
Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

ECHOES OF THE "DAINAS" AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN POETRY

Author(s): Voira Vīķis-Freibergs

Source: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Spring 1975, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 17-29

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43210649

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms


Taylor & Francis, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Baltic Studies*

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ECHOES OF THE *DAINAS* AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY LATVIAN POETRY

Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs, Université de Montréal

The poet writing in Latvia today, unlike his western counterpart, is required to keep his creative impulses within the bounds of a strictly defined ideological orthodoxy. As an editorial in *Pravda* (Sept. 1972) puts it: "Our literature expounds the noble ideals of Communism, the writer is a propagandist for the Soviet way of life and an active fighter against bourgeois ideologies."

This functionalist conception of the artist's role, while giving the writer a sense of social relevance which he does not always have in the Western world, can also be a source of considerable psychological stress. A worker in a kolkhoz or a factory who has fulfilled his quota of production can have the assurance that here is at least one part of his life where he can be sure to be above reproach, but the poet or writer can never be quite at ease: just when is a poem socially relevant enough, just when can it be said to show the right level of socialist militancy? The criteria are elusive, intangible, subjective, and liable to change from one Party Congress to the next. As a result, the writer lives in a constant state of uncertainty about the social acceptability of his work.

It is probably in response to this situation that one of the major themes in contemporary Latvian poetry is a preoccupation with the problems of moral goodness, of personal integrity, and of ultimate human values. Faced with the vaguely-defined and changeable demands of "society" (i.e., the Party), the poets seem to be searching for more absolute, enduring, and reliable criteria of human worthiness, adherence to which might ensure the individual of a reasonably healthy sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

However, for poets of the Baltic countries (as for all other non-Russian poets in the U.S.S.R.), the demand for social relevance is far from being the only source of stress. While living in their ancestral territory, on which they still (but for how long?) represent an ethnic majority, they have become, since the occupation of the Baltic States by the U.S.S.R. (1940-41, and again in 1945), the

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

members of a small minority in a huge, Russian-dominated amalgam of peoples. Furthermore, even this minority status, with all the disadvantages it entails for independent cultural development, is officially considered but a temporary state before the ultimate obliteration of all national distinctions, i.e., the ultimate destruction of the non-Russian languages and cultures. This aim has been officially declared in a number of Party Congresses: "The nations will draw still closer together until complete unity is achieved," although it is conceded that "the obliteration of all national distinctions, and especially of language distinctions, is a considerably longer process."[1]

It may not be superfluous to point out that the "obliteration of national distinctions," just like its North American counterpart, the "melting pot," is never envisaged as a natural process of gradual change, resulting from the reciprocal influences of cultures considered equally important. In practice, such policies have always made unilateral demands on members of minority cultures to renounce their own national heritage and characteristic way of being in favor of someone else's by integrally adopting the dominant group's language, customs, world view, and particular interpretation of history. By demanding of the minority member this sort of renouncing of what he is or has been, such ideals of "brotherly" sameness psychologically devalue him in relation to the ruling majority. It is thus not surprising to find that, while members of ruling ethnic majorities (whether in communistic or capitalistic systems) tend to see in the disappearance of national differences the answer to humanity's prayers for a conflict-free society, members of minorities, on the other hand, will see it as the expression of crass, totalitarian disregard for the basic human right "to one's own self to be true."

The fact that one people are more numerous than another, while undubitably a tribute to their greater fertility, in no way gives them or their culture one iota more of intrinsic human worth or value. The true measure of humanity lies in respecting its infinite diversity, and it is a plea for such respect that we find in the following poem by the Latvian poet Jānis Peters:

We all hoard this world under the sun.
What a mercy we don't all hoard alike!
Blast away, elephants, trumpeteers,
screech away, grasshoppers, on your strings!

Grosbeaks, bang on the hearts of the oak-trees,
gently rap, little tit, on the panes!
Whether hatching, flying or dying, little cuckoo,
for ever and ever remain cuck-koo!

Cuck-koo! Cuck-koo! Cuck . . .
Turn, little old world, turn, let your motors purr,
make sure to record on the tapes of the sunlight
all the voices, singing each its own way!

