

THREE POEMS



Paulo Teixeira

THE LAST ROMAN POET

As waves break over the beaches
and cannons boom beyond the city walls,
he asks for one fleeting, indulgent hour
in an inviolable place,
shielded by the muse's wings and the sibyl's words
like an actor gone backstage.

Forgetting the dream of a laurel-crowned head
and the couches that cradle the last Epicurean souls,
he longs only for adverbial quiet—not a sound—
in which all might be preserved, in the ambit of his art,
with the lightness of a quill passing over paper.

That each word, purified, rolling on the tongue
like a host, might have the authority of a garland
or royal seal
and press the world he knew into a hedge
as everything degenerates and collapses around him.

In this work of falconry applied to time past,
writing reminds him of the notches the prisoner
cuts in the wall of his cell to count the days,
knowing what will come: the slipknot of the gallows
or a shot fired straight into his brain.

Aware that all his work will now suffer
dispersion,
he wants to save, consoling and sufficient,
a word on the face of a future stele.

BAYS

The horizon is like a thought.
That art of indifference, that belaboured view
from the stern, before the vast murmuring ocean
of the past, slowly turns, the keel, its silent
arc, the world's orbit in an embrace.

Under the raptures of a star a ship light
crosses, like a lure, the oceanic night.
In vain a hook catches the fish of a life
—the survivor inhaling rivers, estuaries,
rolling as he can in the cornice of the waves.

Looking behind him, his mouth in spasms,
he sees the inhumed cities, tempered by light,
their echo stomping against the ocean floor,
the girders bowing under the waves, fixed,
like a stare, in his dream of bays.

CALENDAR

The sheet of paper is the ground summoned. The calendar
is a bird that flaps in the air the nation of its wings,
the ensemble of friends scattered like a handful of straw
in the wind: they depart in the cauterized circle of a voice
repeating, against this seashore of all hopes,

the sounds of the choppy sea. They're a world's mist,
the towers aligned like battlements against the night,
the scribble of a name in the sky's evening bundle.
What's left is a voice, a linen hand, in the sphere
of a lament. Their years drawn in chalk on the cold sheet of air.

Translated from the Portuguese by RICHARD ZENITH