

Contemporary Galician Poets.
A Poetry Review Supplement

Jonathan Dunne

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CONTEMPORARY GALICIAN POETS

A Poetry Review Supplement

Selected and translated by Jonathan Dunne



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Translator's Introduction

JONATHAN DUNNE

Galicia is a region in northwest Spain, with Portugal to the south, the Atlantic to the west and, to the north, Ireland and the Bay of Biscay. The capital is Santiago de Compostela, a Christian pilgrimage site since here are supposed to be the remains of St James. Four provinces comprise the region – Coruña, Lugo, Ourense and Pontevedra – the largest city being Vigo, an important port and industrial centre.

In the Middle Ages, Galician-Portuguese (the two share a common history) was the language of poetry in much of the Iberian peninsula. Various songbooks record the famous *cantigas* – songs of love, of a friend, of devotion to the Virgin Mary, of mockery – composed by local troubadours as well as Alfonso X of Castile and Dom Dinis of Portugal. Galician has possibly the strongest poetic tradition in this part of Europe, a tradition that was silenced in printed form during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but kept very much alive in the oral tradition and revindicated by nineteenth century poets, first among them Rosalía de Castro (1837-1885).

The purpose of this supplement is to present those names most widely recognized in the field of contemporary Galician poetry, poetry being written in the Galician language today. In selecting poems, I avoided using those that have already appeared in book form in English translation. Various Galician poets have published poetry collections in English: María do Cebreiro (*I Am Not from Here*, Shearsman Books, 2010); Miguel-Anxo Murado (*A Bestiary of Discontent*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1993); Chus Pato (*Charenton*, Shearsman Books, 2007; *m-Talá*, Shearsman Books, 2009); and Manuel Rivas (*From Unknown to Unknown*, Small Stations Press, 2009). A full list of books of Galician literature in English can be found here: www.smallstations.com/galician.htm.

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Xosé María Álvarez Cáccamo
Vigo, 1950

Knives

Life prepares with craftsman-like dedication
its finest, saddest knives,
one day a chance blade to touch the part of skin
we trust most with its enchantments. It brings
the necessary weapons, arms that barely reveal
the open wound, the river of excessive
lament and deterioration.
The knives – friendly words,
even caresses – seem
beautiful instruments to accompany the table's
solemn festivity. No one thinks that,
after the merriment and pleasant
dishes we were served, the succession of faces
talking with great love after wine,
the knives could open serrated edges,
bloom roses of rust, gleam
with violent intention. But the day will come
when all the knives that were simply
warnings of prudence
will grow into tools whose terror kills
and all the millimetric wounds,
parallel cuts in slow miniature,
were meant only to tell of an increase of blood
that will make us sad, peaceable men for ever.

[Untitled]

I went back in the house. You'd left
 to take your place in the transparent village.
 In the study a body of smoke still stands.
 The blinds don't close. Cracks appear
 through which doves, colliding, go.
 The wood dilates, opens craters, swells,
 soaked by the sea at night. The house heels over
 under the weight of fossilized water.
 Mother, anchored in mist,
 spins murmurs of porous foam,
 learning to feel you a fugitive, afar.

She sometimes walks on now slanting carpets,
 needs to seek shelter against vertical walls,
 listening in her fingers to the restless activity of ants
 which come from geraniums in your absence,
 she comes and goes along the corridor as if it were an avenue,
 talks to wrong numbers on the phone and leaves enigmas
 in other houses perhaps of exile like our own,
 or to get us back she calls my name from the windows,
 silencing the evening's engines.

Then she settles down. The house lies to,
 sleeping boat in calm sea coves.
 You again remain or return
 to affirm the keys of quietness
 and the bodies recover their central weight.



Manuel Álvarez Torneiro
Coruña, 1932

On The Matter Of Adagio

In tribute to Tomaso Albinoni

The hour arborescent in the shelter of evening.
That voluptuous taffeta of sense.
And life which binds severe moments.

A lit blade of grass touches the tremulous flesh,
elaborates the happy flowering of what's lost.
Nothing is shipwrecked definitively.

The viola turns into sheer silk.

Great scars receive their oils.

Territory

Sheets of December. Explosions of shade. Discursive rain. Coppers. Fittings. Millenary camphor. Kaleidoscopic months of March. Death dressed up in a paper flower. Inscriptions in mud. Pepper and lilac. A tired wheel. Towers of parsimony. To walk and unwalk. Looks of sadness which don't fit in a day. Leather which overpowers us with its burnt fragrance. Goad and silk. Absolute force in granite calms. A founding light of space. Emperor cats on the hearth. Naked blue grass under the passing of days. The first bird to see the light of the world. Tablecloth and birth. Living strata. The forest of oceanic diction. Enormous liquid eyes of rough-honeyed animals and patients on somehow adverse afternoons. The disconsolation of wisdom. Inferior stars asleep on the rooftops. Pronounced women pressing a wild strawberry. The antidote in the hand sharpening the scythe. The broad stairs of injustice. The monster's minuet. Air that tastes of ash in extreme summer. A dove on the head of the blind apostle. The rotation of windows on greenery dead in early pavements. That roadside shrine. The punctual sacrifice which bloodies twilight. That taste of a reclaimed body. The baroque. A prayer for us in silence.

