

Inhabitants of the Flesh

*A Selection
of Poems
by*

DIONISIO CAÑAS

1985

de 174 and 10 considered

about a
month to

10/10/1914

10/10/1914

Dear Sir,
I have the pleasure to inform you that the
proceedings of the Court in the case of
the above named person have been
concluded and the Court has rendered its
verdict in favor of the defendant.
The Court has found that the defendant
is not guilty of the charges against him
and has acquitted him of all the charges.

TO DAVID M. CASKEY

I am very glad to hear that the
proceedings have been concluded and
that the defendant has been acquitted.
I am sure that you will be pleased
with the result. I am sure that the
Court has done its duty and has
rendered a just verdict. I am sure
that the defendant is innocent and
that the charges against him were
unfounded. I am sure that the
Court has done its duty and has
rendered a just verdict. I am sure
that the defendant is innocent and
that the charges against him were
unfounded.

Very truly yours,
[Signature]

*"I was, after all,
weighed down by your
mere physical presence.
I remember, for in-
stance, how we often un-
dressed in the same
bathing hut. There I
was, skinny, weakly,
slight; you strong, tall,
broad."*

FRANZ KAFKA

LETTER TO FATHER

to Orlando José Hernández

Naked in a tunnel we entered long ago
your handsome body shows me
geometries unknown to the flesh
How could I not have loved you if you were
all the strength and tenderness I wanted
But perhaps I'll never be able to ask you for anything
and I want to think now of the days in reverse
in a room where you watch me as I take off
the clothes you had carelessly put on
That winter frightened only by the birds
who once more imbued the air with warmth
I would have rather been your image in the lake
and not that old family photograph
brought together only by a silver frame
It is not possible to return to the beginning
of this spiral that drags me dizzily towards you
and draws me away
Perhaps as you did once in the secret quarter
Today I write you and surrender myself in the writing
and alone I reread a letter

that you will never send

from LA CAVERNA DE LOT

Translated by Jill Netchinsky

HORSE DROWNED IN A LAKE

Perhaps they were once a horse those bones
burnished by the mud and thus restored
by the relentless force of rain in the spring
We could well have thought that is was chance
but it was a certain destiny temptation or torture
which grew obstinately among ourselves
The lake was a space abandoned to silence
inhabited only by the bulk of some bird
a mortal web for a horse on its run
and, for us, a murky mirror to look at time
We were the reverse of a hunting scene
where a horse was bolting
chased by his shadow
and was trapped by the waters
We saw his carcass up against a thickening sky
and we ran chased by the fear
of feeling suddenly dispossessed
of that love we are rewriting today

*from LA CAVERNA DE LOT
Translated by Elizabeth Lipton*

A SUMMER'S DAY IN RIVERSIDE

Fish
and the tenderness of a man
stretched out on a bench by the river
his head inclined gently
eyes tightly shut as an answer
to a final greeting
or to a plunge of a knife's edge
to a flare of light or of a bullet which burns
the shirt the skin life abandoned

in summer

Mouth opened as if some prayer
as if some canto would have
been petrified in its highest moment
The black man was on the bench
on the river the ripples still
have a trace of an indifferent ship
The seagulled water whispered
a monotonous canto

In the afternoon the passers-by
dare not think that this man
stretched out on the bench

is dead

*from LUGAR RIO HUDSON
Translated by Elizabeth Lipton
and David M. Caskey*

RUINS BY THE HUDSON

to Puri and Jesús

At last they lay here
the ruins by the Hudson
extended sheets of glass
licking the river
that brings with it an ancient mud

Contorted
mangled steel
teases a darkened sky

We drink thick mire
the cement afire of a summer
already filled with particles
of oxide and the slit
throats of birds

to soothe ashes and dust
We sound senseless
locked up in zinc cubicles
from remote belvederes we see puzzled
the gummy border
of the exiled river

Seagulls fly by tracing gusts of gray wings
Slowly erected
new ruins
towers flaking transparency
columns adrift
gnawed by the slicing air
which penetrate the murmuring
artery of our bodies

Voracious waves of artificial teeth
chew on the keel of abandoned ships
Gloomy hangars
fallen gargoyles
On the ground
the triumph of plastic
After burning the greenest wood
there

at the border of the most recent ruins
with elliptical noises
from broken conch shells
old new york moans and groans

And we see nothing
but the rags of unidentifiable banners
extinguished torches
and the dreadful flight of birds
searching

in the warm rubble
for a defeated body
smoke flowing freely
love diminished

A tepid
wing touches the slag
the eyesocket

Amidst the fog
an improbable island

*from LA CAVERNA DE LOT
Translated by O.J. Hernández*

LIGHT'S ENCLOSURE

And you told her of the sea
of the sun which lighted up your face
of the slight dazzle at the sight of the waves
thirsty tongues of froth
covering the sweaty bodies
You told her of palm trees
which fallen dipped their crest
in the saffronlike ceremony of the sea
and of the boys scratching the sand
with fingers like pens
And the awkward black gadget
an indifferent mirror for the voice
which splitting the labyrinth
repeated the sharp images of a chimerical ocean
Almost faded in her memory there was an island
the blurred echo of an ancient beach
where darkened
waves would stir up the sand
disturbing its bequeathed penumbra
And you told her of the unattainable sea
which rang immemorable

in her dry retina

from LA CAVERNA DE LOT
Translated by O.J. Hernández

MASSAPOAG LAKE

To the Gould Family

The cat and his answer to the inhabitants of the house
cloistered between glass
the night rushing on the artificial
order of a garden among the daisies
the white cat looks at the eyes seeing him
he looks at us and goes toward the lake
place where he observes enclosed fish
under the sparkling water
The boats are quietly reflected
without their sails

in a day of calm skies

trapped by the darkness

There were no regattas this afternoon and we didn't see
the naked arm between the rope and canvas
flattered by the wind
we didn't see the scream and the dive in the water
of the less adroit of the two
weekend sailors

It has not been a sunny morning
but one of ruffled gray clouds
that left tremors over the trees' leaves
and the roads' humid asphalt

Playing tennis and circling the
quiet lake petrified in its function
of reflecting the boats and cat's eyes
the fish are sheltered by the fragile
aquatic surface and there in the night
and the cat walks unconditionally white
in order to break I don't know what ancient magic
of this night where love is not mentioned

and carefully penetrates the space between our bodies
looking at us to see if we observe him
the cat love the fish the night
boats are mirrored in the placidness of the lake

from ESTACION ENEMIGA
Translated by David M. Caskey
and the author