

# LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 23, No.4 - Winter 1977

Editor of this issue: Antanas Klimas

ISSN 0024-5089

Copyright © 1977 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



VYTAUTAS VIRKAU, 1974

## FOUR POEMS FROM THE ESTONIAN

by Ivar Ivask

\*

*One day all of us will be translated  
yes even from the Estonian  
the most difficult verse forms  
will not deter eager Americans  
looking for something new  
always something new  
pioneers discoverers defenders  
thanks to their enthusiasm  
one day we will become song  
in Shakespeare's tongue  
don't give up friend write  
write poetry till you too  
will be translated  
into Whitman's language  
and you can peacefully  
give up your ethnic ghost*

*between the hard covers  
of a fat American anthology*

Translated by Astrid Ivask and the author

\*

*I have always liked to look at water  
down to the deepest rock  
in a glimmer of refracted rays  
under clouded sadness  
seagulls  
leaving their plaintive cries  
to the waves  
to me  
a curving promontory  
a path  
between one blinding darkness  
and the next*

\*

*Foliage foliage  
autumn wind constellations  
clarify nothing for me  
nothing changes but shrill voices  
punctuate unspoken sentences  
unfold on the wind  
carry strangely  
hourly for the owl  
the years unfurl  
but it does not count  
fish-like the soul  
slips into the coolness of fall*

(from *October in Oklahoma*, 1973)

\*

*I am the shepherd of the heavenly flock  
a white infinity of sheep is below me  
what sheared curly hills of wool  
I am a humble and quiet spirit  
on the snowfield of the endless North  
a flaming blue sword  
leaves my hand a swan  
with the fingers my limbs  
abandon me  
I descend to the eternal snows  
to brood on the world's egg  
I lean against the pale shell of the visible  
holding on to the North Pole  
giving up the ghost  
I sway in the space of space  
icier than an ice floe  
I run back into myself  
fleeing from the radiant peak  
on which vision  
fades into invisibility  
no one can deny me  
to vanish into my own tongue  
a seed of seeds*

(from *Gardens of History*, 1970)

Translated by Astrid Ivask and the author

FOUR POEMS FROM THE LATVIAN  
by Juris Kronbergs and Gunars Salins

Juris Kronbergs

*be calm, don't rush  
be calm, digest yourself slowly  
digest yourself thoroughly, carefully, with understanding  
with understanding, that is important  
because no one else will do it for you*

*digest yourself all  
spare only your skeleton and your eyebrows*

*because your skeleton holds you together  
and with your eyebrows you express astonishment*

Gunars Salins

SONG

*In the cold my voice grew hoarse  
and one day my song  
was frozen solid.*

*I drank hot milk and honey  
and recited a single prayer:  
for the song to return — if only like  
he moos of cows or bees' buzzing.*

*Then it happened: in the night, when all  
who tended me were gone,  
from the waterfront slaughterhouses  
attle broke onto the streets.*

*Thirsty, they mooed the city full. Galloping,  
with their hot breaths and bodies  
they melted the snow from windows and trees,  
from skyscrapers and squares.*

*I pushed open the window — a scream  
thawed my voice. From it, as from a river,  
cows were drinking at noon. Soaking  
their warm udders in my song -  
their warm udders in my song.*

Translated from the Latvian by  
Laris Salins

Gunars Salins

AT A HAPPENING

*As if a temple.  
As if a communion.  
As if the eve of the flood.  
But over the loudspeaker come stock reports, weather*

forecasts ("Mostly sunny . . ."), lectures on  
horticulture,

and a red-haired woman in a bathrobe,  
her legs dangling over the balcony rail,  
plays the cello -  
or is it her legs?  
And two young people in the corner play ping pong.

In the meantime  
God has stepped out by the altar  
and indeed is building  
the flood -  
blue waves, green waves -  
higher,  
higher,  
higher,  
higher . . .

The youngsters stop their ping pong match  
and switch to  
pachisi.

On my right a Pakistani or Indian woman with beautiful skin  
asks for the time  
or a safety pin.  
I show her the in-  
side of my fin,  
but the cellist starts on an Irish spin.

God glances over his shoulder,  
disgusted  
dismantles the waves  
and takes them back to the flood warehouse.

Suddenly someone rises and shouts:  
"Stop these antics -  
liberate the captive nations!"

What? Was it me who shouted? Sweating  
I collapse in my seat. "Oh, I see -  
you, too, have a part in this mystery,"  
 marvels the Pakistani woman  
with that beautiful skin.  
And over the loudspeaker — stock reports, weather forecasts. But then

I see: at last  
demonstrations have begun. People come  
with posters. No, with totem poles down the aisles  
come the vanquished Indian tribes,  
the ancient Incas along their rope bridges,  
and the ancient Jatvingians, ancient Galindians, ancient  
Old Prussians and  
dinosaurs, labidosaur,  
alosaurs, trachonons,  
diplodoci, triceratops,  
tyrannosaurus rex -  
they come in procession  
with the Jatvingians, with the Galindians, with the Old Prussians  
(It's kind of fun to be extinct,"  
a ghastly diplodocus whispers in my ear) -  
and they disappear where God disappeared.  
And over the loudspeaker — stock reports, weather  
forecasts, lectures on horticulture.  
From the cello, from the balcony rail  
cries of fishes, laughter of earthworms, twittering of snakes.

