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SIX POEMS JURGIS BALTRUŠAITIS

Morning Song

Dawn, bright herald, proclaims the accession of Day
To the valleys still heavy with night,
And the clouds of sheer opal and ruby make way
For the regal arrival of Light.

And the skies and the plains lie wide open, unfurled
From the cope to dew-covered base,
As though God were withdrawing the veils of the world
From His infinite marvel of space.

Sudden shudders now pass through the bay, as it flings
Waves that whiten and roar and assault,
And the crystal of silence falls shattered and rings
Its joy to the jubilant vault . . .

(Translated from the Russian by Ants Oras)

To The Crucified Homeland

An orphan's fate, to stray and stumble
On ways of blood and fire, is thine . . .
Yet in your wordless grief, my humble,
Believing heart, await the Sign . . .

Hail beats thy crop, stark lightnings cleave it,
Thy ancient shields are sighs and groans,
Yet He who built this land, believe it,
Makes wine of tears and bread of stones.

You labor painfully and slowly
Through fruitless days of blight and sleet,
Yet trust and deem divine the lowly,
Mute stigmata of bleeding feet.

And though thy pain seem daily greater
And blessing bitter from above,
Lift up thy mind to the Creator
For the last victory of love.

(Translated from the Russian by Ants Oras)

Testament of Grief

When pain assails your heart to tear it,
Your naked heart, its helpless prey,
Receive the gift of grief and bear it,
Soul of my dark departing day.

When times of torment strike unbidden,
With weeping eyes, through pain and stress,
You peer at mystery, dimly hidden:
God's ways are ways of deep distress . . .

We take the tasks that life enforces,
Grove to light its drabness bars
And raise the load of mundane courses
Up to the festival of stars.

And he, and only he, can sever
His ties with dust in throes of birth
Who loves the crown of thorns, forever
Renouncing all he owned on earth.

(Translated from the Russian by Ants Oras)

The Surf

The day's wild ocean sings and thunders,
And beats against the fatal shore,
This breaker with dumb sorrow sunders,
And these like laughing victors roar,
Their sheen — one joy of vernal wonders,
Their sheen — vast winter's shining hoar.

In wrath triumphant forward swinging,
The lifted billow calls and fails,
A joyous giant shouting, singing,
Its voice the voice of sounding gales,
Its glory in the sunlight flinging,
Whose noonday glow it hold and hails.

Across the sea, now lightly foaming,
Another rears, that stirs the deep,
And floods the shore with the silence gloaming;
Morose and slow it seems to creep
Like one who drops, worn out with roaming,
From his bent back a fatal heap.

Each moment new, with changing power,
The surf is thundering alone.
Now idle, now it seems to lower,
Hymning a silence all unknown,
Like a dark heart asleep, — for hour
On hour in restless monotone.

(Translated from the Russian)

Camomile

Camomile, you mite of whiteness,
To refresh the road I've taken,
Rising from the dust, you stand there,
With your glowing head uplifted ...

For a poor man trekking stubbles,
Such a blossom's full of riches —
Now I'm not alone, that's certain —
In earth's void, I'm not forsaken . .

Cured the ills of nagging hardship,
Quiet now the pain of longing,
Vanished from my breast the exile's
Terror of earth crucifixion . . .

Since you've brimmed the sun's own chalice,
Darkling, I stride on more surely,
While my heart in silence reckons
What you're singing to my spirit . . .

(Translated from the Lithuanian by Demie Jonaitis)

To the Minstrel

Not for a flash of flame — your zither, brother!
Its charm is charged to praise the macrocosm
Where ages gather, in one enigmatic circle,
Remoteness of existence with earth's clay . . .

You've praised the rose, you'll praise the withered grasses
For he who scans the leaf but sees the tree,
Himself a drop, recurses to the whirlpool —
Reaching, in a flash, eternity's remoteness . . .

Enchanter, sing to those in life's alliance
Who, to grasp a flashing moment dimly,
Disavow the magic wealth of ages —

Proclaim earth's will, unbroken by disaster,
The long night's restless dream of sun-borne tidings —
Already comes the cockcrow — it's dawning, dawning!

(Translated from the Lithuanian by Demie Jonaitis)

The Rustling of Hair-grass

Greet the tender grassblades by your path, and listen
While the clay-sprung grass that's fine as hair will whisper,
Whisper to your heart, which seems so hard of hearing,
"You and I, to time eternity, are equal..."

For Almighty Father God has so arranged that,
Since you both accepted as your destination
Modest earth, you're halves of an equation: riddles
Both: in bloom and ashes, comparable miracles . . .

Catch this living knowledge, let your eyes be opened,
And from then on you will draw your dwindling moment
From forever — and not have to split the empire
Of the world to muddy earth and starry heaven . . .

(Translated from the Lithuanian by Theodore Melnechuk)