





# LATE TIDE

ROWENA HILL

## MAREA TARDIVA

ITALIAN VERSION BY SILVIO MIGNANO

## MAREA TARDÍA



*Alliteration*

LATE TIDE | ROWENA HILL

Italian translated from the Spanish by Silvio Mignano

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## THE SLOW DIGESTION OF WORDS

Note on *Marea tardía* by Rowena Hill  
Silvio Mignano

In a passage of *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (*The Late Mattia Pascal*), the novel (1904) by the Italian writer and dramatist Luigi Pirandello, Nobel Prize for literature in 1934, the protagonist, who no longer wants to be called Mattia Pascal but Adriano Meis, attends a production of Sofocles' *Electra* acted by automatic puppets. Mattia/Adriano is mystified by the novelty, which reveals brutally the concept of fiction in classical tragedy, and tries to imagine what would happen if Orestes, at the moment of avenging his father's death, noticed that the sky was simply a paper curtain, and torn besides.

In *Leap*, the second poem in Rowena Hill's new book, "At the back of the day's stage/ behind a threadbare black curtain/ fractions of figures gesticulate". They are her former teachers, these images, or figures, or fractions of figures, explain to the poet, and they add: "Feel how we pull your strings". Precisely, we would say, like a puppet, like one of the puppets acting the *Electra* that the late Mattia Pascal watches.

Fiction, in the sense closest to Borges, is the thread that holds *Marea tardía* together. The sea is not the sea, it's a mental construction that can be reached through a trap door in a cellar: it's a sea below the sea, agitated by currents and waves that move the reader's memory, obliging him to rethink his own existential certainties, which will no longer look so certain and solid.

In the same way, the eye is not simply the organ of sight from an anatomical point of view, but a window we look through to see our lives *à rebours*. They will be transformed into plays for the theatre and over the stage vultures, cats, clouds, pigeons and butterflies will parade - puppets, once again, which are no longer what they appear but something else, characters that embody feelings, memories, fragments of existence.

Rowena Hill resides in two languages, English and Spanish, in a plurality of cultures and in a reality, that of Venezuela, which in its turn is a cauldron of human and cultural identities and heritages and an eternal frontier territory between different worlds. She writes and translates, Rowena, and so is uniquely familiar with the ambiguity of the word, which is also its strength and richness. A word doesn't always have the first meaning that comes to mind when we read or listen to it, and no one knows it better than a translator.

So, a blue plastic bag blowing in the dust of an empty street is not necessarily what we think; it can announce a band of haggard goblins that have taken over a city reduced to debris and waste. A feeling of deep pity runs through the book, together with the intimate pain that memory causes the poet. She feels no hypocritical shame in showing us her nostalgia for the instincts that are still alive in her body, and yet no longer match what they were: she does this through verses with a simple, apparently banal structure, which however are dense and sometimes need a long time to be truly read and above all digested.

But it is not a happy metamorphosis that these poems by Rowena Hill offer us: they are not only a cathartic reflection on existence and its transformation in time. The last part of the book takes on desolate tones: little space remains for any redemption, in a reality where the crematorium is a shining bread oven and the alternative to burning is the body slipping, without a coffin, toward the blind depths of the sea - once again, the metaphorical sea that opens up in our inner consciousness.

It's the expression of a grief that's no longer only personal but also collective, where the Towers of Silence of the Parsis in India become a titanic funeral scaffold, an impossible stretcher from whose giddy height the bodies fall toward the abyss. So it's perhaps no longer a puppeteer that's pulling the strings of the characters on stage: it may be the Parcae, the Fates, and instead their action is to cut those strings.

A powerful synthesis between the images of the puppeteer and the Parcae is Thanatos, who arrives at the end of the book as an executioner and at the same time a liberator, subtly in balance between tenderness and violence, tragedy and humor. Rowena Hill's voice reaches from this moment on perhaps its highest level: at the point where there are no frontiers between human feelings, where fear and hope annul each other and converge, leaving the field open for the most enduring existential questions, for the word and its indefinable protean nature.

