

Journal of Italian Translation



Editor Luigi Bonaffini

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**Journal
of Italian Translation**

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Book reviews should be sent to Joseph Perricone, Dept. of Modern Language and Literature, Fordham University, Columbus Ave & 60th Street, New York, NY 10023 or perricone@fordham.edu.

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Luigi Bonaffini

Volume XI

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Each issue of Journal of Italian Translation features a noteworthy Italian or Italian American artist.

In this issue we present the work of Vanni Macchiagodena. The essay that follows was penned by curator Anthony Molino for the artist's most recent exhibition, entitled Sintessenze (a neologism combining the Italian words sintesi and essenza), on display this past spring at the Fortress of Civitella del Tronto (Teramo).

MACCHIAGODENA: THE EVOLUTION OF AN OBSESSION

"If the recurrent theme of [Henry] Moore's work is infancy, this is not of course to say that everything Moore did should be considered in this light. Watteau's recurrent theme was mortality; Rodin's submission; Van Gogh's work; Toulouse Lautrec's the breaking point between laughter and pity. We are talking about obsessions which determine the gestures and perceptions of artists throughout a life's work, even when their conscious attention is elsewhere. A kind of bias of the imagination. The way a life's work slips towards a theme which is home for that artist." (John Berger, *Portraits*)"

In light of Berger's intuition, and in line with the title and focus of this exhibition of Vanni Macchiagodena's work, I would like to draw attention to the one theme, the one iconographic figure, which comes closest to the kind of obsession that Berger equates with an artist's "home". The theme wherein the artist takes refuge, that becomes a veritable *place* where the artist protects, replenishes and redefines himself. It's odd, even for a psychoanalyst such as myself, to speak of the evolution of an obsession. How indeed does something fixed, repetitive, obstinate in its unyielding recurrence end up evolving? But over the years I have witnessed first-hand the process whereby Macchiagodena has remained faithful to the "home" that is for him the figure of Saint Martin, while at the same time subjecting that figure to the kind of stripping down that characterizes so much of his recent work, and defines both the focus and scope of this show.

In a public conversation of mine with Macchiagodena and the renown Italian sculptor Giuliano Giuliani, Vanni made explicit the present-day aim of his art. He said that his ambition is to be able to represent a theme or figure which, "stripped" of its historically evocative

and defining iconographic traits, would remain capable of transmitting the theme's essential message across time and space. Profoundly respectful of the tradition out of which he originates, Macchiagodena looks to achieve what I've termed the *sintessenza* ("synthessence") of an idea, of a story, of an iconographic tradition. He strives to achieve a plastic representation of the archetypal kernel, if you will, of the figural concept that has become his Object. Like astrophysicists who relentlessly pursue the echo or image of our origins, who sound black holes and gravitational waves to retrace the history of who and where we are, and of how we've come to be, Macchiagodena – in both his painting and sculpture – does something of the same, rekindling, in his fertile folly, a dream not unlike Plato's theory of Forms. So what's this all have to do with Saint Martin?

The figure of the 4th-century saint is a fruitful obsession which has long preoccupied Macchiagodena. It's endured for years in his painting, in his sculpture and printmaking – and is, as one would expect, duly and variously present in the *Sintessenze* exhibit. A few years ago I had this to say: "In Macchiagodena's case, the saint's gesture (the offer of his cloak to a naked beggar)... seems to me charged with a symbolism that transcends traditional representations. Macchiagodena's frequent references to the legend of St. Martin allude, I believe, to the function of art itself, to its highest and most noble function: namely, to the often desperate attempt to restore an ancestral link with the Other; to insist on the necessity of one's offering, of one's contribution– at once both ethical and aesthetic – to the life of the *polis*. To a community which, ever increasingly, and ever so sadly, instead identifies the artist with the beggar at the margins of society, contemptuously ignoring both the artist's role and the scope of his message: that is to say, ignoring the very gift he means to share with us, his fellow men." Today, at a remove of several years from this statement, I stand by every word. But I want, and need, to say more, as the artist's obsession has become, in a way, my own.

For awhile, I flirted with the idea that what might fuel Macchiagodena's obsession was a shifting identity crisis of sorts. As Martin would inhabit equally Vanni's paintings and sculpture, I imagined that the saint's division of his cloak was a way for the artist to identify equally with soldier and beggar: that is to say, alternatively, with painter and sculptor. I know people who appreciate Vanni more in one guise than the other: some who swear by the what they deem

to be the sculptor's superior talent, others who rave at the painter's mastery of his craft. Knowing the man as I do, and suspecting that he'd have no part of transposing to the arts the evangelical dictum that would have no person serve two masters, I could envision the cloak being cut in two as the artist's way of making a statement about himself. As a means of dealing with the likely tension that could well result from the demands – both internal and external, subjective and environmental – of two *metiers*, of two ways of being, of two fundamental but potentially mutually exclusive vehicles for the necessary expression of one's talents.

But there's yet another reading of the artist's obsession, a quite simple one, that I'd now like to offer. As Macchiagodena has worked tirelessly, in recent years, to approach the *sintessenza* of things in his work, doesn't it make sense that the figure of Saint Martin should have remained omnipresent in his practice? Doesn't it make sense that in a practice only occasionally inhabited by the human figure (which has, by the way, almost totally disappeared from his painting, save for the occasional evocation of Martin), the one figure that persists, obsessively, emblematically, is one whose very *mythos* involves the act of stripping down? Martin's defining gesture is, in fact, one of divestiture. His is a gesture that opts for the essential, that disposes of the superfluous: ultimately, both saint and beggar, remain warmly wrapped even in half a cloak. And, my guess is, each half could in turn be further divided still: for the miracle of art, of Macchiagodena's art at this stage of his life and career, is the equivalent of a wager staked precisely on that possibility.

So no, as Berger says about the function of Moore's and other artists' idiomatic obsessions, Saint Martin is not the only lens through which to view the totality of Macchiagodena's production. But it is a serviceable lens, for it allows us to see what the artist is about and to focus on what focuses his attention. Indeed, it allows us to think about Macchiagodena's relentless pursuit of *sintessenze* as an ongoing process: not as an end in itself, but as another stage or turn in the evolution of an obsession. The story has it that on the night Martin shared his cloak with the beggar, he dreamed of Jesus, clad in his half-cloak, telling his angels: "Here is Martin, the Roman soldier who is not baptised; it is he who has clothed me." The next morning, upon awaking, Martin found that his cloak was whole. Like I said, we can read the story in different ways. One way is to understand the cloak as a metaphor for the very process

of Vanni's obsession: as an image bridging synthesis and essence. As the paradigmatic *sintessenza*. An obsession which Martin embodies, and mediates. The place where the artist aches to return. Where less, ultimately, is more.

Anthony Molino

Journal of Italian Translation

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Table of Contents

Featured Artist

Edited by Anthony Molino

Vanni Macchiagodena

ESSAYS

Antonio D'Alfonso

On Translation.....12

TRANSLATIONS

Francesca Benocci

Italian translation of excerpts from "Addis Ababa" by Sarah
Jane Barnett 21

Len Krisak

English translation of poems by Bassani, Quasimodo, Montale,
D'Annunzio 26

Pasquale Verdicchio

English translation of pages from Sergio Azteni's *Racconti con
colonna sonora* 38

Brenda Porster

English translation of two short stories by Mia Lecomte.....68

Santi Buscemi and Brian Zuccala

English translation of *Il dottor Cymbalus* by Luigi Capuana 90

Daniela De Vincenti, Donna Pucciani, Luciano Sestito

Italian translation of poems by Donna Pucciani.....122

SPECIAL FEATURES

Scritture sperimentali / Experimental writing

Edited by Gianluca Rizzo

Gianluca Rizzo and Dominic Siracusa

Italian translation of "Sì, ma lentamente" by Emilio Villa.....134

Voices in English from Europe to New Zealand

Edited by Marco Sonzogni

Elena Traina

Italian translation of "Solidarity with the Anchovy" by Gregory O'Brien.....158

Anna Allenbach and Charlie Hann

English translation of poems by Anna Ruchat 174

Marco Sonzogni

Italian translation of "October Thought" by Seamus Heaney 195

Theater

Frigoriferi / Refrigerators Act I by Mario Fratti, translated into English by Carlotta Brentan `198

Re:Creations

American Poets translated into Italian

Edited by Michael Palma

Barbara Carle

Italian translation of poems by T.S.Eliot.....240

Luigi Bonaffini

Italian translation of poems by Charles Martin.....252

Classics Revisited

Dante's Poems from the Vita Nuova

Translated by Joseph Tusiani 266

Beginnings: Seven initial passages of classic Italian works

Translated by Peter D'Epiro 310

<i>A Garland of Gozzano:</i>	
<i>Poetry and fiction by Guido Gozzano</i>	
Edited and Translated by Michael Palma	366

<i>Dueling Translators</i>	
Edited by Gaetano Cipolla	
<i>La follia delle donne</i> by Carlo Frugoni translated by Florence Russo and by Onat Claypole	416

Book Reviews

Seamus Heaney. <i>Death of a Naturalist</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 2016 (1966); Seamus Heaney. <i>Morte di un naturalista</i> . Translated into Italian by Marco Sonzogni. Milano: Mondadori ("Lo Specchio"), 2014. By Roya Jabarouti.....	423

ESSAYS

On Translation

Antonio D'Alfonso

Antonio D'Alfonso, the author of over 40 books, founded Guernica Editions in 1978 where he published over 900 authors and 475 books for more than 30 years. Since he sold Guernica in 2010, he now works primarily as a literary translator and teaches, when possible, creative writing, script writing, film studies, and Italian at various universities. His novel *A Friday in August* won the Trillium Award in 2005. His feature film *Bruco* won best director award and best foreign film award at the New York International Independent Film Festival in 2010. His latest feature film *Antigone* is an adaptation of Sophocles' play. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and was given an Honorary Doctorate in Letters by Athabasca University in 2016.

Poetry is an affirmation; translation is the confirmation of that affirmation.

The comparison of these utterances has produced truckloads of books. Fidelity or betrayal? This binary paradigm motivates the debate about poetry and translation.

The non-derived work and its translation are, however, both subjective adventures. This proposition is suggested in Octavio Paz's much-quoted phrase: "When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate."

Personal choices greatly influence composition. Whatever poem one writes arises from a mindset developed during the acquirement of experience and knowledge. The same can be said of translation.

The principal difference between primary and secondary products, as this very sentence implies, is a barely-concealed moral prejudice. One is encouraged to compliment, on one side, the authentic crop, and castigate, on the other, its derivative confection. As soon as a person speaks of translation what should be equivalence brings about preconceptions and discrimination.

How can such a mental process not bring about condescension on the part of the poet toward the translator? Is this not what the

Italian pun *traduttore, traditore* intimates? The translator becomes unavoidably a traitor. It is as though translation contained from the onset some sort of wickedness, an inherent loss of purity. The moment mentioned, translation gets soiled. Poetry is the fruit; translation a contrivance, a genetically engineered food. No surprise critics consider translation as being impure. No wonder there is as little as three percent of literary translations of all published books in English-speaking countries. From this not-so-subtle sinfulness, we move mechanically into xenophobia. Edith Grossman explains this situation boldly:

"How sad to contemplate the efforts of know-nothing governments and exclusionary social movements to first invent and then foster the mythical 'purity' of a language by barring the use of any others within a national territory."

Translation affirms as much as it confirms. In other words, its locality is on the same latitude and longitude as those of poetry. Translation is neither more western nor more eastern of poetry, as poetry is not more southern or northern of translation. Both are fabrications. Willed inventions. Aristotle defines poetry, as being a scientific production, a "medium of imitation", where a work seeks to imitate the lives of men and women, for the better or the worse and for what they are.

Translation would thus be poetry +. Translation is not a minus; translation is poetry plus something else. It is not "tracing paper", to use an Edith Grossman image. Translation is an addition in purpose and merit. Translation is not collateral damage. Its significance is valuable on the personal and collective realms.

Translations tear down the walls of our national prisons. Precisely the very type of offence customs officer do not wish to solicit. But they sometimes do make exceptions.

What produce comes from abroad must satisfy the security and safety requirements of what is acceptable inside. This reasoning will inevitably lead us into the political realm, which we will avoid this one time. Regardless of our excuses, translation is surely related to politics.

Let me quote Maurice Friedberg to push the point across more directly:

"Specifically, the publication of literary translation in

an isolationist absolute monarchy (and, later, in an even more isolationist Communist dictatorship) resulted in the dissemination of books that were, inevitably, carriers of alien Western values. This ambivalence toward foreign cultures helps explain why translations in Soviet Russia were traditionally a reliable barometer of the country's political moods. They benefited from periods of relative ideological tolerance and suffered during years of xenophobia and political witchhunts" (15-16).

