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La Casa Dei Doganieri

Eugenio Montale

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La Casa Dei Doganieri

EUGENIO MONTALE (1896-1981)

Tu non ricordi la casa dei doganieri
sul rialzo a strapiombo sulla scogliera:
desolata t'attende dalla sera
in cui v'entrò lo sciame dei tuoi pensieri
e vi sostò irrequieto.

Libeccio sferza da anni le vacchie mura
e il suono del tuo riso non è più lieto:
la bussola van impazzita all'avventura
e il calcolo dei dadi più non torna.
Tu non ricordi; altro tempo frastorna
la tua memoria; un filo s'addipana.

Ne tengo ancora un capo; ma s'allontana
la casa e in cima al tetto la banderuola
affumicata gira senza pietà.
Ne tengo un capo; ma tu resti sola
né qui respiri nell'oscurità.

Oh l'orizzonte in fuga, dove s'accende
rara la luce della petroliera!
Il varco è qui? (Ripullula il frangente
ancora sulla balza che scoscende...)

Tu non ricordi la casa di questa
mia sera. Ed io non so chi va e chi resta.

The House of the Coast Guards

translated by IVO SOLJAN

You do not remember the Coast Guards' house
high up above the steeply sinking reef.
It's been waiting for you, empty and lost in grief,
Since the evening in which there entered a swarm
of your thoughts, and disquietly remained there.

For years the old walls have been lashed by southern gales
and the happy ring of your laughter has become rare:
driven crazy, the compass now only fails,
and those numbers of the dice return no longer.
You do not remember; some other time is pulling stronger
at your memory; a thread is stretching away ...

I hold an end; but further and further away
vanishes the house, and the sooty weathervane
on the roof-top is spinning without respite.
I still hold an end; but all alone you remain
and do not breathe in darkness, without light.

O the horizon in flight, where from time to time
flares up a dim light of a tanker!
Is this the passage? (Up the crumbling cliffs
the foaming waves incessantly climb...)
You do not remember the house of this my eve.
And I do not know who will stay and who will leave.

This celebrated poem by the Nobel Prize winner Montale (1975) was first published in 1932 in the collection *La casa del doganiere e altri versi* (*The Customs-House and Other Verse*), which was incorporated in 1939 in *Le Occasioni* (*The Occasions*), an epoch-making book of poetry. It was translated into English by George Kay in 1964 and published in 1965 as "The Shorewatchers' House." My choice of the title is dictated by American situation; the Coast Guards would control the waterways and ensure the enforcement of the customs laws (fighting the smugglers); that is exactly what "i doganieri" would do in Italy. The house of Montale's poem is a lonely building overlooking the Ligurian Sea near Genoa. Incidentally, the "you" of the poem was not in reality a grown up woman, but a little girl he remembered in the area. Still, in this love elegy, she grows into a lover.