

Lech Majewski

25 POEMS

EL

While talking to someone
He outlines the veins on his hand

He whispers into his hands
Later rubs them on the forehead

Of whoever he'd like
To receive the clandestine words

He tells the stories of objects he holds in his hand
He feels all the palms that have touched them

He carries his own doormat to wipe
His shoes on

He likes to say
Plus minus infinity

Near the airport he concentrates
To help lift planes up into the air

He investigates relations between numbers
In the plates of cars in accidents

Certain numbers protect
Others condemn

He lights candles outside the homes
Of his dead friends

Bedframes torment him
He's more confident on the floor

He talks to his feet his fingers
He asks how they feel

He connects with each part of his body
In turn hearing out their responses

He survived his own death
Now he does what he loves

WHISPERS

Steaming rain
The sky's untamed waves

Two birds thought & memory
Sit on your shoulder

They whisper into your ear
Stay in your mother's womb for twenty years

Have double teeth
Double eyebrows and double members

In towns choose the broadest stairways
Churches courts

Enter up the middle descend bow
And greet the population of your invisible empire

Issue your own banknotes
With your portrait on the face

The house of your birth
On the reverse

Sculpt a door with the most important
Scenes from your own life

Then enter again and again
Do not fear yourself

THE SCREAM

Painted by Edvard Munch at the
end of the 19th C it was scoffed at
and ridiculed by his contemporaries. It had

to wait sixty years to become
an icon reproduced in millions
of copies and hundreds of versions. But Munch

Painted it from despair. The cliff
where the horrified figure stands
and screams witnessed his friend's

suicide. At its foot rose
a lunatic asylum; Munch's sister
was an inmate, and he

soon ended up there. The asylum
stood next to a slaughterhouse. Animal wails
mingled with the screams of the sick.

Sixty world years later
the painting became famous. One symptom
an inflatable cushion

in the shape of the screaming figure.
It's for sale in department stores.
When it's sat on, it screams.

CHILDHOOD

A little girl enters a house she's never been in
She sniffs the walls

A man goes into a toy shop He buys a doll
He has it wrapped for his daughter He goes home

He unwraps it He caresses it
Kisses it licks it

A child punishes herself by looking
At a postcard with St. Sebastian

A little girl
A big suitcase beside her

The works of Buddha in 108 volumes
A girl weaves 108 braids

216 is the number
Of all the mysteries

THE LAST NIGHT

Nuns are listening to punk rock
And punks to Hildegard von Bingen

Gangsters are talking the language of poets
And poets the language of gangsters

A boat full of water in the middle of a desert
Swine in a palace Luxury in a hovel

A naked peeping Tom looks through the keyhole
At a fully dressed couple

A lavish divorce celebration The groom carries his bride
Over the threshold and throws her down the stairs

A NEW WAR ON TELEVISION

Chechnya. Mountains. Heat. A man in his underpants
fires a cannon. Who knows to which army
he belongs. The sun burns his shoulders.
He rubs on lotion.

He loads a fresh shell, covers his ears.
A bang. Smoke. Who knows where he's firing
or who it hits. Who knows who gave the order
or what it was.

This is the Lord at work.

THE SISTINE CHAPEL

Tourists enter through the gates of Hell.
Coincidence? ACHTUNG! ACHTUNG!
a megaphone forbids talking and photos;

it resounds with the echo of a railway station.
A packed, musclebound, material Michael
the Angel. Bodybuilders' heaven.

Daniele da Volterra, "the painter of panties"
called upon a year after the death
of Buonarrotti to paint thrusting

juicy male buttocks. In a sea of muscle
is an island of beauty: God attired in sliced
brain gives life to Adam.

Temptation. Exile. Sybille.
A tourist kneels by the altar. He tries to pray.
He is trampled by a crowd straight from Hell.

THE EYE

Notre Dame The enormous eye
of the southern transept's stained glass
If God is light, the glass is his portrait

The perspective of the Tuileries garden closes
in the giant circle of a ferris wheel
It's carousel eye shimmers with moving lights

God of entertainment
Today's God must be friendly
He winks and takes you for a ride

PENULTIMATE JUDGEMENT

A gentleman in a cloth suit
With a simple linen bag
Sandles on his bare feet

Gets off a tram
He walks slowly
Interferes in nobody's life

A courageous rat (or a sick one)
Runs across his path
The man stops

The rat hides away in a crevice
The gentleman dons his glasses
Meanwhile his son

Jesus is on television
Disguised as a Mexican footballer
He receives a yellow card

