

Possible Solutions



Krzysztof Ostaszewski



Possible Solutions

Krzysztof Ostaszewski

Légréte Press Translation Series
Volume One

Légréte
Press

Copyright © 1986 by Krzysztof Ostaszewski

All rights reserved.

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-083200
ISBN 0-936993-16-2

Except where indicated otherwise, the work in this volume was translated from the Polish by the author.

Légèreté Press
Post Office Drawer 1410
Daphne, Alabama 36526 USA

Some of these works have previously appeared in *Propositions* (Purple Heather Publications, England), *Poetry Australia*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Black Bear*, *Writ*, *The Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The New Quarterly*, *Waves*, *Aldebaran*, *Moments*, *Moods and Memories*, *In Quiet Places*, *Légèreté*, *Rhythm-and-Rhyme*, *The Toll Gate Journal*, and *Poetic Justice*.

PREFACE

This book is a form of a memoir of a search. In its most important aspect, I may say that my search is now complete--so I wouldn't write this book any more. This, however does not indicate a negation of the search itself. Also, it doesn't change the fact that my answers are simpler than I ever expected, and not always to the questions I had asked. Finally, I have amassed new questions, of a more specific nature, or maybe of a different nature.

All the above is not an attempt to be sophisticated. I am just surprised.

Krzysztof Ostaszewski

Louisville, Kentucky
13 March 1987

OPUS 80, A TRAGEDY

Vienna
28 September 1976

Recently the beaches of the Riviera have been afflicted with a plague of cats. Some of the local residents claim that these are not cats at all. They say this because the creatures have squirrel-like red tails and blue eyes, in which there lurks something undefined, something ominous. And although the psychosis has no basis, tourists are abandoning the fashionable seaside resorts. All the while the cats prance proudly about the streets, lolling on the terraces of elegant villas. A man may be lying peacefully on the beach sunning himself, reading a book, or just brooding over his life, and a cat will sit right behind him, silent, very still, but in such a way as to be noticed. It squints its eyes rapaciously, staring at the sea. It seems the beast is lost in thought, pondering some decision.

The cats have yet to do anyone any harm, so really there are no reasons for panic. Yet it is difficult to remain calm when the animals appear everywhere, red tails flashing at every street corner. They do not meow, they do not purr, they just sit silently in some horrible way. No one can say anything definite about them, because thus far everyone has seen only one cat. There should be some comfort in this, except that the beasts are seen by everyone all the time. If someone is sitting on the beach, looking a cat in the eye, then at the same time, in some totally different place, the mayor of Nice is wiping the sweat from his brow staring in alarm at the red-tailed grey cat strolling around his office. The animals are real, they can even be petted. But their blue eyes then observe so penetratingly, so seriously, that no one tries to approach them anymore.

The cats have overrun the Riviera. The beaches and the sea, the hotels--everything belongs to them. They even come at night; then people waken up with a scream--and see the cats lying by their beds. They too are asleep. Dreaming of people.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 16, A COMEDY

Katowice
24 June 1977

In the nineteenth century of the New Era, on the planet Theta, two great sculptors, Bayten and Gayten, discovered that beautiful sculptures could be made not only of stone, but of metal.

Since Sculpture was an expression of the Secret of Singular Existence for the inhabitants of Theta, this discovery caused a great stir. The reactions were many, mainly indignation at the shameless profanation of sacred traditions--for how can one sculpt in metal?

Bayten and Gayten sacrificed their whole life in the struggle for their idea. After their death, they were recognized as being as great, perhaps even greater, than those who had once sculpted so beautifully in stone.

In the twentieth century of the New Era, on the planet Theta, only metal sculptures were created. Stone has been designated an anachronistic resource.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 75, A COMEDY

Łódź
7 July 1977

A certain great scientist once developed a machine for killing people with blue eyes. It was a truly amazing apparatus, functioning in accordance with all known laws of nature. In it, the scientist made use of every modern achievement in science and technology. The fool-proof system for seeking out and annihilating blue-eyed people was fascinating. The harmony of the mechanism seemed to be the fulfillment of man's dreams.

