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Arnoldas Gabrėnas

**NATURE IN THE CITY AS PUBLIC
SPACE: AN ARCHITECT'S REMARKS
ABOUT DESIGNING THE PARK
IN JURBARKAS**

Romualdas Vaičekauskas

TWO ESSAYS

Vytautas Pečiukonis / Agnus Elegrus

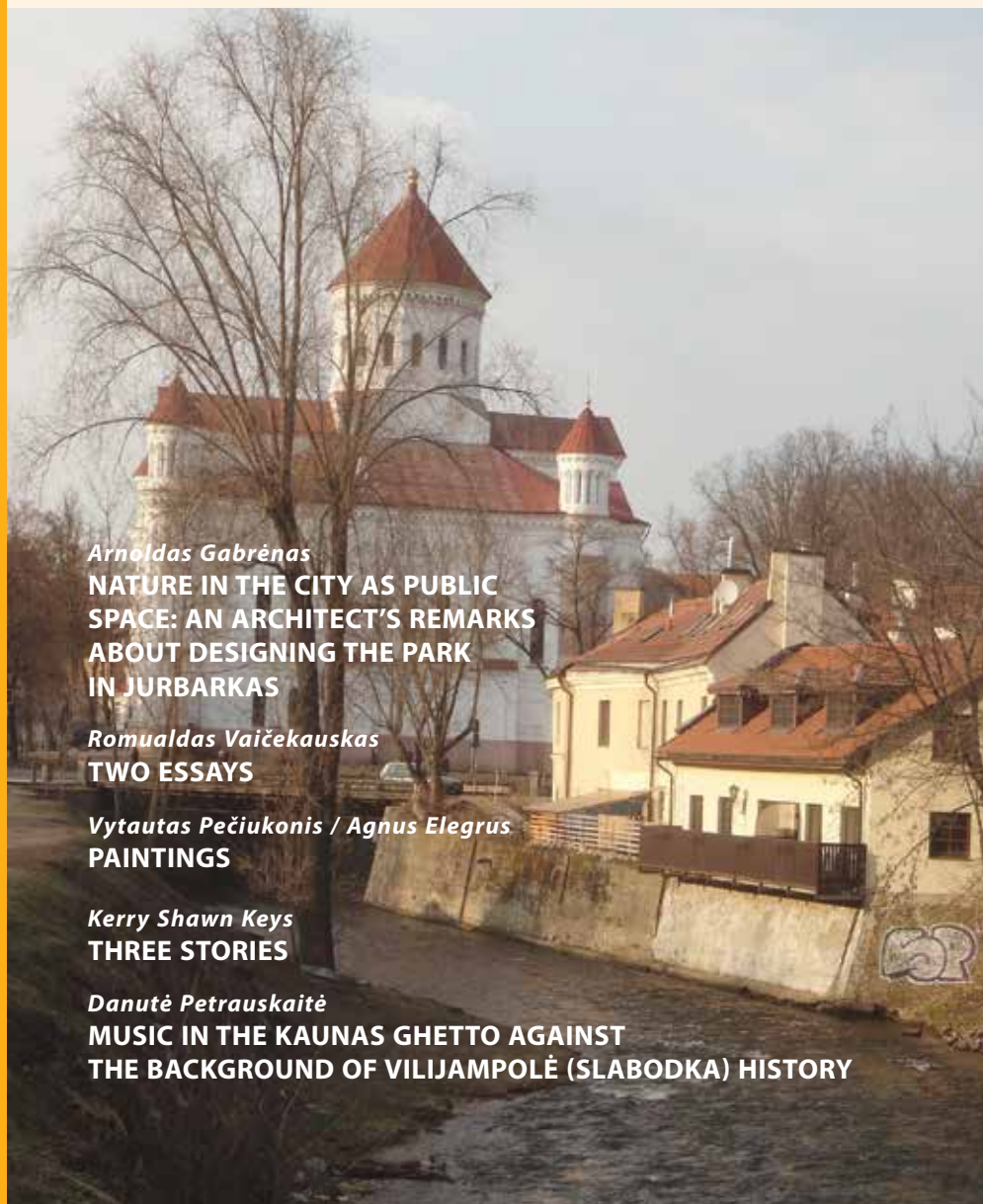
PAINTINGS

Kerry Shawn Keys

THREE STORIES

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**MUSIC IN THE KAUNAS GHETTO AGAINST
THE BACKGROUND OF VILIJAMPOLĖ (SLABODKA) HISTORY**



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The Stairs. Photo by Romualdas Vaičekas.
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Nature in the City as Public Space: *An Architect's Remarks about Designing the Park in Jurbarkas*

ARNOLDAS GABRĖNAS

In recent decades transformation of public urban spaces has become an especially relevant issue for Lithuania. Spaces, which have been inherited from Soviet times and today are no longer functional, have been greatly neglected during the transition period due to a lack of funds and initiative. They continue to be eye sores in the capital and other Lithuanian cities. Often their reorganization becomes a real headache for local municipalities. However, public space projects designed to correct the urban culture of cities are noticeably on the increase. The project of creating a park in Jurbarkas was an aesthetic challenge for the author and his colleague, Agnė Gabrėnienė. In 2009 our two-person architect team received an offer to design a public space — the park of Jurbarkas. We began this undertaking by first familiarizing ourselves with the location, its spacial parameters and its current state. Even though the location was called a small park, in reality it was no more than a simple field with a few clusters of trees and insignificant bushes and an asphalt sidewalk. The terrain took up almost 14,400 square meters, but it was covered with weeds and automobile tire tracks and was essentially unlit. There was no place to sit down in the park. Fences belonging to adjacent properties and the buildings behind them, which are typical of villages, marred the aesthetic appearance of the space. On the other hand, the park's plot of land is not far from

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the formal center of the city of Jurbarkas, its administrative, public and business buildings. The city public library and school are relatively close by, as are sections of the city containing multi-storied apartment buildings. We noted that the park was at a sort of half-way point between the center of town and residential areas further away. We concluded that it would be inappropriate and harmful to just maintain a plot of land which is in essence a field of grass practically in the geometrical center of the city of Jurbarkas, when there are plenty of such grassy fields in the city itself and around it. The attractiveness of the physical environment of small cities like Jurbarkas is especially important for their everyday social and economic activities because it can be a factor which increases attachment to place. In addition, it can be a factor which attracts and encourages tourism. The architect, when he creates any kind of object in such a space, contributes to the formation of a visual impression of the location. According to psychologist Eugenijus Laurinaitis, we are what we think about ourselves.¹ If so, then the city is what we think of when we observe what is in it. In this respect, we tried to design the park in such a way as to contribute to the visual image of Jurbarkas as a city which is not afraid of innovations nor of bold, less conventional architectural choices. That is why we consciously tried, with the help of the aesthetics of its space, to make the park different from recreational plots and public spaces which proliferate in outlying parts of the country and which are overly commonplace and are organized on practically standardized principles. These plots and spaces often exude a disdain for place and a disdain for creativity. We decided that Jurbarkas Park needed to be a visually attractive space appropriate for densely urbanized locations, whose characteristics would contribute to the qualitative improvement of the city's living environment. We concluded that to achieve this purpose it was especially important to find architectural solutions which would elucidate the harmony between man-made

¹ Laurinaitis, *Žvilgsnis iš veidrodžio*.

and natural elements, to make maximum use of the park's relief and its orientation towards the four cardinal directions, and to create a space that would not only be a means of passing through the park, but would also interest people and invite them to spend time in it.

As we created our conception of Jurbarkas Park and tried to make clear choices for the project, we familiarized ourselves with the most successful realizations of similar projects around the world, as described in detail in the works of Lyall Sutherland, Marilyn Symmes, Francis Tibbalds and Alejandro Bahamon.² I personally visited some of these projects. My studies at the Department of Architecture of Gediminas Technical University in Vilnius, especially the course on architectural composition, had a great influence on my architectural choices and their artistic form. This course is described in the publication *Architektūros kompozicijos tyrimai* (Research into Architectural Composition).³ Recently I took part in teaching this course.

When speaking of the actual architectural characteristics of the Jurbarkas Park project, one should first mention the planning and zoning choices made. We evaluated the characteristics of the location, the elongated configuration of the plot of land, its orientation, the size of the plot and what is adjacent to it. It became clear that it would be necessary to use architectural means to bring this plot of land into a unified, expressive, and artistic compositional whole. We considered the actual size of the park and its orientation towards the four cardinal directions. We sought to preserve the park's two existing historical pathways (one through the park and the other along its eastern border), which have appeared over the course of time. We found spaces in the existing situation which we could supplement with elements that bring out the best characteristics of the current park. We took note of the characteristics of the location's relief, its

² Lyall, *Designing the New Landscape*; Symmes, *Fountains Splash and Spectacle*; Tibbalds, *Making People*; Bahamon, *Landscape Architecture*.

³ Ziberkas, *Architektūros kompozicijos tyrimai*, 2003.

orientation towards the four cardinal directions, its visual ties with the city's environment, the existing pathways, and the patches of valuable vegetation. The park accents three places or zones from which the panorama of the city opens up or certain objects become visible. The first zone (noted with the numeral 1 in the first illustration) is designed to be a space typical of a terraced square. The terraces arose as we reacted to the relief of the location and considered its favorable southern orientation and the vistas which open up from it towards the Nemunas River. The upper terraces are separated by raised platforms which further divide the space into smaller individual zones, each with its own fountain. Concrete steps formed on the side of a natural ravine make up a more minutely terraced space reminiscent of an amphitheater. These steps are intended to give people an opportunity to enjoy the city vistas in sunlight. Such a reinforced hillside forms an amphitheater which can also be used for various functions. In the second zone (denoted by the numeral 2 in the first illustration), we decided to leave the hill as it was in nature, just as in the first zone, but to create a visually similar but more chamber-like space. (Illustration 2) Fragments of city vistas are visible from the top of this hill as well. In the third zone (denoted by the numeral 3 in Illustration 1), we created another chamber-like space for the use of city dwellers in their free time. This is a natural square in a grassy field. It is supplemented with fragments of poured concrete and a brick pavement, which allow people to sit or play in the sunlight with the city's church towers are visible in the distance. All three zones are intended essentially for quiet relaxation but also in part for an active use of free time.

In general, the park presents the picture of a unified whole consisting of six separate architectural elements and their groupings, all of which are united by a unified stylistic "language". Concrete sidewalks, steps, benches, asphalt pathways, squares paved with rhombic bricks, light sources, fountains, and vegetation combine through their architectural and artistic characteristics and functional properties to make a compositional whole



Illustration 1. *The plan of Jurbarkas Park*

in a park space which is quite long and which cannot be absorbed in a single glance.

Concrete towers and planes, which serve as paths, steps or benches, make up the most important elements of the park's architecture. Concrete pathways, steps, and benches, with their uniform, monolithic surfaces, constitute the "main melody" of the park's architectural whole. Straight-line contours and masses constructed from straight planes provide a contrast in form to the natural surroundings of the park. They highlight the delicate beauty of the living trees, bushes, and grasses. On the other hand, these architectural elements when used in certain appropriate areas also become smooth, nuanced extensions of natural characteristics, interpretations of them – paths meander between groups of trees, steps and benches are placed so as to repeat and follow the variations in the natural relief which existed in the location originally. When we picked the material to use for the realization of these elements, it was important for us to consider not only the aesthetic "brushstrokes" it would pro-

vide for the picture of the park, but also its utilitarian physical characteristics. The durability of the material was important because the park is a specific object that is open to climatic influences. We also tried to construct a park whose upkeep would cause the least amount of trouble. We chose concrete because it is a material which has been in use for many years and because its use has been the subject of exhaustive scientific research in the works of David Bennett, Friedbert Kind-Barkauskas, and their colleagues.⁴ A publication edited by Martin Peck⁵ is an example of recent research into the aesthetic and physical qualities of concrete. In Jurbarkas Park, concrete allowed us to form the elements of landscaping smoothly and sculpturally. It permitted necessary forms to serve various functions (the same element can serve as a pathway, a step, a ramp or a bench). Thanks to the universality of this material, any form can have visually identical horizontal and vertical surfaces, various dimensions. This permits the people using the park to choose for themselves how they will treat the various shapes made out of this material. (Illustration 2) Some of the horizontal surfaces differ from each other by a height of 140 mm or 420 mm, which respectively are appropriate anthropomorphic heights for climbing steps or for sitting. The concrete pathways, benches, and steps in the park are light grey, almost white in color. It was necessary to use a light color for the concrete in order to provide a color contrast with the asphalt covering of the main walkways and in order to clarify compositional lines against the background of the plots of grass and trees as they appear at all the different times of the year.

The second important element in the architectural design of Jurbarkas Park are the aforementioned walkways covered in concrete and asphalt. Asphalted walkways were left in place for economic reasons: they had been newly paved just as the project was about to begin. In Lithuania, asphalt is considered a simple,

⁴ Bennett, *Concrete Architecture*; Kind-Barkauskas, Kauhsen et al., *Concrete Construction Manual*.

⁵ Peck, *Materiality and surface*, 2014.



Illustration 2. *A stepped terrace with fountains in the park*

not a particularly representative material. Nonetheless, there are quite a few interesting examples of its use in the world.⁶ Asphalt-walkways were integrated into the general compositional plan of the park's terrain. We constructed intersections of asphalt with new fragments of concrete or paved brick coverings, incising them where necessary. (Illustration 3) The dark, almost black color of this material and the level texture of its surface became important for the details which make up the aesthetic whole.

In some areas, the ground was covered with black concrete bricks. This is the third architectural element of the park. The color of these paved bricks is similar to asphalt, and their rhombic form – to the geometry of the elements of concrete. When the plots between the elements of concrete were paved with these bricks, textural contrasts between the asphalt walkways and the surfaces next to them became apparent. Compared with the uniform and monolithic appearance of asphalt and concrete, the plots of paved bricks appear rough and etched. (Illustration 2)

⁶ Fairs, "Asphalt Spot by R&Sie," 2007.



Illustration 3. *A chamber-like space and one of the two main walkways in the park*



Illustration 4. *The park illuminated at evening time*

Light sources are another important architectural element of the park. We planned to illuminate the park with lights placed on supports 8 meters high. They are along the existing pathways which are the main thoroughfares for the movement of people through the park. We also planned to illuminate the concrete planes of the steps and benches in the park by inserting light fixtures onto the vertical edges of the steps as a way of accentuating them. Groups of trees in the park, fountains and places intended for sculptures, are illuminated with lights embedded into the lawn and into the pavements of concrete bricks. The visible parts of the light fixtures were designed to be black in color so as to fit in with the park's dark asphalt covers and its pavements of concrete bricks, and also to provide a color contrast with the concrete. In designing the illumination of the park, we sought to make it attractive as well as functional. At dusk, the elements of the park are illuminated in a way that differs from



natural daylight. The vertical edges of the steps are emphasized; fountains and the crowns of trees are illuminated from the ground below. This creates a different mood from that of the day. (Illustration 4)

Fountains are the fifth important element of Jurbarkas Park. We designed the fountains to be a means of enhancing the architectural aesthetics of the park, to be a visual and philosophical metaphor, and to be an impressive source of unique psychological sensations. The fountains which dot the main square (noted by numeral 1 in Illustration 1) are important ways of increasing the park's appeal to people of various ages – families with children, young people, and seniors. The fountains dotting the park are intended to be an integral part of the concrete brick pavements. They do not have basins. The water re-enters the surface of the square. In this way the square will be operational even during the cold months of the year, when the fountains are not in operation. The fountains spray their jets of water from black-colored metal fixtures in the ground. These jets reach a height of 0.5 to 1 meter. Of the seven projected fountains, six collect their water at the spot where the water is sprayed. One does not do so: its water cascades down a series of steps onto a smaller fountain at a terrace below where the water is collected. (Illustration 2)

Vegetation is the sixth architectural element of Jurbarkas Park. We planned to detach the terrain of the park visually from the small plots of land around it and from the somewhat chaotic small buildings on these plots. We planned to employ two types of bushes along the fences which wrap around the perimeter of the park. A two-tiered hedge has been planted along the fence on the north side of the park, while a single hedge has been planted on the south side. The bushes have to be sufficiently high to hide the fences, but not too high to block the panorama of the city from the various vantage points in the park. An effort was made to the greatest degree possible, to preserve the existing landscape and the existing flora as well as the park's clumps

of trees. The lawn was invigorated, qualitatively renewed. Dilapidated plots were rejuvenated.

