

autumn / winter 2008 | no 24

# THE VILNIUS REVIEW

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NEW WRITING FROM LITHUANIA

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# editorial

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This year, Lithuania is commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Sajūdis Reform Movement. The Lithuanian reform movement was born as an attempt to give direction to Lithuania's aspirations for independence, to coordinate the outburst of national energy. Improvisation accompanied the entire process, because it was an unprecedented process. Every step required new solutions. Its participants were learning the ABC of politics, because professional politicians were on the other side of the barricades. The artists, scientists and economists who became novices in politics were at the same time great improvisers. The nation expected it from them. I remember the elections to the Initiative Group of Sajūdis: it was enough to call out the name of some well-known person, and the hall included him or her in the Initiative Group unanimously. The elections did not resemble current democratic elections at all, but this allowed creative personalities to be elected. These personalities showed that they were capable not only of writing poetry or staging performances, but also of creating a state. Hardly two years passed since the establishment of the Initiative Group, and Lithuania declared independence in 1990. Artists started withdrawing from politics gradually: their efforts were needed for the turning point; the everyday management of the state was handed over to professional politicians.

Today, after 20 years since those dramatic and euphoric days when Sajūdis meant much more than a political institution, first of all the possibility of a new life, of new possibilities, of expression, and all other freedoms, we can state with confidence that for most people the dream of that time has come true. We have a state, which

meets the standards of a European state in many respects, and the possibilities are unlimited, as much as they can be unlimited in a capitalist society. By freedom of expression, we are even overtaking Great Britain and France. And still, something is not as it should be in this realm. There is a great disappointment in politics and its participants, as never before. It is difficult to find a single social group which is satisfied with its economic or social position. The desire to live better, which inspired euphoria in the times of Sąjūdis, today erupts in the form of indignation and opposition. Do people have too much trust in the state, or, on the contrary, do they not believe in it? The elections to the Seimas this autumn were a marginal expression of that.

A party that was established half a year ago won second place according to the party lists in the elections. The greater or smaller victories of populist parties no longer surprise anybody. However, the party that won this time deserves serious consideration. The party, the Rising Nation Party (the name alone is worth attention), was established by a showbusiness personality who rallied people frequently appearing on television screens, singers and actors. The party of media people went to the elections without any programme; or, to be more exact, a version of the Ten Commandments took the place of their programme. A lawyer or economist was included in their list; however, the electors ousted them by moving television personalities of very doubtful talent to the top.

Does it remind us of anything? Yes, it reminds me at least of the situation 20 years ago, only as a parody, a comic. “Independent” candidates, “personalities”, political novices are being elected. Positions are based on the Ten Commandments. Artists become engaged in politics. Are we going to save the nation?

This is how, in a caricatural way, we commemorate one of the most significant dates of our history. In the days of Sąjūdis, policy was created in the streets and at gatherings of the like-minded. Today it has moved to television, and has become part of a show. Is art winning?

EUGENIJUS ALIŠANKA



Portrait of writer Grigorijus Kanovičius by Adomas Jacovskis. 1998, detail

# In the Shadow of the Devil

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BY ALGIS KALĖDA

.....

Grigorijus Kanovičius' new novel *Šėtono apžavai* (The Devil's Spell) is not a sudden twist in his rich output. We could say that this work grew on the foundation that he has been building for several decades, the basis of which was created in the trilogy *Žvakės vėjyje* (Candles in the Wind), consisting of the novels *Paukščiai virš kapinių* (Birds Above the Cemetery, 1977), *Palaimink ir lapus, ir ugnį* (Bless the Leaves and the Fire, 1980), and *Lopšinė seniui besmegeniui* (A Lullaby to a Snowman, 1982). In these novels Kanovičius depicted, as if through a magnifying glass, the lives of several characters, and recreated the fate of the Jewish community of the whole of Lithuania in the pre-war years and during the Second World War. His other novels deal with a similar set of issues, and each of them is original and interesting.

Kanovičius' novels have enriched Lithuanian literature with new artistic paradigms. This was not only the theme of the fate of the Jews (for other authors, primarily Icchokas Meras, also write about it), but first of all an originally arranged composition, individual and never before seen portraits of characters, and an especially suggestive narrative in which realistic images, mythological parables, confessional monologues and the polyphonic counterpoints of the tale merge into a whole. The writer resorts to aphoristic generalisations and ordinary details of everyday life, and raises the craft of the dressmaker, shoemaker, craftsman or gravedigger to a metaphysical level, projecting the characters' individual feelings on to a genuine human plane into a timeless space. These features are characteristic of the writer's later novels *Kvailių ašaros ir maldos* (Fools' Tears and Prayers, 1983), *Ir nėra vergams*

*rojaus* (There is no Paradise for Slaves, 1985), *Козленок за два гроша* (A Twopenny Goat, 1987), *Nenusigrėžki nuo mirties* (Turn not your Face from Death, 1992), and the play *Nusišypsok mums, Viešpatie* (Smile Upon us, God, 1991).

The heroes of these works usually live in two spheres: in the real one, which is reality that has undergone all historical catastrophes; and in the sphere of visions, myths, one could even say eternity. The first is concrete: it contains details of pre-war life in Lithuania, and easily recognisable historical signs. The action usually develops in Vilnius, Kaunas, or in small towns. The characters are mostly shoemakers, tailors, synagogue servants, musicians, and, recurrently, gravediggers. The latter (usually represented by a comparatively young, still maturing, man) seem to possess the possibility to relate this earthly reality with the one on the other side, the transcendental one. The image of the cemetery that arises in several of Kanovičius' works, quite often, and paradoxically, represents vitality, because it offers the opportunity to show the permanent status of human fate, the continuity of the family, kin and nation. But in work by this writer, it is continuity without continuation, because life's natural passage through centuries is tragically disrupted by the massacre of the Second World War.

In an interview the writer once said: "To be honest, when I look back at the road I've covered, at all those books I've written, I realise it's one and the same book, one saga about the life of Lithuanian Jews. I am happy I came to be a peculiar chronicler of the Jews who lived in Lithuania. Probably the cemetery is the symbol that is dictated by my subconscious and that permeates all my creative work, all my books. I am not an optimistic writer; therefore, the metaphor for the world as a cemetery is very deep in me. The tragedy of the Holocaust, when so many people stayed to live in cemeteries ... And I mean it, to live."

In general, Kanovičius often shows the marginal situations, when a human finds himself between life and death, and experiences a real existential catastrophe. On the other hand, such states, which often emanate a fatalistic hopelessness, seem to crystallise the kernel of the personality, and show the scale of its moral values. In the novel *Žydy parkas* (The Park of Jews, 1998), the author reveals variations of different moral postures, without condemnation, and just states, melancholically, this is how it is ... The narrator's sensitivity in all Kanovičius' novels lets the reader experience the depths of the human soul, to experience catharsis, and a feeling of spiritual enlightenment. The individual's relation with eternity and divinity unfolds in his work with special suggestiveness. The writer creates an extraordinary atmosphere in the communication between a human and God, he allows his characters to "speak" to the Almighty, and to reproach sadly him about deeply rooted injustice. To small people



GRIGORIJUS KANOVIČIUS

unfairly wronged by their neighbours, God is like a source of hope that the wrongs will be redressed. God is different to the Jews led to the mass grave or tortured in the ghetto. He becomes like an equal with them. He shares the same fate, and seems to encourage some to be resigned (“Happiness is not on this earth”), and others to sustain their resolve to defend, at least by weak actions, their human dignity.

The plot of Kanovičius’ latest novel develops along the line of the previous novels. The action of *Šėtono apžavai* is inscribed in the historical context of 1940 and 1941, when Lithuania was overrun by the Soviet army, and shortly afterwards by Nazi troops. The population of Miškiniai, a small town in Samogitia, is predominantly Jewish, outnumbering the Lithuanians. Danuta-Hadassah, a Pole, who some time ago came here from Belarus to her father-in-law, and who is looking after the cemetery with her son Jacob (his father was a Jew), is a peculiar intermediary between the two ethnic groups. The author weaves a web of national relations that is not rare in reality, is natural and does not give rise to extraordinary passions. However, the town’s comparatively quiet life is shattered by demonic political conflicts, and the residents of the town and its environs become victims of demonic powers, and hostages of a peculiar struggle between good and evil.

The novel consists of eight parts, telling about the behaviour, feelings and experiences of the main characters. Kanovičius seldom uses an internal monologue: he depicts his characters from the narrator’s point of view by introducing the *look from aside* approach, and resorting to the abundant expressive dialogues and that kind-hearted irony so characteristic of him. An extremely voluminous style, rich with a diversity of meanings, associations and connotations, and aptly echoing a

perception of the world, thoughts and spiritual state, facilitates in creating that special atmosphere of the work. The author's narrative seems to imitate the character's manner of speaking and events that befell him or her, and judges them from the point of view of the character.

Due to the specific communicative structure, semantics and suggested reflections in this novel are not limited by the contours of reality but step beyond the field of meaning of directly depicted events and phenomena. Following the principle *pars pro toto* (a part for the whole), the writer has succeeded in making a symbolic generalisation of the experiences of individual characters. Among the most characteristic versions of psychological-social existence are the fates of the Nazi henchman Juozas, the communist sympathiser Aaron, Jacob, the Jewish patriot Eliševa, who wishes to go to Palestine, the Lithuanian farmer Česlovas Lomsargis, and, of course, Danuta-Hadassah. In one way or another, all these characters experience the temptation of sin, bliss, and find themselves trapped in cruel challenges. The writer creates an unusual genre form, consisting of a parable, a ballad and a historical realistic novel, that has allowed him to reflect on numerous aspects of the endless space of the human's world.

The literary critic Elena Bukelienė once wrote that Kanovičius' writing "abounds in biblical parallels, biblical wisdom, metaphysical feeling and, simultaneously, rich images of everyday life". The inimitable characters of the heroes, their archetypal way of life, customs, habits, faith and feasts that come from ancient traditions and preserve the legacy of thousands of years, unfold against the background of daily rounds. It is these traditions that determine the writer's originality and artistry, and establish links between him, born and having grown up in Lithuania, and such prominent figures in world literature as Isaac Bashevis Singer and Saul Bellow.



Grigorijus Kanovičius  
*Šėtono apžavai*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 238 p.

# *The Devil's Spell*

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BY GRIGORIJUS KANOVIČIUS

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At the end of April, before Midsummer, the shopkeeper Chatzkel Bregman, nicknamed the “Jewish News”, passed away. For the first half of 1940, glory to the Most High, there were no funerals. Jews didn’t die from the malice of their enemies, and then sure enough, Chatzkel Bregman, known throughout all of Samogitia, set off for the great beyond. The one who, in addition to everything you could find on the shelves of his shop, added a full selection of world and local news, both fresh, and, God forgive him, smelling of mould or mothballs. Bragging that he knew six languages, he would extract news from his old, crackling Phillips and from the newspapers which his relatives constantly sent him, from Paris, London, Warsaw and even New York, in envelopes flaunting rare and valuable postage stamps, which on rare occasions Bregman proudly displayed in his shop by the market square to all who wished to see. The radio radioed, relatives related, but Chatzkel made up most of his news himself, spending days on end behind his counter.

“In our modern world one can get by without bread and butter, without stuffed fish on Saturdays; but without news, stuffed with surprises and sensations, it’s impossible to live. A normal person getting up in the morning and sticking his head out the window first asks the Holy Father: *Vos chert zich?* – ‘What’s new?’ – or in his ancestors’ language *Ma nishma?* and waits patiently until the Most High answers.

The inhabitants of Miškiniai didn’t really worry whether Chatzkel Bregman was pulling the wool over their eyes or telling the truth. It was all the same to them. Both

lies and truth beautified their monotonous existence, brought them joy or sorrow, and angered or elated them, and they were all thankful to Bregman for making their blood, stagnating from boredom and sameness, quicken in their veins. There were times when the next day Chatzkel, smiling guiltily, would negate his news.

“Israelites! Jews! I want to apologize: I have to take back yesterday’s news from Berlin. Hitler is not ill with consumption. I’m very sorry, but for him, so far, I’m very sorry, it’s only ordinary diarrhoea. And one more of my inaccuracies. It appears that Churchill’s son did not marry a Jewess, but rather an Italian.

Not everyone liked Chatzkel Bregman and his “Jewish News”. The old government didn’t make any trouble for Chatzkel Bregman: Jews will be Jews, they can’t help but gossip about one another and the whole world. But later, when the barebellies came rooting to the trough, Bregman the rumour carrier was invited for a chat with some sort of district committee and was told to stop spreading propaganda against the people. Chatzkel, fortunately or not, pretended he didn’t understand this word, and continued to create further news for his clients, according to his own taste and liking, mostly about Hitler, the new Amman, sworn to eliminate the entire Jewish nation. And again he was invited to the district office, but this time not to a civilian committee, but to the police division, to the stern Russian chief who briefly and firmly explained to him that it was forbidden to gossip about Hitler, in Lithuanian, in Russian, and in your language, comrade Chatzkel. Hitler, please take note, is not an enemy of the Soviet Union but a friend, and this is shown clearly by the peace treaty we made with him two years ago, and about friends, of course, you must speak with appropriate respect.

“Is that clear, comrade Bregman?”

“Yes.”

“Very good,” the chief praised. “I hope that your gossiping will no longer stir up trouble and we will not be forced to take unpleasant measures, such as confiscating your Phillips or closing your shop.”

After his meeting with the chief Russian, much changed in Chatzkel Bregman’s life: the relatives in Paris and Warsaw, London and New York vanished, and the envelopes with foreign postmarks and rare postage stamps disappeared. Suddenly the tubes of the Phillips burned out. There were no colonial goods in his shop, Ceylon tea, Moroccan dates, Indian fabrics. Chatzkel became gloomy and withdrawn, bitter and weakened, and he fell severely ill. Worried about their stock of news, his countrymen tried hard to give him countenance: some promised to take the Phillips to an expert in Kaunas who would fix it at no cost. Others joked that for every good piece of news they would pay no less than what they would have paid for

Indian fabric. Others secretly cursed the new government, which was at fault for the tubes burning out, and for the lack of Ceylon tea, and for Chatzkel Bregman falling ill.

Chatzkel had no descendants in Miškiniai (his wife Golda had suffered a heart attack the summer before, and even before the Red Army came both his sons had emigrated to the other side of the ocean, to America), so a relative, a noisy, big-mouthed seamstress named Mirela, who barely spoke with Chatzkel, that miser, when he was alive, made arrangements for his burial.

Having made arrangements with Danuta-Hadassah and with the Burial Society, she chose a time for the funeral and the place. Sunday afternoon, and, for convenience, on the hill next to her parents who were also Bregman. Chatzkel would never have agreed to lie next to them, but no one asks permission of the dead. They bury you: now lie peacefully.

“He could at least have left some money for the headstone,” reproved Mirela of the shopkeeper’s miserliness.

“Don’t worry about it. Jacob will choose a stone,” Danuta-Hadassah answered, scowling and just as reproachful. “It will be Chatzkel’s headstone as well. I told him so.”

“Who?” Mirela looked at her wide-eyed.

“Chatzkel. The dead, just like the living, take joy in good news.”

Before every funeral she began to worry about something. After more than thirty years of interacting with the dead, Danuta-Hadassah had never gotten used to witnessing each unhappiness and brushed-away tear, but also could not hide her deep and uncensored happiness that, at the very least, the funeral brightened her loneliness a little bit. She would meet with many of her acquaintances, and it was good to share a word or two. It was likely the whole town would come together to say goodbye to Chatzkel Bregman. For most of the inhabitants (and in Miškiniai most were Jews), Chatzkel was a bringer of good news and a consoler. They forgave him his lies and inventions, because then no one humiliated themselves or tore their heart out like they do today to plague everyone with truth.

On the eve of the funeral, Danuta-Hadassah followed Jacob around like she was stuck to him. She saw that he would not disappear: she couldn’t dig a hole at her age, when her hands no longer obeyed her and the clay loam was harder than steel ...

“Just don’t think of going off somewhere,” she warned Jacob, having in mind Eliševa. “You must prepare Bregman a comfortable place. He’s not moving there just for a year, you know.”

“I’ll try.”

That Saturday he stayed home, he didn't run off to Eliševa, and when the first star appeared in the sky he hoisted his shovel over his shoulder and climbed the little hill, spat into his hardened palms, and began, with heatedness and unexpected zeal, to build Bregman a comfortable resting place.

Having dug the hole, he fired up his self-built sauna, beat himself with birch, dressed in a clean shirt and lay down to sleep, so that he would not bother any of those come to accompany the town gossip on his final journey the next day with his yawning. Danuta-Hadassah wanted to tell him something, maybe about the headstone, for which the deceased did not leave any money, maybe about the horse, whose long and sad neighing frightened the dead; but she changed her mind, lit a somewhat melted-down candle and, looking at the flame, fragile and impermanent as a one-day moth, she began to weave her nightly Polish prayer, her threads rising like steep stairs higher and higher to the Holy Father. When the threads broke, Danuta-Hadassah feverishly tied them back together, and when the heavens and His heart were very near, suddenly, from beyond the window in the June sky full of stars, came a frightening drone, and then a terrible crash and a flame shot up, covering the stars and the earth in a bloody red.

Terrified, Danuta-Hadassah with her fingertips – she did not understand why in such noise she stole along with her fingertips – slunk up to her son's room and breathlessly, repressing a constricted yell, she called:

“Jacob! Jacob!”

“What happened?” he murmured through sleep, thinking that his mother had been worn down by sleeplessness.

Jacob squeaked up in his bed, listened and, blinded by the thundering dawn, ran into the yard in his shirtsleeves.

The explosions did not stop.

White as a ghost, Jacob stood in the middle of the yard and did not lower his eyes from the flaming sky.

“War,” he said.

He stood there, stroked the mare tied to the rotting post, and returned to the cottage adding hopelessly:

“They're bombing the tank range in Juodgiria ...”

“Where is Eliševa?” Danuta-Hadassah now understood that it wasn't the Russian tanks that were worrying him, but Gedaljė Bankvečeris' daughter.

“As soon as Bregman's funeral is over I'll ride to her.”

“If there will be a funeral at all.”

“What, during war they don't bury the dead?”

“They bury them, they bury them,” said Danuta-Hadassah, and then remembered how Lomsargis had talked about the imminent arrival of the Germans. Maybe Chatzkel Bregman will be the last Jew buried in this cemetery.

“I heard that in Poland the Germans closed all the Jewish cemeteries. They’ll close ours too ... What will we do with ourselves, Jacob? What will happen to us? Eh?”

“You, Mama, the German’s won’t touch. You’re ...”

She didn’t let him finish.

“What do you know about me, son? What? I myself don’t know what I am. I forget. A Pole? A Jew? A Byelorussian? A moth heading for the flame? A ladybird?” Danuta-Hadassah sighed heavily and began to sing a tune: “Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home ...”

Around midnight German planes with crosses on their sides appeared in the sky above Miškiniai. Howling bestially, they pealed over the town where, other than the Jews and the new Red government, there were no targets. One of them nosedived, and, maybe practising or maybe trying to scare them, dropped a bomb on Bruchis’ (who had been sent off to the white bears) furniture factory. The echo of the crash seemed as though it could be heard all the way to that unbearable Siberian flatness. Later, everything quieted. The only sound to be heard was the usual church bells signalling the end of prayers.

“The mourners have been held up for some reason,” worried Danuta-Hadassah.

“Does anyone hurry to the cemetery? No matter what you say, things didn’t go well for Bregman. In times like these, the dead don’t matter to the living. Everyone is thinking about himself or herself ... about how to survive in this mess.

“Not everyone is thinking about that,” argued Danuta-Hadassah, fixing her gaze towards the town, on a crooked clearing in the trees. “Jacob, your eyes are still, thank God, not eaten away by tears and see better than mine. Look at the clearing! It looks like they’re bringing him.”