Šo pasauli visi zem saules mēs krājam
Cik labi, ka nekrājam vienādi!
Taurējiet, ziloņi, taurētāji,
čīgājiet, spēlmaņi, sienāži!

Dižknābji, dauziet pa ozolu sirdīm,
pieklauvē, zīlīte, viegli pie rūts!
Dzeguzīt, šķildamās, celdamās, mirdama
mūžīgi mūžos paliec ku-kū!

Ku-Kū! Ku-kū! Ku . . .
Griezies, pasaulīte, griezies, lai tavs motors iet, –
ieraksti iekš saules lentām
balsis, kas pa savam dzied![2]

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Just what is it, apart from the use of the Latvian tongue, that may give the voice of the Latvian poet its own distinctive note, what is it that makes him a bird of a different feather from others? For many poets, the answer seems to lie in a sense of continuity with one's national cultural heritage, in developing one's identity here and now within a wider framework of time. Threatened in his basic worthiness as a human being, questioned as to the legitimacy of his national distinctiveness, the Latvian poet often reaches back to the ancestral past, looking for the roots of his present identity:

In the heart of Riga, where frozen linden-trees tremble,	Rīgas vidū, kur liepas dreb salā,
In the Great Graveyard[3] where crosses now crumble,	Lielos kapos, kur krusti jau lūst,
Stands a stone from the shores of the river Daugava,	Slejas akmens no Daugavas malas,
Whose fate it is to outlive us all.	Kuram nolemts ir pārdzīvot mūs.
.....	. . . . .
.....	. . . . .
The roots of this stone stretch out like steel tendons,	Akmens saknes kā tēraudā lietas
Forbidding forgetfulness, forbidding ignorance,	Aizmirstību un nezinu liegs,
For without the paths trodden through centuries,	Jo bez gaitas, kas gadsimtos ieta,
Your own path will be worthless and small.	Tava gaita ir maza kā nieks.[4]

Elsewhere, Jānis Peters expresses the same feeling through the image of a well. The expression is somewhat indirect: he speaks fondly of the old wells of Latvian farmhouses as sources of the fabulous and of ancient wisdom. Drink from them, he says,—the cool water drawn from their depths will stimulate the blood and clear the head.[5] But for Imants Auziņš, the image is much more explicit, and he speaks of "springs of blood, red, hot, and clear, watched over, through the ages, by faraway grandfathers." These springs have to be handed on to sons and daughters, for "Forever will remain the land and the people who have the path of the red springs flowing through them."[6]

In looking back to his antecedents, in trying to find the organic roots of his being, the Latvian poet, sooner or later, will be confronted by the folklore of his people. If the Latvian literary tradition is relatively recent, the oral tradition stretches back to remote antiquity and has never quite ceased to be available to the people. Active singers knowing several thousands of *dainas* (folk songs) were still known well into the twentieth century. In addition, the *dainas* have made a remarkably successful transition to the printed page, and a variety of selections from them have been reprinted over the decades. The Latvian child, whether living in his homeland or in exile, still grows up with some knowledge of this ancient tradition.

It should be noted that to the Latvian the *dainas* are more than a literary tradition. They are the very embodiment of his cultural heritage, left by forefathers whom history had denied other, more tangible forms of expression. These songs thus form the very core of the Latvian identity, and singing becomes one of the identifying qualities of a Latvian:

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

They came riding on fast horses,
Taking with them half a million[7] songs

Viņi atjāja straujos zirgos.
Atveda pusmiljons dziesmu.

is how Imants Auziņš, for instance, describes his ancestors.[8]

In this perspective, the *dainas* become a main avenue to finding a sense of continuity with those who have gone before, a continuity which can contribute a deeper meaning to one's present identity. We see this clearly in another passage of the poem just quoted:

You ask for your goal, you ask for your path.
Look to the flames of their fires! –
There, through suffering, wars, and pestilence –
They made bread, children, and songs.