As we coordinated the architectural elements described above as if putting brushstrokes on a painting of Jurbarkas Park, we tried to achieve a spatial and aesthetic harmony between natural and human elements, to find architectural connections with humaneness, permanence, and innovation. As we brought the project to life, we were very interested in how city residents would react to the architectural decisions we made. We wanted to know whether they would find the final aesthetic result attractive, whether the functional decisions we made would turn out to be justified. Jurbarkas Park was opened in the summer of 2015 and so far large numbers of people have visited it. As children run around and try to catch spurts of water from the fountains, adults sit on the steps, on the benches, talk to each other, and walk on the pathways. The creation of a somewhat unusual, less mundane visual space has great significance. Such spaces expand the variety of a person's visual, physical world. At the same time such projects also illustrate the power of art to form and change the living environment of human beings.

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Translated by RIMAS ČERNIUS

Two Essays by Romualdas Vaičekas

A Friend of Stones

When I turned thirty, or thereabouts, I began to feel like, I'm not sure what exactly, something like a sculptor. I couldn't walk past a single large stone in a field with indifference. Previously, however, I never noticed them, as if I had a blind spot, or was hopelessly thick. I remember it like yesterday: I was granted my master craftsman's diploma by a mysterious boulder impressed with the footprint of a god or the devil. It was all quite ceremonial: a plethora of flowers, a heavenly orchestra of winds playing a lofty song, though there was no champagne, no women, but for that reason, probably, the diploma has not expired...

From that day on, as soon as I saw a pretty stone, I was overcome by a strange kind of attack. If I didn't know better – a real case of (kidney) stones. So many times I would chisel a grand sculpture, usually as I recall, on the eternal theme of love, and then gaze about, indulgently expecting applause, but, seeing just a meager meadow flower, or a lonely cloud swimming in the sky, I would suddenly grow ashamed and quickly fix the stone back up as it had been, as if it had never been touched. You see, even then, I was a master of my craft, for no apprentice could do such a thing...

Constantly spoiled by success, I didn't avoid the bigger commissions either. Once, having carefully selected some impressive

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boulders to form the foundations of a castle, I threw myself into the work, but found my stock of granite to be on the small side (by quite a lot), and had to satisfy myself with the materials at hand. So, I finished my castle with air. I'm not going to speculate on how much use my client got out of the result, but it was an invaluable experience. If some old-school master craftsman wants to scold me for making such an unstable construction, I would easily reply to him: so much time has gone by, and where is your castle my friend, where is your fort...

Like a zealous mason, I lost myself in my work – things would have gotten even better, but, this one time, as if rudely awakened by my guardian angel, I said to myself: enough. I understood that I had risen to a height beyond the greatest master... Our most perfect creations are not those which we create, but those that we can see...

That's why I like to lean on a stone in the field, to walk around it, to touch its coarse or smooth surface, to investigate its crystals, their insertions and veins, to knock with something on its sides, or to strike sparks and feel its inimitable scent... When I am full of strength, I often try to move some boulder from its place, but I never succeed. Maybe that's just as well because I wouldn't know what to do next...

Working like that, with such efficiency, suddenly: look! Evening has come. But I probably don't look so tired because the neighbors who have gathered to watch smile at me ambiguously, whispering among themselves, until one of them can't take it anymore and asks: What are you actually doing here? Shouldn't you be doing some serious work? When I answer with a voice grown hoarse from forest bogs that I'm just taking care of my rock, they, speechless, begin to retreat backwards as if they had suddenly seen with their very own eyes a rich man, or, for that matter, a dead one. For, the greater part of my neighbors only get a stone after a life of hard toil, and that, usually, is the only one that their relatives can afford to buy...

Trying to use the rare occasion of an audience, I quickly jump up on the stone and heatedly hold forth on this, our strangest,

form of property until it becomes clear that everyone has scattered a long time ago... So what? An audience isn't necessary for a good lecture – nothing left to do but climb down to the ground...

If you don't have anything new to say, it's unlikely that you'll capture the attention of your neighbors, so I continue to murmur to myself: a human – probably just an animal, but not an ordinary one if from all mortal beings his instinct for self-preservation is strongest... Many times I have noticed how animals try to avoid death, and, equally, I have noticed how humans desire to remain even after death...

I remember one of my teachers – and this is just between us, he would more fittingly have been called a student – who plaintively begged the professors he knew to grant him that same honorable title, and when his colleagues became completely exhausted, unable to find the least little reason to do this, he suddenly played his strongest trump card: will anyone visit his grave if the stone will not be engraved – professor...

Truthfully, though, most of our thoughts are so paltry that it's not worth it even to express them to yourself. Only with the salt of sweat can you earn enough worth to write them down on paper, or, even better, on water: but don't even think about ruining a stone. If you are such a master that your thoughts do not shame human consciousness, some apprentice will engrave on your stone some nonsense or other anyway – eternally mourned... always in our memory...

I can say the same about myself, my friend: I'm not so successful. Beautiful thoughts don't visit me every day, not even every year... In your presence I am determined to ruin paper for only one reason – I have been streaming words over water for so long, leaving commas in the air, that I decided, come what may, to change my medium... Nevertheless, while you may go on and on about the immortality of your work and thoughts, I am more concerned with the continuity of my thoughts. For as soon as I think about that, my thoughts fall one upon the other, like stones rolling down a hill.

If, with a few easy movements of your body, you sometimes manage to create a new body, but one equally unstable as yours, surely you wouldn't forbid your son to do the same?

If your thoughts sometimes rise to the level of your father's thoughts, aren't you at least obligated to tell them to your son?

Doesn't our sky bless us in both cases, generously pouring down grace not only for our victories, but also, at least a little bit, for our efforts?

It's now time to return to stones from which, it seems, we have carelessly strayed. How many amazing stories one can hear about them... I like to listen to them, and sometimes to relate them to others as well, though I'm a bit ashamed that those stories are more beautiful than edifying... Now, if it is easier for even me to do something hateful than to do something good – where have you ever seen such a weak devil who, holding a stone in each hand, can't manage to bash up a church? – I won't even speak about you...

I once heard of a certain advanced nation, maybe the Irish, with a sacred stone that shows them who is the true king. If the rightful inheritor of the throne sits upon it – the stone will speak the truth, but if it's some impostor – the stone will remain silent and indifferent, as if lacking an opinion...

In our country, where every last fool or shady thief dares to pronounce himself king, it would not be in vain to have a few such stones... Nevertheless, unfortunately, there are none. I can solemnly swear this as a witness, for I have spent a long time looking for them. Only once, in a dreary spruce forest near Kražantė, did I manage to find one that, judging from certain signs, gave me hope that it was the sacred one... Not wanting to go home empty-handed, I even tried to sit on it, and sat on it until evening came, but the stone didn't make a sound. The only thing that happened was that my feet became numb and my butt froze, but I'm not so sure that these are signs of the stone's favor. It looks like you, my fellow citizens, will have to figure it out for yourselves.

Another stone that I sometimes visit is genuinely miraculous – it hides within itself the unusual power to grant fertility

to women. Afraid to be held accountable for the consequences, and not wanting to scare people, I never say exactly where it is. After all, most contemporary women would start to avoid the area like the plague... Those who know the rituals describe the nature of the rites ambiguously, or they remain reservedly silent. But I am constantly amazed at the power of faith and passion for miraculous healing in the women of old, since, they, touching the rough stone for centuries with their fingers or the hopeful part of their bodies, have in some places polished the stone to a shine...

O stone, I don't know a more dead thing than you on the entire earth, and I probably will never meet another creature that would be so full of life as the woman strengthened by you...

Sometimes, like a shadow, I quietly slip out to the cemetery in the village of my birth. Prodded by a light cold breath of air, I like to wander the paths between stones... Or, as is fitting for a holy place, my soul goes fearfully first to the graves, while my stiff body drags itself along behind...

I meet a wonderful woman there and think: what is she doing in such a gloomy place, and at such a time when her contemporaries, having forgotten everything in the world, crying for joy, play half-naked on wooden platforms... Not wanting to offend her, I don't use my voice to inquire, but my heart. She, nevertheless, quivering in pain, sadly answers: I am visiting my parents' graves; but the depths of her gaze are so calm, bright and sweet that, unable to contain my emotions, I passionately kiss that intimate soul, though my body, of course, lags somewhere far behind...

Then I see a lonely old woman, futzing about a neglected grave, and suddenly I become confused: should I greet her, or did I say farewell to her in my childhood? But once such doubts arise, it's always better to greet someone...

"I was at the seamstress's – the grave stones are not finished," – as is usual in our village, she talks to me about practical concerns, and suddenly I grow ashamed. After all, I haven't looked after my own... Given that I am standing in front of a person who knows her field, I ask her with a quavering heart

whether she could point out a sandy spot for me... After scrutinizing me carefully with her gaze, the old woman resolutely leads my body on – I fear that she will lead me over the fence, but, thank God, no – she shows me a free spot between a professor and a general...

I like the spot – surrounded by people I know. So I address them:

– Aren't you, general, the unknown soldier of the army not yet born?

Aren't you, professor, the eternal student, always wiping down the board for the next professor?

– And you, rector, aren't you the only shepherd from the parish who herded the flock with the most uncertain fleece?

And so on...

– What are your degrees, titles and achievements?

With these stern, but correct words, I gained the respect of all the speechless ones around. For good measure, I asked: do you remember among you one who was not yet worthwhile?...

However, suddenly remembering something, and shyly turning away from the old woman, I quickly turn out my pockets – there's only enough money there for a small piece of turf... But if the grave lacks a stone, then my turf will be trodden by the professor's students or the general's army... When I return to my senses after the contemplation of such an event, I remember my master craft, praised in more than one marketplace of vanity. Then, looking closely at a strange rain cloud with the form of a rear end, I painstakingly engrave the letters of my name. Following in the footsteps of my previously mentioned teacher, I modestly add: nobleman... Now I feel calm, having taken care of everything, as if I were an old, experienced deceased person. Every time my grave marker floats over the cemetery, my eternal monument will be able to wet the professor's students and the general's army – if they only dare to tread on the grass fertilized by me...

If it seems to anyone that I am mocking human life, then he probably doesn't have any idea what real mockery is.

Completely by chance, we get invited to a feast of a generous lord. We arrive in high spirits, expecting to have a great time for free. Nevertheless, the proud lord doesn't intend to show himself yet, but obedient servants rush about handing out cards to everyone... We are happy again, for we were, it turns out, expected, and so we each expect to find our place at the table. It quickly becomes clear, though, that the places are strangely mixed up, not at all according to our wishes... So here you are reaching for a baked pheasant, already tasting it in your mouth, but then your neighbor at the table warns you that the pheasant is only for those with cards like his... There's nothing you can do it seems: to each his own goblet. But I am uneasy once more – one person has, it seems, a full pitcher, the other – only a few measured, watery drops... And even though we don't know how much wine has been poured out for each, we raise our goblets together for a toast, senselessly rejoicing: the lord poured more wine for me than you...

Somewhat calmer now, a young woman invites me to dance, and “the bells of love are pealing for you”, however, the hall is unexpectedly lit by a strange light – you see yourself embracing a wilted old lady who begins out of nowhere to criticize you for your diminished manliness, though that young woman had just been praising it...

When such unpleasant things are happening all around, you don't want sleep, but clearly see that each person who drank their required goblet falls asleep at once, and we, in tears over the heavy load, quickly carry them outside – maybe they'll recover in the fresh air... Later, back at the table, we quietly slander the person: maybe the lord invited him to his true estate, but surely such a drunk will not be given an eternally full goblet...

You can see that new guests are always arriving, and when they all sit at the table, surely you, my friend, don't think that they will concern themselves with your card that is laying about somewhere...

But if you lost hope in having a good time over such trivialities, then I'm amazed how you, being such a commoner, could

have been invited by my lord to his table. If you can't cut the rug on the dance floor, then at least you could quietly sing...

Whether you want to or not, we will have to return one more time to the cemetery because, whatever you might say, it will always be the place of eternal rest and of the hope for resurrection...

Such was my amazement when I saw how the old, dilapidated cemetery was wiped out. In about a quarter of a century the frozen ground uprooted the crosses, and the grave stones sank into the earth. They were buried under the remains of lush grasses and the falling leaves of trees. No sign remained that there had once been a cemetery here. We have enough strength to put up a stone for a fallen relative, but not enough time to build a monument to dead cemeteries...

One of my neighbors dug out some root cellars there and flung in his root vegetables. All winter long, he was astonished at how rich his borscht had become. You don't even have to put a bone in the pot – he always foolishly rejoiced. Later, he faced the consequences: for a long time he suffered insomnia, hearing noises of all kinds: the clash of arms, death screams and many more. Yet everything ended in the same way – a commanding noble voice intoned: in the name of the future, don't forget! Or something like that. And so on, until the next time...

I visited him to tell him to stop slurping that cemetery borscht. He just replied – the entire earth is someone's cemetery. We argued until we were hoarse. I was even ready to thrash him, but a passing local quack gave us both the same diagnosis. From that time on, my neighbor and I look at the future in our own ways – he plows the earth, digs root cellars and builds houses, not worried in the slightest about any graves, but I, seeing a beautiful stone, occasionally build a monument to a vanished cemetery... Nevertheless, we never argue anymore, as if we were just one person...

That was just a game, my friend. Actually, I don't know why I like to lean on a stone in the field. Maybe a stone preserves the thoughts of people who once stood by it, like a shell preserves the sougning of the sea... *Te Deum laudamus...*

Comet Gazing

An aphoristic parable

Once, with winter ending and spring on its way, all the newspapers in the country, as if in agreement, began to annoyingly drum the news that a star with a tail was heading for the earth – a comet, and if you wanted to see it you had to lift your eyes up toward the north-west once the sun had gone down. Masses of curious people flooded observatories and jostled each other amid the telescopes, wanting to get a better view of the unusual celestial body.

I asked them, whatever did you see?, but they mumbled something vague about a miracle, and then began to relate how they were standing next to some famous person or star. How strange, I thought, how many people live not for themselves but for the spectacle, and only raise their eyes devoutly to the sky when someone sees them do it.

You have to look at the sky not with the eyes of the body, but the soul. After all, the sky of a blind person is just as limitless as yours, and if he doesn't see the closest constellations, then maybe he perceives the most distant black holes, and if he doesn't see the sun, then that's maybe because he looks at it from closer up than us.



The news of the comet's appearance gave me, foremost, a strong sense of guilt. The years run by, and I haven't yet done anything of service to humanity. No one recognizes the Americas I discovered as new continents, and I also climbed Everest one year or another and even that only in my thoughts. I did not become a famous walker on the moon, nor an assiduous star dust cleaner, and I haven't even managed to become known as a generous heart – the jingle of a few coins that I occasionally drop into some tired hat fails to shake the world. The foremost representatives of humanity could use my achievements as a kind of

baseline, i.e., the null point. It's a struggle for a small person in this world where everyone is ahead in some way.

Once, walking down the street, I saw how a former thief or headhunter was insistently causing a well-known professor to cry – saying how his years in jail equaled the professor's years at the university, then insultingly counting how many times over he could buy such a professor and all his property. The old man had already agreed with everything, so not waiting for anymore, I smacked the shameful one upside the ears and told him in a language he could understand: "Brother, life isn't just a struggle of dung beetles for a little pile of someone else's poop. It's just not fitting for a person to become the parody of a beetle."

I felt like I had fulfilled my duty as a citizen, but at once the crowded gawkers began to scold me: how can I so rudely attack a person they respect? And when I proudly explained that no recovered pickpocket will make an honorable professor cry in my presence, the crowd went completely mad, and they wouldn't have let me go with my head on my shoulders if their intellectual leader, as far as their thinking goes, hadn't calmly stated that these days only a pitiful fool speaks like this. The crowd drew back, calmly feeling their superiority. These are the times. These are the customs.

