10-1-2003

Writing Sample

Gintaras Grajauskas

he was overcome. Without any warning,
abruptly, brutally. And had no idea
what he should do.

foaming and thrashing,
if only to get
back here.

he would yell, arms raised, in the dark:
tell me, am I worth all this,
because I will take my revenge on you

for all the many times you have seen
me celebrating victories
even when dead in defeat already

it’s the end of me, now
down to weeping, wailing is all
was how he cried

then quieted down, merely asking,
is it all over now. No,
not all.

what more do I have to do? nothing.
Then what for. Why do you need to know.
What for.

Translated from the Lithuanian by Vyt Bakaitis

A Quaint Complaint in the Land of Hyperboreans

the land, to tell the truth, is bleak and depleted,
the peaks all leveled, everything evenly bottomed out,
the pediments hold no heroes. Yet it’s not easy to die
even here, while dexterity alone is sufficient
to evade a misfit’s switchblade, you’ ll manage to stay alive,
just as the oddballs survive with no legs, no hands,
no heads... even their gods are different, prone to ambush
and barge in, with the mightiest of them maybe a little
like the grimy blacksmith Hephaistos, though this one is
much angrier. They celebrate in their own fashion too,
drinking and crying without much knowing what for,
they'll say it’s sad and that’s it, weird customs,
but what, really, is there would you want to do, in a land where
(it’s a shame to be saying this) all the women are bitches,
and the men pickpockets, and there you are. But it s not
easy to die, even here.

Translated by Vyt Bakaitis

Histories

when you think of it, there have been
all sort of histories, and for all that
hasn’t it been worth it

let’s say the one in which a long time
is spent looking at the wall in an empty
room

or the one where groggy eyes
slowly come to close oh no, that still is
the same story
or the one where there’s laughter and
carrying on, raising hell and spoofing
in the fall of ‘89

when you felt out of it, less than pretty
and so you were, isn’t it a pretty
history though

even that one unclear, when it rained without stopping
it seems, for three whole days and nights, and the fish
swam in by the windows

and one that’s the craziest of all,
with the woman you were in love with,
pretty beyond all hope

and of course the one that’s the simplest,
one you just now
didn’t get to write down in time

wasn’t it really worth it

Translated by Vyt Bakaitis
Temptations of St. Anthony

soft whisperings under the skin, the intimate
talk of the wind, allurings and
caresses, distant, barely audible
promises

shouts of surprise and
pleasure, touches, intimations
of perfect form the limpidness
of fingers in the sun

teasing, licking of lips
going dry, red spots, brown spots,
birth marks, a proud bow of the brow,
cool apples of the eyes

stretching bodies, indecent
suggestions, indecent scents,
the true and deceptive
virginity
glances like a net
thrown secretly on, tears,
hot breath
nestling close

a glorious mirage of love,
in the wasteland, without water and food,
on the 39th day.

Translated by Antanas Danielius

The Second Coming

it was really him authentic and raising no doubts,
need no certifying. He came in a golden coach
harnessed by four white horses,
got by the organizational committee out of a convert

a millionaire. The authentic one, smiling and
somehow confused and glancing through the window
of the coach to everybody and nobody. The mob followed him
and stood on the sidewalks and staircases,

urchins were falling from trees
on the asphalt, and they couldn’t believe
that it doesn’t hurt and maybe will never hurt
any more. Soldiers fired a salute of 70 salves

from the guns, they needed no more, and ministers
came to the last solemn meeting. They enjoyed
the laughter and the rejoicing was over,
like the everyday, last day cries

and only after the insight of some insignificant movements
and short and strange exchanges of glances,
was it possible to feel what the mob is perceiving
they are simply fainting from fear and from hate.