Tu pēc mērķa un ceļa taujā.
Skaties viņu gunskuru liesmās! –
Tur starp mēri, vaidiem un kaujām –
Rada maizi, bērnus un dziesmas.[9]

And yet, returning to the *dainas* is not as easy as drawing water from an old well. The *dainas* are the product of a traditional world, not too distant in the past perhaps, yet irrevocably gone nonetheless. How do the modern poets manage to take advantage of this material, without sacrificing their own needs for novelty and originality? This is the specific question we shall now examine, by considering some examples of *daina* influences on contemporary Latvian poetry. We shall start with parallels to some of the more obvious formal characteristics of the *dainas* and then go on to some more subtle psychological affinities.

The most obvious and striking characteristic of the *dainas* is probably their strict adherence to a very small number of metric structures. An overwhelming majority follow a trochaic meter, with most of the remainder being dactylic, and the typical stanza is a quatrain, with two-line stanzas being far less frequent.

The rigidity of the traditional metric forms constitutes a splendid mnemonic aid to the poet or singer whose only recording device is his memory. To the modern poet working with the written word, however, the limited number of meters becomes an unnecessary stricture. Thus it is not really surprising to find that modern poets have almost completely abandoned the *daina* meters. Attempts to write whole poems in the trochaic folk song meter are extremely rare, and none of them are poetically particularly impressive. One such example is a poem called "Words of Farewell" by Ojārs Vācietis.[10] In contrast to Vācietis' usual performance, the nine quatrains of this particular poem seem just strung together without following any consistent compositional structure and without building up to any overall effect. Moreover, the poet is either unwilling or unable to maintain a constant fit to the trochaic meter. The extent of some of the metric deviations is sufficient to sound like an unpleasant dissonance, but not quite enough to create an effect of novelty or innovative metric variation. This can best be seen by comparing one of the stanzas of the poem (the fourth) with a *daina* that is similar in content:

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC 6 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

White mother, mother of shades,
Take me into your domain,
My cows are already there, lowing,
Unherded, unmilked.

Bāltā māt, vēļu māt,
Ņem mani savā dalā,
Tur jau id manas govis,
Neganītas, neizslaukt̄as.[11]
(Vācietis, "Atvadvārdi")

I saw the Mother of Shades
Coming in through the gate:
A white cloak on her shoulders,
Shoes of sand on her feet.

Es redzēju Vēļu māti
Pa vārtiem(i) ienākot;
Bāltu segu apsegusi,
Smilšu kurpes kājiņā.
(Daina Nr. 49, 478)

Elements of *daina* style, vocabulary, and imagery can be found in a number of poems, although it must be noted that some poets avoid them entirely. Among those who do refer back to the *dainas*, there is usually a deliberate attempt to steer away from faithful imitation or copying. The *daina* references are used for allusion, for *double entendre*, for effects of mood, of contrast, etc. In short, they are used for the sort of effects which depend on a common cultural background of knowledge and associations of ideas, and which could not possibly be rendered into another language without explanative footnotes.

Let us consider one example of such playing with allusions from the *dainas*. We find it in the last stanzas of an unnamed poem by Jānis Peters:

Oh, little lark, oh, little-man,
we both have to print our songs:
you – on the leaves of the sundew plant,
I – to collect them in enlightened souls.

Ai, cīrulīt, ai mazvīriņ,
mums savas dziesmas nodrukāt:
tev – raspodiņu lapiņā,
man – gaišās dvēselēs tās krāt.

In a horse's footprint you are to affirm
what strength there is in the frailty of wings,
when the young-lark-sunrise
will come for you and your mate.

Tev kumeļpēdā apliecināt,
kāds spārnu nespēkā ir spēks,
kad tev ar tavu cīrulieni
lēks cīrulēnu sauleslēkts.

. . . . . .

Praise be to the strength of the lark-country!

. . . . . .

Lai slavēts cīrulzemes spēks![12]

The first line of the first stanza quoted is a sort of parody of one of the stereotyped stylistic devices of the *dainas*. This consists of a direct address (vocative form), with a constant epithet in apposition, as in the following *daina:*

Little lark, little-bird,
Don't roost by the roadside.