“It looks like they are bringing him.”

He wanted to fill the grave all the more quickly, to flatten down Bregman’s clay home nicely with his shovel and, jumping on his anxiously waiting horse, to fly to Juodgiria to find out if anything had happened to Eliševa: the estate of Česlovas Lomsargis was separated from the tank grounds and the emergency Red Army landing strip by only a narrow swath of hemp.

Soon Danuta-Hadassah also saw the mourners.

Bregman was driven over in the spacious wagon belonging to the joker Pinchas Žvairys, who, in the good old days, brought from Kaunas for Chatzkel the in-demand colonial goods that he sold so successfully for many years.

Besides the deceased's distant relative, the seamstress Mirela, ceaselessly and with some joy cried tears as fat as currants, the wise and patient rabbi Gilelis, nervously twisting his payout and the trio from the local Burial Society, almost no one was at the grave. And this was not surprising. German planes raced like lightning over Miškiniai, chasing away most of Bregman's buyers and listeners, who were no longer worried about accompanying the honoured shopkeeper on his final journey, but about how they needed, oh most likely they had all long needed, to save themselves; because if the Germans beat the Russians not one of the town's, and not just the town's, Lithuania's, Jews would escape misfortune.

Rabbi Gilelis chanted with rumbling pauses and overtones and began a prayer, not only for the late Bregman, but, it seemed, for his Phillips with its good and bad news, for the colonial and local goods, for his responsible and irresponsible debtors, for his neighbours, lying in rest under the pines, and, what sacrilege, for the whole town, where it seemed that soon there would be no one to mourn. His voice rang out like never before, and when he finished no one moved from where they stood.

After a moment, they all shuddered and moved as though coming to. Mirela quickly unleashed a bucket of unending tears, and the mourners slowly and respectfully closed the gate.

"Ma'am, hard times are coming," Rabbi Gilelis said in Polish to Danuta-Hadassah as he was saying his good-byes. "Especially for us Jews."

"Where is God looking? Does He not love His own? He chose you from all of His people. Doesn't He love you?" Danuta-Hadassah asked with irony. "Does He like wars ... murder?"

Rabbi Gilelis looked at her in amazement with eyes full of an unusual sadness; he couldn't think of an answer, it was as though he was guilty of all the world's misfortunes, and he began to look around sorrowfully at his fellow tribesmen, until the joker Pinchas Žvairys took him by the hand and led him to the wagon. After walking a little way, Rabbi Gilelis unexpectedly turned around and said:

"I am too small and too weak to bother the Heavenly Father with my questions, or give Him advice, though sometimes, like any Jew, I really, really would like to ..."

He bowed to the cemetery and climbed into the wagon, along with the inconsolable Mirela and two old women who never missed a funeral.

Danuta-Hadassah could not remember so short and hurried a good-bye to any deceased. Only Rabbi Gilelis and the weepy Mirela did not hurry during the funeral. The trio from the Burial Society made a sign to one another, as though understanding what was going on: we have to hurry home, gentlemen, to our wives and children.

The strapping Jacob also darted about, gazing at his horse whose neighing demands for attention and oats denigrated and weakened the solemnity of the remembrance prayers.

“Mama, I’m going,” said Jacob, when the cemetery had emptied.

“But you haven’t eaten anything.”

“Eliševa will give me something ... Lie down, rest ...”

His mother’s garrulity bothered him. Knowing her testy disposition, Jacob never stopped her. He would pretend to listen closely, and he was unwillingly forced to say endlessly needless and meaningless words. Normally he made do with very few spoken words: usually he stammered, nodded his head, sighed sorrowfully, wrinkled his face, or smiled in agreement; words did not give him any pleasure. In Jacob’s opinion, all that is best for a person lay in silence, and had to be protected like money in a Jewish bank, which is why he took as an example not his chatterbox brother Aaron, but the cemetery pines and headstones, austere and silent, guarding under bark and stone that which is unexplainable in any language.

“Listen ... I won’t bother you for long ... I had a thought: maybe you should stay there for a while?”

“Where?”

“In the village. With Eliševa ... It looks to me that it would better for you to stay out of sight. I feel that no one else is going to be buried in this cemetery.” She was silent, and then quickly added: “Like you said, they won’t touch me. I was never a Jew to the Jews, and to the Germans I’ll be even less of one. But you ...”

“Do you think that in the village I won’t be one? A Jew is a Jew everywhere. And so far the Germans are only in the sky ...”

“They’ll soon be on the ground ... Like in Poland. I said last year that the angel of death was flying towards us.”

“Okay, I’ll come back. We will talk. Rest,” he said and turned to his horse’s inviting trumpeting.



Photograph by Aušras Baltėnas

RIMVYDAS STANKEVIČIUS

# The Musty Bosom between Life and Death

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BY VIKTORIJA ŠEINA

.....

With his fourth collection of verse Rimvydas Stankevičius has broken into a secret space, to use the words of the poet, into the musty bosom between life and death (the poem “Laužiu antspaudą”). The collection is extremely uniform in its themes, mood, intonation and images. It can be read as a continuous text, as the misleading journey of the poetic subject beyond death. The new verse naturally continues Stankevičius’ earlier collection of verse *Tylos matavimo vienetai*, which appeared in 2006. It was then that by his poetic programme the poet stated that he was trying to tame “small, dirty, snotty-nosed death”. Nonetheless, this time a step is taken forward from “ars moriendi” (this is the title of the last chapter of the collection of verse published in 2006), beyond death.

This time, poetry turns out to be the only way of speaking capable of breaking the seal separating us from the dead, with its help we can get in touch with departed friends “at the lowest tariff” (the poem “Pigiausiu tarifu” [At the Lowest Tariff]). It is in the “Prologue” of the collection that the poetic subject, though unwillingly, has to die to get into the country that is forgotten and neglected by everybody, and like a Dante of modern times to describe its “intermediate stations” (the cycle of poems “Tarpinės stotys” [Intermediate Stations]). Alongside a pejorative “musty godforsaken hole”, Stankevičius finds a more festive name for that place: Valhala. This is what the habitat of the killed worriers of the god Odin was called in Scandinavian mythology. As myth has it, in Valhala every day the worriers fight valiantly among themselves, perish and are resurrected, hunt animals, and in the evenings they revel.

In this way, they pass their days waiting for the moment when, having left their temporary abode, they fight in a decisive battle, after which the end of the world will come. Meantime, Stankevičius' Valhala sooner reminds us of a horrible nightmare, from which nobody is able to wake. Sometimes this place is similar to a madhouse, sometimes to a barracks.

The spirit of the soldiers' fraternity permeates the collection. This fraternity unites poets, in other words, the restless, the searching, the lonely ones, the lunatics, those who sigh "somewhat too deeply for this world", and who, according to Stankevičius, "even there happen to suffer from insomnia". This mystical group of worriers consists of Stankevičius' friends who died tragically in these last few years (poems in the collection are dedicated to them). The poetic subject himself belongs to it, as well as "the private soldier Trakl", who came from the earlier collection. These worriers are not very similar to the above-mentioned Scandinavian worriers, perhaps only in that they also fight valiantly, trying to withstand a frustrating life, holding hopelessly to an unsteady weapon, beauty.

Nonetheless, a somewhat more transparent, aestheticised way of sensing a catastrophe was already then revealing itself in the creative work of the poet. Whereas in his new collection the playfulness of poetry has obviously faded away, feelings of painful solitude and an abject horror of obscurity, an all-embracing darkness, cold, rain and storms have become prevalent. The emotional attitude of the poetic subject is perhaps best revealed in one of the most impressive pieces in the collection, entitled *Kūno mazgojimas* (The Washing of a Body). The subject stuck in no-man's land, between existence and non-existence, sees his life as the history of continuing violence. Here, constantly, day in day out, one loses something, one has to part with somebody dear.

And nonetheless, in this "past continuous" time, where the sounds of the outside world cannot beat through as if in a vacuum, as if out of the thickest glass there is a thin thread that links one with life, with the future: a child's ball comes rolling out of the threshold of life and death, the smell of a bonfire and the fragrance of a woman drifts up, a loud laughter comes echoing ...

The essential question that runs throughout all the collection is as follows: "Does the soul perceive itself?" Tortured by this question, the subject tries again and again to make his dead pal speak, to inquire of the Lord, to persuade himself of the immortality of the soul.

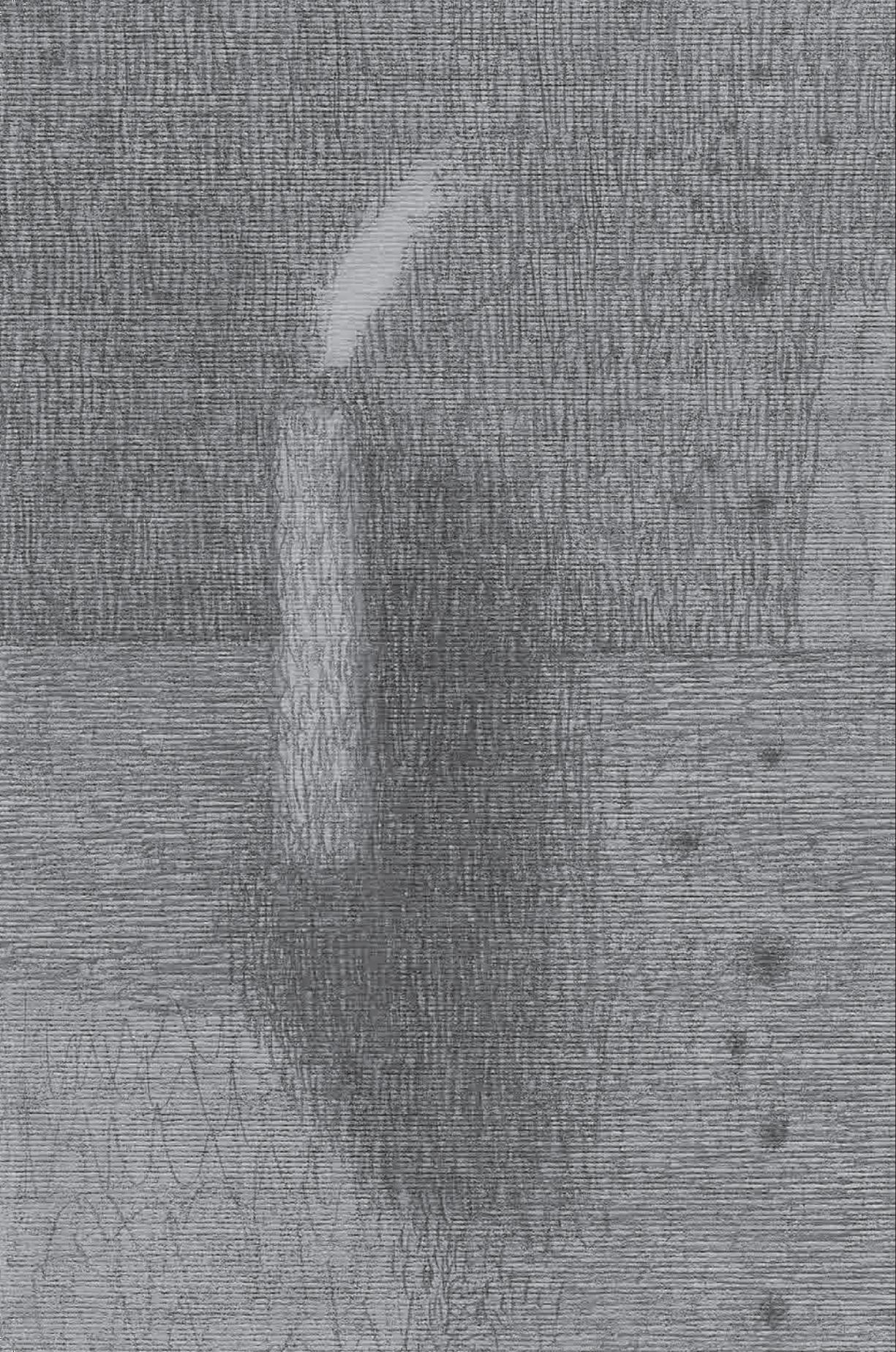
The poet tries out various strategies of speaking: from intonations of a conversation made of the spoken language, the stylistics of the epistolary genre, to variations of a heroic epic in poems written in the first person plural.

When comparing Stankevičius' new poetry with the collection that appeared two years ago, we can feel the changed structure of its versification. Metrical versification and classical quatrains have almost melted into thin air. It seems that the poet, who tried both systems of versification in his previous collections, has found his own manner of speaking: he has decided on vers libre. If I had to characterise in a word the acoustic impression created by this, I would call it rustling. Rain is rapping on the window, reeds, willows, bulrushes are rustling, the wind is turning over pages of poetry, tapping rhythmically, butterflies are beating their wings against a lamp. And it is only between times that a cry tears this monotonous rustling apart, the death wail of a pal, the eternal questions that have been shouted into obscurity during a sleepless night. Stankevičius' poetry is really affecting, engaging everyone. The horrible aesthetics enchant the readers' imagination, and striking, haunting metaphors fascinate him. When reading Stankevičius' latest collection of verse, I found a mature poet, and strong and suggestive poetry. I agree with the poet Aidas Marčėnas, who said that through this book "the poet reveals himself almost at full capacity, realising the potential which had been felt. In this sense the seal really was broken."



Rimvydas Stankevičius  
*Laužiu antspaudą*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 96 p.



# *I Break the Seal*

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BY RIMVYDAS STANKEVIČIUS

## C U T R A T E

That's why I'm calling – I was deep in my dreams –

In spring the earth was flooded with graves –  
Right under the cottage window the south wind blew  
Several untended small graves  
Overgrown with feral fingers –  
Rattling on the windowpane  
Like rain, the jingling of Feng shui ...

The graves that escaped from their corral  
Are buoyed in the fields like boats –  
You can still recognise the recently dead –

Stuck like small clouds over a grave mound –  
Some spongy to the marrow –  
Some – the stronger ones – lunge forward with crosses for oars ---

It means – skills survive (all around here were fishing villages) –  
Scars and experience survive  
Even a bit of pain (the kind which we used to call nervous disorders)  
A pillow wet with sweat survives ---

---- Sweat, I'm saying, not tears –

What's left, just saying goodbye, to heave a sigh –  
Sorry for calling so late – I should've earlier,  
I understand – should've earlier –  
But when you were alive – I had no time at all –

I know, you can't talk for long –  
There they listen to you –  
You just wheeze into the receiver – I'll translate it myself ---

---- Will translate, I'm saying, not ululate –

I'll enroll syllable after syllable, stone after stone,  
I'll check out the notes, the dream-books ...

No, nobody has interpreted my dream,  
I had it fantasised –

They say, if you have somebody you can tell  
Your dreams to – you're not yet alone ...

That's why I'm calling, ignoring the interference  
Ignoring the irksome buzzing of those small graves:  
"We can't make a connection, please  
Check the number ..."

I had nobody else to call, so I called  
I had nothing else to do, so I called  
I had nowhere else to rest, so I called,  
Imperceptibly, I grazed the bell-rope in the darkness –  
– So I called, I'm calling ---

-----  
I knew you'd pick it up –  
I know that those like us even after they  
Even there –  
Sometimes suffer from insomnia.

## W A S H I N G   T H E   B O D Y

I still don't get it, what's mine,  
What I'll be allowed to take with me when I leave?

Now giving clothes, now taking them back,  
Over and over they would thrust out oversized ones.  
It would be painful to grow  
into them ...

They would even take away the bandages  
Stuck to the wounds, the buttons,  
Books stuck to me would be ripped  
From my hands, my memory  
(root shoots sucked into the body  
leaving blemishes, rashes,  
itching at night,  
smearing my sleep) ...

Winters they would take away  
The rickety voices of birds,  
At dawn – fingers,  
They would take away even the possibility to realise  
What’s really taking place –  
Days – fog, at night – blizzards ...

On three sides it’s empty already, empty and empty,  
Only on the fourth side something childlike,  
A ball, sometimes rolls towards me,  
Emblazoned with giraffes,  
Smelling of pine needles, of a bonfire,  
Of women,

In bursts of laughter,  
Trembling of the soul, wafting ...

And here are all the relics.

And those tears?  
They’re damned, never having been mine –  
They were always  
Running before my eyes.

## F I R E P I T

Will the grass ever straighten after the bulk  
Of my being here?

For too long I've stood here wearied to the bone,  
Doors flapping behind my back ...

The bedding hasn't been changed for the mice, moths and other creatures,  
Careening into me from the darkness,  
Wind not milked for three days shrieks under the window,  
The skull's temples bulge –  
Because of tightly clenched jaws – excess of patience –  
A winter-crop on hold –  
Sacks under the eyes, a wound near the left ear –  
Probably cut myself while shaving,  
Probably I overslept the most important moments,  
Maybe I didn't take the right way, wrote the wrong books,  
Mistook a candle, paintings in churches,  
The unquiet breathing of the slumbering sea ...

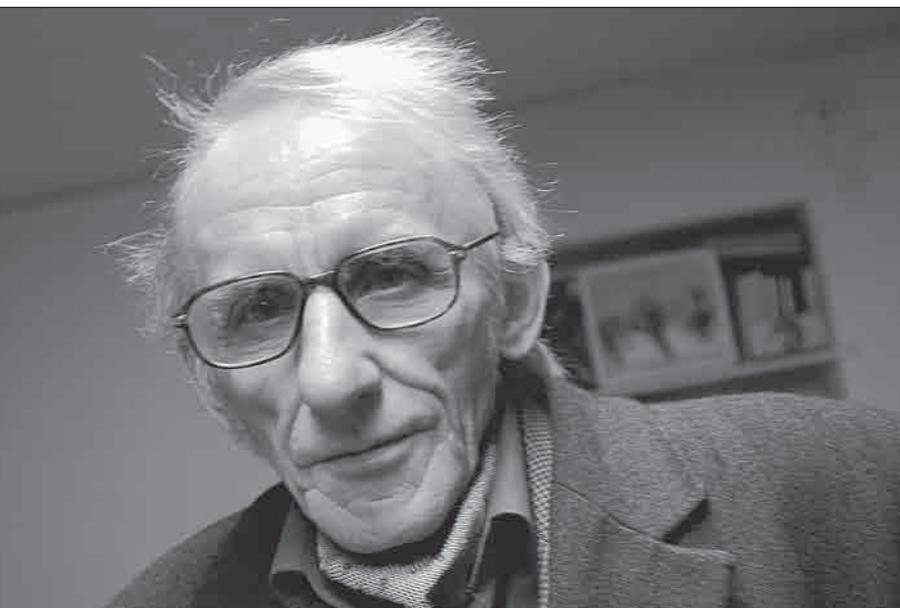
Others also didn't know until death what to do or how –  
Somehow they discovered each other – left,  
No one stands like this in an empty field  
Rocked by gusts of rain ...

And me – no place left to go, no one to ask –  
Trees make themselves understood by grating numb fingers,  
I don't even have those, no place to carry things to, thoughts  
Earned so heavily ...

Still, the grass stealthily straightens.

Now nobody will trample it for a long time,  
Will say: "Don't sit down, it seems there was once a firepit here"

Translated by Eugenijus Ališanka and Kerry Shawn Keys



Photograph by Vladas Brazūnas

PETRAS DIRGĖLA

# Luxuriant Vines of Captivity

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BY RENATA ŠERELYTĖ

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We can say with confidence that Petras Dirgėla is a creator of historiosophic Lithuanian literature. The cycle of novels *Karalystė* (The Kingdom), which is a product of arduous work and which has earned him the National Prize for Literature, is a unique phenomenon in Lithuanian literature. The author's idea to echo the Bible, to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Scriptures, is not superficial; it embodies itself in the past of Lithuania and future models, and is in keeping with models for the country's management and various structures of manipulation, as well as the mentality of manipulators and those being manipulated, its sources, causes and metaphysics.

