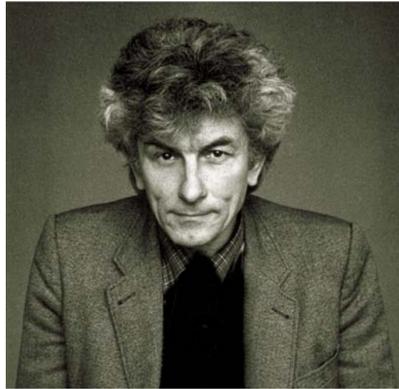


Imants ZIEDONIS

1933
Poet, essayist, publicist



An exceptionally talented poet, publicist, and personality in cultural and social life. The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Latvia was the time of Ziedonis. His creativity was determined by a philosophy, a challenge to uproot oneself from the monotonous routine and to boost one's own and the nation's self-confidence.

Ziedonis has published ten collections of poems, and each of them has been put out in tens of thousands of copies, all sold out. His poems *"Poēma par pienu"* [Poem about Milk] (1977) and *"Viddivārpa"* [Mid Twin Ear] (1982) are considered the highest achievement in Latvian lyrics of the 1970s and 1980s.

Imants Ziedonis' poetic prose — epiphanies — has become known far beyond the borders of Latvia. The Greek word *epiphaneia* means manifestation, shining forth or revelation. Similar to epiphanies, Ziedonis' fairy-tales are rich in colour, poetic language and revelations.

Imants Ziedonis' prose book *"Kurzemīte"* [The Land of Kurzeme] (1970 and 1974) marked a turning point in Latvian literature. It was a collection of essays on Latvians, their customs, everyday life and culture. The concept that not all was well and right in the Soviet Union was first made public.

Ziedonis' creative works and speeches introduced a political thaw in Latvia (a play on words: 'ziedonis' in Latvian means 'springtime'). In 1986 Imants Ziedonis was the first to start a bitter criticism of Soviet occupation. A member of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR, he voted for the restoration of Latvia's independence.

In the 1960s and 1970s Latvia was under a strict Communist regime. The expression or publishing of a free idea was unimaginable. People talked in half-whispers, and loud speaking was only for extolling Soviet power from a rostrum. Latvian writers and poets fell into two groups: the first who wrote for themselves and were not published; the other praised Stalin, Soviet power, kolkhozs and the army — they did not enjoy any popularity among readers. In the early 1960s Latvian book-publishing and the press witnessed the advent of a new, Soviet-educated generation. The most distinguished among them was Imants Ziedonis who realised that it was forbidden and impossible to speak about everything, so he sought such forms of expression that for Soviet censorship would be incomprehensible or overcomplicated. Later, when he was in the zenith of his popularity, not even Soviet censorship could exercise any influence on him.

An exceptionally talented poet, publicist, and personality in cultural and social life. Beginning with the 1960s, he was deeply respected and loved by his people, especially among his peers. A whole generation can be claimed to have lived their lives with Imants Ziedonis' poetry. His poetry books came out every year, tens and even hundreds of thousands of copies, and all of them were sold out. His poetic composition *"Motocikls"* [Motorbike] founded poetry theatre in Latvia. Imants Ziedonis' lyrics have been put to music by Latvian composers, and many poems have become so strongly associated with music that a Latvian may know the poem only with its melody.

Imants Ziedonis was born on 3 May 1933 in Ragaciems, in a Gulf of Riga fisherman's family. He finished Tukums High School No. 1, graduated from the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Latvian State University as well as from the Higher Courses for Literature in Moscow. His first publications saw the light of day in 1956, but in 1961 his first poetry collection was published.

Imants Ziedonis' spirit of an experimenter inspired him to create poetic prose — epiphanies, which have been translated into Lithuanian, English, German, Swedish and Ukrainian. They are tiny impulses, flashes that make individual events unusually bright and meaningful.

Similar to epiphanies, Ziedonis' fairy-tales are rich in colour, poetic language and revelations. Imants Ziedonis has been prolific in prose, writing about Latvians, their customs, everyday life and culture, about forests, foreign places, like the Altai, Tajikistan and Karelia.