And the sea which waits.



Yolanda Castaño
Santiago de Compostela, 1977

Highway To Heaven

i

The motorway is marked with impossible curves,
hesitant lines which go straight for the central reservation.

What would my corn beauty be like
rent and bloody against the windscreen,
what exactly would be the state of my tits
which would never
fall again?

ii

Capsule of only.

Between this and nothing a tiny movement.
A careless mistake, an absurd slit of chance and the
rosy weight of my
bones in the
ditch.

A butterfly of cold crosses my path,
my eyes are drawn to the way it jumps and
I'm lucky.

One two, one two, one
two.

iii

Should at this precise moment
the most terrible bad luck enter my lane,
my girl's fortune go up in smoke,
no one would consider
dubious or suspicious
the sparkling beauty
of my corpse on the hard shoulder.

iv

The motorway at night is like a video game.
The deepest darkness does not confuse me.

Like an indicator,
my youth a line of coke which sometimes
twists.

Behind my orbit the steering wheels go wild.

I accelerate as quickly
as the life goes out of this verse.

Fairy Tales

Once upon a time
...and at the end of the story
Miss Little Red Riding Hood was a wolf,
the grandmother a woodcutter,
the ravener an ascetic,
the libertarian a complete compendium of dependencies,
the mystic a fear-tinged frivolous,
the *homme incompris* an angel,
the princess a monster,
the frivolous a fear-tinged mystic,
the monster a princess,
the other *homme incompris* a demon,
the supposed wolf a real Little Red Riding Hood
and the path through the wood
a woodcutter.



María Do Cebreiro
Santiago de Compostela, 1976

Love Song

And so the poem
can escape from the page
you must hold your breath,
think long and hard
about Spinoza,
write words of love
in another language,
quote without reference to sources,
try to find out
who Jack Johnson was,
recite in the French of Montreal,
say a long verse
without knowing exactly
what it means,
convert this
space
into a soundbox,
lower your head to the cavity
of your thorax,
then close your eyes,
listen.

Saturn

“When the milk is about to boil,
I watch.” “Me too.
I wait until the last moment.”
“As if you were sorry
it had to rise.”
“What really impresses me
is the way it boils in silence.”

“Around eleven, the trumpet player
starts to play. To begin with they were scales.
He couldn’t quite find the notes.
Through the walls I could sense his effort.”
“Is he handsome, the trumpet player?”
“I’ve no idea. We go down
in separate lifts.”

“Has it ever occurred to you he might be a woman?”

“The room is full of people.
I focus on their arms.”
“Like the rings of a planet?”
“Something like that. There’s a piece of ice
inside me, which melts.
When it’s all liquid,
I think of the phone booths.
Boys at night make them
more beautiful.” “Don’t be so sure,
last night they were throwing stones
at the one under where I live.
I went down this morning. Picked up.
The receiver smelt of perfume.
I thought even the night couldn’t get rid of it.”

“Maybe the woman called just before
you picked up.”

“It was a man’s perfume.”

“Do you prefer making
or unmaking the bed?”
“I’m a little untidy. I retire
very early or very late.”

“Tell me that dream again.”

“Does it bother you when he practises?”
“I can’t say. It’s difficult to get into,
he only plays scales.”
“What most impresses you
is hearing him learn.”
“We’re so close, every morning,
since the milk boiled.”
“Is he constant?” “I think he knows
all the notes by now.” “He can’t see you, you listen.”
“He doesn’t play anything whole.”



Miguel Anxo Fernán Vello
Cospeito, 1958

Definitive Forms Of Nostalgia

A liquid perspective exists in this sky
bitten by the acid lights
of the sunset's demolished factory.

An illuminated bus heads for the night,
the passengers are a remote profile in silence,
slow progression of hours
tracing the weary forms of sadness.

In the suburbs grows the shadow of a machine
with a cold belly
and the stubborn rust which nested in winter
suddenly breathes,
its whole weight hurting as it beats on the corners.

Noble sentiments here
are refined stupor.
Grave melancholy which grazes the oily skin of fear,
the black flame living in poverty.

A whirl of voices is extinguished in the air,
in homes the light is coloured yellow like remorse,
the ancient wound of all penury.

Nostalgia here is a return to the heart of nausea.
The world's neighbours approach the misery of the unknown.

The city is one huge graveyard
shining in the mist.

Airport

Every journey is a body with something of hope,
of secret splendour.
In the business of living, with its old routines,
the days still give rise to
the transparent flower of surprise
and every horizon erases the pain.
We leave behind the blue weight of shadow,
the recurrent voices vanishing in the void,
the stubborn slogans time and habit
have condemned to be a confused rite,
pathetic destiny.

Every journey, in the end, is to escape ourselves,
to exit fortune's diverted labyrinth,
to feel the clean flame of the future on our forehead.
Which is why, minutes before leaving,
we feel a strange root
quivering in our blood,
the echo perhaps of an ancient happiness,
the pungent exhalation of lost pleasures,
the love that never was.
The threads of memory are suddenly tied
and there are images that hurt,
gestures that still come back,
grey bodies in the mist,
accidents of life,
remnants of passion.