However, according to the author, books stopped taking part in the life of the political thought of the country a long time ago, or only books that are needed participate in it. Historiosophy as the object of analysis (separation) is on the whole unpopular, because the book market is currently occupied by works as subjects of emotional recognition (identification).

The author of many historical novels, Petras Dirgėla is an excellent short story writer. His latest collection of short stories *Jauno faraono vynuogynuose* (In the Vineyards of the Young Pharaoh) contains many things that remind us of the cycle *Karalystė*. The short stories in that collection are united by an interesting principle of allusions, and remind us of a novel with a polyphonic plot. Stories of families breaking up and the paradoxically intertwined fates of heroes again create a small

cycle of Karalystė. Only this time, the world is devoid of that natural spontaneity which unfolded in powerful images of the sea and the wood in the first volumes of the cycle Karalystė (such as *Books of the Homeless*), and Lithuania rose as an archaic country after the sea had left its place and gave it up to the sea. This time, in his collection of short stories, the author speaks about the vineyards of a young pharaoh, the land of Egypt, metaphors of captivity. Intoxicating wine, the forgetfulness of hope, incest, degeneration and disappearance. And the distant call of ancestors urging us to put up with captivity because it can be not only bearable but also perhaps even pleasant.

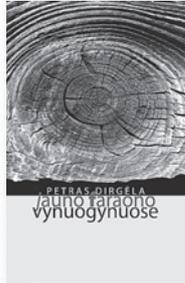
Is this not one of the models of the current reality? For example, let us take Antanas from the short story “Atsargus elgesys” (Cautious Behaviour). Coerced by a bigwig of the criminal world named Angel (a reference to the fallen Lucifer), he does not resist; however, his “cautious” behaviour has hardly anything in common with Christian docility. It is sooner an indifferent reconciliation with reality, which wounds modern society with luxuriant vines. On the other hand, the resistance of the character of another short story, Filė, seems to Angel to have been dictated by haughtiness, which is not a Christian virtue either. Rather than a spiritual force, it is closer to a deadly sin.

One of the main emphases of the short stories is Father’s collapsed authority, the destruction of parenthood as a metaphysical concept which creates and manages the world. Without Father’s concept, the family tree is doomed to decay and transformation, which lead to fruitlessness and the mankurtism of the children. Many of them do not know their father’s name, only the dead definition, “a biological father”, a “social” father, the sperm of an unknown donor, coming into this world with the help of “a long metal tool” (thus, the concept of a father becomes mechanical). However, the attitude of a wise historiosopher prevents the author from imposing the parents’ sins on the children, and vice versa. Perhaps this is so because the sin is not only a thing inspired by ties of blood and inheritance, but is also a personal thing, inspired by the human will.

Seeing his distant grandchild with the eyes of a soul, or perhaps those of a dream, the sinned forefather prays not to be forgotten, rather than to be forgiven. Hence, forgetfulness can be treated as metaphysical death; as non-existence, which, according to philosophers, is impossible to contemplate; as an absolute disappearance from the world, which is governed not only by the laws of physics but also by those of metaphysics.

The book *Jauno faraono vynuogynuose* contains a lot of curious, mysterious, magnetising images, which allow us to experience a nondescript *dėjà vu*, as if we

had encountered the old, forgotten, magical past of man, which reveals itself in the most unexpected ways, and which would be too simple to be called merely “history”.



Petras Dirgėla

*Jauno faraono vynuogynuose*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 160 p.

# *In the Vineyards of the Young Pharaoh*

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BY PETRAS DIRGÈLA

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## It Shall Not Be

Two brothers arrived by car in a barren field where once their grandparent's farmhouse had stood surrounded by a large orchard of fruit trees.

The elder brother strode through tall weeds towards an oasis of dark green stinging nettles in the middle of the field. This was exactly where his grandfather's farmhouse had stood. The elder brother stood there among the stinging nettles, which were quite tall and reached up to just under his armpits. He gazed at the leaves, and through them he could see his younger brother standing beside the car.

He ought never to know where he came from, the elder brother thought to himself. While I was being born, my mother's womb was dislodged and became crooked. After that, our father's seed would bang up against the walls of her uterus, never reaching her egg.

For many years Mother tried to get herself pregnant secretly with other men, strong men, but their sperm also banged up against the walls of her womb, and never reached their target. His younger brother's life was begun artificially, with the help of a curved metal tool, and sperm donated by an unknown donor. His brother was clearly experiencing strange inexpressible thoughts, and that was why he was over there now, leaning against the car, a real bomb, parked alongside the edge of an irrigation ditch. He was not interested in walking around the area. Neither the weeds nor the nettles stirred any emotion in him. This land was foreign to him. He

did not acknowledge his ancestors as being his ancestors, although he was not even aware of it.

The younger brother sat on the edge of the ditch and, with sad eyes, gazed at the point where the horizon met with the barren fields. But all he saw the entire time was his elder brother, who stood among the nettles with the silhouette of his bent head against the horizon.

He should never know where he came from, the younger brother thought to himself. My grandmother was obsessed by an evil spirit. She raised six children, each of them by a different man. When Grandmother was dying, her eyes shone with an evil joy – she was happy to be leaving this life, and leaving her six children behind. Mother didn't get to the hospital in time to say goodbye to Grandmother. She barely had the time to whisper to Grandmother, as she took her last breaths, that she was pregnant. That was all the evil spirit needed to hear. She quickly jumped out of her dying body, and into Mother's womb. She did not manage to kill the fetus though and let the evil spirit inside. He had been begun with artificial intervention, and by the seed of an unknown donor. Mama was afraid to begin a child in sin. Brother was begun in her body while she wracked with fear. Mama was even more afraid of childbirth. The fear out of which brother was born straightened out Mother's womb, and then I was begotten by Father.

We are not real brothers, the elder brother thought. He had wandered deeper still into the thicket of nettles to the very place where his grandparents' house once stood. Father is my biological father. For my brother, he is only a step-father. Father felt the same way.

Once he told us about a dream he'd had. Our family was rushing about the orchard. There was starvation in the land, and we could no longer survive. We knew we must die. Mother and I had a hope that we would be able to save at least our children. We were running. We felt the earth beneath our feet, the marshes, we could smell the grass, the air. We could hear the wind in the trees' branches. We could see other people running from death. At the crossroads, our paths separated. Mother took the younger boy in her arms and walked off in one direction. I took the elder boy by the hand, and we walked off in the opposite direction. We thought then that, by parting and running in separate directions, there was more of a chance to save one of the boys. Father had tried to save me in his dream. Father cared more about me, his real son.

We are not real brothers, the younger brother thought, sitting on the edge of the dirt road alongside the irrigation ditch. Father once told me and Mother about a dream he had had when Brother was not listening. We were running from death,

from starvation that had come over our land. At the crossroads, we parted. Mama took the elder boy by the hand and led him off in one direction. I carried the younger boy in another. I ran for a long time. When I could no longer carry him, the younger boy ran beside me. When we lost our strength entirely, we crawled together the rest of the way. We lay our heads down on the ground – the younger boy and I – close beside each other, and together we peacefully accepted our weakness and the fact that we were dying, together. Father could die peacefully. He felt, and knew for certain, that I alone was his real son.

I was wrong, thought the elder brother, standing there in the stinging nettles. I should not have asked my younger brother to drive me to my father's land. He does not know that his ancestors did not come from this land. He does not know that Father is not his father, that Grandfather is not his grandfather. He does not know that he is not a Jundzilas. He does not know at all who he is. However, he senses that he does not know. He is sitting alongside that ditch on the side of the road, sensing the emptiness all around him, and therefore will not go into that emptiness. He does not know what he should do, where he should go, how he ought to conduct himself in this situation. He is suffering.

I was wrong, the younger brother thought to himself, sitting among the weeds that grew alongside the irrigation ditch on the side of the road. I should not have driven him here. My brother senses that this is not his ancestral land. But he does not have any ancestral land that he can claim as his own. And now he is standing out there now, among the nettles, waiting for his legs to grow into the land.

Just then, Father was at his new farm raking the freshly mown hay in his new orchard. He sat down beside the garden, beside the poppies and the peas, and smoked, gazing out at the young apple trees, at the yellow and blue bee hives, at the currant bushes. Above them the horizon opened up. The sun broke through the plum tree's leaves.

Life had turned out altogether different from how the old beggar, my childhood friend, had predicted it for me. He had predicted that I would never lose my wife, that I'd have her with me forever. But I lost her. She left me. He could not comprehend it. His wife had left the boys for him to raise. They will never know the story of their family's past. His family, the Jundzilas family, begun several hundred years ago, will die together with him. Why had his wife taken away from him the opportunity to further his family heritage? He could not understand it, nor did he try to understand. When talking with a woman, you have no idea who you are talking with. And there is no hope of finding out the entire truth when not a single bit of the truth fits inside her head. The beggar had also said: Everything your younger

son will do will be the work of the Holy Spirit. Maybe this has come true. The hierarchy at the Vatican found out about this particularly pious young man. They sent a representative here to take the boy back to the Vatican with them. There he studied languages and theology and many other things, and after a few years he was sent back here with a mission: to minister to families, to broken families, and to bring them healing, to reunite them. But my son does not go out to the families and minister to them. He does not want to fulfill his mission and serve as an apostle.

And a thought came into his head: perhaps it is a good thing that his family heritage will die along with him. After he dies, there will be no more Jundzilases. For this reason, it will be easier for others to live, and there will be peace for the Jundzilases because they will no longer walk this earth.

Father, after feeling happy over this thought, was suddenly overcome with a feeling of fear. As though hiding from the sun, he crawled into the peas and began to cry. He shoved pods into this mouth, so that he would not cry out loud.

## The Jundzilases Cannot Cease to Exist

While visiting the places that I had planned on writing about here, I met people who firmly believed that the Judzilaitises, who had arisen from the Jundzilases of Aleksandrija, cannot cease to exist. There were simply too many of their descendants walking the earth. Their descendants were too hardy. The poet V.S. was fully convinced of this fact as well. He told me an unusual, but at the same time fairly simple, story about the power of love and love's secret powers.

Many years ago there was a girl named Magė Burytė who was enthralled with art and artists. At that time, when Magė was in love with a talented sculptor, a friend of the poet V.S., an Eduardas Jundzilas began hanging around this romantically inclined girl. No one knew where this loquacious man had come from. He did not create art himself, although he lived in a perpetual fantasy world, entertaining listeners in cafes with his incredible stories. In exchange for his stories, people bought him food and drink. Whenever Eduardas Jundzilas walked past Magė Burytė, he would growl like an angry wolf. The girl began to gaze more and more at Jundzilas. When she'd had too much wine, she inadvertently found herself seated beside him or standing next to him. The great storyteller would growl, only now more gently and flirtatiously. The sculptor realised that he had lost Magė, but it did not worry him. All her previous lovers had lost her as well. The time had come for him too to give up his fairy. It happened as it had been fated to happen. Only, the

sculptor could not understand how someone could growl in such a manner that would entice a young girl to enter into a life of wandering and homelessness with a stranger.

After a while, no one ever saw Magè or Eduardas again.

Ten years passed. The poet V.S. in his youth had begun taking medicine for insomnia. His prescription became stronger and stronger. At the time, he was going through a difficult period. He had lost all his joy in life. His heart sensed more and more that the words that came into his head did not fit his poetry. V.S. killed time, disappointed with himself and with his work.

One evening, the forgotten poet got an idea into his head to go out and visit the café where in his youth his friends would read his sonnets and elegies out loud. The large chair beside the oleander bush was V.S.'s chair, Petrarch's chair. His friends never sat in it. Only he did, their Petrarch.

V.S. was somewhat surprised by the doorman, who looked him up and down, took in his ragged clothing, but nonetheless allowed him inside. He might not have allowed him in. After all, he hadn't shaved or washed his hair. His frightened eyes darted around the café.

He saw that the table beside the oleander was unoccupied. The place looked as enticing as it ever had back in the days when V.S. would sit in Petrarch's chair, and with a fresh face would sip wine and talk passionately about poetry and women.

V.S. stood there in the doorway, not quite sure whether he should go and sit down, or turn around and leave.

"I don't need anything," he said to the waitress, who walked up to him. "I'd only like to sit a while in the chair beside the oleander. Let me know when I begin to take up too much space, and I will leave."

There were only a few people in the café. The music playing on the CD player was out of date.

Some music can be played for ages, thought V.S., while other music is tiresome after two weeks. My poetry is neither one nor the other. I'll never know the fate of my poetry.

He heard the click of high heel shoes on the wooden floor.

The parquet is old, but it still creates an echo, thought V.S. to himself. Instinctively sensing an adventure about to unwind, he turned around and saw a young woman walking off the dance floor. Click, click, click went her heels. Her long black skirt swung around her legs. The lapels on her red jacket flapped as she walked.

The young woman sat down beside the poet's table. She placed an ashberry stalk covered in small red berries in the thin bottleneck of the vase on his table. The

elegant young woman crossed her hands in front of her, and jutted her sweet little chin out towards him, watching him.

“I am Raminta Jundzilaitė,” she said in a clear voice. “And, who are you? Petrarch?”

“I was Petrarch.”

“And you shall be him again. Do you remember my parents? They used to come here with you?”

“Where are they? Your parents? I haven’t run into them for years.”

“My father was too much of a dreamer. She behaved rashly and that killed him. Once, my mother could not believe that the prototype of Giovanni Boccaccio’s “*L’legia di madonna Fiammetta*” was Maria d’Aquino, the daughter of Napoleon’s bastard son Robert. My father insisted that he was right, and to prove it he would swim the great fjord between Sweden and Norway. He didn’t make it. They never found his body.”

“Your mother is now a widow?”

“Yes. Perhaps even twice. I haven’t heard from her in three years. What can you know? She’s a eucharistical woman.”

“A what?”

“She is doomed to love dreamers and artists. Afterwards, the grim reaper comes for them. Would you like some wine?”

“If I had some ...”

“Are you hungry?”

“Yes.”

“Anything is possible. This evening I’ll have some wine and you shall eat. You can read your poems next time.”

“Will we meet here again?”

“Yes. I’ve inherited a lot from my mother. Don’t worry. Lean on me, and once again you’ll climb to poetry’s pinnacle.”

V.S. sat there on his mythological chair and felt as though he were dreaming. He saw flashes of his youth before his eyes. If I were to growl, he thought, I wonder how she would react? I live alone. But then again, wasn’t it solitude that I was looking for? I couldn’t bring this young girl to any Norway or anywhere else.

You are still too young, V.S. thought sadly. He no longer believed that he could climb to any poetic pinnacle, nor did he want to.

For a few months he could not shake off the sadness. And on one dark autumn evening the sadness became too much for him. The poet climbed out of bed,

impatiently lit a candle, and in the light of the candle's flame, wrote on a sheet of paper in Italian in the manner of Boccaccio: "Lelegia di madonna Jundzilaitė".

The elegy was published in two languages, in Italian and in Lithuanian, and was published by a cultural weekly. The sculptor who had once created a few artistic cemetery memorials, and then was overcome by alcoholism and lost everything, read it. He was very sick and was practically on his deathbed when he read it. The poor old man, lying there on his plank bed in a shack, not far from the dump, invited the poet V.S. and three of his alcoholic friends, so that he could bid them farewell. The poet went to the shack, and there beside the sculptor's sick bed, he saw the madonna Jundzilaitė. The young woman was pregnant. In her hand she was holding an ashberry branch covered in red berries. The sculptor lay in a pile of rags, coughing.

"Daughter," he said to Raminta, heaving a deep breath, "when I die your mother will be a widow. Tell her that, from the hour of my death, she will be a widow."

The people who'd been invited to give their final farewells got in the way. He could not look Raminta in the eye. She gazed at him with her large blue eyes, full of understanding and peacefulness.

"I don't know if you are my father," the young woman said, "but I also don't know who the father of my baby is. That night I danced holding an ashberry branch in my hands ..."

"There is no point in you carrying that ashberry branch around," the old alcoholic said. "Whoever it was won't remember the ashberry branch. But they will recognise their son or daughter."

Then he called out to the bums gathered around him: "Have you seen her! This is my daughter! I've said goodbye to my daughter. Take all my savings and go out and buy us some wine!"

The alcoholics grabbed a few wrinkled bills and hurried out of the shack.

"Just think, the old man met his daughter," they said to each other as they hurried through the darkness.

"What's so good about that? In the poems, his daughter's surname will remain Jundzilaitė."

"It's the same to me."

Later, when the alcoholics returned to the shack, they continued talking about the old man's daughter.

"I've thought it over, and I realised that the old bum tricked us. He doesn't have a daughter. This beauty was Jundzilaitė for real."

"What are you saying? The old man can fool a shopkeeper or a cashier, but not us!"

They argued, they fought, but they still didn't resolve a thing.

I often remembered this story that V.S. had told me. Every time I thought of it, I came up with a different interpretation. I'd talk about it, and then I finally came to believe that we live in a gray, bitter world and that we are likely to spin a tale out of any golden speck of dust that flies past. There is no life out there worthy of any of us. There is no life where we couldn't find the seed of legend.

Just like the legend about Fiammetta-Maria d'Aquino. For six hundred years this legend has been worked on, and still nothing convincing has come of it. Perhaps people will construct legends about Raminta Jundzilaitė for several hundred years. There just have to be crazy girls and wild women. We cannot live without them.

Translated by Laima Vincė



Photograph by Vladas Brazdionas

DANUTĖ KALINAUSKAITĖ

# To Know and not to Know

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BY JŪRATĖ SPRINDYTĖ

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Advertising hoardings in Vilnius carry the following arrogant phrase: “I know what you need.” This is what the most distinguished Lithuanian high fashion and theatre costume designer Juozas Statkevičius called his photography book. Writers are never so confident. The book *Niekada nežinai* (You Never Know) by Danutė Kalinauskaitė leaves room for unguessable twits and turns of fate.

The author published her first book of short stories *Išėjusi šviesa* (The Gone Light) in 1987. Why has she been absent from literature for almost two decades? “I simply lived,” she says, and cites the words of the poet and essayist Kęstutis Navakas, that “silence is also an excellent form of self-expression.” Since 2003, Kalinauskaitė’s short stories have begun appearing in the press, which were finally put into a book that was unanimously selected by a commission of experts to be among the five best books recommended to readers this year.

The first novel by Gabriel García Márquez was going to be called *Home*. But when the future writer and his mother visited Arakataka, the town of his childhood, intending to sell their family house, and saw the wasteland of the ruined banana plantation, he experienced an awful emotional shock which inspired him to write another and different novel. The title of Kalinauskaitė’s first short story was similar: *Namo* (Homeward). The emotional shock felt upon losing the home and the parents is the same, the same psychological mechanism, and the same desperate motivation to write both in the middle of Lithuania and Columbia. Divorce in a family is also a common situation in short stories. It is also a loss of

home, at least partially. The most important thing is that the narrator has liberated herself from these losses. She speaks about everything with cosy irony and distance.

The philosopher Arvydas Šliogeris states that Lithuanians are tortured by fear, self-absorption, feelings, and subjectivity. Irritability, nerves and dizziness are our most favourite “criteria of the truth”, he states. The criterion of the truth in *Niekada nežinai* is the richness of the world, the thickness of texture and specific details which are enchanting.

