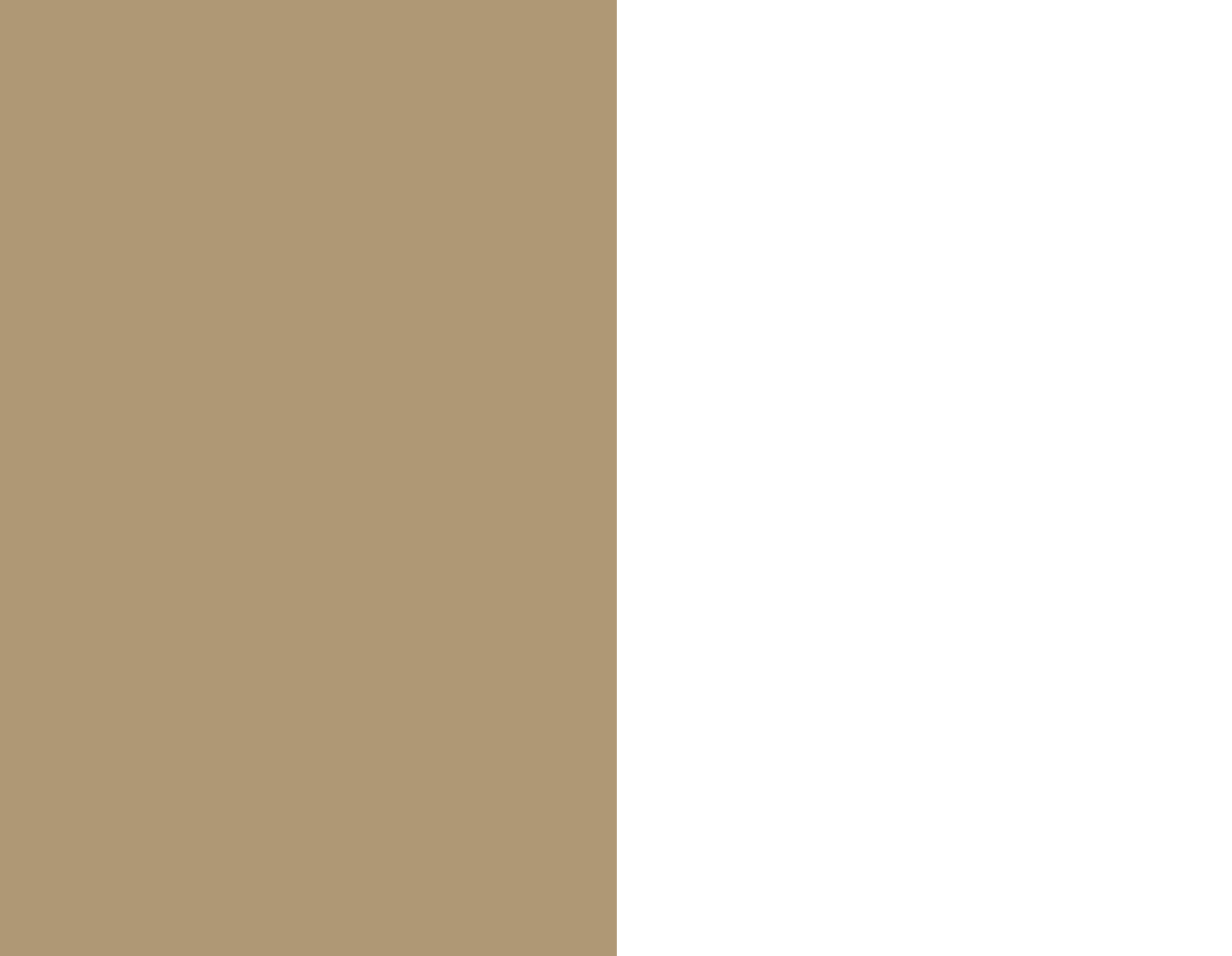


Four Finnish Stories

Carlos
Puente





Four Finnish Stories

Carlos
Puente



**Three Graves in
Helsinki
8**

***Ateenan aamu*
16**

***Juhannusyön
unelma*
24**

***Tempus amplius
non erit*
34**

Original Title: *Cuatro cuentos finlandeses*

© 2020, Carlos Puente Fernández (text and images)

© K. Bernhard 1951, Turku Museum Centre (image p. 34)

© Isidra Mencos (translation)

© 2022, Käräjäkivet (edition)

R. Barjona de Freitas n° 5, 1º Esq

4750-265 Barcelos, Portugal

Tel.: 96 736 60 98

info@karajakivet.com

www.karajakivet.com

1st editon: December 2020

2nd edition (revised edition): November 2022

ISBN: 978-989-33-4000-4

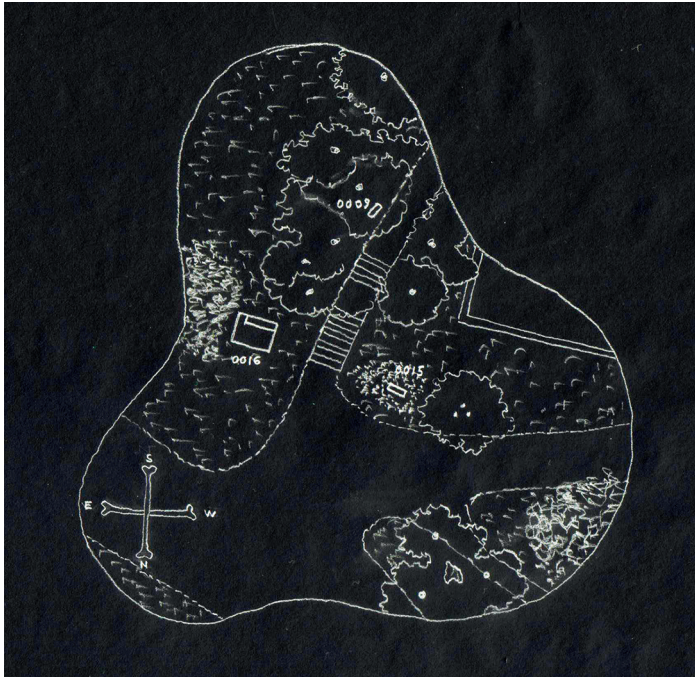
DL: 507558/22

The stories were written in Tampere, between October 2019 and April 2020 and in the same order that they were published.

Edited by Márcia Nascimento and Nuno Costa

Designed by Miguel Peixoto.

In memory of Javier Azofra
1942 - 2018



Three Graves in Helsinki

A Winter Story

In Helsinki's Hietaniemi Cemetery, Sector 21 houses illustrious tenants from the world of arts and letters. In three of the graves in that area—0009, 0015, and 0016—rest, accompanied by their wives, Mika Waltari, Tapio Wirkkala, and Alvar Aalto (the last by both his wives, Aino and Elissa).

Aalto's and Wirkkala's graves are close to each other, perhaps due to trade affinity; Waltari's not too far away.