If one must speak of differences between poetry and translation, it would have to be with this political dimension kept in mind. That is, translations might be, if possibility is the correct connotation in this case, a little freer and certainly more remunerative than poetry. Though both practices are most of the time confined to its national borders, translation is the more lucrative. A translator can make a living from his writing; a poet rarely. Like we said, translation is highly political.

Herein lies a paradox, a sizable contradiction. What one deems inferior turns out to be humbly superior in intent. Translation is a key to another world. And the price to pay for this key is very high. Often higher than what the poet is willing to pay.

Translation lifts poetry onto another dimension. What used to be imprisoned in a specific tradition and culture is raised onto a larger level. *Traduttore, amico* should be the adage. There is never betrayal. Unwillingly what is local turns out to be a global event. What was to be centripetal becomes centrifugal. What was to be centralized becomes polycentric.

There was a famous quarrel between two Italian writers on this specific topic. One, I believe, was Italo Calvino, who argued against the other, Pier Paolo Pasolini, that writers should become at the time of writing aware of the fact that their works would one day be translated and so, if I understand their differences, a writer should write with the prospect of translation in mind from the start. Although I have no proof of how translation affects a poet later on, I am certain that the translated poet has learned more about his own words by reading a translation of his words than by discussing with other poets from his own territory.

The gist behind this argument is that writers do not naturally

think beyond their national borders. Pasolini's position represented, strangely enough, regionalism as being more important than cross-regionalism, a position that appears, to anyone in the know of Pasolini's work, plainly bizarre (a Friulan writer told me recently that Pasolini later repudiated this position). If there is an Italian author who is global, it is Pasolini. And yet for some reason he defended a position at the antipodes of Calvino's hypothesis. Poets are inexorably regional.

In the 1920s, T.S. Eliot had raised somewhat the same contention when attacking Matthew Arnold's "deconstructive" stance. The famous example of this would be Jules Laforgue's importance that surpasses anyone else from the French Symbolist movement; Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, Tristan Corbière and Stéphane Mallarmé, essential icons in modern French-language poetry, were surpassed in importance outside of France by someone who the French consider absolutely a *poète mineur*.

Noticeably, we are dealing here with a very sensitive issue that will have many of us scream at the top of our voices. The controversy, though inestimable, brings to the fore what hides in the background. Comparing a poem to its translation underscores the very notion of what is a work of the first-order or of the second-order.

We don't know why a major figure in one culture does not cross over with all his weight into a second culture. Every one drops the blame on the translator. But is the translator to blame?

One recognizes this problem instantly when reading Anthony Hartley's translations of Mallarmé's work. As fine as these almost verbatim transcripts are, they simply do not carry Mallarmé's momentousness over into the English-speaking world. Substance is lacking. And it is not the fault of the translator. Mallarmé simply does not speak to English-speaking readers of poetry. The Penguin Poets edition speaks tons. The translations are presented below the French original like footnotes; it is as though Hartley was quite aware of the missing gravity of the text once translated. Translation should, however, never be a footnote. A translator must be as brave as Pierre Jean Jouve and John D. Sinclair were, who translated, respectively, Shakespeare's sonnets and Dante's *Divine Comedy* in prose, with no attempt at imitating the rhyme schemes and meters of the original poems. Hartley was correct in presenting Mallarmé's intricately complex texts in prose rather than in verse.

What any translator of poetry learns from such examples is that one cannot translate is the regionalism of poems. One tradition simply does not carry over without damage. What can be translated is the universality of the poem. Precisely the very thing that might not have been important for the poet at the time of his composition.

And for this, the translator is accused of being a traitor. The translator has not dished out the stash that was expected from him. Even if the translator could have handed over the goods, he might not have been willing to do so. Perhaps, it was simply impossible for him to do so. Why?

Poetry affirms a specific locus. Poetry affirms the focal point of subjectivity as well as a collective station. Placement is automatic. There is no such thing as free poetry. The moment poetry is written in a certain language, it is this language that conditions focal point and locality. Deconstruction works only within the confines of the borders of language.

Translation confirms this affirmation, and then shifts poetry's emplacement, elevating it to a higher plane. What Vladimir Nabokov demands of a translation, that it "reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text" is a suggestion that tosses translators into the camp of traitors. Feminine and masculine rhymes, alliterations, beats, syllabification, grammar belong to poetic affirmation and rarely can they be transposed into another language without loss of individuality and community. All the translator can do is permute, transfigure, and substitute one confinement for another. The bet is steep, yet the winning enormous.

By placing one literary circumscription beside a second might not, in itself, break down borders, but it will certainly broaden the expanse of both. Something recalling the Gestalt Effect occurs when a work is transposed into another environment, as it widens the physical perspectives for both the host and guest. Critical thinking brought forth by the exercise of translating the work of living author usually punctures the balloon of innocence and unconsciousness. Translation awakens a cognitive state in the poet. No matter how alert the poet might have been during the composition of his original poem, the translation of the same poem modifies forever his writing and his future writings. He will no longer be able to read his own work as he used to, in the restraints of his collectivity. He now *knows* that a reader in a different situation *knows* as well.

This double comprehension creates a bridge between cultures. It is thanks to translation that connections between heterogeneous regions develop.

Passing over the gangway on to otherness produces the most delicious of fruits. By confirming the affirmation of poetry, translation universalizes what is specific. Translation analyzes details and plunges into the ocean of the unexpected.

We must beware of not mistaking the universalizing mechanisms of translation with translation as being universal. Globalization is not an immediate acquisition. Translating into English works originally written, say, in Italian does not automatically guarantee English-speaking readers to react in the same manner. The reader in London does not read poetry the same way as the reader in San Diego. Local thoughts and practice systems vary according to geography. Poetry is not geographically blind. The dissimilarities within a language should, however, not hinder the translator from doing his work. The translator in Toronto will not translate a Serbian poet the same way as the translator in Sydney. There is no single way to translate a work, no matter what intellectual apparatus the translator uses to defend or a critic to attack a translation. If we don't agree about poetry being untranslatable, we do nevertheless believe that there are as many ways to translate a poem as there are translators. In the industry of books, the concept of a perfect translation has more to do with rights and royalties than it does with translation *per se*.

Translation follows the same pattern as pain management. Our Western philosophy has taught us to want to change things as they are; whereas Eastern philosophy teaches that it is only by accepting what is there that we can adapt with circumstance. What we have to change is our perception of the situation. We must shift our focus and change ourselves.

Surely, there are times when adding a comma produces the right amount of endorphins that will relieve us from a malaise. Who are we to say "no" to the sense of euphoria that such a transformation might generate? Inevitably the squads from academic propriety will yell from the rostrum, "You have broken the Golden Rule of fidelity."

Most of the books from the past are black books on unfaithful husbands and wives. We have yet read a single work from the

Greek or the Latin or the Mandarin that does include an Apology from the translator. Critics should learn to be kinder and view slip-page and the slight of hand not as heresy but as, to use Yves Bonnefoy's term, a necessary sacrifice. There are times when writing a phrase in the negative can render what was written in the positive. Other times, the active voice is preferred to the original passive voice. Some times, switching the position of an adjective unleashes just enough charm for the reader to let out a gasp of contentment.

Once we have accepted the fact that there will never be a single, perfect translation of a poem as there will probably never a unique cure for elevating pain, we must reinforce wellness of multiple translations instead of hurting translations. It is by interlocking these variously distinctive, peculiar, and individual attempts, to quote Roman Jakobson, at "equivalence in difference," that we gradually climb over our borders and build arches over the gaps that divide our societies. By outplaying regional poetry, translation works toward a more open society.

April 22, 2016

TRANSLATIONS



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Flux* (Flusso), linden and bitter oak, cm.90x15x140 (2016)

Addis Ababa | Addis Abeba*

by Sarah Jane Barnett

Translated by Francesca Benocci

Francesca Benocci is a PhD candidate in Literary Translation Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and holds an MA in Literary Translation and Text Editing and a BA in Languages, Literatures and Cultures both from the University of Siena. She is also a poet, short-story writer, editor and blogger. Her poetry translations appear regularly in *Journal of Italian Translation* (US) and *Atelier* (Italy).

Sarah Jane Barnett is a poet, creative writing teacher, and book reviewer. Her poetry has been published in New Zealand, Australia, and the US, and anthologised in *Best New Zealand Poems*, *Dear Heart: 150 New Zealand Love Poems* (Godwit), and *Essential New Zealand Poems: Facing the Empty Page* (Random House). Her debut collection *A Man Runs into a Woman* (Hue & Cry Press, 2012) was a finalist in the 2013 New Zealand Post Book Awards. Her second collection, *WORK* (Hue & Cry Press), was released in October 2015. Sarah was the recipient of the Louis Johnson New Writers' Bursary and the Estate Phoebe Maunsell Scholarship. She teaches creative writing at Massey University. She lives in Wellington, New Zealand, with her husband and son.

Addis Ababa | Addis Abeba*

by Sarah Jane Barnett

* The following texts are excerpts from 'Addis Ababa', the first poem of Sarah Jane Barnett's last collection, *WORK*, published in October 2015 by Hue&Cry Press.

He wants to communicate the meaning of the source-language.

He gently smooths the original text.

He moves through the shape of the words,
which, strictly speaking, are his shape.

The concept of metaphor is imperfect, he knows this.

A translation is often not word-for-word,

style, concordance, word order

and context – they all matter. They are crucial
values in seeking equivalents.

Here, the ground has a different name. The sky is quartz blue.

Yes, he thinks, this is literally a re-linguaging.

He carries his words

in books and on his tongue. *Bilingual,*

the *translator's key, target language,*

paraphrase: these are all words

imitating words in his language.

What is beautiful in one language can be nonsense

in another, or it may still

be beautiful, *amarä, qonjo.*

That is the translator's job –

to find the right word

to remember beauty.

He has many terms

for death – *mot, hlfät hywät, hlfät,*

amwamwat, but only one for near death, *bämot afaf.*

Addis Ababa | Addis Abeba*

by Sarah Jane Barnett

Translated by Francesca Benocci

Vuole trasmettere il significato della lingua di origine.
 Appiana delicatamente il testo originale.
 Si muove attraverso la forma delle parole,
 che, a esser precisi, sono la sua forma,
 Il concetto di metafrasi è imperfetto, questo lui lo sa.
 Una traduzione è raramente parola-per-
 parola,
 stile, concordanza, sintassi
 e contesto – sono tutti importanti. Sono elementi
 cruciali nella ricerca di equivalenti.

Qui la terra ha un altro nome. Il cielo è blu quarzo.
 Sì, pensa, questo è letteralmente ri-linguaggio.

Porta le proprie parole
 nei libri e sulla lingua. *Bilingue*,
 la chiave del traduttore, lingua di destinazione,
parafrasi: sono tutte parole
 che imitano parole nella sua lingua.
 Ciò che è bello in una lingua può essere assurdo
 in un'altra, o può comunque
 restare bello, *amarä, qonjo*.
 È questo il lavoro del traduttore –
 riuscire a trovare la parola giusta
 per ricordare la bellezza.
 Ha molti termini
 per morte – *mot, hlfät hywät, hlfät*,
amwamwat, ma uno solo per vicino alla morte, *bämot afäf*.

[...]

*

It is my turn to buy the biscuits. In the aisle
of the New World I examine the packets:
chocolate domes of marshmallow, swirled shortbread
with cream filling, hard ginger rounds.

Last week a woman brought bright pink buns
filled with sweet cream. People had clapped.
An old man is touching the tea, his hand
lifts one box and then another, holding each

like a cubed puzzle. I see his arm tremble.
'Go home,' he says, his head still down.
I look over my shoulder. *Me?* Hot needles prick
into my face, my throat thick and salty.

The man turns to face me. 'Go back home,'
he says, 'we don't need you here.' His eyes
are liquid and raw. Sun spots blotch his cheeks.
For a moment, I look back. 'Isn't this home?' I say.

*

He knows he will lose his language. A translator who
habitually speaks both languages cannot see the world as a
monolingual does. Each object has a layer of words: a horse, a
färäs; a house, a *bet*. His habit of use decides which comes first,
the change most noticeable in everyday speech. He can feel new
words in his mouth, others dropping away. They are tied to
ground he no longer walks. He watches his thoughts for interfer-
ence, when the second language disrupts the first. Proper nouns
are the most in danger. He will forget the names of certain birds
and the word for his local drink. He will forget the green strip
where those birds once roosted. He has already forgotten the
amber flash of their wings.