*And the Pakistani woman walks around and distributes  
forgiveness of sins? mercy? the flesh of God?*

*I sense  
through my leg, through my shin-bone someone is ringing me  
(as if by telephone) — and then at my ear I hear  
a dreaming skull -  
waters mix with sounds,  
fire mixes with rocks,  
hills with the sun, with the moon, with the stars,  
plants with the air —  
A dreaming skull*

Translated from the Latvian by the author

Note: "It's kind of fun . . ." quotation from Ogden Nash's poem "Next!" in *The Private Dining Room and Other New Verses*.

Gunars Salins

## TO MOONCITIES IN THE OCEAN AND NOAH'S WIFE

(for Janis Strods)

*NIGHT. We're by the ocean. And there  
on the waves like on rolling vineyard slopes  
mooncities are born  
and dazzling as if in flashes of shattering fate  
they rush toward us, toward the shore and disappear  
into the darkness, the sand, ourselves.*

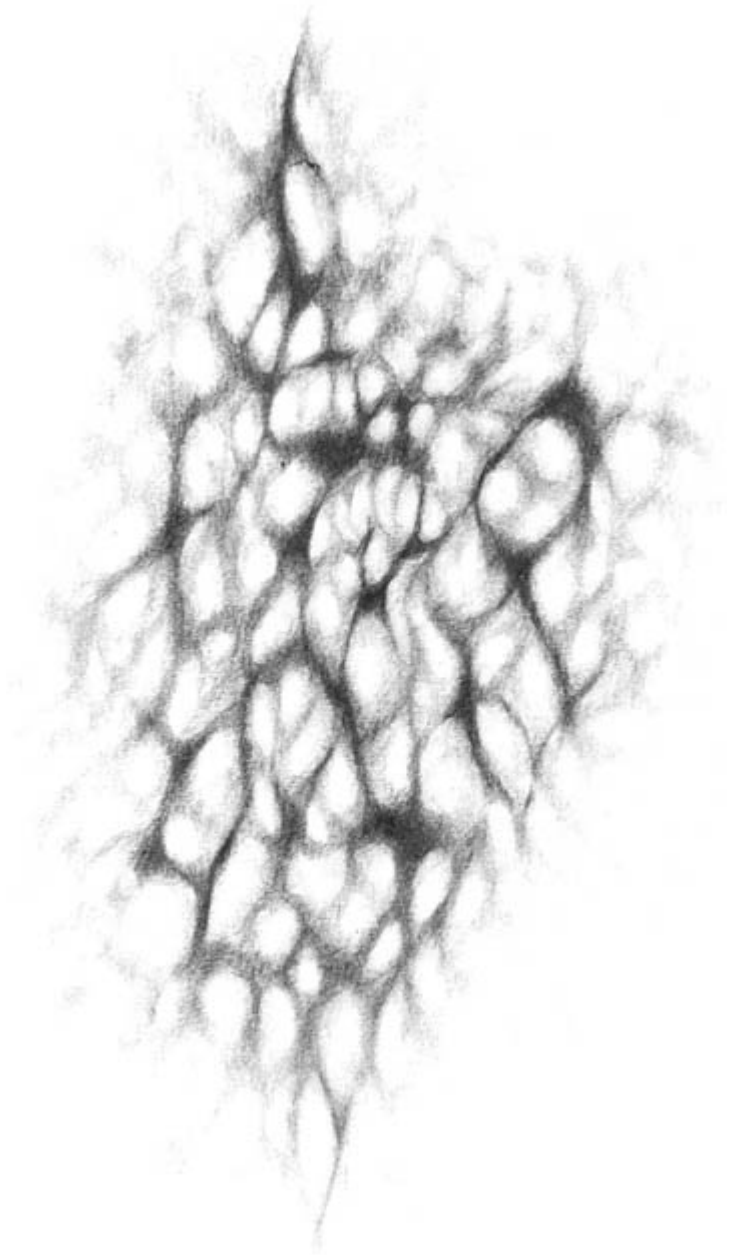
*Ah, Noah's wife,  
when the flood came, you didn't desire to be saved  
with your hundred year old husband, but to stay in those cities  
that dazzling disappear — drunk on hundred year old wine  
and the Lord's anger*

*Did you,  
Eve's knowing daughter, take their rocking with you  
in Noah's Ark — may be in your lap? — and send it i  
nto the cleansed world? With this rocking,  
already rose the smoke of Noah's first sacrifice?  
And was it for just this reason it seemed so sweet  
and familiar to the Lord — as if from your lap?*

*From your lap  
with the rocking of flood and ebb  
wine was born again — and on it as if on the flood:  
rolling cities, shattering fate, day and night.*

*Ah, Noah's wife  
as it was in the beginning,  
is and will be: with bone frames and flesh walls  
we live in mooncities built on waves.*

Translated from the Latvian by  
Laris Salin



*Drawing by Ivar Ivask for his Verikivi (Bloodstone; Lund, 1976)*