THE SHINING

Men slip their patent shoes on
They dip their feet in the shining night

Women smell of trees
A forest of women

Leaning his head under a streetlight he reads
A scrap of newspaper on the pavement

Suddenly from the darkness emerges a face
Fragile and absent

A cheek lit up by the handset
Of a mobile phone

It flows right by
And vanishes behind his right ear

In the evening she puts on a dress
Made from his hands

Around her neck she drapes
His kisses

The coarseness of his tongue against her feet
He bathes inside her body

Stars tears themselves off her breasts
And roam the heavens

There is no body in heaven
But you can touch

The place where she slips her hands in
To feel an angel's wings

Angels
Are our souls

ABANDONNED

A woman who takes on someone else's pain
She goes to bed and suffers

He shot like a meteor through her life
A meteor that tore out her heart

ONE OF THEM (FREE PERFUME)

She is one of those women who think that the table
Is a place for love and beds are for sleeping

A woman with a face sharp enough to cut throats
A woman in a hat of live snakes

A woman in a ruffled fur like a drowsy fly on stilettos
A woman in a coat of foxes

One Sunday foxes surrounded her
And went for her throat

Small nose big demands
Shoes with heels higher than her desires

While talking she keeps lifting her foot
Looking at her shoe

A bulging face but slender hands
Eyes wide apart teeth too

A woman who asks the food in the fridge
If she can eat it (cream, jam) with a pendulum

And she checks if her husband is lacking in iron or zinc
She asks the pendulum everything

She goes into a department store
Just to perfume herself for free

In museums she likes touching paintings
The alarms don't bother her

SUCCESS

He heals wounds mythologising them
Pink bandages
Perfumed plasters

He talks to a switched off mobile
Phone in the middle of the street
Saying all he wants others to hear

He makes up for the greyness
Of his existence with the rainbows
Of his ties

Finally
His life vanishes
In the shadow of his success

Driving his car
He talks on the phone for real
He's so lonely

LIAISONS

Liaisons are dangerous desire is proportional
To distance unavailable fires the imagination
Like unknown lands

When heroes and their actions are too close to the lens
A microscope effect ensues bending over the eyepiece
Can be fascinating in the short-term

The very definition of untried undiscovered
Is loaded with incitement
Liaisons are dangerous

Mars was once full of domes and flying saucers
Venus inhabited by massive-eyed women
When probes were sent there only ashes was found

A holocaust of dreams and imaginations
Time turned grey
Like in old ashtrays in abandoned hotels

FEAR

Where is the hair you pleated as a girl
The scales of skin have been swept from the floor
The headache has passed
And your spine has died a hundred times

Where is the trembling
In the sudden shadow
The roughness of a summer storm

You buried your dresses and words
The sadness of a July afternoon
Evaporated with the rain

And you've been gone for many years
And gone is she who replaced the other
And you still cry out in your sleep
And you say you're afraid of death

FAREWELLS

Nurses swim around in the cold
aquariums of a hospital

A telephone that nobody answers
letters never opened

These are houses to die in
a woman dies

The chestnut tree
that she planted dies

A cemetery – eternal resting ground
of names and dates

Is there a fly that's been shut
in a coffin?

Plants plucked from a grave
someone tends to them

He addresses them
by the deceased's name

The dead are watching us
from behind mirrors

LOVE

In St. Laurence's cemetery in Wroclaw
There is a grave overgrown with delicate grass

It shines like the fur of an emerald cat
A hairy prism

Eery grass
As if someone had dreamed up the thickness of its blades

In a narcotic dream
A wretched cross

With a badly cast iron Christ
Two plaques carelessly and hurriedly

Stuck in the hair of the grass
Like black flowers

A married couple
He died the seventh of February she the eighth

Maybe they were in an accident
Pulled from the wreckage of a car

He passed on first
But more likely not

Were they not too old to be driving a car
Him 92 and her 89

And one more day was
Unbearable

THE SENTENCE

if you've hurt someone
enough to make them scream with pain
that scream will roam
the world until
it returns to your mouth

SPIRITUALIST ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN
33 BELGRAVE SQUARE, LONDON

I love Wimbledon, will I be able to watch it in the afterlife?

Yes

From which seat?

From any. During the game you can move around,
be everywhere – on the terraces, on the court, getting in no-one's way,
because you're immaterial. It's like that during every game,
the court full of ghosts watching them play, the ball
flies through them painlessly.