Cīrulīti, mazputniņ,
Negul' ceļa maliņā.

We see that Peters uses the traditional formula, yet makes two changes in it. First, he destroys the *daina* meter by adding the exclamation *ai* (oh). Second, he changes the traditional epithet "little-bird" to "little-man," a new word of his own invention. At the same time he remains faithful to one of the typical structures of the *daina* quatrain in which the direct address at the beginning of the stanza is followed by a parallel statement of metaphorical similarity between the singer and the creature addressed in the last two lines.

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The first line of the second stanza alludes to a folksong in which the lark is said to brew beer in the footprint of a horse, and in which the main play of ideas is around the lark's tiny size. The next line brings in the paradoxical concept of strength in frailty, which becomes clearer once we realize that in the *dainas* the little lark not only was a singer par excellence (together with the nightingale) but also could stand for the oppressed peasant. The replacement of "little-bird" by "little-man" was thus intended to reinforce this line of association. The lark-country, of course, is Latvia.

Occasionally, one finds a poet using traditional metaphors that date back not only to the *dainas* but also to the ancient *vedas*. Thus Imants Auziņš, in a poem called "Haymaking," talks of the sound of distant thunder as coming from *Dieviņš* (God) trampling down

His heavenly haystacks	. . . Savas debess gubanas
For his heavenly cattle	Debess telēm savām.
His cows still have to pasture	Viņa govīm jāganās
Through the blue meadows	Vēl pa zilām pļavām.[13]

Here, just as in the *vedas*, the clouds are the cows of God (Latv. *Dievs*, Sanscrit *Dyāus*), pasturing in the blue meadows of the sky. The attribution of thunder to God's trampling down his haystacks, however, is an image original to Auziņš, so far as I know.

Other poems show such a fusion of different elements that the allusion to the *dainas* becomes more faint and elusive:

Out of jealousy,	Sarkano saules rozi
evening plucks	vakars aiz greizsirdības
the red rose of sunset.	nolauž.
Tomorrow another will open.	Rīt uzplauks cita.
Again it will be adored	Atkal to dievinās
and plucked	un lauzīs
just like love.	gluži kā mīlestību.[14]

This short untitled poem by Daina Avotiņa brings up echoes of the Latvian sun-myth songs, in which the sun and the evening star are frequent protagonists, and which often emphasize the repetitive cyclicity of the sun's course. Yet the comparison of the sun to a rose and the notion of romantic adoration is completely alien to the *dainas*, and more reminiscent of Western European poetry.

The subject of romantic love, it might be noted, is very rarely treated in the *dainas*, and that of unhappy love more rarely still. The modern poets, on the other hand, have produced numerous offerings on this topic, and a large part of these dwell at length on the sufferings of unrequited love or of lost love.

Another of the striking aspects of the *dainas* is an extremely explicit and pervasive sense of closeness and harmony with nature. The metaphorical parallels

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

between people and plants, for instance, are so pronounced in both the Latvian and the Lithuanian folk poetry that some observers (e.g., Van der Meulen, 1907)[15] could only explain it as the remnants of a primitive "animisim." Be that as it may, the close sense of affinity with nature is still one of the major characteristics in modern Latvian poetry, as can be seen from the following two examples by Daina Avotiņa and Ārija Elksne, respectively:

. . . It's good to live under the apple trees	Labi zem ābelēm dzīvot ir
In an old and a young garden;	Vecā un jaunā dārzā;
There is no fear of life and no fear of death –	Bail nav dzīvot un bail nav mirt –
Pain stills in the apple orchard.	Ābeļu dārzā viss pārsāp.[16]
* * *	* * *
I'll lift up my arms and walk into the woods,	Es pacelšu rokas un ieiešu mežā,
I'll give myself up prisoner to the trees,	Un padošos kokiem gūstā,
May they do with me as they want, –	Lai dara viņi ar mani, ko grib, –
I believe – it will only be good.	Es ticu – man labi būs tur.
At night I'll sleep on the moss,	Pa nakti gulēšu sūnā,
With fern leaves for cover,	Ar paparžu lapām klāta,
And a deer will come and snuffle me	Un briedis pienāks un apostīs
Like he would a boletus mushroom . . .	Mani kā baravikas kātu. . . .[17]