Their shapes, and the way they present themselves to the stroller, differ quite a lot: classical and guarded Aalto's, rustic and feral Wirkkala's, modest and tidy Waltari's.

In the largest one, Aalto's, the inscription is engraved on a big white *pavonazetto* marble headstone. As in the architect's portrait painted by Roberto Sambonet, an intricate filigree of lines traverses the marble, which on the left side is cut into the profile of an amphora, bringing into view a dark stone that lines the back; in front of this emerging background, half an Ionic capital rises. The ensemble has the resolute will to not go unnoticed, and its stone proscenium stands ready to receive the homage of bouquets and crowns.

Wirkkala's, to the right if we look at the graves from the front, and hardly six meters from the other, erects, in precarious balance, a dark stone *crux commissa* that is the capital letter of its occupant's first name. Coarsely carved, stuck on the grass and surrounded during summer by a mob of small flowers in colorful disarray, its horizontal arm prevents the names carved on the vertical stone from strolling toward Lapland—at least Tapio's.

Between them, a sand path takes us to some steps that elevate us to higher ground where, to our left, we immediately find the Waltaris' grave. It's the smallest of the three. Its tombstone has a metal lantern as a companion (the path is dark in the world of the dead), and hostas, now dormant, as well as ferns, edge it. In the inscription, in capital letters, the ae's do without their horizontal rung and transport us to Egypt. Right in front, on the other side of the narrow path, Tauno Hannikainen conducts forever Sibelius's *Valse triste*.

The first two graves look to the north to blind us during our contemplation of them; the third, as could be expected, to the left bank of the Nile.

In the coldest and darkest nights of the dark and cold Finnish winters, surprising and little-known things tend to happen in this place, one of which I'm about to tell you.

There is no moon. There are no visitors either and, of course, there are no squirrels. It's 2 a.m. and the sky is greenish, just like when the Lady of Cold is about to appear in the Moominland Midwinter. Tove Jansson, by the way, also inhabits this cemetery, but she won't take part in our story.

In reality, the person who appears, leaving grave 0016 stealthily to avoid disturbing his wives, is Aalto; he walks (although I don't think this is the most appropriate verb to explain the displacement of a dead person), dressed as Tintin, up to grave 0015, where Wirkkala rests. He gives a little tap on the *tau's* hat, and Tapio appears right away, with trekking boots and smoking a

pipe. In the white whirlwind of his head, it's hard to distinguish hair from smoke.

A second later they are already sitting on the nearby steps that go to the Waltaris' grave. Right by them we see, without knowing how they have appeared, several bottles of *Finlandia* vodka and some *Ultima Thule* glasses. Aalto and Tapio are talking. Talking? Some will say that what sounds like voices is really only the light creaks of the frost, but I tell you they are talking. What are they talking about?

Aalto mentions how much better it is, in the long run, to be given an award for designing a vodka bottle instead of for making a flower vase, judging by the yield that, since Tapio arrived in the cemetery thirty-four years ago, they are getting from the stockpile of bottles the award granted him, especially during such inclement nights as tonight. Tapio comforts Alvar, reminding him of the spark of emotion he must have felt seeing the shape of the lakes from the air and imagining their transformation into glass. Aalto's face becomes dreamy. "Ah! Those airplanes..." Aalto was always more into flying; Wirkkala, however, as we would say in Spain, was from where the ox steps or, better said, from where the reindeer steps. How many icicles must have fallen on him during his treks! You can see them in the shape of his glasses.

They hardly ever speak about Finnish architecture and design, and if they have ever spoken of it, I will not replicate their opinions here. I will only say that Alvar grumbles a little when the subject of the wooden cage where his boat is shut away in Muuratsalo comes up, or when Tapio asks him, with a wry smile, about the neighbors that are rising in the south side of Park Töölönlahti. Other than that, most of their relaxed chats are about the Mediterranean when Aalto sets the tone, or about the tundra at the border with Norway when Wirkkala takes the lead; after the third drink, Wirkkala needs to be restrained so he won't run away to fish for thymallus and roast them in a skewer. In the last few years, he has also been very excited about two young Lusitanian architects who have resurrected (what a word

to use in a cemetery!) the idea of Urho Kekkonen's memorial in Saivaara; however, even though in his current situation he is not in a hurry anymore, everything goes so slowly...

All of a sudden, the faint but growing murmur of a psalmody joins our two characters' voices: *"I, Sinuhe, the son of Senmut and of his wife Kipa, write this. I do not write it to the glory of the gods in the land of Kem, for I am weary of gods..."* Aalto and Wirkkala turn around to see how, unhurried, sliding on the stairs without touching the steps, arrives Mika Waltari. He is in a dark velvet robe with light-colored trim, a white silk scarf at his neck, and Moorish slippers. It may seem like a scarcely suitable attire for the climatological circumstances, but we need to keep in mind that Aten heats up a great deal.

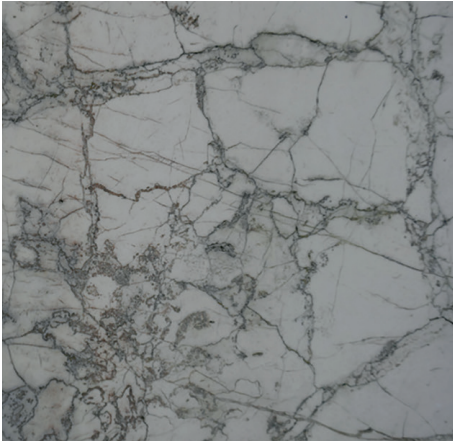
Alvar and Tapio welcome their neighbor, and as good hosts, making room for him between them, they offer him a drink. No, they do not have Egyptian beer from the Eighteenth Dynasty, nor do they have *Chartreuse*, but they do have vodka. After he accepts it, they let him go on with his monody.

"... why shouldn't we drink wine and be happy in the place the river has brought us to? For it is a beautiful place and we are hidden by the reeds. Storks are crying among them, and I see others flying with outstretched necks to build their nests; the waters gleam green and gold in the sunlight, and my heart is as arrowy as a bird now that I am freed from slavery..."

Time passes slowly and more than a bottle has already gone down. Aalto, who has been showing signs of impatience for a while, can't contain himself any longer and says, "Mika, skip all this boring pharaonic intonation and go straight to the middle of the book, where you speak about Crete."

And then Waltari, his gaze lost in some spot where a light that could melt all the ice in Finland shines, recites:

"Nowhere in the world, then, have I beheld anything so strange and fair as Crete, though I have journeyed in all known lands.



Marble of Alvar Aalto's grave

As glistening spume is blown ashore, as bubbles glow in all five colors of the rainbow, as mussel shells are bright with mother of pearl..."

Alvar and Tapio open their mouths so wide that the latter loses his pipe.