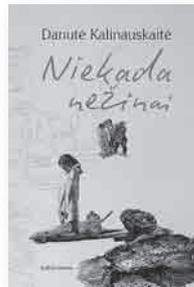
The writer knows how to take a good look at everyday things, and the simplicity of people, and their persistently being by themselves and for themselves. Things have a tangible physical state: forms, smells, colours, textures, names, blades of grass, vegetation, household utensils and gloomy relics (the lock of hair from a teenager who died of cancer). The power of all sensitivities is accentuated, especially, unexpectedly, the power of smells (because of this, a 16-year old boy intends to become a cook in the short story “Kartą Tunise” (Once in Tunis). The abundance of things testifies to the joy of being rather than the desire to have and to accumulate, because this world is “volumetric rather than a contour”, as the writer says. This is something of the highest calibre that has just rolled out of a shell like a polished chestnut. It is only a woman who is so attentive: “dust carries honey in the honeycomb of the curtains” for her, and opening the China rose blossom is the most subtle erotic scene that I have read recently, not only in Lithuanian prose. The woman in Kalinauskaitė’s short stories shows herself subtly in her vital nature, in stronger contact with basic things, with the mentioned forms and textures, which are of more help than abstractions.

Critics argue about what she writes: short stories or essays? A short story, when about people and events, preserves a link with the concreteness of life and, what is most important, with the reality of other people. A short story sees Another, an essay sooner sees oneself (the short story “Kalėdos su svetimu” [Christmas with a Stranger] tells how a cheerful master, a Russian, from the Langų visovė company, saves from suicide a Lithuanian who was typically suffering from depression). Short stories are like small fragments, “bitten out” of a larger space, which exists around the event being described.

Our changeable post-Soviet life reveals itself with all the miseries and joys of émigrés and entrepreneurship, the talents of those who remained here, or the neuroses of men who were given the sack. A good short story turns a glance from itself back towards reality, reminding us that life goes on, and that there are lots of insoluble

and unavoidable things in it. A short story's mercilessness, heavyweight character, the size of its volume, follows on from this.

Another important thing which makes Kalinauskaitė's writing so good is the amount of artistic information in a small cell of text, where every metaphor, word and detail is exact and well thought-out. This is simply an excellent book.



Danutė Kalinauskaitė  
*Niekada nežinau*

Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2008, 192 p.

# *Just Things*

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BY DANUTĖ KALINAUSKAITĖ

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I am a teacher of the Lithuanian language and literature. Recently I had my seniors write an essay on the topic of “Things” (the idea was suggested by my son: “All the things around us are so objectified; it’s as if they no longer exist ...”). I wanted them to write about the most common things – an orange, a pair of shoes, a hand towel. In an approachable way, the task was to write about the quiet essence of the things you use and surround yourself with, but which you never even notice. However, almost all of them wrote about “soshal” inequality. About the things that they would like to own, but don’t.

Here are the thoughts of one student: “Her daughter-in-law has a salon in the center of Vilnius, her son has a growing company, and of course he is the director. He has a country home bedecked in tile and hardwood floors. And her other son has a house with a pool, a sauna, a bar, three dogs, a cat, a chinchilla, an iguana, and the devil knows what else. But all we have is a kitten named Raisin that we found under the bridge.” Under the Soviets, when the cultural elites talked about the spiritual, and about society in general, they had much to say about this kind of possession of things (and wealth), and back then it meant the betrayal of spiritual values. In articles that analyzed “the interaction between literature and contemporary reality”, there proliferated “the real increasing danger of the cult of material goods” and the threat that the “love of things” would “replace love of man,” quite commonly turning man into a “slave of things,” or “Things are impervious to human warmth,” etc.

Ideologies have changed. The “cult of material goods” has been officially sanctioned, and the “greedy materialist consumer” has been rehabilitated. Only the things themselves, then, and now, of course, are not to blame. As years go by, you convince yourself that they are in fact permeable – if you yourself, for whatever reason, haven’t become oblivious – to human warmth and coldness, crime and punishment, this world, the world beyond, everything.

I won’t pretend to be ambivalent to “material goods.” I like things. I find things interesting: they are the instigators of discord, but also peacemakers that, like mushrooms, with their microscopic threads, have interwoven themselves into human interactions. Things are like parts, from which an entirety can unravel like a spool of thread. Or an entirety can squeeze itself into one component part. Into some black coat (turned inside out once already) whose shiny lapels, cuffs, and pockets are touched up with a piece of coal before you head off to an important engagement ... Things: the signs of fate and its prophets. Archives or depositories, hiding places and artifacts. Things in the attic unnecessary to anyone, living out their final reincarnation: nobody will ever take them anywhere again. Life after life.

It’s really true that after death, people take up residence in things. When I look in the mirror with the chipped corner, with an image of Riga on the other side, or at a jackknife (price: 2 rubles, 10 kop.), or at a chess piece, the white rook, or at Peponen pumpkin seed oil capsules available at any pharmacy, without any recourse to astrology, I know that these are my father. The rosary with finger-worn prayer beads, and a note from a neighbor leaving for a trip: “Dog food in the greenhouse. Wish us luck!” My aunt died on that trip. On my desk, the thorn-apple cocoon emptied of its contents by rain and wind – that’s me when I temporarily “take my leave”. And my parents’ house, which no longer exists. The dyed lock of hair in the jewelry box with the secret bottom is not “a kertinized epidermal skin cell” as the encyclopedia says, but *Vilmutė*.

*Vilmutė* was from another town, and while being treated in Vilnius, she stayed at my place. Those locks of hair of hers, according to her doctor’s suggestion (because they would fall out anyway), we cut off in the kitchen, after we’d covered the pot with stuffed cabbage. Joking around (back then, we joked around a bit), we shared the locks “as souvenirs.” *Vilmutė*’s friend, also a junior, having dyed his hair orange, the color of hope, had given up his studies in that other city, and had moved in with us, sleeping on an inflatable mattress. He put a lock of his hair into the pages of his physics textbook. *Vilmutė*’s cousin, also a student, pressed his lock into the pages of his address book. My son, then a sixth grader, with no idea why anyone would want a lock of human hair, tied his lock with a string and hung it from the table lamp. I

was astonished – it reminded me of a sad, drooping mustache of a Jew, a Jew sentenced to death. I told him that the locks were souvenirs and must be preserved in a medallion. We found a place for it in my box with the secret compartment for my pewter ring.

The girl's parents were divorced. Her father was a musician from "God's Grace"; when drunk, he'd become big-hearted, the world his stage. The thought that he was suffocating in his own home where nobody understood him, enlightened him one day while observing a solar eclipse through an x-ray of his wife's lungs. That's when he decided to sell his two saxophones and buy a cottage in the country. Worn out by city noise and bickering with his wife in their common but unshared apartment, he was now happy, with nobody nagging him, to sleep until noon and shave his beard outside using the shard of a mirror. He kept a goat, and with it (because it never got bored or interrupted him), he would discuss his existential problems. Sometimes he would come into the city, to his former home, because one room still belonged to him there. He knew Vilmutė's diagnosis, but he never knew what city or to what hospital she'd been admitted, what her temperature was, what she was eating, or if she was eating at all. He was annoyed when his wife's relatives would force him to concern himself with these matters – they'd "push it through the needle of banality." His relationship with his daughter – it was intense. Spiritual. He could not care for her or help her in any way, because he'd suffer too much. He couldn't endure it. He'd die himself. And so, at the very least, he'd leave his farm-fresh apples on the table in the foyer. But his daughter, back from hospital after chemotherapy, most often would find them already rotten. If she had not returned by his next visit, the bowl of rotten apples would so infuriate him that he would break everything in sight.

Vilmutė melted like butter and little by little forgave everyone. Even her father, because his love for her was probably searching but not finding another means of expression. And Paris, because she would never see it now. The little black dress with spaghetti straps. Her peach-colored lipstick. With her belongings in a plastic shopping bag from Maxima, she went from hospital to hospital. Already in the foreign clinics, when her doctors still had hope "in theory," one evening she quietly asked her mother to bury her in the cemetery next to her grandparents. To plant snapdragons, because their "mouths are happy." She promised to look after them all "from the other side." On her last day, having tidied her things, she said what to give to whom, she washed up and brushed her teeth. She prepared like someone who'd lived for ninety years, and for whom death had not appeared unexpectedly, but was just one more little hill in the map of her mind.

During the funeral, Vilmutė's father, a tragic figure by calling, truly wailed, holding onto the shoulder of his mother, an elderly woman, because, as usual, he was "a tiny bit late," "racing against time," so at the very least he poured some sand from his daughter's grave into his mitten (where does he keep that sand now? In a bottle? In a bottle with a secret bottom? Did he spill it while drunk?), but, uninvited to the funeral dinner, he disappeared in an unknown direction. Vilmutė's friend, in protest of what happened to him, dropped out of school, dyed his hair black, and to the horror of his parents, became the town's Blek, but fortunately only for a short while. And her mother ("I am, but I'm not") has already cried out all her tears. On rare occasions, the source of a woman's tears can dry up. I know a woman for whom God or fate didn't spare any trials: to care for and destroy her father, then mother, to lose her only son, who was changing a tire on the side of the highway and was hit by a truck, and now to care for her mother's sister whose legs are swollen like balloons. The old lady wets her bed, and while being fed, yanks at her care giver's hair, and spits porridge at her face. In order to be able to cry her feelings out like most people, this woman needs an operation on her tear ducts: her eyes are forever dry, as if filled with gravel. So she's forced to make do with fake tears. Which she has to buy. They cost 13 litas, 75 cents. There's always a vial with tears in the fridge. She often asks her husband: "Bronius, where did you stick my tears? It's time for me to buy some tears ..."

When there's a plethora of deaths, and that almost always happens after your forties, you start to notice what's happening to the things belonging to the departed. They are worth something: a juicer, dishes, bedding, towels, frequently still with price tags, kept for "special occasions." These are distributed to relatives like prizes. A good number of things, irreplaceable like a second skin, having served most loyally, and most deserving to remain, on that day become trash, not worth anything to anyone. Dentures, shaving implements, a bandage with a container for kidney stones, underwear, shoes shaped by one's individual body, are all traveling to their end in the trash containers – for bums to happily discover. Things carry away one's entire life piece by piece as if one had never even existed.

Those on their way out of this world, whether they like it or not, have to leave their things behind, even though they were a large part of them. The living, on the other hand, clutch those things tightly, as if they won't ever have to die. And they accumulate even more. Everything that is accumulated and warehoused breathes up life's oxygen. But to have only as much as one needs requires Schwartzenegger-like strength. Perhaps the things themselves won't let go of you and are playing their evil games? Over there, a moth-eaten rug inherited from a deceased relative has

pitted brother against brother. And a pair of cousins is beating up one another over a small hand-held mixer for whipping egg whites, worth no more than a few litas. I read somewhere that things behave according to the rules of social engagement: they seek revenge, hold a grudge, they lie, quarrel, and kill. And this is especially characteristic of tables, wallets and knives. My friend's uncle who left for America, in a time of need sold all his family's gold and silver, but he kept and cherished his most ordinary kitchen knife. He's certain that he made it only because of that knife. It's true, little knives at all times have been given the biggest burden and the hardest tasks: poverty, fear, hope, making a (comfortable) living, and death. But most often it's the violins and pianos that get angry and take revenge. At my house, everything sighed with relief when four men pulled our Ukraina Cernigiv piano out to the stairwell on a greased hide. I decided to sell it when I heard my son tell his new Internet girlfriend on the phone: "If you want to find out more about me, I'll start with the worst: I play the piano ..."

To get rid of what you don't need any more, the things that breathe up your life's oxygen, is a big relief. That's probably why the winds of time have whisked things away from modern contemporary – minimalist – interiors. Accordingly, I categorize homes as "hard" or "soft." "Hard" ones are furnished only with what is needed by someone worn out by the stressful tempo of contemporary life: lots of clean, empty space. No irritants to assault the psyche. The past has been virtually surgically removed. Blinds, halogens (operating room lighting), silent creeping constructions, laminated flooring, plastic ceiling tiles, euphorbias and chamaedoreas, cacti, a computer. One hundred percent functionalism. True, the blinding newness sometimes affects homeowners in a strange way: they feel like guests in their own homes. That's why wealthy people, for quite hefty sums of money, send designers to London to learn how to falsify the marks of time, to age things stylishly: to upholster the walls and furniture with the patina of time – even lighting fixtures – to soften the kitchen mirror with the suggestion of steam, and to graze the sink. For the "soft" ones there's no need to invest in age. Time does all its grazing for free. In the cluttered halls of these homes, things no longer serving any purpose are mired in sap – no one makes a move to toss them out, either out of sentimentality or attachment. On the windowsills the sparrows make their nests, and the no-longer-fashionable geraniums become overgrown. Doors creak and the wood "walks."

Sometimes, if you're home alone, a transcendental wind blows out of a dark corner. It brings in with it – through what tunnels? – the smell of the other side, always of greyness, and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. In those

homes, voices, footfalls and the dust need to settle somewhere – into the drapery and shades. Spiders have a place to weave their lacy blankets. There are plenty of those unfortunate spiders to feed to the green salamander San Sanych who came here in a box of oranges from Spain. There is always something to break: the framed and glassed Chardin “Prayer of Thanksgiving” which hung on the wall for twenty years meets its fatal fall at 2 o’clock in the morning and shatters. It probably means something.

Nonetheless, during a person’s life, things do vanish of their own accord – in concentric circles – and this does not conform to any fashion dictates or desires. Here you cannot choose. It’s a banal comparison, but in autumn does a tree choose to drop its leaves in a ring around itself? First to go is the gold sequin matron of honor dress. And the formal suit with white pinstripes and the “Fantasia” hankie in its pocket. Generally, all “Fantasias.” And all butterflies. Ties. Hats and hat pins. Sixty place settings of dishes, and as many champagne flutes. You won’t have to borrow from the neighbors (all sixty relatives, friends and acquaintances have died or they’ve forgotten you – only one or two visit you now). The fishing net and bamboo spin cast pole. Shish-ka-bob skewers, pruning shears, the electric juicer, meat grinder, and the sausage maker, the shovel and hammer under your bed (for protection). Finally the thimble, spools of thread, pens, knitting needles, checkers, photographs, toothbrush and toothpicks – because there is nothing left to pick – until only “hard” minimalism remains in your small circle: the chamber pot, eyeglasses (held together with a wire), and the pressed glass tumbler. It’s too heavy for the x-rayed hand, but that’s why, when it’s at the edge of the table, it doesn’t tip over when the green love bird swoops down to get a drink. Yes, your last sips; now shared with the bird ... The person hasn’t turned into a thing yet. If he keeps his wits about him; if he’s mindful of the worries of his kin, he can be a real prophet until the end of his days ... he can see through walls, he can hear the unheard “Forward!” He knows what his relatives will say. He’s practically a “thing in itself.” “A nail” that will decide for himself, when it’s time for him to put the spoon down.

It’s a different story when a person actually becomes a thing. Officially he still has a passport and an identification number, a pensioner’s certificate, a space in the lists of the Republic of Lithuania Registry of Population, and, during elections, a vote. But, unofficially, he’s a thing. An old suitcase with a checkered lining, once upon a time taken to Petersburg, or Bauske, and later used to transport Clapp’s Favorites, candy that practically melts in your mouth, to the market. Now it’s in the attic under a heap of rags, wrapped in a dusty scrap of furs. Such a person, lost in the dimensions of time and space, living in his children’s apartment on the ninth floor, wakes

up at three in the morning (for his children, it's night) and goes to feed the pig and the chickens, and so he goes out "feeding" all day, every half hour, sometimes even more often. Or he ends up somewhere and when he's there, he has "bowel movements" (whoever has been to hospital has heard doctors ask during their morning visits: "When was your last bowel movement?"), and in his mind's eye there are no more hills, dales, or steep slopes, only plains. That's when the relationships between the children (brothers and sisters) of these old folks (God's little birds) are tested with fire and brimstone: "If you force me to take Dad, I'll lock him in a closet, because I have no other place to put him." Or: "If you won't agree to take Mother nicely, I'll take her to work or leave her on the doorstep – in the morning you'll find a little present."

But that's not even all. Not too long ago I read a story in the paper about an accident on the German *Autobahn*, where three Lithuanians were killed. Young, attractive, traveling around Europe. They were returned to Lithuania in zinc coffins. When their relatives – and later the court-appointed forensics expert – opened the coffins, they were dumbfounded. The dearly departed had been thrown into the coffins like logs "uncomfortably" with their arms broken and legs twisted, already disintegrating, with rotting faces (they were not refrigerated), probes in their mouths, taken directly from the intensive care unit. Their relatives immediately sought justice – to protect the right of the dead to dignity. But the pragmatic German burial laws dismissed their claims: a body in transport has the same status as a thing; that's why you cannot file a suit – not for redress for insult to dignity and respect for the departed, but only for "the destruction of things, property." In other words, don't look for something you never had. What you sent out, that's what you got back: things. We apologize for the poor quality. For their depreciated value.

You wake up in a cold sweat when your blood pressure is up and you imagine what will become of you after death. Your hair, your nails, your skin. Where will you go? What kinds of states, situations, and deceptions are still awaiting you? If your faith is limited to what you can see and touch, most likely you'll come back as a thing: a remote control for a TV, a Siemens telephone, a pen, a potato peeler, a lavender sachet. An aromatherapeutic bar of soap.

I like things. I guess I'm a slave to things. I like the very physical essence of things. Their texture. Their roughness, their coarseness ... A close up of Amélie's hand reaching into the bag of slippery peas in the film *Amélie*; that hand could be mine. At my friend's house, I secretly open up her old kitchen cabinet door and breathe in its scent. It's not the scent of pearled barley or buckwheat in three-liter jars, but of a past world long gone. That world, I'm guessing, is made up of bags of

wool and a patch of muslin, a dark green bottle of turpentine, a dry cough, Agota bread wrapped in cheesecloth to protect it from fire, nutmeg and cardamom, heart medicine, and in a secret corner of the cabinet, a gold ring (a turn of fate – but that’s a different story), which, because of carelessness was sold along with the cabinet. My friend’s husband worked long and hard on this cabinet until he managed to squirt a special mixture into each termite hole in it when was bought many years ago from an old lady. Thus embalmed, it survived the old lady and her daughter, the ring’s owner, and the orchard, which was leveled, and the village, whose name everyone has already forgotten. At another friend’s house, I secretly dig my nail into her Malaysian hardwood table (it’s only called hardwood; it’s soft as butter). Damn my oversensitive sense organs! I must smell everything, touch everything with my fingertips ...

Besides that, I find it hard to part with things. It’s harder than I’d like to throw down the garbage chute the things that I can easily do without. I am especially fond of little things. All kinds of knick knacks, short stories, wisdom that can be summed up in one sentence. I could write a treatise about the smallness of things. But smallness is more palatable for the Chinese, because they have such tiny fingers. Lithuanians on the other hand ... My father told me how his father, my grandfather, many years ago in the village whose name everyone has forgotten by now, was repairing a watch that he had taken apart on the kitchen table. This big-nosed guy named Peredavičius stopped by the cottage and spent some time chewing the fat with my grandfather. When he was ready to leave, Grandfather suddenly noticed that a tiny watch piece was missing, probably a spring for connecting a gear to run the crank shaft. The whole family fell silent in concentration, Peredavičius along with them, searching for that crank shaft in the pots, in the cracks between the floorboards, in the bucket of ashes; they even studied the slops. After about two hours of hunting, Peredavičius, to his great surprise, found it under the nail of his ring finger, large as a frying pan. “What a little shit,” he said while leaving, as if he were offended or tricked by someone ...

In the oppressive heat of the afternoon, as I look at the pumpkins, squash, and zucchini, all scattered in the matte gold dust, I realize that the very soul of summer is locked in those seeds. The poplar bonsai is dropping its yellowing leaves: on its miniature shoulders, it balances time’s cosmic turn from fall into winter. From my ninth-floor apartment window, the silver Mazda after the accident looks like a wrinkled piece of aluminum foil. The wasps’ nest under the ceiling of the woodshed, like a water-soaked Japanese paper lantern ... That’s more or less how I wanted my students to look at things. But they wrote only about having them.

