

Zbigniew Herbert

Nike Who Hesitates

Nike is most beautiful at the moment
when she hesitates
her right hand beautiful as a command
rests against the air
but her wings tremble

For she sees
a solitary youth
he goes down the long tracks
of a war chariot
on a grey road in a grey landscape
of rocks and scattered juniper bushes

that youth will perish soon
right now the scale containing his fate
abruptly falls
toward the earth

Nike would terribly like
to go up
and kiss him on the forehead

but she is afraid
that he who has never known
the sweetness of caresses
having tasted it
might run off like the others
during the battle

Thus Nike hesitates
and at last decides
to remain in the position
which sculptors taught her
being mightily ashamed of that flash of emotion

she understands
that tomorrow at dawn
this boy must be found
with an open breast
closed eyes
and the acid obol of his country
under his numb tongue