"Their art is strange and wayward. Every painter paints as the fancy takes him, heedless of rules, and he paints only such things as in his eyes are beautiful. Vases and bowls blaze with rich color; round their sides swim all the strange creatures of the sea. Flowers grow upon them, butterflies hover over them, so that a man accustomed to an art regulated by convention is disturbed when he sees the work and thinks himself in a dream..."

Tapio springs up, snaps his fingers, raises his arms in a cross (*commissa*), and starts to dance a full-blown *sirtaki*.

"...Buildings are not imposing like the temples and palaces of other countries, convenience and luxury being the aim rather than outward symmetry. Cretans love air and cleanliness; their lattice windows admit the breeze..."

Alvar joins the dance.

Hours go by. It's past 8 a.m. A sort of blurry brightness can be glimpsed in the southeast. The three figures and their bottles and their glasses are dissolving in the air like a hazy mist. But their whispers ...The whispers stay there; they tangle up on the stones of the graves, they hang from some tree, and if you go to this cemetery and listen attentively, even on a summer day, you may hear a word, or a sentence...



The "scenary" in a winter morning. Aalto, Wirkkala and Waltari graves

Ateenan aamu

A Fall Story

Mid-morning of a bleak and rainy thirteenth of October, I was walking indecisively along a sidewalk on Mechelininkatu in Helsinki, by the stone wall of the Hietaniemi cemetery. I had gone all the way there with the purpose of enjoying the fall colors, which would be at their peak in this place of repose. The persistent rain, however, was making me question my intentions.

At number seven on this street, close to where I was, stands the Perho restaurant. I decided to pop in to have an espresso and dawdle some time away to see if the day would clear up. This restaurant, with a small, cozy cafeteria in the lobby, is on the ground floor of a lovely building that Aarne Ervi designed as a cooking school in the fifties; it acquired some prominence in a 1961 Finnish movie entitled *Kaasua, komisario Palmu!*, the script of which was based on Mika Waltari's novel *Who Murdered Mrs. Skrof?*

Nowadays, at least in Spain, few people remember Waltari; his *Sinuhe* went out of fashion, and the rest of his very plentiful literary production (scarcely known in my country), including the Inspector Palmu novels, even further out of fashion; in the fifties, however, he collected substantial royalties for his Egyptian novel. The editor Rafael Borràs tells fun anecdotes in his *Memorias* about the writer's ethylic fondness during his trips to Barcelona



Hietaniemi in the fall

for getting paid in cash, from José Janés's hand, the earnings that Sinuhe accrued.

Going back to the movie: in it, the outlandish murderer is an artist who occupies the attic of the building where I found myself, fulfilling that unwritten law of cinema that states that murderers, especially if they are neurotic, must live in apartments that are canonically modern (sometimes, especially in the most recent cinema, they also listen to the *Goldberg Variations*). This circumstance (of being modern) led to the graceful spiral staircase designed by Ervi being seen from the street in several scenes through a large picture window.

So, there I was in the setting of Palmu's investigations, with Mika Waltari, Joel Rinne (the actor who played Inspector Palmu on the screen), and Aarne Ervi buried scarce two hundred and fifty meters away.

As I finished my espresso, the rain persisted and even, at times, intensified. I left Perho and walked back to the cemetery gate closest to the Old Chapel. I went in.

Given the weather, there was no sign of visitors, and fall welcomed me, as I had expected, in all its splendor. The trees still kept part of their foliage and the leaves that had fallen had spread out, covering paths and flower beds like a carpet. Well, not all of them; ruining a scene that could have been perfect, from time to time a gardener, donning his waterproof suit and big headphones, gathered mountains of dried leaves with one of those hellish leaf blowers that have replaced old rakes.

Since I wasn't in a hurry and didn't have a set plan, I started by strolling around the south side of the cemetery, by Lapinlahdentie. There, five severe parallelepipeds of gray granite, like five parallel fingers, mark the graves of the Engel family, including that of the great architect Johann Carl Ludvig Engel, who is partly responsible for Helsinki being what it is. Being so close to the fence, it seems as if the deceased hopes to be reinstated at his work any minute.

I then walked toward the north to visit Tove Jansson; her grave, on the other side of the chapel, wasn't very far away. I remembered that it has on it a naked child who is balancing on a ball with his little fists up high. This bronze sculpture rests on a small red granite monolith on which the name of the writer and illustrator is engraved. The ensemble sits on a bed of dark pea gravel surrounded by a small ceremonial circle of stones: a miniature *kärjäkivet*. Inside this circle, I also remembered, are some flower vases and several candle holders.

As I approached the grave, I saw that in addition to dried leaves having joined the composition, an odd new element was leaning against the monolith. I didn't realize it was an open book until I got close. I crouched down to look at it and noticed a small plush Moomintroll, barely ten centimeters in size, that was keeping watch by it. The reader will remember that it was raining; it was raining heavily; therefore, you can imagine the condition of the book and its guardian. It was a Russian book titled *Fairy-tale Stories of Scandinavian Writers*, published in Moscow in 1987, that includes three of Tove's stories: *Comet in Moominland*, *Magic Winter*, and *The Magician's Hat*. The book was open to page 284, precisely where that third story starts. If you remember the tale, the Moomintroll find a magician's hat and they take it home, unaware that it would cast a spell over the whole Moomin Valley, setting the stage for all kinds of strange happenings... Well: as I was looking, intrigued, at this unusual scene, a sort of mysterious and faraway ringing, which in places reminded me of a Mozart glockenspiel, added to the sound the rain made on my umbrella; it seemed to come from the New Area, and, my curiosity piqued, I set off toward it.

Going round and round following that magical sound, which I sometimes lost only to find it again, even more intense, I finally made it to Kaj Franck's grave, or, better said, to the Ahrenberg family's, where it seemed to originate. A small obelisk, also of red granite, bears the names and dates of birth and death of the grandfather, the grandmother, an uncle, an aunt, the mother (née Ahrenberg), and, already on the base, closer to the ground, those of Kaj and his sister, the last to pass away. The inscriptions,

ordered from top to bottom in a rigorous chronological heap, seemed written with lichens. A rhododendron with perennial leaves formed the backdrop, and a cloak of dried maple leaves completed the scene. There was no trace of the origin of the delicious carillon, which kept ringing at the wind's whim.

Suddenly, as if the background and the figure on a Rubin's vase underwent a slight displacement among the tender green of the lichens, the yellow of the maple leaves, and the intense green of the rhododendron, what had been there from the beginning but I had not been able to see revealed itself to me: halfway between an old illustrated edition of *Robinson Crusoe* and a Papageno who seemed to have changed his feather suit for one made with leaves and his cage for a see-through umbrella with the glass clusters of his *Ateenan aamu* hanging from it and producing that cheerful and mysterious ringing, the figure of Kaj Franck moved.

