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## Post Avant-Garde Poetry from Lithuania by Ausra Kaziliunaite



By [Olivia Snaije](#)  
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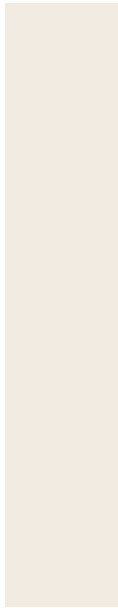
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### second floor

*from my windows i can see  
the trolley bus wires  
take the people away  
electricity sparks and  
dies  
pupils narrow  
and expand  
blood flows to the temples  
and a buck restlessly raises  
his head  
to listen for the unheard murmur  
of the night from which he drank*

By Aušra Kaziliūnaitė, translated by Rimas Užgiris



Aušra Kaziliūnaitė has been writing poetry “since forever.” Her mother has notebooks in which she would jot down her daughter’s poems before she could write them herself. The 30-year-old Lithuanian poet and doctoral student was published at age 15, and her first book of poetry appeared when she was 19. She hasn’t looked back since, with four books now to her name. A collection of her best poems has just been published in English by Parthian in a collection called [The Moon is a Pill](#), translated by Rimas Uzgiris.

## The Moon is a Pill

**Aušra Kaziliūnaitė**



Parthian  Baltic

Her poetry has been described as “post-avant-garde” and while she says Lithuanian literature is “connected to

history, with lots of details and a baroque style,” in her poems, she tries to deconstruct the language.

“When I write poems it’s very important to paint a picture. I think in images first. Maybe it’s connected to my field of study, philosophy of film.”

Besides being interested in philosophy—Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in particular—film theory and utopian studies, Kaziliūnaitė is a human rights activist who is vocal on issues such as sexism and feminism. Her parents think she should be more careful about her activism, but they grew up during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania.

“It’s very interesting to hear my parents telling stories from a different time in society and I think this is key to my way of thinking and seeing things. They talked about censorship and Soviet times.”

Kaziliūnaitė says she was a very “late child,” meaning her parents were in their 40s when she was born. Her mother is an agricultural engineer and her father is a computer scientist. Although she was born in Vilnius, when the independence movement began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, her parents decided they should move to the country to start a farm.

“The problem was,” remarked Kaziliūnaitė, “they were very urban. It was like an experiment for them. They decided they would not only grow their daughter but vegetables too. So my mother taught me to live healthily. It wasn’t easy, they didn’t know how to manage a farm. We tried to have rabbits. But they couldn’t bring themselves to kill them when they became adults. There were a lot of rabbits in our garden.”

Kaziliūnaitė’s parents held out in the country for 12 years and then moved to northern Lithuania to the 15th century city of Biržai, which has a rich and somber history and where Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Lipka Tatars once mingled. Lithuanian was spoken at home but Kaziliūnaitė’s parents also spoke Russian together. This heightened awareness of languages, religions and cultures so predominant in the region is also present in Kaziliūnaitė’s work and her interests. Because it was so important to her to reflect on religious diversity, she studied the subject for her Masters, and for her thesis she wrote about [Pier Paolo Pasolini](#) and the presence of religion in his films. Once she has finished her PhD thesis she is anxious to begin work on her first novel, which she says will be about Lithuanian folklore on a mythological level, linked to the present day.

Her inspiration came from a story she happened on in the Vilnius library, where she says she practically lived. She found an ancient manuscript that describes an artist who was commissioned to paint an image of a devil but became so frightened of his own painting that he could no longer look at it.

“Lithuanian culture is interesting because it was the last to become Christian, we have lots of old pagan stuff and in our Christianity we have lots of syncretism. Our devil is more pagan. In the pagan religion the devil was like a joker, playing tricks, similar to Loki in Norse mythology. My book will be like an intellectual horror story on a psychological level...I’m interested in studying how in modern life we paint our pictures in our mind and try to avoid negative things. We try hiding from ourselves on a personal, social and political level.”

Kaziliūnaitė refuses to hide, and in taking an active public stance, [according to the academic Virginija Cibarauskė](#), she distinguishes herself from other poets of her generation by actively speaking out against discrimination, and by being supportive of the LGBT community, for example.

As Cibarauskė says, "the ideas that she represents are not voiced in a straightforward manner: they hide in the structure and poetical imagery of her texts and in the registers of speaking which she chooses."

Not often do all one's interests come together, but Kaziliūnaitė seems to have a knack for that which she then shares in thoughts, words, and images with others.

*Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are the Market Focus countries at this year's London Book Fair, 10-14 April 2018. Public author events around the UK are organised by the [British Council Literature](#).*

*All photographs by Laima Stasiulionytė*

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