Why does the recollection now plan its coup
of unmeditated bitterness and cracked profile?

Every journey is a sign burning in the wind,
we are ready now, there's no turning back,
we are being summoned over the loudspeaker,
another life awaits us, another breath, another voice,
we wear a blazing star on our bodies,
the days vibrating like a secret triumph;
the duration that waits to be in the future,
the word within a lucid ember
which invades the mind when the ship has departed,
far away, up high, in the blinding light,
in the air suspending the world:
purification.



Luís González Tosar

Buenos Aires, 1952

Tools Of Identity

Like an adze on smooth sycamores
I want to work at the verse until I lose all sense,
with time and strength to position the word,
with occasional mistakes to fill my breast
with the familiar warmth of a box handle.

To guess through weaving Penelope's footsteps
on rocks covered in blades and barnacles
and, if light and sensations permit,
to climb on the back of memory, to cut logs
of silence in evenings of leaden fear.

Neither inside nor out of my body,
I shall call for cold irons, share with you
hoes in smithies that were anvils.
Meanwhile I lay down foam, ropes,
wrapped in a blanket of sea smells.

Water Of Love Without A Name

It would help sometimes to clench my fists,
 think a bit with my hands near the fire
 so I could encourage your shadow,
 slowly compose a new figure,
 as if I felt it coming in the blazing form
 and impulse of a plodding, large blond ox.
 When I turn to the freshness of those rivers
 or drink from liquor's smoky entrails,
 I enter the sweet iron of your body,
 climb a sea starting at the legs,
 which shakes things, familiar noises;
 announced song of thrushes without a cage,
 embers of a known, distant island.
 In this uncertain light separating our bodies
 I'm well aware I'm a sad boat
 desirous of shade in an evening harbour,
 knocking against rocks and stranger ships,
 leaning on acid loneliness for ever,
 hearing from time to time the call of a horn
 which lifts our waves onto the bow,
 magical vision which eats away
 at colour and phosphorescence,
 in words everything drowns.



Bernardino Graña
Cangas, 1932

On The Death Of Mark Tobey As I Bathe My Feet In The Sea

I think now (with my feet in the water) of Mark Tobey,
Mark Tobey the painter, poet as well,
who painted New Yorkers, thousands
of workers, photographers, eyes,
eyes and more eyes,
little dots,
the lines of them passing, rockets,
the constant craziness in the streets.

I think, mull and ponder on the skin of the water
a nuclear message for beyond forms...

Mark Tobey died
or hasn't quite died, must die and be forgotten, it's amazing,
I paint a sign on the water with my feet,
a strange, mysterious scribble,
I myself
am unsure if this is finally a full representation of the world.

I want to paint the world,
I kill a horsefly I'm so worked up and excited,
a horse as well I'll kill if I have to.
I should like, as I said, the world
to be rounded off and well painted,
for ever and ever, like an eight.

But oh no! What's this?
See the fruit,
see the cold forever on moors,
enormous seas and deserts.
See other deaths come scrambling to knock at doors,
charging regularly as banks.
It's a shame to think, just to think,
of the misery on people's shoulders.

I think, mull,
am overcome by laziness,
ineffable asepsis in cities,
here as well, comfortable though I am,
bathing my feet
in the waves.

I clean my feet, stare, think and say:
what's the use of all these toes,
what's the use of so much cleaning,
if flowers and rest will never grow
on feet, I'm getting muddy,
am also Mark Tobey
and must die...

The Sea Tavern's Cat

There's no silence here there are men
who talk men talk
the wind doesn't come through here that ghost
men talk and talk
another wind hubbub is formed
a ghost made of this smoke
this endless smoking these words
there goes a smooth cat this is its home.

They drink wine brandy
shout argue tell jokes chew
on a bit of ham or chorizo maybe
the cat sniffs smells looks waits
goes to the kitchen the counter would like
a juicy piece of meat a touch
of tenderness some cheese a crumb.

There are no waves here or foam
no rocks or beaches to be seen
the taverner moves greets charges serves chats
changes a thousand pesetas shouts out to his wife
answers the phone the orders
the men angrily raise their voices
laugh shake hands it all blows over.

The cat pricks up its ears
so tame smooth unassuming
flicks between legs boots
tall waterproof rubber boots
erect hard so calm
there's no silence here but twenty men
the ravaging sea far away.

Should the cat happen to catch the man's eye
it grows tense listens peacefully hides
a sharp indifferent ear
calmly stubbornly licks a paw
possibly dozes opens one eye
sees the men drinking smoking arguing constantly never growing tired
of Russian salad tripe mussels anchovies
and wine wine red and white wine in cups galore
they hawk spit enter leave jostle toast sing
the radio's on there's music
the cat suffers no harm understands is used to it these are men
no reason to be afraid.



Xulio López Valcárcel
Romeán, 1953

Embers

That heat you leave in the bed
when you get up...
nothing so tender, nothing so subtle,
ungraspable, nothing so intimate.
The heat of your body,
a bird's down,
a wing's tepidness,
unknown angel which left
its invisible presence
in that place your body,
imprecise, delimits;
your body, light weight,
but tenuous, more tenuous, the warmth
of those coals
without matter or form,
diluted weightlessness,
dying embers...
Vague frontier, limit to non-being,
that silent, profound heat
which climbs the fingers
in amorous current,
mist surrounding
the heart
in ardent target.



