

Rafaël Newman

A CISTERN FULL OF GREEKS

Down here you see your breath, if not your feet.

A wooden gangway leads you, once descended, through the gloom,
From portico to watery portico
Along a street below the street above,
The Turkish afternoon of cigarettes and tea
Receding brightly with each careful step.

Not far beneath the boards, a brackish pool
Malingers on despite Byzantium's demise:
The advent of another thirsty horde
Of visitors preserves it, 16 centuries beyond its birth.

The walk meanders, left and right-angling along
Through all the stone preserve, past awkward pedagogy and
Attempts at rendering this place more mythic
Than the workaday container that it was:
A store of ghosts instead of drink.

Until you reach the leftmost port,
Where ghouls robbed from their homes do double duty:
Medusas brought to heel by ancient practical hands,
One rightway up, the other sidewise laid.
And notice now the voices all around you:
The colour-coded umlauts you'd begun to beat in time to
Lost now amid the hiss and rattle of another shore, the *ex* and *pros*
And *brekekekex* that claims this cellar for its attic space,
This topsy-turvy forest petrified by topsy-turvy fiends,
This final headland of a vanished empire, gone aground against
The ceaseless rushing of a world that would not turn to stone.

TAVIRA

The moors have quit this town.
They've left it nothing more than streets named for atrocities and
Two or three abrupt reminders that the site
Of this or that *igreja*
Once upheld a mosque, here in the shade of oranges and almond trees.
Now, as the northern tourists pass, among the spires of convents, crosses sacred
To the sons of Infant Henry
And the salt flats growing crystals for their lunch,
There's nothing here to say the moors had ever been,
Or that this farthest southwest shore of Europe once
Supplied the upper left-hand corner of another world:
Except the pyramids of tile that rise above the skyline,
A roof for every room, where villagers are said to keep their precious stores;
And one odd fanciful muezzin's tower aloft
Above the rooftop of a *residencial*,
A low-slung, high-flown pergola, a wan gazebo,
A salmon-pink pagoda sailing seedy and serene
Behatted with a mint-green Panama on spider's legs,
A wiry finger poking jester-like into the eye
Of one of many Gods.