At a scientific conference, a certain man asked the scientist just what purpose his fabulous machine served, and whether it shouldn't be remembered that it was possible to have blue eyes and still be a man (maybe even a scientist).

Of course it turned out that the questioner was a chance guest at the conference, and a dilettante at that. So he couldn't really be expected to make pronouncements on such matters as the remarkably functioning mechanism.

His question was simply inconsistent with the laws of science and poorly formulated.

Fortunately for him, his eyes were brown.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 53. A COMEDY

Lódź
10 October 1977

The little creature's occupation is rather unusual, none of his friends even suspects him of such activities. He manages quite well, though he must be completely on his own when he decides to continue his work (his day-to-day job is also his creative work, but we don't want these words interpreted ambiguously). The little creature has grown quite accustomed to being alone, though the need to be constantly on the alert, to avoid people's probing glances, has added to his problems and anxieties somewhat. No one must know what the little creature does between nine in the morning and five in the afternoon. At the same time, all should assume that he has some sort of normal job. The little creature gets up at eight o'clock, washes, and quickly eats breakfast. Then he puts on his green uniform (because of it, he must stealthily sneak downstairs, but that is not so difficult since he is so small). He always sets out for work full of enthusiasm (this fact will be explained later on in the story, at least apparently, I repeat). He hides somewhere in the green of the city lawns (he is small and in uniform, so no one can see him), he looks for four-leaf clovers. He tears one leaf from each of these. Occasionally, he finds five-leaf clovers--from these he tears two leaves. He works by the sweat of his brow.

Each month he appears before his superior (sometime around payday, between the thirtieth and thirty-first). It is a difficult moment. He then receives payment for his labours, modest, but sufficient for his needs (if they in fact exist). But if it should happen that he overlooked a four-leaf clover and it has been discovered by someone else (employed in a different department) a severe penalty awaits him. His salary, not to mention bonuses, is withheld.

We need not add that all instances of discovery of four-leaf clovers (by anyone) are Duly Reported to the little creature's superior.

The little creature tries to justify himself, saying that the four-leaf clover found by this person need not bring him good luck at all, especially in such cases when the person does not believe in its significance, but these explanations do not help, the regulations do not make concessions for unconscientious workers.

And so the little creature is always very happy when he finds a four-leaf clover. Then he knows that fate has smiled on him, that the threat of any penalty has been momentarily deferred. But in order to be truly happy, he would have to find all the four-leaf clovers in the world.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Lódź
12 January 1978

I am a dark cloud over the city

I arrived their welcome was enthusiastic
there were dogs barking at me
the upper classes didn't change their habits

I am a dark cloud over the city

a man in a grey coat followed me
I ran till my strength disappeared
he uttered imprecations against me

I am a dark cloud over the city

I was quiet I was a captive on a bus
I will be a witness before leaving I'll fall asleep
I'll fall asleep poisoned by a winter venom

I am a dark cloud over the city
you do not face me

OPUS 71. A COMEDY

Lódź
23 April 1978

When flowers bloom, we look at them and think they're pretty. We also look at people's faces and are attracted to them or not. Or we listen to birds singing--all this can be very beautiful.

But if we had one more sense, would a whole new magical territory open before us? We can assume that all beauty is born in us, therefore any new impressions would not essentially ennoble us. Yet we would be compelled to ascribe certain positive traits to objects which do not excite us now, objects we don't even notice at present. For we have no way of knowing whether beauty is associated with only those senses which we possess at the moment; if so, every new sense would never rise above the others. But wouldn't our present world suffer by this? Perhaps its essence (that which our extra sense would provide) would not be contained in that which we find beautiful? Yet if something is ugly and beautiful at the same time, we acknowledge its beauty (to distinguish the more valuable idea and to submit to the principle of contradiction). In the same way, everything is worthy of our admiration, but we are no longer capable of it, as a civilization we have matured to completely different problems. And we're still growing.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 60, A COMEDY

Lódź

5 May 1978

Let's imagine a certain specific substance, whose essential attribute is variability. It also tends to momentarily, sometimes longer, remain in its actual stage. The only method by which to alter this state is prodding. Yet this deforms it irreversibly, since the energy expended in the process is absorbed by it. In this way each further attempt to mobilize it must necessarily be more labourious. And such an attempt must follow, since variability is the substance's essential characteristic. Doubts could be raised--is the use of force against the substance really necessary? But it is unavoidable; such is the nature of its variability.