Xosé Luís Méndez Ferrín

Ourense, 1938

Words To A Future Reader

for you to exist as I want
everything hangs on us
happy cuckoo will cuckoo in those parts
deep in the forest spring
and not far
the herd's bell perhaps unchanged

this now is in a thousand years

I refuse to imagine you

this poem is only for you

by the time you read it
my children's children's children will have died
deceased layers increased
under granite
waste or oblivion
there will be more reduced consciousness

now I am in the cuckoo's voice the nothingness
in the cow's bell the only permanent substance

and perhaps there will be accursed butterflies
or invading birds sent from somewhere

you are the one I dare not imagine
insoluble enigma formless face
of the unborn recipient of these verses

and you'll say they were written just to make
me vomit from dizziness
so you can fabricate me in your own image

we will never touch or smell one another
or debate in terms of theory

the moment has come then
for you to violently desire me

the prison
is of ice
this exile is made of horror
I also desire you
stranger who will never land on my beach

here are two people who yearn for each other
and can only
live together in springs separated by countless abysses
in the cowbell's interiors and those of the eternal cuckooing
in spring when you too will die

which is to say
every reader is outside and in the future

Rest

Happy he who leaves the village without locking the door
of his home rides to valleys where peasants
plough in fields and farms
hitches his beast to a ring of the old grocer's shop grabs
the shepherd's crook takes the road leading to the plateaus
of thickets full of turtle doves briefly crossed
by the jay's blue stars
and there sits down on the rotten stump of a holm-oak
internally surveyed by the larvae of stag beetles and various worms
which are completely blind looks around because it's summer
the sunlight sends the cicadas wild he realizes a world
of circus grasshoppers is doing gymnastics on the tips of parched
grasses feels happy because in the neighbouring stream a cricket sings
its ballad there the stream the verdant stream
in which not even a thin skein of water threads gabbles in moss
and the birch dressed in a sailor suit has at its top the oriole's
pendulous bag he sees he's not worried and doesn't wish to be
there's no struggle going on inside his breast he does up his trainers
returns to the path to rest again this time at the foot
of laurels lies on coarse grass the immortal leaves
crowning his brow softly hums habaneras
as the sun goes down over the ridge he leaps to his feet
as quickly as it is unnecessary runs
lurches round the corner enters the high ground of gorse follows
the tracks of animals treads on black clods dismantled by the snout
of a boar and as the shadows fall and the sun ceases to be
a blond lamp he understands there's nothing human in the expanse
all darkness begins to look solid the face of a floury
giant appears from behind the crags and he decides then to close
his eyes and stop thinking.



Olga Novo
Vilarmao, 1975

29 January 2002.

Dear mum, I'm learning to bark.
une saison en enfer. repeat after me Une-Saison-En-Enfer.
thirty generations of mine illiterate I am learning to bark.
to mark a never territory with the epiglottis
like a puppy like a mongrel
to doggify until turning into me into a dog then I pronounce
Walt Walt
Walt Whitman mum.

I'm learning to bark.
I stick my bum up at the sun hold onto a hoe and
try to mimic the cuckoo's song song up at the sun then
my throat is squeezed with pain
and future possibles howl like never before making our veins throb
like a pot of milk on the stove.

the eyes of my love carry
the tinkling of cowbells inside onagainsthother onagainsthother
from Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony
mum.

and I look into your eyes your little eyes you're so tired
but I'm not and this
is the moment of wrath dog
I listen carefully to the cry
tal bell of your unfulfilled dreams
like a delicate sculpture by Brancusi
Cons tan tin Brancusi.

again and again the heart huge
like a toadstool autumn is you ooh ooh ooh she-wolf
here I am dancing shouting jumping
a guttural mistress a guttural volcano
like Virginia Woolf like Virginia Woolf like Virginia Woolf.

I look at your hands could lick the scars on your hands
until they gave birth
and cure your slipped discs with a single alexandrine
with a syllable of raw rye an ooh-la-la and then then
count one by one your grey hairs rooted in the world's ages
your plantigrade tongue mum
I could even restructure your skeleton
by implanting an anarchist song.

I sometimes feel the pain settle
plate
by
plate
like slate:
it's an emotional sprain stuck in my nape
and to bark like this it's sometimes necessary to weep iodine
to open the knees with a scythe until you see the sun so close
three centimetres from the iris
mum
I had to suck on your marrow
amaze the world when compassion goes down to caries
and your
forlorn
breasts.

to be able to bark I'd have to gnaw for years
on your allergy to dust to poplar fluff
your anaemia circulating backwards in the blood
I'd have to go with you to bury your 27-year-old brother and
clench my jaw not to cut my tongue
on his tuberculosis mummy dear.

I'm well aware that to be able to bark
I'd have to go with you to my childhood
and see myself almost die of dehydration
and pray to the virgin you don't believe in
to take me back to when I was 3½ months
and weld me to your lap for ever
like an iron scrap in your belly.

don't think I don't know that to be able to bark
I'd have to go with you to the last hours
of Grandma Carmiña holding onto the four corners of her headscarf
and your spleen.