The most visible sign of this affinity with nature is evident in the abundance of vocabulary terms referring to flowers, plants, trees, animals, birds, as well as to the inorganic, but still natural earth: soil, ground, clay, gravel, stone, etc. and water in all its manifestations. If statistical comparisons could be made with the vocabulary of contemporary English-language poets, for instance, there would probably be significant differences in the number of references to natural, as opposed to man-made objects, and the use of concrete terms, as opposed to abstract terms.

More important than the mere frequency of usage, however, is the fact that references to living, growing things are always accompanied by a background of strong positive feelings: joy, pleasure, serenity, peace, consolation. To Mirdza Bendrupe, for instance, the wild snapdragon is a friendly face, "a small, bi-colored dragon's child, laughing from ear to ear" (*Mazs pūķa bērniņš raibs ar pilnu muti smejas*). And of the digitalis (called *deviņvīruspēks* 'Nine-men's strength') she says:

Like tapers in a candelabrum pale yellow flowers burn . . .
You, limpid warmth, how much I miss you!
You, lucid strength, against your bother you will never raise a blade.

Kā sveces lukturos deg ziedi dzeltenbāli . . .
Tu, dzidrais maigums, kā man tevis trūkst!
Tu, skaidrais spēks, kas nevērs asmeni pret brāli![18]

It is this background of strong feeling which suggests that we are dealing here

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

with something more than mere verbal learning of an existing tradition of lexical preferences, or with the lifeless relics of some long-forgotten "animism." This aspect of Latvian poetry seems to us simply but definitely a living continuation of the ancient Latvian tradition of *respect* toward the natural world, in which man is seen as one of the harmonious components *in* nature, never above it or outside it. This feeling is in direct contrast to the sense of man's divorce from nature, developed at length by Western Christianity (cf. White, 1967)[19] and culminating again in nineteenth-century materialistic rationalism. The Latvian, rather like the North American Indian, has tended to see nature as something to work with, not against, as something to be wooed, not raped.

This attitude differs markedly from that of the ideal Soviet man who, just like his arch-enemy, the American entrepreneur or "go-getter" or indeed, Western man in general, likes to glorify his own achievements above all things, and tends to devalue and to ignore the natural order.

This does not mean, we hasten to add, that the modern Latvian poets fail in any way to appreciate the progress of science or any other human achievements—quite the contrary. It is just that they manage to value man (in his better aspects) without necessarily devaluing nature. Thus, we surmise that they would have no fundamental quarrel with the goals placed before them by the *Pravda* editorial already quoted from earlier and which states: "The Soviet writer cannot have a nobler goal than depicting the richness of soul [sic] of our present-day working people who melt steel, drill for oil, grow wheat or cotton, who explore the cosmos or uncover the secrets of the living cell."[20] Since one of the major aspects of the *dainas* consists of the glorification of work as something which gives sense and meaning to man's life, there is no problem at that level. The Latvian poet, however, might want to add a small qualification to another aspect of this program, as did Ojārs Vācietis:

. . . Long live chemistry!
And may all go well with the chemists!
But let also live
Sundays grown one with the earth,
with a knapsack, and with kilometers!

This century has a metallic voice
And a steely hand
And talks too much of: dominating,
conquering,
forcing,
And too little of protecting and preserving.

But it is not for nothing that the century itself
Screams, begging for clay, and for wood,
And for one yellow
Grove of young birches . . .

Lai dzīvo ķīmija!
Lai ķīmiķiem labi būtu!
Bet lai dzīvo ar mugursomu,
Ar kilometriem
Un zemi saaudzināta svētdiena!

Gadsimtam ir metālbalss
Un dzelžaina roka,
Pārāk daudz jēdzienu: paklaut,
pieveikt,
piespiest
Un pārāk maz – saudzēt.

