

Zbigniew Herbert

Fragment of a Greek Vase

In the foreground you see
a youth's handsome body

his beard leans on his chest
one knee is pulled up
his arm like a dead branch

he has closed his eyes
he disavows even Eos

her fingers plunged in the air
her hair flying loose
and the contours of her robes
make three circles of sorrow

he has closed his eyes
he disavows his bronze armor

his fine helmet
adorned with blood and a black crest
his broken shield
and spear

he has closed his eyes
he disavows the world

leaves hang in the still air
a branch quivers with the shadows of birds flying off
and only the cricket hidden
in Memnon's still living hair
speaks persuasively
in praise of life

Translated by Alissa Valles