
Selection of Poems by David McLoughlin Translated into Spanish

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Details into Light

It has been said of David McLoughlin's first collection *Waiting for Saint Brendan* (Salmon Poetry, 2012) that "These are big, ambitious, sometimes sprawling poems, rich in narrative and in detail, an autobiography of sorts, where the voyaging soul is concerned to find home and meaning in a dialogue between self and other." It has also been pointed out that McLoughlin "unites sharp 'eye work', in rich and telling detail, with what Rilke called 'heart work', in a series of clear and powerful images". I found the book to be the work of a courageous poet, particularly in section two, where he confronts his own demons as Brendan confronted his.

But the common word in the above commentaries is "detail" and the poems under discussion now are from a forthcoming book, also from Salmon, called *Santiago Sketches*. For "sketches" we could read "details" because the poems are made from observations in little notebooks kept during a year in Santiago de Compostela and then transferred to bigger page-a-day diaries that the poet bought in those "great Spanish stationery shops".

I remember watching the poet Desmond O'Grady jot down words on torn corners of newspaper pages and carefully fold the tiny pieces of writing and place them in his wallet. Also, I once came across a poem by Heaney on display in the British Library, written on the inside of a Kellogg's cornflakes box. We all have our methods and anything will do really: beer mats, paper serviettes, cigarette boxes, even mobile phones; they all serve the poem, helping it along towards the printed page or to never see the light of day again. Thankfully, we have McLoughlin's perseverance and "eye work" that has given us, in these poems, an outsider's / insider's view of the ordinary, day-to-day happenings in Santiago.

These are not "big, ambitious, sometimes sprawling poems" but rather ethereal, worked-on but not overworked, slightly-controlled reactions to what caught his eye. Instead of photographs, we have photowords. Glimpses, gleanings, scratches and scrapings of life as he experienced it during the course of a year (from 1993 to 94) in that great pilgrim City of Galicia. They are the poet's own searchings on a voyage that would eventually take him to New York.

In a sense, these poems are a pilgrim's store of experiences and longings brought to us by a keen-eyed poet: from "Café Derby" we read of the waiter who could have served Valle Inclán (how we wish for those *tertulias* again), the bikers in the Obradoiro (this *barrio* is where the poet mostly hangs out) and the zinc bar counter (not many left now). In "Lamed" we are treated to a wonderful juxtaposition of proud, Napoleonic-type strollers and the medieval clerk wearing a one, four-inch orthopedic shoe and the presence of the Moors –

never too far from us in Spain. “Map” makes the connection with Ireland and West Clare cheekbones, “Agua De Colonia” “is the smell of Spain” (well, one of them) and “Civil Disagreement” is a snapshot of its political divide. We are back with McLoughlin’s penchant for saints in “All Saints” and the day, November 1, tastes of saint’s bones (a type of bun), its sound as old fingers rake the dominos (an exact image) and the poet’s imaginary escape from the spewing rain to the smells of late summer in Nerja, a thousand kilometers to the south, where the younger McLoughlin used to holiday with his parents.

From here we enter the terrain of people and place and the details that go into making up their lives. In “Pepe’s Wife” we can see into her sad apron eyes, the traditional pipers and their flaccid bagpipes like deserters from a forgotten peninsular war, the gong of the poet’s silence and the call to prayer (McLoughlin cannot avoid it!). “León with Regina” takes us on an excursion to High Castile and the presence of water where cypress trees grow, a walk past unofficial shebeen bars and the glassed-in balconies are sun traps (they also provide winter warmth). We are back in familiar territory with the seven year wait for a holy door to open as the poet pokes fun at the twelve apostles, while someone else has painted their lips with lipstick. Rain again, as Beckett said, while the priest ignores the beggar and life is a lottery ticket, a street sweeper, a junkie, the poet’s dead grandfather in a suburban fir tree in Dublin via Santiago, and the over-grown moss on the cathedral is a beard. Víctor Jara’s broken hands are recalled in “Antonio”, a poem about a busker, a second chance with Lucía (a girlfriend at the time), Basque rebels and the poet’s refusal to play the Irish card. This is followed by “Evening, Quintana” and its café life of dark-haired men, a medieval pilgrim from Dingle (one of the *caminos* and the place where the poet lived for a few years) writ in stone and gypsies jamming.