The minor initial shift became a resolute walk and, since he seemed to disregard me, I decided to follow him. He went down the main path and, taking a left turn, began to walk happily, despite the weather, as if he was strolling in Santorini on a summer morning. We went past some of the weatherproofed gardeners, but between the never-ending rain and the noise of the leaf blowers they were minding their own business: what I mean is that they didn't care about listening to bells.

There we went, Kaj paving the way in an unhurried and jingling walk and me behind him, when I thought I saw, far away around sector 21 A where illustrious artists rest, a figure wearing only a dark bathing suit and carrying out exaggerated moves, which I'm not sure if I should define as gymnastic or dance-like; he raised each leg, now one, now the other, until his foot was at the level of his head.

As we got closer, I realized with astonishment that it was Alvar Aalto who was performing that sort of *aurresku*. I deduced that he was doing it in honor of Kaj or his small bells because when we were in front of him, he ended the dance and, with his left

hand on his chest, bowed ceremoniously from the waist to my companion. From that moment, they began a conversation from which I was excluded. (This made me think that the interest the living have in the dead is not reciprocated, something I find very wise of them.)

Aalto was saying that he had heard a sound similar to bells from early morning, and though at first he attributed it to his neighbor Selim Palmgren, who, to be in sync with the times, might be rehearsing *Sadepisaroita*, he soon realized those notes had a more southern character; therefore, he could not resist putting on swimming trunks and welcoming the day with some salutary exercise. No; Tapio was not there, he said, answering Kaj's question; he had left for Saivaara. Kaj nodded, smiled, and jiggled his portable vitreous *campanile* because he knew his friend got pleasure from it. After discussing some issues of current Finnish design better left undescribed, they bid farewell affectionately, and Kaj—and I after him—walked up the steps that ascend between Aalto's and Wirkkala's graves.

A few meters later, we ran into a small commotion in front of Mika Waltari's grave. (Even though there were only three figures gathered there, we can call it such due to the narrowness of the path.) Mika, his neighbor Tauno Hannikainen, and Inspector Palmu (that is, Joel Rinne, who, incidentally, had strayed quite far from his sector), were making guesses about the strange buzz of little bells that wafted in the air that morning. While Mika noted the possibility that they had run into a new case for the inspector, Tauno, with his staved notebook, studied the structure of the notes that he caught on the fly.

When they saw us materialize or, better said, when they saw Kaj materialize with his vitreous rattle (as it seemed I was invisible to the inhabitants of that place), Palmu, who was already rejoicing because of Mika's suggestion, seemed very disappointed to see that, with Kaj's apparition, his case had disappeared. Tauno wanted to know in which key the instrument was tuned, and Mika, forgetting his previous conjectures (though not entirely his fondness for detective novels), asked, without addressing

anyone in particular, if what Kaj carried was a percussion or wind instrument, adding, without waiting for an answer, that in any case that glass was magic like the one the Babylon priests used to increase the volume of objects, and it also looked as soft as Nefernefernefer's bosom. After this discourse, he pulled out of his sleeve a two-reed oboe and, following the bells' rhythm, took some solemn and Akhenatenic steps to invoke the favor of the harvest gods. Meanwhile, Palmu remained crestfallen and Tauno, singing to himself, jotted notes in his notebook.

While I contemplated with awe this extravagant concert, I got distracted for a moment when I realized that I didn't need an umbrella anymore since it had stopped raining. After I closed it, I saw with a light shock that I was alone, in the middle of a silence broken only by the distant sound of the leaf blowers. Kaj, Mika, Palmu, and Tauno seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Pensive, and fascinated by what I had seen and heard, I left the cemetery, walking slowly through the same gate I had come in through.

Some may think that what I've narrated is just a fantasy produced by contemplating the rain from behind the glass of the window as I savored my espresso and remembered Inspector Palmu's movie. Others may believe it's the result of a pleasant nap. But my advice is that if you ever go by Hietaniemi, even when it doesn't rain, remember *The Magician's Hat*. Then, if you pay very close attention, you may have the good fortune, as I did, of hearing the bells of an Athena's morning in Helsinki.



Juhannussyön unelma

A Summer Story

Jyväskylä, June 22, 2019

“Today, on this island, a miracle happened.” Thus begins *The Invention of Morel*, and thus I could begin this story, changing “Today” to “Yesterday.”

The plot of Bioy Casares’s novel, which Borges characterized as perfect, uses that resource beloved by Chesterton, which consists of making us believe that we are witnessing a supernatural phenomenon, only to reveal at the end that the artifice underlying the narration, even though fantastic, is the product of scientific ingenuity. Bioy uses the word “miracle” as a camouflage; in my case, as you will see, I would have to use it in the literal sense.

I could also open this narration with a kettledrum bang, as Dickens does in *A Christmas Carol*, revealing an indisputable truth: “Aalto was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.” Of course, he doesn’t say “Aalto” but rather “Marley”; aside from that, it’s the same thing.

Yet, was that an indisputable truth in this case?



It's best I explain what happened, and the reader will judge.

Between 1952 and 1954, Alvar Aalto builds a house in Muuratsalo. He calls it *Koetalo* (Experimental House), a name that expresses only a half truth. Nowadays, visits to this house are managed by the foundation that bears the architect's name. Perhaps due to the climate and for the convenience of architecture-loving tourists, it's open to the public only from the first day of June to mid-September on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, except on Saint John's Eve if it falls on a Friday, as happened this year. The visit is by appointment (and for a fee), scheduled via internet, and it starts at one thirty; at that time you have to be at the threshold of the property, where visitors are welcomed.

Since I arrived in Finland, I'd been there twice, both times this spring, on the second and third of June. I left early by bus from Tampere to Jyväskylä, where I took another bus that went back southward for fourteen kilometers, jumping from island to island over Päijänne Lake and traversing Säynätsalo and Lehtisaari until it arrived in Muuratsalo.

The route ends at a roundabout by the small café *Table en Bois* in the northeast of the island, where the sparse local population is scattered. An open field with two soccer goals and a playground indicate that this place, in addition to being "base camp" for architects on a pilgrimage, serves as the social center of the area. From there, you set out on the last stage of the journey, walking about five hundred meters on a road that first climbs westward and then turns south. Soon a wooden fence that's recognizably Aaltian appears on your right, and a little later, a gate.

On my previous visits, as I returned to Tampere in the evening, I reflected on the particulars of the day: the oddness of the sauna; the fate that awaited the plants and fruit trees that had been Paul Olsson's responsibility; the peculiar "foundation" of the guest wing; the acrobatic construction of the shed that, like an appendix detached from the body, extends the house even farther toward

the southeast; and, with an almost archeological curiosity, the mystery of the curvilinear graphics that appear in some blueprints past the aforementioned shed. These graphics are as strange as the drawings that Poe traced on the last pages of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Aalto described the graphics perfunctorily in his 1953 piece for *Arkkitehti* as "*brick buildings freely formed and an experiment with solar heating*." I thought there must be something that escaped me or that I hadn't paid close enough attention to during my visits; something, in short, in which the mystery that this place radiated must be hidden and that the things I've already mentioned didn't explain.

