



GOOD FRIDAYS

I VENERDÌ SANTI



SILVIO MIGNANO

Foreword by
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Translated by
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Alliteration

GOOD FRIDAYS | SILVIO MIGNANO
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THE PASSION OF SILVIO MIGNANO

Reading a book of poems might give us an aerial view over a delta. But it would not be the mouth of a single river, no; it would be many streams debouching in the *imaginary geography* so like a cauldron where a very thick existential soup is being cooked. That is what happens when we browse intently the fascinating collection by the Italian poet Silvio Mignano titled: *Good Fridays*.

Many musical registers and many possible references meet in its pages, from pleasure in a prosody which harmonizes a musically complex phrasing, to a mature verse, dense with the meanings it invokes.

Names pass through my mind, possible authors who were read with attention in order to compose this unified and at the same time delta-like terrain. There are several poets whose names we might mention: Robert Lowell, Virgil, Adam Zagajewski, but above all the ineluctable tradition of that enormous water course called Eugenio Montale. The fact is that contemporary poetry hides deep down a sacred act of conciliation, an effort to relate different voices that in the end are resolved in the specific speech of each poet. In the case of Silvio Mignano this is a miraculous but everyday alchemy.

The very particular title of the first of the four parts of the book, *Of certain combinations that are not realized*, gives us one

possible key to the whole collection. I mean to say that Mignano's poetry does not attempt to tell us anything concrete, beyond its effort to communicate to us an existential state in the face of the world.

The poem behaves as a combining (associating) machine which knots together over the time of its unfolding various meanings and images. In the end, each poem is an artifact that preserves a marked formal imprint: a kaleidoscopic game, paradoxically very unified. These are poems truly carved in time as if they were pieces of music.

Personally I value highly the substantive manner of Mignano's poems, his cultured treatment of the everyday, the weight of each word so none are degraded by superfluous use.

The following sections of the book offer the reader different focuses from the decidedly existential treatment of the first, passing through a pictorial emphasis in the second and third parts and concluding in a naturalist game, with a nod to the "scientific", where the existential reappears but using as a pre-text an entomological lexicon.

Italian poetry has succeeded in keeping up with the times without losing its refinement and a discrete approach to the world. Silvio Mignano preserves with a poet's wisdom his happy medium, a pivot among many literary references. This book deserves to have many readers.

Igor Barreto
Caracas, March 2020

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OF CERTAIN COMBINATIONS
THAT ARE NOT REALIZED

*DI CERTE COMBINAZIONI
CHE NON SI AVVERANO*

L'ingombro dei corpi senza contenuto¹

*Quello che importa non è la fuga della curva
che pervade ogni stato d'ombra.
È poi vero, è lì che finiamo inghiottiti
— o il nostro sguardo, al posto delle gambe —
in quel cunicolo di spessore concavo
rettangolare nonostante sia fatto ad arco:
ma quello che conta oggi è il volume
il parallelepipedo di legno odoroso
duecento centimetri per cinquanta
il tavolo su cui abbiamo mangiato tutti
la bara dentro la quale scivoleremo
l'oscurità di terra che abbiamo sognato.
Eppure forse non è nemmeno questo:
è che il disegno è fatto proprio bene
le distanze tra le linee e il loro tracciato
sono prova dell'armonia che ancora resta
tra il grigio e il marrone dell'assenza,
e l'inutilità dei fili d'erba ci redime.
È lungo il gesto del muoversi
zigzagando nel corridoio chiaro
trovandosi a inventare le traiettorie
per l'ingombro dei corpi senza contenuto
che comprendiamo l'intuizione più banale:
la caduta di un grave in movimento verticale.*

¹ L'ingombro dei corpi senza contenuto nasce dalla mia visita a Plegaria muda, mostra dell'artista colombiana Doris Salcedo inaugurata al Maxxi di Roma il 15 marzo 2012: centinaia di tavoli di legno delle dimensioni di una bara, sovrapposti a coppie e uniti tra loro da un cuscinetto di terriccio dal quale nascevano sottili fili d'erba irrigati con un sofisticato sistema di tubicini.

The Obstruction of Bodies Without Content¹

What matters is not the vanishing of the curve
that pervades every state of shade.
It's true, it's there we end up swallowed
—or our gaze, instead of our legs—
in that tunnel whose thickness is concave
rectangular in spite of being arched:
but what counts today is volume
the parallelepiped of scented wood
two hundred centimeters by fifty
the table at which we've all eaten
the coffin into which we will slide
the earthy darkness that we've dreamt.
However it may not even be this:
it's that the design is very well done
the distances between the lines and their layout
are proof of the harmony that still remains
between the gray and the brown of absence,
and the uselessness of the grass stems redeems us.
It's along with the gestures of moving
zigzagging in the clear aisle
finding ourselves inventing trajectories
through the obstruction of bodies without content
that we grasp the most banal intuition:
a body falling in a vertical movement.

