

# Set Poemes

## *Seven Poems*

### Ponç Pons

*Translated by Clyde Andrew Moneyhun*

Presoner d'esborrancs/*Prisoner of Ink*

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## **Presoner d'esborrancs**

La mandràgora creix i murgona giscant dins el bosc on hi ha petges ardents d'unicorn.

Sóc amb ploma i espelma a Macaret i escric.

Presoner d'esborrancs . . . la foscor no enlluerna espriunca la imatge dels nobles xiprers ni el somriure postís de sirenes m'encanta o em tempten els pàl·lids honors del llorer.

He tornat del dolor per besar l'alegria.

Arrelat a la sang, estimat, oprimat, tot el meu patrimoni és un verd diccionari.

Apilats a les golfes dorments de la infància, amb ditades de verges, llustrosos, daurats, breviaris que s'omplen de pols, catecismes, novenes, manuals d'ajudar a ben morir-se llanguixen i, amb faltes, escrits en l'asprosa pell de calç del temps hi ha versos, enquimerats i horàtics, que la humitat esborra.

## Prisoner of Ink

The mandrake takes root and grows, screaming in the forest where unicorns leave burning tracks.

I am at Macaret with pen and candle and I write.

Prisoner of ink . . . the darkness does not obscure, espriuesque, the image of the noble cypresses,  
nor does the deceptive smile of sirens enchant me or tempt me with the pallid laurels of  
honor.

I have turned from misery to kiss joy.

Rooted in blood, loved, oppressed, all my inheritance is a green dictionary.

Heaped in the sleeping loft of childhood, with footprints of virgins, lustrous, gilded, languish  
breviaries full of dust, catechisms, novenas, manuals to help you die well, and verses full  
of errors written on rough, weathered leather, fantastic and horacian, that dampness  
erases.

NOTES: Macaret is a cove on the north coast of Minorca; Salvador Espriu i Castelló (1913-1985), whose surname name is the source of the poet's invented adjective, was one of the most important modern writers in Catalan.

## Gorg d'ombra

Cal tornar a sembrar mots.

Pel quadern escolar hi ha vestigis d'un vent que vivia els penyals i besava amorós entre els arbres les muses dorments que abillades de llum somniaven els versos d'Horaci.

Virgili no ha mort.

La clepsidra ha perdut tota l'aigua i els llors assecats m'han servit per fer foc i cremar les deixalles que, brusc, esquitxat de quitrà, gemegós el mar gita.

Ja no hi ha res sagrat.

Des de l'hort on escric veig el boxc enllunat i sol·lícit intent refer l'illa que abraç en un íntim deler de bellasa i quietud.

Mentre cant enronquit el seu cos requejat, en filera, pel full, abaltits i malalts, plens de pena i rancor, passen faunes que fugen.

## **Pool of Shadow**

I must return to sowing words.

In my school notebook are vestiges of a wind that lived in the cliffs and tenderly kissed the sleeping muses, adorned in light, dreaming the verses of Horace among the trees.

Virgil has not died.

The clepsydra has lost all its water and with shriveled laurels I have made a fire to burn the trash that, suddenly, spattered with tar, the moaning sea vomits.

Nothing is sacred any more.

From the garden where I write I see the moonlit forest and ask that I may heal the island I embrace in an intimate passion of beauty and stillness.

While I hoarsely sing its rocky body, fleeing animals pass in lines across the page, dejected and sick, full of shame and resentment.