**LATE TIDE**

**I**



## GROUNDSWELL

### **Conversion**

Scratching of rat claws in the cellar  
swells to percussion,  
random pulses on the sea bottom  
collide in a quake,  
scattered sparks gather  
in a lightning flash,  
expose the god's face  
the hand with the dagger.

## Leap

At the back of the day's stage  
behind a threadbare black curtain  
fractions of figures gesticulate.  
“We’re your masters,” they murmur,  
“since childhood we’ve taught you to spit, to pray.  
Feel how we pull your strings.”

“I don’t feel it,” I answer  
and push them aside to pass  
into an empty room  
where silence is a yell  
with no exit till I find  
a trap door in the floor.

I jump into the void,  
in the thick dark my fingers brush  
winged seeds of words.

## Sea Below the Sea

In a cellar of the psyche  
a sea below the sea  
lit by a deathly glow  
an eclipse; on the beach  
no creature lives.

I walk along the edge of the silent waves  
dreaming the birth in the foam  
of cells and songs.

Suddenly the water divides  
and objects are hurled out  
fragments of lives and bodies  
twisted cables splinters of furniture  
broken wings drowned fishes  
and hairy legs skulls with threads  
knots of guts and veins  
that twist and wriggle on the sand.

I wish, I want  
from my deepest heart  
to assemble the debris  
reunite the shards  
of the world that belongs to me.

But I'm useless, dumb  
and in my resignation I taste peace  
while the light fades.

I efface myself, but the light?  
It wasn't dawn, it was dusk,  
it's gone. And those eyes  
that radiate in the ground?

## **Groundswell**

Agitation - the dictionary says -  
spreading from inside.  
It comes to beaches in big waves  
that threaten strollers  
and bring to light  
the ferments of the sea floor.

## FLOWERS

I lived in flowers  
lost in the heart of their trumpets  
pierced by their lances  
shining in their suns.

Later I descended stems  
and thick trunks,  
swam in tides of sap.

Now with roots  
I sink in the original clay  
the dark humus that germinates  
and molders.

# MAREA TARDIVA

**I**

## MARE MOSSO

### **La conversione**

Il graffiare di topi in cantina  
diventa percussione,  
battiti aleatori in fondo al mare  
sbattono e fanno tremare,  
scintille disperse si fondono  
in un lampo,  
rivelano il volto del dio  
la mano con la daga.



## Salto

Al fondo dello scenario dei giorni,  
dietro un telone nero consunto  
gesticolano frazioni di figure.  
«Siamo i tuoi maestri», sussurrano,  
«fin dall'infanzia t'insegnammo a sputare, a pregare,  
non senti come tiriamo i tuoi fili?».

«Non lo sento», rispondo  
e le metto da parte  
in una stanza vuota  
dove il silenzio è urlo  
senza uscita finché scopro  
una botola nel pavimento.

Salto senza vedere il suolo,  
nella spessa oscurità le mie dita a tentoni  
toccano semi alati di parole.

## **Mare sotto il mare**

In una cantina della psiche,  
un mare sotto il mare  
illuminato da una luce cadaverica,  
da eclisse, sulla spiaggia,  
non vive nessun essere.

Cammino sul bordo delle onde silenziose  
sognando il parto tra la spuma  
di cellule e canti.

All'improvviso si apre l'acqua  
e cominciano a uscire gettati  
frammenti di vita e corpi  
cavi ritorti schegge di mobili  
ali spezzate pesci annegati  
e gambe marcite crani sfilacciati  
nodi di viscere e di vene:  
si ritorcono e muovono sulla sabbia.

Io voglio, desidero  
dal più profondo di me stessa  
assemblare i resti  
ricomporre i frantumi  
del mondo che mi appartiene.

