

EEVA ELINA UOTILA  
1941-1995

Eeva Uotila was born on March 8th (considering her name, that date was appropriately to become later International Women's Day), 1941. The happy event took place in Helsinki, although the family lived (in rather affluent circumstances) in Viipuri. Not only was the Soviet Embassy to erase the hospital in Helsinki where she was born, but the whole city of Viipuri and its province of Karelia were lost, and the family ended up in Hämeenlinna, traditionally famous as a school town and producer of many cultural figures (among them the composer Jean Sibelius, whose "Finlandia" was inspired by the surrounding scenery). For a little girl who had only known the noises of war adjusting to poverty was easy, and she often commented on the fact that she was blessed in having had to live in such circumstances, because it forced her to live in the realms of thought, fostering intellectual independence, rather than pursuit of fame and wealth. The war left in her a life-long interest in the history of the Second World War, as well as a fear of abrupt noises: back-firing cars and fireworks always really frightened her. Although she often acknowledged herself as a displaced Karelian, her real soul belonged to Häme, the province around Hämeenlinna and after which the latter is called. This is quite crucial in understanding her personality, a finesse that is not comprehended elsewhere. She was indeed doubly *human* (*umana*), as she could point out to her students that *Häme* and *human* are identical in origin. Already in Finland she straddled "two cultures", east and west, which gave her a good basis for Finnish dialectology. The family of course retained its "cultural history" and cultural attachments, and these showed that achievement is possible. Members

of her family had had positions up to the ministerial level, and Aukusti Uotila (1858-1886; he died in Ajaccio and was buried there) was a founder of modern Finnish painting. And she was to follow the poet Oskar Uotila's (1853-1903; brother of Aukusti) example in teaching Finnish to those whose mother tongue was not Finnish. Oskar Uotila taught Finnish for Swedish-speaking law students in Helsinki, and not only translated the Swedish law code into Finnish, but translated Dante also, an area that was later to occupy Eeva as well. Her father's mother's father was a Porthan (distant relative to the father of Finnish history H.G. Porthan), a leading citizen in Viipuri and founder of the still-functioning society "Viipurin Pamaus".

Both of her grandfathers (with good libraries) actively encouraged Eeva in scholarly pursuits, "although she was a girl", the common handicap in those days. She became a "Renaissance woman" at an early age and in a way prepared to enter Italy when the time was to come. She dreamt of becoming an archaeologist, an aspiration that was to shift into the archaeology of words. But first, she had to go through the Hämeenlinna Lyceum for Girls, the famous "Tipula" ('chick house'), where for eight years she was the *prima* of her class, a popular leader, and a well-liked companion. She matriculated in 1960. One of the houses she lived in as a child was displaced by the new Hämeenlinna library, a favorite shrine of hers in later years.

At the University of Helsinki Eeva Uotila entered a "normal nationalist" curriculum of Finnish language, Finnish literature, and Finnish history (expanded with world literature), which gave her a foundation in Hungarian, Estonian, and field work. She collected place names in the community of Lammi, continuing this work even during summers when she was already appointed at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. Her Master's thesis was on the names of areas under cultivation in the central and northern villages of Lammi (1965). The year before she had presented her thesis in her minor (Finnish literature) on the image world of (the poetess) Helvi Juvonen (1964), a work that remains valuable.

Taken together both show the balance between language and literature that was to be hers till the very end. She learned languages easily, and ended up in her life-time by managing ten (beyond Finnish), which is about double the number of an average academic Finn; and she published in four. She once surprised her mother in Naples by speaking a weird language with another person apparently without an effort. It turned out that the language was Lithuanian, which she had picked up in Naples with the help of an exchange scholar from the Soviet Union! In her student days she once startled (in Russian) the occupants of her former Viipuri home. She just wanted to see the place; the Russians were startled, because they thought that she had come to reclaim her property!

The journal of the Finnish Language Society, *Virittäjä*, is one of the best language journals in the world. Eeva Uotila became its first female editorial secretary (at the time of her death the first woman had just taken over its main editorship), and throughout her life she was a steady contributor; in fact, noted in statistics as one of the most frequent women contributors in it in her time.

In Hungary, where she had been polishing her language skills, she met her future husband Carlo Arcelli, who was the main reason she took on the lecturership in Finnish in Naples. The famous Finnish democracy was put to shame in that she lost her Finnish citizenship by law. When a few years afterwards it was possible to reclaim it, it could not be done under her own name, whereas in Italy she could always use her own name, also on her Italian passport. About ten years ago Finland allowed women to keep their own names, and she immediately availed herself of this opportunity, although many still do not believe in such rights, and there is some confusion about her official name.

