

Self-Portrait

By Adam Zagajewski

Between the computer, a pencil, and a typewriter
half my day passes. One day it will be half a century.
I live in strange cities and sometimes talk
with strangers about matters strange to me.
I listen to music a lot: Bach, Mahler, Chopin, Shostakovich.
I see three elements in music: weakness, power, and pain.
The fourth has no name.
I read poets, living and dead, who teach me
tenacity, faith, and pride. I try to understand
the great philosophers--but usually catch just
scraps of their precious thoughts.
I like to take long walks on Paris streets
and watch my fellow creatures, quickened by envy,
anger, desire; to trace a silver coin
passing from hand to hand as it slowly
loses its round shape (the emperor's profile is erased).
Beside me trees expressing nothing
but a green, indifferent perfection.
Black birds pace the fields,
waiting patiently like Spanish widows.
I'm no longer young, but someone else is always older.
I like deep sleep, when I cease to exist,

and fast bike rides on country roads when poplars and houses
dissolve like cumuli on sunny days.

Sometimes in museums the paintings speak to me
and irony suddenly vanishes.

I love gazing at my wife's face.

Every Sunday I call my father.

Every other week I meet with friends,
thus proving my fidelity.

My country freed itself from one evil. I wish
another liberation would follow.

Could I help in this? I don't know.

I'm truly not a child of the ocean,
as Antonio Machado wrote about himself,
but a child of air, mint and cello
and not all the ways of the high world
cross paths with the life that—so far—
belongs to me.