Let us observe that this simple formula contains one rather strange element: each subsequent prodding must be stronger. The substance thus becomes an arena for a contest of force against force. And the chain is endless: individual elements may be destroyed in it, even the substance itself may disappear, that very substance which we are trying to describe at this very moment.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 121, A COMEDY

Lódź

10 May 1978

Let's imagine an aquarium full of fish. The aquarium should have thick walls, so that it can withstand all the pressure necessary for our experiment. Above the surface of the water there are containers with food, attached to a movable lid. Attached to each food container there is a string, hanging above the water. A tug on this string causes a momentary opening of the cover: food pours into the aquarium, then the entire cover is fractionally lowered. Those fish which are bold enough to pull on a string fulfill, in the eyes of the other fish, a doubly useful function: first, they provide nourishment for all the inhabitants of the aquarium, but least of all for themselves since by the time they realize what they've done, most of the food is gone; and second, they lower the lid, thereby also lowering the ends of the strings, making it progressively easier to reach the food.

The process of acquiring food has, for the fish, a very basic significance; without it, every other activity would be not only unsuccessful but pointless. Therefore they assess the gradual lowering of the lid positively, observing in this action great possibilities for the future.

But let us note that the accompanying increase in pressure inside the aquarium must eventually lead to a situation in which reaching for the food will be completely problem-free (the string will be within easy reach), but all the other activities of the fish will be eliminated because of the horrendous pressure of the surroundings.

This process is irreversible because the fish (we can hope) will not choose self-annihilation.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński



OPUS 35, A COMEDY

Lódź
18 May 1978

Let's imagine a large cage full of birds. And let's pretend it has one additional very unusual feature--if any of the birds comes near the cage's mesh, the bars separate, leaving wide open space before the bird.

And so the walls are always some distance from the inhabitants. And in this way they don't have their freedom of movement restricted in any way.

Let us observe, however, that for the birds nothing actually exists beyond the cage; everything on the outside is distant from them. On the other hand everything exists for them potentially, no matter which way they fly, they're bound to find what they're looking for. Of course they won't find everything right away. That would be impossible.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 42, A COMEDY

Lódź

25 May 1978

Aristotle's definition of truth is depressing to a certain degree. Because an idea which is supposed to change the world, that is, an idea of value, must anticipate reality. This kind of idea, however, in accordance with the above definition, is false.

There is something very subtle in this deduction. For man is in some way a creature who, in the name of imagined visions, functions creatively. He is a fallacy shaping the world. The whole is a structure immune to categories of ethics, which are ascribed to it by man.

Regardless of the logical side-effects of these words, it must be emphasized again that the dynamics of human consciousness are connected to the static character of its supra-rational strata (metaphysics precedes gnosiology).

Truth is my friend, but I like Mozart better.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 108, A COMEDY

Lódź

28 May 1978

The only criterion for distinguishing the present moment from others which have passed is the memory of the past. If not for memories, there would be no way for us to feel the passage of time. And we accept it without reservation, assuming it to be the way it is, whereas it is only the accumulation of memories.

Yet if we were to recognize the creation of these memories and their differentiation as a natural function of human consciousness we could then, without fear, imagine ourselves as beings which float on the surface of events--always the same ones--in one unalterable darkness, creating for ourselves beneath it a bizarre, confused, chaotic vision of the past, which is no more than a longed-for presence, which in turn does not exist at all. And death--we could call death the ultimate absence of memories.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 109, A COMEDY

L6d2

29 May 1978

Each of us will become a specialist and will be well-versed in his own essential trifles. Keeping in mind the growing possibilities which accompany technological progress, we will sink into the contemplation of our toys, until finally we go mad. Then we will become small grey robots, floating along with others just like ourselves, in this way (at least apparently, I repeat) honing our improvisational talents. The visions of science-fiction writers will be fulfilled: they sincerely believe that in the future, machines will perform grimy and unpleasant tasks, and even pleasant ones. Yet who would suspect that these machines will be people, directed by a slightly larger machine, one which they will fear more than they do today. They--all of them--will carry their groceries in identical green shopping bags. Dachunds, stupid dogs, idiotic in shape and movement, will be annihilated, replaced by other useful creatures. Generally, everyone will be friends, at least if they can bring themselves to do so.