[...]

*

Tocca a me comprare i biscotti. Nella corsia del New World prendo in esame le confezioni: marshmallow in cupole di cioccolata, frollini arricciati ripieni di crema, dischi duri allo zenzero.

La settimana scorsa una signora ha portato panini rosa ripieni di crema dolce. La gente ha applaudito. Un signore anziano sta toccando il tè, la mano solleva un pacchetto poi un altro, come fossero

cubi di Rubik. Vedo che il braccio gli trema. 'Vai a casa,' dice, ancora a testa bassa. Mi guardo alle spalle. *Io?* Mi viene un formicolio alla faccia, un nodo salato alla gola.

L'uomo si gira verso di me. 'Tornatene a casa,' dice, 'non ci servi qui.' Ha gli occhi lucidi e infiammati. Le guance macchiate dal sole. Per un attimo mi guardo indietro. 'Non è questa, casa?' dico.

*

Sa che perderà la sua lingua. Un traduttore abituato a parlare entrambe le lingue non potrà mai vedere il mondo come un monolingue. Ogni oggetto ha uno strato di parole: un cavallo, un *färäs*; una casa, una *bet*. La consuetudine d'uso decide quale viene prima, il cambiamento più evidente nei dialoghi quotidiani. Si sente le parole nuove in bocca, le altre che lo abbandonano. Sono legate a un suolo che non calpesta più. Controlla le interferenze nei pensieri, quando la seconda lingua interrompe la prima. I nomi propri sono quelli più a rischio. Dimenticherà i nomi di alcuni uccelli e come si chiama la bevanda locale. Dimenticherà la striscia verde su cui quegli uccelli un tempo si posavano. Ne ha già dimenticato il lampo ambrato delle ali.

Poems by Bassani, Quasimodo, Montale, and D'Annunzio

Translated by Len Krisak

Len Krisak's most recent books are a complete translation of Rilke's *New Poems* and a collection of his own verse, *Afterimage*. With work in the *Hudson*, *Sewanee*, *Antioch*, *PN*, and *Southwest Reviews*, he is the past recipient of the Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and Robert Frost Prizes, and a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Madre con bambino / Mother with child*, legno di tiglio, h.cm.180, anno 2016.

GIORGIO BASSANI**Variazione sul tema precedente**

Se un corno alto di luna varca i corsi sereni
e scalda della sua mite brace i glauchi selciati
escono i cavallanti tra il sonno ammantellati
alle strade che affondano tiepide in mezzo ai fieni.

Calma e chiara è la notte, dal madore dei prati
sale un latte leggero che ondeggia a soffi leni
di vento, si ode a tratti la cieca ansia dei treni
lontani che precipitano verso i folti mercati.

Ma tu, dio che sorridi al profitto e alla perdita,
incanta lungo il cammino i tuoi neri protetti,
lungo il dolce cammino che sfiora i campi già verdi!

Socchiudi la finestra dell'ostessa, dai letti
odorosi richiama sulla porta le serve,
splendi nel vino, accendi nell'ombra occhi diletta!

GIORGIO BASSANI

Variation on the Preceding Theme

The high moon horn serenely glides through day,
warming with its faint coals the grey-green squares.
Through sleep, cloaked horsemen ride their mares
down tepid roads that end in fields of hay.

A calm, clear night. From dewy meadows there's
a milk-light mist come up to wave and sway
in wind. With blind dread, heard from far away,
the trains bear down on crowds and market wares.

But you, a god who smiles at gain and loss:
bless the road of your black devotees —
that sweet road brushing fields already green!

Raise the inn-keeper's sash. From beds' sachets,
Call housemaids to the doors. Now be the sheen
In wine. In shadows, kindle joy's bright gaze!

SALVATORE QUASIMODO**Alle fronde dei salici**

E come potevamo noi cantare
con il piede straniero sopra il cuore,
fra i morti abbandonati nelle piazze
sull'erba dura di ghiaccio, al lamento
d'agnello dei fanciulli, all'urlo nero
della madre che andava incontro al figlio
crocifisso sul palo del telegrafo?
Alle fronde dei salici, per voto,
anche le nostre cetre erano appese,
oscillavano lievi al triste vento.

EUGENIO MONTALE**Portami il girasole**

Portami il girasole ch'io lo trapianti
nel mio terreno bruciato dal salino,
e mostri tutto il giorno agli azzurri specchianti
del cielo l'ansietà del suo volto giallino.

Tendono alla chiarezza le cose oscure,
si esauriscono i corpi in un fluire
di tinte: queste in musiche. Svanire
è dunque la ventura delle venture.

Portami tu la pianta che conduce
dove sorgono bionde trasparenze
e vapora la vita quale essenza;
portami il girasole impazzito di luce.

SALVATORE QUASIMODO

On the Limbs of the Willow [from *Day after day* (1947)]

And how were we to go on singing? How?
With foreign boot soles stamped down on our hearts?
Among the littered dead left in the square
on frozen grass? Or to the lamb-like cries
of children left un-dammed? Or to the black
howl of the mother running toward her son
the telegraph pole strung up, crucified?
No. On the willow limbs, we left a vow —
our votive lyres, which we suspended there,
to tune sad air to all that lives and dies.

EUGENIO MONTALE

Bring Me the Sunflower

Bring me the sunflower. Bring it so that I
may plant it in my sere and salt-sown space,
and offer to the blue reflective sky,
all day, the fear that paints its yellow face.

They reach toward brightness, all the darkest things,
spending their bodies in the shades that flow
and melt in music. So the dark things go,
fading in the destinies chance brings.

Bring me the plant that leads us to that height
where all the blond transparencies will rise,
and where life's essence merges, fades, and dies.
Bring me the sunflower that's half crazed with light.

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO**Bocca d'Arno**

Bocca di donna mai mi fu di tanta
soavità nell'amorosa via
(se non la tua, se non la tua, presente)
come la bocca pallida e silente
del fiumicel che nasce in Falterona.
Qual donna s'abbandona
(se non tu, se non tu) sì dolcemente
come questa placata correntia?
Ella non canta,
e pur fluisce quasi melodia
all'amarezza.

Qual sia la sua bellezza
io non so dire,
come colui che ode
suoni dormendo e virtù ignote
entran nel suo dormire.

Le saltano all'incontro i verdi flutti,
schiumanti di baldanza,
con la grazia dei giovini animali.
In catena di putti
non mise tanta gioia Donatello,
fervendo il marmo sotto lo scalpello,
quando ornava le bianche cattedrali.
Sotto ghirlande di fiori e di frutti
svolgeasi intorno ai pergami la danza
infantile, ma non sì fiera danza
come quest'una.
V'è creatura alcuna
che in tanta grazia
viva ed in sì perfetta
gioia, se non quella lodoletta
che in aere si spazia?

Forse l'anima mia, quando profonda
sé nel suo canto e vede la sua gloria;
forse l'anima tua, quando profonda
sé nell'amore e perde la memoria
degli inganni fugaci in che s'illuse

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Mouth of the Arno

A woman's mouth isn't as sweet a thing
to me (as soft as things of love *can* be —
though yours are sweeter, sweeter, dear) as right
now *this* mouth is — so stock-still and pale white.
Here's Falterona's rill; look at its wave.
What woman ever gave
herself in love (except for you, for *you*, dear) quite
as sweetly as this current, full and free?
It doesn't sing,
but flows on, seeking, like some melody,
its bitter goal.

Its beauty, taken whole,
defeats my words. I keep
on hearing sounds while sleeping.
I hear their unknown powers that come seeping,
deep into my sleep.

The green, audacious waves leap — green waves wild
with foam. They churn as they advance
with all the grace a bold young animal might show.
(Donatello styled
less joy in all the angel hands he formed,
that linked in marble that his chisel warmed,
when he adorned the white cathedrals.) There below
the garlands carved with fruit and blooms, a child-
like gambol wreathes his pulpits. It's a dance
that's lovely, yes, but not so fair a dance
as this alone.

Is any living creature known
to be in such a state of grace —
alive with joy complete and true,
except perhaps the lark exulting in the blue
and ranging in that sky's far space?

Perhaps when it is deep in music, and my soul
perceives in its own song its own true glory;
perhaps when it is deeply loving, and *your* soul
forgets, in such a love, the transient story

ed anela con me l'alta vittoria.
Forse conosceremo noi la piena
felicità dell'onda
libera e delle forti ali dischiuse
e dell'inno selvaggio che si frena.
Adora e attendi!

Adora, adora, e attendi!
Vedi? I tuoi piedi
nudi lascian vestigi
di luce, ed a' tuoi occhi prodigi
sorgon dall'acque. Vedi?

Grandi calici sorgono dall'acque,
di non so qual leggiere oro intessuti.
Le nubi i monti i boschi i lidi l'acque
trasparire per le corolle immani
vedi, lontani e vani
come in sogno paesi sconosciuti.
Farfalle d'oro come le tue mani
volando a coppia scoprono su l'acque
con meraviglia i fiori grandi e strani,
mentre tu fiuti
l'odor salino.

Fa un suo gioco divino
l'Ora solare,
mutevole e gioconda
come la gola d'una colomba
alzata per cantare.

Sono le reti pensili. Talune
pendon come bilance dalle antenne
cui sostengono i ponti alti e protesi
ove l'uom veglia a volgere la fune;
altre pendono a prua dei palischermi
trascorrendo il perenne
specchio che le rifrange; e quando il sole
batte a poppa i navigli, stando fermi
i remi, un gran fulgor le trasfigura:
grandi calici sorgono dall'acque,
gigli di foco.

of self-deception that illusion brings,
 and strives with me for victory, its quarry –
 perhaps we'll know of joy *then*, joy complete,
 our happiness made whole
 as waves set free and strong as open wings,
 or songs sung with a wildness nothing can defeat.
 Worship, and watch.

Worship. Worship and watch.
 You see? Your feet were bare,
 And left their prints of light.
 The waters' wonders rise up in your sight.
 You see? You see them there?

Out of those waters rise great calices
 woven from gold finer than I can say.
 The hills the clouds the woods the shores the seas,
 through huge, corolla'd blossoms, now appear –
 you see? – distant but sheer,
 as in unknown, dream-like countries far away.
 Butterflies like your golden hands fly clear
 in pairs; they find in waves discoveries
 of wonder – giant blooms from some strange sphere –
 while you breathe brine-sachet,
 the salt-sea scent.

The sun at noon is bent
 on heaven's jest,
 changing in play above –
 just like a joyful, singing dove
 whose throat swells from its breast.

You see the fishing nets hung out? Some slope
 like balance-scales that hang from poles in place
 to prop the high, extended platform-bridges
 where the men keep watch to twist the rope.
 Some hang from bows of dories, where they cut
 the everlasting, glass sea-face
 that mirrors them in turn; and when the sun
 beats on the boats astern, and all the oars are shut
 down, stilled, huge radiance transfigures them:
 Out of these waters rise great calices –
 lilies aflame.

Fa un suo divino gioco
la giovine Ora
che è breve come il canto
della colomba. Godi l'incanto,
anima nostra, e adora!

That's when it plays its holy game,
that sun's young face —
a game that's shorter than the chant sent
up by doves. Praise such enchantment
with joy, our soul. Worship its grace!

Sergio Atzeni
Stories from *Racconti con colonna sonora e altri*
"in giallo"

Translated by Pasquale Verdicchio

Pasquale Verdicchio teaches Italian film, literature, & cultural studies in the Department of Literature at the University of California San Diego. As a translator he has published works by Pasolini, Merini, Caproni, Porta, and Zanzotto among others. His own writings of poetry, reviews, criticism, and photography have been published in journals and in book form by a variety of presses. His books include *Devils in Paradise: Writings on Post-Emigrant Cultures* (Guernica Editions, 1998), *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), and *Looters, Photographers, and Thieves* (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2011); his most recent poetry collection, *This Nothing's Place*, was awarded the 2010 Bressani Prize. Most recently, he was awarded the 2015 Muir Environmental Fellowship by Muir College, UCSD.

Sergio Atzeni (1952 –1995) was an Italian writer from Sardinia. He lived and worked in Cagliari as a journalist for a number of the most important Sardinian newspapers. In 1986, he left Sardinia to travel across Europe, eventually settling in Turin, where he wrote *Il figlio di Bakunin* (*Bakunin's Son*), *Passavamo sulla terra leggeri* (*We walked gently across the earth*) and *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (*The fifth step is the farewell*). All of Atzeni's works are set in Sardinia and were written in Italian. His language shows a strong influence of the Sardinian tongue coupled with a lively experimental streak, fusing literary Italian with the language of the Sardinian working-class. Along with Giulio Angioni and Salvatore Mannuzzu, Atzeni is part of the so-called Sardinian Literary Spring, a revival of sorts after earlier prominent literary figures such as Grazia Deledda, Emilio Lussu, Giuseppe Dessì, Gavino Ledda, and Salvatore Satta.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *St. Martin* (San Martino), oak, h.cm138 (2015)

SERGIO ATZENI

da *Racconti con colonna sonora e altri "in giallo"*
Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2008.