I know I know everything
for me to learn this bark
in the end were necessary
a thousand women constantly washing in the river Saa
a thousand ploughing two thousand sewing five thousand
collecting sticks and briar roots on the hillside and You
most of all you planting pines on a vast ridge
unlearning everything you are
perforating your doubts.

Dear mum, I'm learning to bark.

someone sees me opening my jaw until I crack it and say
I'm barking ooh like the dog uh-uh
like Camille Claudel like Camille Claudel like Camille Claudel
like Camille mum in marble
like Camille
like Walt Whitman Walter Benjamin I'm coming mum
to you
coming I'm coming
up
up
ooh...



Pilar Pallarés

Culleredo, 1957

and when the time for memory arrives I hate you
and return to my mother's house your face
is a fragment rescued from the Garden of the Hesperides

an army deserts my fingers
installs its drums in my blood
goes deeper into foam

over in the east the evening's horizon has collapsed

mother similar to the taste of his sex is that of vengeance
pity me lying on the left side of the bed
with hunger for his mouth and spit
and an ivy in my belly

mother make me a crown of tiny teeth to bite me
pity me
stopped by the sword of God at the door of Paradise
and I'm lost with nostalgia for his rough tongue and sealing-wax
around my waist
dispossessed of every word's initial syllable
and already so given to death

mother tell him the warrior
taught me love and hate grow from the same humus
and so in hate I love and in his body I trust

mother tell him to besiege me
and to set the price of his hostage high
and to release his dogs
and let them devour me

[Untitled]

Our feet splash about in the slimy mud
– José Hierro

Those lines on Argelès beach
and this one advancing, the same,
to the asthmatic music of the tractors
sixty years on.

That woman running, grabbing her daughter's
hand, redoing the parting in her filthy hair
and crying, watching the sky, calculating
in a confused state
how much silence to go before death.
It's a street in Bilbao or Belgrade,
a lost, slippery path
on the border with Albania
(doesn't Kosovar sound like samovar,
extinguished scent?).

In both planes of time it's spring.
Here it's starting to rain. She checks the hair
of the girl sleeping in an Abando shelter
in 1937 or '38, one night in April.

A thin sheet is the water mirror
between yesterday and tomorrow, a skin she insists on smoothing
like her daughter's hair.

But the feet already splashing in mud...



Chus Pato
Ourense, 1955

Louise Labé is a verse
Louise Labé is a library
the library is sunken
Louise Labé is a port, the port is sunken
Louise is a portrait of oval shape

poetess sun, poetess diver

the library has no books, is microfilmed
the cathedral sails
has a periscope
cupola

the princess has no steed
the princess has an ox
she doesn't want to wed
she doesn't want to marry the ancient king of the Huns
she doesn't want to marry the old king of the misers

"my tribe is the oldest on earth"
he said
prefiguring her death

"what's a city, what's a street, what's a century?"
"I know, I know" answered the princess

he said: black, blacker than the blackness of night
he said, the outsider

the sun has leprosy
the sun hides its face
the sun is a Sarmatian horseman
the sun is one of fifty against Ponthus, Gallaecian knight,
the nets are purple, scarlet, the sun is a Magnet
the sun is a masked companion.
Impossible for me to conceive of the sea as a ceiling
laurel burns, crackles in the solstice
drunk, the eternity of my bluish
flesh

she had a lute, she played on a harp

the waters flow sweetly
the earth is wreathed in flowers of unparalleled colour
nymphs have fun
elegant is the tread of their feet on the grass

she says the sun travels daily
from the Caucasus to the Hesperides
Parthians wage war
she loathes tournaments, games and masks

she recites the verses of Catullus in French
affirms the skies are in harmony
he praised the perfection of her tresses

she talks of black Ethiopian squadrons
flourishes a spear, grasps a lance,
spurs and curls her horse
compares herself to Bradamante or Marfisa,
Ruggiero's illustrious sister

*"Come one day at least, dressed in mourning,
and approach my grave..."*

in Keer Is, in Limia, in Samothrace

I hate tranquillity
I detest the language of purity

Arbeit macht frei
Zeno, cruel Zeno, Zeno of Elea
the Colts:
in the Library.

[Untitled]

i

From the other side, where one is alone with time and the I is an innumerable which multiplies and decentres

since this narrator (the one from Thermidor) – who doesn't even have a name and whose contract the author didn't renew because she was inept and inconsistent – can't allow herself the luxury of not being osmotic even though she does have a raincoat

The tale is autobiographical inasmuch as the words that make it up are biographical

ferocity writes naturalizing poetics; its opiate deceleration, geometrics.

ii

The emotional tension is considerable. She asks for a shot of J&B. Evaporates (we locate her by the glare of her boots, the trail soon peters out). Not even the tiniest part of the smallest measurement of distance between her and her surroundings: pedestal tables, conversations and above all fusion with the black receptacle that is really a theatre. The words, syntactical stretches, reverberate in her eardrums, fill her tummy. If this – cinematographic – she sees right now is an artificial dream, what kind of technology is a poem?

iii

Because of him, because of Oedipus, his alabaster skin, his eyes green as the Nile, his body resting on the bows, the sounds of his harmonica, she forgot the faith sworn before reason, her trust in progress. It wasn't then she learnt the virtues of a dildo and the equivalence of bodies.

iv

And you, who will never make names and objects coincide.

v

Since she doesn't remember, she takes notes. Glosses clot (on her skin).