Woe for the country when a teacher gets his salary and grows sad, while a judge gets his salary and smiles, even though they were educated the same.

Woe for the country if it's founder, a learned man, can't find his place and feels compelled to shoot himself.

Better one good teacher than ten good judges.

Not for nothing did a comet hang in our skies, no, not for nothing. We don't know for how many thousands of years its appearance was a sign for people of impending catastrophe – wars, epidemics and even the world's end. It's only been a minuscule sliver of time, about the span of one human life, that we have so puffed ourselves up with knowledge that we treat the comet as a pastime created to entertain us.

Tradition is more to my taste, because everyone of us is waiting for our world to end, and for you, brother, not much time is left. So, wouldn't it be praiseworthy to treat the comet's appearance as an opportunity to spend some time on the life of the soul? If you plan to travel to the skies, it's probably not enough to just scrub your feet.

Our knowledge of this other life is incomplete, shaky, untrustworthy. Only faith gives us any kind of hope. One of my mad friends, when annoyingly asked how his life was going, always answered with the great joy of fools, although, to me a bit enigmatically: ask father, father knows better. I've never heard a better answer to such a difficult question: we really don't know, after all, how we are living until our Father tells us. You cannot replace faith with knowledge, and the stubborn attempts to do so lead to madness.



Comet

The threatening comet hanging in the sky created such tension that I would probably have broken down and run to a telescope along with everyone else. However, by chance, a certain old man sent me a message that he goes out every night to solemnly stand under a twisted pear tree. This volunteer, with no help from the media, came upon the comet in the sky and sees it especially well from his forest.

In this way, I got the opportunity to engage in some deep comet gazing, and I had no doubt that like a real superman I could take out three hares with one shot.

First, I hoped to get a really good look at this rare visitor in the sky and feel its effects on the smallest unit of humanity – me. Very few people alive today will get a chance to see this comet again, or, to tell the truth, none of them.

Second, I considered how if two valiant men out of several billion on earth watched that night when the comet first appeared, later

named after them, then maybe I will be the only night watchman watching that night when the world ends. "Comets are like cats, they have tails and do what they want," – the first discoverer clearly warned. In the event of the end of the world, I could then be of service to humanity, warning them in time of the danger. If I failed to save any bodies, then at least perhaps some souls.

Third, I cherished a secret hope: If all turned out well for me, I would be the first and last person to announce the end of the world, and the absolute champion of any earthly contest. Considering this more carefully, it occurred to me that I should value this possibility to make my mark with a little more temperance. Nevertheless, I had no doubt that one could drum up a flock of fools who are so caught in the rat race that they would gladly agree to become famous at even this price.

To be sure of success, I chose a night with a full moon for my comet watch. If the end of the world was nigh, then it would be on such a night. I had come to know long ago, and done much investigation, on the effects of a full moon: all the madmen begin to stir, and, even more so, those who are not far from madness.

– Here a married couple, having shared their love and fallen into the sleep of the righteous, tear at each other's hearts with cat's claws – without meaning, without purpose, and even with no remuneration.

– Here a person who can't fall asleep, kneels in prayer, diligently tabulates his life's account, and the more thoroughly he counts, the more base his balance. It's not hard to guess how this will end, but the person is not yet born who could say to him: you know, brother, even you don't live in vain.

As the sun sets, I go out into the springtime forest. During the day, you can catch the earth's scent awakening, and at night it breaths a cosmic cold. If the comet is a dirty snowball, then the forest looks as if it had rubbed against its tail – there is enough dirt and snow. Not a living soul in sight – only a little bird breaks

off from the earth in a flash, and like a meteor in reverse direction it draws a pretty parabola towards, it seems, the sky, then settles down for the night by the trunk of a birch. Taking my time, I get a fire going and begin my long night watch.

When someone turns on the least little light at night, the person becomes, in part, the light itself. For, looking at the light from a distance, it's source is usually hidden. So the words "to build a fire" take on a different meaning, and this meaningless act gains a certain special weight.

To build a fire... I will never know what skipper of the universe, perhaps in a different dimension, navigated safely to a harbor by means of my light, or what captain of an airship in the heavens was lit up for a flash next to his helm upon seeing the glow of my night-watch, or for what demon of darkness I became the first cordon of humanity that night, stopping him, or forcing him to strike fearfully to the side, or for what tired, traveling bird I had given a sign so that he reached the land of his birth.

And do you, who don't believe in the power of a human's little light, dream of illuminating the night's forests with something stronger than the sun, expecting it not to go out until the leaves begin their photosynthesis?

Haven't you heard how the meekest candle, not anything like the sun even from afar, lit at midnight by the side of a dying pauper in a forest cottage covered in snow, saved the life of a traveller lost in a blizzard? Wasn't it just as significant for that traveller to see that radiance as to see the sun again? Is a candle not, in the end, that same sun?

Couldn't you, for whom life's road is lit by others' lights, spend at least one night on the watch, saying: "I am the Light. I am the Lighthouse." Even if you are so meek as to be afraid of the night, could you at least be brave enough to say that to yourself during the day? After all, your day is that heroic deed about which you always dream, isn't it?



Only a real man can spend all night staring, as if it were nothing, at the comet that hangs like a millstone on a hair above his head, asking himself, will it fall or not? But even for him, if he wants to make it till dawn, it would be best to forget about it entirely. Emotions swell up in such pure form that they are experienced as such only in dreams or in the vast cosmos. I try to understand their essence and feel, amazed, that those which people call negative are actually positive.

It's not right for a real man to be full of fear. Fear is your most faithful servant. It always comes at the right time and presents to you the unwelcome guest, Danger, and then modestly retires. It's wrong to try to seduce it like some libertine. Nor is it fitting to invite it oneself without reason, nor, once it shows up unexpectedly, to try to keep it from leaving. One who fears nothing is already as if dead.

Anger is not your enemy. You don't need to offend it. Anger saves you from your annoying co-habitant, Despair. When Despair completely overwhelms you, Anger forces you to live until you can get even with that tramp. Don't ever invite Anger for any other reason. One who can't get angry, is one who is already as if dead.

Despair lives with you. A stranger connection is harder to imagine. It seems as if you love her twin sister Hope, but all your life you're left guessing which one will show up in the evening. Nobody has yet managed to create a more permanent marriage with one of the two sisters. Nevertheless, the one who is without Hope is already as if dead.

A wind blows up after midnight, a north wind piercing right through me. Unconsciously looking for shelter, I huddle by a birch trunk and remember that little bird sleeping somewhere above my head. It, this meager mote of life, who is not even given a consciousness like mine, manages to guess the correct direction the wind will take, to choose a place for the night on a slip of bark on the south side of the trunk, and manages to make it until morning in the icy forest. A great rush of warmth

comes over me at the feeling of solidarity with this little kernel of life. Since I am still following the comet with my eyes, I can't imagine the bird's heart in any other way than as a small, invisible pulsar flying together with me through the Milky Way.

It seems as if my consciousness, unable to contain either such thoughts or the rain of stars, unexpectedly swells and floods over its edges. I stop feeling. After a moment or a light-year, in my consciousness or in the cosmos, a new system of celestial harmony is being born – the comet's, my and the bird's pleiad, shining brightly and with vitality in the absolute darkness. The Hale-Bopp Comet.

The first thought that flared in my re-awakening consciousness was this: we are all created from the same shining material, and the Creator really was not stingy with it. Against any kind of prejudice, like a ball of grief in my throat, a feeling of brotherhood begins to rise for all of those fools, traitors, patricides, child molesters, prostitutes, hypocrites, and Bolsheviks. A person is always a little more than his name...

I don't know and can't imagine who will watch the comet when it shows up again in the sky of my home town. Maybe some genius clone, of uncertain gender, with a worthless rudimentary necklace, and a greedy laser gaze will be glancing through the closest galaxies, searching for fresh pastures for his vegetative flocks. Maybe he will dream of becoming rich by speculating with Martians on the mining of stars that have long gone out, or maybe like today he will show off to his neighbors his new cosmic cart. I am afraid to even ask: brother, if I'm not around then, could you, somewhere far from everyone's eyes, in the most distant corner of the universe, preserve at least one little bird, perhaps with the last sacred spark in its chest?



This unexpected turning of my consciousness raised in me an irrepressible storm of happiness. Refreshed by this, I grab my satellite phone and become a superman once again: behold the

man who could be needed by the world at any moment! Who could have thought that exactly at that time when I was ready to paint all of humanity with happiness, I came face to face with failure.

The side of the earth's globe facing the sun answered me with incomprehensible speech, while the side bathing in darkness seemed to be sweetly sleeping. Despite my efforts, no one answered my calls. As if, without my knowledge, the world had already come to an end. Maybe, I naively thought, at least the emergency services are on the watch. But who calls them to share his happiness? I decided to try anyway, and proclaimed to all of them the same message: "I found the night-lodging of a little bird."

As rarely happens, a quick-witted police watchman understood at once that this was a secret agent informing on a big-time criminal and immediately promised – "The police commissioner will hear of it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow the bird will be gone!" Such efficiency makes me laugh, so I firmly demanded that he write up a report with my name and the night's events. Under our skies, it is common to hold a person to be famous if his name is written in at least several legal briefs.

The fireman who answered my call didn't understand a thing, but also tried to speak matter-of-factly: "A night-lodging? Is it burning?" I shot back with some anger: "While I am on watch, that's impossible," and dialed another number without thinking.

A sleepy woman who didn't seem to hear so well nevertheless brightens up to my message in a strange way: if your little bird isn't too small, a lodging-place can be found for him. She names a price. When I figure out where this satellite connection is going, my conqueror's spirit revives: "Surely, a real man will never pay for that?"

My hands begin to shake from shame – while you sit here on watch, look what women start to imagine! In such affairs, I de-

cided it's not worth it to call a doctor – they'll just come and try to make a profit from my happiness.

Whoever said the greatest worth is the connection people have with other people? These words are all too happily repeated by small-shouldered men and dainty women.

Speaking seriously, the famous airship captain who said those words is undoubtedly right, but the scoundrel has grown silent... The greatest worth is a person's connection to other people if, through it, other virtues express themselves – such as the connection with the universe or even with the Highest One. What love that lucky dog experienced in order to say something like that so clearly!



“Do not human beings have to serve as soldiers on this earth?” – What a capacious line of holy writ!

At this point on earth, the leader is not in debt for all the toil experienced by his most faithful soldiers. Is it right to blame him if he doesn't always pay their salary in gold?

How many times, private, have the stars of heaven landed on your shoulders, but you don't value them because the ring of coins or a sergeant's raggedy shoulder tassels are more important to you? How can gifts be given to you if you don't accept them? And how can you be gilded if you debase yourself?

Surely, you don't expect that once you finish your service you will once more muster in the ranks?

Shouldn't you feel especially, if not unworthily, honored if you manage to make it at least until dawn?

Old soldier! If in life's tavern some pompous fool pretends not to see the stars you won from hard service, and tries to address you like some failed sergeant, answer him proudly: I am actually a private whom the lord allows to give his own rank, and so my worn pants are worth a general's stripes.

Better an ordinary nobleman of the Highest than ten generals of humanity.



As has happened to more than one person, such a promotion made my head spin, and swaying as if I had gotten drunk after my new rank, I began to look around for the little bird, wanting to wake him up.

It was already dawning, but the little bird was still sleeping all balled up, so I had to nudge him for a while with a long switch.

The bird was frightened and, getting caught on branches along the way, flitted up to the top of the tree. Either from fear, or the joy of making his escape, he began to sing.

The comet melted away. The bird sang. I was happy as a man who had spent his night well and even helped spring come along a little early.

I wasn't able to learn if the comet was the sign of the end of the world, but I'm sure that the little bird will announce the Resurrection by starting to sing on an early spring morning.

People were still sleeping, but that was all the same to me. If just one person hears the song of a little bird, then all of humanity is saved from deafness.



No one should denigrate the song of a meager little bird, because he could be announcing the Resurrection this very morning. No one should denigrate the life of a meager person, because maybe he was, just that very night, on watch for all of humanity.

*Translated from the Lithuanian by
RIMAS UŽGIRIS*

Cosmological Visions of Vytautas Pečiukonis / Agnus Elegrus

ALMANTAS SAMALAVIČIUS

During most of his life-time, the painter Vytautas Pečiukonis / Agnus Elegrus (1926–2013) remained a complete enigma to his contemporaries, including the people who were most intimate with him – his numerous disciples, some two hundred of which eventually became professional artists themselves. Forced to spend the bulk of his life under the Soviet regime, he consciously chose never to exhibit any art works at any official art venue, and thus risking to remain an eternal outsider and the usual suspect in the formal art circles of the Soviet era. He was rumored to have a huge number of art works in his spacious flat, yet nobody was ever allowed to have a glimpse of them until the very last years of his life when his two one-man shows were opened to the public in Vilnius – one in 2005, another in 2007, followed by a post-mortem exhibition in 2016.

Educated at the Kaunas Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts, where he studied architecture and painting, Vytautas Pečiukonis eventually graduated from the sculpture department at Vilnius' Arts Institute (now Academy). After a few brief teaching appointments at several institutions, he finally settled in at Vilnius Art School (now renamed after Justinas Vienožinskis) where he taught during the period from 1960–1987 while simultaneously completing vocal studies at Vilnius State Conservatoire (now renamed the Academy of Music and Theatre), and even briefly appearing on the stage of professional opera.

No one dared to suspect in those times that Pečiukonis was not his real name: according to his story it was adopted by his father – a musician who had moved to Lithuania to pursue a ca-

reer as a church organ player after marrying a young Italian woman from an old aristocratic family against the will of her parents. He was eventually taken to his maternal grandparents and then spent his childhood and early adolescent years in their Italian *pala-tio* until his father brought him back to Lithuania during WW II where they found themselves to be entrapped at the end of the war. His father was arrested by the Soviet security in 1946; two years later he was murdered. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Vytautas Pečiukonis/Agnus Elegrus chose the life of a hermit and to live on the margins of Soviet art institutions.

Refusing to sell any art works to the occasional wealthy visitors to Lithuania during the Soviet period who somehow found a way to reach his secluded home-studio, Pečiukonis/Elegrus finally donated his entire collection – some 144 oil paintings and 322 water-colors to the city of Vilnius; his legacy survived mainly due to the efforts of his former student Gražina Murelytė-Ajauskienė who together with some others are struggling to press the municipal authorities to find a permanent exhibition space for these exceptional art works that do not seem to fit into any known classification of modern Lithuanian art. A mixture of the visionary with symbolism and abstract art, he seems to have created a very personal view of aesthetics and spirituality that gives difficulties for those wishing to classify his remarkable artistic legacy. In this sense, one can only think of Čiurlionis who also did not fit into the context of his day a century ago. To me, this parallel seems quite meaningful, and deserves to be further explored.

