

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 43, No. 1 - Spring 1997

Editor of this issue: Violeta Kelertas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1997 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



JANINA DEGUTYTĖ

Translated by M. GRAŽINA SLAVĖNAS

THORN ETUDE

They left in boarded-up trains.
I escaped into a fairy tale.
Tanks rolled down the street.
I gazed at the birds.
From the forts billowed smokestacks.
I was tending grandmother's flowerbeds
which had just started to bloom.

The third time that I stood
at an open grave
I placed my faith in death.

As fountains of blood and fire spewed from the earth
and torrents drowned out the last bit of hope,
I planted a blackthorn in my window.
Begrudging a rock I compose fairy tales.

[1971]

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPE

III.

Today I saw you off
on your immeasurably long journey
To the other side..
To where you are now,
 on the other side of the mirror.
On the other side of hope.
So much suffering must have had a meaning.
Everything has a meaning.
I don't believe that this small heap
of frozen February earth
is the end of a life.
Just one falling star
can light up the darkest night.

You always begged me not to die,
for how would you live alone?
Could it be that this agony
was meant to bond us closer than joy?

[1983.III.1]

* * *

Bent over a white sheet of paper
I kept drawing the same picture:
a bright room, and seated around
the table father, mother, and
their happy daughter.
Stretched out on the floor was the dog.
(In this dream only the dog was real).

SUGAR BELFRIES

Such white December city, —
High sugar belfries.
Windows with silver birds.
And trees — like snow wormwoods
 against the high clouds...
Such a festive city — almost unreal.
So white, —
 as if there had never been
 soot
 or blood.
As if everything had been
 absolved
 and justified.
And nothing inscribed.
And everything still to come.
Still to come.

[1968]

AUSCHWITZ HAIR

...I too walked here. On stones like coals.
...My body still shakes with cold and pain.
...I too did not return, reduced to dust and smoke.
In a cell with hair I search for my hair.

Oh, but we come from far.
...from Mammoth hunts,
From dancing, crying, frozen Pompeii.
From shattered Viking ships,
 the battlefield of Tannenberg,
from huts of serfs,
 conscription camps,
Castillian squares,
 from forts,
 and ghettos...

Oh, we have come from far, —
in search of our hair and bones.

The stones are gleaming in the autumn sun.
The silenced lips cannot speak or cry.
Only the rustle of the golden trees.
The rustling flow of time:
which was — is — will be

[1966]

ANTIGONE

Farewell, my bridegroom, — I never kissed you.
Farewell, my son, — who never was.
Love brought me here and love will show me out...
In outstretched hands a trembling morning gust.

But I will come again.
A thousand times.
Across red sand,
the soggy clay,
the firesites, —
I will be back.
To bury my brothers in the night.
I will come barefoot.
I will be unarmed, with empty hands.
Their temporary laws are not my law.
And let them
shrug me off,
or curse me,
Or have their courts condemn me
for the thousandth time,
I cannot be condemned.

I shall return —
a ghost
to walk this salty earth at night,
This battlefield
in which to bury brothers —
black and white.
While over sea and land descends
a tyrant's hand,
While our branded faces
burn with shame,
I will return —
a thousand times.
To breathe the dark
which shrouds the dead.
To hold your helpless head.
To place your sword against your side...
Condemned a thousand times —
Your sister —
Your Antigone.

[1966]

With horror-filled eyes
we stared at the foreign tanks,
at foreign feet
stomping on our land,
heard a foreign tongue...
Through floods of tears
watched the boarded-up trains
in the old Kaunas railway station,
the crying, the screams.

And then,
night after night
the roar of engines
on our quiet suburban streets
along the Nemunas,
— which back then was
a clean and happy river. —
While we lay fully dressed,
next to our bundles of clothes and bread,
fully dressed,
next to our bundles of clothes and bread,
just waiting. —
Was it our turn?

This is how my childhood ended.

[1989.09.06.]

* * *

To live is to yearn for eternity.
To plant a tree is to build a road
to that other world which
dwells inside us.
To drink love to the last drop
so it would linger a while,
to carry a fruit under the heart
so as to prolong the longing.
On a high high silver
lily
climb to the star
and there
in infinity
leave our signature
like a mark
that we are more than ants.

* * *

I pray to stars and to grass.
To the sacred bubbling of a living spring.
I pray this evening for everyone, —
for the sainted, for the accursed,
for the righteous.
A savage bridge of conflagrations and gore
connects catacombs, inquisition courts
and concentration camps.
The mountain of ashes is piled high.

A gray evening. A gray bird.
This evening I pray for everyone.

(1969]