Michal Habaj Translated by John Minahane Freedom Night's echo covers everything that breathes. We're beyond the horizon, and now the wheels are turning only in heads. The pilgrims squeezed the bones that moan in the wind into a grain of rice. From the sand dunes freedom blows.

that eats up everything

in the name of profit.

It has the face of a worm

| The skeletons of states |
|----------------------------------|
| blow in the wind, |
| hung on a cross |
| as a windbreak. |
| |
| Mary, |
| you're asking the way, |
| but in your heart |
| the snake |
| goes sinuously in time |
| backwards. |
| |
| The stairways have been moved. |
| The pilgrims have been carted |
| off to execution. |
| |
| While they were dreaming, |
| someone screwed off their heads, |
| filled them with sand |
| and sold them to museums. |

| We browse in memory's offprints, | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| we're the first who're going nowhere. | | | | | |
| Shot by firing-squad at dawn, | | | | | |
| we testify to the shadow's length | | | | | |
| in puddles of blood. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Dogs bark. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Beyond the horizon of days | | | | | |
| shining white tents, | | | | | |
| phantoms of onetime | | | | | |
| expectations. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Continents on pilgrimage | | | | | |
| through the looking-glass. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Freedom is only a word | | | | | |
| that the wind | | | | | |
| gnawed into your heart. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

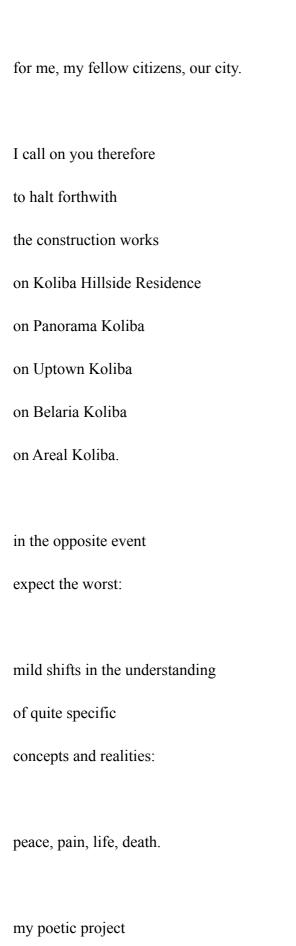
Letter to a developer

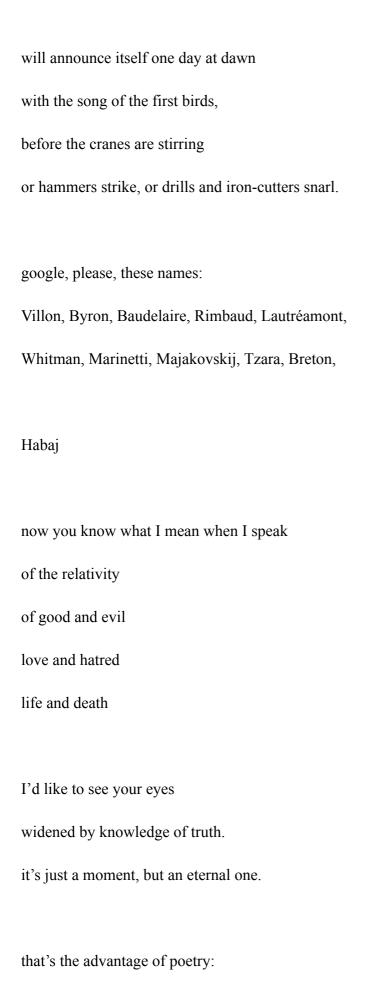
dear investor,

as you have just learned,
this envelope
contains a letter,
not a cartridge.

since I am not the holder
of an arms certificate,
any such gestures
would have only symbolic force.