“The Book of Beginnings”, “First Night” and “Leaving” close the selection included in this issue of *Estudios Irlandeses*. Each poem is a return to the time when his Santiago experience began. They speak naturally, from hindsight, of sharing cigarettes with old female acquaintances, that Iberian confidence and penchant for profanities that would be shocking in more prudish societies, an epiphany in his old *barrio* and that predawn walk of loneliness and discovery.

These sketches or searchings are better than any tourist guide. The information is precise, accurate and loyal to people and place. With a little imagination, the reader will relish the detail and if the urge is carried to its conclusion, you could do worse than go to Santiago with these poems in your pocket to guide you. They are the stuff of a poet’s pilgrimage, homages to a place that helped him to grow and to complete some of that dialogue with himself and the other. Is not this what the *camino* is all about.

John Liddy. Madrid, August 2016.

CAFÉ DERBY

Past the leaking umbrella bin of dark wood
by the door, girl facing boy, four teenagers
play seriously at adulthood. The boys' hair
is bullfighter-gelled, deeply *engominado*;
French-style, each girl wears a pastel sweater
around her shoulders, another at the waist.
They are attended by a small bald waiter
who might have served as apprentice
at the *tertulias* of Valle Inclán. Hieratic,
a slight limp, the collarless white coat
buttoned to the neck, unhurrying
he carries a tray to their table—the dark
thick hot chocolate from the Americas,
the *infusiones* in alchemical jars, unfurling.

*

Two biker pilgrims in muddy boots
and PLO scarves, stubbled,
stand beside elbow-high bikes
with Madrid registrations—
wheel rims choked with mud and dust—
chatting to a suave traffic cop
in the Obradoiro, square of the gold-workers,
their bikes parked below the cathedral
as if after some Paris-Dakar.

*

Two elderly women in buffalo fur coats
—like the campaign coats of centurions—
stand at the zinc counter
of the male-dominated bar, talking at
each other: small, gesticulating upwards.
Old men frown, slapping down dominoes.

LAMED

Among the proud walkers, each his own Napoleon
—only briefly perturbed as a 6 foot 4 blond German
passes in rope sandals—go the ones hobble-walking
through the drizzle of medieval streets.
And apart from a brief case and beige gabardine,
the small man with the four-inch black orthopedic
platform shoe could be medieval
—that sense of the afflicted.

*

Swans asleep in the rain
pattering on the art deco Moorish pool
in the Alameda —
the name of the park,
it means *grove of poplars*.

CAFÉ DERBY

Al cruzar el oscuro paragüero de madera, chorreando
junto a la puerta, chica para chico, cuatro jovencuelos
galantean serios con la madurez. Los chicos y su cabello,
fijado a lo torero, intensamente *engominado*;
a la francesa, las chicas revisten sus hombros
con jerséis pastel, y a la cintura otro.
Los atiende un camarero, calvo y retaco,
de menester quizá madurado desde mozo
en las *tertulias* de Valle Inclán. Hierático,
algo rencoso, viste una blanca chaquetilla sin cuello
abotonada hasta la garganta, parsimonioso.
Les lleva una bandeja a la mesa—denso,
de las américas, caliente chocolate negro,
infusiones en ánforas de alquimia, bullendo.

*

Dos motoristas peregrinos de botas lodosas,
con palestinas y barba de tres días,
están de pie junto a sus enormes motocicletas,
las matrículas de Madrid—
y las llantas bañadas en barro y polvo—
conversando con un afable policía
en el Obradoiro, la plaza de los orfebres,
mientras que a los pies de la catedral descansan sus motocicletas,
cual persiguiendo un París Dakar.

*

Dos ancianas, envueltas en abrigos de piel de búfalo
—como los que los centuriones vestían en sus campañas—
se acodan sobre la barra de zinc
del varonil bar, conversando
entre ellas: gesticulan al cielo, menudas.
Los ancianos, ceñudos y en sus dominós, estampan las fichas.