{Dichiarazione generale}

Ogni musica, evoca immagini, in chi ascolta. Le immagini non sono le stesse per tutti. Ognuno di noi ha, ovviamente, sue proprie immagini, che dipendono dalla singolarità della sua esistenza. Le mie immagini dipendono da molti fattori: livello di concentrazione sui ritmi della musica, tipo di compagnia, ricordo sgradevole e improvviso del maledetto capufficio, vicinanza di bambini rissosi, martello pneumatico nella strada sotto casa, non eccelso livello di cultura musicale... mi sarebbe piaciuto, fare il conservatorio...

Una lettura "buona per tutti" di un brano musicale, mi pare impossibile. Sfido, però, a immaginare bambini che sorridono, mentre si ascolta *For Harry Carney* di Mingus. O l'immobilità di un pomeriggio in campagna, senza vento ne rumori, con *Lulu* di Enrico Rava. Ci sono *impedimenti* abbastanza comuni: chi riesce, a immaginare Toro Seduto che guida le truppe, e Custer laggiù in fondo, e le urla dei morenti — con *La Primavera*, in sottofondo? E livelli di *adesione*: l'Apprendista Stregone e proprio Topolino, dopo *Fantasia*: riesce a "comunicare" le sue immagini al mondo intero... i nuovi media... superano la singolarità delle esistenze... amalgamano il gusto e le immagini: l'immagine educa all'immagine... e il processo è appena cominciato... ne vedremo, negli anni a venire...

Primo racconto con colonna sonora

Il brano è *I Zimbra*, dall'album *The name of this band is Talking Heads*. Suoni africani, elettronica, voci umane fra il computer e il discosound. Tessuto poliritmico veloce e ossessivo. Spazi di sola percussione. Finale in crescendo, violento. Ripetizioni os-

SERGIO ATZENI

from *Stories with Soundtrack*

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Edizioni Il Maestrale.

[General statement]

All music evokes images in those who listen. The images are not the same for everyone. Obviously, every single one of us has their own images, ones that depend on the singularity of their existence. My images depends on a number of factors: the level of concentration on the rhythms of the music, the company I am with, a sudden and unpleasant memory of my damn office manager, the proximity of noisy children, the jackhammer in the street down below, and a not so extensive musical culture ... I would have liked to attend the conservatory ...

I think that a reading of a musical piece that might be “good for all” is an impossibility. But I challenge everyone to think of laughing children while listening to Mingus’ *For Harry Carney*. Or of the immobility of an evening in the country, silent and windless, with Enrico Rava’s *Lulu*. There are some fairly common *obstacles*: who could imagine Sitting Bull at the head of his men, and Custer down in the distance with the screams of the dying – with Vivaldi’s *Spring* playing in the background? And *coherence*, as there is no question that Mickey Mouse is the *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* who, after *Fantasia*, is able to communicate his images to the whole world ... the new media ... they go beyond the singularity of existence ... the bland taste and images: images educate images ... and the process has only barely begun ... we’ll see more in the years to come ...

First Story with Soundtrack

The track is *I Zimbira*, from the LP *The name of this band is the Talking Heads*. African sounds, electronics, human voices between computer and disco sounds. Fast and obsessive poly-rhythmic fabric. Spaces of percussion. Violent ending in crescendo. Obsessive

sessive scandite da tempi esatti e perfettamente “quadrati”. (Manu Dibango: “la quadratura del ritmo, viene dall’Africa”).

Mi ha regalato un’immagine notturna, abitata da un monomaniaco...

La scarpa di quell’uomo è alta, fino al collo del piede. La suola, schiaccia una formica. Poi, un’altra formica. Le formiche escono da una crepa fra due pietroni squadrati — e si sistemano sotto il piede. Le schiaccia, una dopo l’altra, con regolarità da metronomo. L’uomo, in piedi, dietro la grata del Porto, guarda il mare. E conta: il tempo, alle formiche: uno, due, tre, quattro, fino a venti: altra formica, schiacciata.

Uno. Venti. Schiacciata.

È alto, incappottato in un coso nero che finisce sulle scarpe da pioggia, alte fino al collo del piede. Massacra le formiche, e guarda il mare.

Sembra uno che riflette, intensamente. Invece, più semplicemente, conta: fino a venti. E schiaccia la formica. Non riflette. Assolutamente. Mai. Non l’ha mai fatto, in vita sua.

Il mare è scuro, appena sfiorato dalle luci di una nave che va via. L’uomo guarda la nave.

Lenta, una Mercedes gialla supera le spalle dell’uomo. Dalla Mercedes lo guardano Il Grasso, e la sua banda: cinque paia di occhi che scoppiano, arrossati e gonfi.

La Mercedes prosegue, lenta, per una decina di metri. Si ferma.

L’uomo, sembra non accorgersene. Pare che pensi. Ma non pensa.

Il Grasso scivola giù dal sedile posteriore della Mercedes: una calata lenta: prima un piede, poi l’altro, piano piano. Sembra un sacco pieno di roba molle, pronto ad aprirsi sulla pancia, Il Grasso. Dal basso, vengono due gambe gonfie e flaccide. In cima, coperta dai capelli appiccicati, una palla di ciccia, che dentro ha due cerchietti neri che sembrano appuntati cogli spilli: due occhi, immobili, in una faccia di lardo. La pelle è gialla, livida. Nessuna espressione, tranne un ghigno ebete che non si muove mai. La faccia di uno che sa diventare crudele, quando può. Trema continuamente, Il Grasso: i muscoli e il lardo sono agitati da un ritmo proprio, nevrastenico, automatico.

repetitions with exact timing articulated perfectly. (Manu Dibango: “the quadrature of rhythm comes from Africa”).

It gifted me with a nocturnal image, inhabited by a monomaniacal ...

The shoe of that man is high, up to the neck of the foot. The sole crushes an ant. Then another ant. The ants come out of a crack from between two large square stones and arrange themselves under the foot. He crushes them, one after the other, with metronomic regularity.

The man, standing behind the grate of the port, looks out at the sea. And he counts: time, to the ants: one, two, three, four, up to twenty: another ant crushed.

One. Twenty. Crushed.

He is tall, wrapped in some black thing that falls to his rain shoes, high up to the neck of the foot. He massacres ants, and looks out to the sea.

He looks like someone who thinks about things in an intense manner. Instead, he simply counts: to twenty. And he crushes ants. He doesn't reflect. Absolutely. Never. He never has, in his whole life.

The sea is dark, lightly touched by the lights of a ship sailing away. The man looks out at the ship.

Slowly, a yellow Mercedes passes behind the man. From the Mercedes the Fat Man and his gang look at him: five pairs of exploding eyes, red and swollen.

The Mercedes drives on slowly for another thirty or so feet. It stops.

The man doesn't seem to notice. It looks like he is thinking. But he is not.

The Fat Man slides out of the back seat of the Mercedes: a slow process: first one foot, then the other, slowly. He looks like a sack full of soft stuff, ready to split open at his belly. The Fat Man. Two swollen and flaccid legs rise from below. Up above, covered by greasy hair, is a ball of flesh, in it are two little black circles that seems to be attached with pins: two immobile eyes, set into a face of lard. His skin is yellowish, bruised. No expression, besides an unflinching moronic sneer. It's the face of someone who knows how to be cruel when he can. He trembles constantly, the Fat Man: his muscles and lard shake to their own rhythm, hyper, automatic.

Il Grasso si ferma.

L'uomo, come non avesse nessuno, affianco. Guarda il mare. E ammazza le formiche.

Dieci minuti, buoni, e lentissimi, prima che Il Grasso apra bocca. La voce è un bisbiglio infido: "Uomo, ti chiedo scusa. So che devo aspettare al Polpo, ogni sera, per poterti parlare. Mi dispiace davvero, disturbarti..." Nasale, la voce del Grasso.

Tace. Un attimo... L'uomo guarda il mare, come fosse solo. Venti. Formica.

"Non sarei venuto, se non avessi avuto un motivo... non potevo aspettare, che decidi di venire al Polpo... e una cosa che non può aspettare..."

Un minuto buono di silenzio. Venti. Formica.

"Una cosa che non può aspettare, Uomo. Ho bisogno di dieci chili. Tutti in una volta. E subito. Per uno che parte fra due ore. È troppo per chiunque, dieci chili. Tu sei l'unico..."

Pausa. Venti. Formica.

"Al prezzo che vuoi, Uomo. A qualunque prezzo. Senza limite in alto. A me, mi basta il dieci del bisnass."

Venti. Formica.

"Comunque... se vuoi... non dico... cioè: sono venuto a romperti i coglioni... e a te non piace... mi accontento anche del cinque... appena un ringraziamento per l'amico Grasso che ha portato il bisnass... eh?..."

Venti. Formica.

"Dieci chili in due ore, Uomo. Non potevo fare altro. Non pretendo di assistere alla vendita... se vuoi. Tu, dimmi di sì. Io ti mando il bisnass, e aspetto in macchina... il tale che parte, è qui con me... parlate tranquilli... mi dai quello che ti sembra giusto per l'amico che ha portato l'affare... non torno più, a romperti i coglioni."

Venti. Formica.

"Ti ho portato un bisnass, Uomo. Anche gratis." La faccia del Grasso: se è possibile dire, di un ebete, che è rattristato... La voce: una specie di cantilena, un pianto. Ancora un po', e Il Grasso è capace di pregare.

L'uomo, conta: Venti.

È immobile. Non si muove di un centimetro. Solo la suola, scatta, e uccide, ogni venti contati dall'uomo. Il corpo

The Fat Man stops.

The man, as if no-one else is there, beside him. He looks out to the sea. And kills ants.

Ten minutes, a good ten, and very slow, before the Fat Man even opens his mouth. The voice is a threatening whisper: "Mister, I ask your forgiveness. I know that I have to wait for the Octopus, every night, in order to talk to you. I am truly sorry, to disturb you..." Nasal, the Fat Man's voice.

He is quiet. A moment... The man looks out to sea, as if he were alone. Twenty. Ant.

"I would not have come, if did not have a reason... I could not wait, you decide to come to the Octopus... it's something that cannot wait..."

A good long silence. Twenty. Ant.

"Something that cannot wait, Mister. I need 10 kg. All at once. And right away. For someone who is leaving in two hours. It's too much for everyone else, 10 kg. You're the only one..."

Pause. Twenty. Ant.

"Whatever price you ask, Mister. At whatever price. Without limits. The usual ten of the deal is enough for me."

Twenty. Ant.

"Anyway... if you like... I'm not saying... but: I've come to break your balls... and you don't like it... I'd be happy even with five... as a way of thanking your Fat friend who brought some business... eh? ..."

Twenty. Ant.

"Twenty two pounds in two hours, Mister. I couldn't do otherwise. I am not expecting to be present at the sale... if you like. You, tell me yes. I send you the business, I'll wait in the car... the guy who is leaving, he's here with me... talk calmly... you give me what you think is right for the friend who brought you the deal... I won't come back, to break your balls."

Twenty. Ant.

"I brought you some business, Mister. Even for free."

The face of the Fat Man: if it's ok to say so, face of a sad moron.... The voice: a sort of whining, of weeping. A little longer, and the Fat Man is ready to pray.

The man counts: Twenty.

He is immobile. He doesn't move an inch. Only the sole of

sembra un tronco. Gli occhi sono semichiusi, come di uno che pensa lontananze. Le braccia sono lunghe, sui fianchi.

La punta delle dita, arriva alle ginocchia. Venti.

Il Grasso, riprende a pigolare: "Scusami, Uomo. Non volevo. Vedo che disturbo. Vado subito via. Basta un cenno di no, e vado viaaaaaahahahahahahah" due dita che sembrano uncini piegati, di ferro, si ficcano negli occhietti del Grasso, e la mano dell'uomo spinge la faccia di lardo incontro al proprio ginocchio: un rumore di ossa spezzate. Il Grasso, rotola sulla grata, e a terra, sulle formiche uccise. La scarpa di quell'uomo si infila fra le gambe del Grasso, all'altezza del ventre.

Il Grasso, urla.