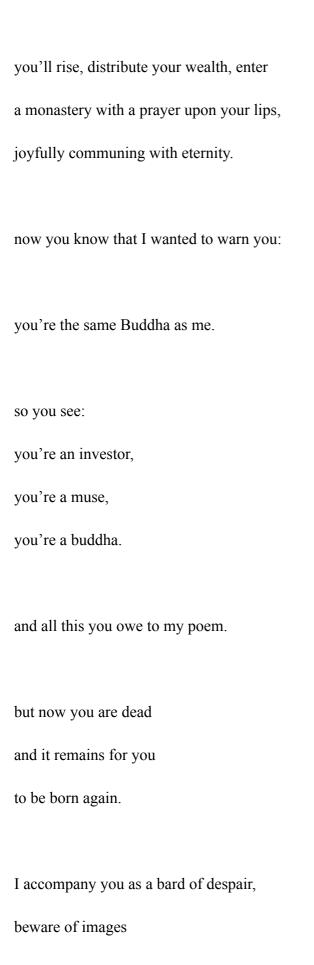
I do however favour
action, direct where possible,
precisely like you,
who are making life bitter

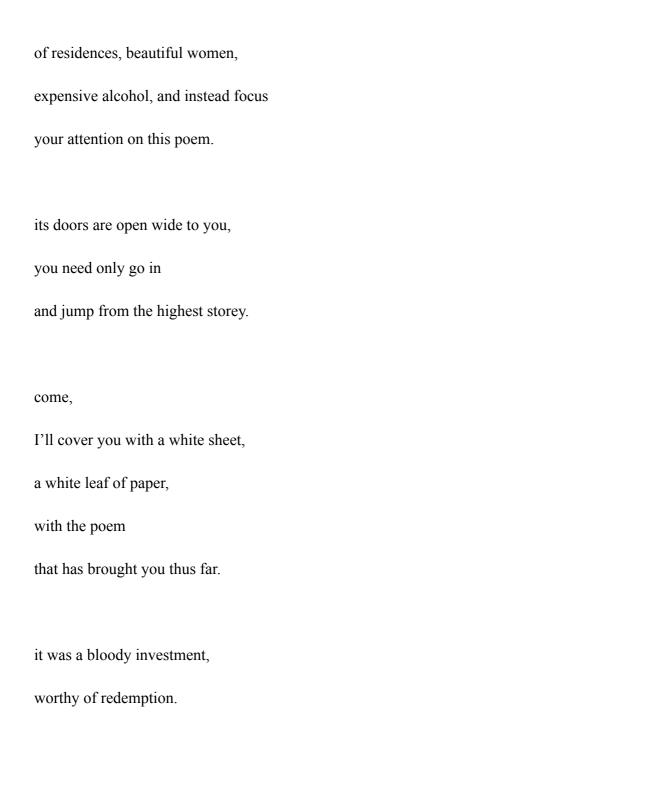




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unlike your precast concrete
it never loses concentration,
it lurks like a bird of prey
till it catches its kill.
you will never be safe
from the poem
that's written for you.
you won't survive this poem,
your building won't survive this poem,
your name will crumble in dust.
this poem will find you
dead or alive,
in the Bahamas or Cyprus,
bankrupt or not.
but have no fear,
the time of judgment and prophecy will be fulfilled
long after
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the cranes for the last time turn their scraggy necks,
the cutters sing their requiem,
the hammers drive the last nail into the coffin.
here am I playing with keyboards
while you're hard at work.
in the beginning was the word: whoreson,
in the end a poem,
thank you for the inspiration,
O investor, O developer, muse.
inscrutable are the ways of God,
I have told you:
good and evil are relative.
and this poem?
it is only an expression of divine awareness,
of universal wisdom,
of the central intelligence in the cosmos;
today it lays the path for my anger,
tomorrow for your humility, when in the morning
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Michal Habaj (1974, Bratislava) belongs to the late 1990s generation of non-conforming Slovak poets. *The Roots of Heaven. Poems from the Last Century* (2000) is a lament — or a mockery of lamentation, or both — for culture and human beings, overwhelmed by an absurd technology. Habaj is also a literary scholar, specialising in early 20th century Slovak prose.