## Obituari

*People change and smile, but the agony abides.*

T.S. Eliot

He anat a caminar pel camp fins a Son Bou  
i he vist els trencs solcant l'enfront de Llucaquelba  
Sota un cel generós perfumat de llentrisca  
les figures lliuraven enterra els seus fruits  
Pel barranc verd d'Es Bec entre Ses Canessies  
Son Boter dava a un mar d'un profund blau turquesa  
Desterrades les aus orfe d'antigues dunes  
jo em pensava gelós que el paisatge era nostre  
dins les s'iquies la gent llença llaunes I fems  
Ara em tanc en la nit de Sa Rocassa I cant  
amb amor tot allò que perviu d'aquesta illa  
exploçada que estim amb dolor de fill pària  
Ja no hi ha vellmarins pels penyals de Fornells  
S'omplen totes les cales de bars i de murs  
La llum grega es tenyeix de renous asfaltats  
L'idioma en què escric no l'entenen ni els morts

## Obituary

*People change and smile, but the agony abides.*

*T.S. Eliot*

I have walked the fields to Son Bou  
and I have seen gullies scoring the face of Llucalquelba  
Under a generous sky perfumed with pistachio blossoms  
the fig trees drop their fruit to the earth  
Across the green valley of Es Bec in Ses Canessies  
Son Boter descends to a sea of deep turquoise  
Rootless birds, banished from ancient dunes  
I covet this land that was always ours  
People throw cans and sewage into the canals  
I cloister myself in the night of Sa Rocassa and sing  
with love all that survives of this ruined island  
adored with the broken heart of a prodigal son  
Already there are no seals in the crags of Fornells  
All the coves are full of bars and walls  
The Greek light is tainted with asphalt eruptions  
The language I write is not spoken even by the dead

NOTE: The epigraph is from "The Dry Salvages," the third section of *The Four Quartets*; Son Bou, Llucalquelba, Es Bec, Ses Canessies, Son Boter, Sa Rocassa are place names on the tiny Spanish island of Minorca, where the poet was born and still lives.

## **Fumeres de tardor**

L'esilio che m'è dato onor mi tegno.

Dante

Des del camp menorquí m'acomíad mentre encenc  
fogueres de brancam com ofrenes per tu.

La passió d'escriure i llegir m'ha portat  
dissident lluny del món literari i no vull  
formar part de cap grup limitat per l'edat  
(tenc més segles que Homer) que no sigui d'amics.

Els antòlegs no saben on m'han de ficar.

M'estim més, solitari, ser una illa dins l'illa.



## Autumn Fires

L'esilio che m'è dato onor mi tegno.

Dante

I am dismissed while, in my Minorcan field, I light  
bonfires of branches like offerings to you.  
The passion to live for writing and reading has carried me  
dissident far from the literary world and I don't want  
to be counted part of any school restricted by age  
(I'm centuries older than Homer) who are no friends of mine.  
The anthologizers don't know where to slot me in.  
I prefer to be alone, an island on an island.

NOTES: The epigraph ("The exile imposed on me I take as an honor") is from Dante's *canzone* "Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute." In the original Catalan, the poet's passion is "escriuire," a neologism Pons uses in other poems as well that combines the words for write (escriure) and live (viure).

## **Areia escrita**

Tenc una tenda de campanya lusa.  
La plant discretament pel nord de l'illa  
a les platges desertes de setembre.  
Menj pa fet meu i fruita,  
passeig, escolt, escric,  
parl amb els arbres,  
llegesc el mar.

No ho dubtis:

Viure és més que existir.

Damunt la sorra  
agraesc a la nit els seus misteris  
i encenc un foc humit de llenya morta.  
El fum sembla una ofrena,  
el vent canvia . . .  
M'invent l'eternitat.  
Fa trons.

Plou terra.

## **Sand Writing**

I have a Portuguese tent.  
I pitch it discreetly in the island's north  
on deserted September beaches.  
I eat my own bread and fruit,  
I walk, listen, write,  
converse with the trees,  
read the ocean.

Don't doubt it:

Life is more than mere existence.

On the sand  
I thank the night for its mysteries  
and I light a damp fire of dead wood.  
The smoke resembles an offering,  
the wind shifts . . .  
I create eternity.  
Thunder cracks.

Rain falls on the earth.