Imants Ziedonis is the author of scripts for such films as *"Pūt, vējiņi!"* [Blow, Wind!], *"Puika"* [Boy] and others, the libretto of I. Kalniņš' opera after Rainis' play *"Spēlēju, dancoju"* [I Played, I Danced], the lyrics for I. Kalniņš' oratory *"Dzejnieks un nāra"* [The Poet and the Mermaid], the stage version of A. Čaks' poetry for the play *"Spēlē, spēlmani!"* [Play, Player!]. He has translated works by such Russian authors as A. Pushkin, A. Blok, E. Bagritsky and others.

In the 1980s, as the yoke of the Soviet regime slackened off, Imants Ziedonis used his influence and popularity to seek contacts with Latvians who had fled from Latvia in 1944 and 1945, and to meet Latvian writers and poets in exile. Ainars Meiers' interview with I. Ziedonis in the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* [Literature and Art] in 1986 was the first publication in Latvian press to openly criticise the Soviet system, as well as to demonstrate a civic consciousness and a striving for national liberation. Between 1987 and 1992 I. Ziedonis was Chairman of the Latvian Culture Foundation.

When writing about Imants Ziedonis, one cannot but mention his extensive social activities and his civic consciousness during the Latvian National Awakening. A member of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR, he voted for the restoration of Latvia's independence. In 1995 Imants Ziedonis was awarded the Order of the Three Stars, Second Class; his books, however, are still being published to meet the demand of readers.



Djārs Vācietis, Imants Ziedonis. By coincidence, two outstanding Latvian poets were born in the same year: 1933. In the late 1970s early 1980s, they set the tone not only for Latvian poetry, but also for the intellectual development of the nation in general. The poetry evenings with Ziedonis and Vācietis attracted people of all generations. The poets' presence and their unconventional train of thought urged people not only to discuss, but also to act. Their popularity did not hinder the poets, and they continued searching for the deeper essence of things and phenomena, and their revelations from astonishing points of views continued to surprise people

A conversation between two writers. Imants Ziedonis with Zigmunds Skujņš, one of the brightest 20th century Latvian prose masters (1926). Laconism, elaborate and ingenious style, vivid details, portraits of persons, neat dialogues, paradoxes, unusual comparisons — these are all characteristic of his works



The advisor to the Prime Minister. In Prime Minister Guntars Krasts' office. Sitting: Inese Vaidere, Guntars Krasts, Iveta Sers. Standing: Aivis Freidenfelds, Didzis Nimands, Eizens Cepurnieks, Juris Viņķelis, Roberts Rēmss, Imants Ziedonis. Later Ziedonis relinquished the *Saeima* Deputy's mandate, basing his decision on the fact that he no longer saw any possibility of influencing the development of political processes in the country



Imants Ziedonis, the popular song lyricist, and Raimonds Pauls, the composer. Many songs for choir, and solo songs, have been composed using Ziedonis' poetry as the lyric

Imants Ziedonis with his spouse. Ausma Kantāne, an actress of the *Dalle* Theatre, is a member of *Saeima* [Latvian Parliament], a member of its Education, Culture and Science Committee



Voted for the independence of Latvia. Imants Ziedonis' active position in life opened the gate for freedom of the press in the late 1980s. People elected Imants Ziedonis to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, voted for the Declaration of Independence on 4 May 1990. Pictured: people greeting the Deputies [Parliamentarians] with cheers and flowers at the *Saeima* House after they voted for independence

Poets Imants Ziedonis, Jānis Rokpelnis Jānis Peters in the 1980s



See that old man casting his net in
So unhurriedly from the shore —
Who would think that twice in his lifetime
The world was shaken by a world war?

See, that old man tending an apiary
Picks the swarm off a nearby lime —
So unhurriedly and so calmly,
So unruffled, he bides his time.

See, that old man pouring the malt in
Brews his beer in a leisurely way.
Who would think that he knew its habits,
The tricks that beer can sometimes play?

So unhurriedly and so calmly
The old man potters about till night,
As if eternity were awaiting
The old man somewhere
not far out of sight.

But if that old man does know for certain
That he is a particle of light,
Perhaps eternity does await him;
Who knows — after all, perhaps it might!

Calling the nation together. Imants Ziedonis was already using his popularity and recognition widely to pave the way for the consolidation of the Latvian nation during the Soviet period. He used this opportunity to visit the USA, where he met Latvians in exile. Ziedonis improved ties with the Latvians in America even more after Latvia regained independence in 1991

