

Edward Hirsch

Krakow, 6 A.M.

For Adam Zagajewski

I sit in a corner of the town square
and let the ancient city move through me.
I sip a cup of coffee, write a little,
and watch an old woman sweeping the stairs.

Poland is waking up now: blackbirds patrol
the cobblestones, nuns rush by in habits,
and the clock tower strikes six times.
Day breaks into the night's reverie.

The morning is as fresh and clean
as a butcher's apron hanging in a shop.
Now it is pressed and white, but soon
it will be spotted with blood.

Europe is waking up, but America
is going to sleep like a gangly teenager
sprawled out on a comfortable bed.
He has large hands and feet

and his dreams are innocent and bloodthirsty.
I want to throw a blanket over his shoulders
and tuck him in again, like a child,
now that his sleep is no longer untroubled.

I'm alone here in the Old World
where poetry matters, old hatreds seethe,
and history wears a crown of thorns.
Fresh bread wafts from the ovens

and daily life follows its own inexorable
course, like a drunk weaving slowly

across a courtyard, or a Dutch maid
throwing open the heavy shutters.

I suppose there's always a shop-girl
stationed in the doorway, a beggar taking up
his corner post, and newspapers fluttering
from store to store with bad news.

Poetry, too, seeks a place in the world—
feasting on darkness, but needing light,
taking confession, listening for bells,
for the first strains of music in a town square.

Europe is going to work now—
look at those two businessmen hurrying
past the statue of the national bard—
as her younger brother sleeps

on the other side of the ocean,
innocent and violent, dreaming of glory.