To have this, that, and the other thing. To have is also the desire of my son. Since his earliest days, I have been teaching him to appreciate the intangible – in the absence of this, that, or the other thing – which is impossible either to buy or to have. For example, the golden threads of a good tale. Metaphors and metonyms. Beauty itself without any possession. Especially beauty invisible to the naked eye. I teach him to cherish small things. In the way that Arundathi Roy’s protagonists cherish them in *The God of Small Things* as “They laughed at the ant-bites on each other’s bottoms ... At the minute spider who ... camouflaged himself by covering his body with bits of rubbish – a sliver of wasp wing. Part of a cobweb. Dust. Leaf rot. The empty thorax of a dead bee.” And so on. But inevitably the time will come when one’s child will badly need serious things. It’s his God-given, human right to have a Lamborghini, or at least a Harley Davidson. The kind of car that, when you press a button, it instantly turns into an office; from its depths emerge a computer, a modern telephone, a chilled bottle of champagne, silver goblets, and even a nude woman.

In moments of crisis, I go to my friend’s house in Markučiai. She’s a heartless cynic, but that helps me. Last time, when was upset and I called her saying “I just want to kill myself,” she immediately gave me a cold compress. Now wearing jay feather earrings in the deepening darkness, she puffs on her pipe, her anger is fermenting. Furious, she demands that I lie down and she rubs my back with coarse salt. While rubbing, she says: “Your everyday ontology, the dead bee’s empty thorax, and those quiet essences are all full of shit. You have to give your son the best of everything, and that’s that. Instead of weeping and feeling sorry for yourself, hold your head up. Damn it, you’re a teacher, a Lithuanian specialist, you should be sparkling with fantasies! On how to marry him off to the daughter of a Mafioso or the head of the customs office. Then your little Vytautas *will have* his Harley Davidson, and after your chin is covered in whiskers and you’re suffering from gout, you *will have* a peaceful old age, covered up in a fringed shawl.” I know that cynic is right as usual. But for me, like for all mothers, it’s uncomfortable to go “forward.” I look around my “soft” home. I go “feeding”: I feed an autumn fly to my San Sanych.

With a glance, I look around my pantry and bookshelves. A little bit of everything, all breathing up the oxygen of my life. Lots of sentimentality and attachment, but nothing worth passing on in my son’s hope chest. Not even a porcelain dinner service for twelve with an oversized soup bowl. Not even silver candlesticks made up of eleven parts. Not even any family artifacts: a great-great-great-grandmother’s gold incisor or a pair of scissors for trimming candle wicks. I’m not even going to men-

tion anything like a Fabergé egg. Instead, I've got my thorn-apple cocoon, into which I escape in moments of weakness. The time, I know, will come ... when I will remain in it for eternity. For now, just in case, I keep my chin up and fill it with something intangible. Secretly, if we are successful, I hope that he will be able to sneak it into the customs' office director's house like contraband.

Translated by Jūra Avīzīenis

Jakaterina Deineko // Lauras Jokūbpreikšas // Jūratė Gačionytė // Tomas Andriukonis // Daumantas Plechavičius // Rasa Voverė  
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Dainius Gintalas // Gabrielė Labanauskaitė // Benas Šarka // Remigijus Venckus // Virginija Apšegaitė // Rita Mačiliūnaitė // Juliu  
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// Jūratė Gačionytė // Tomas Andriukonis // Daumantas Plechavičius // Rasa Voverė // Justina Christauskaitė // Vitalij Červiakov  
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## Sintezija: A Meeting is Possible

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BY VLADAS BRAZIŪNAS

.....

Sintezija is a movement of creators of different branches of art that started in Lithuania several years ago and which today includes at least a hundred poets and video artists, composers and producers, actors and musicians, dancers and performers, who seek to synthesise alternative arts and new medias by means of revolutionary projects. Sintezija is a society of arts and a guild of ideas aimed at encouraging artists from different fields and all people of goodwill to create together, to share ideas and be friends: this is how they introduce themselves on the cover of the first (2008) compact video and audio disc (DVD), released with the help of sponsors.

The impression forms that marketing gave rise to at least one root of the vocabulary of the creators of Sintezija. Let it be so. And the paradoxical (like marketing?) aspiration of the revolutionary youth for patronage. Let it be the aspiration of Jonas Mekas himself. In this way, it won't take long to wake up and feel that "the end of your searching" (I am quoting from the work *Makaronizmai*) finds itself on the shelf of some Guggenheim Museum. You seem to be untouchable by hands also. I would wish to avoid such an unavoidable fate for as long as possible.

The nucleus of the creators of Sintezija cannot be accused of inactivity, neither organisational nor managerial. Those who have ever tried to rally gatherings of the arts have experienced the costs to your own time and creative work, and your nerves, this occupation is based on. Without making sacrifices, for which nobody will say thank you, it is impossible to achieve anything. This sacrifice that colleagues make is fascinating.

I am looking at and listening to the same record, the names at the end of the compositions flash by quickly: Agnė Biliūnaitė ... I hear a familiar voice, that of Julius Žėkas. I am listening to the improvisations that are inimitable in their beauty by the late Remigijus Audiejaitis ... Video clips of poetry, music. Sometimes, just so ... (I am not saying that eclecticism "Opera m", with whatever you want, with decorative animated cartoons, and with playful animated cartoons of frankfurters, is not interesting: the text is by Žilvinas Andriušis, the video by Virgis Malčius, and the music by Jonas Sakalauskas, but my aesthetic blood group seems to be different). Sometimes they are more successful, more integral. Let's say, the impressive unity of intonations of the author's voice, the image and rhythms of music here and there in the cycle "Dega" of ten poems by Julius Žėkas, which bridles the texts, which is hardly bridled by the author himself when writing it (video by Jonas Tertelis, music by Sergej Cyplakov). Or let's take *Demonai* (Demons) by Antanas Šimkus: the lines of the text alone, the moderate music and the image (video by Daumantas Plechavičius, music by Albertas Navickas), the more rapidly pulsating work by Gabrielė Labanauskaitė *Nėra okeano* (There is No Ocean) (video by Virginijus Malčius, music by Aivaras Ruzgas), Antanas Šimkus' *Lopšinėš* (Lullabies, video by Daumantas Plechavičius, music by Rita Mačiliūnaitė) the hypnotising murmurs of images and echoes, the enchanting monotony of a dream of *Ištįsusi žuvis* (Spindly Fish, text by Gabrielė Labanauskaitė, video by Virginijus Malčius, music according to Max Richter's "Shadow"), *Liūdesys ir šviesa* (Sadness and Light) by Agnė Biliūnaitė and Julius Žėkas, which has a peculiar tone, which is replayed only towards the end (video by Remigijus Venckus, music by Lauras Jokubpreikšas).

Thus, there are magic echoes in Sintezija. Respite, when a rapid fragmental stylistics of video clips, which sticks needles into your brains, does not become prevalent. I hate it when it is done in an aggressive and forthright manner. Dainius Gintalas does not do it to such a great extent in *Kalbos punktyrai* (Dotted Lines of Language). The text of the poem to be read on a bus, it seems, in Kiev. The author reads it and Yuri Kruchak shoots it. Then in the market. It receives royalties from the spontaneous listener (a trader in the market), the best long piece of pork fat, with some ham ...

Sometimes the Lithuanians and Ukrainians together. An especially attractive artistic emotional documentation of readings, musical improvisations, performances (sometimes a little naïve and clumsy, especially when compared with operas: yes, Sintezija operas!) of last year's Sintezija festival in Kiev and Vilnius. And the combined works of Remigijus Venckus, Akvilė Anglickaitė, Halina Kruk, Dmitro Lazutkin and Bohdan Oleh Horobchiuk ...

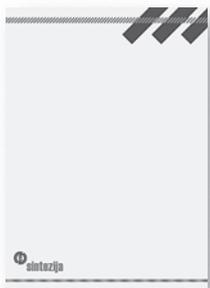
Three components of primitive magic rituals: the world, rhythm or/and the melody of that world and music, the dance (movement), inseparable from one another, and quite sufficient. Signs are ever more frequent in Lithuania too that the word, as if embarrassed and ever more often losing trust in its own powers in the fragmental environment, or simply in answer to the call of archetypes of the subconscious, that the word of poetry strives to go back to its genetic beginnings and be already expressed, by coming back to life in the form of the same syncretic rituals of the word, musical sound and movement. It is true that this movement is seldom the dance of a live body (though in the performances and operas of Sinteziija it is); it is sooner a dance of things and bodies on the canvas of a video screen, which is finally frozen up on the canvas of a painter, the plane of a photograph or the space of some installation. The essence is hardly a conscious aspiration to go back to the uterus of primitive chaos, the chthonic state of the embryo, and to mercifully return to life from it. The word of poetry has lost its power of prophesy, attributes and exceptionality in a mercantile society. This loss was too sudden in our space, a space of essential soci-cultural changes: in the evening a man is still respected and flattered as “a knight of poetry”, and in the morning it is arrogantly explained that the author had died, that his text is useful only to be analysed as an example of communication between two people. Like some signs of political miming or an advertising clip. Well, a great number of people from the generation of “knights of poetry”, even several generations, either died physically or the balloon of their words of pathos was mercilessly punctured. They failed to come back to life. Glory to those who had enough life, who did not have to come to life again. It was more difficult for the young ones who were full of self-confidence and seethed with revolt ... against what? Against the stagnant authorities? But the authorities were buried. Against all this hustle and bustle of insignificant fragments? Still (almost) before being born, one has to come to life again. Go ahead into the chaos! Go ahead, through it, to transparent and syncretic art. Heaven help.

Heaven help walkers of Sinteziija who started from the starting line recently and are finishing to fill the entire stadium. Heaven help them maintain the speed throughout the entire creative marathon, especially when, in small groups and individually, they reach the gardens of deceptive recognition and plains of temptation, the thicket of hills and valleys full of contradictions and objections. Help them perceive clearly that actually they do not go along roads invented by them and enlightened by their own greatness, but tread in their precursors' footprints: thousand-year-old, hundred-year-old or just yesterday's footprints. Okay, let us leave a century-old antiquity.

Finally, I hope we get a feeling of the more recent examples of this context, still hear the echoes of the Lithuanian poetic word from the past and the present. Echoes of words, which are often mingled with a different, not only specifically poetic, expression. That poetic “Futurism is going back to the beginning. To the initial stage, to nature and archaic epochs, to ancient cultures. This is a paradox of renewal (Sigitas Geda)”. Because: “There is nothing/more cosmopolitan/than the archaic past” (Alis Balbierius).

The word is like a myth. An action is like a ritual, one is embodied in the other. A mimical projection of mytho-poetical consciousness and practice, which disappears nowhere, which is sustainable like matter itself, towards the present day, restless and bubbling.

I speak from my own experience and from my own understanding, which is perhaps distant to the understanding, self-image and the vocabulary of the creators of Sinteziija themselves, but if even this, no matter how paradoxical, meeting is possible, this means that we have managed to submerge into a certain depth of subconscious, deeper than the logical-discursive, scientific ways of knowing oneself and the world reach: where all vessels are adjoining vessels, which are joined by capillaries of a mytho-poetic consciousness that never get blocked up.



*Sinteziija* (DVD)

Vilnius: Sinteziija, 2008

Tomas Andriukonis

---

**FROM WAITER  
DIARY: SEPTEMBER**

Rain. And chairs  
Under the sunshade.  
Come on in,  
Wet sparrow.  
You're my first client.

I'm paying.

Translated by Petras Gagilas

Žilvinas Andriušis

---

EXTERNAL VIEWS OF DEGENERATION

History is a nightmare which I am trying to wake from.

As a night dream no doubt magnificent.

My address is not a House, nor a Street.

My house is a cupola of life.

Of course, I represent Russian language, if you play (in) Russian.

Where is the battle?

Whom do I suggest a slumber?

Russian matter is better than potatoes.

The champion does not feed the food.

It's a late evening.

Time of cunt.

Never can be grasped.

While folk speech hits the RA.

From the very beginning Moscow slaves away to the intervention as to the fire.

Democracy is like a wife who recalls a song from Ilyich.

What a mud.

Again 25.

There is no place to wage war.

Sahara between the legs.

Good politicians start aiming at good finish, and the bad ones at good exit.

We shall correspond by the links of underground passages;  
we shall beat our breasts as the wall.

Verdict is not a thief.

What is happy has no limits.

Weapons mark and press way back.

Fo felo fo fol.

Penis within its own embrace.

Faith has disappeared under the makeup of science.

Expects where the horsemen fuck.

The roof has slid off.

The treasure has drove off.

A wonderful staircase has moved away.

The terrorist act depraved out of the act.

In literature and music, there and here a slim cultural fact will be.

A man to man is a sanitarian.

And a drunk asshole for the entire year.

Why I have told you about that – fuck.

Weaponlets off!

Translated by Augustinas Ambrazaitis

2 . H U R R Y I N G S

it froze  
in hurrying, climbing, waiting  
without existence till the end at night  
the pain of fingertips in a bar  
feeling it in the cords  
existing deeply  
and walking  
as a body or was I for you  
or are you  
in the photo or now  
does having my eyes open mean I see or remember  
words or feelings or the playing of the harmonica  
on your lips  
or a little child  
or was he here already  
he felt it cried and begged so much  
taking a purse into her hand so it'd hurt when he's alone  
dark when he's alone with big eyes  
with the fear remaining ...

## 6 . G O D ' S P A T H S

the path of god burnt  
on bent grass  
nails dug  
into the doorframe  
really slowly  
I swim  
In my marsh till evening  
I just talk  
neither knowing, nor believing  
In this tale woven around a spool  
And as if accidentally stumbling  
I am  
Sometimes  
The locked gates of the Old Town  
I stick my tongue  
On the rusty bars of the cellar  
The memory that doesn't fit anymore in my palm  
Sometimes  
After packing words rough and unplanned  
in the pocket I made  
All of them beforehand

Translated by Jayde Will

## Dainius Gintalas

---

### EXHAUSTED FORMS

really I just bustled around suburbs  
meanwhile eyes burned in scythes  
sparkled shrieking reddening scars speaking nonsense  
like a butterfly dragged along by its underbelly

a plot. tampons. parchment. zephyr.  
a choking chimney. a three-legged dog.  
a drowned man. a dish.

and an ever horrific tickling ticking  
in a gurgling gullet a butterfly

to wake. to scorch. to torture. to mock.  
to gape. to grab. to gyrate. to gasp.  
to warp. to swoop. to grate. to smite.

if one raves, the other tunnels,  
the rest is a guest,  
a sleeping pail of drowned butterflies

devoured. murdered. hanged. tortured.  
ingurgitated. nodded off. hacked apart.  
fractured. desecrated. puerile.

and she is teeny tiny  
pushy pushy

only a step away from the work table  
a stone away a kilometer away a mile away  
seen through leukocyte through a smoky bayonet  
fed hiccups by smoky eyes

the last hard phase of the moon  
glazed over glass and tobacco  
like mounds of minced butterflies mulled in the night

wood sorrel. whortleberry. cranberry.  
sea-jelly. tapeworm  
or other winged ones  
or winged dreamers

yellow mass – boils, moms  
morgue-orgies

and a pumped stomach  
the intestines slouch across the slough  
squashed pigeons smidgen  
detestation. abomination. quickly.  
brutally. horribly.  
liver for the stomach  
and apples and caterpillars  
and the glance of an octopus  
light and evil coming closer

evil. hot. cold. boiling.  
blue. a red sparrow.

i'm a dog a dog's a calf a mustache  
the concentration camp's rubber-booted fool tapir  
an amphisbaena's wing a hog's trickster  
twilight rabies

in stripes. in flight. in rice.  
suddenly. quickly. forcefully.  
dreaming. crouching. shaking.  
meditating. thrashing. listening.

the road is plugged  
twigs are tears are throats  
already a bird  
stork rook the rooster-hour  
bird-time now winter-time

but already. not yet. or maybe. or otherwise.  
however. good-bye. and thank you. i'll greet my end  
wading through the bile i'll meet my end  
as the sun rises  
between your two lungs  
huge as whales

Translated by Laima Vincė

## Gabrielė Labanauskaitė

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\* \* \*

There's no ocean for such a drowned as me  
Through the clearings of trees – just a nude body  
Just running  
From the dressed in Japanese style  
Backward motion:  
I don't want their rice nor their tea  
Give me a chill  
But not that cooling the mouth  
Transforming the body into ice desert  
Give me some water  
Not that purified by formulas  
Unknown figures

There's no ocean for such a drowned as me  
Through the clearings of trees –  
Just the unmended sky  
Failed to sew with the crotchet of sun, loose  
Give me another  
Give me pulsating  
Sorrow pulsating with blueness  
Cast me aside  
Spit me out  
From the sunsets that  
Are melting somewhere else  
To the dew of the darkness  
To deserts divided by honeycombs  
To the ocean that's not for such a drowned as me

\* \* \*

Take a look at me –  
We are identic, stitching each other  
With tattoos that are similar  
Identic  
With similar scarves around our necks  
That we tighten  
Similar are  
The rings that we hide  
By putting on other fingers  
We are identic:  
Ashamed of each other

Translated by Aleksandra Fomina

## Antanas Šimkus

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### LULLABY

The season returns to autumn's trail,  
Leaves fall, the park's emptiness prevails,  
The lonesome swing-set, wind rustles emptily through,  
The story ends, it becomes cold in the story too,  
It's time for everyone to be tucked in tight,  
Forget about everything. Good night, good night.

Translated by Ada Valaitis and Kenneth Smallwood

## D E M O N S

All in all, there are approximately thirty demons living in my heart –  
The First is responsible for firewater,  
The Second knows all there is to know about women,  
The Third specializes in Tarot cards,  
The Fourth knows God and that's why he keeps away from Him,  
The Fifth keeps up the pretence of having already seen it all,  
The Sixth starts and finishes his activities on Saturdays,  
The Seventh rests all the time,  
The Eighth confesses he visited Mars,  
The Ninth tells lots of tales with sad endings,  
The Tenth is a decadent in the school of Baudelaire as well as an admirer of Poe,  
The Eleventh can skunk Sabonis,  
The Twelfth is paying my bills at the "Conspiracy",  
The Thirteenth gave me the lottery ticket,  
The Fourteenth always gets me into the trolley to "Good Hope" when I'm sloshed,  
The Fifteenth awarded me with an addiction to junk,  
The Sixteenth trained me to smash windows,  
The Seventeenth manifests himself in the shape of the spy Shitirlitz,  
The Eighteenth allows me to smoke and to blow it into others' faces,  
The Nineteenth is always neither for nor against,  
The Twentieth unfortunately became a pederast,  
The Twenty-first constantly plays "Hearts" with me,  
The Twenty-second invented the nouveau riche Russians,  
The Twenty-third rewrote the New Testament in the dialect of Timbuktu,  
The Twenty-fourth made me climb out on the edges of roofs,  
The Twenty-fifth provides me with psychological help every year,  
The Twenty-sixth strongly resembles a woman,  
The Twenty-seventh relays "Nirvana" and the "Doors",  
The Twenty-eighth has a fantastic punch with his left,  
The Twenty-ninth likes to kiss my indecent spots in my dreams,  
The Thirtieth somehow is very shy since he is the last one –  
But shit, what's there for me to do in February, when there's not enough room for all of you?..

Translated by Sonata Paliulyté and Kerry Shawn Keys

Julius Žekas

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TAT TVAM ASI\* OR  
PEOPLE, WHERE ARE YOU  
FROM?

If it's a halo it's definitely wooden  
If it's Cosmos&Damian it's definitely gay  
If it's espresso coffee it's definitely with anise  
If there's matches then just from Paris  
If it's lillies they definitely blossom  
If it's a barman it's definitely a man  
If it's Ahasuerus he's definitely a Jew  
If your fingertips do the touching he's definitely blind  
If anything he's just like his father  
If it's a chalice or supper then it's the last

\* That Thou Art (Sanskrit).