Bet ne velti pats gadsimts
Kliedz pēc māla un koka,
Un pēc vienas dzeltenas
Bērzu ataudzes.[21]

We now turn to reflections of a last aspect of the *dainas* to be considered

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

here, and this is their essential "coolness" of style, somewhat along the lines of MacLuhan's distinction between "hot" and "cool" styles of communication. This characteristic, which we have described in more detail elsewhere,[22] has as one of its manifestations a strong reserve and reticence toward the direct expression of deep emotions. Thus, the *daina* poet will often be content with describing the situation which provoked his feelings, leaving the listener to infer them, rather than dwelling on a direct description of the feelings as such:

A hell, a hell is the threshing barn of the baron,	Elle, elle kunga rija,
A torture chamber for my brothers:	Manu brāļu mocītava:
There the color was drained from their cheeks,	Tur izbāla sārti vaigi,
There their bodies were bent and twisted.	Tur salīka augumiņš.

And, in an another variant on the same theme:

There they made me slave away,	Tur tie mani kalpināja
Hacking my back with [overseer's] canes.	Rīkstēm mani kapādami.

The above is an example of a series of *dainas* which may be properly termed "protest songs," because they describe very graphically the full miseries of a serf's oppression. Yet there is no crying out, no weeping, no wailing, no gnashing of teeth. The same laconism appears in a modern poem by Imants Auziņš on the same theme of oppression:

We shall endure. All overlords will go.	Mēs dzīvosim. Un aizies visi kungi.
Away the stranger, who has seized your land.	Un aizies svešnieks, tavu zemi ņēmis.
Time has decided, time has decreed it so.	Tā laiks ir domājis, tā laiks ir lēmis.[23]

This style is in sharp contrast to the style favored by the official Soviet propaganda apparatus, whose penchant since the Revolution has been for a form of expression which could be fairly located at the extreme of the "hot" dimension. The latter style, while compatible with the folk style of the Russian people, is not always the most felicitous approach from the point of view of other cultures. An example in point is the Soviet practice of stringing enormous slogans over large buildings. A Communist official has told us of his surprise at the reaction of a delegation of French Communists visiting Riga: every time they saw one of these slogans, they would all burst out laughing. It would seem that Latvians also, even indoctrinated Communists, may feel alienated by this sort of stylistic approach. Ojārs Vācietis puts it quite clearly is a poem entitled "Walls":

Walls, what are you telling me?	Ko jūs man stāstāt, sienas?
Do what you like	Dariet, ko gribat,
But, please, do not shout into my ear	Bet nekliedziet, lūdzu, man ausīs
That, which I already know,	To, ko es zinu,
And that, which is usually whispered.	Un to, ko parasti čukst.

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I talk to you every day Let us not spoil our relationship.	Es ar jums runājos katru dienu. Nevajag bojāt mūsu attiecības.
. . . .	. . . .
I get angry, wall, When you shout at me.	Es esmu dusmīgs, siena, Kad tu uz mani kliedz.
I come from work And I go home to eat, But you, spread all across the wall: – Love our Soviet Fatherland! –	Es nāku no darba Un eju uz mājām ēst, Bet tu man pa visu sienu: – Mīliet mūsu Padomju Dzimteni! –
Right away.[24]	Tūlīt.[24]

The point, needless to say, is not about loving or not loving one's fatherland, but rather about the manner in which such love may best be expressed. The *daina* poets often expressed patriotic feelings through the apotheosis of some small, apparently humble and insignificant detail which, through a sort of condensation, of concentration of attention on it, would become the metonymic expression of a far larger whole:

Oh, fatherland, Your comeliness! The little grass blooms With silvery blossoms.	Ai, tēvu zemīte, Tavu jaukumiņu! Smildziņa ziedēja Sidraba ziediem.

A brilliant synthesis of the cool, metonymic approach of the Latvian folk tradition, and the hot, direct, militant style so dear to the heart of Communist officialdom has been achieved by Imants Auziņš in his poem "Through a Fragrance of Apples":

Leaves fall, leaves flutter, leaves fly
hither and thither and yon.
Through a fragrance of apples,
through a fragrance of apples,
through a fragrance of apples I go.