Ma sono incapace, muta  
e nella resa assaporo la pace  
mentre la luce si dissipa.

Io mi cancello, ma la luce?  
Non era l'alba, era crepuscolo,  
andato via. E questi occhi  
che irradiano il suolo?

## Mare mosso

Agitazione – dice il dizionario –<sup>1</sup>  
propagata dall'interno.  
Arriva alla spiaggia a grandi ondate  
che minacciano i passanti  
e fanno uscire a risplendere  
i fermenti del fondo.

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<sup>1</sup> In italiano manca un termine esattamente corrispondente al mar de fondo o mar de leva spagnolo, che la Real Academia de España nel suo dizionario definisce così: “1. s.m. o f. Agitazione delle acque del mare propagata dall'interno e che in forma attenuata raggiunge i luoghi più vicini alla costa. Può anche prodursi in mare aperto senza effetti sulle coste, con propagazione di onde, anche deboli, da un luogo all'altro. 2. s.m. o f. Inquietudine o agitazione più o meno latente che intorbidisce o rende difficile il corso di un qualsiasi evento”.

## I FIORI

Ho vissuto i fiori  
perdendomi nel cuore delle loro trombe  
trapassata dalle loro lance  
brillando nei loro soli.

Poi sono scesa per i talli  
e i tronchi massicci,  
nuotavo nelle maree di savia.

E ora con le radici  
affondo nel fango della fonte  
l'oscuro humus che germina  
e scompone.

# MAREA TARDÍA

**I**

## MAR DE FONDO

### **La conversión**

El arañar de ratas en el sótano  
se vuelve percusión,  
pulsos aleatorios en el fondo del mar  
chocan y hacen temblar,  
chispas dispersas se juntan  
en un relámpago,  
revelan la cara del dios  
la mano con la daga.

## Salto

Al fondo del escenario de los días,  
detrás de un telón negro raído  
gesticulan fracciones de figuras.  
«Somos tus maestros», susurran,  
«desde la infancia te enseñamos a escupir, a rezar,  
¿no sientes como jalamos tus cuerdas?»

«No lo siento», respondo  
y paso apartándolas  
hacia una habitación vacía  
donde el silencio es alarido  
sin salida hasta que descubro  
una escotilla en el piso.

Salto sin ver el suelo,  
en la espesa oscuridad mis dedos tantean  
semillas aladas de palabras.



## Mar bajo el mar

En un sótano de la psiquis  
un mar bajo el mar  
iluminado por una luz mortecina,  
de eclipse, en la playa  
ningún ser vive.

Camino por el borde de las olas silenciosas  
soñando el parto entre la espuma  
de células y cantos.

De repente el agua se abre  
y comienzan a salir arrojados  
fragmentos de vidas y cuerpos  
cables torcidos astillas de muebles  
alas rotas peces ahogados  
y piernas marchitas cráneos con hilachas  
nudos de tripas y venas,  
se retuercen y mueven sobre la arena.

Yo quiero, deseo  
desde lo más profundo de mí  
armar los escombros  
recomponer los añicos  
del mundo que me pertenece.  
Pero soy inútil, muda  
y en mi renuncia saboreo la paz  
mientras la luz se disipa.

Yo me borro, pero ¿la luz?  
No era amanecer, era crepúsculo,  
se fue. Y ¿esos ojos  
que irradian en el suelo?

## **Mar de leva**

Agitación - dice el diccionario -  
propagada desde el interior.  
Llega a las playas en grandes olas  
que amenazan los paseantes  
y sacan a relucir  
los fermentos del fondo.

## LAS FLORES

He vivido las flores  
perdiéndome en el corazón de sus trompas  
traspasada por sus lanzas  
brillando en sus soles.

Luego descendí por los tallos  
y los troncos macizos,  
nadaba en las mareas de la savia.

Y ahora con las raíces  
me hundo en el barro de la fuente  
el oscuro humus que germina  
y descompone.