¹ *The Obstruction of Bodies Without Content* was inspired by my visit to *Plegaria muda* (Mute Prayer), an exhibition by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo inaugurated at the Rome Maxxi on 15th March 2012: hundreds of wooden tables the size of coffins, piled in pairs and connected by a layer of soil from which threads of grass sprouted, irrigated by a sophisticated system of fine hoses.

In fuga

*È come quando la salita comincia ad impennarsi
sembra che le ruote siano pesanti d'altro materiale
che il pedale si rifiuti di girare, e pensi di fermarti
sederti a bordo strada, su questo paracarro
e in giro non c'è nemmeno più un bracciante
(non uno, insomma, che tagli l'erba all'altro lato
soltanto un susseguirsi di vuote quinte
come quando ti affacci al balcone di una casa
intravista in sogno, senza paesaggio).
Dov'era il compagno che ti porgeva la borraccia,
cos'altro avresti dovuto fare per non sfuggire
alla noia del deserto, all'essere tu stesso disertore
pur non avendo scelto l'ora, il luogo, la ragione?
Forse forare, restare privo di forze,
lasciare che il plotone ti riassorbisse,
salutare quelli che passano, nel fruscio,
e ti osservano con una smorfia di meraviglia
incerti se sia proprio tu lo stesso ch'era andato via
e che ora ritorna, senza muoversi di un centimetro:
succede lo stesso quando entri in una tabaccheria
scegli un gioco a premi, raschi la casella,
esce una sfinge o un faraone, e non hai vinto.*

In Flight

It's like when the slope begins to get steep
it seems the wheels are heavy with some other material
the pedal refuses to turn, and you think of stopping
sitting at the edge of the road, on this bollard
and there's not even a laborer around any longer
(not one, in short, cutting the grass on the other side
only a succession of empty villas
like when you stand on the balcony of a house
glimpsed in a dream, without a landscape).
Where was the companion who passed you the canteen,
what else should you have done so as not to flee
to the tedium of the desert, to being yourself a deserter
without having chosen the hour, the place, the reason?
Have a puncture perhaps, run out of strength,
let the platoon reabsorb you,
greet passers-by, in the jostling,
who observe you with a grimace of wonder
unsure if it's really you, the same you who went away
and now returns, without moving a centimeter:
the same thing happens when you enter a tobacconist
chose a game of chance, scratch the boxes,
a sphinx or a pharaoh appears, and you haven't won.

Il tuorlo

*Poi si torna – è una possibilità –
tra le macchie dei pitosfori, o quelle
del trifoglio e di certe campanelle gialle
che restano chiuse nella guazza di rugiada
e magari ci si sente chiedere dov'eri stato
e si risponde: qui, sul tuo muretto a secco
a pochi metri dal castello, oppure
nella piazza della scuola, tra le aiole
dove la terra era zolla polverosa.
Si era rimasti qui tutto il tempo, fermi,
a immaginare viaggi, sognare orologi
scandire il passo con un metronomo di carta
il guscio di un uovo che si è scartocciato
e ha rivelato un tuorlo di coriandoli e grafite.*

The Yolk

Then one returns –it’s a possibility—
among the patches of pittosporum or those
of clover and certain yellow bellflowers
that remain shut in the damp of the dew
and perhaps one hears it asked where had you been
and one answers: here on your low drystone wall
a few meters from the castle, or maybe
on the school square, among the flowerbeds
where the earth was dusty clods.

One had stayed here all the time, immobile,
imagining journeys, dreaming of clocks
marking time’s passage with a paper metronome
the shell of an egg that has unwrapped
and revealed a yolk of confetti and graphite.

Sei in montagna

*Il sorso preso su un torrente in Valtournenche
mi era sembrato anni fa la prefigurazione del salto,
una balza dietro l'altra, come acrobata sul filo,
deciso a non voltarmi indietro, mai più cedere,
non importa quante spore restassero sotto le felci
o quanti canti ammutoliti nella laringe di un tasso:
finché mi è apparso ovvio che mi ero perso
che il sentiero aveva fin troppe curve a destra
e non spuntava mai il ghiacciaio orizzontale,
quello dove saresti spiccata in mezzo al bianco
al verde luccicante, dopo aver segnato un gol.*

You're in the Mountains

The sip from a stream in Valtournenche
had seemed to me years ago the foreshadowing of the jump,
one leap after another, like an acrobat on a wire,
determined not to look back, never again to give in,
never mind how many spores were left under the ferns
or how many songs muffled in the larynx of a badger:
until it became clear to me that I was lost
that the path had too many bends to the right
and the horizontal glacier never appeared,
the one where you'd have stood out against the white
and the shimmering green, after scoring a goal.