For this reason, the thought of seeing the house in solitude seized me. As Saint John's Eve fell on a Friday this year and therefore there would be no visitors, why not go on that precise date? Although the idea seemed harebrained from the get-go, I couldn't cast it aside. I was aware that clearing the gate was not at all difficult, but I didn't know if there were security cameras. Although I didn't believe it was likely, this was just intuition that I strove to turn into certainty, reasoning that this type of measure was unnecessary in a country such as Finland, where nobody would be so crazy as to infringe a norm when doing so would yield so little benefit. In contrast to this sole doubt, everything else about the plan felt exhilaratingly attractive, beginning with the special nature of the date, the summer solstice; it made me feel as if I were Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief*.

By the nineteenth I had made my decision, and on the twenty-first, *de bon matin*, I sat out from Tampere toward *Table en Bois*. In the movie, the adventures of *Le Chat* took place at the *Côte d'Azur*, so my French café destination enhanced my feeling of being a white-gloved thief.

I decided to spend the day in Jyväskylä (since I didn't need to make it to my destination by one thirty this time) and stay there that night (I say "night" out of habit, even though in Finland the word is not apropos during the summer). I took advantage of the day to visit the Aalto Museum and the university (I was an Aaltian pilgrim, after all). When I arrived in Muuratsalo in the late

afternoon and got off the bus, I set off down the road without stopping first at the café to avoid arousing suspicion, lest they think I was a tourist with his schedule mixed up. This time no one, either visitors or guide, waited by the gate. As I had foreseen, it was easy to trespass.

I go in. The narrow path runs among pine, birch, alder, and mountain ash trees and goes down toward the lake, its route designed to make the visit more comfortable; even so, in some sections rocky outcrops have made the use of wood planks necessary to walking without risk. Since 1998, when the shed where Aalto's boat is kept was built, the road splits into two forks right away; the left one goes directly to the house; the right one to the boat and the sauna. This is the one that guided tours take and the one I take now. I arrive where the boat is, by the lake. The gate that opens to the shed/pantheon is closed, naturally, but through the light larch-wood lattice I can see the *Nemo Propheeta in Patria* inside.

I stroll calmly by familiar places: the lakeshore, the reedbeds, the piers. I keep going until I get to the sauna. I go around it and it arrests me with its indelible smoke scent and its lesson that the best structures are built in the mind before they make it to the drawing board; that's why Aalto's sketches very often are little more than blots.

I walk now toward the house. Even though it seems inevitable to mention Pompeii when you talk about it, I think it is, more than anything else, an unfinished castle, perched on a nonexistent mountain, built by a mature, lovestruck, and wise Italian prince, and the tapestry that embellishes the facade of this castle's patio is part of the wedding gift for his young princess. Aalto fills up the place with the plants she likes.

I enter the atrium, where the *Aristolochia* climbs exuberantly over the lattice of the westerly wall. I fondle the patchwork of the walls. In the center, the hole of a firepit and its grill retain

traces of soot. I stroll around the guests' pavilion and the tight-rope-walker shed. I keep walking where the mysterious "experimental" remains should be: there are only trees. I think that if the house is Dr. Jekyll, all these additions, including the sauna, are Mr. Hyde. I then climb to a rocky vantage point close to the southeast angle of the house that substitutes for the missing tower of the castle. From there, I inspect the roofs blanketed with pine needles; the shed's roof is covered with moss. I turn my back to the buildings and ponder the thoughts that brought me here, my unfocused gaze on the lake. I check the time: it's ten o'clock. The last bus for Jyväskylä leaves at eleven; I still have time, but the truth is, I haven't solved anything.

Suddenly the flickering of a golden sparkle in the water captures my attention. Instinctively I turn my head, and my heart skips a beat: from the house's patio the brightness of a fire rises. It's normal that it comes from the patio, where there's a spot especially for that purpose. It's not so normal that it's there when the house should be empty. It occurs to me: it being Saint John's Eve, is it possible that the foundation has organized a private party? Crouching (or, more accurately, lying down on the rock), I watch. A few minutes later, I see people arriving from the west: five or six people, at least, are walking toward the house. I can't make them out clearly, but I think there's something odd about their clothing that I don't know how to make sense of. I begin my descent with care, keeping my distance, and stop when I can position myself to the front of the patio and be shielded by a rock. Now I can see the group of people, men and women, who seem to chat animatedly, some standing, others sitting around a low table set over trestles in front of the large window. Since they are still far away and I can't hear them, I feel like I'm watching a mute film whose background music is the crackle of the fire, stoked by someone who looks like...

I remember that I have with me a camera: it will allow me to observe the scene without risk. I don't even think of pressing the shutter because a flash of light might give away my presence; in my favor is the fact that they must be blinded by the flames interposed between us, which reach almost two meters in height.

I focus on the fire; the telephoto lens brings it so close that I myself am blinded. My eyes get used to it. Now the flames illuminate clearly the person who's stoking the fire... Alvar Aalto!

My heart doesn't skip beats any longer; I rather believe that it may stop altogether. I put down the camera and rub my eyes. I keep them closed for a few infinite seconds. I open them again and nothing has changed. Or yes, it has: now nobody is by the fire. I look again through the camera at the group in front of the large window. Nothing can shock me anymore: in addition to Aalto, I see Göran Schildt, Mona Schildt, Maire Gullichsen, Maija Heikinheimo, Elissa Aalto, Carola Giedion, and Sigfried Giedion. Aalto is now near Giedion and he seems to be telling him something important, judging by how attentively he's listening to him. Now I understand what puzzled me about their outfits when I couldn't yet distinguish their faces: these are the clothes they wear in the photographs from the fifties that I'm familiar with. What's happening to me? In what time do I find myself?

If the clothes they're wearing come from the fifties, have I traveled in time like Wells's character? He traveled to the future; did I travel to the past? The only machine I've traveled in is city bus number 16, and I'm not aware of having fainted "as a whirlwind of copper and ivory shining weakly" during the trip. Furthermore, I didn't set off from a lab, but from a bus stop in Vapaudenkatu at Jyväskylä. But the fact is, here I am, terrified that I'll be discovered by beings from another time.

I look at my watch and, even though the last few minutes have seemed to last for ages, only fifteen have passed since this "incident" began. Now Aalto is back in front of the embers with an enormous grill, on which a crucified salmon is offered in sacrifice. He has gone farther back in time, from renaissance prince to Etruscan haruspex.

I have to leave this place, though whether to be at my time travel machine by eleven or to drink a vodka I don't know. I start off to my right and walk between the guest wing and the aerialist shed. In Wells's book, the Time Traveller brought two flowers

from the future; I crouch to grab a handful of moss from the past. I keep walking toward the sauna; I pass it and leave it behind, and I reach the nautical pantheon, which is still in its place.

