

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 43, No. 3 - Fall 1997

Editor of this issue: Violeta Kelertas

ISSN 0024-5089

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STEPHEN DARIUS

DARIUS VICTOR SNIEČKUS

Chicago-Kaunas, 1933

This foreign commemorative coin advocates two faces from a square of marine-blue-velvet sky. A profundum in minted orbit, poor captain and co-pilot turn glorious for their testament to future, race and country, *recto*; *verso*, perhaps the dechristened silver aeroplane at last defeats gravity—its rust-orange hull reborn nose up on a transatlantic museum floor, captive of this shorter century. Remembrance yet fails to slow a wound consigned to catastrophe's hand. The allegory, like most exile history, is a wreck. It roars with vertiginous liberty as if native invention waxed sunward on the day no part machine; roars when man's dead reckoning and octant and a twilight god sent electric storm delivered the small black cross back from heaven's shield to earth. Nineteen forty-four: wingclipped by DP camp wire, God's birds* economised tobacco, kicked rocks, named son and grandson after the pilot's blind flight.

* God's birds - *Dievo paukšteliai* (i.e. DP, - Displaced Persons -as World War II refugees were known).

THE CART

Mühlhausen, 1944

The cart bought on the other side of a war's borderland of bodies now steers to stop for a portrait in cobbled Mühlhausen. Its driver sits, a woolprickled shade, a relative or in-law; its horse months borrowed from a fled neighbour; its missized wheels have rolled over the limbs of the dead. Elsewhere you have fought past the trainstation's last warring mob, with wife and son, inched

away as the dogs, let slip, raged ominous,
long shadows, lost themselves snarling round brick
and wood streetcorners. Eleven-fifteen
frames an ungainly history: horse and cart
are still as black and white; the skies exposed
oppress the chimneys; a man poses
in dread peace with what has been left or passed on.

TO EXILE

Montreal, 1996

Unwriter of poems, ad hack: what
else to claim Canadian about

my migration and populace? There is none other
than exile from old buckled geometry

of heaven-high plaster, vested
maple floors; or brother

chastisement. And a body will not rest
in motion, nor oppose this earthly

width like a sarcophagus.
I cannot die, flesh ink-dry

paper, cloth, but at home;
the black silver blizzards, gold

squalls illuminating the page of cold
childhood's snow-blind memory;

a country's brief blue kingdom
come and gone for us.

SPLEEN

after Baudelaire

What snow-country king would not banish me
now, gone in the air? The day sky flames
an hour more, yet as irrecoverable;
midnight comes down, a more darkly-washed globe.
There is nothing more supplicates father
sky, mother earth; and potential is cold
rain sheared to fall in carbon sheets keeping
each apart from himself and from others.
Next spring will roll in without dumb drum or march.

Even stubborn winter's teethmarks look
a fit disloyalty to my throat or
the recovering ground. This sympathetic
magic province and I are corpses steeled
poor, rich with future copper, blooming white,
trefoil, sterile in memory and machine.
And bells, bells, bells, bells; but fleurs-de-lys push
up, headstones, end-game histories. And night's last
hours fly overhead like my blackened flag.

BLACK SPRING

London, 1996

The emptied black *Blueline* notebook eyes me back
from its perch, a city-grounded pigeon—
it knows nostos in its orange iris,
unbroken spine; bleached barren pages close
feathering covered rest; less predatory
furies: autumn is the spring of the mind.
I am pecking at my bleak own October,
the mind's recycled dearth; this sole talus
grips its shelf unscholarly against the fall,
against the flapping riot of free-flight.
My lost history: a doubt dare-devils lift
off, murdering moment after moment's
departure, a corpus, a lifetime
to come and go. I nod, I dodge my human
boot, hunch under inclemency, return
maladroit my own upstart rescuer—
club-clawed scrawl both wing and timed gravity.

HIBERNATION WEIGHT

1

My corpus, the cat's, starts to fatten:
it is late fall again.
Now shaving in the dark rosy mirror,
I see the oblique mass; so I am found
asking
how work is like a cat:
sleeping awake
or brutally flinching? Or why columns
prevail, when a digit turns
a statue shameful.
November: our clothes cover
deciduous; or a pelt—our modesty.
Will I reform from under, older in
this temple to lean pursuit?
My body, my Hermes
lumbers into action and hibernation.

2

Let's turn again to talk
routine
like the hoped-for better
mean devised from succumbency
to all heavy weather's measure.
Busts of writers are no
longer sold in statuaries;
hang fire
the cursor but it pulses four-day light.
Our brass world alone
suffers season's cracks. Yet
the second nicks about
the watch: quick anvil; harp; or oar.

3

Time told: I am not one.

And these four years:
official failures;
an American tin medallion
for my neck and throat.
But who can love snow
plows' oil-locomotive furrow;
or six months in boots and doubled coat?

Even, last night, mild January rain
fell as if fled from negligence:
a nonsense. The Canadian resistance
to cold; the feast of reason
as clocks relent
from decomposition; the arctic matrix:
we host a body of memory transfixed
by light godly blizzard: for we'd repent.

Black-iron church
bells appeal to metal manifold;
bridges; engines; flag-poles;
a pigeon perch. And this white Sunday quiet is lost
to traffic's toil
and Mount Royal
shaking—like a cane—its steel cross.

4

Young—winter,
summer—I wore
a constant hat:
as well to think
gods just beyond
the line of sight.

Now a hat returns—
if slouched and older—
to cover the head
and eyes over shoulder.

5

A day;
a day:
air is gunning
up like an arctic engine;
wind's war-car *argumentum*
ad baculum conquers
brief birdsong.
All's been driven under wheel.

This is no climb through bright
sparks fanned by Artemis.
The winter sun
burns weakly;
and snow, smoke, shade
are in commixture.
Now dead
words wake the dogs
to walk about.

Ours; mine; is yet
another day embattled
by reformation:
the season, the age
is almost over.
And each morning squalls
altered more violent;

more remote;
in any quiet nation.

6

The mountain firs greyly steam; the skatted rain
drop tap acts out the counting on:

April
is doubtless ticking in from sea to stream.
Let the month comes down,

the globe have its fill.

On the skull of Mount Royale
the cross stays up—blind witness to high erosion,
not the worm-rich decomposition

of foot hills. Below, the plateau soil
welcomes old promise
from the blood-cold run
off of fall's horse-mortal din.
And this Easter Tuesday sits sombre as an office.

The kitchen is dark at my back; Daylight
Savings Time again
will raise the day-long slight
of the hour lost and yet regained.

7

Come out, come out—
the wild waters spout;
the grass stems stir
the air.

In eight o'clock's light,
old order walks tonight
as certain of blood as doubt.
Out, out:

the stone's rolled clear,
the door is ajar;
our eye-teeth are whet
by white.

Wide night whirs on worn cogs;
and now dogs and dogs
and pale neighbors
walk soft on the earth and its papers.