

Milosz BIEDRZYCKI  
Poems

### **ON THE PREEMINENCE OF THE WORKING CLASS**

don't you think I haven't seen those crowds of men  
at the beginning of each shift turning into  
colorless ETs in work boots, casually  
punching their time cards, tipping  
their hardhats before oleographs of St. Barbara  
in the elevator shafts. those cars full of coal on TV  
are just for show (the real purpose of mines  
is never mentioned) underground most of them  
simply form lines, facing west,  
they patiently walk in place in three shifts  
(a hamster turns the wheel by running in place)  
so stop asking me how the earth rotates.

## VIRTUAL REALITY

I walk & marvel at how realistic it is  
I feel the pressure on my shoe exactly  
where the sole of my foot meets the sidewalk  
tilt my head slightly and I see a little different  
fragment of the picture. a red truck  
roaring on the left, louder  
in the middle, on the right.

dust, whirling—very  
realistic. but what's that? oomp-oomp-oomp  
like a thresher or a punk band. or is it blood  
in my ears? behind the city hall tower  
the same hippies with drums as last spring  
even the rhythm is the same. maybe it is blood—  
and the helpful processor serves instant

images: drums, hair, girls' filmy  
dresses, so that the sensations make  
sense. a boy circulates among the audience  
collecting money in his drum. I give him two thousand,  
he looks and mumbles, fanks. fanks? what's fanks?  
they should have added Polish dialogue. oh well,  
who cares, it's probably a pirated copy anyway.

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the most dangerous of all is air, scientists warn  
100% of addicts started out inhaling air.  
eight to twelve times a minute, twenty four  
hours a day. even a few inhaled doses can lead  
to permanent addiction. the first cry,  
a sudden short choke—and you can't  
live without it. pills, opiates, ideas, cars, feelings  
of superiority, of being hurt—just a matter of time.  
the gate has opened. there's no return.

some of the addicts featured in our program  
are already dead. a chinook blew all night.  
some older air addicts will die of a heart condition.  
no return. not everybody needs to have AIDS  
and beg: a spoon over a gas burner—a fancy  
business dinner in a hotel—a nice afternoon  
with the family in front of the tv—a hot  
dry wind blows October leaves  
down the alley—

## MASSACHUSETTS

pass me a tubajfor, creampuff  
hey you're soft as water,  
like melting butter, a total softie  
I was ripping out sajding for these eyetalians  
when you were still in diapers back in Poland  
have you ever seen a house made of tubajfors, creampuff?  
pass me a twentypound hammer  
we need to move this corner over by an incz  
not one angle is straight here  
have you ever seen a szitrok wall?  
have you ever rubbed in dżoint kompond, creampuff?  
have you poured boiling tar on rufing?  
modernity swirled below the surface  
and punctured the Earth's skin  
with all these skyscrapers  
like it or not  
but don't cough on me like that, creampuff  
you can cough all the fiberglass out after work  
go to dankin donats after midnight they'll give you  
yesterday's donats six for a dollar  
coat your throat with them, it'll help  
you're a total softie but don't worry  
you'll learn fast. life is very simple  
simpler than you think  
you'll get a gray beard, a kar from the junkyard  
and you'll be giving creampuffs just like you  
rides to work.

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I am a night that doesn't want to end  
so hot and dry my throat sticks  
the soft walls coated by mucus by dust

I am the giant letters IŁAWA GŁÓWNA  
the ashen glow of sodium lamps  
the loud buzz of a fluorescent tube in the corridor

I am the mumbling of a hippie demanding  
three thousand zlotys for a cup of tea  
because the pigs only just let him go

I am the pigs on the platform hunched in the wind  
eyes red from lack of sleep  
chins tucked in the collars of their uniforms

I am the iron-gray river under the bridge  
I am the clatter of a train on the bridge's grid  
I am a mercury vapor rising above the fields

I am the broken window a trip without a moral  
I am the broken window that lets the fog  
seep in, I am the clatter, the travel, the night.

## HYMN

smears from insects are pure light full of power.

remains of smashed insects on the windshield are pure light.

the river bubbling with potholes rolling under the bridge of our truck's axle  
is pure light.

the front and rear axles floating over the solid asphalt river are pure light.

the big ploughed field white with storks gathering for flight is pure light.

the pilgrimage walking alongside the road, the nun with a bullhorn stuck on a stick  
are pure light.

pilgrims in sideways ribbons of rain, the nun with a bullhorn stuck on a stick  
are pure light.

storks wading in the brown field, stubble turned face down is pure light.

children selling dusty plums on the roadside are pure light.

the plums' taut skin in the ribbons of rain, the children clinging to the tree trunk under  
its thick crown are pure light.

the dyke above the road, the pond pinpricked with rain is pure light.

the slit of red sky between the rain and horizon,

two rows of lindens leading wet sand to the horizon,

the red glow on the wires alongside the road.

## SPRING

I deal in guns, my belt sewn inside with gold pinches me,  
my leg rots bit by bit. this dream goes on for nearly twenty years.  
after waking up, my friend G. comes, he jerks his head  
robotically. silently he picks up small objects from the table

and tries to leave. Pharaoh's spirit seizes him, makes him lewd.  
autumn with its scent of burning leaves or long bare branches  
in early spring are not good for swallow's sons. I don't want  
him to have to watch the walls in the room bending apart and

the sizzling hell next door with its devils. is this a trick  
of chemistry in the head. or reality that one must accept.  
is the current prime minister, who starts to get it, mad less or more,  
or is the one less mad who takes the world's centrifuge word for word.

1999

*two thousand zero zero party over, oops out of time  
so tonight I'm gonna party like it's nineteen ninety-nine*  
Prince, 1999

today it is as if every day had already happened  
and was happening for the first time.  
looking into the sun now with open eyes, then closed,  
the delta of small veins under the orange peel  
of eyelids, then the dance of shapes and feelings  
before the open eyes  
in the corner of the backyard where dust rises.  
what could I have lost  
if I still have my watch, wallet and sense of identity?  
listening to a cassette found in the basement  
surprised that hits to which I once kissed you sound so ancient?  
surprised that hits I forgot  
now run through me like electricity?

the old tape jams in the machine  
the new day breaks off and rolls in  
the new day starts full of surprise  
the old tape ends without reprise.



## A POEM FOR ANN FRENKEL

Yes, I played in a band, until the bandeonist's  
thumb got overdeveloped. He practiced too much.  
It's hard to flick thoughts from the world of sparkle  
without scratches. My names  
have scattered in all directions  
in a lively *anagrammento*.

Now I approach the piano  
like a dusty slumbering animal. My fingers itch  
sometimes, just a bit, when I touch  
a feather duster. Where is the wind  
that would spin gray dandelion clocks back  
into golden locks, in a blink—

**THE MUSIC HOUR HOSTESS  
ON AL-JAZEERA THROWS A FIT**

bon soir, she always said politely  
and bye-bye. in between, shukran habibi. and ana mabsuta  
but it wasn't that she was upset. quite the opposite.  
Bedouin dreams of luxury, whizzing Lexuses,  
water gurgling everywhere. girls belly  
dancing at the very edge of the cognitive horizon  
of this likable man with moustache and belly.  
everything in its place. sweet ornaments  
waving their hips just right. he sings, sings with he  
roic tenor, a very powerful man. giving so much. and she?  
suddenly a vampire, suddenly mabsuta  
brazenly and wildly, legs all over the place.  
at least the remote is safely stored  
in the sofa. she? should know better.  
she gets up, goes, clicks, off—

*Translated from the Polish by Frank L. Vigoda*