A thought as banal as it is incongruous hits me like a hammer: the boat's place in the fifties must have been the water! A shiver runs down my spine. At the same time, as if the proof that collapses the theory of travel to the past was accumulating to require another, more terrible, theory, I see to my left, at scarce ten meters and by the water, the figure of Aino Aalto. She wears a sort of kimono, deep blue with white cherry blossoms. Her sorrowful face reminds me of Dido in Tiépolo's fresco at Villa Valmarana and of Purcell's Aria: "*When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create no trouble, no trouble in thy breast. Remember me, remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.*"

I am surrounded by dead people who don't respect chronology! What began as an exciting adventure is on track to transform me into a scalded *Le Chat*. I don't want to be the last person leaving this Finnish "Salamanca's Cove," to which I came to learn: we know the dangers inherent in it. Yet, in spite of the terror that overwhelms me, I don't know if it's Aino's grief or the pain of Dido's pure farewell in Purcell's opera that echoes in my head and makes me take pity on this Carthage queen who mourns in front of me while her Aeneas is busy eating salmon (provided the dead can eat). I feel an irrepressible urge to approach and comfort her. I look down to see where to place my feet on this uneven terrain, and when I make it to where she should be, I see only a *Rana arvalis* that, like the one in Basho's haiku, reaches the lake with a jump: plop!

Now my flight is disorganized but vertiginous. I get to the road. I walk down to *Table en Bois*. I see the bus, which is not a time travel machine anymore but only number 16, in the middle of an eerie desolation. It's eleven o'clock. I board the bus at the last minute and almost jump when, as I'm asking for the ticket, I think I see in the driver the architect Francisco Alonso de Santos, who, from the dimly lit cabin, with his white lion-like mane upswept in a Finnish-style bun and a smile that transforms his eyes into

two wise Confucian slits, seems to ask me: "Do you understand now?" In the Tarot, number 16 is the Tower card: I'd rather not think about what it symbolizes because, if I'm not in a time travel machine, I may very well be in Charon's boat.

We take off. In Lehtisaari no one is in the bus stop; the bus goes by without stopping and my restlessness grows. We advance silently in the ghostly light of solstice. Fortunately, in Säynätsalo we pick up a group of cheerful, singing youth. When we arrive in Jyväskylä and I get off the bus, I glance at the driver, who doesn't look like anybody I know anymore; feeling calmer, I head for the hotel.

In the room, I open the fridge and find a small bottle of *Koskenkorva*. I gulp it down and, exhausted from all my emotions, lie down on the bed.

When I get up after a few hours of restless sleep full of nightmares, I write down, as faithfully as possible, what happened yesterday in Muuratsalo.



The reedbeds

Tempus amplius non erit

A Spring Story

*Dainos, Señor
un alpendre de sombras e de luar
para cantar.
E un carreiriño de vagalumes
polas hortas vizosas do teu reino.¹*

Aquilino Iglesia Alvariño

As a child, I spent some summers at my maternal grandparents' house in Galicia, on the banks of the river Sor. The house doesn't exist anymore, and the place is barely recognizable. In addition to the memories, I keep a photograph from the summer of 1954. I know that was the year because all the women in it, including my mother, are dressed in black: the year before, in December, my grandfather had passed away. Therefore, I was nine years old, or I had just turned ten. But the story I want to tell is about something that happened before that, when my grandfather was still alive and I was small enough that my grandmother, who

1. Give us, Lord
a porch of shade and light
to sing in.
And a path of fireflies
in the lush vegetable gardens of your kingdom.



Erik and Carin Bryggman,
1951

was a strong woman around sixty, would sometimes carry me on her back inside a basket made of chestnut wood when she went to cut grass for the cattle. I would ask my grandfather for the four hammers to play with; I guess they were all the hammers in the house. This might have happened around 1948 or 1949.

The fact is that one night that summer, when we were at home and ready to go to bed by the light of the oil lamps, we heard a child's voice calling from the path: *¡Josefa! ¡dígame a Carlitos que baixe, que nunca tal veu!*² Josefa was my mother, I was Carlitos, and the one demanding my presence was a friend of mine who lived in a neighboring house. I went down and that child, whose name I don't remember, opened his little hand in the darkness of the path, in front of my expectant face, and there it was, primeval, the miracle he wanted to show me: a firefly, which he put in the palm of my hand. Then he took me to a place farther from the house, where the path was edged by brambles and the darkness was awash with a constellation of those small and marvelous lanterns. It was true that Carlitos, in his short life, had never seen anything like it.

What part of this is my memory and what part is the memory of words from my mother's mouth in the following years I don't know. In any case, it doesn't much matter, because it has become my reality. Ghosts exist, without a doubt. Why wouldn't we believe in them if they are a part of our life?

*And like this insubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.*

William Shakespeare

I see on the clock at the station in Tampere that it's a quarter to six in the morning when I board the train to Turku. Today, the fifth of April of 2020, marks one hundred years since Carin Bryggman, daughter of Erik Bryggman, was born in this city. Soon after the trip starts, the silence, the half-light of the carriage, and the darkness outdoors introduce me to a haunting dream.

Unsurprisingly, given the terrible days we live in, the first image that appears in front of me is related to death. It's from an afternoon last year. A group of friends get together to remember Javier Azofra, who died at the end of 2018. In a moving moment, Paco Alonso, in secret complicity with the absent, recites a poem by Miguel Ángel Velasco. The last verses say:

*...porque sois, espirales, / el timón de la vida, os invocamos, /
para prender nuestra viruta leve / al fiel tirabuzón del universo.*³

As I recite these words in my mind, the swiveling image of a barber shop's tricolor cylinder rises from the darkness like a spark, the red braid and the blue braid ascending ceaselessly. I approach this deceitful vertigo and, sucked in by it, instantly find myself inside a barrel at the screw of Poe's *maelstrom*. Terrified, I see at the bottom of the barrel a frothy Charybdis, who threatens to swallow me. Before things get uglier, my brain, with an accurate turn of the rudder, transforms the *maelstrom* into the cyclone in *The Wizard of Oz*—the cinematographic version. It's swiveling too but, from my point of view, less aggressive (I'm not too keen on water). Inside the cyclone, the barrel has become a bed. Just like Dorothy's bed in the movie, it sits by a window that looks suspiciously similar to the train's window that I was looking out before I fell asleep. I lean out and, mixing plots in a disconcerting way, without leaving Dorothy's traveling bed, I now inhabit a Carson McCullers story. We overtake an Airedale terrier, who runs backward, and it's not really a dog but Madame Zilensky, who, looking at me proudly, says: "One day, when I was in front of a *pâtisserie*, the king of

2. Josefa! Tell Carlitos to come down, because he never saw anything like it!

3. [...] because you are, spirals, / the rudder of life, we invoke you, / to light up our slight shaving / to the faithful corkscrew of the universe.