L'uomo si inginocchia. Un pugno che sembra inguantato nel tirapugni schiaccia un coso che serviva a respirare, prima. L'uomo, digrigna, colle labbra strette.

Il primo pugno, spezza il setto nasale del Grasso.

Il secondo, trasforma la grata del porto nella parete di un mattatoio, sanguinante.

L'uomo, ha una voce cupa, bassa, furiosa: "*Signore*, per te. Non: Uomo». *Signore*. Impara, stronzo: *Signore*."

Il Grasso, vomita sangue.

L'uomo salta oltre la grata, appoggiandosi appena colle mani: una rincorsa, una presa, un volteggio, e via tranquillo e veloce nel buio del porto.

Quattro paia di occhi scoppiati stanno immobili, dentro una Mercedes.

Quel signore, è già lontano.

Secondo racconto con colonna sonora

I brani sono *East* e *Jinx*, dall'album *Desire*, dei *Tuxedo-moon*. Elettronica addolcita da violino e sax struggenti, come in una tango... accelerazione del ritmo – quasi un mambo? – con voce solista e sax da Night vecchio stile.

Una rapina tranquilla. Forse anche dolce, in ambiente ovattato. Il finale del racconto va col finale di *Jinx*. Non riuscirei a spiegarlo: bisogna ascoltare il finale.

Qualcuno lo chiama Caino, quell'uomo. Del nome vero,

his foot, springs out, and kills, every twenty counted by the man. His body is like a tree trunk. His eyes are almost closed shut, like one thinking of distant things. His arms are very long, on his hips.

The tips of his fingers, reach his knees. Twenty.

The Fan Man, he begins his chirping again: "Excuse me, Mister. I had not meant to. I see that I'm disturbing you. I'll leave right away. Just say no, and I'll goooooooooohohohohohoho" two crooked fingers like hooks, of steel, poke into the Fat Man's eyes, and the man's hand pushes the lard face against his knee: the sound of breaking bones. The Fat Man rolls on the grating, and on the ground, on the dead ants. The shoe of that man finds its way between the Fat man's legs, to the belly.

The Fat Man, screams.

The man kneels down. A fist that seems to hold brass knuckles crushes a thing that once was meant to breathe. The man grinds his teeth, behind his lips.

The first punch, cracks the bridge of the Fat Man's nose. The second, turns the grating of the port into a slaughterhouse wall, bloody.

The man has a deep voice, low, furious: "Sir, to you. Not "man." Sir. Learn it well, asshole: Sir."

The Fat Man, he vomits blood.

The man jumps over the grating, lightly leaning on his hands: a hop up, a hold, a vault, calmly and fast into the darkness of the port.

Four pairs of eyes big and wide motionless, inside a Mercedes. That man, he is already gone.

Second Story with Soundtrack

The tracks are *East* and *Jinx*, from the album *Desire*, of the Tuxedomoon. Electronic track sweetened by heart-rending violin and sax, like in a tango... rhythmic acceleration - almost a mambo? - with solo voice and old style nightclub sax.

A quiet robbery. Maybe even sweet, in a muffled environment. The end of the story goes with the end of *Jinx*. I couldn't explain it: one has to listen to the ending.

Some call that man Cain. Not a trace of his real name.

niente tracce.

Non è difficile, aver fama di Caino. Chiedete, a chiunque abbia un potere da difendere, anche minimo, quanti sono, i caini che cercano di portarglielo via. Chiedete, a tutti i paranoici della città, sbarrati dietro le porte di casa, col tele a volume alto, per non sentire i rumori sulle scale. O a chi buca. Loro, lo sanno, quanto cainume c'è in giro.

Un giovane barbaro, venuto dalla periferia sterminata che è cresciuta come un cancro attorno alla Ciudad. Sembra uno di coraggio: in realtà è un pazzo da manicomio, che conta le formiche, recita filastrocche, non legge un giornale, e se avesse un fratello, non si fiderebbe di lui.

Un pazzo che ha imparato la prudenza. La Pula, non l'ha mai preso. Qualche volta, l'ha annusato da lontano.

Cammina.

Entra nel portone nero — odore di cavoli — di una casa antica. "Signore... è un onore, vederti in bottega."

Caino è ringhioso, quando parla:

"Quattro mitra, veri, per subito, e caricatori." "Hai dichiarato guerra a qualcuno?"

"Quattro."

"Kalashnikov, ak 47. Appena oliati: in venti secondi puoi fare una guerra." "Il venti per cento del guadagno, se ti fidi."

"....."

"Con restituzione delle armi."

Caino si allontana, coi mitra dentro una borsa di pelle marrone, da operaio. Scende i vicoli della città vecchia.

Gli altri, appartengono al genere "vecchi amici": nel senso che finora hanno evitato di ammazzarsi, fra loro.

"Il Gobbo è l'autista. Ha scelto una simca verde.

Mosè, comanda l'assalto: l'idea, è sua. Siede davanti, e controlla le armi.

Il terzo è Cespuglio. Partecipa per finanziare un traffico di coca. È un sadico violento. Ha portato le bombe.

È una di quelle sere d'estate che il caldo ti costringe a chiedere la grazia del Maestrale.

Alle colline del Margine Rosso, la simca prende un viottolo di terra.

Si ferma, al buio.

It's not hard, to garner the fame of a Cain. Ask anyone who might have some power to defend, even the smallest, how many Cains have tried to wrest it away. Ask all the paranoid people in the city, those living behind barred and locked doors, with their tvs turned up high, so as not to hear the noises from the stairs. Or those who shoot up. They know how much of a Cain attitude there is around.

A young barbarian, from the immense periphery that has grown like a cancer around the Ciudad. He looks like he might be courageous: actually, he is insane and should be institutionalized, someone who counts ants, recites nursery rhymes, never reads a paper and, if he had a brother, would not trust him in the least.

A crazy man who has learned to be prudent. The Pula has never caught up with him. They have at time scaught his scent from a distance.

He walks.

He goes through the dark gate - the smell of cauliflower - of some ancient home.

"Sir... it is an honor, to see you in the shop."

Cain talks in a growl:

"Four machine guns, real ones, right away, and magazines."

"Did you declare war on someone?"

"Four."

"Kalashnikov, AK 47. Recently cleaned: you can have a war in twenty seconds."

"Twenty percent of the profit, if you trust me."

"....."

"And a return of the guns."

Caino leaves, with the guns inside a brown leather bag, a worker's bag. He walks through the alleyways of the old city..

The others belong to the class of "old friends": in the sense that until now they have managed to avoid killing each other.

The hunchback is the driver. He has chosen a green Simca.

Moses leads the attack: the idea, is his. He sits in the front, and he controls the guns.

The third one is Shrub. He is participating so as to finance his coke smuggling. He is a violent sadist. He brought the bombs.

It's one of those summer evenings that makes you beg for the gracing touch of a northwester.

I quattro, scendono, e cominciano la marcia, in una campagna di mandorle e ville. Il mitra sulle spalle, e maschere di cartapesta, in faccia, come a Carnevale.

Arrivano al muro di cinta della casa: oltre il muro, un giardino e una lolla, e un salone: e decine di giocatori di carte. Il ritrovo abituale di certi amici che amano giocare forte: la casa, la moglie, l'orologio d'oro (il cinque per cento delle vincite, alla casa).

Tavoli verdi. Lampade a stelo. Bar, lungo tutta una parete: per gente che si serve da sola: alcol e bicchieri. La sala da bagno è degna di un "nait".

Al primo piano, le stanze, per gli amici che smettono tardi, e per quelli troppo ubriachi. Cento a letto.

È quasi l'una, e ancora nessuno degli ospiti è andato a dormire. Si beve. Si gioca. Si parla poco.

Il Gobbo e Caino superano il muro di cinta, attraversano quattro metri d'ombra, e scivolano dentro la finestra aperta dei bagni, a pianoterra.

Mosè, segue il muro, fino al cancello principale. Calca un campanello bianco. Qualcuno, da dentro, aziona l'apriporta, senza chiedere nemmeno "chi è?". Nessun controllo, né all'esterno, né all'ingresso. Vengono solo amici, quassù. Niente polizia: mai.

Mosè, spinge il cancello. Entra. Ha una maschera da "Cosa" gialla, sulla faccia. Dopo dieci passi, spara. Una raffica, un pelo sulle teste. Silenzio. Solo la moglie di quello che si è giocato la moglie, piange, non ha sentito gli spari. Un'altra raffica. Anche la donna, tace, e anche i passi del "privato" che piomba giù dal secondo piano, con la mauser in mano.

La terza raffica — il privato si accovaccia dietro la porta che dà al patio — è seguita da una voce: "State buoni. Fermi, e zitti. Io non sparo. Se vi muovete, se parlate, se strisciate, sparo nel mucchio." Una risatina lugubre accompagna il silenzio successivo.

L'Ufficio è al secondo piano. È il cuore della villa: lì, si paga il conto, e i clienti depositano i valori. C'è un certo via vai, nell'ufficio, sul principio della sera, e alle prime ore del mattino. Nell'ufficio staziona il Cassiere, costretto al turno continuato e al lavoro notturno: il suo sogno è trovare posto in un'impresa edile, come contabile. Solitamente, nell'Ufficio c'è un poliziotto

Near the hills of the Red Margin, the Simca takes an unpaved road.

It stops in the dark.

The four get out of the car, they start their trek through fields of almonds and homes. The machine guns on their shoulders, with papier-mâché masks on their faces, like the ones used in the carnival.

They arrive at the wall that surrounds the house: over the wall, into a garden and a foyer, and a hall: and dozens of card players. The habitual gathering of certain friends who love to play hard: the house, the wife, the gold watch (five percent of winnings go to the house).

Green tables. Floor lamps. A bar, the length of a whole wall: self-service: alcohol and glasses. The toilets are like those in a club.

On the first floor, the rooms, for those friends who stay until late, and for those who are too drunk. One hundred per bed.

It's almost one, and none of the guests has gone to sleep. They drink. They play. There is little talking.

The Hunchback and Cain get over the wall, cross twelve feet of shadows, and slip through the open windows of the toilet, on the ground floor.

Moses follows the wall to the main gate. He rings a white bell. Someone on the inside opens up without even asking "who's there?". No security check, neither on the outside nor at the entrance. Only friends come up here. No police. Ever!

Moses pushes the gate. He goes inside. He has a yellow "Thing" mask on his face. He takes ten steps and fires. A burst of gun fire slightly over their heads. Silence. Only the wife of the man who gambled away his wife cries; she did not hear the gun shots. Another burst of gun shots. The woman is quiet now, as are the steps of the "private" one who runs down from the second floor holding a Mauser.

The third round of shots – the private one crouching behind the door to the patio – is followed by a voice: "Be calm. Be still and quiet. I won't shoot. If you move, if you speak, if you try to crawl away I will shoot into the group." A grim smile accompanies the silence that follows.

The office is on the second floor. It is the heart of the villa: that's where debts are paid, where clients deposit their valuables.

privato, di guardia. Al momento, però, il privato è a piano terra, accovacciato, e spera che quel pazzo che spara dal giardino decida di venire avanti.

Caino si muove come a un gioco di bambini, le Belle Statuine, mentre apre la porta dell'Ufficio, per il mitra del Gobbo. Il Cassiere sviene, quando vede il mitra che spunta dalla porta, e entra, seguito da un mostro giallo coi denti rossi — un Satana colorato male, sulla faccia del Gobbo. Il denaro, nella cassa a muro, aperta. Arraffano, e filano. La finestra del bagno, a piano terra. Il muro di cinta. Mentre salta, Caino spara un colpo. Subito, i passi di Mosè, che scappa verso il cancello. Il privato corre fuori, fra i giocatori immobili proprio mentre una granata scoppia sulla destra, e fa volare due auto ben parcheggiate. Fuoco. Una bomba cecoslovacca piomba fra i tavoli: un gran botto, molto fuoco, gente che scappa colla giacca in fiamme. Il privato si tuffa a terra, colle mani sulla testa. È arrivata la guerra.

Cespuglio ha fatto un buon lavoro, dal muro di cinta, colle bombe.

È andata. Il Gobbo strattona la simca per quattro chilometri folli, di stradine di campagna. Fino a un casolare, sul bordo di una vigna. Odore di muffa, e di marcio. Divisione rapida. Trenta a Mosè. Quindici a Caino, Gobbo e Cespuglio. Altri cinque a Caino, per le armi che ha pagato, e che ora si riporta via, colla simca rubata. La getta nello stagno, quasi subito.