General specialization awaits us all, along with the great task of destroying dilettante attitudes to serious problems.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 47, A COMEDY

Gdańsk

3 August 1978

They were building a house. They worked steadfastly, they used many bricks and an unusual amount of mortar. Their efforts had almost symbolic meaning.

Finally they finished it. It was a rather large rectangular structure made of bricks secured by mortar. And the interior? There was no 'interior,' there were bricks everywhere--naturally, of the highest quality.

A certain passerby addressed them in the following way: How can it be? Can one live inside it? You want to call it a house?

Offended, they replied that their creation was made of bricks and mortar. So what else could their work be if not a house? Furthermore, since they used material of the highest quality and their efforts were supreme the result had to be of corresponding excellence.

They chased the passerby away.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Gdańsk
8 August 1978

better that they endure in uncertainty
than transform themselves with certitude
as long as they remain ignorant they are beautiful
as long as they remain ignorant they love each other
what an unhappy misunderstanding
no one wants to know them better
only some people talk to them
only the chosen ones talk to them
their words change the world but they do not change them

better that they just exist than die like the others
if they shout it is the rapture of shouting which compels them
they do not feel free they do not think of liberty
still they know it so well
they are like migratory birds returning
like rivers flowing arrested in one instant
time is not their foe nor is it their ally
their immortality is but a gift of fate

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 87, A COMEDY

Sarbinowo
16 August 1978

When it was learned that the mosquito drinks blood, great consternation spread through the animal kingdom.

For the mosquito had been disregarded till then.

And the bear, raising his paws to the heavens, declared: 'Forsooth, I say unto you, he penetrates the skin and drinks the blood.'

And all the animals felt anxiety in their hearts.

'Is such an atrocity possible?' asked the doe, contemplating her sleek young body.

But no one knew the answer.

And the leech, seeing the universal condemnation of the mosquito, herself felt threatened.

She spoke in the mosquito's defence.

But no one said a word against the leech.

And all the animals looked upon her with distrust.

Then the baboon took the floor, submitting a proposal.

And it was decreed that the lion, king of all animals, be replaced by the mosquito.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Sarbinowo
27 August 1978

there's an alien among us
he calms our thoughts
his magic melts slowly in us
just as a memory or an oblivion
just as a winter nightmare

we'll not be taught by him
we've had our lessons
yet we'll be looking for him

one of us will be late for the meeting
the other one will come very early



OPUS 28, A COMEDY

Łódź
7 October 1978

Let's imagine several snails crawling around a circle. And let's suppose that the dream of these snails is to reach the centre of the circle (one dream for all). Well, we'd say, nothing could be simpler than to head in that direction: the road is just as long and just as difficult for all of them, since the distance from all points to the centre of the circle is the same. This is true, but we haven't considered one further problem. For among the snails there is one stronger and more important than the rest, in short--he is the leader of the pack. The others must comply with his orders--by necessity. And this most important snail found his way to the centre, straight and simple, along the radius; now he is ordering all the others to crawl along the arc of the circle to the point from which he departed, and only then to proceed to the centre--in his tracks. Thus, any snail wanting to reach the centre by the shortest route is making a mistake, and the leader of the pack proves it to him.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 12, A COMEDY

Lódź

10 October 1978

The cage consisted of two sections connected by a passageway. A metal grating placed at the bottom of one of the sections was connected to an electrical circuit. And in this part of the cage there was a rat.

A current was passed through the grating. The rat jumped up and down, wriggled its paws and squealed. It squealed very strangely. But the experiment didn't produce the desired effect: for it was expected that the rat would develop a conditioned reflex and cross to the other part of the cage at the sight of the small light which was turned on at the same time as the current in the grating. The rat squealed but did not cross over. It was carried across. Of course it returned to its section and again began to squeal. The rat was thus entirely unsuited to the experiment. It could in no way be evaluated positively.