Finland passed by in a sled." *Since I know the tale, I don't tell her that Finland is a republic; I only ask, like Mr. Brook in the story, "And was he nice?"*

Annoyed by the turn this nightmare is taking, I open my eyes for a moment, and I see that it's clearing up. I close them and go back to sleep until we arrive in Turku. Now my dream is more placid, and I hear the twelve symphonies by Madame Zilensky, "beautiful and immense."

In Turku, I take a taxi to go from the station to the cemetery. We cross the Aura, a river that reminds me of the Nervión of my childhood, and we go up by the left bank. Suddenly, before leaving it behind, on the other bank appears the warm sienna color of the apartments designed by Bryggman in 1948, where he lived the last three years of his life. I see the balcony and the windows of his house on the highest story. Above them the gable, in which a square of small circular holes forms a drawing similar to the battleground of some old *tafl* board game, illuminates the attic. I find it surprising that there is someone there so early, yet from each of those holes emanates a weak glow.

Seeing this tiny hive of lights, I am reminded of that long-ago night when, as a child, I saw my friend's little hand opening in the darkness. In a miraculous metamorphosis, this image grows and grows until it becomes the bronze hand that Wäinö Aaltonen cast for the front patio of the *Kulttuuritalo* in Helsinki. He called it *Rakentajan käsi* (Builder's Hand). That open hand shows a model of the building, as if making an offering, and it seems to ask me, "Did you ever see anything like it?" Then, as if in a cinematographic fade, Aaltonen's sculpture becomes a black-and-white photograph in which now appears Rietveld's open hand with a small model poised on it: the pavilion he designed for Park Sonsbeek in Arnhem in 1955. It's a carpenter's hand. It's not cleaned up for the photograph, and it appears to have been around sawdust and linseed oil. It's also an offering, and it too asks me, "Did you ever see anything like it?"

I'm still lost in my memories, which now take me to another photograph. In it appear Erik Bryggman and his daughter Carin; it was taken in 1951, at the house we saw a few minutes ago. He is seated at a table where there is a piece of paper; his hands rest on the paper and he's got a pencil between them. At the other side of the table, his daughter is standing but leaning over to see the paper, supporting herself on the tabletop. The table is by a window from which you can see the Aura; the light sifts through a venetian blind. On the windowsill are two small flowerpots. Outside another window, which isn't in the photo, is a maple whose leaves seem to sprout from Bryggman's head (to use Carin's affectionate name for her father).

The photographer has told them, "Now look at the camera," and they, obediently, have done so without changing their posture. They look alike; they look very alike. Carin bears a faint and sweet smile; his is more tired and sad. His face and his hands are those of a person older than he; this very year he was really sick, and four years from now he will die. They dress with a discreet elegance but, since I know about his illness, I'm moved by a detail in Bryggman's figure in this photograph: under the good cheviot blazer and the impeccable white shirt with a starched collar (and wool tie, of course), on his forearms are, sticking out from the shirt's cuffs as if they wanted to see what his hands were drawing, the sleeves of an undershirt, possibly of merino wool.

The taxi has stopped at the entrance of the cemetery, by the Old Door in Uudemaantie, next to the Kukkaportti flower shop. There is another door to the north, closer to Bryggman's Resurrection Chapel, but I prefer this old area, so I enter from the west. I get off; I buy two bunches of yellow daffodils and, with them, I enter the world of the dead.

Sub specie aeternitatis

From the entrance, one first has to move forward in an east-northeast direction and then take a small swerve east and

keep going along a narrow, dim path that runs between two high hedges. In the background, the left hollow of the portico of the Resurrection Chapel keeps growing as I approach the clearing from which the staircase, sprouting from the Chapel like a creek, spills tamely over the slope, making its way between pines. Here and there the shore penetrates the current, forming a haven.

Bryggman picks up Lewerentz's baton in Stockholm and, though he smokes cigars like the Swedish master, he recites the lesson learned with a kind smile.

When I go out into the light, I see the graves I was looking for to the left.

On December 22 of 1955, I was eleven years old, living in Bilbao, and on vacation. That day, my aunt and uncle, owners of the bar on the left bank of the river Nervión where my father worked, hit the jackpot in the Christmas Lottery. I don't remember it, but I assume the atmosphere was cheerful. The day before that, in Turku by the Aura's banks, Erik Bryggman passed away. His funeral took place six days later. His daughter Carin was thirty-five at the time. Now she rests by her father, her mother Agda, and her brother Johan in this grave before me, very close to the Chapel. On the grass, four simple square slabs of dark honed granite (a bigger one and three smaller ones of equal size), engraved with their names and the dates of their births and deaths, commemorate them. They are placed against each other, forming a rectangle whose sides' relation is 1. 333 . . .

The Chapel's construction ended in 1941 during hard times for Finland. The foreman, Karl Bäckström, died that same year, and his grave, in a gesture of noble fraternity, is close to the architect's.

I leave a bunch of daffodils on each of these two graves and I go up the staircase.

Tempus amplius non erit

In front of the Chapel's door, something happens to me again (something that happened to me on previous visits); even though it's expected, it still surprises me. Having arrived at this point, stronger than my desire to enter the temple is my desire to twirl around it. I think that, without a doubt, this is the origin of my dream in the train; something told me that, as on previous occasions, I would face this irrepressible impulse that makes me whirl around the building, in a counterclockwise direction, like a Sufi dervish. Jussi Vikainen's bas-relief figures to the left of the entrance advance as well, keeping me company, in the same direction in which I begin to move.

I go along the portico heading south and I exit it, turning to the left. I skirt the Chapel's facade parallel to the large window, but without getting close to it, keeping the respectful distance that Bryggman advised when drawing the garden. Through the glass, I see the benches inside turning their heads to observe my passing. I arrive at the windbreak that exits the lateral transept and to the grand stained-glass window in subtle pastel colors wisely set out to illuminate, behind the altar, a nonexistent fresco by Aarne Niinivirta. If Aarne hadn't been taken away by tuberculosis and hunger in 1942, when he was thirty-five, the fresco would be on this wall where now the ivy climbs. Behind the blown glass, one can glimpse flowerpots with cactus: "The Garden of Death," by Simberg.

Leaving behind the covered porch that separates the temple from the mortuary, I go around this taciturn parallelepiped, a coffer of death nailed to the ground, which the architect represents in his blueprints as alien to the festive garland of paths, flower beds, low walls, hedges, and paved roads in the rest of the project. It's as if the stones that form a sort of disorganized baseboard attempting to climb the walls were the Parca's hands themselves, pulling the coffer down and preventing its flight.

Once I've navigated this Cape Horn, I continue on my way along the north facade, leaving behind the umbilical cord that unites

the morgue and the Chapel as well as the rise of the discreet and domestic parish offices. Now Bryggman guides me, with dexterity, toward the shaded facade of the church, punctured by four square windows of aqueous blown glass and a high polygynous gap that lights the choir. This wall is belted by a curved path that climbs slightly, accompanied by a low wall draped in flowers. In this way I arrive at the starting point by Vikainen's bas-relief after passing under the golden cross of the westerly facade that, dressed in tendrils and grape leaves, is one and three on sunny afternoons. I start anew.

