

Poems

Terry Gifford

Segóbriga

Here, like a Tuscan hill town, walled
on the steepest rise in La Mancha,
its sheer side the rocky river bluff,
Rome carved its grid into Spain.

Now it faces black fields of upturned
tilted tables, a grid of solar panels
like vast banks of bees' honeycomb
melting energy as they soak up the sun.

Wood fuelled, Caio Iulio Silvano's house
kept a shrine to Zeus carved in Greek, warmed
by oak and birch cut for fields of corn.
Below, the watermill turned for tostados.

Lined along the horizon now,
like a knoll of grand old oaks,
white turbines turn in La Mancha wind
slowly saying, 'Y, Y, Y'.

Lapis specularis the Romans mined here,
the new technology's window glass,
and spring water ran in stone conduits
siphoned over hills for five kilometres.

The new motorway winds below,
sucking the last oil from the earth,
past rolling ranks of sad sunflowers,
dead heads hanging for future fuel.

A whisper on the platform of the theatre
still carries to the gods, and stalls for wild
beasts still stink under the amphitheatre
where five thousand sat, as for a bullfight

in the civilised city of modern Madrid.

This Lemon Condition

Orihuela 2010

The home of Miguel Hernández
is backed up against the mountain,
between the rock and the poorest
place in Orihuela, place
of the Golden Oriole and an ancient
college of colonnades and inner courts.

The home of Miguel Hernández
steps down from the mountain
in the three level stanzas
of the wounds he was born with:
life, death and love –
garden, goat shed and house.

The home of the famous poet
who herded goats across this mountain,
mixed with poets in Madrid,
knew poverty like Neruda,
left to die in Alicante prison,
speaks of his lemon of a life.

For even in his museum home,
in his centenary-celebrating town,
after Civil War poems, love poems
for his wife in Orihuela,
the famous 'Onion Lullaby' for his son,
not a single poem can be seen.

Early Morning Café Wings

The fluttering wings of a falcon pass
Above the patio of Oh LaLa in Alcala.

The fussing pigeon turns, half in, half
Out of a triangular hole in a high house wall.

The model stork on its messy plaster nest
Looks down its beak at a relief of the town.

The patio sparrows know the score, pecking
At yesterday's crumbs among modern mosaics.

Mothers fuss their children, the male falcon
Passes through to work, solemn old men stare,

American tourists pick at ancient places on
the coloured mosaic of their modern map.