Esce dall'acqua coi piedi bagnati. Raccoglie una bicicletta. Sembra un operaio nottambulo, con quella borsa appesa sul manubrio. O un contadino che si è svegliato molto presto. La casa dei Cavoli, nella Ciudad. Ora, c'è puzza di piscio di gatto. "Ti ho riportato le armi. Me le paghi la metà di quello che le ho pagate. Detraggo dalla tua quota." Da bambino non sapeva sparare, ne contare.

There is always a coming and going in the office, in the early evening hours and early in the morning. The Cashier resides in the office, forced to work through the day and hold night hours: he dreams of a job with a construction firm, as an accountant. Usually, there is a private guard on duty in the Office. But at this moment the private is downstairs, crouching, and hoping that the nut-job shooting from the garden will come forward.

As he opens the door to the Office for the Hunchback's machine gun, Cain moves as if playing a child's game, Simon Says. When he sees the gun come through the door, followed by a yellow monster with red teeth, a poorly colored Satan on his face, the Cashier faints. The money, in the open wall safe. They grab and run. The toilet window, on the ground floor. The surrounding wall. Cain fires a shot as he climbs. Moses' steps, he is running for the gate. The private runs outside, through the immobile players, just as a grenade explodes on the right, and two well-parked cars are blown up. Fire. A Czeck bomb falls among the tables: a huge explosion, people running away with their jackets on fire. The private dives to the ground, his hands on his head. A war has started.

Shrub did a good job, with the bombs from the surrounding wall.

It's done. The Hunchback races the Simca for four crazy kilometers of country roads. Up to a farmhouse, at the edge of a vineyard. Smell of mold, and rot. A quick split. Thirty for Moses. Fifteen for Cain, Hunchback and Shrub. Another five for Cain for the guns he bought, and is now taking away again with the stolen Simca. He drives it into the swamp, almost right away.

He comes out of the water with wet feet. Grabs a bicycle. He looks like a night-shift worker, with his bag hanging on the handlebars. Or a farmer who has gotten up very early. The Cabbage house, in the Ciudad. There is a smell of cat piss now. "I've brought the guns back. Give me half of what I paid for them. I'll take it out of your cut." As a child he could neither shoot nor count.

Terzo racconto con colonna sonora

Il brano è *Washington Bullets*.

Voci e coretti che citano (forse, Simon e Garfunkel? Quando giocano col sud del continente...) con appena appena di ironia. *Sandinista*, una band di New York? Autoironia, citazioni, una morbida allegria.

Anche il "duro" non è come si dice: tende al molle, al menottutotondo. Autoironico... No: che razza di eroe sarebbe... o, forse? Ah. Rockmusic, *Clash*.

È cominciata colla banda, la Domenica di Caino. Una banda militare, una specie di sfilata per l'anniversario, una festa nazionale, dalla radio a tutto volume di signora Giovanna, l'inquilina di sotto. Come avere le fanfare alla finestra, per Caino addormentato.

Alle otto del mattino.

Una corsa affannata per prendere il pulmann delle otto e mezza, a doccia fatta, e le salive allo stomaco — una mazzata, per la gastroenterite — e scendere in piazza e correre per acchiappare l'altro pulmann, sempre con l'ansia, e i crampi, allo stomaco. "Cazzo. Bisogna mangiare."

Otto e mezzo. Terzo Pulmann. Una specie di Maratona del mattino, con le note della banda dei carabinieri, nella testa. E lo stomaco vuoto.

Pasta-cappuccino-corsa, ultimi dieci metri a passo lento per recuperare il respiro, digerire la pasta, preparare le parole. Non sono ancora le nove: puntualissimo.

"Ciao, Caino."

È arrivata. Paperina. Genere: ragazza malvagia e onesta: con la stessa rigidità ha distribuito cazzotti agli antipatici e ha difeso la sua straordinaria castità di vent'anni.

Caino, è innamorato. Nei limiti entro i quali a un caino è permesso: tenendo sott'occhio il coltello. La donna "concede" soltanto una "cosa fraterna" — qualche colpetto assieme, e un giorno al mare, assieme, ogni tanto: per le gare di nuoto. Niente di più. Né Caino né Nessun altro. Anzi: è l'amico più caro, Caino.

Dette queste cose, resta la più importante, agli occhi di Caino: Paperina, è una delizia di fica: una donna perfetta di misure, di movimenti, di voci, di occhi, di classe, di tutto. Il letto, potrebbe

Third Story with Soundtrack

The track is *Washington Bullets*.

Voices and choir that quote (maybe Simon and Garfunkel? When they play with the south of the continent ...) with only the slightest bit of irony. *Sandinista*, a band from New York? Self-mockery, quotations, a soft cheerfulness.

Not even the "tough one" is like they say: he tends toward softness, to almost all round not. Self-mockery... No: what sort of a hero is he ... or, maybe? Ah. Rock music, *Clash*.

It started with the band, Cain's Sunday. A military band, a sort of parade for an anniversary, a national holiday, from Mrs. Giovanna's blaring radio, the downstairs neighbor. Like having trumpets at the window for a sleeping Cain. At eight in the morning.

A breathless dash to catch the eight-thirty bus, after a shower and a growling stomach - a real shock, for the shits - and then getting off at the piazza running to catch the other bus, always tense and a stomach ache. "Shit. I have to eat."

Eight-thirty. A third bus. A sort of morning marathon, with the notes of the police band in my head. And an empty stomach.

Croissant-cappuccino-dash off, the last ten meters at a slow pace to catch my breath, digest the croissant, and get my words in line. It's not nine yet: right on time.

"Hello, Cain."

Daisy Duck is here. Type: wicked but honest woman: she doled out punches to the unpleasant ones with the same discipline and defended her extraordinary twenty-year old chastity.

Cain is in love. It is allowed, within the limits allowed a Cain: keeping an eye on the knife. The woman "allows" only a "brotherly" thing - a little stroking now and then, a day at the beach, together, every once in a while: for the swim meets. Nothing more. Neither Cain nor Anyone else. Actually: Cain is the dearest of friends.

Having said all this, what is left is the most important, at least for Cain: Daisy Duck is quite a dish: a woman of perfect proportions, movements, voices, eyes, class, everything. The bed could turn into quite a mess. Daisy Duck doesn't go for it.

trasformarsi in un macello. Paperina, non ci sta.

Domenica. Giornata di riposo. In questo giugno caldo di quaggiù: lo scirocco fa sudare e penare ogni passo.

Loro, non sudano. L'Honda di Paperina spezza l'aria — e Caino si becca in faccia la sabbia, che punge come aghi, portata dal vento. Corrono, affianco al mare, ancora quasi vuoto: i cittadini, si svegliano tardi, la domenica. Mezzogiorno, è ora di mare.

Ore dieci: Paperina ha voglia di fare una nuotata, e stoppa in un tratto fra mare e pineta, e si sveste di corsa. Caino, vive "negli" occhi.

Nuovamente, correre. Via tutto, al volo, e lei è già in acqua, e ride. Prende sempre un maledetto vantaggio, mentre lui si ferma a "guardare".

Una nuotata trenta metri dalla costa, paralleli alla spiaggia, fino all'Ospedale Marino, e ritorno. Lei, sempre dieci metri avanti. Irraggiungibile. Una maledetta campionessa di nuoto.

Ore undici e trenta: il momento beato di Caino. Si esce dall'acqua, si srotolano gli asciugamani, ci si stende al sole. Potrà "guardare". Finalmente.

Trenta secondi dopo, Paperina è sveglissima e indica un tale biondiccio che sembra tedesco: si allontana verso il mare lasciando incustodito un borsello di pelle, vicino a un paio di scarpe e a una specie di busta di gomma con attrezzi da mare. Il borsello prende il volo, e i due scattano come fulmini centometristi verso la Honda, ma Paperina sta ancora soltanto mettendo in moto che — quello comincia a sparare: non era un soldato tedesco, ma un maledetto SS, che ha tirato fuori dalla busta da mare una mauser senza silenziatore, e spara, e Caino si tuffa a terra sul bordo della strada un metro più avanti, al riparo, dietro una gip. La donna ha messo in moto, ha girato la moto con un movimento delle anche, è scattata, dietro la gip, al volo, "su, correre" — e corrono, come matti, verso la città.

Il nazista si è dovuto fermare — il tempo di chiamare una pantera, perché uno dei Suoi fottuti proiettili ha bucato una ruota. Si sono riparati dietro la Sua macchina, per scappare, "maledetti italiani, prima che arrivi la polizia saranno già fuggiti da un'ora. Popolo di merda.

Puah! Lenti come lumache, e viscidì e imbroglioni."

Sunday. Day of rest. In the warm June of these parts: the sirocco makes every step heavy and sweaty.

They don't sweat. Daisy Duck's Honda cuts through the air - Cain gets a mouthful of sand blown by the wind; it stings like needles. They run along the still mostly empty sea: people wake up late on sundays. Beach time is at noon.

Ten o'clock: Daisy Duck wants to go for a swim, she stops between the beach and the pines and quickly undresses. Cain, comes to life "in" his eyes.

Again, at a run. Everything off, flying, and she is already in the water, laughing. She always manages to get ahead of things, while he stops to "watch."

A swim about thirty meters out from the coast, parallel to the beach, up to the Marine Hospital, and back. She, always ten meters ahead. Unreachable. A damned swimming champion.

Eleven thirty: Cain's blessed moment. They come out of the water, unfurl the towels, stretch out in the sun. He'll be able to "look." Finally.

Thirty seconds later, Daisy Duck is wide awake and is pointing to some blondish guy who seems to be German: he walks to the water leaving behind unguarded a leather wallet a pair of shoes and a sort of rubber bag with beach wear. The wallet takes flight, and the two move like lightning fast runners toward the Honda, but Daisy Duck hasn't even turned the key that - he starts to shoot: he wasn't a German soldier, he was damned SS, and he pulled a Mauser without a silencer from his beach bag, and he fires, and Cain dives to the ground on the side of the street a meter or so ahead, to safety, behind a jeep. The woman starts up the bike, turns it with a movement of her hips, and moves behind the jeep in a flash, "come, let's go" - and they go, like crazy, toward the city.

The Nazi has to stop - time enough to call the police, because one of His fucking bullets hit a tire. They hide behind His car, to get away, "damned Italians, they'll be long gone before the police get here. Fucking people. Ugh! Slow like snails, and slimy crooks."

Lo stomaco di Caino, ve lo raccomando: ha mangiato tardi, male, e in fretta, e si è tuffato che non aveva ancora digerito, e si è contratto dalla paura mentre quel maledetto merda gli sparava addosso. Caino, è un brivido di freddo, di nervi, di paura.

Caino preferisce colpire al buio, e con molti ripari. Queste mattane gli scassano il sistema nervoso. E gli faranno venire l'ulcera, allo stomaco.

Paperina è tranquilla. Le vanno, le azioni di coraggio.

Lei lo molla al volo a un passo da casa, e corre a rifugiarsi, in un posto sicuro, per un mese buono.

Nel borsello, "trentamila marchi... vuoi vedere che il nazista ha le mani in qualcosa di sporco..." Quindicimila, in tasca: un bel lavoro.

Lui, farà un viaggio. Forse, a Parigi. Col volo che parte fra un'ora. Di corsa.

Una maledetta banda dei carabinieri, in testa. Almeno fino a domani.

Si è svegliato che voleva fare un bagno, e "guardare" il culo di quella pazza... Parigi... "però!... tornare a Parigi!"

Quarto racconto con colonna sonora

Il raccontino che segue dovrebbe essere letto — in linea puramente ipotetica, naturalmente — con un preciso sottofondo musicale: *Happy Feeling* di *Manu Dibango*, dall'album *Ambassador*, dell'81.

A proposito: Manu Dibango è diventato importante. Repubblica ha rivelato che lo ascoltano a Parigi, a Londra e nelle capitali dello spettacolo. Tutto questo in una pagina dedicata alla musica "africana". Grazie, Repubblica, che dai cibo alla nostra fame. Buona salsa, naturalmente.

Il raccontino cerca di rispettare la punteggiatura della musica. Il ritmo, numerabile.

Sabato mattina, visita parenti. Sulla cima del monte più alto c'è il carcere della città. Ha le bocche di lupo, le garitte di guardia, le mura di cinta, i fucili mitragliatori puntati. Secondo la voce popolare, l'architetto che l'ha pensato, e l'ingegnere che

Cain's stomach, I should warn you: he ate late, badly, and quickly, and he dove into the water before he had finished digesting, and then he tensed up with fear when that shithead fired at them. Cain, is a cold chill, nerves, fear.

Cain prefers to hit in the dark, and plenty of cover. These sorts of outbursts wreak havoc with his nerves. And they are going to give him a stomach ulcer.

