Scipione

Poems

Translated from the Italian by Maurizio Brancaleoni
Revised by Jennifer Panek
Title: Scipione - Poems
Original poems by Scipione (Gino Bonichi) as published in ‘Carte segrete’,
Translated from the Italian by Maurizio Brancaleoni.
Revised by Jennifer Panek.

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Summer

The soil is dry and thirsty
and cracks open.
On the lips of the crevasses
red-hot lizards
run aflame.
The stars on fire fall
to burn the world,
but nobody reaches out to embrace them
and they grow dim, plunging into darkness.
The flesh seeks in other flesh
for springs
and finds eyes
that open like flowers.
And the chime of the crickets,
at night,
leads us to the sun
that will pierce us
with his thousand arrows.
I wait until it is over
and while waiting
I feel dazzled
like a white sheet of paper
on which the sun beats down.
The soil is dry and thirsty
and the night is black and perverse.
Christ, give it to drink,
for it wants to sin
and to be forgiven.
«The Day Has Gone Far»

The day has gone far
and I feel like a man of great stature.
There is no shadow around my body.
I see the mountains, I hear the river
the colours have grown dull,
the roots of the trees rummage through the soil.
In the opaque world wishes take shape,
the toads rub against the bark of big trunks,
the earth has all the hiding places,
the scarab beetles buzz in the air.
If a woman were to sing...
Odours hit the nostrils,
the hands rise to seek
to touch the things created:
the stone is cold - the flesh is warm
and drags with it a breath
that mistakes the soil for the sky.
God, lay your arm upon my head
and allow me to see tomorrow.
Solstice

He lay his hands on the soil and was akin
to a beast.
The earth has all the hiding places,
the scarab beetles buzz in the air.
The head at the root of the hair burns,
the shoulders open wide, the entrails are moved.
There are no voices:
the soil rises, the womb rings hollow,
the breasts stretch, they plummet towards the ground,
the toes are twisted,
the knees, the fingers hit the ground.
The sun has stopped
along the loins. A wind full of pollen runs by.
Everything abandons us without our knowledge.
The blood runs in the closed circle.
The limbs of the young man are beautiful,
his mind is clear and serene,
but the vices of the others write in black
and in the lakes of the eyes
swim evil eels.
The tender reed, green and white,
has nothing to lean on
but it cannot fall.
The joints bend softly:
everything is fulfilled and everything is lost.
The clouds hang in the air,  
a stone falls from the top of the mountain  
and the quail in the wheat  
stops singing.  
A man walks naked:  
he is white like a tree without bark  
and all things created want to touch him.  
And he shall fell the trees  
after enjoying the coolness of their shade,  
he shall catch fish in the river,  
the birds that fly.  
In the air there is fire,  
the thunder breaks out  
and the lightning writes in the sky  
the character of God.  
The fear, the fear of him  
breaks the body as it worships.
«I Hear the Shrieks of the Angels»

I hear the shrieks of the angels
who want my salvation,
but saliva is sweet
and blood runs to sin.
The air is still,
everything is pink like flesh;
if beatitude pervades
one must break and fall.
The sun seeps into my bosom
as into a basket
and I feel hollow,
the hand leaves the ground,
feels the air, the light, the flesh.
The lance sinks deep into the loins of the mare
that runs - and screams with her head in the sky.
Nobody expects you
and the woods marvel as you lighten them,
and the water is beautiful again
in your presence.
Under you the seeds grow sleek,
the trees devour their own shadows.
All things have faith in your return,
and stay still, ignoring each other.
The chant carves its own shape in the air
but the sky is waiting for
the cries that rip through it.
The womb too has dried up to conceive
and man shall lay his hands thereon.
The flesh seeks in other flesh for springs:
all this time, the calm leavens and invades.
But if arms are lifted,
the gesture lives on
in the stone of lost good.
I used to lie in wait on the mountain road
I would climb through the woods full of trepidation
and crouch down to wait, fraught with anxiety.
I would hear the cries of the peafowl.
One night I was taken by the thought of the road.
I climbed higher and higher - and the trees and the stones
came out of the dark
as I lay in ambush.
The white road was like a blindfold
over my eyes.
I heard a noise in the green nearby:
a black horse appeared
it looked around and went down slowly
submerging itself in the white
then it whinnied
and its cry went down the mountain like a shiver.
It stayed motionless, enduring the echo
and fled away.
Summer Chorus

I am the voice of the falling tree,
my bark will be caressed
when they see that I am white inside.
My roots are ivory and are
concealed - a fine soil covers them.
My body is round,
the air alone used to touch me.
The birds nested in my branches,
their eyes saw all my arms,
ythey were concealed by the leaves.
Under me man rested.
I am the voice of the child,
my bones are tender and can fall
and will not break.
My legs run, my feet
leave no footprints.
The tone of my voice resembles
the morning bell,
the light bronze.
At sundown a sheep
birthed a lamb.
It came out all woolly, with blood
heart and voice.
The men pop out
and walk away,
the silent dogs walk away,
the trees wait for the dark
to ignore each other,
the fragrant herbs set off
on their journey.
The owls cry, everything moves
and anguish fills the air
with restlessness.
Gino Bonichi, better known as Scipione after the Roman general Scipio Africanus, was born in Macerata in 1904. He moved to Rome in 1909, where he studied for a short period at the Academy of Fine Arts. Together with Mario Mafai and Antonietta Raphaël he was one of the founders of the so-called ‘Roman School’ or ‘Via Cavour School’, a group of Rome-based expressionist artists who opposed Fascist-approved Novecento movement. His paintings were first exhibited in 1927, and then, two years later, at the Venice Biennale. In 1931 he also exhibited at the first Rome Quadriennale. He probably wrote his poems between 1928 and 1930.

Maurizio Brancaleoni received his MA in Language and Translation Studies from Sapienza University of Rome in January 2018, but he has been translating since 2012. His MA thesis aimed at providing an extended commentary and a translation into his native language of Thomas Wolfe’s posthumous work Passage to England. He has also published several pieces of poetry and fiction in various collections and journals and won a couple of literary prizes.

Jennifer Panek is an Associate Professor of English literature at the University of Ottawa. When not writing the academic publications on early modern English drama that her job demands, she translates Italian fiction for sheer enjoyment. She is currently working on her first translation for publication: Danilo Balestra's Tirati a Sorte, for Atene Edizioni.
Other translations by Maurizio Brancaleoni can be found on his bilingual blog **Leisure Spot:**
http://leisurespotblog.blogspot.com/

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