COJO

Entre los viandantes orgullosos y napoleónicos
—distráidos, quizás, por un alemán, rubio, metro noventa y tres—
que pasea en sandalias de cáñamo—renquean algunos
bajo el sirimiri de callejas medievales.
Maletín y gabardina beige; si no fuera por eso,
el pequeño señor del zapato de plataforma, ortopédico,
negro, de diez centímetros, parecería del medievo
—esa aura de afligido.

*

Cisnes que dormitan bajo la lluvia
y chapotean en la piscina art decó de estilo morisco
de la Alameda—
cuyo nombre significa
bosquecillo de álamos.

MAP

Sky up through the narrow streets.
 Old men in berets and suits leaning on sticks
 talking outside Café das Crechas
 where copper coins glint between the stones
 near an Elizabethan map of Ireland.
 Dark, bearded young men,
 cheek wisps above the beard line.
 Strong, *galego*-speaking women
 with Al-Andalus eyes, smoking *Ducados*.
 One of them turns: West Clare
 in her cheekbones. Her hazel eyes, to me,
 have the intensity of someone young
 in an old photograph, taken in Quilty
 a summer day, through a long exposure.

AGUA DE COLONIA

Under the moped fumes, *torrefacto* coffee,
 dark tobacco with no filter, straight *aguardiente*
 —throat rip of aniseed, no water no chaser—
 the public buildings that carry it
 even in their ammonia—is the smell of Spain:
 the agua de colonia they put on babies
 that sells in large bottles for almost nothing.
 Women cool their wrists with it,
 dab it behind the pierced ears
 of baby girls. Gold sleepers.

I've been looking for it since childhood.
 The towelettes the Iberia air hostesses
 passed was that smell. They were beautiful, and tall
 and I did not understand. It was there in the heat
 evaporating like jasmine, the haze of gasoline
 when they opened the door.

CIVIL DISAGREEMENT

A punky young woman
 muffled in a PLO scarf, dark-eyed
 all determined, anarchism and the Basque mullet
 gets on the bus—an old, blue 1950s city bus—
 says to the driver in *galego*:
 “Praza Roxa, por favor.” Red Square.
 A man with a long black moustache
 growls in Castilian:
 “*Plaza* José Antonio Primo de Rivera!”

ALL SAINTS

Forearms in sugar dust, the baker
 relishes saying, “¡hoxe comemos
 osos do Santo!” On All Saints Day

MAPA

Sube al cielo por las angostas calles.
 Ancianos en boina y traje, apoyados en bastones,
 charlando en la puerta del Café das Crechas,
 donde monedas de cobre brillan entre las piedras
 junto a un mapa isabelino de Irlanda.
 Mozos morenos y barbudos,
 con pelillos por encima del contorno de la barba.
 Mujeres fuertes que hablan gallego
 con ojos del Al-Andalus, fuman *Ducados*.
 Una se gira: el oeste de Clare
 en sus pómulos. Sus ojos de avellana, para mí,
 tienen la intensidad de alguien joven
 en una fotografía antigua, echada en Quilty,
 un día de verano, con una larga exposición.

AGUA DE COLONIA

Oculto bajo el humo de las motos, bajo el café *torrefacto*,
 bajo el tabaco negro sin filtro, bajo el más puro *aguardiente*
 —un anís que desgarrar la garganta, sin agua, a palo seco,—
 en muchos edificios públicos está presente,
 oculto hasta bajo el amoniaco—el olor de España:
 el agua de colonia con la que embadurnan a los bebés
 que viene en grandes botellas por cuatro perras.
 Con él se refrescan las muñecas las mujeres,
 y lo aplican tras los perforados lóbulos
 de las niñas. Zarcillos dorados.

Lo busco desde mis años mozos.
 De las toallitas de las azafatas de Iberia en los viajes
 emanaba tal olor. Tan gráciles eran, y tan altas,
 y yo ni las entendía. Estaba incluso ahí, en ese calor febril,
 evaporándose como el jazmín, en una bruma de gasoil
 mientras ellas abrían las puertas.