Translated by Antanas Danielius
I build a barricade
around myself

push the wardrobe and the bed together,
bring down the refrigerator

they send a negotiator
a pizza seller

resistance is senseless, he says

resistance is senseless, I agree

he leaves as the victor
leaving pizza with crabs

a postman comes: here is
a registered letter for you, sign please

I sign, both of us are smiling
resistance is senseless the letter says

I don’t argue, agree politely
the situation is beyond hope
then a Mormon comes do you know
the divine plan, the Mormon asks

I do, resistance is senseless,
I say, the Mormon murmurs down the stairs

I improve my barricade, stuffing up the gaps
with old newspapers and chewing gum

the doorbell rings, and there’s again

the pizza seller behind the door,
the Mormon and the postman

what else, I ask

you were right, they say, resistance
is senseless, the situation is beyond hope

so we are on the same
side of barricade

Translation: Antanas Danielius

MP3 file
& and we carried heavy flags raised
high, and they fluttered in the wind,
and the golden dust settled
on our shoulders, and our chief’s face
shined, the eyes of the blood lappers
gleamed like steel, and thieves
fought, not dividing their plunder,
while buzzards divided up their intestines

what a time it was! everything was clear.
The skies were clear,
the steppes wide, backs strong,
and women when we looked at them
fell over backwards. And our narrow-eyed horde
multiplied, like a deck of cards
in a fakir’s hands. What a time it was.
We were the arrow, you the bow

you were the swamp and we the mountain
and we carried your impaled heads
so you would see the world from up higher
like a trick, like a game, like a deception,
like a woman, like a flag, like food,
we were a mountain and you a swamp,
you were a trap and we animals,
we were powerful. The trap closed.

Some Kind of Kafka

I live in a former hotel’s former breakfast room
(first floor, white veranda)
and have a multitude
of neighbors

on four steel concrete floors
they eat on me

on four steel concrete floors
they lie down on me

on four steel concrete floors
they push around furniture

alongside is a small forest, there

it’s even more horrible: a jackdaw colony

eats, sleeps, hatches children, shits

on everyone, tugs on intestine ends

stolen from the butcher’s what

celebration, what a happening, how much

noise, croaking and jumping

you see and there a jackdaw

poet: sarcastically opening

his beak totally insincere

the shame of the jackdaw colony

scoffer, insurgent, tied

by the leg to a tree branch head

down he’d not be a bad

friend: too bad he’s dead.
Carnival

Robinson with a Parrot on his Shoulder
A Mountain Rifleman with a Rifle on his Shoulder
A Monument with a Copper Child on his Shoulder
A Villager with a Rake on his Shoulder
Nabokov with a Squirrel on his Shoulder
Jesus with an Olive Branch on his Shoulder

and also:

Jesus with a Parrot on his Shoulder
Nabokov with a Copper Child on his Shoulder
A Villager with a Rifle on his Shoulder
A Monument with a Squirrel on his Shoulder
A Mountain Rifleman with an Olive Branch on his Shoulder
Robinson with a Rake on his Shoulder

And Everything is Watched by Three Cretins
Cretin Father, Cretin Son
And Cretin Holy Ghost

With Heads on Shoulders
Squinting, showing their Teeth
Happy
The Fall of the Empire

the Empire had never seen such legions: old men, armed
with bayonets from the time of the plague, town-dwellers, farmers, Byronic
black-hairs, reserve lieutenants, an Armenian, having run in from
the melons, Eastern war specialists with ninja swords and bandages, fight

with veins filled with adrenalin, pale, untalkative new
barbarians, żmudź, Sarmatians, birdspeched labuży*
most still children, pressing in their handkerchief-wrapped
hands, to hold them better, framing rods

boasted, grew bold, always saying at least
they’ d nail some Russian paras, and then whatever. One of them,
covered with scars, sat in a corner with that crazy
framework bludgeon, only doubled, smoked into his cupped hand

even though it was strictly forbidden, all around gasoline,
Molotovs, smoked, with one ear listening to that
war talk, smiled, white metal teeth
shining like a new unknown weapon, blades

filled with rage, cloaked in poisonous fog, in
another time that sort of smile would be deadly,
the kids seeing it quieted down, and he kept
smoking into his hand, smiled, waited

* zmudy Russian word for Samogitians, North Western dialect of Lithuanians; labusy Russian army slang word for Lithuanians.