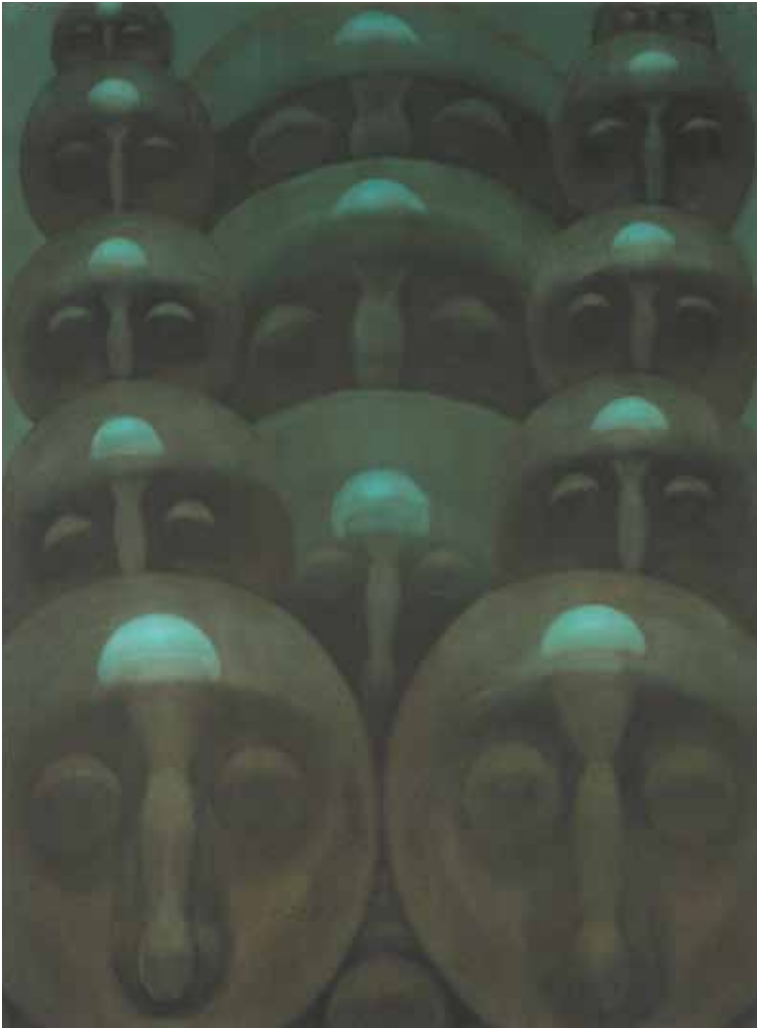
Having had the privilege and pleasure of being a disciple of Vytautas Pečiukonis at Vilnius Art School years ago, I now feel equally obliged to share with others some glimpses of his unusual and thought-provoking art work. They seem to transcend both Modernism and Modernity, taking us into a realm of spiritual visions including a number of Christian symbols, yet often going beyond them and providing a very individual cosmology of an exceptional artist. Standing somewhat outside the realm of Lithuanian modern art, he nevertheless remains a very vital part of its most interesting trajectory.



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS /
Agnus ELEGRUS



View of the Exhibition at Umiastovskiai Palace, Vilnius. 2007



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Faces*
From the Cycle *Heavens and Hell in the World of Constellations*.
Watercolor, 99 × 75



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Figure*
From the Cycle *Heavens and Hell in the World of Constellations*.
Watercolor, 99 × 75



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *The Creature of the Dark*
From the Cycle *Heavens and Hell in the World of Constellations*.
Watercolor, 99 × 75



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Christmas*
From the Cycle *Heavens and Hell in the World of Constellations*.
Watercolor, 99 × 75



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Mystical Faces*
Watercolor, 164 × 108



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Landscape*
Watercolor, 74 × 96



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Landscape*
Watercolor, 74 × 96



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *God the Creator*
Oil, cardboard, 165 × 120



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Strapped Demon*
Oil, canvas, 126 × 176



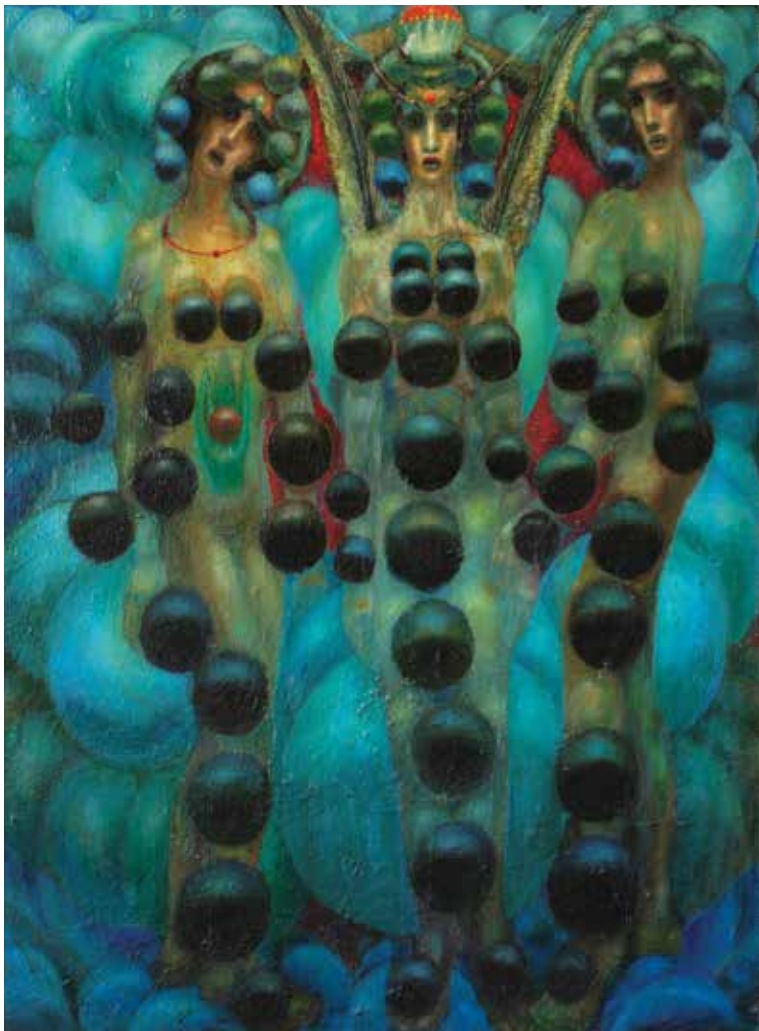
Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Christ*
Oil, cardboard, 105 × 75



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Figure Seeking the Globe*
Oil, cardboard. 171 × 115



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *An Angel*
Oil, canvas. 104,5 × 74,5



Vytautas PEČIUKONIS / Agnus ELEGRUS. *Three Nymphs*
Oil, canvas, 123 × 99

Three Stories by Kerry Shawn Keys

The Bay

It's been ages since I first visited the shore of the bay. The sand dunes are resplendent. I think some of my earliest memories are from here. Again, I feel the soft surf as much as I see it, lapping the sand, my toes. I don't remember the amber then. It's something I look for now. I remember my mother, or her flesh anyway, cooling me from the hot sun, her voice drying me and licking me clean of the rough sand and the goose pimples that covered me when the sun was covered by clouds and the seabreeze was windy and dark. Not much more that I remember, but these are my earliest memories, and if I squeeze my brain a bit more, and concentrate, I think I remember a ball or a balloon in my lap, and a bright silvery glistening stone caressed and clenched and unclenched in my fingers. I think it was a pebble like this one in my pocket, seeing so many pebbles here now, and knowing how even today I enjoy picking up a few and fondling them between my fingers.

It's not really a bay. I call it a bay because usually it is so calm and not at all similar to the rough seas and oceans where I've

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passed so much time since my days here with my mother. Though I visit here every few years whenever possible. It's a sea, that's what it is. A seashore. And not far away is the lagoon, which is really more like a bay. And this is the spit in between.

I don't remember my father being here. Maybe he was, or for sure he was according to my mother. Was? Was here I mean. With me. Maybe he was the one who put the ball in my lap. I don't suppose it was a balloon. The wind would have whisked a balloon away in too short a time for the memory of a balloon on my lap to be so strong, and I don't have any memory of crying, crawling after a wind-tossed balloon, abandoned.

No, I don't feel abandoned even now. Not by my father since I don't remember him. Not by my mother since she seems a part of my flesh, especially when I am here sitting on the beach, my legs stretched out into the surf, my hands buried behind me in the cool sand, and the sun an orange ball on the horizon.

I don't think I would come here anymore if I couldn't come at evening and watch the sun going down, my slow gaze taking in the pink and orange feathers of sunlight, the green-dark gloom of the sea beneath, and sometimes a sail on the horizon in between. It's cool in the evening, and often cold because a wind comes up at that time, but the custom of coming here and sitting in the surf has made me almost inured to feeling little more than a shiver. And I feel my mother is here with me, as though her flesh were keeping me warm from the shiver of the water. The sun's hot fingers don't scorch me like before, now that I'm older, tanned from so many suns, and the sun in the evening is a small ball held in its own faint light out over the water and then suddenly vanishing behind clouds or down somewhere I can't see or imagine.

At times, looking out over the bay and seeing the sail – not the same sail each time as one sees the sun, but the sail nonetheless – and not a sail, I imagine my father's maybe there on that ship. I imagine one time when I am here, half of my body in the surf and half out, that the ship will come a little too close to the shore and suddenly be washed by the tide almost to my

feet. Looming there in the dark in the moonlight, the moon having just taken over the duties of the sun. I won't be afraid at all. I'll just crawl up to my feet and get on board and hand him the silvery glistening pebble that my mother gave me years ago, saving it from when I was a baby on the beach. He'll nod and speak to my mother, not me, thinking I'm her because I suppose I am. The surf will pick up and knock the ship loose from the sandy shoal, and we'll be heading in the direction where the sun like a ball of yarn unraveled over the rim of the world. I'll take a furtive look back to the sandy beach, and see a little baby there all alone, and then a mauve and balmy mist will envelop all of us in the thickest of clouds.

Last Night

And they were hanging on the clothesline. Clothespins squeezing shoulders and hair, heads and necks, etc. All upright. Not one hanging sideways by an arm or upside down by a foot. One hanging by its hands with its arms above its head like an El Greco I had seen somewhere years before. It was still Winter, quite cold, but maybe above freezing for a few minutes during the day in the sunlight. It occurred to me immediately that they were bathed and hanging out to dry. To drip a few drops, to get some fresh air. A spring-cleaning to bring on Spring. In that Impressionistic light, how they seemed the children of children suspended on a journey to God knows where. About a dozen, a few more perhaps – dolls, teddy bears, other stuffed animals and figures. No puppets on a puppeteer's strings, though they were hanging. Stumbling closer, I noticed two were hand-puppets. I circled them – they were facing in all directions. I admit I was a bit drunk and it was late – past midnight, but rest assured I saw what I saw. The tiny courtyard outside my flat is always a bit lit from the light coming from some of the windows, the streetlamps outside the main gate, and that kind of overcast luminescence that big cities often have. Rarely do you see any stars

because of this undercurrent of light. I saw what I saw, but I'm not so assured I was seen by them – their eyes just seemed opaque reflections of what surrounded them. And what was around them was the cold night, the pavement, the surrounding walls, and the black gulf above.

What made this whole welcoming show terribly interesting for me, was that it didn't seem coincidental. I had been to an art opening of religious icons earlier in the evening, and had gotten curiously stressed out by the rigidity but at the same time archetypal substance of the figures in the gallery. These dolls in all their dimensions on the clothesline seemed a bit more real than the paneled icons. And yet the icons in their refusal to accept a flat, two-dimensional world also seemed a bit human, as if struggling to animate themselves after being watered by so many years of veneration. I felt the dolls and icons merging and giving birth to each other right there and then in front of me.

I stood half-frozen myself, and again looked at the doll that was hanging by its hands as if one of the elect pointing out the path, and the clothesline like a cross to which the fingers were clamped above the body itself. It was a male figure for sure though I can't say why. On either side were female dolls, such was the tenderness of their features. To reach the entrance to the stairway at the far end of the courtyard, I had to duck under the clothesline once more. Like dancing the limbo before the rope lowers and it gets quite tough. As I did so, my head bumped all three, and I could feel they were frozen quite hard, and now the whole row of them was vibrating from the collision, and I felt a bit ashamed. Again I repeated to myself as if I had grasped a face-saving mantra, *the children of children*. For sure they were graced with a kind of supernatural solidity by the bitter cold. I felt maudlin as drunks often do. None would drop a tear for me, I knew that. Not even the next day should the sun come out. I could never be a child again, among them, and journey with them to wherever they were going. I was more suited to the parade of icons in the gallery, though perhaps that was the end of a beginning that would bring me here, or just had.

I slowly mounted the steps to my small room, as though I was condemned to be there forever. And I started to cry. You know, as drunks often do. Though I wasn't drunk. I got out a bottle of wine but it didn't help. I was even sobbing. No reason. It was as if my body itself was an amputation from something else, something indefinable. Then I went to the window, and looked out, and I could see my reflection superimposed on the scene below. There they were – the stuffed animals, the dolls, the strange menagerie of them – and the three in the center where my gaze was principally focused, seemed to be crying with my tears, and the one in the absolute center, his hands still clamped above his head as though in the service of an inquisition, was pointing toward some unapproachable, invisible star.

Milk

I didn't know it would be so difficult. I just wanted to get a liter of milk. It was about midnight, but the store was a 24-hour store and only a few blocks away. I went out to the corridor down the steps from my flat to the entrance of the building, but when I pushed the door to go out, it wouldn't budge. I pushed and pushed, and it budged a little. I pushed a little more and it moved a little more. And then no more. It was strange, though, because there was some give. Finally, exasperated, I went back up to the flat, got a screwdriver, hammer, and wrench, and took the door off its hinge.

Then I saw the problem. There was a body on the ground outside the door, and a whole sea of bodies in every direction, all more or less against each other, and to all appearances completely inert. I dragged the body that had been blocking the door inside and put it under the mailboxes. What a pisser, I would have to make my way through all those bodies, or over them, to get my liter of milk.

It was tough going, figuring out how to step over or twist my way through. At first, I tried to carefully step between them

thinking that would be the easiest way, but then my foot constantly got wedged between – sometimes between the ribs of two bodies, sometimes between an arm and a leg, or a knee and a neck. You name it. Usually I could wrench or twist it out, but sometimes it got really stuck and I would have to stand there on one leg in a really tight spot and jerk and jerk. The third time it happened I lost my balance and fell, my butt right on somebody's head – I mean a body's head. It was after dusk. I don't see too well. Anyway, in order to stay even keel, it was more important to look where I was stepping than to see where I was going. Not exactly in circles, but. A few times my shoe came off – always the right foot since I tried to lead with that leg. Then I'd have to sit down anyway. That was even more of a pain in the ass than just falling because I'd have to decide where to sit when all I really wanted to do was to get my milk. To make up my mind – on someone's butt, a neck, the middle of the lower back...usually the most comfortable to balance my own butt on. Sometimes there was no choice. I just sat where I had to in order to get my shoe and put it back on. Next time I'd wear boots. Sitting and putting my shoe back on was the most disgusting part. Maybe an ankle bone trying to wedge between my cheeks, or teeth seeming to bite it. On getting up, I felt like kicking a leg or knocking the teeth out of a mouth, but that was impossible since it was hard enough to even walk, let alone stand. Pissing was a better solution but I didn't have to go.

The store was only a couple hundred meters away but it seemed like an eternity and progress was slow with all the damned bodies strewn in the way like someone had mowed a field of corn. Yeah, a whole sea of them but not washed up from any water. It would have been easier to literally step through them – marinated or bloated and soft. More give. Maybe it was only after fifty meters of impatiently making my way that I thought of changing my tactics. I'd try walking on them. This would require an athletic focus. Of course, this meant still stumbling a lot, turning, leaping, staggering to catch my balance, and it wouldn't be such a direct route either, because of being thrown

off balance and catching it a few bodies later. But at least less probability of getting my foot stuck between a couple of shoulders, or somebody's thighs, and then having to feel their balls or dick right through the leather of my shoes. Thank God for little girls – without them how would an old critter make his way through life. I quickly learned the lesson not to try to go from head to head as one might cross a stream from rock to rock – they rolled or listed and my foot came down once again stuck between sundry parts of bodies. Legs were kind of iffy too. As common sense would have it, backs and stomachs were the best bet. I wistfully thought that if only they had come straight from some interrogation center or concentration camp, there might be more room between the bodies – but probably not since there would probably have been more bodies packed in. Sometimes the mere configuration of the bodies prevented any choice, and I stepped gingerly on an ear – when a head was turned sideways it was a little more stable – or on a neck and hoped that the chin didn't thrust up wedging my foot between it and the breastbone.

You can imagine it was taking some time, and sometimes I got caught into the prelude of intimacy when I fell face down – though it seldom happened – and it was especially horrifying if it was a baby body or a very old body. I'm not sure why. The older bodies in the dusk were indistinguishable from the others (and I was not trying to distinguish anything) except when I fell, but the very small bodies were quite obviously baby bodies, and were quite easy to walk on since they were the perfect size for a foothold, more malleable, and did not roll like heads often did. I think coming face to face with a baby made me feel guilty because their only use was for me to get my carton of milk. And even if they arose from their inertia, I wouldn't even share my milk with a cobra.

