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Heavy Mechanics

We'd have to write an etiquette of silence,

point out that there are different kinds,
from the lowest and most common to the highest and religious,
that the two extremes touch, hold together,
that all our forms come within this tangency.
Yet our nature is made of words,
it is our nature to betray, to shift the shadow,
to heal each time the absence that shapes us.

In this mechanism, if one part outstrips the other,
there will be a background noise like a belt
coming loose from its pulley, there will be an echo
for the entire species. So I understand the challenge
of those who accept the dystonia, because in the body,
but also in heaven, in universal space,
every action corresponds to a contrary and inverse
action, and we can pretend not to hear,

dissemble, which is not to betray,
but the umbilical cord of the prime rule
never detaches itself completely,
frustration starts up again, and disease,
the background crackling of the machine,
its engine running,
joining us to each other, even if with the passing of years
we feel more and more alone and distant.

But try, we must try,
so that the void be worth what it is worth,
so that it remains a variation, a gaze throbbing,
distracting us only for an instant, leading us to the bottom,
leading us to transform time into space,
into rooms and strophes, reminding us of words,
our final wager. Celan once
asked his teacher the last word.

Heidegger was shaken by so much innocence.
I'll repeat the formula, a simple equation:
we cannot grasp what comes before us.
And so we lay our lives on the scale,
and our deaths, who keeps it all in equilibrium
we do not know. I call it heavy mechanics
this staying still to watch the system of levers
we've entered without making a noise.

Foreign lands

Today I wake up later than usual
and ask myself if all this is true,
if the present state still exists,
if there's room for its realm,

for the voices of masons
raising scaffolding to the sky,
if their every gesture isn't a way
of silencing the dogs I dreamed,

and I ask myself if animals
if it's true that dogs
have no memory,

if it's true they don't suffer,
don't feel pain,
like people who can't remember their dreams.

Now I live where the elephants rest.

There, behind the smokestacks, among iron bales,
you can find their cemetery;
their ribcage is still swollen with breathing.

There are carts that rise slowly,
they carry fossil coal up to the sky,
from their smell you can tell how black it is.
A worker comes towards me, he shakes my hand,

says he fell while working –
ghosts' fingers are flaccid like doubt
like someone greeting you against his will –

he's the watchman of this place,
he makes sure that no one touches the ivory,
he says I'm the only one who can see it now.

Now that the mornings are white,
they leave the sting of night,
now that we could dilate the shadow,
we go back to the same old pact.

It was Rilke who said,
"I don't care a whit about being right".
Reality doesn't harvest these pearls,
they remain chaste like stones on tombs.

"Burn whatever is left",
someone answered,
"burn the Great Wall of China, too".

Because one day there will be no border
between besieger and besieged.
Prehistory comprehends us.

The Curve of the Coast

The curve of the coast is perfect only now
that the mass of water is ebbing,
the natural apex of destruction.
You, perhaps, have had news of it,

observing the opalescence of stones at the water's edge,
that revelation was the first.
Then there was the Mannerist attempt
to hold force in a swimming pool.

You contrasted the overly exposed life
to the subdued cause of the void,
pressure against pressure,

or the idea and its dispersion.
All this from childhood until now,
all this like its form.

If these stones had pity
on my wounds, I would be right,
being an animal among creatures,
because the accent you note, the pain,

is only memory starting to go bad

and, if you think about it, is worth nothing.

Now my way of having a voice
is a wheeze that is not my own,

distracting me from my heartbeat.

And you, too, after all,
will be resigned to the force that breaks out

at the extreme moment of the hunt,
in the prey, which does not hide,
which is extinct on the face of the earth.

The Port of Baiae

1.

We get a tour here, too,
moving forward cautiously,
we walk amidst berthed ships,
we listen to the wave oxidizing the keel,

the slow seeding on the bollard.
From here Pliny saw the top
of the mountain, the lapilli of lava and ash,
he saw the end of the armies,

the tortoise disintegrating on the sand.
He wanted to become fossil,
stone, casting of the earth.

He sailed towards the other coast,
Pliny the Younger witnessed it,
on a wax tablet he noted down the disappearance.

2.

It's no use using speech here,
eyes that look forward are of no use,
the vertical posture of primates,
you need only skirt the puddles,

jump over the holes, pay attention,
reason with a bipolar mind,
the thrill of the race or the delicate
countenance of comprehension.

Here all is reduced to the elementary,
the carapace upside down on the sand,
the animal's decomposed carcass,

the vitreous substance of the retina.
What matters is the beach,
and the long, centuries-old stretch of land.

3.

What you watch shapes the scheme,
it is a brain in its ampoule,
here you've buried your mourning,
you've made a rock of it,

you've raised walls,
from here you can't get out, or in, here you stay.

You've left the traffic of vacationers
on the surface,

you can hear them rounding the curve
going back down towards Cuma.
You watch and write the laws

established by the colony,
all those you remember you reduce to one.
Now, you hope that its crust will break.

Traduzioni di Brenda Porster

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Vincenzo Frungillo was born in Naples in 1973. He has published several poetry collections: *Fanciulli sulla via maestra* (2002), *Ogni cinque bracciate. Poema in cinque canti* (2009), *Il cane di Pavlov. Resoconto di una perizia* (2013), *Le pause della serie evolutiva* (2016). For the stage he

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