Altai, Yablonovy, Stanovoy (mountains)

Darfur, Kimberley (plateaus)

Orinoco, Mekong (deltas)

Challenger (trench)

Ob, Yenisei, Amur, Huang He (rivers)

vi

And the delta, that tongue of earth, full of light, advancing.



Alfonso Pexegueiro

Angoares, 1948

The Sands Of Language (Life)

It was when the world started.
"I don't know how she left the house on her own!" said the gods.
The way she walked was so decided
they let her go. "Where are you off to
all on your own?" they asked. "There's
a handsome, affectionate man waiting for me, gods,
but that's something you wouldn't understand."
And she carried on alone, under the gods' watchful gaze.

She crossed paths. Blank spaces.
Clouds. The odd mountain. She crossed a river.
And on reaching the sea (of the universe) she stopped.
"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "Everything's so far away!"

"Where do you want to go?" asked the gods.
"To the other side," she replied. "Of the sea?"
"Yes, to the other side of the sea, where there's
a handsome, affectionate man waiting for me,
but that's something you wouldn't understand,"
she said. "We'll take you! Climb aboard!"

And she climbed barefoot onto a green and red
dolphin, which rode the waves without getting
her wet. "How well you swim!" she said.
"I'm part of the sea," replied the dolphin.
"You could be the handsome, affectionate man
who's waiting," she implied. "And what
might his name be?" asked the dolphin.

“I don’t know, he’ll tell me when I get there,
 but you could be the handsome man
 who’s waiting.” “And how will you recognize him
 if you don’t know his name?” asked the dolphin.
 “By what he says!” the woman replied,
 watching the horizon go red and surprised
 by the question. “Isn’t that how
 we recognize all things?”

The dolphin remained silent. Only the waves spoke.
 “And how do you know he’s handsome and affectionate?”
 insisted the dolphin, a little ill at ease. “It couldn’t be
 any other way,” the woman replied,
 full of self-confidence. “Were it
 any other way, he wouldn’t be waiting
 and I wouldn’t be going to meet him...
 But you could be the handsome, affectionate man
 who’s waiting...” “How can you be
 so sure of what you say?” asked the dolphin,
 interrupting her and leaving her on the beach.
 “If it were otherwise, the world would not
 exist... but that’s something you gods
 have yet to understand.”

The dolphin took its leave,
 leaping over the ocean. And the woman,
 barefoot, went to meet
 the handsome, affectionate man...

The Parents

The night. The moon. But there was no moon.
The soldier entered her house,
dragging her with him, in humiliation.
He plucked out the husband's eyes and hung him
from a hook hidden in the clouds.
The children (fortunately) still
hadn't been born.

...

The night. The day. But there was no day.



Luz Pozo Garza
Ribadeo, 1922

First Memory

I opened my eyes
and felt the rain on my nape and temples.

I arrived when silence oscillates
in an attempt to make itself portico of time.
An inner form shared the movements
of the stars,
there came words,
dark rivers of joy,
voices passing through walls,
innocent ships fleeing in pupils.

I opened my eyes
and felt the rain.

I remember now an empty square
criss-crossed by winds of nostalgia like a known,
uncertain hand.
I remember streets not at right angles,
stones marked with lichen,
steamers sounding in afternoons of mist
when the quay slips into shadows and silence...

I should say, with the poet,
“I saw the shade without a look, without a lamp.”
But the light goes with me.

I opened my eyes.

In Search Of Federico García Lorca

And we buried in the ground
Overstepped the limits of the Genil and the Darro
Crossed bridges of agony
Climbed the mountainsides...

It was still snowing on the ridge
We walked the streets of Granada
with black chrysanthemums on our eyes...

We went in search of your shadow
in the cold Granadan dawn
We asked the black olives
overflowing fountains
myrtles
oleanders
oily-voiced beggars
We asked the crosses
dead tarantulas...

“Dig down add lament
Scrape with love with agony
the land is bruised in this part of Spain
The grass seems angry and injured
Add plenty of love confined death...”

There was a cold flower
an oleander in abandoned shade

With knives with nails and with teeth
we buried in the ground... and nothing!



Manuel Rivas

Coruña, 1957

Blind Man's Grass

Poussin of Normandy was asked
for the ancient world's
most beautiful gift
for a museum in Rome.
He didn't waste an hour.
He chose a handful of earth.
That strange matter,
that mass of shadows
fermenting with dawn.
A fistful of earth,
a bloody scab,
a putrid soul
salted
with the marble dust of statues.
A handful of earth,
winter embers,
the ancient world dreaming of
raising a stinging nettle
(blind man's grass)
in the mould of a hand.

