



At the Fallow's Edge (Inklings) (Volume 3)

Astrid Ivask

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At the Fallow's Edge is a bilingual Latvian/English book of poetry. Astrid Ivask is a writer and translator. Astrid Ivask's education continued at the University of Marburg, Germany, where she studied Classical, Romance and Slavic languages. Her poetry reflects a French influence that she had contact with through her father as a child, and again in her own studies. It is personal, from the viewpoint of a definite 'I,' and has a mystical attitude toward nature and religion. Three books of Astrid's poetry have been published in Latvian, and she has completed a manuscript of prose sketches. The poems in this selection are from her second book, *Ziemas tiesa* (Judgment of Winter, 1968), for which she was awarded the Zinaida Lazda prize; and *Solis silos* (A Step into the Forest, 1973), for which she received the Latvian Culture Foundation prize for literature. What impresses me most about her poetry is her sure sense of place; there is none of the characteristic lost bewilderment of an exile here. She has the Latvian love of nature, and expresses her being and mood and setting with a keen simplicity. Many Latvians who can not return to their homeland are bitter and unhappy anywhere else: not so Astrid. Her favorite place to vacation is Latvia's neighboring Finland, where she has managed to spend a dozen summer vacations during the past two decades. Her poetry is rich with an awareness of the Finnish gods of nature and a tribal sense of Latvian folklore. It is as though her homeland is veiled, but near; and she is open to whatever of life touches her in her paths. It has been said that one begins to read Astrid Ivask's poetry where her words leave off. Hers is an elegant sophistication, pared of nonessentials. Her poems are subtle multi-level experiences; they weave spells about the reader. There is a flowing together of time, a coexistence—"mountains/transparent; and you enter/the clear depths of the mountains." And yet she can delineate a poem to a terse, clear beauty—"knowing that only thin glass parts us, / I go on living as before,/not letting on to anyone how close I am/ —to life, to the abyss, and to you." Experiencing her poetry is not to step into a separate world that is hers—it is to share feelings that we know the familiar edges of, our earth-given life. Astrid Ivask is very active in the literary world. She has translated poetry from Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian and Russian into Latvian for emigre literary publications. Her husband, Ivar Ivask, is the editor of *World Literature Today* (formerly *Books Abroad*), and Astrid is a frequent contributor to it of reviews and translation work. She has taught Russian, German and French at several universities. From personal experience, I know she is unflagging in helpfulness and warmth to answer questions and solve problems in translation and international literature.

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