## Un tal Walsler

Ha vingut caminant a Sa Figuera Verda  
i ha demanat confús: On és la neu?  
Li he explicat que a Menorca mai no fa prou fred  
i les nostres muntanyes només són pujols.  
Ha somrigut benèvol. Hem anat  
a passejar en silence i ha intuït  
content estranyes formes en els núvols.  
He besat un ullastre, ha acarolat  
una paret i en veure les figueres  
que tenen dos-cents anys, emocionat,  
s'ha llevat el capell per fer una reverència  
i ha dit: Són ben iguals que les que hi ha a La Bíblia!  
Mentre tornàvem m'ha contat que escriu  
una història difícil sobre uns germans Tanner.  
Assuguts a l'aljub hem vist pondre's el sol.  
Tenia els ulls molt blaus i el pensament molt lluny.  
De cop, ha fet un gest d'adéu i se n'ha anat,  
com una ombra que fuig, cap a Binifamís.  
Quan passava spectral am paraigua pels horts  
plens de fruita cap gos s'ha atrevit a lladrar.

## A Certain Walser

He came walking into Sa Figuera Verda  
and asked, confused: Where is the snow?  
I explained that on Minorca it never gets cold enough  
and our mountains are no more than hills.  
He smiled sweetly. We walked on  
in silence and, happy, he made out  
curious shapes in the clouds.  
He kissed an olive tree, he embraced  
a stone wall, moved by the fig trees  
some two centuries years old  
he doffed his hat to bow to them  
and said: They're just like the ones in the Bible!  
On the way back he told me he was writing  
a difficult story about the Tanner brothers.  
Sitting together on the cistern we watched the sun set.  
He had very blue eyes and thoughts very far away.  
Suddenly he made a gesture of parting and left,  
like a fleeing shadow, all the way to Binifamís.  
When he passed with his umbrella, ghostly, by the gardens  
full of fruit, not a single dog dared to bark.

NOTE: German writer Robert Walser (1878-1956) died alone in the snow on one of the walks he was famous for. Sa Figuera Verda is Pons' rural garden on Minorca; Binifamís is a rural area near his hometown of Alaior.

## Walsler, el passejant

He vingut ben mudat amb cordata i capell.  
Duia al braç un paraigua a pesar de fer sol.  
S'ha assegut a l'aljub, he contemplat el camp  
i amb un gest amorós ha dit: Tot és tan bell  
que em fa pena deixar aquests camins per ser un mort.  
Li he dat aigua i els moixos li han pujat demunt  
les gallines, però, li han vist cosa d'estrany.  
M'ha parlat amb tendresa dels anys que ha viscut  
tuancat a un sanatoria de malalts mentals.  
Si pogués tornar a viure, m'ha dit, t'assegur  
que . . ., i molt trist s'ha aturat amb un rictus de plor,  
mentre el gall espantat per una ombra ha fugit.  
S'ha posat bé el capell, ha exclamat bondadós:  
Adéu. Torn a l'infern!, i m'ha donat la mà.  
Quan partia he volgut regalar-li uns quants ous.  
Allà on vaig, ha rigut, el real no existeix.

## Walser, the Walker

He came today well-dressed in tie and hat,  
an umbrella on his arm in spite of the sun.  
He sat on the cistern, considered the countryside  
and said with a sweep of the hand: It's all so beautiful  
that it grieves me to give up these walks to be dead.  
I gave him water and the cats climbed onto his lap  
though the hens found him eerie.  
He spoke to me gently of the years he lived  
locked in a sanatorium for the mentally ill.  
If I could come back to life, he said, I assure you  
that . . . and disconsolate he broke down in a speechless sob  
while the rooster fled, frightened by a shadow.  
He adjusted his hat and exclaimed good-naturedly:  
Adieu! It's back to hell. And he extended his hand.  
When he left I wanted to make a gift of some eggs.  
Where I'm going, he laughed, there's nothing real.