The End, Which In All Likelihood Is Not

To watch the clock and live. To appear
better than you should. remains for us. To appear. To be discreet.
To see as if not having noticed.

The untouchable reserves have been spent.
Only a single season remains for the entire year.
Irony offers no help. That is completely ironic. Humanness is not funny.
Humanness would be good. how good innocence would be. Or knowing how to shoot accurately, and some
old doll carriage. For practice.

Everything is more or less quiet. You can’t even get angry.

No one says: be cool, my friend.

No stopping. No acceleration gathering momentum.

Those who need a change buy hats of different colors.

Something ended. Nothing begins.

Each morning beginning at nine, athletic training.

We learn not to live. The teacher has

a black belt. An absolute corpse.

We fly in airplanes. Go out for walks.

We meet someone like us. Sluggishly multiply ourselves.

Ask: who’s there? it s me, your beloved.

Who, who? no one’s there already, my dear.

They ignore us. They photograph us clean through.

Mirrors refuse to accept our faces.

We page through empty albums, because that’s all that’s left.

We look ahead of ourselves, as if we had not noticed.

-----------------------------------------------
here's a poet who hears
voices, and it's enough for
here's a poet who tried to vomit out
his soul because he doesn't need it

here's a poet pretending to be young, hands
in his pockets, hopelessly aged jargon

here's a poet who wants to be a pilot
but he'll be a poet because he reads while eating

here's a poet werewolf, a poet only
by night, during the day a bookkeeper

here's a poet who is clever because he knows
what to publish and what to discard

here’s an endlessly serious poet who does
the same thing and still constantly says: I don’t write much,
I carry lines around in my head a long time, and here’s
a poet who takes nothing to his heart?

here’s a poet romantic, who dedicates
his lines to waitresses and is easily moved to tears

here’s another poet, who washes his hands
and whistles softly as the closet bagpipe buzzes

here’s a poet glorifying nature as if
it needed his glorification

here’s a poet who hasn’t written a single
good line, but that doesn’t matter

here’s a fashionable poet with his retinue
secretly daydreaming about a scholarly career

here’s a poet intellectual, who all the while wanted
to be fashionable but did not succeed

here’s a poet naïf, who looks at what
he’s written and thanks The Almighty?

Here’s a poet at his very best, two or three
days before he goes crazy

here’s a poet mystic, wringing
his neck in the cabala

here’s a poet in whose bathtub
is a poster of naked Marilyn Monroe

here’s a poet who doesn’t’ t have Monroe or
a tub and washes in a bowl

here’s a poet driven into a corner, left
by a woman, left and afraid

here’s a poet, sacrificing his poem to metaphors
and here’s another, sacrificing metaphors to his poem

and here’s a poem, having sacrificed the poet, curly-haired
lamb, well in fact a whole sheep

a poem all alone:
the kind that’s enough for everyone.

---------------------------------------------------------------
that thing we are watching
is called a kinescope
it only seems to be flat
but in reality it is like a bag
filled with tiny dots
jumping around like
shining Christmas
fleas

when those dots get their orders
they obediently stand in their places
and arrange themselves into tree, skyscraper
the Balkan crisis or L. Di Caprio
(just take a look at how his white
shirt shines it’s all because of those dots)

so if you see something
horrible don’t be afraid, don’t show
you can be deceived
there are no jungles there nor floods
no zombies with chainsaws

but I’m not saying that there is nothing there
(the way the obscurantist say)

there is a great multitude

of dots

Bud tojas
The Night Watch Man

in a room warmed
by sleeping breath
the night watch man leans
shoulders against the wall.

he watches the dark, his head
cocked, so he could see better,
winds a thread, torn
from his jacket, about his finger.

he smokes: the flame at the tip
of his cigarette crackles. someone turns over.
someone talks in his sleep.

Don’t answer, watch man. as long
as they dream, you needn’t worry. time,
like an eighteen-wheeler, doesn’t chase
after you in their dreams.

and when the wall clock strikes
four, don’t jump, watch man.
hold onto the edge with your nails,
crumbling bones, cracked teeth.

it is yours: the dreamers,
the name in the dark. dream that I’ll never enter,
watch man, poor night watch man.
as it turns out, he's a restorer. He drives out
to all sorts of remote places, churches,
monasteries, offering
his services. But no one needs them.