Daisy Duck is calm. She goes for gutsy things.

She lets him off on the fly near his place, and goes off to hide, in a secure place, for a good month.

In the wallet, "thirty thousand marks ... the Nazi is probably involved in some dirty dealings ... " Fifteen thousand, in the pocket: nice work.

He will take a trip. Maybe, Paris. With the flight that leaves in an hour. Quickly.

A damned band of police, ahead. At least until tomorrow.

He woke up wanting to go for a swim, and "look over" that crazy woman's ass ... Paris ... "not bad! ... going back to Paris!"

Fourth story with soundtrack

The little story that follows should be read - of course, completely hypothetically - with a precise musical background: *Happy Feeling* by Manu Dibango, from the album *Ambassador*, from 1981.

By the way: Manu Dibango has become rather important. The newspaper *La Repubblica* said that they listen to him in Paris, in London and all the entertainment capitals. All this in a page dedicated to "African" music. Thank you *Repubblica*, for feeding our hunger. Good sauce, of course.

This little story tries to respect the musical syncopation. Its rhythmic beats.

Saturday morning, family visitation. The city's prison is at the top of the highest hill. It has basement windows, sentry towers, surrounding walls, machine guns at the ready. According to popular tales, the architect who dreamed it up, and the engineer who built it, both died suicides, after they saw the end product. A disgusting prison: no even the bandit Mesina was able to escape from here.

l'ha costruito, sono morti suicidi, dopo averlo visto finito. Una galera schifosa: neanche Mesina è riuscito a fuggire.

Piccolo entra nel portone alto fatto per mettere paura. Piccolo ci ha le palle, ma le porte che si chiudono lo fanno tremare.

È lungo, il parlatorio vuoto. Dieci minuti, cogli occhi del mitra a un passo e mezzo. Finchè arriva Mammai, che sorride come sempre. Mammai sa vivere con gioia.

"Come stai, Piccolo?"

"Ti ho portato le acciughe salate."

"Già nell'olio?"

"Sì."

"In casa come stanno?"

"Ma! La cicatrice e gonfia, e viola."

"Sempre è viola, quando piove." La cicatrice nasce dentro l'occhio destro sbarrato, colle palpebre appiccicate dal chirurgo, e scende per la guancia fino al doppio mento. Ricordo di una roncola, quando la famiglia era unita, e Babbai ancora vivo roncolava ogni tanto, nell'euforia del vino buono.

"Fuori è vero che piove."

"Ah, mi piacerebbe, una passeggiata." Ci sa fare, Mammai, coll'ironia su se stessa. La passeggiata! Due ergastoli, deve scontare. Due, i cristiani ammazzati. Primo, Babbai. Squarciato col coltello grande di cucina e trascinato sotto il fico del cortile: macellato come si deve, prima di darlo a mangiare al maiale. Anche la salsiccia, quell'anno, e stata buona: tutta carne e anice e niente lardo. Babbai era un porco e un ubriacone, e una sola volta e stato tenero, una sola, nella sua vita mortale e immortale, dopo che il maiale l'aveva digerito.

Mammai recita la solita litania di lamentele: niente tele a colori, in cella, e puzza di piscia di donna gravida. E rancido di donne sporche.

"Da ieri è meglio. Gigliola l'hanno mandata a isolamento. Non poteva continuare, a sbattere la testa sul muro ogni notte alle tre, solo perché quella era l'ora che, fuori, saliva sul comò e faceva lo strip per il magnaccia. Dice che non riesce a farne a meno. Nostalgia. Si è dimenticata che l'ha ucciso, e che è dentro per quello. Il mondo, dico io, ci ha il culo al posto della testa. E ieri si è ammattita, e invece di sbattere al muro ha preso a testate una guardia. Trenta

Piccolo goes through the large entryway built to instill fear. Piccolo has balls, but the closing doors scare him.

It's long, the empty visitation hall. Ten minutes, with the eyes of the machine gun a step and a half away. Until Mammai arrives, she's always laughing. Mammai knows how to enjoy life.

"How are you, Piccolo?"

"I've brought you salted anchovies."

"Right, in oil?"

"Yes."

"How are they at home?"

"Ok! The scar is swollen, and purple."

"It's always purple, when it rains." The scar runs from the closed right eye, with the eyelids stitched together by the surgeon, and runs down her cheek to the double chin. Souvenir of a pruning hook, when the family was together, and Babbai still living liked to prune every now and then, in the euphoria of good wine.

"It's true, it's raining outside."

"Ah, I'd like to go for a walk." Mammai is always good with her self-irony. A walk! She has to serve two life sentences. Two, the good christian souls killed. First, Babbai. Ripped open with a large kitchen knife and dragged under the fig tree in the courtyard: butchered clean, before being fed to the hog. The sausages were good that year: all meat and anise, no fat at all. Babbai was a pig and a drunkard, he had been tender only once, just once, in his whole mortal and immortal life, after the hog had digested him.

Mammai goes through the usual litany of complaints: no colored canvases, in the cell, a stink of pregnant woman's piss. It's rancid with dirty women.

"Yesterday it got a little better. They put Gigliola in isolation. It couldn't go on, she bashed her head on the wall every night at three a.m., because that was the hour at which, on the outside, she'd climb up on the dresser and strip for her pimp. She says she can't help it. Nostalgia. She's forgotten that she killed him, and that's why she's here. I think the world has its asshole in place of its head. And yesterday she went crazy, instead of banging her head on the wall she banged it against a guard. Thirty days of therapy for that.

giorni di cure, per quello. Oh, anche gli sbirri, sembrano budino. Per una testata quasi moriva, e si è licenziato e cerca lavoro da muratore. Gente di nulla.”

Mammai sorride. A lei piacevano gli sbirri di un tempo. Ha persino nostalgia, di quello che aveva resistito quattordici minuti di orologio, ai suoi cazzotti.

Ah, era un uomo. Era successo quando Mammai si era arrampicata sul tetto, a respirare. Un bel sole caldo, e si era sfilata il reggiseno “Anche le tette, a respirare”. Le mammelle di Mammai: resti sfasciati di una gioventù ricca di amori. Grandi come angurie e bianche come formaggio fresco. Quello sbirro, quello dei quattordici minuti, era salito sul tetto, e voleva riportarla giù. Al quindici era morto. La mano di Mammai gli aveva stroncato la spina all’altezza del collo. Così, il direttore aveva dato ordine che attendessero, e lei era tornata quando era venuto il buio. Era tornata.

C’era freddo, sul tetto.

“Torna giovedì, Piccolo. Portami Grand’Hotel. Quello del mese scorso l’ho quasi finito.”

“Vabbene, Mammai.”

Piccolo si allontana. Ha paura di tornare a casa: non riuscirebbe a dormire, per nostalgia di Mammai. Si lascia tentare da un’autoradio. Poi da un’altra. Così non spreca il tempo.

L’uomo nuovo ritmmenblus

Il raccontino che segue, se non fosse folk, e potesse chiamarsi, forse sarebbe: “L’uomo nuovo ritmmenblùs” e avrebbe, come colonna sonora, *Peter Gunn Theme*, dall’album *The Blues Brothers*. Ma, anche, quel pezzo di Otis Redding che fa “mama am sciò adevrnà iéssorrà”, per esempio. Ritm’en Blùs.

Già: uccisi la donna. Aveva le labbra rosse ributtanti di una zingara. Altri avrebbero dovuto, da tanto. E tanto, meritava. Comprava le anime, per strada.

Mescolai i passi alla città, carezzando vetrine. Se ho strappato i documenti, non è stata paura. Oh, no! È che bisogna cancellare i segni del passato e creare l’uomo nuovo, repulisti.

Oh, the guards, they're like butter. He almost died because of a head-butt; he quit and is looking for work as a bricklayer. Good for nothings."

Mammai laughs. She like the old-fashioned guards. She is even nostalgic, of the one who had resisted her punching him out for a good fourteen minutes. Ah, he was a man. It happened when Mammai had crawled up onto the roof, just to get a breath of air. A beautiful warm sun, and she had taken off her bra "to give her tits a breath of air as well." Mammai's mammaries: the broken remainders of a youth full of love. Huge like watermelons and white like rounds of fresh cheese. That guard, the one of the fourteen minutes, had climbed up on the roof and wanted to take her down. At the fifteenth he was dead. Mammai's hand had snapped his neck. The warden had then ordered everyone to wait, and she had come back when it turned dark. She came down. It was cold, on the roof.

"Come back on Thursday, Piccolo. Bring me the Grand Hotel magazine. I'm almost done with last month's."

"Ok, Mammai."

Piccolo walks away. He is afraid to go home: missing Mammai, he wouldn't be able to sleep. He lets himself be tempted by a car stereo. Then another. So as not to waste time.

The new rhythm 'n blues man

The following little story, if it weren't folk, and could maybe be called, maybe could be: "The new rhythm 'n blues man" and would have, as a soundtrack, the *Peter Gunn Theme*, from *The Blues Brothers* album. But, also that piece by Otis Redding that goes "mama I'm sure hard to handle, now, gets around" for example. Rhythm 'n blues.

Sure: I killed the woman. She had the red disgusting lips of a gypsy. Someone else should have done so, a long time ago. In any case, she deserved it. She bought souls, in the streets.

I mixed my steps up in the city, along shop windows. If I ripped up my documents, it was not out of fear. Oh, no! It's that we need to erase the signs of the past and create the new man, clean up.

The old night porter, there at the hotel front desk, I crushed

Al vecchio portiere, al burò dell'hotel, schiacciai le lenti dentro agli occhi. Per imporre rispetto, e cominciare bene, come si conviene, e un poco a modo mio.

Oh, il profumo, l'odore dell'albergo, quanto gusto di donna, i passi leggeri dell'adultera che fugge scordando mutandine, rumori di acqua che scorre e porta via le tracce della lingua, porte carezzate dagli amanti, colpi di pistola, le gambe di seta della cameriera. Ah! L'albergo.

In sole sette notti cancellai i ricordi. In soli sette giorni cambiai faccia. Mi diedi da fare.

Quando l'uomo nuovo ch'ero io uscì in strada, un'orchestra suonava, e il sole dava spettacolo in rosso. Un bel cominciamento.

Era, chissà come, Carnevale. La città, metà faceva rantíra, metà stava sbarrata in casa per paura. Si diverte, la gente, a spaventarsi.

L'uomo nuovo mirò i colori, e decise di passare. Quanto a questo, era un uomo di coraggio.

Venne una Carmelitana labbra di biacca, mezza bianca mezza nera, cosce chiare e pizzi viola, parole di scirocco. L'uomo nuovo disse no.

Venne Benda Rossa dei Pirati lingua fra i denti di riso, non parlava ma, Dio, sapeva camminare, culo di colomba. L'uomo nuovo disse no.

Venne una donna rara, una che regalava, guardava dritti gli occhi, e buona mercanzia, sudore di letto caldo. Disse no.

Venne una donna vera col ventre al posto giusto e labbra di farfalla, delirio di una notte senza sonno. Disse no.

Certamente, disse no. L'uomo nuovo ch'ero io non guardava le donne. Né pizzi né scirocco. Né rose né mele o acqua di mare. Né lingua né culo né regali né odori di letto, ventri di donna o farfalle. Ah. L'uomo nuovo ch'ero io conosceva la sua strada: camminare senza scopo.

Vennero Labbra Rosse di una solitudine stanca. La donna abbandonata e triste che.

La seguì nei vicoli della città, l'uomo nuovo in fregola di dare; le sfiorò la mano all'angolo di strada, livide luci di fanali, a un passo da casa.

Così accadde: Fuggo, Trattienimi, Prendimi, Carezzami

his glasses into his eyes. A way to demand respect, to start off on the right foot, as it's needed, and a little in my own way.

Oh, the perfume, the smell of the hotel, so much scent of woman, the soft steps of the adulteress who runs away forgetting her underwear, sounds of water running that carries off the traces of the tongue, doors caressed by lovers, gunshots, the waitress' silken legs. Ah! The hotel.

In only seven nights I erased the memories. In only seven days I changed face. I worked hard at it.

When the new man that I was walked out into the street, an orchestra played, and the sun put on a show in red. A beautiful beginning.

I don't know how, but it was Carnival. The city, half was going crazy and the other half had locked itself in, afraid. People have fun at being scared.

The new man aimed his colors and decided to pass. In this, he was a courageous man.

There came a Carmelite with leaden white lips, half white half black, pale thighs and purple lace, sirocco words. The new man replied no.

