The Phaninetai (He Seems to Me) Fragment

Catherine Theis
THE PHAINETAI (HE SEEMS TO ME)
FRAGMENT

He strikes me as godlike
who up close before you
sits and intent upon your sweet
voice listens to the bay of Naples
of tears of smoke
and passengers
from a journey starting here
the imagination a line
that slowly moves
between the blackened temples
towers
uneven rise
on unsure footing I go
following
  crusted edge
to the sea
I was there once within
spear's throw
  dangling
from this buckled loop
close to love
stepping in from the height
  of a tower
  O vision
but not a sound from their lips
I heard and in my ears not a single word,
and as your charm fills his eyes
with longing, yes, it
makes the heart in my lungs shake;
for when I look at you, no
longer thereupon
am I able to speak,
a breastwork opens
an aching spirit
    beyond the crossblades
of passion sings
a seat soaked in wine
    the wishbone cracking arc
of man's life
the green grass growing paler
    without speech
    listening

but now my tongue is rent, subtle
flame races gently over skin,
and in my eyes no sight; there is
a ringing in my ears, for it is planted
and fastened
we are told
not in organs of the thorax
and abdomen
but folded inside
    the oil marrow
    the breath-soul refrains

a voice thrown
with trumpets and timpani, and down me
the sweat ran, and a trembling
wholly overtook me, paler than grass
I was, and I am dead just short of that
it seems to me, it is,
is this the cold sweat
that holds
    and shakes after living
love? Still gold bracelets
for my youth and sweet voice
before death's winding sheet
    first hung
    Pindar's bar across the eyes
to crust with a salt cloak
a seeming that cannot mean end.