There's nothing left to restore. Everything
has been taken abroad or burned during the war.
That's why he can sit here with me, trying
to involve me in a drunken friendship.

Sensing that I'm bored, he starts telling
stories. Tries to catch my interest. Insistent.
He says that he's discovered the secret
of the portrait of Mary that shed tears of blood.

Fe2O3 he explains offhandedly, iron
oxide. The paint simply dripped from the irises
because of dampness and age.
After that it's simple condensation.
however, the conversation doesn’t click.

I get up to say good-bye. growing drunker quickly. to stop by sometime when I’m driving past.

already at the bar, paying up, I freeze:

nothing impressive, he mutters under his breath,

yes, and that’s how it should be,

otherwise what would we do.

---

the plan we knew by heart:

government buildings

bridges radio towers

train stations

some of us

had buddies in the barracks
it began

at exactly six am

while you were still asleep

at half past we were

already reading the communiqué

at eight the white

minister of justice

was puking on the green rug

the crowds were celebrating

barrels rolled in the streets

the prostitutes strutted their stuff

raising the standard of revolt

five minutes past noon

we declared amnesty for all prisoners

and that was all

that we could do

(I'll say it again: that we could do)
at half past twelve Gabriel
the archangel
sounded the trumpets of Armageddon

Toksai komiksas
_A comic strip_

my life would make
a strange comic strip

all the boxes would show
a long trip taken on a dusty road,
lazy eye movements,
thin weeds bending along the roadsides

in all the pictures
the reins would be between my knees,
and above my head in a white balloon
the text would read: halala humm and there d be polite,
yet proud, nods to anyone
standing alongside the road

in all of the pictures there would be
a whip lying beside my boots,
my drooping eye lids, the corners of my mouth
hanging down, and the horse’s massive rump

you drive and you drive, and drive,
just like that, I would drive

from one box
to the next

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Kaimo ba~ny is pale p s
The Attics of Rural Churches

broken pews, a bundle of candles,
old surplices, chasubles, and
all sorts of strange clothing
darkness and dust, and, just look,
at least a few rays of sunshine
falling from the roof down to the floor

holy statues
once upon a time diligently gilded,
wearin aquamarine tunics,

the paint is peeled, some
are missing arms, noses

there are spider webs
in the folds

some stand in corners, others
are laid to rest softly, nameless now,
as though they were all saints

white faces, until now red
was the paint of blood,
the virgin Mary has lost her infant
Jesus where is he,

where is he now, maybe crawling
in the chaff, entangled in spider webs

down below the carpenters but only one
is a carpenter, the other is still a boy,
a carpenter’s assistant are repairing the organ

(this old organ cannot play a trumpet; there are sparrow bones in the pipes)

it took until very late

the boy watched the bats,

flying above the altar (everything trembles!)

occasionally listening, how up there, up above,
something went thump, but he wasn’t startled,
not really

he’s explored everything up there already,

secretly, holding up a match stick for light

so that there’s nothing,

absolutely nothing, to be afraid of
Up
The River

just above the water
just below the slope
in the sunshine

a suppliant

just below the suppliant
gnats, warm silt
perfect for a bare foot

water and bottom plants
so green they’re black

dragonflies flit above the water,
like mad, momentarily hanging still
mid-air, as though they ‘d remembered something,

their eyes bigger than their heads

absolutely stunned

by the beauty of this world.
A mottled dog trots along the dirt road. His coat is dusty.

It hasn’t rained for a while. We really need it.

You know, it was stupid of me to expect something.

Half past two. How slow everything is today.

That’s it and nothing more. Smiles for the heck of it. Good, you say, no reason to get involved.

Heavens! But after all, it’s your own fault.

Where’s your dog gone to?

He’s rolling in a field of dandelion fluff.

So then, hasn’t rained for some time. The wind is
directionless, weak.

Translated by Laima Sruoginis