SO GOOD  
THAT IT COULD EVEN  
HAVE A NAME

young  
    most likely  
        a man  
clutching  
    most likely  
        in his hands  
his  
    probable  
        self  
from  
    a probable  
        non-existence  
partaking  
    probably  
        of fullness  
with a bowl  
    probably  
        afraid

Translated by Jayde Will



**Tomas Andriukonis** was born in Vilnius in 1982. He graduated from Vilnius University. He has been publishing his poetry and criticism in various periodicals and almanachs since 2001. He has worked as an actor, and in 2006–2007 took part in the project *Sintezija* together with Ukrainian artists.



**Žilvinas Andriušis** is a poet, essayist and literary critic. He was born in Kaunas in 1972. He has a BA in history (1996), and an MA in philosophy (1998) from Vilnius Pedagogical University. He works in an archive, and lives in Vilnius.



**Agnė Biliūnaitė** is a poetess, prose writer and translator. She was born in Utena in 1981. In 2004 she received a BA in oriental studies from Vilnius University. In 2006 she received an MA in culture management and culture policy from the Unesco Chair at Vilnius Art Academy. She works as a producer's assistant in the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre.



**Dainius Gintalas** is a translator and critic. He was born in 1973. He has published two poetry books and is the author of several librettos. He translates from French and has compiled literary miscellanies. He has arranged four exhibitions of conceptual photography, and shot a film with the Ukrainian artist Yuri Kruchak.



**Gabrielė Labanauskaitė** is a poetess, prose writer, playwright, literary critic and translator. She was born in Klaipėda in 1980. She graduated from Vilnius University with an MA in the theory and history of literature in 2005. She has also studied the audiovisual arts, philosophy and literature in Finland and Italy, and released a CD of audiovisual poetry.



**Antanas Šimkus** is a poet. He was born in Vilnius in 1977. He currently works as an editor for the weekly *Literatūra ir menas*. He takes an active part in the *Sintezija* movement.



**Julius Žekas** is a poet and prose writer. He was born in Vilnius in 1980. He is the initiator of movements of self-government for schoolchildren and students. In 2004 he received a BA in Lithuanian philology, and in 2006 he wrote his MA thesis on literary theory for Vilnius Pedagogical University. He has won acclaim for his activities as a phonologist and researcher into the synthesis of arts. He is one of the most active creators and organisers behind the *Sintezija* movement.

*the view from here*

## Dramaturgy between 2005 and 2008

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BY AUŠRA MARTIŠIŪTĖ

.....

Compared to earlier years, more works of drama have been published recently. The Writers' Union Publishers has published two new plays by Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė, *Artumo jausmas* (The Feeling of Closeness) and *Blyksnis po vasaros vandeniui* (A Flash under Summer Water). It has published dramas by Kostas Ostrauskas, the avant-garde playwright writing in America, *Užgavėnių kaukės* (The Mardi Gras Masks, 2006), embracing long years of creative biography (the book includes his first play *Pypkė* (The Pipe, 1951), *Kvartetas* (Quartet, 1969), and works of recent years. It has also brought out the first selection of plays by the poet Mindaugas Valiukas *Kreatyvo mirtis* (The Death of the Creative, 2006), and the selection of plays *Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas* (The Girl that God was Afraid of, 2007) by the poet Gintautas Grajauskas, who was recognised as the best author of national dramaturgy this year. The Theatre and Cinema Information and Education Centre continues the series of new Lithuanian plays which was begun by Marius Ivaškevičius' *Madagaskaras* (Madagascar, 2004). Two important books appeared in this series: Marius Ivaškevičius' play *Artimas miestas/Close City* (2005), which was published in Lithuanian and in English, Sigitas Parulskis' first plays *Iš gyvenimo vėlių* (From the Lives of the Dead), *P.S. Byla O.K.* (P.S. Case O.K.), *Nesibaigianti vienatvė dviem* (Never-Ending Loneliness for Two), and programmatic interviews with Parulskis and the theatre director Oskaras Koršunovas, *Trys pjesės* (Three Plays, 2006).

In search of new plays and authors, theatres started holding drama competitions. Since 2005, the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre has been organising the

Versmė drama competition and festival, and the Kaunas Drama Theatre has held the panorama of contemporary Lithuanian drama since 2006. Audiences are interested in new plays by Lithuanian authors presented as readings of those plays or as performances-sketches. Thus, competitions turn into impressive events in theatrical life, and give creative impulses even to playwrights of the older generation who were famous in Soviet times and who have distanced themselves from the theatre. New plays were submitted by Kazys Saja (*Kenčiantis Jovas* [Suffering Jovas]) and Juozas Glinskis (*Vieno tėvo vaikai* [Children of One Father] and *Spąstai nelabosioms dvasioms gaudyti* [A Trap for Catching Demonic Spirits]).

The greatest value of the competitions is the discovery of talented new playwrights, the opportunity for writing individuals to become well known, to get closer to the theatre. Competitions encouraged writers to write their first dramas: Marius Ivaškevičius wrote *Kaimynas* (The Neighbour) and Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė produced *Išlaisvinkit auksinį kumeliuką* (Let the Golden Foal Go Free), while recent years saw debuts, with original works, by Marius Macevičius with *Antoškos kartoškos* and *Sing When You're Winning*, and Aneta Raževaitė with *Karjera* (Career).

Contemporary Lithuanian dramaturgy has seen a revival of easily recognisable political themes and moral issues that were hidden in the theatre of the Soviet period. This is especially evident in the plays by playwrights of different generations in which they reflect on Soviet times or the issue of freedom in general. Various aspects of exile are touched upon in Glinskis' *Vieno tėvo vaikai*. The sins of intellectuals during the Soviet period are confessed in *Spąstai nelabosioms dvasioms gaudyti* by the same author. Issues related to Lithuania's "joining" the Soviet Union are dwelt on in Herkus Kunčius' play *Matas* (Mate). The dramatic nature of the postwar resistance unfolds in Vytautas V.Landsbergis' *Bunkeris* (The Bunker). Ivaškevičius' science fiction anti-utopia *Apgaubti* (The Encased) discloses the destiny of an individual living in a country covered by a gigantic casing and isolated from the rest of the world. The phenomenon of emigration offers new themes (Mackevičius' *Antoškos kartoškos*, Raževaitė's *Karjera*).

Writing actors aim to fill niches topical to contemporary society and creative personalities. The co-authors of *Žvaigždžių kruša* (A Hail of Stars), directed by Gintaras Varnas, were his students and the young playwright Gabrielė Labanauskaitė. This performance-research, created along the principles of the reality show, speaks of the illusionary splendour and misery of our reality, and the experiences and fates of young people who have quickly turned into "stars". Atviras Ratas (Open Circle, director Aidas Giniotis) theatre laboratory also focuses on youth issues. The close relation between the text and the theatre's creative ideology determines the

successful debuts of Atviras Ratas actors at drama competitions. Justas Tertelis' *Vienaveiksmė monopjesė pradedančiam aktoriui* (A One-Act Monoplay for a Beginning Actor) and Marija Korenkaitė's *Pabėgimas į Akropolį* (Escape to Acropolis) were among the best plays in the Versmė competition in 2008.

Cezario Grupė (Caesar's Group) created an original version of political theatre in the performance *Lietuvos diena* (A Day in Lithuania, 2007), for which the director Cezaris Graužinis created the script. The director bases the appearance of the performance on the actors' civic position: in the colourful world of today's theatre, there hasn't been a single play revealing the attitude of its creators to the present, to what we are seeing on television, reading in newspapers and on the Internet, to what we hear in the streets. That was how this original work in an unusual form was born in the context of contemporary Lithuanian theatre.

Actors' experiments are even bolder in the performances of Oskaras Koršunovas' Vilnius City Theatre. At the initiative of the actors Birutė Mar and Dainius Gavenonis, and the set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė, three original performances appeared in the repertoire of the OKT (Oskaras Koršunovas Theatre): *Grimo opera* (The Make-up Opera, 2006), *Kartu* (Together, 2007), and *Uždaras vakaras* (A Private Party, 2008).

From a make-up textbook and numerous interviews from women's magazines, that is, from accidental texts, Birutė Mar "produced" a work for the stage. *Grimo opera* does not have a plot; it is based on the clear chronological course of human life. Three characters, Ballerina, Actress and Singer, are shown at different moments of their lives. Acquiring the shapes of multiple personages, they give television interviews, revel in discoveries, losses and the happy endings of their lives. Constantly changing make-up and shifts in moods and age reveal transformations, irony and sadness, although it is not stated in words.

In 2007, the actor Dainius Gavenonis and the set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė created the parable *Kartu*, after Daiva Čepauskaitė's radio play *Pupos* (Beans). The play looks into the relationship of a couple who have spent their life together. The performance tells of two old villagers, stuck, with sacks of beans, in a home-made lift in their house. To that, the creators of the performance added the popular Lithuanian fairy tale about "an old man and an old woman" who grew a bean as high as the sky and reached God, and how God cast them out of Heaven. In the performance, these two texts, one written by the playwright, and the fairy tale, are separated by different genres: the actors' comic acting in Čepauskaitė's play is opposed to the finale of many meanings which the old man and the old woman dance in a modern style and stir a multitude of responses in the audience, balancing between the grotesque and lyricism, the comic and sorrow, disgust and admiration.

The performance *Uždaras vakaras* was created after the archaic fairy tale “Žmona deivė” (A Goddess Wife). The fairy tale inspired the actor and singer Brigita Bublytė to create a musical composition that, in turn, attracted the actor Dainius Gavenonis and the set designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė into finding an adequate form for transferring this almost mythical tale on to the stage. That was how this “unplugged” performance, in which playing and singing are live, came to be. The fairy tale in the theatre programme plays its role for those who cannot imagine theatre without a text. A spectacle imitating dream logic unfolds on the stage. This musical performance invites the audience to forget, for at least the hour of the performance’s duration, what they knew about theatre, and embark on a journey with its creators.

On the other hand, Lithuanian theatre, with its reputation of elitist art, looks back at popular culture that offers new spaces. Sigitas Parulskis’ *Laukinė moteris* (The Savage Woman) is performed in the New York Club nightclub, while the Domino theatre is located in a cinema hall. Popular culture brings about new themes, too. In his play *Sing When You’re Winning* Marius Macevičius shows Robbie Williams’ fans, while Parulskis wrote his *Laukinė moteris* as a response to the “top” performance *Urvinis žmogus* (The Caveman). A more serious and critical reflection on popular culture is offered by the creators of *Žvaigždžių kruša* and Birutė Mar’s *Grimo opera*.

Many playwrights reject refined experiments in drama’s structure and language. Changes taking place in dramaturgy were highlighted in the selection of plays by Sigitas Parulskis (*Trys pjesės*, Vilnius: baltos lankos, 2006). These plays, *Iš gyvenimo vėlių* (produced in 1995), *P.S. Byla O.K.* (produced in 1997) and *Nesibaigianti vie natvė dviem* (staged in 2001) were the first swallows in new Lithuanian dramaturgy to stimulate new theatrical thinking and the search for new forms of theatrical language. In recent years, the playwright has been aiming at simplicity, realistic quality, and the effect of recognisability. He is approaching a realistic depiction of everyday life. The characters in his dramas face the topical issues of today. Parulskis’ play *Kel-tininkas* (The Ferryman, 2008, directed by Paul Eugene Budraitis, OKT) is written in a realistic style that follows the logic of the detective story. The action in the foreground of the play takes place in an everyday environment. The characters speak a rough spoken language. The playwright is concerned about “enriching” the trivial level of the play with transcendental experience, and for this reason the events in the play turn around the main character, Henrikas, a 43-year-old, mediocre businessman, who unexpectedly finds himself in the presence of death, and is confused and thrown off balance. Death directs the thoughts of the characters towards the Bible and ancient myths: among the characters, there is a priest, and an allusion to the mythical Kharon (the taxi-driver called Ferryman) is made.

The style of Marius Ivaškevičius' dramas is also undergoing changes. The lyrical comic quality that lent so much charm to *Kaimynas, Malbiš*, and especially *Madagaskaras*, is yielding its place to constructions of rather artificial meanings made of realistic personages and situations (*Artimas miestas/Close City*, and the 21st-century anti-utopia *Apgaubti*).

Dramas by Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė and Gintaras Grajauskas stand out in the context of contemporary Lithuanian dramaturgy. The tendency of poetic drama, which has deep roots in Lithuanian dramaturgy and brings together the work of writers of independent Lithuania (Balys Sruoga), those who emigrated after the Second World War (Antanas Škėma), playwrights of the Soviet period (Justinas Marcinkevičius, Juozas Glinskis, Saulius Šaltenis) and writers of younger generation (Sigitas Parulskis, Marius Ivaškevičius, Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė, Gintaras Grajauskas), is becoming stronger in the style of both authors. Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė's third book, *Artumo jausmas* (The Feeling of Closeness, 2005), includes two new plays, *Artumo jausmas* and *Blyksnis po vasaros vandeniu*. In her plays, Černiauskaitė shows the relations between groups of characters that are set against one another and unable to enter into contact: between children and grown-ups, between men and women, between social and asocial people. The writer possesses a unique ability to preserve a balance between the realistic and the poetic aspects of drama. She creates psychologically convincing relations between the characters, somewhat resembling those of Chekhov, likes monologues in which objects from the environment of the action (water, a fish, fire, a city, a village) turn into metaphors.

Gintaras Grajauskas' play *Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas* stands out prominently in the period discussed. The jury of the Versmė '07 competition held by the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre voted this play the best out of the ten finalists. On the occasion of International Theatre Day, Grajauskas was awarded the Golden Cross as the best author of national dramaturgy in 2007. According to the theatre critic Šarūnė Trinkūnaitė, Grajauskas' drama "bespeaks beautifully the attempts of poetic Lithuanian drama to supplement, ever more willingly, its imagination with inlays of details of actual reality; in this particular case it inserts from the lives of 'new Lithuanians' which bring the dramatic action closer to the analysis of a topical circle of issues". *Mergaitė, kurios bijojo Dievas* is a drama in an original form that makes it possible to speak about a peculiar renewal of historical drama.

Grajauskas found a suitable form which makes it possible to link several historical epochs, to balance flexibly between episodes depicting the past (Lithuania's first period of independence, the Soviet invasion, the Second World War) and the present; to balance between the real and the impossible, both in reality and in the

fantasies of the heroine of the drama. The spine of this flexible form is the play's central character Marija, endowed with an extremely vivid and creative imagination.

Grajauskas sums up the efforts of the contemporary dramatists of the younger generation Marius Ivaškevičius (*Madagaskaras*) and Sigitas Parulskis (*P.S. Byla O.K.*). A piece from the biography of Antanas Gustaitis (1898–1941), the creator of Lithuanian aviation, in Grajauskas' play is linked to the attempts of the younger generation to create new heroes of the past, to the search for outstanding and original personalities in the history of Lithuanian culture. In his play *Madagaskaras*, Ivaškevičius highlights the personality of the somewhat forgotten prominent geopolitician Kazimieras Pakštas, the dramatic fates of Lithuanian intellectuals of the period between the two wars, shows, through the prism of lyrical irony, their idiosyncrasies, their sincere naivety, and utopian ideas. Grajauskas restores the historical personage's romantic dignity, but at first sight it looks as if the idealisation of history is a step backwards. In the past, Grajauskas finds points of reference and moral pillars (the Lithuanian aviator Antanas Gustaitis implementing his ambitious ideas, the brave tank driver-grandmother who distinguished herself in the battles of the Second World War and found her faith in God), against the background of which he discloses the grotesquely distorted shapes of the world and different nuances of the duality and inconsistency of the personality. From tender and lyrical irony in depicting Marija's childhood, her atheist grandfather or religious grandmother, the author goes down to the world of crudely caricatured traditions (the episode of the wedding) and of today's heroes, businesspeople.

Criticism of the Soviet period, which is gloomily mythologised in Parulskis' drama *P.S. Byla O.K.*, did not relate easily to the reflection of today's world. Grajauskas joins the experience of Soviet times and independence with a dark thread: different epochs have a nihilistic attitude to the spiritual and free individual, the ideological dictate of Soviet times is replaced by the dictate of material goodies in independent Lithuania. In the finale of the play, Marija makes up her mind to resist the unacceptable reality. However, the shots at her husband and his business partners do not turn her into a brave or brutal heroine of our days. Grajauskas does not see the goal of contemporary drama in the strategy of the character's single-minded actions. He gives preference to the dramatic aspect of a creative personage endowed with a rich imagination.

The creative theme and topical issues are becoming dominant in contemporary Lithuanian dramaturgy and theatre, which we can discern in the works of both playwrights and writers. It holds forth the hope that the actor and the theatre director will finally meet for a long-expected significant performance of national dramaturgy.

*an essay*

# Writers and the Baltic Way

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BY VYTAUTAS MARTINKUS

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The 20th anniversary of the Sąjūdis Reform Movement reminded me of Soviet Lithuanian literature. Today it seems neither interesting nor important. We, authors, participants in it, who wrote and published something, had a different opinion then. I remember very well how new and paradoxical growing free of censorship of the press was, and how clear the creative endeavours of my colleagues in the eighth and ninth decades were. We were somewhat used to modernism in poetry, in a short story, and even in drama; however, in those years the novella and the novel were changing rapidly. Ramūnas Klimas surprised readers with a plot of the partisan struggle in Lithuania that was double-coded. Romualdas Granauskas wrote an impressive psychological novella about the victims of collectivisation in villages. Saulius Tomas Kondrotas took the road of history and magical realism. Ričardas Gavelis boldly and impressively broke down the deep-seated taboo of criticism of the KGB and the entire Soviet system.

The new non-fiction was especially unexpected. It was perfectly suited to identifying the syndrome of the “captive mind” (according to Czesław Miłosz) and to overcoming it. Writing came in handy, at meetings, at gatherings, and in all spheres of the “Singing Revolution”.

I would define the common direction in the transformation of literature by the imperative of Alexander Solzhenytsin: “Not to live lying.” It is true, in those days nobody wanted to die in the gulags, so, until 1990 (before censorship ended), the greatest changes took place in poetics rather than in themes. Cryptic language,

symbols, allegories, metaphors and other means of artistic expression were first of all intended for telling the *truth*, especially for historical, political and ideological insights, which journalists, historians and philosophers could not show because of censorship.

In literature, readers ever more often found the themes of Lithuania's occupation, Russification, the partisan struggle, and signs of the state's and, what was most important, spiritual independence.

The books published in the Eighties in Lithuania even now seem to me as if they are taken from the world of fantasy: collections of prose (and sometimes of poetry) were published in runs of 60,000 to 90,000 copies. And still there was a shortage of books. Readers used to stand in line in bookshops throughout the night, waiting for when a new book started being sold. Lithuania seemed to be the last island of people who read books.

Nonetheless, when I look for an image which would indicate most exactly the place and the role of Lithuanian writers in the reestablishment of independence, I do not look at books by Justinas Marcinkevičius, Marcelijus Martinaitis, Saulius Šaltenis or other authors, but remember 23 August 1989.

That day, the 50th anniversary of the German-Soviet pact, together with its secret protocols regarding the division of Europe into spheres of interest, was commemorated. On that day, citizens of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania formed the "Baltic Way" from Vilnius to Tallinn. Over a million people gathered. Half of them were in Lithuania. The participants demanded that Russia (and the world) should recall who started the Second World War in Eastern Europe, and recognise and publicly denounce the pacts signed by Ribbentrop and Molotov in 1939.

It took a long time to prepare for that impressive campaign, in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. In the middle of August, a sitting of the Baltic Council was held in Cesis. The declaration adopted ran as follows: "The Baltic Way is a parliamentary way to the peaceful reestablishment of our statehood." It was a symbolic, however, bold, and then almost fantastic, statement.

