

## palindrome

We were a meeting of palindromes, a parry and riposte. We lit candles to chase away midges; we saved bath water to throw down amongst the vegetables. Dionysus was the only god we found who brought peace, who led a path outside ourselves. We were from different lands, wanderers of different shores, subject to different tides of the same moon. "You can read me any way you want," he said, "It's all the same at the finish." "And you, sir, can do the same for me," I replied.

In Cuba dragging round a wretch of a dog and a grubby child whose grin stretched from here to Guantanamo Bay. We had our hair put into braids for a pittance and sat tossing back improbably coloured drinks and feeling quite ashamed. "They have a really quite superb health service," he said, threw back his head. And the sun setting made him loose his laugh half way. Back and forth to the bar for all inclusive soddenness, and every one tastes the same. When we get hiccups late we try drinking them backwards and they taste the same too that way. He was dancing with a beautiful leech, seventy times our combined age, who "Marry me" said, "would be perfect" in a crisp £5 English.

In Madeira on a terrace overlooking a modern building, school all modern overhanging plinths of orange coloured wood high fenced. Two girls uniformed at a concrete table, with table-tennis bats in hand. To-ing and fro-ing with drinks in our hands. Back at his place which stank of money, overhanging too, he said, "A house is not a home that does not look out of a night over the conurbation lights." We ate tinned tomatoes and I looked at him seeing him proud at that pronouncement and we drank a bile coloured liquor. Saying "All of this my son," with an all I survey gesture, "One day," he giggled, "Will be yours." he took a drink and looked under his eyebrows at me. I said, "How many times have you done this before?" "Ah." he said. "Many, many times, more than you should count." But just as many times as I've stood here, on balconies overlooking cities, and a man has looked over his drink at me, and he's returned to me.

On Foula ridiculous on Brighton beach-chairs, glasses of Laphroaig, wind buffeted. Whore-cries of unidentified birds proceed his pronouncement that "No one provokes me with impunity". I like you. Honey." "How'bout getting something cheaper from the tent?" "But the pith? The fervour!" "When the squall starts... What is that anyway? Motto of somebody?" "A tent is not a home," he said, "Just that." "It's the best home you'll ever provide for me." After that things declined until Dionysus

worked his way through the haze. The squall started and we took off our clothes together, hurled obscenities at the wind. "What's a palindrome anyway?" "Only this: that I hurl from this cliff this sharp rock, and that it comes back." I took from the ground a stone with a point and threw it into the void and a gust of wind took that stone indeed and turned it end over end to strike a gash at my lovers temple and I could not staunch the flow.

Tristan da Cunha was meant to be a final home, at last as far away as possible. We packed a case of wine and a small library and took some months to wend our way, finishing the wine in days, the books in the rest of the time. He plants his feet on volcanic ground. "Vegetables won't grow in this," he said. I said, "Volcanoes replenish life." "Volcanoes kill everything. Sincerely though," He looks at me in a way that I've not seen before, he looks at me asking for sincerity, "Sincerely though, how long do you think we'll stick it out?" "Sometimes it's good to be where you're not wanted at all. Sometimes it's good to not want to be here at all." We shuffle on and off the boat, hauling boxes, feet on volcanic ground, and I can still taste that last bottle of wine.