POMPEII

Incinerated figures

Frozen in mid-movement

It takes a catastrophe

To immortalise a moment

Everyday life washes it off

Imperceptibly

GRAND CANYON MUSIC

a gramophone record's grooves with a width
of a hundred billion microns when enlarged appear
like the Grand Canyon and what melody
would the canyon play if it were miniaturised?

10,000

A certain ruler was told that ten

Thousand of his soldiers had died in battle

But he didn't know how many that was

So he had a rope strung out

In the city's largest square

And ten thousand shirts hung up

He walked among them touched them

Watched them sway in the wind

He climbed a tower to get a view

And still not know

SARDANAPALUS

The Assyrian king in Byron's poem
And in Delacroix's painting

Besieged in his palace unwilling to surrender
He decides on suicide

He orders his personal guards to destroy
Everything dearest to him

As they rest abed before his eyes
There's a slaughter of dogs horses maids wives

They shatter pottery smash the lamps
If he could he would have the mountains crushed

Dry the rivers dear to his eyes
So the enemy would get nothing

CIVILISATION

He walked
And his shadow ran after him like a dog
From the dusk emerged galaxies of suburban lights
Shining with neon shells by the roadside
The obese bodies of Ikea MacDonaldis and Shell
Devouring the outskirts

Police cars miaowed like cats
They mounted each other
And copulated irritably

A tired woman at the kitchen table was counting
Aeroplanes out the window
Beside her face shone the pillow
Like a sawn-off slice of moon

Smile and kill he thought
Be polite and skin them alive
Say pleasethankyouexcuseme
And tear out their fingernails

CITIES OF HUNGER

New York

The first October of a new millenium.
Ground Zero. After three weeks the ruins
are still smoking.
On the darkened displays of buildings
covered with dust - clothes, perfume, watches;
charred pictures of models.
The air lifts the stench of dust, burnt hair,
asbestos and powdered metal.

Tourists take photographs,
they cover their mouths, read artless
poetry written on hurried rolls of paper.

A motionless woman in an orange cape.
She sits on the sidewalk.
Waiting. Or unable to stand.

Darkened shops.
Sales with knock-down prices.

A bomb scare in Macy's.
They evacuate the buyers and sellers.
Beside is the silent figure of the Empire State.
Has there been an explosion?
People raise their heads. The spire of the sky
Scraper punctures the wreath of gloom.
But it is not smoke. Just a dark cloud
hanging still above Manhattan.

On a leaflet handed out on the corner of Broadway and 34th St
we are all guilty.
Unrestrainedly sinful
we called out for disaster.
We may beg Him on Friday at eight
p.m. at the Met Pavilion
a hundred and twenty five West
Eighteenth Street, between Sixth and Seventh.

Copenhagen

Candles burning in shop windows.
The clattering of guardsmen's heels at Amalienborg

The dome of the Marmorkirken. Someone practices the organ,

gets lost and starts again. Out of the rehearsing and stumbling
appears a melody's baroque construction.
The ostinato pillars of basses, arpeggio arches.
Someone painstakingly builds a cathedral of sound.

Light does not fill the cathedral,
it does not penetrate every corner.
The sound does – the vibrating air
forms a three-dimensional negative,
a transparent cast of the cathedral.

On a pew the psalm book DEN DANSKE SALME BOG.
Bog means book in Danish,

Venice

Barnaba Feruzzi Balbi is talking about his grandfather
who painted the most famous Madonna and Child in the world.
He claims the original went down with the Titanic.
The model entered a convent. The child grew up to be
a murderer, and died in prison.

Contessa Barbarigo-Franchini. Matted, blistered
walls covered in reliefs. Like her cheeks.
An old lady in the kitchen.
Plastic bags of medicines and banknotes.

The aristocrat Da Mosto-Ranieri. The walls' purple silk.
A golden chapel with an opening into the boudoir.
One can powder oneself listening to the private mass.

Padua

The electrified grave of St. Anthony.

The Scrovegni's chapel. The power of money donated to art.
Dante placed Scrovegni the usurer in hell for all eternity,
but his son's money had Giotto transport the usurer
to the gates of heaven (and the body rested on the altar).

Buenos Aires

Violet jacaranda trees.
Torn posters. An obelisk.
Forty year old cars like new.

Boca. Ships rotting in the docks.

Half sunk. Overgrown with reeds.

Cale Mexico 564. Biblioteca Nacional.
The abandoned Borges library.
A stained-glass heaven on the ceiling. Empty shelves.
Plastic chairs beneath the high dome.
Now an orchestra of the blind rehearses here.

Mar del Plata

Families drive to besiege the cliff.
The open boots of their cars. The droning radios.