She traveled to Naples in January 1966 and made her academic nest in a frame within Slavic and East European Studies prepared by Nullo Minissi, and so began her shuttle-existence between north and south, with a most important station of in-laws in Bologna, which became and remained the heart of her Italy. Her

gentle, considerate, but exact and competent teaching and balanced library acquisitions made the Institute the foremost in Italy for Finnish and in fact the biggest Finnish unit in the world outside Scandinavia and the Finno-Ugric lands. She also once acted as a professor of Swedish and taught Finnish Swedish literature, which received enthusiastic reception. It has also been a fact that her students have consistently excelled at the summer courses staged by the Ministry of Education in Finland. In the beginning of the 1970s she was promoted one step (*incarico*), and was appointed full professor in 1981. The resulting administrative duties were quite repulsive to her, although the protestant work ethic prevailed when necessary.

Eeva Uotila has been the leading voice in various Italian encyclopedias on Finnish (and Estonian) literature and theater. But her main interest and the bulk of her production falls into loanwords: Baltic, Swedish, Germanic loans (and even an Indo-European one) in Finnish (or Estonian). The earliest one is on *mähkä* 'club moss' (a word totally unknown to the average Finn) (Virittäjä 1969), followed by Swedish ones in Finnish dialects (1970), and then *laukas*, *kärhä*, *perkele* 'devil', etc., in *Euroasiatica* in Naples (1970). This period is capped with some late Germanic loans in Finnish dialects (Virittäjä 1974) and a study on *sampa* 'world pillar, cornucopia' (*Euroasiatica* II:4, 1973), which led to both acclaim and opposition. But she was right, as right as one can be in history, and it is nice to see that this piece is listed in the new edition of the *Sanskrit Etymological Dictionary*. She was very active during these years, because much of her later work is based on her notes from this era, and much is still left over. This is good work and very useful for the field, but apparently she held back, somehow, perhaps because synchronic grammar was more fashionable and dazzled the field and brainwashed her for a while.

The second part of the 1970s saw the appearance of her syntactic and morphological work. Foremost in this are two articles she wrote with Jussi Ojanen on the derivation of frequentative and momentaneous verbs in Finnish (Virittäjä 1977) and on the derivation

mechanisms of Finnish verbs (1979). This work has been well received and is often quoted.

In 1983 her second phase in loanwords starts, with *viekas* 'sly', etc. (Baltofennica III). Cafeteria discussion of this solution led to *ovela*, also 'sly' (with Raimo Anttila; 1984), and it is her solid and sober knowledge of the dialects that led to the solution, rather than the coauthor's crazy first attempts to find wisdom from Siberia. There has always been some suggestion that this somehow connects with *ove-* 'door', but it had not been seen how. The solution is simply that it was indeed 'the place at the door', and parts fall in place when we consider early Finnish architecture and folklore. Furthermore, the solution had a syntactic repercussion in that it solved the origin of the Finnish possessive construction as well (*minulla on* 'on me there is = I have'). Other studies of hers now came out in a steady flow, on *eine* 'food' (1984), *kohta* 'place' (1985), *vihi* 'trap guide' (1986), *vero* 'tax' (1989), *hinta* 'price' and *suhta* 'proportion' (1990), *kersa* 'kid', etc. (1992), to list just entries and leaving out derivations as support. These works are now sure, "bold", but elegant; she is no longer apologetic for treating history. She has come fully into her own. Many of these words treated touch the core of modern culture, and she fills inelegant lacunae in the handbooks. Good examples of this are *hinta* and *suhta*. She shows that *hinta* is identical to Italian *cento* (borrowed from Baltic, of course). The problem had been the semantic justification, but she ties it in with the earlier squirrel hunting context in which a hundred pelts would be small coin. *Suhde* (derivative of *suhta*), which figures in the Finnish term for relativity theory (*suhteellisuusteoria*), had been thought to come from a postposition (*suhteen* 'concerning'), which she shows is inadmissible; it has to go the other way, and then she convincingly gives the Baltic source too. Her last etymological work came out in the first volume of the new *Studi Finno-Ugrici* at I.U.O. (1995), and she saw it published. This is on *konna* 'toad' and *kontio* 'bear' (and *orava* 'squirrel'), which proves an earlier suggestion that the latter comes from *kontata* 'to clamber, crawl on all fours, etc.' and proves that the former belongs here also; both are euphemistic

names. This is beautiful, and the article has been received with enthusiasm even by many non-Fennists. So, even in her scholarship, she was at her best and happiest in Forest Finland, or using the boundary between Field and Forest Finland (as in *vihi*, too, and cf. her thesis).

One must add that Eeva Uotila was not an atomist who would treat only disparate details. She did consider the big picture or the total structure behind it all; she just did not publish on such matters. There is one exception, however: "Baltic impetus on the Baltic Finnic diphthongs" (*Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* 47, 1986). Lauri Posti had (FUF 1953) suggested how the pre-Baltic Finnic consonants were filtered through Baltic and Germanic producing a much more meager inventory. Uotila showed the opposite with diphthongs, which were multiplied many times over. The result is that today the running frequency of vowels vs. consonants is higher than in Italian, a fact usually not known.

