinced that the sounds and feelings of Finnish words are woven into his essential sense of himself, and at the same time aware that those words really just float on the surface of whatever he was, or might still be. [See the comments by José, following this review, for more on the plot. I thank him for correcting several points I made.]

It's a great idea, with all sorts of implications for identity theory, language, and translation theory, and it fits with the ongoing fascination with stories of failed memory. It questions one of the common assumptions of identity theory in relation to language -- that the words, phonemes, and grammatical forms we learned as infants are deeply embedded in our nature, in our character. A seminar on structural linguistics could make good use of this book, and so could a seminar on translation theory.

The problem is that the author never quite figured out how someone with no language can contemplate the etymology of words or the poetry of myths when he can scarcely understand anything that is being said to him. Throughout the entire book -- all the way up to ten pages from the end -- the narrator is saying things like, "Once again, I did not understand it all, although I could not fail to see that it contained harsh words" -- this after an impassioned and extremely eloquent letter from a woman who had loved him. (p. 173) After a lengthy and detailed exposition of the Finnish epic Karevala, the narrator says simply, "I had at last managed to begin to make some sense" of the myths. (p. 126) The book is full of eloquent, articulate, detailed accounts of national character, history, literature, and language, which we read in full, but which the narrator can't really understand. Somehow, he reconstructs these wonderful speeches by memorizing entire sentences, and by pondering what had only seemed to him to be passionate random sounds.

It's such a pity that such a trivial, logical problem of narrative prevents this book from working as it should. It would have been easy, for example, to introduce another character who could hear and transcribe everything in detail, and then have the patient recall what he could of each speech. Oh well. Marani is a translator, and is full of wonderful ideas about language; I may read another of his books in future.

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## Despoina Despoina says

Β?ζω 3 ?χι γιατί? δεν ε?ναι ?να πολ? καλ? βιβλ?ο αλλ? γιατί? δεν με ενθουσ?ασε.  
Η υπ?θεση ε?ναι προβλ?ψιμη-στις πρ?τες 50 σελ?δες κατ?λαβα περ?που τι πρ?κειται να γ?νει.  
Οι πολ? καλ?ς στιγμ?ς του βιβλ?ου ε?ναι εκε? που ?ρες ?ρες γ?νεται ?να θαυμ?σιο λυρικ? πο?ημα π?νω στην Φινλανδικ? γλ?σσα. Στα πολ? καλ? του β?ζω επ?σης αυτ? την α?σθηση ασφυξ?ας, ησυχ?ας, μοναξι?ς και μελαγχολ?ας που κυριαρχε? σε ?λο το βιβλ?ο.  
Με κο?ρασαν τα κομμ?τια της μυθολογ?ας-δεν ?φταιγαν αυτ? αλλ? το δικ? μου γο?στο που βαρι?ται τους μ?θους.  
Γενικ?: Ιδια?τερο βιβλ?ο, πρωτ?τυπο. Θα γιν?ταν και καλ? ταιν?α-σαν να βλ?πω ?δη εικ?νες της μπροστ? μου.  
Δεν θα το σ?στηνα ε?κολα.

\* Το βιβλ?ο μου ?φερε πολ? ?ντονα στο νου την ταιν?α Η μυστικ? ζω? των λ?ξεων  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sec...](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sec...)

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## Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

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## Lisa says

It's taken far too long for this seductive book to be translated into English, and I'm not surprised that it has been shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize almost as soon as it hit the shelves in the English-speaking world. (What other treasures lie in store for us, I wonder, now that at last readers can source the kind of books they like from everywhere, not just limited to what local booksellers think they might like? Publishers are starting to realise that there is a world-wide market for books in translation at last!)

Diego Marani is an Italian Eurocrat, apparently one with a sense of humour. To divert himself from his work as a linguist for the EU in Brussels, he spoofs current affairs for a Swiss newspaper using his own invented language called Europanto. He is the author of six novels, but according to Stu at Winston's Dad, New Finnish Grammar is the only one to be translated into English. Let's hope we see more of them soon.

New Finnish Grammar is the story of a man's search for identity. Not the navel-gazing, coming-of-age or getting-older kind of identity that in my opinion tends to preoccupy too many authors at the expense of more significant issues, but an actual identity. He doesn't know who he is, and in the turmoil of war, neither does anyone else.

It so happens that he is found on the quay in Trieste, with near-critical head injuries, in September 1943. The

date is significant because this is when Mainland Italy was invaded by the Allies under Montgomery and the Italians signed an Armistice. Although Italy was then no longer a belligerent in the war, the Germans still occupied Trieste in the northeast near the border with Slovenia, and that is how a neurologist from Hamburg happens to be working there. (The Germans also continued to occupy other places in Italy, as all those of us who've read Captain Corelli's Mandolin will remember).

To read the rest of my review, please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2012/04/22/ne...>

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### **James Folan says**

oh, look. here's a letter from that pretty nurse I met recently in wartime Helsinki after losing my memory:

'Do you remember my tree in Kaivopusto Park? There are many ways of seeing it: you can regard it as a network of lymph vessels, of veins, of roots teeming with sap, linked up to a living nucleus which, through the breathing leaves, establishes and maintains a flow of matter between earth and sky, between inert matter and air. But you can also reduce it to a pure number, make it into a law of chemistry which governs the way things decompose and are transformed. In both cases, different though they are, that tree will still be something outside ourselves, something we are observing, something we know, perhaps, but with which we do not have any relationship. Establishing a relationship, that's what we're talking about: agreeing to move towards the other without taking possession of them, without making them conform to what we expect of them. That's what I'd like to do with you.'

er... no thanks, love.

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