Ingres And The Fornarina

At that hour
he feels like a body
made of old rags
with scabs of pigment,
word amputees,
blasphemous hands,
ashes of flames, decantations,
tearful ruts of wax,
oily remains of shadow pruning,
the mutiny of discarded things,
guilt piled up in the corners,
the dross of strokes,
the toxic moment, sublime cripple,
mystical poison,
light hurting on a bed of spirals,
the swamp on the floor,
a plain of insomniac breezes,
souls of bats on barbed wire,
sheep chewing grassy leather,
the enigmatic organization of mist,
destiny's petrified discontent,
the Florentine dawn creaking
through the studio window.
Finally Jean Ingres gives in. Takes a step forward. Tenses his trembling.
Paints the most beautiful back in the history of nudes.
That of Margherita, daughter of Francesco Luti, baker.
In 1518 Raffaello Sanzio
prepares to stroke that same curve
and she, the Fornarina,
on the lap of her lover and painter,
eyes Ingres with a wife's ironic glaze,
in the year 1814.

Tierra del Fuego

The tourists stretch and grow excited
when a crack appears in the crest of the glacier.
The collapse of Gothic nature
leads to shouts of jubilation.
Perhaps it's withdrawing out of a sense of shame,
or because of the flashes,
the whoops of amazement.
Success, extinction.
Nature really does imitate art.



Xavier Rodríguez Baixeras
Tarragona, 1945

Dialogue With The Eastern Trees

I also spoke to the eastern trees,
perfumed in a fervent breeze,
scattering down in secret
gardens: I shan't see you until, far away,
after many years, the nostalgia
of having been abundant for someone
who under you greedily held
onto me, but putting limits
on the night's caresses, gives me back
the caterpillars crossing tracks,
the cheeks stolen from a pool
crammed full of fish, sinuous
colours which even then referred me
to a more ancient, dazzling time
I had to forget: I shan't see you
tremble until the immature days
of the agony of mists, ardent
friends who may still breathe,
seeing the sea defiled by the opaque
eyes of those who are adrift.
They haven't stopped replying.

Shadow Child

For some time I've been hearing voices,
 doors banging in the attic, voices
 consumed by fever; doors
 banging angrily, ardent,
 high. I don't know when
 they started to come, from what hidden
 lagoon, these faltering,
 suppliant voices ("warm water"),
 then diffuse, which catch me
 lying on the floor, which shake me,
 won't let me sleep.
 For some time now
 I've been hearing footsteps coming from those doors,
 lively, tremulous
 footsteps as of someone carrying a weight
 up in the attic.

 Why
 carry so much water if there are lakes?
 Why am I sleeping on the floor?
 I stretch out my arms
 to the net of darkness, pursue myself
 through ravines, grottoes, wound my feet
 on stony beaches,
 the only centre I find the pleasure
 of remorse, am laid low by hail,
 some cheap wine, a gale
 of crazy leaves...

 Who is calling me?
 Who is turning on the light?
 I emerge between nettles,
 rub my eyes. Hear someone say
 – like a shadow – "you've a new brother."
 Only then do I fall asleep.

Elegy

For my brother Rafael Baixeras, painter

From a lunar pool, from an estuary porthole, from a carriage blinded by turbid snow, you see me.

From your inland distance, from your vantage point, when I mean to chase you through tunnels someone numbered, thinking of return, you see me.

From a balcony in the cold night, suddenly noticing as I cross the street with the saddest of gestures, you see me.

From some wind or sand, desolation of sleeping women, from inside their eyes lost in light, you see me.

From that dark room, from the rust of decanters and the scent of tyres that hasn't gone away, from that lament, you see me.

From seas which are to blame for us going where everything ends, to a bottom without cure, without anchor weeds, without sediment, you see me.

From the day of your birth and the afternoon of my death, from the dawn of blond bodies swept away on a gust of wind, from the half-closed shutter of our laughter, you see me.

From a light that is intense, from a summer night, both of us breathing in the same peace-deprived room, sailing in wine, you see me.

From the hour that signals the moment of departure, world without end, from the grandfather clock whose eyes we once plucked out, you see me.

From the faith that, when verses and paintings burn beyond closed eyelids, blinded by a single sun, I can say I see you, you can say it to me, you see me.



Claudio Rodríguez Fer

Lugo, 1956

An Old Man And A Boy
(Revolutionary Project On Lugo Wall)

In tribute to Ánxel Fole

Lugo was a truly walled city back in 1970:
the wall seemed made not just not to let people in, but not to let them out.

There lived an old man with an open wall at the gates of his heart.
And a boy with an open heart at the gates of the wall.

The old man carried in his eyes all the humidity of the river as it passes
through Fingoi.
And the child the blue of the railway polished by the passing train.

The old man had a map of his youth which coincided with a vegetable patch
in laurel alley.
The boy had a map of the world hanging in the school where he'd been born.

The old man's chest thumped to the sound of the Kuban Cossack Chorus.
The boy's chest filled with the lead of Zeppelin's percussion.

The old man had known the freedom of the Second Republic which carried
on governing his imagination.
The boy had known no other freedom than that of his unruly mind.

But the old man continued chatting to his lunatic, pansophic, parabolic and
fablist phantoms.
And the boy going crazily alone to the mad flames of a bitch named Lilith.

The old man dreamed of fertile fields and the ripening green Galician valley.
The boy dreamed of great cities beyond the frontiers of the wall.