An enormous pipe comes out of the sea, and like a rusted
snake crawls along the beach, blocking access to the water.

Radio tango only plays tango.

In a nocturnal park in the cold rain
of glow-lamps, couples dance tangos.
Mature women wind round elderly men
with licked-down remains of hair, hunched to attention.

Manhattan

A lost gull as a reminder of the sea.
A Chinaman eats a melon on the subway.
He eats his tongue and teeth. Chewing then swallowing,
he spits the seeds into a bag. Nearby
sit suburban princesses
their lips painted on with pencils.

Massive lobbies with spotless civil servants.
Silent pageants in mahogany lifts.
Names of clerks in a bank: Mosea, Aeiranna, Sobeida, Gontie.
Boticelli's Venus on the biceps.

A dummy running in the Nike shop's window
on the corner of 6th and 34th.
Sweating people connected by headphones
to TV running
on running machines in Lafayette gyms.
Others sit in armchairs, watching them,
waiting their turn.

In a house with a view of a wall,
someone sets up a mirror outside
the window, to look at the sky.

Paris

It was the year when men shaved their heads,
stood still before mirrors and patiently
stroked the knots of their ties.

Women's gazes touched.

Overhead, Paris rolled out the concrete carpets of ceilings.

Motor car beasts growled on zebra crossings,
ready to pounce.

Rome

A city given over to cars' pastures.
Their gluttonous chassis scavenge for cat-meat.
Boys shout out, honk at girls,
drive beside them, lick women out
with longing looks. "The eye is a sexual organ,"
says Picasso, "You can rape with a look."

Old houses grow out of even older shells.

Guides battle in the Colloseum. With megaphones.
The laudest wins. The others, along with their
excursions, fade into the shadows.

Piazza Navona. Bernini. The fountain of four rivers:
the Danube, Nile, River Plate and Ganges.
The history of the world: Greek mythology beneath an Egyptian column
conquered with a Christian cross.
Water flows from under Poseidon's feet, vanishes in a dragon's snout
to flow once again out among the cans and cigarette butts.
Death and birth, life as a puddle full of rubbish.

Foro Romano. Septimus Severus' arch.
The night silence. The seagulls' cries.
Illuminated by the lights of the Capitol,
the white birds whirl on the sky's ink.
In 203 Septimus Severus raised a triumphal
arch in honour and praise of his sons
Caracalla and Getus. Eight years later Caracalla
murdered his brother and removed his name
from the fourth line of the inscription on the arch's crown.
He had committed a double murder.

Physical and Historical.

Earlier, Romulus had murdered Remus.
You have to be able to kill your brother
to become father of a city.

Romulus and Remus, suckled by a wolf and rescued
by Faustulus the shepherd decide to found a city.
They observe the flight of birds.
He who sees the sign shall give the name.
From the Aventine hill, Remus first
spots six vultures, then Romulus
from the Palatine hill spots a dozen vultures
They quarrel – the first or the most numerous?
Romulus kills Remus. Quantity wins over quality.

The Vatican. Under Bernini's marble colonnade
is a second, smaller, contemporary one –
electronic gates with metal detectors.

The Foro Romano and the Vatican.
The night silence and daytime chaos.
Will God create a new world from this?

Ciudad de Mexico

A gigantic flag waves in the rarified air.

Circuses at the red lights of successive crossroads
(each one is different, which means the same).
Jugglers, fire-eaters, little acrobats.
Chicanos wash a car windscreen.
They cross themselves with the coin they receive.
You are the hand of Providence.

Cats in the Octavio Paza gardens.

A woman paints her eyes in Trotsky's garden.

New York

Seventh Avenue.
Pizza wrapped in a warmer.
A baby in a nappy.
A girl blows out bubble gum.
She holds her breath in it.

April third, two thousand and two.

Wednesday. The Sheraton Hotel.
Newspaper front pages dedicated to sportsmen.
The headlines praise muscles.

The subway. An empty wagon. Bundles in black
Plastic bags on the floor.
Did someone forget them? Throw them away?
A few stops later one of the bags
Moves. It moans.

Times Square.
Shining skyscrapers copulate at night.
In the morning they have bastards:
A naked cowboy with a guitar,
Blacks dancing on their heads,
A Chinese man with a shredded
Trash can instead of a hat.
The adverts throb aver faster.

Star Wars. Children know that fairy tales
No longer happen on Earth.
They can't. Forests too small, mountains conquered
And in palaces they sell tickets.
So they have escaped into space.