After what seemed hours, I finally made it to the store. I thought maybe I should buy a bottle of Drano also, pouring it on the bodies each time I returned to my flat so that eventually – maybe after a few months – there would be at least a path cleared

for me to walk. Or two bottles – one for my way to the store. But it would be cumbersome, and I just didn't have the heart for it. The main problem was to get back carrying the carton of milk without breaking it. Thank God not glass bottles anymore. I won't bore anybody with the details, but returning was pretty much like coming. The same chore, the same similar logistics in reverse. The milk was in my coat pocket anyway, so I still had both hands free – the main difference was to be even more careful not to stagger and then fall on the side where I had the milk. When I finally reached the door to my building, it was a wonderful sight to see that there wasn't a body immediately in front blocking my way. Good that I had dragged that body inside before going on by what now seemed a mission. A kind of godsend without anything being sent, the bare concrete was like a welcome mat in a sea of bodies that looked like one gigantic flying carpet. I scraped my shoes to the marrow on my "godsend" since they were really messy despite the seemingly antiseptic nature of the bodies – shit and blood, and traces of hair on them. When I went in I saw that I had to take the body up to my flat since there was really no room for it except if it continued to block the neighbors' access to their mailboxes or I put it on the steps, but then someone might trip over it and there would be one more frigging body to deal with. Also, to have to step over it to get my own mail every day would be a pain, and maybe a government offense. It wasn't easy. If you ever tried to carry a dead body you know what I mean. Worse than dragging a deer – at least a deer has antlers. This one didn't even have a cock to cinch my belt to. I finally just dragged it up the steps by the feet, first wrapping my sweater around the head so as not to bruise it.

Now comes the real climax, not later on, because it was a terrible moment. When I got the body into the room, turned on the light and looked at it, it was my mom. Well, you can imagine. I hadn't seen her in years. In fact, I thought she was dead long ago but here she was dead now, in my room. Now who should use the word, "ingratitude". I couldn't just drag her down the stairs again, effectively throwing her out of my life just like that.

She must have come a long way. And to drop her out of the window on top of another body – though the drop would be cushioned – would throw the word “ingratitude” back into my own face. But really there isn’t much room in my flat, so no place for her to comfortably sleep. I figure if life is just a dream, then death is too. And maybe both life and death and everything are just a dreamt dream. And I didn’t want her goddamned tossing and turning and keeping both of us out of our dreamt dream. And I had only one glass for milk since I live alone. And only one pillow, one spoon, one towel, one quilt, and one television. It took me awhile, but it finally occurred to me that I should put her on my cot, and let her have the pillow. I didn’t need a pillow anyway. I could wash the glass and spoon each time they were used – a person can catch a disease and maybe they can catch death. As for the towel, she could use one side and I could use the other. As for the quilt we could take turns every other night, or I could use one of the curtains. And the TV, well it hadn’t worked for years anyway. Anyway, I made her all comfy, and then went into the kitchen to drink my milk. I drink a whole liter each day, usually in the evening. After gulping it down, I suddenly realized I didn’t have any milk left over for mom. I felt really exhausted but the store is a 24-hour store and it was best to go back. So I put on my coat, went down the steps, and stepped outside on my non-existent welcome mat where my mom’s body had been. She must have come a long way and almost made it. Probably had to stumble over all these bodies herself. Maybe she had even brought me some milk since there was a kind of stale smell of milk in the air. When you see your mom for the first time in years, you begin to reflect a bit. So, not a bad idea resting up here a few minutes where she was, before going back to the store. Besides, that whole sea of bodies is rather intimidating. It’s a 24-hour store, and they never run out of milk. No need to worry, if I fall asleep sure enough she’ll come down and wake me up and we can go get our milk together.

Music in the Kaunas Ghetto against the Background of Vilijampolė (Slabodka) History

DANUTĖ PETRAUSKAITĖ

Sources of Information on the Kaunas Ghetto and its Musical Life

It may seem that there is nothing much new to be said about the Kaunas Ghetto. The first books about the lives of Jews in Lithuanian ghettos were published in the West immediately after the end of the Second World War. Such books were also published in Soviet Lithuania. These were mostly memoirs: Marija Rolnikaitė, *Turiu papasakot* (I Have to Tell), Vilnius, 1963; or document collections *Masinės žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944* (Mass Killings in Lithuania 1941–1944), vol. 1, Vilnius, 1965; vol. 2, 1973. However, few books of this kind were published. Only after 1990, when Lithuania regained its independence, was the Holocaust and the lost Jewish cultural heritage re-examined. At that time, Lithuanian historians began to analyze the history of Jews in Lithuania, and Jewish-Lithuanian relations during the Second World War (through the work of scholars such as Arūnas Bubnys, Alfonsas Eidintas, and Liudas Truska). The subject received great attention, prompting a considerable increase in published mate-

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rial. Some articles were written about the Kaunas Ghetto (such as research by Arūnas Bubnys). Lithuanian artists also did not ignore this subject. The Jewish tragedy inspired composers (Algirdas Martinaitis), writers (Jonas Mikėlinėskas, Linas Vildėiūnas, Markas Zingeris), and photographers who tried to capture the image of survivors and witnesses of the mass-killings (Antanas Sutkus). The subject of the Holocaust was included in the curriculum of secondary schools; special methodological literature was published for teachers (by Jonas Morkus, Rūta Vanagaitė). Several books were translated into English: *Jews, Lithuanians, and the Holocaust* by Alfonsas Eidintas, Vilnius, 2003; *The Holocaust in Lithuania between 1941 and 1944* by Arūnas Bubnys, Vilnius, 2005. Books by foreign authors (Martin Gilbert, Raul Hilberg, Dov Levin, and Avraham Tory) were translated into Lithuanian. Avraham Tory in his book *Kauno getas: diena po dienos* (Kovno Ghetto: Day After Day), Vilnius, 2000, described the life in the Kaunas Ghetto in great detail and was well-supported with documentary evidence. He revealed not only the Ghetto's structure, the stages of its development, the technology of the mass destruction of Jews, but also the form and nature of the residents' spiritual resistance. One such way was musical activity which had not been described by Holocaust researchers, including Lithuanian historians. This omission inspired more detailed research of the subject.

It was not easy to find sources about the musical activity in the Kaunas Ghetto, also due to the fact that most of the literature on the subject published in the West in the second half of the twentieth century did not reach Lithuania. Some significant English language sources were found, in several archives and collections, such as the library of Dr. Kazys Pemkus housed by Klaipėda University. One of most valuable books by William Mishell was *Kaddish for Kovno. Life and Death in a Lithuanian Ghetto 1941–1945*, Chicago Review Press, 1988, which contained authentic and emotional recollections of the most memorable events in the Kaunas Ghetto. The memories, as well as fragments of Avraham Tory's diary, are quoted in the present article several

times, since they almost exclusively represent the primary source for authentic accounts of the musical life in the Kaunas Ghetto.

One of the key resources for the present research was a CD of the songs written in the Kaunas Ghetto, titled *Hidden History. Songs of the Kovno Ghetto*. It was released in the United States in 1997. The record contains 17 songs. One of its contributors was musicologist Bret Werb who worked at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. He said he used a great variety of sources while looking for the songs. Those sources were books (Shmerke Kaczerginski, *Lider fun di getos un lagern*, New York, 1948; Yosef Gar, *Umkum fun der yidisher kovne*, Munich, 1948; Leyb Garfunkel, *Kovnah ha-Yehudit be-hurbanah*, Jerusalem, 1959; *Fun letstn khurbn*, ed. Israel Kaplan, Munich, 1946–1948), and the private collections of Avraham Tory and Diane Cypkin. Even though there were quite a number of songs sourced (about 80, including different versions of the same song), few lyrics had the accompanying melodies preserved alongside them. Bret Werb wrote:

However, the CD still includes the greater part of the repertoire of the Kovno Ghetto songs that survive with words and music intact. As a rule, we preferenced those songs that turned up in multiple sources, since these were presumably most popular or representative and songs drawn from our own archives or from collections used in the museum's exhibition.¹

Presently, the CD is one of only a few musical sources accessible to the global audience, because songs sung in Yiddish were translated into English. Listening to these songs gives a greater insight into the life and emotions of the Ghetto residents.

The material about the musical life in the Kaunas Ghetto had to be looked for in Lithuanian archives and museums. The most significant resources were the collections of the Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum which had concert programmes, some musical scores, and the list of members of the Kaunas Ghetto orchestra. The findings made it possible to check the accuracy

¹ Werb's letter to Danutė Petrauskaitė.

of some earlier published facts and supplement them with some new material. It was a pleasant surprise to meet several Ghetto survivors in Kaunas. One of them, Fruma Vitkinaitė-Kučinskienė, told the author about her childhood spent in the Ghetto, and shared the memories of her friend Katia Segelson-Rozen. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum internet pages were also very useful, since they provided some information about the Kaunas Ghetto musicians. Information about them was also found in the Lithuanian Literature and Art Archives that houses the personal files of Kaunas State Opera employees. There were quite a few Jewish musicians in the orchestra who later appeared in the Ghetto. Various encyclopaedias and personal memories helped to recapture the history of Vilijampolė, since the author of this review had lived in the post-war territory of the Kaunas Ghetto.

Historical, Economic, and Cultural Traits of Vilijampolė

PERIOD FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES. Near the intersection of the Rivers Nemunas and Neris, where Kaunas City is located, a new suburb began to emerge on the Eastern bank in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was Vilijampolė, often called *slabada* of Kaunas. (*Slabada* originated from a Russian word *слобода*, what means a suburb or a big village.) Jews had greatly influenced its development. Some of them had moved to Vilijampolė while trying to escape the plague epidemic in Vilnius and Gardin, while others came from Kaunas City. Jews had been banished from the city several times, but they tended not to move far, preferring to settle across the river. In 1652, the city of Vilijampolė was established. During the seventeenth century, this territory had belonged to the family of Duke Radvila. Jonušas Radvila gave this land to Lithuanian and foreign merchants and craftsmen, and set them free of taxes. For this reason, Radvila is officially referred to as the founder of Vilijampolė.

In the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vilijampolė was a centre of commerce and rafting. There were warehouses which stored grain, flax, leather fabrics, and other goods. When in 1791 the Lithuanian-Polish king Stanislaw Augustus allowed a marketplace in this district, the commercial life intensified even more. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Vilijampolė started to grow rapidly. In 1861–1862, there were 3,000 residents; by 1888, the population numbered 9,000.² The increase in the number of residents was influenced by the status of Viliampolė as a separate territorial unit. For about a century, until the establishment of the independent Lithuanian state in 1918, this settlement had its own council, courts, and other civic institutions.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Vilijampolė began to exhibit evidence of industrialization. In 1863, a merchant named Wolf built a beer brewery and began producing *Wolf's Beer*. In 1868, Finkelstein opened a factory of matches. The number of Jews, the majority of Vilijampolė residents, grew until the First World War. In 1847, there were 4,986 Jews in Kaunas and 2,973 of them in Vilijampolė. In 1897, the number of Jewish residents in Kaunas was 24,448, i.e. 35% of all residents, and in 1908, 32,628 (i.e. 40%). In Vilijampolė there were Jewish schools, a synagogue, a hospital, a cemetery, not to mention a large number of stores and workshops. The statistics of 1887 state that in Viliampolė there lived and worked 5,479 Jewish craftsmen: tailors, shoe makers, butchers, cigarette makers, gardeners, fishermen, bakers, carriage owners, barbers, blacksmiths, bookbinders, or mill men. There was a very influential Jewish middle class, including teachers, writers, musicians, doctors, judges, and rabbis.

In Vilijampolė there was a yeshiva, which is the highest institution of Jewish religious education, where Rabbis are trained. It was founded in 1882 by Israel Slanter Netta and Tsvi Finkel, and it was called *The Kneset of Israel*. After the First World War, this yeshiva became one of the most important Jewish religious

² *Mažoji lietuvių tarybinė enciklopedija*, t. 3, 754.

centres in Europe. It was attended by students from various countries, even from Palestine and the United States of America. In 1920, *The Knesset of Israel* was attended by over 500 Jews. During the Second World War, almost all its students and teachers were killed.

As Kaunas received the status of a Russian border fortress, 1882 saw the beginning of the construction of defensive buildings and forts. The residents were forbidden to build any buildings taller than these structures. For this reason, the expansion of Vilijampolė stopped, and the number of residents even decreased. In 1905, there were 8,000 residents; in 1913, 6,800, and by 1923 a population of 6,600.³ The effect of the First World War was considerable: in 1915, there was an order to banish all the Jews from the Kaunas area. Many of them did not return to their previous residence.

PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WARS. In the year 1919, after the declaration of independence of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilijampolė officially became a part of Kaunas City. From the initial half a square kilometre, it had already grown to four square kilometres. Much of the land was given to volunteers or landless residents. In 1929, an iron bridge was built across the Neris River, as a replacement to one which had been destroyed during a great flood. Thus the access to the city centre improved a great deal. The rapid growth and Lithuanization of the suburb had begun.

As the government provided good conditions for the development of Lithuanian industry, in the 1920s and 1930s several factories opened in Vilijampolė: the Silva cotton fabric, the Inkaras rubber goods manufacturers, the Grandis factory of mechanical supplies (the ancestor of today's Atrama), a few sawmills, a furniture factory, other manufacturers of art, knitted fabric, and fur products. The increase in the Lithuanian population was marked by the founding of several cultural and educational institutions. In 1919, the Veršvų primary school was opened, later – several

³ Ibid.

more schools of this type, a crafts school, and a school for mentally challenged children, an orphanage Lopšelis, the Baby Jesus Society, Riflemen's house (Šaulių namai) with a library and two movie theatres. In 1936, a Veterinary Academy and the Institute of Bacteriology were opened; and in 1932, a Catholic church (St. Joseph). The church's founder and builder was a parish priest, Juozapas Dagilis. This church should have been temporary because there was a plan for building a big and beautiful church; however, the Second World War prevented the implementation of this project.

Since wealthier Jews had moved to Kaunas City, and Vilijampolė was mainly populated by the working class population, the district remained quite poor, and buildings were very simple. Because the number of Lithuanian residents in Kaunas increased, the percentage of Jewish population went down. In 1923, Jews made up a total 27% of Kaunas inhabitants, in 1940 they accounted for 25%.⁴ However, Jews still remained the biggest proportion the of non-Lithuanian population, which for a long time had influenced the economic and cultural development of Vilijampolė.

Even though Lithuanian and Jewish societies lived in close proximity, they showed little interest in the lives of each other. According to the historian Saulius Sužiedėlis, Jews tended to lean more toward the Russian culture, while Lithuanians favoured Polish. Only when the Lithuanian government declared Lithuanian to be the official state language, did Jews begin integrating into Lithuanian cultural and social life. They studied at the Vytautas Magnus University and participated in the Lithuanian-Jewish cultural cooperation society. An overview of Lithuanian literature was published in Yiddish, and anthologies of Jewish poetry and short-stories were translated into Lithuanian. Overall, Jews were a loyal ethnic minority. They were not interested in political matters, which would harm the Lithuanian state, but were mostly involved in economic and cultural life. But when anti-Semitic trends in Europe were becoming strong,

⁴ Ibid., 247.

there appeared a clear ideological split – a part of Jewish youth began supporting the ideas of communism. This youth movement precipitated riots of the workers, clashes with the police, and organized the first meeting of Lithuanian Communist Youth, which took place in 1924. They also founded the underground printing-house Spartakas in Vilijampolė, which operated from 1925 to 1934 (with several interruptions). The residents of Vilijampolė saw the obvious connections of Jews and the Communist party, and also thought that strong Jewish influence might hinder the growth and modernization of the Lithuanian economy. As a result of this tension, various conflicts began to emerge. In 1929, there was the so-called “Excess of Slabada”, which took place on August 1–2, when groups of Lithuanian men began attacking various Jewish residents, whom they suspected to be favouring communism.⁵ Despite of all the incidents, Jews in Vilijampolė did not experience much discrimination. The Lithuanian government did not pass any anti-Semitic law or act; on the contrary, financially it supported the Jewish religious and cultural life.