That day, at the headquarters of the Writer's Union, in the very heart of Vilnius on the edge of the Šventaragis Valley, not far from the cathedral, in a two-storey building constructed at the end of the 19th century, nobody, as would have been usual, gathered, discussed, was in conference, wrote letters, or held meetings.

The idea of the Baltic Way matured in the *rašytnamis* (the house of writers). As far back as 1986, public discussions that became famous all over Lithuania about "blank patches" in history, the status of the Lithuanian language, Russification, and ecological threats to the Baltic Sea, were held there. Beginning with the summer of 1988, at

any time of day, one could meet members of the Initiative Group of the Lithuanian Sąjūdis Reform Movement, and in the autumn of the same year members of its council or the Seimas, all distinguished Sąjūdis people.

It is not by chance that the two-storey building was referred to as *rašytnamis*, or “Oginskynė” (recalling Countess Marija Oginskienė, to whom the house belonged before the Soviet occupation), but also as “Smolny”, a subtle and ironic allusion to a symbol of the Bolshevik revolution in St Petersburg. A different, “singing” revolution, unknown to anybody at that time, was going on in Lithuania. Without any violence, it swept away Bolshevik authority and its consequences in Lithuania: occupation, the totalitarian dictatorship, censorship, and communist ideology.

Thus, that day, the building of the Writers’ Union was completely deserted. No meetings or sittings were held. Typewriters were silent. Neither resolutions nor letters were written. I myself got into a Zhiguli and turned on to the Vilnius–Panevėžys road. I drove towards marker 263. According to the plan of the organisers of the event, there, between Ukmergė and Panevėžys, in the third section of the Baltic Way, people from my native region of Jurbarkas had to gather. I persisted in getting to that symbolic place on the road. It took me a long time to push through the traffic jam. Having found a roundabout way, I at last reached the place I wanted to get to.

Among my Samogitians, there were no writers. Step by step, we divided the metres and kilometres. Here, far from Vilnius, there were too few of us to hold hands. Some of us had to stand and open out our arms wide, and to join with other people by our glances. The unrepeatable experience of the Baltic Way was to find a place and to stand, to stretch out your arms to others, to be able to see one another. No laws were issued; no new institutions were created on the Baltic Way. Writers, like me, found their place individually: among relatives, friends, and Samogitians. It was unusually simple. Only emotional tension and belief: together, on the Baltic Way, we are all different. Stronger. Bolder. We have more willpower to change and change. At the end of our fingers there were sparks, and our eyes saw very far, not only people, cars, fields or forests. The feeling of physical and social space was quite new. When a helicopter flew over our heads, from which somebody dropped flowers, it seemed to me that I saw it flying, and becoming smaller and smaller, not only as far as Panevėžys, but also Riga and Tallinn.

After the Baltic Way, we could hear the voices of Lithuanian writers at meetings, conference halls, in school classrooms and university lecture rooms. However, there was not a single important event of the Lithuanian reform movement in which a writer did not take part. The Initiative Group of the Sąjūdis movement, set up on 3 June 1988, and later all segments of self-government of the reform movement (the

Seimas, its council, the councils of cities and towns, artists' organisations and other cultural institutions), contained a number of famous writers. Some of them were elected to the Supreme Council of the USSR and the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and later became signatories to the Act of Independence, members of the Seimas, and the government.

Thus, writers' organisations, and the opinions of prominent writers, meant a lot. The attitude towards writers was somewhat romanticised: their talents and personalities were given prominence. This image proved useful to the Sąjūdis movement. Everybody knew, and often supported, writers' patriotic opinions, their political stands. Many people wrote letters to the Writers' Union, telephoned, asked writers to explain something, to give advice. On the initiative of writers, new literary newspapers (*Šiaurės Atėnai*), magazines (*Proskyna*), publishing houses (the Lithuanian Writers' Union Publishers) were established. Literary publications from the inter-war period were reestablished (the avant-garde magazine *Keturi vėjai*, which was published in the Twenties, was restarted in Kaunas, and in Vilnius *Naujoji Romuva* reappeared). Literature of the diaspora that was not known in Lithuania before began to be published. Works of foreign authors were translated. The most important speeches delivered by writers at meetings and gatherings, and essays published in the press, were issued in a separate book *Atgimimo balsai* (Voices of Rebirth) in 1991. Readers find the book interesting even today.

Of course, this was only the beginning, the beginning of new literature created in independent Lithuania. I should not say that following Sąjūdis there were fewer problems. Perhaps the most serious problem was to continue the maturity of the identity of the national literature started before the Sąjūdis movement, to find a present-day creative meaning for all of Lithuanian literature and its authors. To do this under the conditions of literature open to the whole world, when telling the truth, is far from being a decisive dimension of the renewal of literature. This is really difficult.

No writers' associations, no joint projects of theirs, can encompass that. It is only talented young authors who can continue the tradition of Lithuanian literature, and preserve its vitality in the literature of Europe and the entire world; those who did not experience the syndrome of the "captive mind", perhaps even those who did not stand in the Baltic Way, an image of which, to my mind, will definitely stick in our historical literary memory.

# new books

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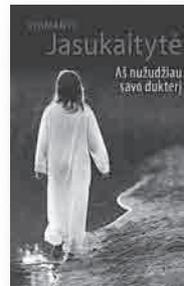
## Crime and Guilt

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BY RENATA ŠERELYTĖ

Vidmantė Jasukaitytė  
*Aš nužudžiau savo dukterį*

Vilnius: Alma littera, 2007, 208 p.



Vidmantė Jasukaitytė's novel *Aš nužudžiau savo dukterį* (I Killed my Daughter) is willy-nilly taken as a provocation (the title itself contributes greatly) and we begin to read it predisposed to find pathetic and thickened colours. However, the further we go into the book, called a “small novel”, the clearer it becomes that the “social” problem turns into a metaphysical one, that killing an unborn child is neither liposuction nor removing a tumour.

I happened to hear a woman politician saying that an embryo, “a part of a woman's body”, and its fate is a matter for the woman herself. Such an attitude can represent the opinion of both militant atheism and modern but tolerant parts of society. However, what are we so tolerant of? And what are we fighting against? Against something that does not belong to us and is not *only* a part of our body or brains? Is life merely man's ownership, which can be manipulated in any way one wants? The opinion that human life belongs to God, because He gives it, is unpopular. Man has

become accustomed to being a consumer, and life is gradually becoming an object of consumption. Politics, science and culture are adapting themselves to powerful consumerism. What would most educated and intellectual people say about the heroine of Vidmantė Jasukaiytė's novel, who goes into the street with a poster on her back saying "I have killed my daughter" because she feels terrible guilt for having performed an abortion once? Would they smile forgivingly? Would they put their finger to their temple? Suggest she take tranquillisers and go and see a psychiatrist? Or perhaps they would agree with the illiterate yard-keeper who said to Jasukaiytė's heroine: "You had an abortion, and now you are going mad? I don't understand these women. Why did you have it? I had seventeen abortions, and so what? Look, I am alive and that's it ..."

This "and that's it" stuns us one more than the words "alive" and "seventeen". And at the same time these words strike with a terrible destructive force. I am beginning to understand what the concept "the gates of hell" mean whereby a woman's womb is defined in the Bible. This is the place for lost souls, whose fate was determined by God, but man terminated it of his own free will, and did not let it open, mature, or perceive itself. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is equally important to both a mature life and to one that has just started.

This novel testifies to that. Its heroine tears herself apart and "goes crazy" (in her husband's eyes, she remains crazy because he assumes neither blame nor responsibility for the termination of the life, because he is of one of those "normal" people for whom an abortion is just an operation). She frightens the people around her and harms her family by her tactlessness, hears the voice of her unborn child, a girl that resembles mist, goes to monasteries and churches, writes to parliament, and appeals to the police and the prosecutor's office because she considers herself to be a criminal, a murderer. We could say that the heroine's feeling of guilt is hypertrophied, perhaps even unnatural, but which one of us could say so if we all are from the family of the guilty ones?

The author's style is open, simple, surprisingly economical and accurate, without any "art", any "high matters", or hidden metaphors; therefore, this is an honest, professional and moving work in which there is something more than an "acute social problem". The killed life serves as a link between the two worlds, as a part of the woman's soul rather than her body. Try to imagine how terrible it is to lose part of your soul. And the link with the metaphysical world. To come face to face with matter, with death and disappearance. Infertility.

The author's professionalism does not allow her to veer off into cheap tricks. Apparent madness and a stay in a mental hospital do not give the heroine absolution

for her sins, nor do they give the novel any doubtful piquancy. The novel remains uniform to the very end: highly dynamic, impulsive, as if written in one sitting. The format of the work chosen is convincing, a “small novel” (because it would be a risk for a “big” one to stretch out the theme to the end). The following words are absolutely convincing: “Why have I not happened to meet any woman who suffers like I do? I feel there are lots of them, but they live in prisons of silence, together with their unborn children (...) Those women live, and bring up other children but their love is cooked, lifeless, it gradually turns into jelly, into glue, which somehow glues torturing life.”

Vidmantė Jasukaitytė’s novel testifies to the fact that love can be neither divided nor measured; it is endless, there is enough of it for each life started.

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## It is still Important

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BY ELENA BALIUTYTĖ

Jonas Kalinauskas

*Miego meistras*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 88 p.



*Miego meistras* (The Master of Sleep) is the 11th book of poetry by Jonas Kalinauskas, and the sixth published since independence. Memory and the past are important in all of his books: he goes back to the village of his childhood, and goes deep into his family roots, stories and the fates of people.

The relation between the lyrical subject and the past is complicated and contradictory in *Miego meistras*: by recalling the past, he seeks to overcome the senselessness of the present, but the same question of sense meets him there too. In many poems, the lyrical subject meets with his earlier self, and does not know very well what to speak about with that “other”, and, on the whole, why they had to meet. Pajiesis of his youth, secret currant bushes, the extinct village of Balandžiai, with its people and stories, come to life in the verse in surrealistic images of “reversed John”, which can be understood as the author’s alter ego, in the present, in dreams and other sleep/life visions.

These are deliberate distances, the poetry of the paradoxical image, a poetic narrative that has become especially fragmentary and associative. Signs of social reality

(neither the former nor the present) are not important in the collection: the poet writes from existential experience, after the question of meaning has arisen. One could even say that *Miego meistras* is a book of illusionless poetry. Images of the night, sleep, dream, shadows, which direct the “plots” towards the other side, are prevalent in it. The world of the collection can metaphorically be called the winter image, when everything that is alive puts a stop to its life cycle and dies. Time in the book seems to have stopped, frozen in unchanging succession, as if life has tuned into a dream. This impression is strengthened by the motif of silence, which is of importance in the book.

The title of the collection aptly and expressively identifies the prevalent features of the lyrical subject, its inclination for peculiar states of weightlessness, indeterminateness and passivity. In this case sleep would be the border between life and death. The author sometimes inserts fragments of realistic stylistics in the shadows, non-material images of the memory, and this counterpoint of styles often renders irony or autoirony to a poem. Literary critics have assessed *Miego meistras* as the author’s best book.

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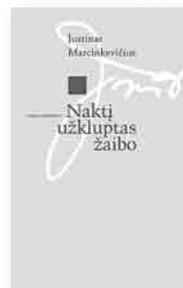
## A Literary Retreat

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BY VIKTORIJA DAUJOTYTĖ

Justinas Marcinkevičius  
*Naktį užkluptas žaibo*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 126 p.



The main ontological line of Justinas Marcinkevičius’ current lyrics is ascetic. In terms of existentialism, an ascetic attitude also means a withdrawal into the safer retreat of literaryism. The poet, when writing intensely and for a long time, accumulates not only existential, but also literary, experience. This means that he can act on the level of the text and its literaryism alone, correctly phrase, rely on the language, not to spin out, stop in time, turn back, and conclude unexpectedly. Contrasts, effective realities remain, but the text follows its only own principles.

*Naktį užkluptas žaibo* (Overtaken by Lightning at Night) is a two-part book, consisting of two chapters: the first part is entitled *Pastabos* (Remarks), the other *Elegijos ir kt.* (Elegies, etc). Surprising symmetry – the number of pages is the

same. *Pastabos* is a stopping of observation, sooner self-observation, and language. The experience of elegies in Justinas Marcinkevičius' lyrics is essential – *Septynios meilės elegijos* (Seven Elegies of Love) once held the attention of both readers and critics.

The general, dominant mood of the lyrics of this poet is elegiac. Elegy is inseparable from reflection, sadness, and the consideration of death. It might be said that the elegiac character is the inner link in the collection. When experiencing the world and itself, experiencing itself by means of the world, and the world by means of itself, consciousness finds itself in front of a blank wall – the deeper it experiences, the higher the wall; the gate keeps opening, but it is not open. Irony that is heard more clearly in the first part of the book is often of an elegiac nature. Elegy does not avoid irony or even sarcasm in the second part of the book; joining elegy and irony marks Justinas Marcinkevičius' new poetical discoveries. Special moments, the enlightenment of consciousness, and alertness are important.

This is the same *undertaking*. It does not matter that it is not by lightning; consciousness seems to be obliged to speak, and it seems that speaking reaches for deeper times than in life. Immersion in existential situations, perhaps a hardly imagined constant presence in them: the poem means coming to the surface, breathing in air, the possibility to speak, yielding to the power of the language, leading along a straight path and endless spirals of metaphors. In this way, the dilemma of ontological certainty and professional literaryism is resolved.

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## The Word in the Void

BY REGIMANTAS TAMOŠAITIS

Lidija Šimkutė

*Mintis ir uola / Thought and Rock*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 111 p.



Lidija Šimkutė, a poetess with Samogitian roots, was born in 1942. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania in 1944, her family fled to Germany. In 1949, they moved to Australia, where she lives to the present day. For many years she worked as a nutritionist in Adelaide. In 1977, she made her poetic debut in *Metmenys*, a literary and cultural magazine of Lithuanian émigrés.

Šimkutė has published the memorable poetry books *Antrasis ilgesys* (The Second Longing, 1978), *Prisiminimų inkarai* (Anchors of Memories, 1982), *Vėjas ir šaknys* (Wind and Roots, 1991) and *Tylos erdvės* (Spaces of Silence, 1999). She writes in Lithuanian and English, and has published the bilingual poetry selections *Tylos erdvės/Spaces of Silence* (1999), *Vėjo žvilgesys/Wind Sheen* (2003), *Weißer Schatten/White Shadows* (2000, translated by Christian Loidl), *Iš toli ir arti/Z bliska i z daloka* (2003, co-author and translator Sigitas Birgelis). Her latest book *Mintis ir uola/Thought and Rock* (2008) is also bilingual.

Readers' attention is attracted by the new minimalist forms of the poems, the intimate sound of the word, and the quest for harmony between man and the universe. Poetic minimalism imitates oriental stylistics, while in concepts and the assertion of the natural element, the poet enters the ideological context of the New Age movement. These poetic orientations are supplemented by landscape miniatures and the small-scale lyrics of love. Characteristic of the poet is an aesthetic relation with reality enriched by elements of romantic mysticism: freedom, endless longing, and the expectation of the sacredness of the world.

This intonation of the religion of universal powers, with elements of ethnic nostalgia, continues throughout her entire creative work. Yet, the main accent falls on the word, its magic power and the sound of its deep meaning. The poet is concerned not with expanded metaphors and the sensual concreteness of the image, but with a vertical actualisation of meaning, a magical denomination of things. It is also important that, in naming objects and fragmentary phenomena of life, the poet actualises not the physical reality of the world and the psychological reality of the human, but points to the metaphysical foundations of this reality, and directs the thoughts towards the metaphysical space of existence. Therefore, the poetic word is gradually getting emptier throughout her creative path. In losing its concreteness, it just points to or emphasises what is impossible to think of clearly or experience directly. To her, the word is a means for highlighting the ontological void. Eventually, the spaces of her work become more cosmic, and the word more lucid, almost empty. The aesthetic principle becomes increasingly soteriological: a poem looks like a means of meditation or a ritual act.

The new book is written in a Buddhist style: lots of space of white paper, and very few words. The word as the trace of the human's ephemeral existence has only one mission: to emphasise that white void as true reality; and as little as possible human feeling in words, because they do not contain human substance. It seems that, to the author, her poems are more important as an act of ritual reading, as a peculiar spiritual monologue, and not as sincere communication with the human reader.

John M. Coetzee, a Nobel laureate, writes at the beginning of the book that “*Thought and Rock* contains poems of remarkable purity, written in the spirit of receptiveness to the world in which the poetic insight suddenly emerges like a bird taking wing.”

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## On the Other Side of Poetry

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BY RIMANTAS KMITA

Gintaras Grajauskas  
*Eilėraščiai savo kailiu*

Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2008, 111 p.



Gintaras Grajauskas does not publish books for no purpose, but for the simple reason that new poems have accumulated. Every new book is another step to somewhat different poetics, putting on new accents. Two main lines, which started in the earlier creative work, the emotional attitude of the loser and the aesthetics of anti-literaryism, are developed and intertwined in the collection *Eilėraščiai savo kailiu*.

The characters in Grajauskas' poems are outsiders in life, lame ducks, the betrayed, people left in loneliness, outcasts, those who are not understood, and sometimes people who choose defeat consciously, as an alternative to success in society. As a prototype for all of them, Jesus Christ to whom defeat is the most important, is chosen rather unexpectedly in the book. The defeat is chosen as an alternative in a winners' society, which is constructed according to scenarios of the happy end and success stories as a more humane, natural attitude enabling one to isolate oneself from the pressure of success, compulsory heroism, and to try to be real rather than to seem and avoid a “sin” to truthfulness.

A defeat, tiredness removes masks put on by the scenarios of different duties, functions, success for a short time, and a real human face appears for a while. It is only an exhausted journalist who has had a good cry and finally speaks as a live human being (the poem “Žurnalistė” [The Journalist]).

This emotional attitude is closely related to Grajauskas' *idée fixe* to avoid literaryism, to break out of literature, to create a non-poem, not to be a poet. By refusing literary conventions, clearing the language of the poem of unnecessary poeticisms, the author seeks to achieve the effect which the title of the collection refers to: to

speak from his own specific experience to a specific person, to reduce the distance between the writer and the reader as much as possible, not to flirt, not to hide behind metaphors. *Eilėraščiai savo kailiu* seeks to be without any skin: ascetic recordings, devoid of unnecessary details.

Though Gintaras Grajauskas tells stories in his book, he curtails some of his poems to the following sayings: you won't overcry the silent. By means of such non-poetical forms, it is paradoxically sought to find oneself on the other side of poetry: I gave up writing, started living and then fulfilled myself, runs one of the poems.

By his sixth collection of poems, Grajauskas once again confirms that he has created his own peculiar timbre of voice in Lithuanian poetry, and it sometimes seems that the poet does not try to pursue originality, he ignores the literary context, he marches into the domain which post-modernist authors have declared to be an illusion, he tries to discover certain things anew, and believes that not everything is mere masks. Without any poses, without any justifications, to say *be, I still love you*, and not to be afraid to be commonplace, is brave.

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## Dances Past and Future

BY VALENTINAS SVENTICKAS

Aidas Marčėnas

*Būtieji kartiniai*, Vilnius: Apostrofa, 2008, 416 p.  
*Šokiai*, Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla,  
2008, 118 p.



Why dances (*Šokiai*)? Aidas Marčėnas, who has managed to adjust modernism and tradition thus far, and having distinguished himself sharply for that, becomes a jazz dancer running wild in his new poems. He writes “disintegrating” sonnets (thus far, his sonnets have been close to the norm). He somehow makes *vers libre* dance rhymed classics of the form. He calls the final poem of the collection, which is really beautiful, Tan Zen, relating the German and Oriental meaning of “dances”. And, smiling because of that. In short, he creates a new model of free verse, which recalls old pirouettes, speaking ironically about them, and making use of present day movements.