The old man struck the boy as a grandad who knew all the tribe's secrets.
The boy struck the old man as a romantic poet looking like a Russian anarchist.

The old man had discovered hell in precisely 1936 and was condemned to silence.

The boy had discovered silence without a date and wouldn't stop until sentencing hell.

The old man wasn't getting any younger and the boy wasn't getting any older: everything was arranged for there to be no contact.

But against all expectations no one could stop the meeting taking place. And I swear that pure contact was enough simply to transform the world.

from Trace Of Woman

Inside

I know I'm alive
having placed my hand
on your belly.

Where only you were inside.

Poetry

The only ink I write with
is the trace of your flux.

But I'm aiming for your body
and life is not for writing down.

Museum

Everything exists so that you can.
You are so that everything exists.

And there you were absolutely
supremely existing.

Landscape

Time passes on the boulevards,
the frenzy, everything passes.
Time passes through you.

And is filled with life.

Body

There is no past or future.
Now you are a bitch.

There is only time for the present
if it beats in your vulva.



Xavier Seoane

Coruña, 1954

When my soul goes up and flies over the sea
I shall come back to tell you the fortune of the birds' return
and the rain of spring on fields

for nothing is so beautiful in this life
or so cruel perhaps
as coming back to your beloved country and finding yourself
rewinding the ball of a youth of ours that never died

when over these isles the air is crossed
by a spirit that was mine and disappears
there will be a shuddering in the old things that tied us
a silence pondering the return of a voice that sang in me

be generous-hearted
and when my soul goes up and flies beyond the sea
rise and sing
on the land we loved

Bestiary

For Miguel González Garcés

The rustle of an insect resounds on the earth
a fish floats along in the sky

cats are balls and curl up
weasels wound the throats that sing

beetles rest in the potato patch
mice dream of a barn paradise

a praying mantis chooses a drunken mate
silence emanates from silence amid bees

torpid tortoises overtake hares
unknown silent birds
drink skin

high bats weave death in the shadows

in the heart of the world a quiet dove is



Xohana Torres
Santiago de Compostela, 1931

I always went down through Old Square
where children played with coins
in the fish market.
The stifling heat congealed a dreadful stench
on the tables, of guts
the fishwives tore out early.

In the distance, the bestest sea,
the dockyard's grey propellers,
naval gangways, tall, dark,
rain-worn.
The birds always
like an independent caravan
detracting from flight...
ah, tremendous gift of beating the air.

Childhood, footsteps of mine, irrevocable shadow
is all I have left of your night.

Field of Time, unharmed meadow,
to enjoy May for my doves:
how life delegates that sweetness
it sheltered in the doorway with your name!

Still without thinking high-throated songs
wouldn't be eternal
warming us a little like small hugs.

Still without knowing anything of the two sides
hopelessly dividing men,
if two are ever recognized.

We are summoned by a drunken testament of years,
a skeleton in the sea, which doesn't return
even a bone with a flower on it.

Didn't you know?
Nothing is that transitory calm on the side:
The sea next to the sand, which is much the same
as saying Death.

My Name Is Image In The Hour's Mauve Light. Sometimes Mist Comes To Change Me Completely

Body lying on the sand, melancholic girl.
When you jump up and move your hair
I look like you, creation on another beach.

The Islands communicate that unreal filter
of festival lights in the celestial heart.

We were credulous but time went by.
(The dream is in the light that blinds us for an instant.)

Suddenly the landscape alters mercilessly,
the girl in the red swimsuit disappears,
a voice calls to her from the maize.

The mystery now is on the horizon.
Everything has the sadness of feeling alien
while Venus appears in the evening.

That simple minute of a Japanese print
stains the estuary grey: Thus dusk,
time passing like colour.

Light I saw fade in Rande,
one moment of glory.

The sky offers no explanations. Everything and nothing
on the migratory veil anticipating night.

Galicia

First you were
in the green of the branches
over our heads,
on the blank pages,
in the seed, light and merriment.

Then you were
in the turns of the waterwheel,
nobody's men,
night islands,
in the struggle,
the chains,
the bitterness.

What did you mean
by announcing yourself
so close and yet so far...?

As a response
to such a sea of doubts
(let's not hide anything),
I spent my entire life
walking along your walls:
you're like a door, land of mine,
and you're still waiting.



About The Translator

Jonathan Dunne studied Classics at Oxford University, and holds advanced diplomas in Galician and Spanish from Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela Universities. His translations of work by Tsvetanka Elenkova, Manuel Rivas, Enrique Vila-Matas and others are published by Harvill Secker, Shoestring Press and Shearsman Books in the UK, and Europa Editions, New Directions and Overlook Press in the US, and have appeared in various magazines including *Absinthe*, *Calque*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *Poetry Review* and *Poetry Wales*. Most recently they were nominated for the Warwick Prize for Writing and the Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation. He is the editor of a bilingual *Anthology of Galician Literature 1196-1981*, published in 2010 by the two main Galician publishers, Editorial Galaxia and Edicións Xerais. He has written two books, *Even Though That* (2004) and *The DNA of the English Language* (2007), and directs the publishing house Small Stations Press.



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