The first Soviet occupation had severely complicated the relations of Lithuanians and Jews. Officially the Jewish communists made up a small portion of the community, but many of its members, knowing the cruelty of Germans against the Jews in occupied Poland, enthusiastically met the tanks of the Soviet army rolling into Kaunas:

It was especially the youth who greeted the Red Army soldiers. This behaviour was very different from the feelings of anger and grief that Soviet occupation stirred in Lithuanians. Among Jews, there were also people who feared the Soviet regime (the middle class, ultra-religious wing, Zionists), but those were the minority. Most of the Jews were very enthusiastic and felt a great relief. Certainly, the biggest joy was expressed by communists, and most of them, including Jews, quickly adapted to the new regime and got employed in the high positions in the administration

⁵ Sužiedėlis, “Avrahamo Torio Kauno getas: diena po dienos,” in Avraham Tory. *Kauno getas: diena po dienos*, XVII–XVIII.

and infrastructure, including the internal security forces. The new regime gave them many benefits, so their economic and social condition greatly improved. When the new government came to power, Jews not only felt increased safety, but also that the previous restrictions had been abolished.⁶

However, the joy and enthusiasm did not last very long. The Soviet government soon began to destroy their cultural and religious institutions (they were forbidden to go to synagogue, celebrate the Sabbath, and to use the Hebrew language), nationalized the banks and businesses, took away the bank accounts of private business owners and social organizations, and also exiled Jews into Siberia just like Lithuanians. Despite all that, the Soviet regime for Jews was less evil than the genocide brought by the Third Reich – that is why many of them adjusted successfully to the new living conditions.

The Kaunas Ghetto: History, People, and Musical Activities

PERIODS OF THE GHETTO EXISTENCE. The government and police forces of the Third Reich were the main perpetrators of the Holocaust. As soon as the Germans entered Kaunas, pogroms and the persecution of Jews began. The acts of mass destruction took place in Vilijampolė as well. 25–26 June 1941, due to the atrocities of Lithuanian collaborators, about 600 Jews were killed and many of their homes were burnt.⁷ July saw the beginning of regular mass killings of Jews in the forts of Kaunas. It was this environment that paved the way for the Ghetto.

The establishment of the Ghetto began on 10 July, 1941, when the superintendent of Kaunas ordered all the Jews of Kaunas to move to Vilijampolė before August 15. The Germans aimed to isolate and to control the Jews, numbering about 28,000 people.

⁶ Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje*, 146.

⁷ Bubnys, "Kauno gėtas (1941–1944 m.)," in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 11.

During the first months of the Ghetto existence, about 10,000 of its residents were taken to the Ninth Fort and executed there. In total, more than 30,000 Jews were mass murdered in the Ninth Fort of Kaunas. The period between November 1941 and September 1943 was the time of stability. At that time, Jews (about 17,000, much less than in pre-war Kaunas) fostered hope of survival. An advanced administration structure in the Ghetto was founded, which was led by the Council of Elders. The Ghetto became a type of micro-state, which had its own government, economy, and the institutions of spiritual and cultural life. But all the hopes and dreams of the people were shattered when on September 15 the Ghetto was made into a concentration camp (the German administration's governance of the Ghetto was taken over by the SS forces). On 8–13 July 1944, the Ghetto was liquidated. The buildings were burnt, about 1,000 of its residents were killed, and another 7,000 were taken to concentration camps in other states occupied by Germany, where most of them died. Only 300–400 of the Ghetto's residents managed to escape and survive.

MUSICIANS. The Kaunas Ghetto was a residence for all kinds of people: children and the elderly, workers and professors. There were many musicians, either professionals or amateurs, who had taken some instruments with them: violins, cellos, mandolins, accordions, and wind-instruments. Those people were well-respected, and well-protected from slave labour conditions, so their names did not appear on the lists of workers. Many musicians who appeared in the Kaunas Ghetto were the members of city orchestras, artists of the State Opera House, or teachers of the Kaunas Conservatoire: Cesar and Aleksander Stupel, Michael and Morduch (Motel was the “pet” name he used) Hofmekler, Daniel Pomeranc (the pioneer of Lithuanian jazz), composer Edwin Geist and his wife Lyda (a pianist), and Nadežda Dukstulskaitė, the famous employee of the Kaunas Radiophone, a pianist and a member of chamber ensembles. But after the sad experience of the mass killings of 1941, they were forced to hide their real occupations. On August 18, Germans intentionally executed Jew-

ish intellectuals: 534 persons, who were the most educated people in the Ghetto, and on October 29, another 9,200 Jews were killed.⁸ Among those killed was teacher Ruvins Robert Stender, who began teaching violin in the Kaunas Conservatoire in 1934. He was a citizen of Latvia, graduated from the Riga Conservatoire, played in the Liepaja Philharmonic Society, and played viola in the Lithuanian String Quartet.⁹

Michael Hofmekler (1898–1965) studied music from a very young age. First he learned from his father, who was a cello player, and together in the family ensemble they played light entertainment music. In 1920, he founded an ensemble of his own and played this kind of music around Kaunas restaurants and cafes, and at the War Museum and the Kurhaus of Palanga. At the same time, he played violin in the orchestra of the State Opera, and conducted the ensemble of the Kaunas Radiophone. From 1926 to 1940, he recorded about 120 musical pieces on gramophone records. These records were published in thousands and mass-consumed. Through this exposure, Hofmekler became a pioneer of Lithuanian entertainment music: he brought to popularity a new form of Lithuanian light music that soon replaced the foreign repertoire of Kaunas cafes and restaurants.

In 1931, the President of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona, awarded him with the Gediminas Fourth Order for the popularization of Lithuanian music. Hofmekler entered the Ghetto together with his parents and sister. His father Motel played the cello in the Ghetto orchestra, which was conducted by Michael. During the years of German occupation, Michael's records were forbidden for broadcast on radio, but Lithuanians gained the right to broadcast the recordings anyway, just without mentioning Hofmekler's name.

He survived the war, despite being held in the Dachau concentration camp toward the end of the war. From 1949 to 1955,

⁸ "The Kovno Ghetto Orchestra (1943–1944)," in: *Jewish Virtual Library*.

⁹ Kauno konservatorija, R. Stenderio asmens byla, in: *Lietuvos literatūros ir meno archyvas* (The Kaunas Conservatoire, Personal file of R. Stender, in: *Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art*), 2–4.

he lived in Israel, and from then until 1965 he resided in Munich, where he died.

Alexander Stupel (1900–1944) was a well-known violin player in Kaunas. When coming to the Ghetto, he took his violin with him and did not part with it until his death in the Dachau concentration camp.

ORCHESTRA. Since the mass executions of Jews had stopped, the Ghetto council dared to ask the Germans for permission to establish an orchestra. Protecting the musicians, the council decided to register them as policemen and dressed them up in uniforms. On 3 January 1942, the guidelines were made for the establishment of a police department with a clear organizational structure including sections for art. This way a group of 35 instrumentalists and five vocalists was formed, as mentioned in several publications.¹⁰ (The title “symphony orchestra” is somewhat misleading since the group consisted of only string and wind instruments.) Michael Leo Hofmekler was the leader, and its concertmaster was Alexander Stupel. However, the number of orchestra members was not constant. In the list of the Ghetto police orchestra, dated 28 December 1942, there were only 23 names (excluding the sheet-music re-writer, messenger boy, and guard), but in the concert programmes new names were included. Among them, there may have been some gifted students from the courses taught by Alexander Stupel for young violinists.¹¹

People of different ages played in the orchestra. For example, the violin player Jenkele was 13 years old, and Morduch (Motel) Hofmekler was 71. The orchestra included many members who were kin to each other, such as Max Bornstein and his sons Eljašas (Elijah) and Jokūbas (Jacob). Thanks to the concert programmes and the record of the police orchestra, we can learn the names of many Ghetto musicians and singers in the period from 1942 to 1943.

¹⁰ Sneck, “Music in the Ghetto,” in: *Bret Werb’s personal archives*.

¹¹ Judelevičius, “Dvasinės ištvermės metraštis”, in: *Krantai*, 18.

The members of the orchestra (according to the list in Lithuanian): 1. Abramamas Abramsonas. 2. Eljašas Bornšteinas. 3. Ickas Bornšteinas. 4. Jokūbas Bornšteinas. 5. Maksas (Mordechai) Bornšteinas. 6. Samuelis Broidė. 7. Nadežda Dukstulskaitė. 7. A. Fidleris. 8. Beras Fidleris. 9. Moisejus Finkus. 10. Maja Gladstein. 11. Percy Haidas. 12. Michaelis Hofmekleris. 13. Morduchas (Motelis) Hofmekleris. 14. Jelinas. 15. Jenkelė. 16. Berelis (Borisas) Kariskis. 17. Kučgalis. 18. Michelis Linas. 19. Danielius Pomerancas. 20. Izidorius Rozenbliumas. 21. L. Šeinberg. 22. Šoraitė-Kopelmanienė. 23. Abromas (Alexanderis) Stupelis. 24. Borisas Stupelis. 25. Rachmielis (Yerachmiel) Volfbergas. 26. Benjaminas Zacharinas. 27. Jekelis Zaksas. 28. Dovydas Zlatkinas.

The singers: 1. G. Abramovič. 2. D. Račko. 3. S. Doret. 4. Kupricienė-Sachs. 5. Marusia Rozalskienė. 6. Šeinker. 7. J. Zaks.

The last singer's name is found both in the list of orchestra players and singers. As the name is indicated without the ending, it is difficult to say whether it was the same person (Lithuanian endings indicate the gender of the noun).

The concerts of the orchestra took place in the Ghetto police house, the former yeshiva of Vilijampolė. The coordinator, responsible for culture and education, was Chaim Nachman Shapira, a famous linguist, the son of the chief rabbi of Kaunas. The first musical event, a concert for schoolchildren, was held on 28 June 1942. The young audience was asked not to clap, thus expressing respect for the community members who had been killed.

The first official Ghetto concert took place on 23 September 1942. (This could have been influenced by the musical life of the Vilnius Ghetto, when on March 18th of the same year a group of 17 musicians gave a concert of symphony music).¹² Many residents expressed great discontent, since a great number of people thought that playing music in the Ghetto was disrespectful to the memory of the mass-murdered Jews. Others thought the concert, aimed for the Ghetto elite, was a desecration of the

¹² Kostanian-Danzig, *Dvasinė rezistencija Vilniaus gete*, 99.

holy yeshiva building. A resident of the Kaunas Ghetto, Moshe Diskant, wrote in 1942:

The Ghetto elite are invited into a decorated salon
And with them they bring the men who ordered –
Our murder, degradation, and slaughter!
They enjoy intensifying the scene
With blue and white flags,
To hear the music, the pleasant tenor!

Only they don't know what they step upon,
On whose blood that was extinguished
Without a why, without an indictment!

Don't you see that from the ornamented walls
Martyred hands reach out,
And dance out with wild screaming,
"Get out of G-d's house,
Of the holy yeshiva,
Where we have given up our lives with heart and love!
The music is not for us,
We cannot hear it,
We ask you not to disturb our holy rest!"¹³

But when people heard the first sounds of the Jewish hymn "Kol Nidrei", many people in the audience burst into tears. At this moment, many people began to feel the music strengthen their spirit, sorely needed in the atmosphere of death which surrounded them. William W. Mishell, who had been a Ghetto resident at that time, gave a detailed description of the first orchestra concert.

The hall in the meantime was filling up and everybody sat down waiting for the concert to begin. The musicians started to assemble on the stage and we were waiting for the conductor, but instead of him, an officer from the cultural department of the Ghetto entered the stage. He asked everybody to stand up and to honour our martyrs by a minute of silence. People got up and some quiet sobbing could be heard. When the minute was over, the man on the stage gave us an introduction explaining the

¹³ *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto*, 176.

strains and struggle the committee had been through before finally deciding to have the concert. His speech was very subdued and at the end he expressed hope that we would be forgiven for not waiting a year, since otherwise, given the circumstances in the Ghetto, there never would be a concert. While the speech was well delivered and proper under the conditions, it probably would have been better if it had not been made...While many wounds were touched, we were here not to aggravate but rather to soothe.

Finally the leader of one of the most prestigious bands took the podium. There was no applause. He started the concert with a piece by Mendelssohn, whom the Nazis had banned since he was of Jewish blood. The tune was melancholic and before he had a chance to get even half-way through, everybody in the audience had tears in their eyes. Not only the audience had succumbed to emotion, but one by one even the musicians had tears filling their eyes and could not go on. The conductor had to stop and to ask the people and the musicians to relax. After a short while the piece was resumed from the beginning. People around us were sitting with handkerchiefs in their hands, but controlling themselves not to disturb the concert. When the piece was finished, there was again no applause and some relief that we had managed to face the challenge. The last number played was Scheherazade, by Rimsky-Korsakov...There was no applause even at the end of the program. On one hand, we wanted to listen to more and more music, but on the other we were really glad it was over. The concert had taken a piece of life from each of us. The wounds were too fresh and still bleeding and a concert, which should have had the effect of a balm, actually only rubbed more salt into the raw flesh.¹⁴

However, the second concert which was arranged after one week was different:

There was no speech by the official of the cultural department and no minute of silence. The program was slightly modified, eliminating some of the more melancholic tunes. There was even

¹⁴ William, *Kaddish for Kovno. Life and death in a Lithuanian Ghetto 1941–1945*, 132–133.

scattered applause when the soloist completed his number, Gypsy Airs, by Sarasate. It almost seemed as if the orchestra had won a victory of sorts over our tormentors. The concert again ended with the tune from Scheherazade.¹⁵

Concerts were given one after another. From 20–27 December 1942, as many as four concerts were given. It became a form of spiritual resistance and a reaction against the fear and horrors of daily life in the Ghetto. “Every day facing death, the musicians of the Ghetto orchestra would give the most refined concerts. As in a grotesque theatre, the high German officials would attend them, being impressed, shaking hands with the musicians and giving promises of various privileges”.¹⁶

On 28 December 1942, a Ghetto resident, eighteen-year-old Ilya Gerber, who was the son of a music teacher and did not survive the war, wrote in his diary: “Musical circles are working at 120%, concerts are organized, there are rehearsals, and people sing, they play, they blow, and they tickle their instruments.”¹⁷

Usually concerts took place once or twice a week in the renovated building of the Yeshiva, where at the beginning of the war Germans were shooting the homeless dogs and cats of Kaunas. During one year of the orchestra’s activity, 80 concerts were given. On 27 June 1943, the 50th concert became a celebration. For that occasion, the poster was decorated with a yellow star and the number 50. On 24 July 1943, when Ghetto Zionists were celebrating the 20th and 21st days of the Hebrew month Tammuz,¹⁸ an impressive concert of Jewish music and poetry was given, in memory of Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Šitas vaikas turi gyventi. Elenos Holcmanienės užrašai*/compiled by Reinhard Kaiser ir Margarete Holzman, 177.

¹⁷ Ibid., 172.

¹⁸ In accordance with the Jewish calendar, Tammuz 20 was the birthday of Theodore Hertzl, founder of the political movement of Zionism; Tammuz 21 was the birthday of Hebrew national poet Chaim Nachman Balik. Zionists joined the two days into one commemoration.

During the few years of its existence, the orchestra performed about 80 concerts. They were held once or twice a week, and additional concerts were held at every opportunity (for example, on holidays like Purim and Chanukah), in the yeshiva building which had been converted into a concert hall, with work completed on 25 November 1942. Very soon, the Ghetto orchestra began to play in the work camps, too.

When the Zionists were celebrating the 20th and 21st days of the Hebrew month Tammuz on 24 July 1943, an impressive concert of Jewish music and poetry was held:

First, the conductor and violinist Hofmekler gave a signal. Then the sounds of Perlmutter's "For Thou Art Dust" and Idelsohn's "For Herl's Soul" filled the hall. Inspired by a sense of the significance of a great moment, those gathered listened to the sounds of the orchestra. Next, a Bialik poem, "The Word", was recited. Each phrase was absorbed by the audience as never before, its appreciation shown by the stormy applause. Then the orchestra played "Song of the Valley", followed by a selection of songs from the Land of Israel. The singer Mrs Ratchko then sang with considerable talent "Two Letters" by Avigdor Hameiri and "Let Me In" by Bialik. Kupritz then recited the chapter, "At the End of Days"; Zaks sang "The Harbor Song", and the violinist Stupel played – with great emotion – a Hebrew melody by Akhron. A string of Zionist dancing songs was then played, amid cries of joy from the enthusiastic audience. The concert was not over yet. But one such gathering had been enough for our people to come together in one mass, united and guided by one idea – the idea of the Kingdom of Israel. At the end, the whole audience rose to its feet as one man and sang the "Hatikvah" to the accompaniment of the orchestra. The mighty sounds of the Zionist anthem went out a great distance, to the mountains of Judaea, to the valleys of Sharon, to the Mediterranean, to the banks of the Jordan, to Mount Scopus, and to the cities and villages, farms and kibbutzim of the Jezreel Valley and the Galilee. The sounds of the anthem conveyed greetings from here, and returned from that distant land with tidings of redemption drawing near.¹⁹

¹⁹ Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust. The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, 433.