This is a new road for new Lithuanian poetry, which is not completely clear yet. Marčėnas is not alone on this road, but he has managed to give a name to it: dances.

Real poets do everything in a simple way. By the titles of the chapters of the collection, Marčėnas adheres to the principle of simplicity: he puts poems written between the autumn of 2005 and the end of 2007 in chronological order. And they tell the reader what the poet was concerned about at that time.

I would begin a summary of the book *Būtieji kartiniai* with the following quotation from Marčėnas' poem: to watch for a long while/into the eyes until you feel the foreign pain. These are words about the method of criticism. Of course, they words are metaphorical. Reviews of literature published in the cultural press, which Marčėnas wrote for, and his attitudes towards creative work expressed by him in various genres (talks, essays), prevail in the book. As a reviewer, Marčėnas undertook the classic task of a poet becoming a critic, to evaluate, to say what is what. What does he usually criticise? Standards, moralisation, tedium, and old-fashioned style.

Marčėnas the critic is inclined to rely on his artistic intuition, the impression experienced. He does not stick to one method of analysis; he is acquainted with the work of the most distinguished theoreticians, and cites those that he likes. He is not inclined to impose a cognitive or didactic mission on literature; he perceives it as a creative phenomenon, worth itself. It has to affect the world by its very presence.

The familiar talking in his reviews takes root better than in his poetry, like his abilities to make funny jokes, saving him from taking offence; however, unable to save. Walking on the borders of seriousness and playfulness is one of the most admirable peculiarities of Marčėnas' criticism and non-fiction. Here speaks a dancer, a jazzman who is always ready to improvise. Combining the truth and doubt, a recognised motif and an absolutely new one, mockery and thoughtfulness.

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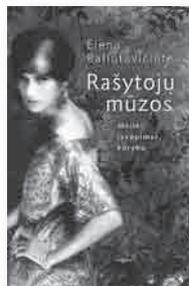
## Closer to the Masses

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BY ALEKSANDRA FOMINA

Elena Baliutavičiūtė  
*Rašytojų muzos*

Vilnius: Tyto alba, 2008, 456 p.



This is one more book devoted to the complex and unusual relations between a creator and the rest of the world. It seems that books like this are very useful in Lithuania, because the view that a creator is some sort of saint carrying out a

special mission of spiritual education and the sublimation of the soul is still deep-rooted in this country. This is why, in memoirs and anthologies, writers are shown only in a positive light, and their portraits seem to remain unfinished: do we not all know that a writer, just like any other person, has vices, bad habits, and a multitude of rationally inexplicable qualities. Such “dark sides of the moon” abound in this collection, written in a light style.

Literary scholars and readers with an extremely serious attitude to literature will probably be infuriated: there is no need to depict, in such detail, the writers’ intimate lives or announce their unconventional sexual orientations, as was done in the sections devoted to Marcel Proust, the Vilnius-born Romain Gary, or the master of the detective story Raymond Chandler. It seems, however, that the book is intended for a general readership, and not for scholars or literary experts. Thus, the juicy details seem to bring the adored geniuses to the ground, and make them “closer to the masses”. Consequently, they make them more understandable, and, finally, kindle interest not only in the writers but also in their creative work. This is quite a step in motivating people to read.

The author has selected many beautiful photographs, in which world-famous writers and their women look both dignified and carelessly elegant. It must be admitted that the captions resemble the style of *Žmonės* (People) magazine, and although the language of the book is emphatically refined, it does not avoid the “dissection” so characteristic of journalistic writing. The author calculates meticulously the value of jewellery given as gifts to the beloved, informs us what Stefan Zweig drank before committing suicide, and what efforts the writers put into creating their halos of genius through active communication with the press. It turns out that many of them saw writing as a profitable business, and not as a subtle expression of the soul. Also, the book shows that women (and men) took an interest in the writer’s glory or romantic image in society. I did not come across a single quotation from a work inspired by a muse; in general, the writers’ works occupy very little space in the book. As for the muses, first of all we find descriptions of their appearance, origins, profession and methods of bewitching. Quite a number of geniuses, who were far from moral, willingly surrendered to these muses.

# e vents

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## Encounters in the Northern Summer

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BY TOMAS ANDRIUKONIS

The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that all literary festivals and forums are not worth much if papers, readings and the like are their main goal. All that could be a pretext for an event, but not its final aim. I think the most important are encounters: old and new, successful, and not very. That is why Šiaurės vasara (Northern Summer, which took place in Jurbarkas from 12 to 15 June) is such an accomplished and successful event. Compared to Poezijos pavasaris (Spring of Poetry) or Poetinis Druskininkų ruduo (Druskininkai Poetic Fall), the number of participants was quite modest, but that is why the event was much more intimate and had a better circulation of socio-literary energy.

The person who writes about such events faces established genres and stylistic norms of release of this particular sort, which do not allow the appearance in text of elements like, let us say, the warmth of the blanket in the hotel room, the agility of a cocker spaniel, or the view of the moon over the bridge in Jurbarkas. But aren't these things important?

Through details like these, one could unfold everything that is necessary. The text, however, would lose its institutional aspect. Thus, just saying that some participants

vanished as soon as the European Cup started, I will move to the programme of the event.

The theme of this year's forum was "Writer and Revolt". Thus, it was very much to the point that the first evening started with literary readings and jazz in the Neringa. Incidentally, one of the best features of the entire forum was the combination of readings and jazz. The most obvious example that has stuck in my memory was the continuation of the sound theme of the experimental dadaist poem by the Icelandic writer Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl with saxophone, bass guitar and percussion. Rolandas Rastauskas described, quite accurately, the poems by this writer as sound scripts, which Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl performs in quite an interesting way. And, what is most peculiar, he somehow manages to *read* all this phonetic abundance and all those reduced tongue twisters from his little book.

Apart from the Icelandic, there were two more northern guests at the forum: Vigdis Hjorth from Norway, whose style of communication was quite un-northerly, and the Swedish writer Maja Lundgren. The fourth and last guest was the Finnish writer and graphic artist Tuomas Kyrö. As literary readings go, Hjorth's short, merry and very much à la Bridget Jones story of a woman intellectual left the best impressions among the foreigners. Having started as a children's writer, Hjorth is one of the most important contemporary Norwegian writers.

In addition to the literary readings and jazz, there were other papers, listening to which I arrived at the conclusion that in their papers writers are mostly inclined towards essay writing, or patchwork, as Giedra Radvilavičiūtė metaphorically defined essay writing. And when writers attempt to step into spheres in which critics feel more at home, into more academic discourse, they often get lost, because they do not define the issue and do not set the borders of the theme.

Of the essayist papers, I would like to single out Agnė Žagrakalytė's "Mother-Poet" on two opposite, conflicting and uncompromising forces arising from two positions indicated in the title of the paper, which constantly violate each other's borders, and on the attempts to preserve these borders intact for a little longer. Another patchwork belongs to Tuomas Kyrö: a sincere yet not sentimental and honest narrative about a lengthy attempt to adapt to society, and later, upon achieving success and recognition, finding a way to avoid comfort and acceptability. Kęstutis Navakas' essays on poets and relatives, and on poets and summer, were also read, but they belonged to literary readings.

Among the papers of the second, writer-misleading, type, I would also like to single out two delivered at the last session. One was the first, the other was the last, but due to their very obvious ideological opposition, they became inseparable from

one another. These were the papers by Laimantas Jonušys and Darius Pocevičius. According to Jonušys, only aesthetic revolt is of value in art, while ideological and especially collective revolutionary rebellion is disastrous, not only in art, but in life, too. Some misunderstanding took place here due to the speaker's rather peculiar use of the term "ideology". For, after all, an aesthetic revolt is impossible without an ideological one. Each ideology has its own aesthetics, and the other way round, just like the obverse and the reverse make up a coin. Seconding Laimantas Jonušys, I would like to add that, in the case of the "literary coin", the obverse belongs to aesthetics.

Pocevičius' paper was entirely different: as the speaker read several points on how to demolish the hegemonic culture production machine, protesters sprang up who tried to boo him and spread programmatic feedback. After some racket and the eventual departure of the latter (according to some participants, Pocevičius had staged this part of his paper), a short film on several counter-cultural actions in Lithuania, and on the adventures of Castor & Pollux, was shown.

Grudgingly obeying the above-mentioned stylistic norms reserved for information releases, I must add that most readers, speakers, interviewers and musicians were bypassed. What remains is to offer a justification to the effect that the main poetic feature of releases of this sort is reduction.

Thus, in summing up, I can say that there were good literary readings, good music and good papers. What else, apart from some boldness, is necessary for good encounters to happen?

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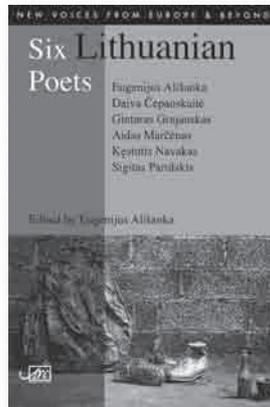
## An Anthology in Great Britain

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This year, several collections of Lithuanian poetry have been published in the United Kingdom. At the end of March, together with the *Poetry Review* published by the London Poetry Society (Volume 98:10 Spring 2008) the supplement *Contemporary Lithuanian Poets* (Šiuolaikiniai lietuvių poetai) was issued. In the autumn of this year, Bloodaxe, a well-known British publishing house, published the collection of poetry by Tomas Venclova *The Junction*.

The new anthology of Lithuanian poetry *Six Lithuanian Poets*, compiled by Eugenijus Ališanka, the author of the introductory word, and presented in Man-



chester, Edinburgh and London in August, was prepared for publication by the contemporary poetry publishers Arc Publications. This is the first book of Lithuanian poetry published in England by the British themselves.

Poetry by Eugenijus Ališanka, Daiva Čepauskaitė, Gintaras Grajauskas, Aidan Marčėnas, Kęstutis Navakas and Sigitas Parulskis was published in the new collection. Verse was translated from the Lithuanian language into English by Ališanka, Kerry Shawn Keys, Medeine Tribinevičius, Laima Vincė and Jonas Zdanys. This collection is the fourth publication in the series *New Voices from Europe and Beyond*, in which poetry is published in the Lithuanian and English languages.

According to the publishers, “all the poets whose verse is published in the anthology were born after the 1960s when Lithuania was a part of the Soviet Union. Most of them started to publish their creative work after the country had declared independence. Unlike their predecessors who were more interested in political themes, poets of this generation tend more to aesthetic and existential considerations. Though each of them does it in his/her own way, they all are united by a strong feeling for the language and the ironical, post-modern attitude, relying more on tendencies of contemporary European poetry rather than on local traditions.”

Arc Publications, established in northern England in 1969, specialises in publishing poetry, issuing about 25 books a year. It is one of the main poetry publishers presenting good contemporary poetry from other countries to English-speaking readers. It has a series of literature on music “Arc Music”, established in 1998.

Readings in Edinburgh related to *Six Lithuanian Poets* became a part of the most prestigious literary event in the United Kingdom, the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The anthology was also presented in Manchester and London. The book was presented in Great Britain by three authors in the collection: Grajauskas, Parulskis and Ališanka.



## The Aukštaitian Diementas

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BY BENEDIKTAS JANUŠEVIČIUS

An international festival of poetry took place in Utena district on 13 to 15 June under the Aukštaitian title “... ir saulas diementas žėruos ...”.

This event, having visited Anykščiai, Ignalina and Utena, was held for the fourth time. More than 20 poets participated in it: local poets, poets still living or who once lived in the Utena district (Svajūnas Dačkevičius, Regina Katinaitė-Lumpickienė, Vytautas Kaziela, Rūta Mikulėnaitė-Jonuškienė), guests from within Lithuania (Erika Drungytė, Kerry Shawn Keys, Sonata Paliulytė, Viktoras Rudžianskas, Vytautas Stulpinas, Ričardas Šileika, Lidija Šimkutė, and the author of these lines), as well as guests from abroad (the Scots Eleanor Livingstone and Colin Will, the Latvian Liana Langa, Vladimir Beliayev from St Petersburg, the Georgians Gaga Nachucrishvili and Davit Robakidze, and, last but not least, Lidija Šimkutė, now residing in Australia). Moreover, Rimantas Vanagas, Jonas Liniauskas and Kornelijus Platelis enriched the group of poets episodically.

All the readings were more or less similar, and this, in my opinion, is a drawback: the poets read one or two poems each, and the foreigners appeared with their translators (Lang was translated by Drungytė, the Scots were translated by Keys and Paliulytė, Beliayev by Katinaitė, and I translated the Georgians). The prose writer and essayist Stepas Eitminavičius conducted the readings zealously, resourcefully, and without avoiding lively intrigues.

We spent the first day in the Anykščiai region. In the first half of the day, having divided up into two groups, we read poetry in the towns of Debeikiai and Troškūnas, and towards the evening we gathered in the churchyard of Anykščiai's Church of St Matthew. There the poetry intertwined with renaissance dances, a wedding: when the readings came to the middle, a procession of guests at a wedding marched out of the church.

The second day of the festival, the Saturday, was devoted to a trip to the Ignalina region. However, in the morning we visited the exhibition “Knygos veidas: iliustracijos (The Face of the Book: Illustrations)” at the Utena Cultural Centre. Works by 14 artists were displayed. Towards the evening the congregation of Palūšė's Church of St Joseph, and all those who were hiding from the poetic rain under the wooden roof of the church that evening, listened to our poetry.

In the first half of the Sunday, the laureate of the Antanas Miškinis Prize was announced at the homestead of Antanas and Motiejus Miškinis. This was Vytautas Vilimas Skripka. Unfortunately, the poet himself was unable to collect it. Marija Dičkutė, a pupil at the Panevėžys Juozas Balčikonis High School, the winner of the small Antanas Miškinis prize, failed to arrive too.

The festival came to an end in the new Antanas and Motiejus Miškinis Public Library in Utena, to the sounds of the Chordos string quartet. This Aukštaitian *die-mentas* is without doubt one of the smoothest festivals in which I have had the opportunity to participate. The organisers of the festival, Regina Katinaitė-Lumpickienė, the head of the Utena Cultural Centre, and Vida Garunkštytė, the director of the Antanas and Motiejus Miškinis Library, have done a good job.

Towards the autumn, a small almanac, *Birželio sodai '08*, containing works of the participants in the festival, was published.

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## Lithuanian Literature in Slovenia

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From 3 to 7 September, the Vilenica International Literature Festival took place in Slovenia. Lithuanian writers have been participating in this festival since 1988, and this year Lithuanian literature enjoyed special attention. Five authors took part in the presentation of the anthology of contemporary Lithuanian literature *Artuma* (Closeness; selected by Bernarda Pavlovec Žumer, translation into Slovenian by Bernarda Pavlovec Žumer and Lucija Štamulak, introductory article by Kornelijus Platelis, published by the Slovenian Writers' Union Publishers).

On 4 September, Tomas Venclova took part in the discussion "The Writer Between Text and Context". On 5 September, quite a successful discussion on Lithuanian literature "From the Contraband of the Essence to the Freedom of Reality" was held at the Slovenska Matica Culture Centre in Ljubljana. It was chaired by the Slovenian literary critic Marko Sosič, and attended by Eugenijus Ališanka, Aušrinė Jonikaitė, Kornelijus Platelis and Tomas Venclova.

At the literary soiree at the Gajo jazz club, readings from works by Eugenijus Ališanka, Kornelijus Platelis, Birutė Jonuškaitė, Sigitas Parulskis and Tomas Venclova were livened up by improvisations by Jazz Trio (Vytautas Labutis, Leonidas Šinkarenko and Arvydas Joffė).

In addition to the anthology, Slovenian readers had the opportunity to get acquainted with Sigitas Parulskis' novel *Trys sekundės dangaus* (Three Seconds of Heaven, translated by Bernarda Pavlovec Žumer, published by Modrijan publishers), a selection of Eugenijus Ališanka's poetry (translated by Bernarda Pavlovec Žumer, published by Apokalipsa publishers), and the anthology of small Lithuanian prose *Zgodbe iz Litve* (selected and translated by Klemen Pisk, published by Sodobnost publishers). Eugenijus Ališanka and Sigitas Parulskis held presentations of their books in Ljubljana.

This year, the festival's main prize was awarded to the Polish writer Andrzej Stasiuk, and the Crystal Vilenica Prize for the best publication in the festival's almanac went to the Belarussian poet Andrei Khadanovich.

More information on the Vilenica festival can be found at [www.vilenica.si](http://www.vilenica.si).

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## Books from Lithuania is already Ten!

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BY AUŠRINĖ JONIKAITĖ



Books from Lithuania (Lietuviškos knygos) is celebrating its tenth birthday this autumn. The institution, established on the initiative of three people in 1998, seeks to popularise Lithuanian literature in the world. Arguments put forward by the publishers Lolita Varanavičienė and Saulius Žukas, as well as those of the writer and translator Antanas Gailius, received the approval of the then minister of culture Saulius Šaltenis, and the Ministry of Culture became the fourth founder and sponsor of the institution. Within a decade, the institution gained momentum, grew, and today the results speak for themselves.

Within a decade, Books from Lithuania has implemented about 350 projects. With the efforts of the institution, in one way or another, Lithuanian literature has reached 43 countries around the world. We have cooperated with hundreds of partners in those countries.

Books from Lithuania cooperates and collaborates with 148 translators of Lithuanian literature all over the world. Altogether, 137 writers have taken part in projects carried out by Books from Lithuania, which means that their creative work, at least once or at least in one country, was presented directly or indirectly. The institution has participated in 14 international book fairs, in some of them on an annual basis.

Books from Lithuania, together with the Lithuanian Exhibition and Conference Centre Litexpo and the Lithuanian Publishers' Association, has already organised ten book fairs in Vilnius.

Within a decade, Books from Lithuania has issued 38 publications of a different nature in eight foreign languages, presenting Lithuanian literature. It has sponsored translations of 115 books by Lithuanian writers into 23 languages, and financed 59 pilot translations into 14 languages.

The institution has prepared internationally recognised projects, which received a strong response, such as Express of Literature "Europe 2000", the Lithuanian Literary Programme at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2002, the Lithuanian Literary Programme at the Goteberg Book Fair 2005, the Lithuanian Literary Programme at the Turin Book Fair 2007.

When commemorating its tenth birthday, Books from Lithuania mounted an exhibition of translated books into 22 languages at the Contemporary Art Centre on 8 October. Friends and like-minded people, writers, translators, literary critics and partners, came together that evening. The event included a poem by Tomas Venclova translated into ten languages, and this symbolically gave a meaning to the work done by Books from Lithuania over the decade. On that occasion, 30 translators of Lithuanian literature from 18 countries came to Lithuania to take part not only in the birthday celebration, but also in the traditional seminar organised for translators of Lithuanian literature that started in Nida the following day.

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“I heard that in Poland the Germans closed all the Jewish cemeteries. They’ll close ours too ... What will we do with ourselves, Jacob? What will happen to us? Eh?”

“You, Mama, the German’s won’t touch. You’re ...”

She didn’t let him finish.

“What do you know about me, son? What? I myself don’t know what I am. I forget. A Pole? A Jew? A Byelorussian? A moth heading for the flame? A ladybird?” Danuta-Hadassah sighed heavily and began to sing a tune: “Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home ...”

Grigorijus Kanovičius in *Šėtono apžavai* (The Devil’s Spell)

Accordingly, I categorize homes as “hard” or “soft.” “Hard” ones are furnished only with what is needed by someone worn out by the stressful tempo of contemporary life: lots of clean, empty space. No irritants to assault the psyche. The past has been virtually surgically removed. Blinds, halogens (operating room lighting), silent creeping constructions, laminated flooring, plastic ceiling tiles, euphorbias and chamaedoreas, cacti, a computer. One hundred percent functionalism.

Danutė Kalinauskaitė in *Niekada nežinai* (You Never Know)