DESACUERDO CIVIL

Una punki jovenzuela
 de ojos negros, arropada en una palestina,
 tan suya con su anarquismo y coletilla vasca,
 se sube al autobús—una cascarria azul de los cincuenta—
 y le dice al conductor en *galego*:
 “Praza Roxa, por favor.” Plaza Roja.
 A lo que un hombre con formidable bigote negro
 ruge en castellano:
 “¡*Plaza* José Antonio Primo de Rivera!”

TODOS LOS SANTOS

Hasta los codos de azúcar glas, el pastelero
 se deleita en decir: “Hoxe comemos
 osos de Santo!” ¡En el Día de Todos los Santos

we eat the saint's bones!
Biting down, I get to the sweet
marrow of it.

*

Old men's caps and coats hang on hooks.
A cheesy, low-cut variety show on Tele Cinco
on mute. Oblivious, stony-faced,
they rake the dominoes, rake through bones.
At the next table, a card player flicks one down
onto once-plush baize, and turns away
with the contempt of the defeated.

*

Under the spout drains in the Old Town
—mouths of monsters spewing rain—
I'm thinking of Nerja
a thousand kilometres to the south.
In November, the air in Andalusia
still holds the *deje* of summer:
faint bruise—a trace.
I love the way the winter air
has almonds, sea salt
faded jasmine in it,
like breathing nostalgia.

PEPE'S WIFE

When you go to pay,
she never accepts the money,
motioning you to him with her eyes
—eyes of flies in close-up,
crawling on tapas, eyes of hair
greasy from frying *tortilla*,
fat, sad apron eyes.

*

Unshaven *gaiteros* in traditional costume,
black waistcoats, white shirts, black breeches,
flaccid bagpipes over their shoulders,
talking among themselves in *galego*,
long bedraggled hair: like deserters
who've walked a long way.
White puttee bandages below their knees,
black knee-breeches—like the battles drummers
from a forgotten peninsular war
falling behind among the prostitutes
and their children, the stumbling camp followers.

3 a.m.: I walk home
mist through the old town.
—Gong!—Gong!
Rim of my silence.

nos comemos los huesos del santo!
Bocado a bocado llego
al dulce tuétano.

*

Las boinas y abrigos de los ancianos penden del perchero.
El show de Telecinco, soso e insulso,
en silencio. Abstraídos, pétreos sus rostros,
remueven los dominós, rebuscan entre huesos.
En la otra mesa, un jugador de cartas estampa una
sobre el tapete, antaño terso, y se vuelve
con la vehemencia del vencido.

*

Bajo las bocas de las canaletas en el casco antiguo
—fauces de fieras que espantan lluvia—
pienso en Nerja,
un millar de kilómetros más abajo.
En Noviembre, en el aire de Andalucía
todavía vuela ese *deje* de verano:
una mera muesca—una marca.
Adoro el invierno y su viento
de almendras, de sal marina,
de jazmín vaporoso,
una bocanada de nostalgia.

LA MUJER DE PEPE

Cuando toque pagar,
nunca aceptará el dinero,
y con sus ojos a él te mandará
—Ojos de mosca en primer plano,
que se arrastran por las tapas, ojos de cabellos
aceitosos de freír *tortilla*,
ojos de delantal, orondos, mustios.

*

Gaiteros sin afeitado en sus trajes regionales,
negros el calzón y chaleco, blanca la camisa,
sobre sus hombros una gaita flácida,
en *galego* entablan sus conversaciones,
pelandreras largas y lardosas: como desertores
que han hecho un largo camino.
bajo sus rodillas, blancos vendajes
sobre calzones cortos negros—como un tamborilero
de un conflicto peninsular de antaño,
en la retaguardia junto a las prostitutas
y sus críos, a trompicones, siguiendo al ejército.

3 de la madrugada: camino a casa
la niebla devora el casco antiguo
—Gong!—Gong!
El filo de mi silencio.