Those Ghetto residents who secretly were able to make and conceal radios sometimes listened to the concerts broadcast by the Kaunas Radiophone. But the number of such listeners was very small.

Concerts with tickets for sale were also given on the request of the Germans (about three concerts may have been given for the SS soldiers). On such occasions, the orchestra performed the music that was favoured by Germans, except for the music of German and Austrian composers which was forbidden to be performed in the Ghetto. Despite this, Jews once performed Hungarian Dance No. 1 by Johannes Brahms.

Ephraim Romm, who lived on Panerių Street near the Yeshiva, later wrote: "The Germans organized classical music concerts there. They didn't have a problem finding musicians and other artists in the Ghetto. So I had the opportunity to listen to classical music of the highest quality right outside my home and I took advantage of this at every opportunity."²⁰ This can be seen from a diverse and colourful orchestra repertoire, reflected in the concert programmes. The repertoire consisted of Italian (L. Boccherini, G. Verdi, V. Bellini, G. Rossini, R. Leoncavallo), Polish (F. Chopin, S. Moniuszko), Czech (Z. Fibich, A. Dvořák), Hungarian (F. Liszt), Spanish (I. Albéniz, P. Sarasate), Norwegian (E. Grieg), French (F. Boieldieu, Ch. Gounod, J. Massenet, C. Debussy), Finnish (J. Sibelius), Russian (A. Gretchaninov, M. Glinka, P. Tchaikovsky, N. Rimsky-Korsakov) and Jewish (J. Achron, G. Bizet, J. Engel, M. Elman, Gansin, Garber, Grozovski, J. F. Élie Halevy, A. Hameiri, Levandovsky, G. Meyerbeer, F. Mendelssohn, Shalit, E. Zimbalist, Zetleén, Zytomirski) compositions. There was no concert without at least some Jewish music being performed. Compositions written by the Ghetto musicians were played quite often. The most popular compositions were Percy Haid's "Far dir", "Ich wil aheim", "Telchai-Kadima", "Zwei Themanische Lieder", "Hora-Kranz", "Rapsodie in Gelb", "Walse-Caprice", also "Paraphrase ueber eine Hebraeisch

²⁰ Romm, *"How I survived the Kovno Ghetto"*.

thema" by Dulstulskaitė, and "Juedischlich" by Hofmekler. Music sheets would get into the Ghetto from outside. The Hebrew and Yiddish pieces were composed by the Ghetto musicians: Michael Hofmekler, Perci Haid, and S. Brvyda (Samuel Broide?).²¹ But it was impossible to find any musical pieces by Lithuanian composers in the orchestra's repertoire. It is necessary to note that at that time there was not much symphony or chamber music composed in Lithuania and very little was published. There was also a negative attitude towards Lithuanians because of their collaboration with the Germans and persecution of the Jews. Therefore, Lithuanian music in the Ghetto was not desirable. Avraham Tory clearly stated as much in his diary, dated 16 February 1943:

I am at a loss to work out the connection between Lithuanian Independence Day and the reinforced guard in the Ghetto. Is there anyone capable of surmising that we, the Jews in Lithuania, harbour positive feelings toward Lithuania and its independence? Should it not be clear that all that was connected with Lithuania no longer exists?²²

The last public concerts of the orchestra were given in September 1943. We failed to find any later concert programmes. It is possible that, after the Ghetto turned into a concentration camp, symphony music was no longer performed. The times became too hard for the former orchestra members. For example, a talented pianist Lėja Šeinbergaitė, who had studied music in Switzerland and England, had worked on the Kaunas Radiophone and had performed "Malagueña" by Isaac Albéniz on the stage of the Ghetto, was forced to do physical labour in the felt boot factory. Later she was transferred to the fur-coat factory Vilkas. With the help of a Lithuanian woman, she and her mother managed to escape the Ghetto temporarily, but soon both were arrested and killed.

The Kaunas Ghetto had several amateur activity groups which formed spontaneously when, in 1942, the Ghetto schools were

²¹ Sneck, "Music in the Ghetto," in: *Bret Werb's personal archives*.

²² Tory, *Kauno getas: diena po dienų*, 223.

closed down. Children were enthusiastically learning to act, sing, and dance. The performances, as well as the lessons, took place secretly, often in the most unlikely of places – for example, in a garage which was used as a warehouse and as a prayer house on weekends.²³ Hebrew hymns were chanted in chorus and Jewish songs were sung – for example “Geshem Geshem” (Rain, Rain), “Al naharto Bavel” (On the Bank of Babylon), “Hatikvah” (Hope), etc. The singing nurtured love for the Jewish nation and love for the land of Israel in the hearts of children. One of the most devoted teachers was Sonia Segal. Thanks to her, the Purim festivities took place on 21 March 1943. About 100 children participated in it. A play was performed on the stage, songs were sung, and games were played. David Helerman accompanied them on piano.

The Ghetto even had a ballet group. It was led by a student of the famous Lithuanian dancer and teacher Danutė Nasvytytė who employed the style of Isadora Duncan. She taught the children to improvise, to master natural gestures, and plasticity. The girls were not dancing classical dances, but modern ballet pieces. They appeared on stage wearing white night-gowns and tiny rope cords as waistbands.²⁴ The Ghetto children were also taught to play musical instruments: piano, violin, and mandolin. Little information on these lessons remains.

During the destruction of the Ghetto, some of the musicians were killed, while others were sent to the concentration camps of Stutthof and Dachau. Only a few managed to survive. However, those who survived after the war gave a concert in St. Ottilien Monastery in Bayern. It was 27 May 1945. The orchestra conducted by Michael Hofmekler performed compositions of Grieg and Bizet. At the end of the concert, with the whole audience chanting, the orchestra performed a Hebrew hymn “Hatikvah”. In 1946, some of the Kaunas Ghetto orchestra musicians together with musicians of other concentration camps (including pianist Fanny Durmashkin-Beker, sister of the Vilnius Ghetto conductor Wolf

²³ Segelson-Rozen, “Mano istorija,” in: *Fruma Kučinskienė's personal archives*.

²⁴ Petrauskaitė. Interview with Fruma Kučinskienė.

Durmaszkin) performed in Nuremberg, where the International War Crimes Trial took place.²⁵ Their audience consisted of those who had come to witness, accuse, and judge at Nuremberg.

The songs in the Kaunas Ghetto

GENRES. During the incredible everyday hardships, the songs for Jews became a main source of hope, a way of expressing pain, suffering, and the wish for revenge, and dreams that would never come true. One of the survivors later recalled:

Songs, sayings, jokes rang out from every street and courtyard. The songs were awkward; their melodies taken from the Soviets or the cinema, the sayings were mordant, the jokes provocative – and the people sung. Never before the war had I heard so much singing in Jewish homes as I heard in the Ghetto. Every voice resounded like a Patti or Caruso, every melody echoed as from the Garden of Eden.²⁶

A song was a great help in the resistance fight and one of the most attractive means of socialization. On 4 December 1942, Ilya Gerber wrote in his diary:

The people, bit by bit, create, notate, and express the pain of Jewish life in songs. Here, the ghetto-dweller's life is recounted and sung about. Every song is a slice of life from a very special era. A ghetto song begins with pain and misfortune and ends with the hope of better things to come, of a bright and happy future.²⁷

These songs were saved by the survivors, who after the end of the war started collecting and publishing them.

The Ghetto songs consisted of a variety of genres. They were lullabies, songs of children, songs of love, work, wedding, shame, humiliation, hatred, vengeance, satire, humour, battle, and victory, together with songs of the home and street, various ballads,

²⁵ Posset, "Vom DP-Lager Landsberg ging die Zukunft aus".

²⁶ *Hidden History. Songs of the Kovno Ghetto*, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

and religious hymns. Their authors, who mainly were the performers as well, usually had particular ideas in mind: 1) to illustrate the life of the Ghetto; 2) to escape the everyday reality; 3) to preserve Jewish traditions. The latter were paid special attention to at schools, where children were learning their native language and customs. Despite severe poverty, hardship, and German sanctions, Jews celebrated their national festivities, where they sang their songs. Avraham Tory remembers the Purim festivity on 21 March 1944:

Almost a hundred children are present in the hall, which resounds with their unrestrained laughter. Their joy is unmistakable. Finally, the festivities begin. A group of the youngest children appears on the stage. Mrs Segal delivers a short opening speech. She says that the debate over whether to celebrate the Purim holidays publicly in the Ghetto was won by those who wanted to carry on with the festivities. It is good for the children to forget, even for a moment, their gray, fear-filled life in the Ghetto. The event is inaugurated by a song, sung in Hebrew:

Do not ask the old
nor the young men.
We small ones
also know what Purim implies.

Games and recitations follow. Needless to say, the main part of the program was the play about Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus, Mordechai the Jew, and Haman. The audience followed the play staged by children with great interest and open joy.²⁸

Jewish hymns were chanted during festivities and religious rituals. Then it was possible to hear "Hatikvah" and "Chad Gadia", also the Hasidic songs, which were supported by the hand clapping and feet stamping of the singers. Sometimes the performers got carried away so much that it seemed they had forgotten the war and did not fear the German supervisors nearby. The songs of everyday life were composed by children and adults,

²⁸ Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust. The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, 254.

educated and illiterates, famous and unknown people. This way they were seeking comfort, cheer in the moments of hardship, and to express their protest. New poets mostly created new lyrics for well-known melodies because it was impossible to compose music for such a variety of new texts, which were created quite frequently. The songs of one ghetto often spread widely, even reaching areas some distance away. That is why the songs of Vilnius Jews were sung in Kaunas and in Warsaw, and songs from Vilijampolė sometimes reached other places of Jewish residence. For example, Tsvi Garmize, a war refugee from Poland, who appeared in the Šiauliai Ghetto, composed a song “Ikh hob mayn man farloyrn” (I Have Lost My Husband), which was brought to the Kaunas Ghetto by another prisoner.

MELODIES. After hearing the songs of the Kaunas Ghetto, we can note several distinctive features: 1) the rhythms of the tango, waltz, and march were common, as well as melodies of popular (especially Russian) songs; 2) newly written lyrics were adapted to the older melodies written by Jewish composers; 3) some of the songs were based on Jewish folk song tonalities; 4) the character of the music does not always stress the meaning of the lyrics that show the brutality of life against the bright hopes of the people.

IMPLICATIONS. The lyrics of the new songs were mostly about the Ghetto life. They inform us about how hard the people had to work, the bad food they had to eat, what heartbreak they had to experience losing their loved ones, especially in the case of children. Jews deeply hated their enemies, people of the Aryan race, whom they called barbarians, and strongly believed in a better future. Some songs inspire persistence and non-conformity with the cruel reality, while others form lamentations, which express sorrow and complaint. But in the songs there are no sad endings: all of them contain signs of hope. Humorous songs were also very popular. In such songs, the Ghetto residents ridiculed their oppressors – Lithuanian collaborators, corrupt administra-

tors, also the Jews who collaborated with the regime and willingly served Germans.

The song authors, trying to intensify their emotional expression, used various means of language: analogies, personifications, jargon, even curse-words. For example, some authors explored dreams as means of escapism. Percy Haid speaks to snowflakes as to his best friends: "Shneyle fli, shneyele fal, brings mir a grus fun dem vinter" (Snowflakes take flight, snowflakes alight, bring me a greeting from winter). Others communicate to their hearts as sentient objects, asking them to be strong, waiting for the freedom to come: "Harts, du zayn nor shtil, un zog vi shtark iz mayn gefil, iz tsum otemen fray un tsum lakhn" (Heart, do not be still, and tell me how I long and will to breathe free air and to laugh again). Nature is glorified in the songs, and is understood as absolute perfection, while beside it, man appears as flawed. The East is perceived as the source of all good; the October Revolution is often remembered: "In mizrakh ober shteyen feldzn, di feldzn zaynen zeyer a hoykh, es hobin finf un tsvansik yorn" (But in the East, high cliffs are looming, massive cliffs they are, indeed; for twenty-five years, and counting, the winds have still not reached those peaks). The West is compared to the evil wind ("Fun mayrev blozt a beyzer vint"). The song "Hoykher man!" (Lofty One!) ridicules a Ghetto administrator Vulf Lurie, a vulgar and cruel man, who mercilessly oppressed his fellow Jews. In the song, there is a vulgarism *putsedom*. It is a neologism, made up from a word *puts*, what means "show-off", "fraud" or "male organ", and an international word *aerodrome*, the airport.²⁹ In the lyrics there are also some words and expressions commonly used by Lithuanians. For example, a strange looking soup was described as *yushnik* ("pig chow"). Referring to the bread distribution centre Parama and meat packing plant Kauno maistas, the song authors did not change the original Lithuanian names: *brigade* "*maistas*" *geyt*; *ot lemoshl iz a rey – bay* "*parama*" *shoen shtey*. They also did not exclude a common slang word *bulke* ("bulka") which means white

²⁹ *Hidden History. Songs of the Kovno Ghetto*, p. 22.

bread. In some songs there are some Jewish words that cannot be simply translated into another language, for example *klezmer*. *Kley* is an instrument, *zemer* is a song. The word refers to a musician, who plays by ear. Such musicians usually accompanied singers or sang themselves.

In song lyrics, there sometimes would be elements of Aesopian speech, the result of a self-protection instinct. For example, in the lyrics of the song "Yales" (Bigshots) there is a story about a Ghetto resident who is sick and needs a vitamin *p* (*un ver hot kadokhes un ver vitaminen*). That is an encoded example of protectionism, referring to the possibility to avoid labour in exchange for a certain bribe.

Even though the songs were sung in *Yiddish*, the spoken language of Jews, the lyrics included Lithuanian phrases, as citations of their oppressors' speech. For example, Avrom Axelrod in his song "Fun der arbet" (Coming Back from Work) describing smuggling in various goods, used a phrase often heard from guards: *Šitas jo, tvarkoj* ("This one's all right" – *Gey tsum rekhtn goy* – "*šitas jo, tvarkoj!*" *S'iz do a labn broyt*). There were no songs in Lithuanian, since Jews lived quite an isolated life, so neither Lithuanian language nor culture held significant influence on them. One exception, however, is recorded; an expression of the accumulation of hatred and thirst for revenge, expressed with curses on the Lithuanian land and folk. This song was a re-written Lithuanian anthem, originally composed by Vincas Kudirka. The anonymous author took this melody and added the lyrics: "Lithuania, bloody land, may you be cursed through the centuries. Let your blood flow like the blood of Jewish children..."³⁰ This parody of the anthem was sung in *sotto-voce*, so that it would not be heard by enemies. This showed the hatred not only of the Lithuanian collaborators, but of the whole nation, because during the war Lithuania became a place for the mass genocide of the Jews. The inclusion of the song into the CD is a reminder that

³⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

the crimes which took place in the land of Lithuania are impossible to forget both for Jews and for Lithuanians.

COMPOSERS. One of professional musicians and songwriters was Percy Haid (1913–1977). He studied piano and composition in Dortmund, and in 1930, when he had moved to Kaunas, he played the piano and accordion in the cafe Monika. He played in the Ghetto orchestra and chamber ensembles, and in his free time he composed songs. His song “Mamele” (The Old Mother) was composed in 1944, after the Children’s action, when about 1,300 children under 12 were killed. In the same year he was deported to Dachau, where he created a symphonic piece “The Yellow Fantasy”, which was based on the melody of the song “Mamele”. Percy Haid survived all the atrocities and died in Chicago, in 1977.

