

OSMO PEKONEN

Descartes

by *Eeva-Liisa Manner*
translated from the Finnish by *Osmo Pekonen*

I thought, but I wasn't.
I said animals were machines.
I had lost everything but my reason.

Give my greetings to all those
 whose knowledge is secret,
Paracelsus, Swedenborg, and Elberfeld's numerate horses,
who extract a root and raise to a power,
calculate streaming numbers with their clever hooves, not their heads –
for the body knows everything, but a learned head has a nail in it.
Say philosophy is loneliness and a dead body
copulating with reason and the baby is
a discourse on method and an imaginary quantity.

Today
fast horses race over a dying France
and their hooves drum a hidden knowledge
 on the Cartesian temple-bone.
Today I'm one with them.

Note: Influential Finnish poet and dramatist, Eeva-Liisa Manner (1921–1995), made a breakthrough in 1956 with the publication of her poetry collection *Tämä matka* [*This journey*], which includes the poem “Descartes”. Deeply critical of the intellectual climate of her times, Manner looked to the primitive innocence of ancient cultures as a source of renewal.