*

Loud speakers on the minarets
of the cathedral
as if for some call to prayer.

LEÓN WITH REGINA

In High Castile,
between cypress trees marking water,
a transhumance of sheep washes across the road
from white stubble fields.
—Shepherds in red wool jerseys waving us on.

*

Walking out of the city along Calle Pombal
in the late afternoon, women lean in doorways.
They don't call to me, even tiredly. I glimpse
empty beer crates in shebeen bars,
bedrooms behind curtains at the back of them.

*

Glassed-in balconies are sun traps
for women born before the civil war.
White-panelled wood between the panes,
grey-blue double doors, green tendrils
trailing down the grey iron.
Faint wood-smoke over the old town.

*

Leaving Thomas' flat into the Rúa do Vilar
and then the cathedral—the Puerta Santa's
closed, won't open for another seven years.
Statues of apostles in relief around the door
whisper against each other
behind their hands, as if at shift's end.
Someone's painted their lips with lipstick.

*

One stall left in the Rúa Nova.
A woman walks past
under an umbrella,
her Siamese cat peeps
over an upturned collar.

*

A small priest bent over
in his cassock, passes beggars
in the rain. I wonder where to go
in the Quintana dos Mortos,
in the city of time.

*

Megáfonos en los minaretes
de la catedral
como para llamar a la oración.

LEÓN CON REGINA

En la Alta Castilla,
entre cipreses que señalan el agua,
una trashumancia de ovejas inunda la carretera
desde campos de blanco rastrojo.
—Los pastores y sus jerséis rojos de lana nos dan paso.

*

Cruzando calle Pombal para salir de la ciudad
bien entrada la tarde, las mujeres se asoman a los portales.
No me saludan, ni con desgana. Atisbo
barriles de cerveza vacíos en cuchitriles,
cuartos tras cortinas al fondo.

*

Los balcones acristalados son trampas de sol
para las mujeres nacidas antes de la Guerra Civil.
Paneles de madera blanca unen los cristales,
puertas dobles azules y grises, zarcillos verdes
que descienden junto al hierro gris.
El débil humo de las chimeneas cubre el casco antiguo.

*

Salir del piso de Thomas a la Rúa do Vilar
y justo ahí la catedral—la Puerta Santa está
cerrada, y no se abrirá hasta dentro de siete años.
Las estatuas de los apóstoles cuidan la puerta, aliviados,
cuchichean entre sí
con las manos a la espalda, como al acabar sus turnos.
Alguien les ha pintado los labios con pintalabios.

*

Solo queda un puesto en la Rúa Nova.
Una mujer pasa de largo
resguardada en un paraguas,
y su gato siamés se asoma
sobre el cuello de la camisa.

*

Un cura bajito, doblado
en su sotana, deja atrás a los mendigos
bajo la lluvia. Me pregunto a dónde ir
en la Quintana dos Mortos,
en la ciudad del tiempo.

*

No letters today. The ONCE lottery ticket seller
in the glass booth with venetian blinds
Braille-counting a roll of 5,000 pesetas notes.
My lungs' harsh residue.

“¡Vamos, hombre!” an old man says
to the rheumatic Alsatian straying behind him
as if to a friend.

Three o'clock. White-jacketed waiters
in El Paradiso café serve tea to old women
in the in-between time.

Two female students link arms
under their umbrella.

A street sweeper in navy overalls,
luminous white stripes at her ankles and sleeves,
a witch's broom sweeping long trajectories.

The junkies shelter under the arches
in the Toural square. Old men
stand beside the police.
The police ignore them, the old men
keep nodding as if they were included.

*

Smell of astringent pines by the Auditorio.
Mist drifting across the houses on the hill
like wood smoke. A smell of damp grass,
or the perennial berries
of suburban fir trees at the end of gardens
in Dublin. My dead grandfather.

*

Long, beard-moss on the cathedral.
An aged foreign couple, white-haired,
strolling. A cherub flying, all cheek.
Eroded lion faces watch them out of the stone.

