



Photo Credit: Stefano Parrini

da *La Sommersione*, Nino Aragno Editore, 2016
from *The Submersion*, Nino Aragno Editore, 2016

I. *The Danse: Variation on Burnt Norton*

We waited and it did not happen.

It should not have been but it was.

Now that they break, things exist.

The unknown order dances inside the fracture: here
they meet

the growth of house plants, the confessions in the open air
the vocation to seclusion, the greetings to the dead, the evasion
the rice on newlyweds, the armed hand
the flight from home, the light sleep, the return to reason.

What we have been
and what we are not yet
are together now
movement of fragments
finite and commensurable
because the limit is whole

: the finite is ours forever.

II. (1974)

In March molecules aggregate.
Drowsiness in April, a suspicion in May.
June was clear and presumptuous
(you did not want it, but then you understood).
In July terror grew under the navel.
August and September some dizziness.
In October you ate chestnuts.
November was too late to go back.
December what cells compose
our coming into the world, our common
moving forward to the finite.

Violence crosses the eyelids
the wet streets, the flags.
Each of us has been alive
at least once between the legs
of a woman.
Each has been present, between the legs
: to that moment belongs
a private vision you will not remember.

But there is a weightless shadow that accompanies
the body's weight.

The shadow traces our contour
projecting it on the ground nailing it down moving it
like visible light in its halo.

Light you can say is lacking
when it is put out

and no longer throws a shadow.

III.

This it says. It says:
imagine a shipwreck.
The before and the after.

Between the two moments
a process of "molecular" change has taken place
in which the people before are no longer the people
after.

To take into consideration the movement
of this time of ours.
To take care of the molecular desegregation
of these people.
To keep the shapes unwavering
in the face of choices.

What has never had a beginning is for us
what could begin.
The future imagined as a

not yet having come into the world.

Or else to cancel traces, unravel sweaters
forget names, not go back to places.
Deny having met.
To disown compassion, difference, revolution.

The time we have on earth
assumes and loses innumerable shapes.
Even the shape of the end
is a relation.

from *The Relations* (publication forthcoming)

For your birthday (it's already
the second year since you got in touch)
I write letter after letter
with Cetta: we hold tight to one another
in the typos of the web's epistolary,
far from the speakerphone.

There's no wish to cry. She talks to me
about a nut in the middle of her chest
(a pretty metaphor for mourning: you
would have never said you were dead, and you are still
her husband).

There's no wish to laugh, either.
We play with you at tug-of-war, our arms
are strong enough to bring you back. But you resist.

If only you believed in the beyond, it would be easier.
For some it is essential to imagine a place to come back
from
to contradict the living.

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None of us here has dead ones to mourn,
we feel the envy of grenades mount in us.
The young follow the fashion of travelling in war zones:
landmines to dodge, life touches them lightly.

When everyone was hitting the falling walls: I was there too.
I was there: there, right there, do you remember? Leben geht an uns vorbei.
Life touches us lightly and leaves. You saw it too
that life fades immature, it arrives at the time
still unripe, skin pulled back like leather on a drum.

After the milk we feel sleepy. Our most serious duty
is to mourn your dead, commemorate massacres.
The one of the bread and the fish. And the one of the market.

So thanks, then. After the dinners and the coffee,
After the raki there remains so much to do,
everything to rebuild . I have to tell the doctor
that the strength of a people is measured
by its resistance to the world market.

You don't even hear me, what are you thinking of
when I talk to you.

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You say I'm class-conscious and I can't deny it.
But you meant for me
(eroticizing the Kantian sublime)
that my classism comes from on high
like a late-nineteenth-century British attitude
of a cape-clad suffragette
at the hour of exotic herbal teas
from the Indian empire.

And that's right. But my dear,
between me and the bourgeoisie
there is the same evolutionary difference
as between the lynx and the smoke-grey parlor cat.
It's a matter, of course, of creatures
that do not practice the passive:
felines hostile to the art of taming.
And it is this, I imagine - a surly sense of discretion -
that makes me find a waiter disagreeable, when he's servile.

I don't want to be served and I don't ask to be saved
even by companion Bertold Brecht.

How angry it makes me when the revolution speaks in its medical language.
Recently I read a warning label for a medicine
and it seemed hostile to me, not to say
subversive: too many side effects, too much pride
in its technical-scientific jargon.

I prefer to drown melancholy in a warm bath.
And I don't believe in the least that the 'people' is more
important than I am because
I'm inside it: from this three-penny privilege comes
the temptation to suicide it, the people, by forcing it

to read the entire Recherche,
and not just the bit found in anthologies
about the insipid madeleine dipped in tea.

And I already know. They'll jump on me if I say
Bruno Lauzi was right:
I write sad songs because when I'm happy, I go out.

Translated by Brenda Porster

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sara Ventroni

Sara Ventroni was born in Rome in 1974. She has published the play *Salomè* (No Reply, 2005); *Nel Gasometro* (Le Lettere 2006, short-listed for the Delfini prize; Napoli prize 2007; the German translation of the volume *Im Gasometer*) has been published by Korrespondenzen editions of Vienna; *La sommersione* (Aragno, 2016; Trivio prize 2018). Her short stories appear in several anthologies ("Sono come tu mi vuoi", Laterza 2009; "A occhi aperti", Mondadori 2008; "Scrittori in curva" Marotta&Cafiero 2009). Her poetry has been translated into German,

English, French, Serbian and Slovenian. She has written plays and programs for RAI Radio 2 and RAI Radio 3. She is one of the founders of the women's movement *Se non ora quando? (If not now, when?)* and has worked as a columnist for the Italian daily, *Unità*. She collaborates with the Fondazione Gramsci and the Archivio Storico delle Donne. She is a research scholar at ILIESI (CNR).