Apples in baskets, in tractors and horse-carts,
dried apples. Rotting. Mashed up for juice.
Who can tell, fifty years from this moment,
will this apple scent still fill the air?
. . . . . .

This scent seeps through clothes, into the depth of souls,
on shoulder and arms you will find it.
And I feel, there is enough for us all – to love
and enough, even to defend it.

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

And I compose a large and resounding slogan,
the kind you hang up on fences and walls:
about this fragrant and splendid fruit of all Latvia,
the apple, as it's rightfully called.

Krīt lapas, plīv lapas, un lidinās lapas
gan šurpu, gan turpu, gan teju.
Caur ābolu smaržu,
caur ābolu smaržu,
caur ābolu smaržu es eju.

Nes ābolus groziem, ved mašīnām, ratiem,
spiež sulu. Tos žāvē. Tie pūst.
Kas pateiks, vai arī pēc piecdesmit gadiem
šī ābolu smarža vēl būs?
. . . . . .

Šī smarža ir vīlēs un dvēseles dzīlēs,
uz rokām un pleciem tāpat.
Un jūtu, ka pietiek mums visiem – ko mīlēt
un pietiek – ko aizstāvēt – pat.

Un saceru lielu un skanīgu saukli,
ko varat uz žogmalēm kārt:
par lielisko, smaržīgo Latvijas augli,
kam ābols – ir likumīgs vārds![25]

Choosing a fragrant apple to embody both one's country and one's love of it is a pure continuation of the *daina* tradition, although this specific image has never been used in this way in the *dainas*. Making a "large, resounding slogan" out of it is, of course, the modern, socially relevant touch. The poet thus manages the improbable feat of being original, traditional, and socialistic—all at the same time. . . .

In conclusion, it seems apparent that the Latvian poets' recourse to their national heritage can in no way be construed as an attempt to find in the past facile, ready-made solutions to present-day problems. We have mentioned briefly the purely poetic difficulties there would arise in any slavish adherence to old, established formulae. It is the emotional acceptance of the national past, however, that poses an even more difficult problem. In looking to history for help in finding his own identity, the Latvian will find little solace there, for it offers little reflected glory, and precious little vicarious ego gratification. For too long throughout history, his ancestors were lucky to barely survive. Imants Auziņš expresses clearly the ambivalent nature of his heritage in a poem called "On gold and silver," which starts with a folksong quotation:

I wade through a silvery river
With golden shoes on my feet,
The silver sinks to the bottom,
The gold dances on the surface.

Sudrabiņa upi bridu,
Zelta kurpes kājiņā,
Sudrabs grima dibenā,
Zelts pa virsu lidināja.

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

There's much gold and silver in the folksongs,
Such brightness – just as in paradise,
But the people trotted through the fields, ant-like –
Not in silver *pastalas*,[26]
Nor in golden *vīzes*.[27]

Daudz tautas dziesmās zelta un sudraba,
Tāds gaišums – kā paradīzē,
Bet cilvēki tecēja laukos kā skudras –
Ne sudraba pastalās,
Ne zelta vīzēs.

Their feet were cold. Their dwellings were smoky
With icy cracks around the windows,
And noses got cold. Feet got frozen.
And fevers would shake and choke them.

Un sala kājas. Bij dūmainas mājas
Ar ledainām logu spraugām,
Un nosala deguni. Nosala kājas.
Un drudzis sagrāba žņaugā.[28]

Obviously, the very nature of Latvian history is a guard against nationalism in its pejorative sense, that is, the cheap, blind glorification of one's own nation, "right or wrong," combined with scorn and lack of respect for all other peoples and cultures. The search for a national identity, as we find it among contemporary Latvian poets, represents a broadening rather than a narrowing of one's frame of identification, and comes to merge with the other search—that for the essential qualities which make man a truly human being. It is at this level that, for some of the best poets, the coming to terms with one's heritage can be achieved:

Where others with dollars, with duckats and rubles
Erected their cathedrals and castles,
Through a diamond dew,
Through silvery mud,
You wade in your golden *pastalas*.