ANTONIO

Most nights there was a busker
in the arch under Bishop Xelmirez's palace
—the acoustics so good you heard him
long before you came up the stairs from the Obradoiro.
He sat because of the long hours, and when he stood
he walked as if his leg had been turned the wrong way.
I didn't know his name.

10 years later, Lucía and I were walking down from Cervantes,

*

No hay cartas hoy. El vendedor de la ONCE
en su cabina de cristal de persianas venecianas
cuenta en braille un manojo de billetes de 5000 pesetas.
El penetrante residuo de mis pulmones.

“¡Vamos, hombre!” le dice un anciano
al reumático y descarriado alsaciano a su espalda,
como si fuera un amigo.

Las tres. Camareros de chaquetilla blanca
sirven té a ancianas en la cafetería *El Paradiso*
en el intermedio.

Dos chicas estudiantes entrelazan sus brazos
bajo el paraguas.

Una barrendera en un mono azul marino,
líneas blancas fluorescentes en sus tobillos y mangas,
la escoba de una bruja que barre largos trayectos.

Los yonquis se resguardan bajo los arcos
de la plaza Toural. Algunos ancianos
aguardan junto a los agentes.
Los policías los ignoran, pero los ancianos
siguen asintiendo, como si los tuviesen en cuenta.

*

El astringente aroma de los pinos junto al Auditorio.
la niebla que se desliza sobre las casas de la colina
como humo de leña. El olor a césped húmedo
o las bayas perennes
de los abetos al final de los jardines
a las afueras de Dublín. Mi abuelo muerto.

*

Musgo largo y barbiespeso en la catedral.
Una anciana pareja de extranjeros de niveo pelo,
pasea. Un querubín que vuela, todo mejillas.
Erosionadas facciones de león que los vigilan desde la piedra.

ANTONIO

Muchas noches merodeaba un músico
bajo el palacio del Obispo Xelmirez, bajo el arco
—la acústica tan buena que lo escuchabas
mucho antes de pasar el Obradoiro y subir las escaleras.
Sentado por la larga jornada, cuando se ponía de pie
andaba como con la pierna mal torcida.
No sabía su nombre.

10 años más tarde, descendíamos por Cervantes Lucía y yo,

Santiago starting again for me.
 He was playing “Te Recuerdo, Amanda”
 by Víctor Jara. “¡Claro!” he said to her,
 “you played at singer-songwriter nights at *Modus Vivendi!*”
 At midnight his girlfriend collected him
 with their Golden Retriever. She was a student,
 10 years younger. As they walked away
 I thought of second chances, and Lucía’s student
 days when she said “every window was open
 playing Pablo Milanés, Mercedes Sosa, and Silvio,”
 Latin American hope songs. Behind the songs,
compañeros, Víctor Jara—and me and her
 missing each other in every Old Town bar,
 me missing being in a different book.

Tarasca sometimes played the hope songs,
 more often rebel songs, flew the Basque Ikurrina
 beside the Cuban star. When I ordered in Spanish
 the bearded bartender looked at me askance
 under black-and-white photos of prisoners,
 friends of the axe and the asp—echoes of a mural
 iconography. He turned stony, I wouldn’t play
 the Irish card. Off my elbow, a local wore
 the balaclava and the armalite, foregrounded
 on the Tricolour: the easy t-shirt.

Víctor Jara was on the jukebox.
 “Try playing that on the guitar,”
 the soldiers mocked in the stadium
 in Santiago de Chile, after they broke his hands.
 Víctor Jara sang back at them from the ground.

EVENING, QUINTANA

A fiddler on the steps—
tertulia in Café Literarios.
 The open door casts a yellow path
 on the flagstones: to warm voices,
 points closely-argued,
 dark-haired men standing, laughing

—and then 19th century beards,
 friends meeting daily at the coffee house
 mightn’t be that far.

I stop to listen,
 then go on.
 A man runs past, like a fugitive

the cathedral’s towers far above him.
 Sickle moon, Jewish star.
 Tower of contradictory heart.

