

CLAUDIO DAMIANI

ANIO NOVUS

(Translated by Martin Bennett)

1

I know that in a wooded valley back of Tivoli
emerges a stretch of Anio Novus,
the ruins of the aqueduct still in place
far, far from the common gaze;
one day I intend to go there and meet
the arches shadowy against the greenery,
I want to study them at length then begin
to reproduce them, pen on paper,
I will also take lots of photos,
then I'll sit down like a shepherd of yore,
remaining spellbound who knows how long for,
hearing water via aqueduct cross the valley,
entering its flow, now drinking a little,
now bathing, sensing in each splash
the universe stepped closer.

2

The aqueducts of the Romans are marvelous,
one reason being that once abandoned
they have produced zero pollution,
welcoming nature, become one with it,
hand-baked brick alive with moss and plants,
the onrush of arches imitating that
of creepers, of foliage and branches;
enchancing the gaze of painters,
for shepherds a higher form of television,
travelers and pilgrims discovering here
their likeness, like a line of bent figures
headed one and all toward the capital
and who bear with them something precious
and pass it on from hand to hand.

3

If the aqueducts of the Romans,
albeit abandoned, after so many centuries
remain a thing of beauty, does the same fate
lie in store for the works of our own day?
I fear not, since iron rusted and worn away
is ugly, full stop, squalor by another name –
nor can it be relied on not to collapse under its weight

while brick is like stone and over the centuries
grows comelier, and what's more it is handmade..
Often our own works are not even beautiful
in their time, not through any lack of skill
but because we suppose that the happiness
which beauty brings might subtract from the need
to get and consume and spend
and that by standing ages to contemplate some aqueduct
we will have so much less time for shopping,
beauty originating from the public manufacturing sector
being in unfair competition with the private.

4

Should an abandoned bridge or motorway
with time break up (because hopefully by then we may
have found another means), from the rubble would emerge
not only iron, but tubing's horrid pvc
and plastic, electric cables and who knows what;
for this reason I think it would be a good idea
to start building with an eye to digestivity,
to go biodegradable, or use materials which can
harmonize with nature, like the aqueducts
of the ancient Romans and which even now adorn
the landscape instead of uglifying it.

5

And so now I want to remain
in front of his line of eroded arches,
to feel time which flows like water,
and the arches, moments, days, years, centuries
like a current inside nature,
and the green meadows, that flock of sheep
grazing white and slow and which move
only to seem still, I do not want to shift
an inch, you others can take the roads and traffic
to go shopping, to rush, to swarm and kick,
I want to stay alone before this picture.