

Two Poems

“Confession”

Lately I've caught myself
admiring. A habit
sweeter than rage
and more dangerous than smoking.
That man who lives off two eggs
one soft-boiled in the morning
in the evening one scrambled
and more than that - he says - he does not need;
the Chinaman all alone in the world
on the Bohemian border
opening his Lotus Garden ;
the editor, day in, day out,
hopelessly correcting sentences;
that wife with her six face-lifts;
the bankrobber, the disc jockey,
the politician in his prison
and the dosser in his kraal of plastic bags:
they are indefatigable, without why and wherefore
devoted like the diligent mole
and the humble ant
to their mysterious work.
Harder and harder for me
are hatred, envy, contempt
the youthful feelings.
A sign of weakness.
I like my secret vice.
Yes, I admire them, almost all of them,
losers, unstopably
feeling their way and burrowing.

“Plenty Going On”

The ocean is hard at work,
the sun, old plasma physicist,
is devouring itself, volcanoes
are hastening to erupt
and hormones getting up steam always.
Sleeper, you toss and turn,
you babble, you sweat, you dream.
The economy grows
so do cats and the universe.
Idler, we can hear you
drawing breath, we hear
it rattle in your lungs. Admit
you are busy. You twitch
and unstopably your hair
and fingernails thrive.
And not even the functionary
high on his stool
can let things be. Even the dead
work. Oh yes
they pester God who does

not hear, and us.
They visit, they haunt us.
There is no rest. There is,
there is no rest.
There is no rest.

From Lighter Than Air
Translated from the German by David Constantine