

Classic Poetry Series

Aleksis Kivi

- poems -

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Aleksis Kivi (10 October 1834 – 31 December 1872)

Aleksis Kivi, born Alexis Stenvall, was a Finnish author who wrote the first significant novel in the Finnish language, *Seven Brothers* (Finnish title: *Seitsemän veljestä*). Although Kivi was among the very earliest authors of prose and lyrics in Finnish language, he is still considered one of the greatest of them all.

Aleksis Kivi was born at Nurmijärvi, Finland, to a tailor's family. In 1846 he left for school in Helsinki, and in 1859 he was accepted to the University of Helsinki, where he studied literature and developed an interest in the theater. His first play was *Kullervo*, based on a tragic tale from Kalevala. He also met the famous journalist and statesman Johan Vilhelm Snellman.

From 1863 onwards, Kivi devoted his time to writing. He wrote 12 plays and a collection of poetry. The novel *Seven Brothers* took him ten years to write. Literary critics, especially the prominent August Ahlqvist, disapproved of the book, at least nominally because of its "rudeness" – romanticism was in its forte at the time – but maybe also because it was written in the south-western dialect of Finnish, while Ahlqvist himself preferred north-eastern dialects of his homelands. The Fennomans also disapproved of its depiction of not-so-virtuous rural life that was far from their idealized point of view, and his excessive drinking may have alienated some.

In 1865 Kivi won the State Prize for his still often performed comedy *Nummisuutarit* (*The Cobblers on the Heath*). However, the less than enthusiastic reception of his books was taking its toll and he was already drinking heavily. His main benefactor Charlotta Lönnqvist could not help him after the 1860s. Physical deterioration and the development of schizophrenia (suspectedly caused by advanced borreliosis) set in, and Kivi died in poverty at the age of 38.

In 1995-1996, Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara wrote an opera about Kivi's life and works. In 2002 director Jari Halonen's movie *The Life of Aleksis Kivi* (Finnish title: *Aleksis Kiven elämä*) premiered in Finnish cinemas.

Eserleri:

Kullervo
Seven Brothers
Nummisuutarit (*The Cobblers on the Heath*, 1865)

My Heart's Song

Absalon, my son, that I could have died for you, my son.
Life holds no pleasure, let me descent to hell, weeping

Grove of Tuoni, grove of evening,
There a sandy cradle is waiting,
There I will carry my child.

There the child is free from sorrow
In the wood, in the meadow
Tending the cattle of Tuoni.

There my child is free from sorrow
When the evening casts it's shadow
Rocked in the cradle of Tuoni.

There my child is free from sorrow,
Lulled to sleep by a birdsong mellow,
Rocked in a cradle of gold.

Peace of Tuoni, far from passion
Far away from man's oppression
Far from the treacherous world.

Aleksis Kivi