Her textbook *La lingua finlandese* (1975) has been enormously popular, and used elsewhere at universities in Europe in spite of the language (e.g., Holland and Poland). Her next plan was to bring out, with Danilo Gheno, a totally new book also with historical comments. This and many other planned topics on etymology and Finnish derivation, and literature and translation (she was making sample translations from modern Estonian writers into Italian), have now been denied us. Using historical evidence in language instruction was one of her *fortes*; she had published a few comments on it, and we were expecting more. She had also for a time been planning a book-length treatment of early Germanic and Baltic loans in Finnish. Olli Nuutinen, a comrade-in-arms in this area and a former fellow student, also died in 1995 (in Copenhagen), so mainly Jorma Koivulehto in Helsinki remains from this age-group to carry on the work (she greatly appreciated his support of her work).

Eeva Uotila was an accomplished singer, a fine lyrical coloratura soprano, and she used to entertain her colleagues at the meetings

of the teachers of Finnish working abroad during her summers in Finland. In fact, when she became an officer first class of the Order of the Finnish Lion in 1982 for her work in teaching Finnish culture in Italy, she was asked to sing, although she herself was the honoree. But her talent was also acknowledged in Italy: the Merano Opera offered her a permanent appointment (and her stature and looks would have made great Cherubinos, etc.). Although she loved to perform (but only in a theatrical context, not in "normal" life), she ultimately turned it down, because she did not want to live on the road apart from her little daughter. Finnish studies at Naples and elsewhere gained. She had the joy and comfort of seeing her daughter finish her degree, since half a year before her mother's death her daughter became a Ph.D. in theoretical physics in Bologna.

Eeva Uotila was an all-around traditionalist. In music, art, and literature her tastes were purely classical, although she tried to understand and enjoy some of the newest Finnish literature and theater. But in her everyday language she could be quite innovative. Finnish lacks a handy term for the pick-up truck, but for her it became *inkkariauto* (Indian car) after she had witnessed its total preponderance among the Navajos, and she consistently used it afterwards. Very surprising was her insistence on the names for Rome and Vilnius in her Finnish, viz. *Roma* and *Vilnius* (against the "correct" *Rooma* and *Vilna*), and such inconsistency added to her humanity (the ritual mistake). She also devised and used Finnish names for friends and colleagues, e.g. Ykä Janatuinen for George Giannakis. She did not like small children, but she cherished the sight of Apache and Navajo children during breaks in the schoolyards.

Eeva Uotila was a great lover of nature, and during the last five years of her life she had added a serious practice of yoga to her routines, which improved her concentration skills. Yoga helped her enormously during her last ailing year, helped her ultimately face death with a relative peace of mind, and allowed her that year to take farewell of the Finnish nature she loved so well. She

knew most of the plants in Italy (with their Linnaean names), and all the Finnish ones, and one suspects, most of the European plants as well. She picked berries and mushrooms with gusto every year in Hämeenlinna. She often talked about the European forest zone, which runs from Bologna to the southern edge of Lapland, and took wonder at the differences and similarities of its edges, as she was daughter of both, although adopted in the south. Also, she never stopped wondering at the flora of the American west coast, since hardly any plant was the same as in Europe (otherwise she did not like America at all)! She loved the color of the desert and its spring bloom in a very abstract and detached way, since in the final account the real soul nature for her were only the Häme woods. She quite properly considered animals better than people (excluding snakes!), and stray dogs and cats were a life-long concern with her. She would be totally fascinated by the coatimundi (chulu), or an Asian fishing cat with kittens. And the only worthwhile sport for her was biking through the Finnish countryside, particularly in and around Hämeenlinna (in her school days, however, she almost excelled in speed skating), although she has admitted that it was fine to bike around the islands in Tahiti too (where she did not even notice such disturbing facts as that the sun moves the wrong way – “so what, the sun is the sun!”).

Whatever of her unpublished poetry remains is almost all in Finnish. A happy exception is the following haiku of April 1981, which, among other things, tells about the pull between her two cultures:

Il girasole  
 sa: il sole è uno.  
 Felice pianta!

She has found peace, and the two countries (and beyond) have lost. She died among family members in Bologna on September 9th, 1995, just a few days after having come there from Finland for medical consultation. Those who knew her will never see her like again in their lifetimes.



She liked to visit cemeteries wherever she traveled (which ranged from India to Peru to Tahiti to Nordkapp to Egypt; she was always without fear, even in situations where others would shudder), and read history from the tombstones. Once the superstitious locals in Salina could not believe their horrified ears when she asked for directions to the cemetery — at midnight! For her practical mind there was enough moonlight for the purpose. A few years back when working on the Dante translations she had commented to her daughter that she would like to have the last lines of the Purgatory in the *Divina Commedia* (XXXIII, 143-146) on her headstone (Note also that Dante located his unreachable island in the South Seas, and her first trip to Tahiti made such a strong impression on her). There they now are in Hämeenlinna, on a stone she shares with her father:

Rifatto sì come piante novelle  
rinovellate di novella fronda  
puro e disposto a salire a le stelle.

Raimo Anttila