



The Stars and Other Poems

Edith Södergran

**Translated by
Christian Ward**

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For Sara

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Who was Edith Södergran?

Edith Irene Södergran (4 April 1892 - 24 June 1923) was a Finnish-Swedish poet.

Södergran was born in St Petersburg, the daughter of Matts and Helena Södergran.

Now recognised as one of the most important poets to emerge from the region in that period, her work embraced the new ideals of Modernism and Futurism, creating a bold new style of poetry.

Her first book of poems was *Dikter* (Poems, 1916), which was followed by *Rosenaltaret* (The Rose Altar, 1919) and *Landet som icke är* (The land that is not, 1925) among others.

She was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1907 and the disease claimed her life in 1923. She was 31 years old.

Autumn

The bare trees stand around your house
and let in sky and air without bounds,
the bare trees descend to the beach
to see their reflections in the water.
A child plays in autumn's grey smoke
and a girl walks with flowers in her hand
and white silver-white birds soar
at the horizon.

Evening

I do not want to listen to the sad story
the forest tells.
The spruces are still whispering,
the leaves are still sighing,
long shadows slide between the unhappy trunks.
Come out onto the road. We will encounter no-one there.
The pale pink evening lingers over the ditch.
The road runs slowly and the road ascends carefully
and sees itself longing after the sun's light.

The Stars

When the night comes,
I stand on the stairs in the dark
listening to stars swarming in the garden.
Did you hear how one fell with such a clang!
Don't go on the grass with bare feet;
my garden is full of its fragments.

I

I am a stranger in this land
that lies deep under the sweltering sea,
where the sun looks in with bending beams
and the air floats between my hands.
They told me I was born in captivity –
here is no face that is known to me.
Was I a stone someone threw to the bottom?
Was I a fruit too heavy for its branch?
Here I wait at the foot of the murmuring tree,
how will I get up its slippery bark?
Up there the unsteady treetops meet,
there I will sit and scout out
the smoke from my homeland's chimneys...

I had to cross the solar system on foot

I had to cross the solar system on foot
before I found the first thread of my red dress.
Already I am aware of myself.
Somewhere in space hangs my heart,
shaking the void, streaming sparks
to other reckless hearts.

I saw a tree...

I saw a tree taller than all the others,
full of unattainable cones;
I saw a great church with open doors
and all who came out were pale and strong
and ready to die;
I saw a woman who smiled
as she threw a dice for happiness
and became forlorn when she saw that it lost.

A circle was drawn around these things
that no-one should cross.

My Artificial Flowers

I will send my artificial
flowers to your home.
I will set up my small
bronze lions by your door.
I will sit myself down
on the steps –
an oriental pearl lost
in the big city's noisy sea.

Prayer

God, you are almighty, have mercy on us!
See our well of adoration - it wants to grow deeper.
Seven days and seven nights
we celebrated the water
from our well for you.
Seven months and three years
we asked for your mercy
in the same place:
Let us enter into the quiet chamber, where you contemplate matters.

Starry Night

Unnecessary suffering;
unnecessary waiting,
the world is devoid of your laughter.
The stars fall -
a cold and lovely night.
Love smiles during sleep,
love dreams of eternity.
Unnecessary fear and unnecessary pain,
the world is less than nothing;
down in the depths of love, eternity's ring
is slipping from your hand.

The Armoured Train

Fifty wagons of hopes I loaded for your America.
They returned empty.
A freight of disappointment.
Now I will send my armoured train with rock-hard masks
on its threatening portholes:
Thousands of full wagons will be returning home.

The Forest Lake

I was alone on a sunny shore
by the forest's pale blue lake.
A single cloud floated in the sky,
a single island sat on the water.
The ripe sweetness of summer
trickled from every tree,
and into my open heart
fell a tiny drop.

Nocturne

Moonlit night of silver gossamer,
blue waves shimmering.
Silently, they follow one after the other.
The road is covered in shadow,
the shrubs on the beach weep quietly.
Dark giants watch over the silver.
Profound silence fills my summer,
sleep and dreams.
The moon is passing over the ocean,
white and tender.

Nothing

Trust me, my child, there is nothing,
and everything is just as you see it: the woods, smoke and the retreating flames.
Somewhere, perhaps, in a distant country
the sky is bluer and roses cling to a stone wall,
or perhaps a palm tree and a calmer wind—
here there is nothing.
Here there is nothing but snow on the branches of the spruce.
Here there is nothing to kiss with warm lips
and all lips cool with passing time.
But you say, my child, that your heart is strong,
and that living for nothing is better than dying.
What do you expect from death? Nausea drips from his clothes,
and killing yourself is the most unpleasant end of all.
We should learn to love life's long hours of sickness,
these barren years of longing,
like those brief moments when a desert blooms.

About the Author

Christian Ward is a London based poet and translator.

His work has appeared in journals such as The Kenyon Review, Diagram, Elimae, The Emerson Review, Denver Syntax, Envoi, Iota, Other Poetry and Poetry Wales.

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