The Ghetto residents had their lyrics adapted and set to melodies by composers such as the Warsaw teacher and composer Henech Kohn (1890–1972), the judge Mark Warshawsky (1840–1907), the playwright Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908), and Shaul Shenker. The latter had composed many songs – however only one musical piece with lyrics is left: “That Doesn’t Exist in the Stars”. He also managed to survive the war and the concentration camps.

Mark Warshawsky was neither a professional composer nor a poet, but he wrote about fifty songs, which were published by the writer Sholom Aleichem. They were popular in all the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Warshawsky was known as the last Jewish bard of the nineteenth century.

Goldfaden, born in Russia, was one of the first Jewish playwrights and founders of the Jewish theatre. In 1883, as the Russian government had forbidden the Jewish theatre, Goldfaden emigrated to the West. He lived in Paris, London, and New York. In the latter city he founded a drama school. He wrote about 400 drama pieces, the most famous of which is “Shulamite” (1880). In Lithuania, his songs were also known, since one of the melodies became a musical basis for a popular song “In the Slododka Yeshiva”.

POETS. The most famous Ghetto poets were Avrom Axelrod, Nosno Markovski, Abraham Cypkin, Ruven Tsarfat, and Shaul Shenker. (Some of them wrote not just poetry but music as well, such as Shaul Shenker.)

Axelrod died during the liquidation of the Ghetto, as the Germans set his hideout on fire. Cypkin (1910–1979), who spoke Lithuanian, German, and Yiddish very well, was a leader of the labour brigades in the Ghetto. He survived the liquidation in his underground hideout, and later immigrated to the United States, where he died. Tsarfat, who was a well-known journalist before the war, prepared a lecture entitled “Songs and Sayings of the Ghetto”. He died in Dachau.

Conclusions

The Jewish Ghetto was founded in Vilijampolė for the following reasons: a) due to the convenient geographic location; b) due to the specific character of the suburb (a distant district where criminal activity would not be noticed and observed by the city residents, and gave convenient access to the city centre for the Germans); c) suburb specificity (Jewish residential area with old traditions of trade and commerce).

Music became an inseparable part of Ghetto’s everyday life. It developed in several dimensions: a) institutional (founding of the Ghetto orchestra); b) spontaneous (composing and performing various songs and hymns), and the organization of children’s amateur activity. The orchestra was a chance to employ professional musicians, to colorize the Ghetto life, and to perhaps win a little favour with the Germans.

By composing songs and hymns, people aimed: a) to preserve Jewish traditions; b) to record the main events of the Ghetto life; c) to escape the brutal reality; d) to preserve hope and anticipate vengeance. The authors did not aim for artistic results; they were only seeking to express their emotions and to unite the society.

For this reason, they mainly used popular melodies, paying most attention to the lyrics.

The Ghetto songs have historical significance and value. The analysis of melodies and lyrics reveals the hopes, political views, and the artistic sense of the Jewish community. These songs also illustrate: a) the nurturing of Jewish traditions and a belief in the future of the state of Israel; b) the daily life and brutality of the Ghetto; c) cherishing hope and wishing the genocide executors a well-deserved punishment.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Gint Aras (pseud. Karolis Gintaras Zukauskas). *The Fugue*. [Chicago]: Chicago Center for Literature and Photography, 2015. 450 pages. ISBN 978-0986092251.

Karolis Gintaras Žukauskas hails from a Lithuanian immigrant family that settled in the Lithuanian enclave of Cicero in the suburbs of Chicago. He received a BA in English from the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana and an MFA in creative writing from Columbia University. His short stories have been published in a swath of American literary journals.

The author's second novel takes the reader on a journey through various vignettes in his native Cicero. The main character, Yuri Dilenko, is a former convict with an artistic vocation to become a sculptor. He served time for setting his parent's bungalow on fire and burning them alive, but there is more than meets the eye to this ordeal. Fire becomes a disturbing symbol throughout the novel, be it gunshots, fireplaces, or arson. Yuri is the child of a Ukrainian father Bronza and Lithuanian mother Gaja. As a first generation American, his life struggles with questions of trust and belonging. His parents and their friends also mirror such struggles. Yuri wants to come to terms with his past and his family, but not his church. At times, he may be losing his grip on reality: a once familiar world has become alien and confusing. On the other hand, characters from his past may be involved in some sort of cover up. The plot mysteriously winds around Yuri's past and secret.

To help track the characters, the novel opens with a list of *dramatis personae*, as if it were a play. Yuri's parents suffer from a discordant marriage, filled with unfaithfulness, alcoholism and abuse. Gaja herself is a child of incest and victim of priestly sex abuse. The two reflect the reality of war refugees in a new, alien country. Lars Jorgenson is the church organist, neighborhood piano teacher, and oddly close family friend. He holds the keys to the church, literally and figuratively. He composes the "Fugue" that ostensibly serves as the name of the novel. His daughter Alina is a childhood friend of Yuri's who reappears as an adult. Monsignor Kilba is the confidant for all, although airs of suspicion shadow him. Lita Avila is Yuri's contemporary and friend. She, alone, remains outside of Yuri's childhood network of kith and kin. Can Yuri really trust Lita?

Each of the main characters has their own deep, dark secret. The narrative tension builds around the avoidance of these secrets. The novel opens with a World War II Soviet raid, in a segment entitled "Subject". The first half of the novel introduces the characters, with missing information about each of them. It is as if the novel is an elaborate game of Whodunit. The reader engages the clues in a process of deduction. Yuri's sexual encounter with Lita is the anti-climatic turning point of the novel, entitled "Episode." In the second half, the various secrets are slowly revealed. The novel closes with a recap of the conflagration at the bungalow and the Soviet raid: both events play themselves out in Bronza's half-asleep, drunken stupor. This segment is called "Answer", as if it were an answer to a test question (the author makes his living as a community college English instructor). This final moment highlights the alienated sense of reality throughout the novel. The narrator remains in masterful control of the complex plot.

The narration is anything but sequential: the past and present play a grand game of checkers with the sequence of time. To assist the reader, headings identify the place and time for each chapter. The vignettes range from 1940 to 1999. Vignettes sometimes come in pairs, each from another character's perspective,

but not in sequential order. The narrative end to the story comes about midway through the novel, while the web of secrets continues the plot to the conclusion of the novel. In the “Episode” chapter, the narrator explains that Yuri would talk in “patches of a cut-up story, usually quite disorienting...sometimes from one point of his childhood, then—without a segue— another, even to periods of time before he was born.” This clue helps explain the intentional confusion of time in the novel. Reality, if there is an objective reality, is merely tenuous: characters construct their own semblances of reality. The reader is faced with deciphering these perspectives. The book is an example of Roland Barthes’ *scriptable* or ‘writerly’ novel: it violates literary conventions, forcing the reader to construct meaning on their own.

Musical references pervade the novel, especially references to a fugue. The novel defines a fugue as a mix of two melodies or voices, that borrow bars from each other. The narration incorporates this notion. Assuming melodies metaphorically represent characters, the novel traces an endless melodic interplay of Yuri with the other leading characters. A fugue is also a psychological state of identity loss and confused reality. Such is Yuri’s state, at times. Likewise, both notions of a fugue help explain Bronza’s life-long pain and guilt. What really happened, when the Soviets found him hiding in the cellar with his little brother? His former life relentlessly haunts him, his wife, his two children, and his friendships. Soviet terror reverberates through the lives of multiple characters and two generations.

What is *The Fugue* of the novel? Yuri’s innocence, that he did not commit arson, is one melody in this novelistic fugue. Bronza’s guilt, that he accidentally suffocated his baby brother, is the counter-melody. Between these two melodies emerge the interactions of all the characters and, ultimately, their interplay with Yuri.

VILIUS RUDRA DUNDZILA

Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania: From the National Liberation Movement to an Authoritarian Regime (1893–1940).
By Alfonsas Eidintas. Translated and Edited by Alfred Erich Senn.
Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015. xix + 486 pages.
ISBN: 978-90-04-30203-7

Alfonsas Eidintas is a noted scholar-diplomat in Lithuania. He began his career as a historian, specifically focusing on interwar Lithuania, Lithuanian-Jewish relations, and World War II. He later went on to serve as Lithuania's ambassador to the United States, Israel, Greece, Canada and other countries. Dr. Eidintas has always distinguished himself with substantive works based on painstaking research and the utilization of copious primary and secondary sources. The present volume is no exception.

Antanas Smetona was born into modest means but was able to parlay the opportunity for education into nationalist and political activism. Smetona was the quintessential Lithuanian intellectual who blended his studies, interests, and work together to fight for Lithuanian consciousness and, later, sovereign political identity. As his predecessors in the national renaissance of the nineteenth century, he believed that a strong Lithuanian nation had to be based on a knowledge of her language, literature, history, and culture. These beliefs crystallized while a student (resulting in time in czarist prisons), were propagated in his campaigns for Lithuanian autonomy and independence, and reached fruition while president, e.g. during the 500th anniversary commemorations of Vytautas the Great, various ceremonies honoring soldiers and military invalids, and promotion of the Lithuanian language. "...When, as Lithuania's president, he was preparing his writings to be published, Smetona worked nights to find time to edit them carefully. Not in the sense of detail, polishing old journalistic works, but correcting the language for which he felt great respect – every word, every expression." (p. 26).

The reviewer found the use of thematic chapters instead of a straight chronological account very useful. There are chapters on particular issues, as well as individuals, such as Sofija Smetona,

General Stasys Raštikis, and Prime Ministers Augustinas Voldemaras and Juozas Tūbelis. These chapters enable the reader to see how Smetona's relationships with certain individuals and constituencies changed over time, and how important his personal and professional partnerships were to him and the nation. While some earlier accounts of the president's wife described her as more Polish nobility than Lithuanian patriot, Eidintas's description does not appear to reach the same conclusion. The ever enigmatic Raštikis remains so in this volume. His familial relationship with Smetona clashed with his own ego and later policy stances, especially his contention toward the end of the interwar years that Soviet domination of Lithuania would be preferable to that of the Germans. Tūbelis comes across as Lithuania's unsung hero, the long serving prime minister who maintained a fiscally conservative policy, avoided credit, and helped maintain the nation's economy among the strongest, albeit not the most sophisticated, in Europe. Thanks in great part to him, Lithuania avoided the extreme privations of the Great Depression suffered by others.

Voldemaras, his arrogant personality and Iron Wolf paramilitary organization, understandably occupy an important place in the book. The thematic arrangement of the work again helps better illuminate changing relationships and circumstances. Smetona's work with Voldemaras is shown from the president's grudging acceptance of the prime minister's brilliance, the 1926 coup and its aftermath, opposition from his Iron Wolf paramilitary organization, Smetona's weariness of Voldemaras's personality traits, and finally concern over the creation of a separate power center – complete with a private army. "...While Smetona was quiet in his talks and articles, calmly explaining and convincing, presenting his thoughts calmly in stylistically elegant speech, Voldemaras in his speeches and writing abounded in belligerence and with intentions of demolishing opponents and any adversary." (p. 151).

Fascinating are the chapters dealing with the Catholic Church, the Catholic "Ateitis" organization, and individual priests. Smetona's love-hate relationship with the Church and its representatives still defies explanation. He considered himself a devout and faithful Catholic, while also disliking the Vatican's position rela-

tive to Poland and the Vilnius Archdiocese and what he felt was meddling by church groups possessing at least an informal relationship with the opposition Christian Democrats. "...The centers of the Christian Democratic Party, their strong press and the youth organizations were the force whose pressure [Smetona] felt for the entire period of his presidency." (p. 258). Some opposition priest-activists were conveniently exiled to remote village parishes, while others found favor with the president. Others supported the regime and openly defied their bishops and, indeed, directives from the Vatican. The president's Chancellor, Father Izidorius Tamošaitis, and Father Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas are just two examples of those who could be styled as semi-rogue priests who saw the regime in the service of both God and Nation.

The major shortcoming of this volume is not the author's fault. The translator's product is occasionally awkward, such as writing "prezidium" instead of "presidium" (p. 73), "martial court" instead of "court martial" (p. 222), and occasionally leaving out the article, "the." (e.g., pp. 146, 186).

Anyone who wishes to understand the genesis of Independent Lithuania, the interwar period and the multifaceted and still debated role of Antanas Smetona will find substantial references in this volume. There are no stunning revelations about foreign relations and Smetona's often skillful maneuvering in international affairs, especially with the Germans during World War I and later during the Nazi period. Eidintas's book, however, is one of the most important dealing with the man and his times: a humanist who also believed in order, an authoritarian who rejected fascism and kept Plato's works on his bedside table to help maintain a "presidential regime, not totalitarian," (p. 439), a shrewd political operative who truly believed that the Nationalist Association was to unite all people and parties, a fiscal conservative who approved of the expropriation of nobles' land to distribute to their former tenants. So many years later, Eidintas presents a comprehensive view of Antanas Smetona, though in many ways he still remains an enigma.

ROBERT A. VITAS

Pranas T. Naujokaitis. *Dinosaurs in Space* (Balloon Toons).
Maplewood, NJ: Blue Apple Books: 2012. 40 pages.
ISBN 978-1609052539.

Pranas T. Naujokaitis. *The Radically Awesome
Adventures of the Animal Princess* (Balloon Toons).
Maplewood, NJ: Blue Apple Books: 2013. 40 pages.
ISBN 978-1609052966.

Artie Bennett, author, and Pranas T. Naujokaitis, illustrator.
Belches, Burps, and Farts-Oh My!
Maplewood, NJ: Blue Apple Books, 2014. 40 pages.
ISBN 978-1609053925.

Pranas T. Naujokaitis is an American graphic novelist (illustrator of comic books for young adults) and children's book illustrator of Lithuanian descent. He is the author-illustrator of 3 children's comic books and illustrator of a fourth one, as well as a frequent contributor to non-children's zines and minicomics. He graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in Sequential Art and a minor in Contemporary Writing. Literary talent runs in his family, as he is the grandson of the Lithuanian novelist and poet Pranas Naujokaitis.

DINOSAURS IN SPACE is a quirky fun graphic novel that presents crazy dinosaurs in space. They live, travel the galaxy, meet aliens, resolve problems, share meals all in this nifty space setting. All of my four children, ages 4, 6, 10 and 12, enjoyed the book.

ANIMAL PRINCESS is a hilarious graphic novel that stars a young girl going on adventures. She travels the kingdom overcoming challenges to save her King Dad and Queen Mom. She finds ways to beat back boredom to infinity by creating the cupcake monster. All in all, the enjoyable book taught my children ways to use their imagination.

BELCHES, BURPS AND FARTS, OH MY! is a delightful graphic novel that takes the stink out of stinky situations. In a quite clever manner, the book describes the regular human body functions as normal situations that should be viewed as hilarious, rather than gross. My four-year old absolutely loves to share farting facts and has no problem sharing why this is normal behavior for humans and various animals.

VILIJA GARBONKUS

ABSTRACTS

ARNOLDAS GABRĖNAS

Nature in the City as Public Space: *An Architect's Remarks about Designing the Park in Jurbarkas*

The article analyzes the experience of architects in designing a park in the central part of Jurbarkas, on Daukantas Street 28A, by reconstructing a neglected public space. The article discusses the architectural specifics, the conceptual, compositional and functional aspects of the operational object, which the author brought into being. The article discusses some of the aesthetic possibilities of architectural composition involved in the designing of public urban spaces in a provincial Lithuanian city.

DANUTĖ PETRAUSKAITĖ

Music in the Kaunas Ghetto against the Background of Vilijampolė (Slabodka) History

The article presents a review of musical life in the Kaunas Ghetto against the background of the history of Vilijampolė, a suburb of Kaunas. The focus of this research is the activities of the Ghetto musicians, as well as the melodies and lyrics of Jewish songs which were created during the Second World War. The aims of this article are: 1) to ascertain the reasons for establishing the Jewish Ghetto in Vilijampolė; 2) to examine the traditions of musical life in the Ghetto; 3) to reveal the hopes, political views and the artistic consciousness of the Jewish community through the analysis of the orchestra concerts and songs performed by the Ghetto residents.

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