



PROPOSITIONS

KRZYSZTOF OSTASZEWSKI



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by

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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

Lodz, January 10, 1979

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?

Kamienica, February 3, 1980

I speak to you of flowers I want to see flowers in words
I tell you about birds I want to hear birds in words
but the words abandon me and brush against your lips

Nowa Weis Szlachecka, July 20, 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

Lodz, May 10, 1980

it is curious reality is composed of repetitions
shadows form a mosaic an image they repeat
the image changes but the shadows repeat
we move along
we move along we look the direction still unnamed
our feet still touch the ground our hands our eyes
it's getting harder the obstacle is getting nearer here it is

I looked out the window and saw little birds among the leaves
they rested here on their way north it was warmer
brighter the sun's radiance brought with it new shadows
then moving along I was as always tomorrow among you today

the road we're moving along is as in the evening I hide my/
head in my hands
the road is like the false despair of those about to sleep
we move along
we place our steps on entirely new ground bravely
more bravely there are many more roads the choice where/
is our choice
bravely we'll still make it we move along just one more second
there in the distance a city a city bigger farther than even/
I can see
one leaf one bird one face gazing down at me heaven

Seattle, February II, 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 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
and if other than the arena you are given nothing?
knowing this you can imagine the rest

Seattle, October 4, 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

Seattle, December 22, 1982

our inheritors will give us fancy names
they will name us once we are 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

Seattle, January 10, 1983

it's beautiful now the blue sky the sunshine
faster - I say to myself - I'm swallowing the day
that means I'm only 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

Seattle, February 2, 1983

of course there weren't many of us
no one expected many enemies
but here - our wishes fulfilled we are enemies
this is just a description mind you just a description
sir you're chewing words sir you're spitting words
sir your 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

Seattle, February 3, 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

Seattle, March 9, 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

Seattle, April 20, 1983

the dog seemed most terrified
the water in the bay was cold it was evening
the wind swayed the branches in the trees
the wind touched the people on the shore

the dog was new here fearful by nature
as for the people they were average
the wind caressed the people as they chattered
whispered rather gazing at the sun

before them the dog danced and said nothing
before them the water timidly lapped against the shore
everything they had forgotten lay before them

for reality is like an image without sound
a television beyond repair
for as the dog wags its tail - that's still not everything

Seattle, September II, 1983

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

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 flame

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

Seattle, February 19, 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

Seattle, May 19, 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

Minneapolis, July 28, 1984



KRZYSZTOF OSTASZEWSKI was born in Lodz, Poland, on August 5th 1957. Beside writing poetry he is also the author of essays and plays. All works are written in Polish, but most of them are available in English translation. Three previous collections *QUESTIONS* (1980), *WE LOOK AT ANIMALS* (1982), and

AT LEAST APPARENTLY (1984), have all been published in Poland. Widely published in small press magazines in Australia, France, Canada, Germany and the U.S.A., his work has also been featured in *Five Leaves Left*, *The Toll Gate* and *Global Tapestry* in England.

A member of "Legerete" International Writers Union and "Pomost" Socio-Political Movement, in August 1985 he received a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Washington and is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California at Davis.



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