Today, fortunately, such rats no longer exist in the world of science.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Lódź

10 January 1979

my friend I am but a silent passerby

I told you a story and you listened to it
you caught the words like fish and swallowed them
you took no more than the world offered you

my friend I am but a silent passerby

tell me if my mistake was my mistake alone
if tomorrow there is a day sunlight rain and I leave
you will not learn what my story was

my friend I am but a silent passerby

I will go where my shadow sends me
I will flow from one drop of water to another
the moon will look in my face and I will be no more

my friend I am but a silent passerby

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 5, A COMEDY

Poznań
4 March 1979

There were flowers in the garden, tulips, lilies, pansies, and others. Each of them knew its place well and was happy with the situation as it was.

One day a rose bloomed in the garden. She was beautiful. Yet other flowers did not notice her beauty. They were disturbed by her unusual behaviour, especially by a lack of respect for common customs. No one ever bloomed the way she did, no one every looked the way she did. And it appeared as if she didn't care whether the flowers were shocked at her behaviour or not. She was just smiling upon everyone and telling all the neighbours her funny stories.

The flowers judged the rose severely. She was sentenced to death. She was cut, then put in a vase. There she died.

OPUS 20, A COMEDY

Molunat
29 August 1979

At night the stars look down from heaven at the people on earth. Each of them shines with the light within it and with which it is, by nature, indivisibly tied.

People raise their heads, look up in the sky and ask--which star shines most brightly, which is the most important?

And sometimes one of the stars would like to give them a human answer--then those down below smile and say, 'Look! A falling star!'

But whoever would like to hear a true starry reply--it makes no difference which star shines most brightly or which can't even be seen, for stars shine not for their brightness but for the light alone.

On the great tapestry of the North and South, people still seek different answers.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Lódź
19 November 1979

there are so many questions around me
even more than stars over my head
grains of sand under my camel's feet
I look for questions I am the questions
I know my trip will be forty-nine days long
I know I should wait for the end
and be as patient as my old camel
I should wait quietly for the end

Kamienica
3 February 1980

what can I do when I am hidden in white flakes
in the snow quietly falling on me
if the snow reminds me--you were not here
if the snow speaks to me--what shall I answer?

OPUS 30, A COMEDY

Lódź
15 March 1980

They say the lion is a wild and cruel animal. They also say that the lion is lazy, it lays about for whole days and does nothing.

By a strange coincidence a certain man became the owner of a lion. A lion in a cage. For quite a long time he could find it no activity. Then finally he managed to get some piecework for it--knitting.

The lazy lion did not want to knit. The man bought a whip and a riding crop. With the help of these instruments he encouraged the do-nothing to work. But the widely held opinion of a lion's laziness was confirmed. Under the influence of the man's determined action, the animal did start to work, but it did little and ruined a significant amount of expensive wool in the process.

The widely held opinion of the lion's cruel character was also confirmed. One day it broke out of its cage and ate its master.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Łódź
10 May 1980

there are few differences now between the sky and the trees
birds doze on branches dance in flocks in the sky
their shadows cast on human heads on dry yellowed leaves
on grey black houses in the apartments of the locals

and no one will waken
in such a large bus
the locals small and brave
in colours too bright

there are few differences now between us and the birds
those which sleep and those which are no more
we exist we do not dream we go on brave and small
there are few differences now between us today and yesterday

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 10. A TRAGEDY

Toronto
28 August 1980

Go to sleep by a fire. Your hands are already asleep. The tiny
sparks dazzle your eyes. Sleep while you still have the breath.

You will have more time to fall asleep. Before sleep catches you
lulled and defenceless, before this happens, you will see the world.

The world sells you its fabulous wares, and all its people praise
their charms for you with a smile. Buy your place. Sell your place.

Move on. Imagine a large city in North America. Let it be a city
that gets bigger every minute, so that soon it will spread beyond the
limits of its own country.

You are (I am) riding a subway in this city. Across from me sit
two elderly ladies in blue dresses.

I fall asleep by a fire, by the fire of their words.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 6, A TRAGEDY

Chicago
17 September 1980

Old grey-haired travellers tell marvellous stories about oceans. After all, couldn't the oceans be made out of tiny blue and green balls, with white clouds added? --we wouldn't notice the difference. Or think about coasts. There are only three oceans, there shouldn't be too many coasts. Yet every traveller counts them again.

Your fate might depend on whether you travel below clouds, or above them. If you're Australian (or everyone thinks you are), you can look at the world through clouds. And you can see the world through them.

You'll see the oceans, you'll see them suddenly. Be careful, they might dazzle you.

But isn't that enough now, there's an end to the oceans. When they disappear, there will be people again--women with dark eyes, men looking over their shoulders.

OPUS 1, A TRAGEDY

Łódź
17 November 1980

I spin a thread from one moment of my memory. The thread floats away carried by the wind. I see it now, in the distance, above dark roofs of houses. While I am there I gaze upon an island of small stones. There are dignitaries in green costumes dancing on the island; they float among the clouds; the wind billows their robes, blusters their fabulous neckties. I wrap them in my thread, I fly away. I am here, then I am gone. The air's faintest stirring rouses me. I return, I spin a thread from my memory; from the thread I weave a tapestry for all my distant relatives. Fly!

The warnings subside; I hear them no more. I am here again. I am gone. If I spin a thread from my memory, I no longer see it.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

OPUS 2, A TRAGEDY

Gander
7 September 1981

Sad and quiet, people sleep over white clouds. And there are clouds beneath them, birds above them. All is nothing but a warm farewell.

Despite the warmest farewells, the fondest words, these people sleep and each of them is just lonely, hoping to share a few words. But the words will not reach them, the words will not touch their bodies.

These, who bid farewell to the travellers, are right, especially when they do not want to, when they do not believe in clouds, dreams and birds.

These, who bid farewell, wave their hands. The one who leaves has only himself. His two hands hold the luggage bags.

OPUS 15, A TRAGEDY

Seattle
3 October 1981

I hide myself in the dusky reality, in a thicket of cars, colourful leaves and strange people. My thoughts hover about me, I look at them in silence. The state of my mind becomes the state of the world around me just as easily as the world penetrates me.

Is the reality sullen? No, it just inclines me to reconciliation, it taps me on my shoulder. I need more than this. Yet I need this too. I desire the reality. I dream to know its true (does true necessarily mean--hidden?) shape.

I am here. I am at this place, at this time. I run away from something. I am running now.

I hide myself in the dark reality and I learn it. I have always learnt it. There hasn't been any refuge for me. As well as there isn't any now.

But where is the calm I experienced? Who gave it to me? Who took it away from me?

Now it disappears. Although the rest remains the same.

Seattle
28 October 1981

examine your doors and windows
examine things around you
for two reasons
there's still time to do that
now is the time to do that
the world around us won't last
we'll see it disappearing
open windows will be important
open doors will be even more important

examine your words
you've lost some of them
but then again you've found some of them
this is the time
it's not too late
the unalterable will alter
we'll be left with the unknown
although we'll learn it before
and this is the only time

OPUS 3, A COMEDY

Seattle
30 December 1981

Let's imagine a mountain, at the foot of which stands a large gathering of people. They are looking at a ball located at the mountain's peak. A small silver ball.

'Oh, what a beautiful ball,' some of them say.

'What an interesting ball,' observe the more erudite in the crowd.

A few of the people look at the ball with anxiety. But they make up a small minority. They don't really count.

But wait--the ball starts to roll down the side of the mountain. The crowd stirs. And the ball, gathering speed on its descent, approaches them, grows larger.

'A great, great sight,' shout the crowd excitedly.
'Magnificent!' observe the more erudite in the crowd.
And only a small number of the crowd expresses its concern that
the ball is heading straight for the crowd standing at the foot of
the mountain. But their voices are drowned in the crowd's delighted
roar.
The ball rolls, falls like a stone, crushing everything along its
path. 'We can't stop it,' the people say. 'We could have done something
before,' they maintain, 'but now it's too late.'
They are quiet now. Waiting.

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński



OPUS 14. A TRAGEDY

Seattle
20 January 1982

If I happen to write about the world (I don't want to do that,
I don't mean to do that), if I happen to look at the world (this is
my desire), I will see the sky full of clouds, getting darker every
day (there's a plane flying in the midst of clouds, so we must be in
the modern world--isn't the modern world a cavalcade of planes and
helicopters?), I will see small, smokey chimneys--they are smaller than
they appear to be, the smoke is billowing out of them and wandering
among the trees.

If I happen to travel throughout the world (isn't that my destiny,
my curse, my quiet sigh), I will walk in the streets of cities, surprised
again. Yet these cities are my weariness, my escape and my dance--
a tempestuous modern dance.

I look around (I let my eyes serve reality), I behold the everyday
life of the locals, as if their fate were to waste their lives. When
I talk about reality I mean wasted lives, when I talk about wasted
lives I mean reality--and something more.

Seattle
28 July 1982

the King is giving a speech on Loyalty (to the people)
the Executioner is glancing over his instruments but (listen carefully)
now everything is ready we aim at the Modern Times (enthusiasm)
we aim at it we distribute the leftovers of the past
our legs--I say unto you--our legs carry us away
any hand moved any nose turned red
there would be as much laughter as electricity in the air
our legs--I say unto you--our legs do the job
we carry the King in the middle of the column
he looks magnificent we are proud of him
aren't we? --now look--there we go
our legs--I say unto you--our legs create our Future

Seattle
4 October 1982

Instructions for the Apprentice Gladiator

exercise restraint in the arena
bow if you want to but within reason within reason
not to those in the front rows because what's the use
count your steps one day they will be important
concentrate on the task at hand
you will be accountable only for your work
walk calmly you may raise your arms
but do not marvel at the light or the public
despite appearances you will be alone in the arena
you will be there not of your own will and for a time only
intellect dictates that you must survive
don't forget--other than the arena you are given nothing
knowing this you can imagine the rest

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński and the author

Seattle
22 December 1982

voices and sounds still get through to me
and amid this hubbub lights flicker returning lights
in any case--good night--and don't look back
don't look forward either there's nothing to see
calmly now calmly don't complain about reality
everyone except the privileged has equal rights
the world promises nothing promises are but dreams

hello again--one must survive somehow
I repeat words about survival everyone repeats them
come in--the door is open your time has come
here is your gift and an apple for the road
later on you'll find water and some crumbs of bread
and one more word--I so fear making mistakes
I fear darkness getting lost black cats
I seek comfort in the night lights of the city

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Seattle
10 January 1983

our inheritors will give us fancy names
they will name us once we're history
that is once we're gone

our grandchildren
and their grandchildren will talk about us
as dinosaurs which did not survive

they will write beautiful words about us
they will form entire sentences about us
what days those were what houses
they will marvel at our legs
our hope for the future
and our songs our lovely songs

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Seattle
2 February 1983

it's beautiful now the blue sky the sunshine
faster--I say to myself--I'm swallowing the day
that means only that I'm gagging on the air
this metaphysical cough and dark as a shadow
I play I choke I worry and everything before the end
for there will still be an end a farewell to the wind
it will be more beautiful I'll escape alone sentence escape
opinion solitude my rights who knows where

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Seattle
3 February 1983

of course there weren't many of us
no one expected many enemies
but here--our wishes fulfilled we're enemies
this is just a description mind you just a description
sir you're chewing words sir you're spitting words
sir you saliva is paper and paint but what paint
modern I repeat modern
on the surface at least we're buried in questions
but in truth--paint sir newspapers
radio television humbug and reality
a kick sir give him a kick he talks too much
in the face sir in the face his head bent
over there madmen are dancing recounting history
sir they ask you about dancing we'll send dancers
we'll sell visionaries we'll buy and things will be better progress
you can go anywhere you go newspapers
we have paper sir and we have paint
everything can be covered in paper
maybe not everything can be covered in paint
but in paper sir in paper
sir why are you shoving
this is evolution this is entirety
fear not fear not the brightness
sir you are illuminated

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Seattle
16 February 1983

now I have lights above my head I speak to myself
forget the lights forget my words listen to me
all this is happening now but--tomorrow will be different
I've agreed for today and for tomorrow--a funny deal
I mumble mumble look at the lights I turn them on
I pay with all the moments which seemed to be so cheap
no supplications please listen to me now
oh--what a mistake! oh--misunderstanding!
there are various objects in the room
each of them expresses its opinion
time cooperates with them
yet time is on my side

Seattle
9 March 1983

without interpretation we do not sing
the gentlemen will look at us and say
what's to be done or rather what have we done
and what are we about to do
because i repeat
without interpretation we are not here
a void if i may say so
clearly we can be seen but somehow we are not seen
though in truth it's hard to say
there's no certainty--which should be a comfort to us
and there is certainty--which should please us
in general we should calm down
it's high time we did
high time i say

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Seattle
20 April 1983

our times have proved correct
our beliefs have proved correct
victorious revolutionaries
murder
vanquished revolutionaries

vanquished revolutionaries
threaten
victorious revolutionaries

dolls have good intentions
teddy bears have warm little hearts

reality is taking shape
there is courage in this statement
unfortunately
i repeat unfortunately
only a jinx stands in our way

actually things are fine
it was worth winning
after all victory is most important
in victory there is certainty
without victory there are no values
so the victors tell us

everything is growing calm
even the birds are returning

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyfiski



Seattle
19 February 1984

the first days were the hardest
the commandant beat us about the face or wherever
and it was hard to forget where we had come from

but soon we grew accustomed
the heat was no longer so unbearable
sometimes the commandant could be bribed
with a few cigarettes the devils would turn down the flames

finally it was hard to imagine that things had ever been different
that somewhere there was a purgatory maybe even a heaven
some people told us the most horrible stories
of the suffering that awaits us should we not support the commandant

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński and the author

Seattle
19 May 1984

first there were revolutions--games threats
then there was blood and dreams fulfilled
an intoxicating sense of victory
the solitude of dreamers
the euphoria of dreamers

in the end people were slaughtered like swine
but then pigs were not in abundance
revolutionary songs were sung
in various airs

that's why i ask myself
to what extent does my place define me
and how do i define my place
which of my dreams will blind me
at which point will my blindness be lost in dreams

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński

Minneapolis
28 July 1984

the master gazed at me indifferently
a new living tiny ruler in his power machine
silently thoughts and fears coursed in me
silently since he might hear
for the purposes of the scientific model
and the state apparatus
one can assume that there were no thoughts in me
one cannot however
negate
my fear

it is an essential element
in this very model

Translated by
Wojtek Stelmaszyński



Biobibliography

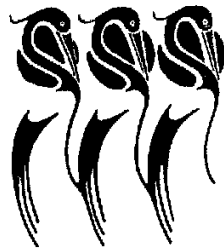
Krzysztof Ostaszewski was born in 1957 in Łódź, Poland. He studied mathematics and philosophy at the University of Łódź. In 1981 he came to the United States. In 1985 he received a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Washington in Seattle. Then he was a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California at Davis. In 1986 he became an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. He is an author of ten research papers in mathematics, including a long memoir on Henstock integration to be published by the American Mathematical Society. In 1983 and 1984 he was the coordinator of Amnesty International USA Group 94 at the University of Washington. He writes poetry, prose poetry, essays, and plays in Polish.

BOOKS: *Pytania (Questions)*, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1982; *Patrzemy na zwierzęta (We Look At Animals)*, Iskry, Warsaw, 1982; *Pozornie przynajmniej (At Least Apparently)*, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź, 1984.

ANTHOLOGIES: *Debiuty Poetyckie 1980*, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1982; *American Poetry Anthology (2)* 1-2, 3-4, American Poetry Association; *The Universe Sings*, P. & S. Publishing, 1983; *Moments, Moods and Memories*, Quill Books, 1984; *Heart on Fire, Volume Two*, American Poetry Association, 1985; *In Quiet Places*, Quill Books, 1985; *The Art of Poetry*, American Poetry Association, 1985; *Best International Poems*, WPBS Publishing (Canada), 1985; *Gentle Hands*, Gadarene Publishing, 1985.

Possible Solutions

Krzysztof Ostaszewski



*Légérét
Press*