

### **In Defense of Informers**

They built on rock.

They didn't trust the bog's will-o'-the-wisps, betrayed the bog.

They didn't allow the past to rule over the obvious,

They knew for sure: there is no god.

Have to get by with the Russian rod.

Just like the rest of us—you may laugh—they shunned informers.

They all suffered from the ambiguity of their situation,

But opted for different remedies.

One identified with the group, a sincere, all comprehending liar—no good for life all the same.

Another identified with power and played at being a big man: shh!

A precise and effective means. No immunity arises. His qualities will come in handy building capitalism; loyalty to the firm

Is a virtue. Me first!

So-called withholding of information is more becoming to the Middle Ages and middle-schoolers,

You may laugh, but the age of great firms is only just beginning.

Now some are in trouble.

They lacked the capacity to predict, so to speak, and chronological scale,

Yet man is not eternal.

Now who will dare?

Let bygones be bygones. The fat man has sung.

We can't know what the future holds—you may laugh—we can't!

1990, Tjärn

## Summer Rain

I

The rain that roams the world

The rain that wanders in the yard

The rain that hesitates outside the window

The summer rain

Let it come inside.

Open the window and let the summer rain inside

Together with its

Trusted companions:

Smells.

The smell of the street of the fleet of earth of buildings of parks of  
arks of potatoes of tomatoes of smoke of oak of pine of brine of nettle  
the smell of speed and of slowness the smell of the sun of shadow of  
carp of melon – a deep well of smells.

Of New York Mallorca and York of the Mediterranean and  
Caribbean of Istanbul and Liverpool of Berlin and Sakhalin, the most  
varied smells

Are in the rain's armpit

Also one sharp, rotting smell.

That of blood.

II

Come inside summer rain

And wash the blood off the walls.  
Pour like you poured over trenches open and closed.  
Pour summer rain, pour  
And wash away the rotting blood.  
Away from the forests and the pavement.  
And from the face I just imagined.  
And from the other one I cannot imagine.  
And from the girl in the trench.  
And from the book's pages.  
And from the alder's leaves.  
And from the soldier's sleeve.  
Away from Latvia and from me.

III

The summer rain pouring and Jānis and Juris are shooting Jews in  
the forest clearing.  
Each has just one rifle but there's a whole big crowd of Jews.  
Barrels are getting red hot but the Jews keep coming.  
And twenty years pass and then twenty-five and again there's a Jānis  
and a Juris and they are singing that song and as the summer rain is  
pouring I walk up and pound their faces in.

IV

Part of my nation was shot dead and buried in the ground to rot and I  
was in mother's womb and could not defend them.  
Jews were shot they were born in our country they spoke Latvian

Uldis Bērziņš

Poetry

Translated by Ieva Lešinska-Geibere

Edited by Kevin M.F. Platt

they served in the army with the Latvians this land belonged to them

as much as to us.

Part of my nation lies in trenches in Biķernieki and in other trenches

from Liepāja to Daugavpils (what for?)

What for?

What the fuck for fuck off assholes motherfuckers fucking pigs tell

me why?

Because they leafed through the papers right to left?

Because they went to the synagogue?

Because they had curly hair?

Oh, I see!

Because they smelled like garlic?

Because they had hooked noses because their shops were closed on

Saturdays?

Because they jabbered in Yiddish?

Why oh why am I not yet alive the axe lies by the stove how come

you go on living give me that axe my God why am I not yet alive?

(Jānis dries off by the stove and goes out again.)

V

Where was the Latvian God hiding

When the summer rain was pouring?

VI

The summer rain smells of Nicosia.

The summer rain smells of Nigeria.

It smells of blood when it pours.

And therefore:

He who was born in this land is a Latvian.

He who goes to my school is a Latvian.

He who knows this language is a Latvian.

He who builds these cities is a Latvian.

He who ploughs these fields is a Latvian.

And if you say no he is not I'll walk up and pound your face in  
before it's too late.

1967

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It's me here. It's you, it's him.

The forgotten one shows up anew,  
seeking a flower, red with my blood's dew.

In my bow I held an arrow

From the tree I shot a sparrow.

Before my maker I did stand,  
though no bird was in his hand.

Substance crumbles, space expands;  
Father's breath, perhaps: a cold, misty draft descends;  
yet nothing can be seen through so semantic a lens;  
there's no one to bear to future ages our sense;  
even numbers lose meaning, black prevails over all;  
what they taught in school lays in the Devil's palm.

No, nonsense. It's me here. It's  
you, it's him.

**Dome of the Rock. Cave of Souls**

You have no right to pray here, Jew! – I’m no Jew! – Who then? – A Jesusist, a  
godbessed wheezer here where my inflected tongue cannot  
reach, a piece of rubbish on the Good Lord’s threshold! – Just look around, man, but don’t even  
open your lips – this is ours! – I am as much yours  
as the broad-faced ones who galloped to die in The Holy One,  
a bearer of souls, heartword courier, I brought “In the Name  
of God” to Fatima’s husband down in the Cave of Souls – she  
can not, she’s old, poor, and sick, she’s in Riga – who’ll carry it up? –  
Son, all the same you may not – go or I’ll call for help! – got only halfway through “In the Name  
of God” look, the Temple Mound is white –  
a second miracle in Jerusalem this spring:  
look, snow!

1999

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The goat! Where the Devil fears to tread, there  
she is sent – oh, goat!  
Ah, oh, along such steep paths,  
her hooves scabble,  
her short tail never stops prophesying.  
Her beard as noble as her lord's.  
She never stops nibbling with an ardent mouth.  
The goat has gnawed away the verses,  
that forbid us to pass the night together! I know  
so many folk who would be glad to stone us,  
but now they're out of luck.

2008