Kur citi ar dālderiem, dukātiem, rubuļiem
Sev pilis un dievnamus slien,
Pa dimanta rasu,
Pa sudrada dubļiem
Tu zelta pastalās brien! . . .[29]

And once achieved, this identity produces a sense of kinship with other people that stretches not only backwards in time, across the centuries, but can also reach out into space and embrace all those who, in our own time, have become separated by distance. Mirdza Bendrupe speaks of such kinship:

Between us stand space and time.
Oceans. Years.
But we are one breath,
We're kin.

Starp mums ir laiks un telpa.
Jūŗas. Gadi.
Bet mēs esam viena elpa,
mēs esam radi[30]

NOTES

1 Resolutions of the Twenty-Second Party Congress, 1961, quoted in Anthony Adamovich, "The Non-Russians," in *Soviet Literature in the Sixties*, ed. Max Hayward and Edward L. Crowley (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 121.

2 Jānis Peters, poem in *Asinszāle* [Hyssop] (Riga: Liesma, 1970), p. 65. A sample of thirteen individual books of poetry (published in Latvia between 1966 and 1972) and two yearly anthologies (*Dzejas diena*, 1968 and 1969) were studied in detail for this article; however, only poetry books from which quotations were taken are listed below.

3 A cemetery in Riga, now filled and abandoned, in which lies the grave of the nineteenth-century poet Pumpurs, creator of the national epic hero, Lāčplēsis (Bear-slayer).

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

4 Imants Auziņš, "Akmens saknes" [Stone Roots], *Skaņa* [Sound] (Riga: Liesma, 1970), p. 41.
5 Peters, poem in *Asinszāle*.
6 Auziņš, "Asins avoti" [Springs of Blood], *Zvaigzne*, Nr. 13 (1972), p. 2.
7 A total of 775,257 songs (including variants) had been recorded by 1939 in the Archives of Folklore in Riga.
8 Auziņš, "Senči" [Ancestors], *Skaņa*, pp. 42-43.
9 Ibid.
10 Ojārs Vācietis, "Atvadvārdi," *Dzegužlaiks* [Time of the Cuckoo] (Riga: Liesma, 1968).
11 Ibid.
12 Peters, poem in *Asinszāle*, pp. 79-80.
13 Auziņš, "Siena pļauja" [Haymaking], *Skaņa*.
14 Daina Avotiņa, poem in *Akmens ziedēšana* [Blossoming of the Stone] (Riga: Liesma, 1969), p. 13.
15 Rz. van der Meulen, *Die Naturvergleiche in den Liedern und Totenklagen der Litauer* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1907).
16 Avotiņa, "Ābeles" [Apple Trees], *Akmens ziedēšana*.
17 Ārija Elksne, poem in *Galotņu dziesma* [Song of the Tree-tops] (Riga: Liesma, 1968).
18 Mirdza Bendrupe, poem in *Nerimas balss* [Voice Unceasing] (Riga: Liesma, 1967), p. 82.
19 Lynn White,Jr., "Saint Francis and the Ecological Backlash," *Horizon*, 9, No. 3 (1967), 42-47.
20 September 1972 (see also intro. para.).
21 Vācietis, "Naktsmājas" [Overnight Shelter], *Dzegužlaiks*.
22 Vaira Vīķis-Freibergs, "The Poetic Imagination of the Latvian *dainas*," *Mosaic*, 6, No. 4 (1973), 209-21.
23 Auziņš, "Ticības dziesma" [Song of Faith], *Skaņa*, p. 58.
24 Vācietis, "Sienas," *Dzegužlaiks*, pp. 146-47.
25 Auziņš, "Caur ābolu smaržu," *Skaņa*, pp. 10-11.
26 A sort of laced leather moccasin.
27 Footwear weaved from tree-bark fibers.
28 Auziņš, "Par zeltu un sudrabu," *Skaņa*, pp. 49-50.
29 Auziņš, ibid.
30 Bendrupe, poem in *Nerimas balss*.

This content downloaded from
132.204.9.239 on Fri, 01 Jan 2021 23:15:50 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms