

Long Paddock

JORGE PALMA

Trans. Peter Boyle

Five Poems

The lighthouse at the end of the world

*Now we are at the ultimate end of the earth . . .
in an inaccessible wasteland.*

AESCHYLUS

I've turned and seen it
anchored to the depths
of my eyes,
where night ends
and mists begin:
a blackened dog
beaten over and over
by the wild frenzy of petrol,
a dog whose hair is all bristles
barking with crazed abandonment.
And no one answers.

The Drowned

*If there was fire, it would burn the earth;
If wind, it would raze it;
If water, it would drown it;
If God, he would sink it.*

CECCO ANGIOLERI (1260-1313)

And with my eyes I listen to the dead.

FRANCISCO QUEVEDO

There's a dead man in the depths
of the sky who can't get out
or drum the way he wants to
because it's raining outside
and everything is drowned.
That's why he strokes his forehead,
his cheeks, his three-day-old beard

and walks in circles
round his coffin, looking sideways
at the blue alpaca coat
without blinking
because outside it's raining and everything
below the sky is drowned.
And the drowned watch
the dark water drift towards
the unreachable depths of a red sunset
and they lean, they stretch on their side to listen,
they walk on tiptoes
because below the dogs are howling
in the place where mud is born.
And if there was wind
and it razed it;
and if there was fire
and it burnt everything?
someone asks
at the sky's request,
on behalf of the dead.
But I listen to the dead
singing into the small hours
and the drowned of the final
kingdom paddling about,
their souls in their arms, howling
from one side to the other of the sky.
And if there was wind
and it razed it;
if there was fire
and it burns everything?
asks the poet.
On behalf of the howling dogs
and the bones,
at the light's request,
and on behalf of
all the dead of this world
who can't get out
or play the drums the way they like
or the castanets
because outside wild rain is falling
and everything is drowned.

Florence

Cecilia, Florence is full
of beggars, not beggars with violets
like me,

but austere counts with fallen capes,
retired generals, hitmen
dressed in mourning outside casinos
where crazed girls dream
in drunken stupor
of some white house shining
in the moon's gardens.

Cecilia,
the world is a table of wretched
tin, riddled with loneliness
and egotism,
the bleak deck of a ship
where a drunken man staggers
but does not fall,
mutters monosyllables
hanging from the railings
when everything everything turns upside down
and he doesn't know if the sea is flying
or the exhausted stars have sunk
and it pains him to breathe
and he doesn't know if he's died
or just been born
because he can't wake up
and he's weeping.

Florence isn't Damascus
or Morocco or Andalucia,
it's a museum of pink stone
where I rot,
a monument to the loneliness
of art,
a mausoleum of yellow fever
convulsed by the insolent rain
of tourists.

And I'm exhausted from paddling against the flow.
And tonight in some dark way
demons surround me
as my blood shivers
and a sinister bird
crosses my forehead,
I'm nailed in the throat
by your joy
and the world is so large and wide
my love
that if you died
I couldn't close your eyes
with a howl
or beat like a madman
against the closed door of your coffin,
from the other side of

this table of cheap tin
where I write
to stop myself dying
and so that you
won't die.

Salaries

Is the salary of an ant
the same as that of a drug trafficker?
And that of a parish priest/ a nun/
a bishop/ a cardinal on fire?
Who pays? Who gives orders?
Is the salary of a hitman
the same as that of a doctor
a postman / a baker /
the same as an old
mournful gravedigger?
Who pays? Who gives orders?
What salary does God get
for administering the tasks
of the world?
Who pays? Who gives orders?
Who pays God?

Uncle Ezra was right

With usura hath no man a house of good stone
E. POUND

Uncle Ezra was right:
you can't build a house
with usura
nor a country
nor a single street
that could bear us
to love's warm tenderness.
Much less can you breathe
with usura
or walk loosely draped
in the breeze.
You can't gaze at the sky
with usura
you can't contemplate
waves breaking
on the breakwaters

of childhood
or tremble with joy
at the bright yellow singing
of a bird,
you can't breathe the cold
air or touch snow
or sit down one autumn
afternoon
on evening's skirt
and tell a child
the wind is hidden now
in the tree's
tangled hair
and the stars
are lamps lit
by spirits in the sky.
With usura you can't
breathe,
or caress, or feel in your heart
as along the surface of your skin
the light tapping
of a dawn so warm and barely there,
peeping through your windows,
through your bedroom's
diminutive folds.
Uncle Ezra was right:
you can't build a house
with usura
or a sky or a flag
or eyes that can see
or eyes that seeing
glimpse
if only for a few moments
the future's
expectant face.