Old ladies pant, linking arms
 climbing the hill of Costa Vella.
 A black cat sits watching
 almost in schadenfreude.
 In the Obradoiro

Santiago tocándome la fibra de nuevo.
 Él tocaba “Te Recuerdo, Amanda”
 de Víctor Jara. “¡Claro!” le dijo a ella,
 “¡Tú tocaste en el *Modus Vivendi*, en las noches de cantautores!”
 A las doce lo recogía su novia
 con su Golden Retriever. Era universitaria,
 10 años más joven. Y pensé entonces en las segundas oportunidades
 mientras se marchaban, y en los días
 de estudiante de Lucía, cuando decía “todas las ventanas
 abiertas al ritmo de Pablo Milanés, Mercedes Sosa y Silvio,”
 temas latinoamericanos de esperanza. Y tras la canción,
compañeros, Víctor Jara—y ella y yo
 sin encontrarnos en ningún bar del casco antiguo,
 echando yo de menos estar en otro libro.

En *Tarasca* ponían a veces los temas de esperanza,
 o más bien himnos rebeldes, e izaban la Ikurriña vasca
 a la par de la estrella Cubana. Cuando pedí en castellano,
 el velludo camarero me miró receloso
 bajo fotos de prisioneros en blanco y negro,
 amigos del hacha y la áspid—ecos de una iconografía
 mural. Se volvió impasible, decidí no sacarme de la manga
 a Irlanda. Pegado a mi codo, un parroquiano
 llevaba el pasamontañas y el armalite sobre fondo
 de la Tricolor: la camiseta inevitable.

Sonaba Víctor Jara en la gramola.
 “Intenta tocar eso con la guitarra,”
 le dirían los soldados entre risas en el estadio
 de Santiago de Chile, al partírle la mano.
 Víctor Jara les cantó desde el suelo.

NOCHE, QUINTANA

Un violinista en el escalón—
tertulia en el Café Literarios.
 La puerta abierta proyecta una senda amarilla
 sobre los adoquines: que te lleva a voces cálidas,
 a argumentos bien defendidos,
 a hombres morenos de pie, entre risas

—y entonces barbas decimonónicas;
 encontrarse amigos a diario en las cafeterías
 no puede quedar tan lejos.

Me paro a escuchar,
 y me marchó.
 Un hombre pasa corriendo, como un fugitivo,

las torres de la catedral lo vigilan desde lo alto.
 Luna de hoz, estrella judía.
 Torre de corazones contradictorios.

Jadean las ancianas, y unen sus brazos
 para subir la cuesta de Costa Vella.
 Sentado, un gato negro observa
 casi riéndose de los males ajenos.
 En el Obradoiro

the stone is still warm from the sun.

At the five star hotel,
a waiter looks out, closes the door,
making the quiet comes closer.
To the west, a spectrum
of blue-black, red-green, darker red,
where the sun is going down.

*

A faint cross decipherable
in sandstone.
The full moon in a window
in whose light sometimes I see
writing on the stone:
graffiti of an Irish pilgrim. They wrote
El Dinguel de Santiago
in the book of arrivals,
then he missed the boat back.

*

The *gitanos* jamming in the Quintana:
the boy on the guitar,
the older man's voice starts up
unsure, shivering—knife.
Two teenaged girls
—eyes of India.
How long since you left home?

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS

Women I knew, then,
who smoked Ducados
would pass me a drag
from time to time
in the Praza de Mazarelos —
black tobacco, the gentle
laceration—and me trying
to find the page.

*

The old woman
wearing her beauty
like dried flowers.
The Iberian confidence
still fresh.

*

At the Platerías door of the cathedral
old men sit, talking.
¡Me cago en dios!—"I shit
on God!"—one routinely punctuates.

The arcade arches

la piedra aún conserva el calor del sol.

En el hotel de cinco estrellas,
se asoma un camarero, cierra la puerta
y hace que se acerque el silencio
Al oeste, un espectro
de negroazul, verdirrojo, rojo oscuro,
donde el sol se hunde.

