

TRIVIAL
EVERYDAY
THINGS

JØRGEN LETH

Poems

Selected and translated
from the Danish by
MARTIN AITKEN

BookThug | Toronto 2011

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

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The poems published here originally appeared in Danish in the collections *Sportsdigte* (Sports Poems) (1967), *Lykken i Ingenmandsland* (Happiness in No-man's Land) (1967), *Glatte hårdtpumpede puder* (Smooth Inflated Cushions) (1969), *Det går forbi mig* (It Passes Me By) (1975), *Hvordan de ser ud* (How They Look) (1987), *Billedet forestiller* (What the Picture Shows) (2000), and *Det gør ikke noget* (It Doesn't Matter) (2006), all published by Gyldendal of Copenhagen.

New Scene, *Pas de deux 1-3*, and *Swamp of Fiction* appeared as fragments in Danish journal *Banana Split* #25 (2005), having previously appeared as parts of more expansive pieces in the collection *Billedet forestiller* (What the Picture Shows) (2000).

Manuscript appears in Jørgen Leth's recent book *Tilfældets gaver: Tekster om at lave film* (Gifts of Chance: Texts on Filmmaking), published by Gyldendal in 2009.

A small number of these translations appeared in *The Literary Review* 53/3 and *PRECIPICE* 3/1 & 2.

None of this would have been possible had it not been for the generous support of the Danish Arts Council.

Printed in Canada.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Leth, Jørgen

Trivial everyday things : selected poems / Jørgen Leth ; selected and translated by Martin Aitken.

Translated from the Danish.

ISBN 978-1-897388-97-6

I. Aitken, Martin, 1961- II. Title.

PT8176.22.E8A2 2011

839.81'174

c2011-904770-5

NOTHING CHANGED

Nothing has changed.
It is still the same.
I have nothing to say.
It means nothing.
Here is the sun and the ocean.
Some things are happening here.
The ocean is not devoid of ships.
The sun has houses and an ocean in which to reflect.
Something is happening here, sounds are heard.
People are moving, some are standing still.
The sound of many violins streams from open doors.
Over there the sound of people on the ocean.
Everything is here that should be here.
Nothing has changed.
You are not here.
You are somewhere else.
It is still the same.
Music is suspended in a cloud of dust and sun.
You are not here.
I am watching the ocean.
The ocean is reflecting the sun.
You are somewhere else.
I allow the sun to warm me.
The sun is the same where you are.
I have nothing to say.
It means nothing.
Here are things to do.
I can go into the shade.
I can let the ocean be.
Here is the sun, and here is the ocean.
It means nothing.
It is still the same.

A SHORT POEM

Right now I want
to be able to write a short poem

I've paper in the typewriter
I sniff my arm

I sniff my arm again
I think about what I want

I've finished
I've written a short poem

THERE IS NOTHING ELSE

There is nothing else but what there is
and what kind of a thing is that to say, so
instead I will say that today I
have exchanged caresses with my loved one
and have taken part in two meals
with my children and have propelled my body
backwards and forwards within these rooms, and that
today I have sat motionless for a long time
and watched people moving and speaking
in image after image, and that I have
now situated myself alone amidst the calm
to let the life from the television flow
through my brain and out into emptiness
onto this sheet of paper.

LOSING ITSELF IN A QUEST FOR SIGNS

losing itself in a quest for signs

camera may leave a scene before discharging
its “meaning”, before reaching its climax
or become preoccupied, dwelling on something
“inconsequential”

how does the food taste in this place?
the coffee?
the emptiness?

equipment: typewriter, radio, ballpen, paper: all this
is me. all this is tangible. true

sadness: the view from this window, the world is wide open
the possibilities endless. completely open

i relish the melancholy
i see my hand and my foot

time is tangible and may be measured on a clock

banalities close-up body, look down at its feet
or knees. tilt down a few times, repetition
the writing hand writing a fateful
sentence

his pocket is full of notes, scraps of paper, calling cards,
tickets. now and then he takes them out,
reads them

linger somewhere camera describing the place, a few
square metres, a door, a section of floor, backwards

and forwards. depicting “exhaustively”

hotel room

camera remains after he has left the room

explores on its own or simply remains

camera a life of its own

its own breathing, its own taste.

its own idiosyncratic way of selecting and
discarding

a day’s shoot can revolve around a detail

like his right hand

a cup of coffee

the women’s backsides

the trees

camera slowly approaching nothing

destroying the image

becoming nothing

feet

coffee

whatever

woman

knees, neck, throat, face, feet, hands

mythology

a tube of sunscreen

coffee

sitting down on a chair

spreading butter on bread

drinking a glass of water

obsession: details

the daily mess that prevents us from seeing clear signs
a constant quest for signs, signals

mythology

money across the table, money changing hands

the upended postcard fishing boats putting out
early in the morning
sunsets

camera striving to categorize and comprehend
e.g. money
dreamy, suggestive, instinctive

repetition: return to something
yet to be properly understood

try to establish a system

out of collated, singly indistinct signs

can a single action be split into seconds?

camera two angles on the same object
slightly offset in respect of each other

“the cinema films death at work
the person you are filming is in the process of
getting older, therefore, you are filming a minute
of death at work.”

man and woman asleep in hotel room, sculpture

series, serial ideas

something the film wants to relate, examine, piece together

this human being and its life

by means of a tracking shot measure the distance
from first word to last word in a sentence

blurred scenes in the dark, the demonic depths of
tropical night

to transform this life into sheets of written paper
or metres of exposed film

a collection of material
searching for a language in this material
cohesion

clear unambiguous settings
a tropical beach
scrub
white house
swimming pool (hockney)
market

persons, objects positioned in the dark
camera with bright lamp approaching
retreating

scene
he sits at a table counting dirty notes
he rises
i have an acute feeling of decay
disintegration
i am going to get a newspaper

scene
i think about my son a lot
i love him, i love him

scene

the face a house

at varying distances, in varying light

scene

i fidget with my hair

i have nothing to say

COLOPHON

Manufactured as the First English Edition of *Trivial Every Day Things* in the Fall of 2011 by BookThug. Distributed in Canada by The Literary Press Group: www.lpg.ca. Distributed in the US by Small Press Distribution: www.spdbooks.org. Shop online at www.bookthug.ca



Type + Design by Jay MillAr