Screws of RNA and DNA, barbershop cylinders, *Maelströms*, tornados, tendrils . . .

Swerving toward the heart of time. To nullify it. Perhaps this is the real meaning of the sentence in the Apocalypse.

Now it's time to go. From the steps, I notice two figures sitting by the Bryggmans' graves. As I approach them, I see in front of me the architect himself; he wears the cheviot blazer he wore that day in 1952 when he was photographed next to Carin. His companion, his back toward me, wears a black tuxedo and a top hat like Baron Samedi. They both smoke cigars. Between the two, on the gravestone, is a board game with the pieces deployed: they are in the middle of a never-ending game. This scene reminds me of another one I've seen sometime before. When I'm already next to them, and in the precise moment when the black player corners the king once again, as he has many times since that far-off twenty-first of December of 1955, Bryggman looks up, smiles at me sadly and, as if it's an oversight, scatters the pieces over the board with his forearm. It's a warning that I have to hurry to get out of here. I do, without looking back.



Bryggman's family grave

Carlos Puente

Born in Bilbao in 1944. He studied architecture at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid (ETSAM) and graduated in 1972. Until 1979, he worked as a collaborator in the office of Alejandro de la Sota, and later in association with Víctor López Cotelo until 1990. Since then, he runs his own office. He is currently living in Finland.

He was a professor at the ETSAM in Madrid from 1996 to 2009.

His work has been subject of various exhibitions and publications, and obtained different awards and distinctions.

In 2008 Arquia published his “common-place book”, *Idas y vueltas*.

Gold Medal for Spanish Architecture in 2021. Awarded by the Consejo Superior de los Colegios de Arquitectos de España.

Kärjäkivet

Is an independent publishing project of thought and criticism of art and architecture that was born from a research around the unbuilt Saivaara Monument designed in 1978 by the Finnish artist Tapio Wirkkala for the Saivaara fjeld in Lapland. The publisher has been achieving, not in form but in content, the concept of Kärjäkivet that Tapio Wirkkala wanted for the Saivaara Monument: the creation of a place where men of all races and colors can gather to think. In this sense, there is an online platform - www.karajakivet.com - where several invited authors are able to gather through literary constructions produced by them, sharing their ideas, in a sort of modern-day assembly.

Evoking the place that Tapio Wirkkala wanted to create at the top of the Saivaara, Kärjäkivet meant to be a place of slowness and introspection where to stop, “observe the landscape” and think.

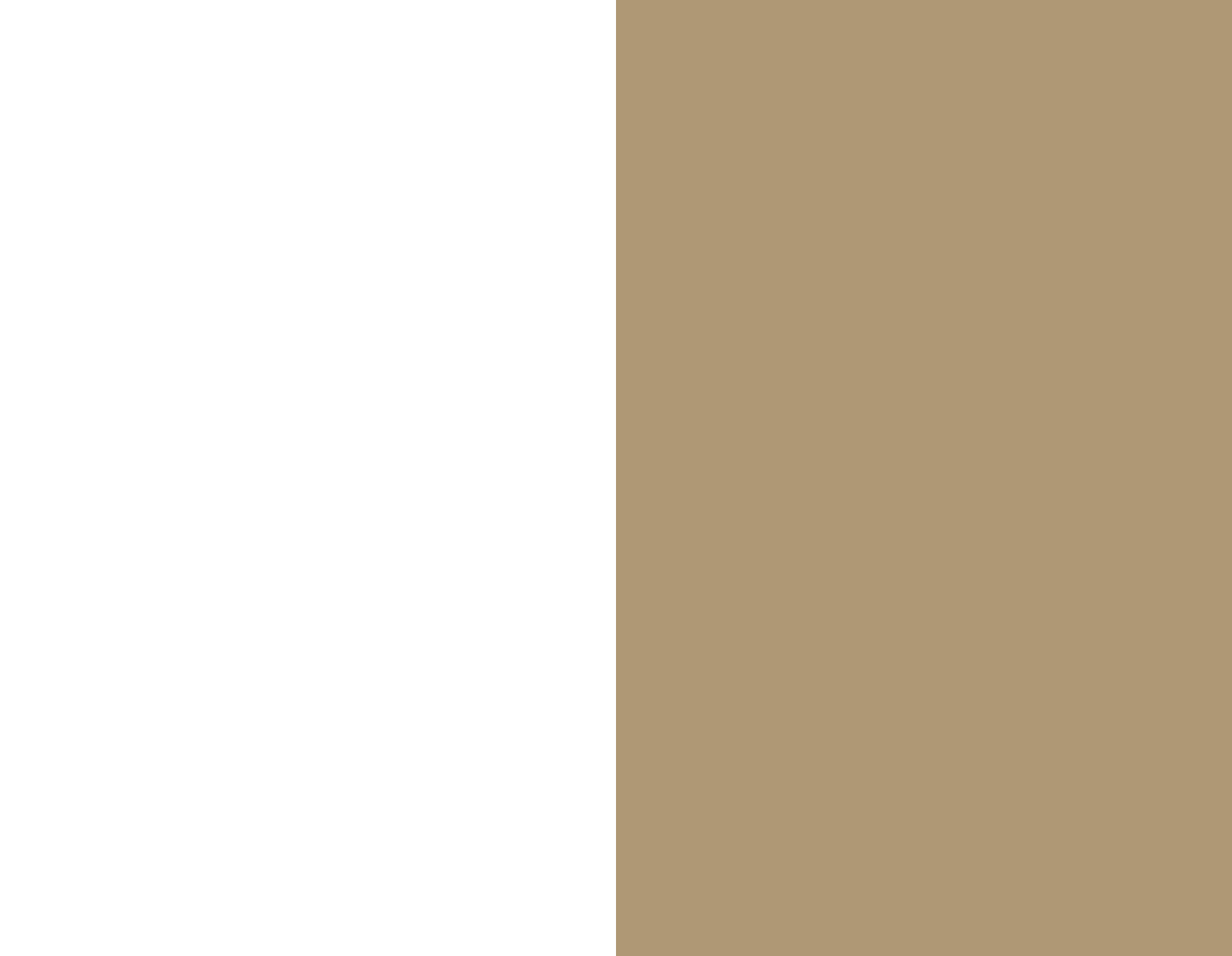


Centre for Contemporary Art Promotion
Centro de Arte Contemporânea
Arts Promotion Centre Finland



Finnish Cultural
Foundation

Four Finnish Stories hand-bound at the Käräjäkivet atelier. Swiss binding softcover book, linen on the spine. Printed with Montserrat characters on scotch paper Conqueror Wove Oyster 100gsm.



www.karajakivet.com



ISBN: 978-989-33-4000-4