*

La sombra de una cruz discernible
en la arenisca.
La luna llena en una ventana,
y en su luz a veces veo
garabatos en la piedra:
el grafiti de un peregrino irlandés. Escribieron
El Dinguel de Santiago
en el registro de llegadas,
Y entonces perdió el barco de vuelta.

*

Los gitanos montan jaleo en la Quintana:
el niño con su guitarra,
y la voz del hombre que arranca
vacilante, trémula—cuchillo.
En plena adolescencia, dos chicas
—ojos de la India.
¿Cuándo la dejasteis atrás?

EL LIBRO DE LOS PRINCIPIOS

Conocía mujeres, por aquel entonces,
que fumaban Ducados
y que me dejaban una calada
de vez en cuando
en la Praza de Mazarelos—
Tabaco negro, esa suave
flagelación—y yo tratando
de encontrar la página.

*

La anciana
viste su belleza
como flores marchitas.
Su confianza ibérica
aun joven.

*

Junto a la puerta de las Platerías en la catedral
se sientan ancianos, que charlan.
¡Me cago en dios!—
puntualiza uno cada poco.

Los arcos de la galería

of Rúa Nova and do Vilar
sheltered them in the winter.

Now in late June, perverse,
they walk in the shade.

The cicadas make a deeper silence
as summer opens its distances.

de Rúa Nova y do Vilar
los resguardaban en invierno.

Hoy, en este Junio tardío,
ellos, perversos, pasean por la sombra.

Las cigarras caen en un silencio más profundo
mientras el verano se abre en la distancia.

FIRST NIGHT

After Café Derby, a single street led up, up
the incline. Now I know it is *Preguntoiro*:
I didn't know it was the old town, didn't know
anything. Displays of *tetilla*—tit cheese—
and flesh-tone girdles—but nothing open, the whole
city a brownish stone that glittered. Out of narrowness,
the Quintana suddenly opened. There was
no one—as if the world had retreated,
and it was given to me. Rain dripped from the arches,
from everything, but there was no rain falling.
I stood there a long time as it glistened.

PRIMERA NOCHE

Pasando el Café Derby, una sola calle sube y sube
la cuesta. *Preguntoiro*, ahora sí lo sé:
no sabía que era el casco antiguo, ignoraba
todo. *Tetilla* en los escaparates—queso de mama
y fajas reductoras—pero nada abierto, toda
la ciudad una reluciente piedra pardusca. Al principio estrecha,
la Quintana se abría de repente. Y luego
ni un alma—como si el mundo estuviese de retiro,
y me lo hubieran regalado. De los arcos goteaba la lluvia,
de todos sitios, pero no del cielo.
Esperé de pie mucho rato mientras brillaba.

LEAVING

“Owl singing in the quiet night
in the shadow of mingled boughs,
you turn these city trees
into an old wood where I always was...”
Uxío Novoneyra (Translated by Pearse Hutchinson)

Avenue of trees by Fonseca.
I stand looking at a fountain
at six in the morning
walking home in the cool June dawn,
the breeze-silence with cut-grass in it
or fresh wood smoke:
a first fire, or embers of the last.

MARCHÁNDOME

“Moucho que cantas pra noite queda
na sombra das flairas tecidas,
ti fais distas arbres de cidade
un bosque antigo no que eu estiven sempre...”
Uxío Novoneyra

Un bulevar junto a Fonseca.
A observar una fuente me detengo
a las seis de la mañana
de camino a casa en el fresco amanecer de Junio
bajo la sosegada brisa con aroma a césped cortado
o a humo de chimenea:
el primer fuego, o ascuas del último.

Notes

All the poems between asterisks are individual units, regardless of their having a title or not.

John Liddy was born and educated in Ireland but has lived in Madrid since 1982, where he worked both as a librarian and teacher at the British Council. He has published the following books of poetry: *Boundaries* (1974), *The Angling Cot* (1991), *Song of the Empty Cage* (1997), *Wine and Hope* (1999), *Cast-a-Net* (2003), *The Well* (2007), *Gleanings* (2010) and *The Secret Heart of Things* (2014). He is one of the founders of the journal *The Stony Thursday Book*.

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