There came Red Sash of the Pirates, tongue between rice teeth, she did not speak but, God, she could walk, a dove's ass. The new man replied no.

There came a rare woman, with many gifts, she gazed straight into your eyes, and good merchandise, the sweat of a warm bed. He replied no.

There came a real woman with a womb in the right place and butterfly lips, delirium of a sleepless night. He said no.

Of course, he said no. The new man that I was did not look at women. Neither lace nor sirocco. Neither roses nor apple nor seawater. Neither tongue nor ass nor gifts nor bed scents, wombs nor butterfly lips. Ah. The new man that I was knew his road: to walk on without goal.

There came Red Lips of a tired solitude. The abandoned and sad woman who.

I followed her through the alleyways of the city, the new man in heat; they brushed hands at the corner, livid car lights, a step from home.

This is how it happened: I'm leaving, Hold me, Take me,

anche quando non vorrei.

L'uomo nuovo la rincorse su scale umide, fino alla tana dell'amore passato e dei rancori.

Piegò docile il capo, ascoltava. Solita storia di donna abbandonata, i pianti e le sfortune. L'uomo nuovo inventò le campane, e le risate. La stanza divenne azzurra di sorrisi, e calda di letto.

Ben presto, il miracolo fu fatto: la donna nacque a nuova vita.

L'uomo nuovo, che non lavora gratis per nessuno, chiese il prezzo per l'anima restituita e la fatica spesa.

Pose lui, il prezzo: prese la donna nel palmo della mano, e cominciò colla prima tortura.

Lei bruciò la mano aperta che la conteneva, per vendetta. Già uccisi la donna. Aveva labbra rosse ributtanti di una zingara. Altri avrebbero dovuto, da tanto. E tanto, meritava. Comprava anime, per strada, e non pagava il prezzo.

Mescolai i passi alla città, carezzando le vetrine. Se ho strappato i documenti non è stata paura. Oh! No. È che ogni volta bisogna cancellare i segni del passato e creare l'uomo nuovo, repulisti.

Al vecchio portiere al burò dell'hotel schiacciai le lenti dentro agli occhi. Per imporre rispetto e cominciare bene, come si conviene, e un poco a modo mio.

Oh, il profumo, l'odore dell'albergo, quanto gusto di donna, l'adultera che fugge dimenticando i saluti, rumore di acqua che scorre e allevia il dolore di uno schiaffo, porte sfondate dal marito tradito, colpi di pistola, la bionda the muore sulle scale. Quel sax, non smette di suonare. Ah! L'albergo.

In sole sette notti cancellai i ricordi. In soli sette giorni cambiai faccia. Mi diedi da fare.

Quando l'uomo nuovo ch'ero io uscì in strada, un'orchestra suonava e il sole dava spettacolo in rosso. Un buon cominciamento.

Caress me even when I don't want you to.

The new man ran after her down humid stairs, down to the lair of past love and resentments.

He lay his head down, softly, listening. The usual story of abandoned woman, the tears and misfortunes.

The new man invented bells, and laughter. The room turned bright blue with smiles, and warm like a bed.

Soon, the miracle happened: the woman was born to new life.

The new man, who works free for no-one, asked to be paid for the restored soul and the spent effort.

He set the price: took the woman into the palm of his hand, and started with the first torture.

She burned the open hand that held her, vendetta.

Sure: I killed the woman. She had the red disgusting lips of a gypsy. Someone else should have done so, a long time ago. In any case, she deserved it. She bought souls, in the streets and did not pay.

I mixed my steps up in the city, along shop windows. If I ripped up my documents, it was not out of fear. Oh, no! It's that we need to erase the signs of the past and create the new man, clean up.

The old night porter, there at the hotel front desk, I crushed his glasses into his eyes. A way to demand respect, to start on the right foot, as it's needed, and a little in my own way.

Oh, the perfume, the smell of the hotel, so much scent of woman, the adulteress fleeing and forgetting her goodbyes, the sound of water running and alleviating the pain of slap, doors broken down by the cuckold husband, gun shots, the blonde dying on the stairs. That sax still playing. Ah! The Hotel.

In only seven nights I erased the memories. In only seven days I changed face. I worked hard at it.

When the new man that I was went out into the streets, an orchestra played and the sun put on a show in red. A good beginning.

Two Short Stories by Mia Lecomte

Translated by Brenda Porster

Brenda Porster is a native of Philadelphia who has lived most of her adult life in Florence, where she taught English language and literature. She is a poet and literary translator, writing both in English and Italian. Her poems are found in numerous literary magazines and websites in Italy and abroad, as well as in many thematic and group anthologies, the most recent of which are *Varianti urbane* (2011); *Sempre ai confini del verso: dispatri poetici in Italiano* (Paris, 2011); *100mila poeti per il cambiamento: Poets for Change* (Bologna, 2013); *Sotto il cielo di Lampedusa* and *Nei boschi: poesie dalle fiabe di Grimm* (2014). In 2013 her poem 'Una lettera' won first prize in the competition *Donna e poesia*, Rome. Since 2012 she has been a member of the *Compagnia delle poete* and with them has performed in various Italian and foreign cities.

She was for many years English-language translator for *El Ghibli*, a website specialized in immigrant writing in Italian. Besides Mario Luzi (in *Toscana Mater*, 2004) she has translated a large number of poets writing in Italian today, among whom Laura Fusco, *Naked Water* (Italian Poetry Review, vol. vi, 2011) and, with Johanna Bishop, Mia Lecomte, *For the Maintenance of Landscape: Selected Poems of Mia Lecomte*, Toronto (2012).

From English into Italian she presented and co-translated with Giorgia Sensi the English poet Vicki Feaver, *Vicki Feaver, La fanciulla che ritrovò le sue mani* in *Poesia* (2006); and in 2009, with L. Magazzeni, F. Mormile and A. Robustelli, the anthology *Corporea: la poesia femminile contemporanea di lingua inglese*; a second anthology edited by the same group of translators came out in 2015, *La tesa fune rossa dell'amore: madri e figlie nella poesia femminile contemporanea di lingua inglese*.

Mia Lecomte lives between Rome and Paris. Poet, author of children's books and of plays, among her most recent publications are: the poetry collection *Intanto il tempo* (2012) and *Al museo delle relazioni interrotte* (2016); the short story collection *Cronache da*

un'impossibilità (2015); and the children's book *L'Altracittà* (2010). Her poems have been published in Italy and abroad, in poetry magazines and anthologies including *In Verse. Italian Poets in Translation* (John Cabot University Press 2008). In 2012 Guernica Editions has published her bilingual poetry anthology *For the Maintenance of Landscape*.

She is the creator and a member of the International 'Company of Women Poets' (compagniadellepoete.com), a theater group made up of foreign poets who live in Italy that stages plays concerning the superimposition in poetry of languages, cultures and different artistic languages.

A translator from French, Mia Lecomte is a critic and editor in the field of comparative literature, especially as regards transnational literature. She edited the anthologies *Ai confini dei verso. Poesia della migrazione in italiano* (2006), *Sempre ai confini del verso. Dispatri poetici in italiano* (2011) and co-edited with Luigi Bonaffini *A New Map. The Poetry of Migrant Writers in Italy* (2011); she frequently lectures on this subject in Italy and abroad.

She is on the editorial board of the bi-annual journal of comparative poetry *Semicerchio* and of various online literary sites, including the tri-monthly *El-Ghibli*. She is a contributor to Italian edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

COSTRUTTI

*... como se entre o silêncio
dos nomes e das coisas
apenas houvesse
pó, dissolução*

*... come se tra il silenzio
dei nomi e delle cose
soltanto ci fosse
polvere, dissoluzione*

Casimiro de Brito

(Non ho che da farmi coraggio e provare a parlarne). È così che mi guadagno da vivere e trascorro il mio tempo (che pure rimane tanto, lo so, si presta ad essere impiegato ancora), tutte le mie giornate. Non è la mia massima aspirazione (mi sarei augurato ben altro) ma è pur sempre un ruolo (un compito) di una qualche utilità e non ho tradito la mia vera vocazione. Quando qualche anno fa (mi sembra ieri) me l'hanno proposto, sono rimasto (a dire la verità) sconcertato: non sapevo (è probabile che nessuno lo sospetti) che esistesse un impiego del genere (con tutto quello che ne consegue). E ho accettato addirittura di buon grado (e poi cos'altro mi sarebbe rimasto da fare?). Ero un uomo (cosiddetto) di mezza età (ora sono ben oltre, un discreto tre quarti) e non ero ancora riuscito a realizzare (forse soltanto sperare) niente di quello in cui avevo creduto (o mi avevano fatto credere, è lo stesso). E allora la proposta mi è sembrata subito piuttosto appetibile (o perlomeno non così indecente). In fondo poteva essere solo l'inizio (adesso so che non è così) e c'era pur sempre qualcuno che aveva bisogno di me (a volte è gratificante). Cosa avevo fatto fino a quella mia mezza età d'allora? (togliendo l'infanzia, con tutte le sue vicissitudini inutili e tragiche). Studiato (malamente), bevuto (molto, pesante), mi ero drogato (meno, leggero), non mi ero mai innamorato (non sono un tipo passionale) e per questo avevo sposato la donna giusta (una qualsiasi). Niente figli (c'era tempo ancora), né amici (ancora più tempo), né troppo fissa dimora. Insieme a mia moglie, conducevamo una vita tranquilla (ce lo dicevamo) con lunghe giornate dedicate alle chiacchiere leggere,

CONSTRUCTS

... como se entre o silêncio
dos nomes e das coisas
apenas houvesse
pó, dissolução

... as if between the silence
of names and things
only there was
dust, decay

Casimiro de Brito

(I've only got to pluck up my courage and make the effort to talk about it). This is how I earn my living, and spend my time (though there's still a lot left over, I know it lends itself to being used again) every day. It's not the loftiest thing I aspired to once (I'd have wished for something better) but at least it's a role (a job) that's useful somehow, and I haven't betrayed my real vocation. When a few years ago (it seems like only yesterday) they made the proposal I was (to tell the truth) taken aback: I hadn't known (and in all likelihood no one could imagine) that a job like that existed (with all its implications). And I accepted, even willingly (after all, what else could I have done?). I was a middle-aged (as they say) man (now I'm far beyond that, a good three quarters) and I still hadn't managed to accomplish (or maybe even hope for) anything of what I'd believed in (or that they'd led me to believe, which is the same thing). And at the time the proposal seemed quite attractive (or anyway not outrageous). After all, it might only be a start (now of course I know it's not) and at least there would always be someone who needed me (which can, after all, be gratifying at times). What had I done before my middle age? (leaving out childhood, with all its useless, tragic happenings). I'd gone through school (not very well), drunk (a lot, heavy), done drugs (less, light), never fallen in love (I'm not the passionate type) and precisely for that reason I'd married the right woman (the one I'd happened to find). No children (there was still time), or friends (even more time) or even a fixed home, really. My wife and I led a tranquil life (as we told one another), long days dedicated to small talk, cinema

al cinema e al sesso (cosa di meglio). E alla lettura. Un lettore onnivoro sono sempre stato (un suino librario), mi interessa di tutto, in qualunque modo sia scritto (una versatilità di lettura che mi è tornata utile). Ma veniamo al dunque (il problema è capire dove sia): è così che mi guadagno da vivere (durare). È successo tutto senza preavviso (una sorta di colpo di fortuna senza fortuna). Un pomeriggio d'inverno (finita irrimediabilmente la luce). Chiamano a casa e non c'è nessuno, né io né mia moglie (finiti gli umani). Allora lasciano un messaggio nella nostra segreteria telefonica (voce preregistrata di confezione, onestamente impersonale): hanno urgenza di parlarmi, ma non riesco a decifrare il nominativo di riferimento: edizioni non so che cosa (e chissà dove). Richiameranno (o vuole dire che non era il caso). Due giorni dopo si rifanno vivi (era il caso, almeno per loro). Le edizioni precisate fissano un appuntamento per la settimana successiva (il luogo ora è certo). E io trascorro la settimana convinto del solito (a metà fra le peggiori aspettative e le migliori speranze). Mi sono dimenticato di dire (lo dimentico sempre) che oltre alla conversazione, al cinema, al sesso e alla lettura, ai quei tempi (anche ora, purtroppo) mi dedicavo alla scrittura (la prima cosa a cui mi sono dedicato, in verità, dall'inizio del mio grande vuoto scandito). Una dedizione superflua, in cui ho sempre riposto vaghe ambizioni cinematografiche (nel senso più hollywoodiano di qualcuno che mi legge per caso e prima dei titoli finali sono già in vetta a ogni tipo di classifica), che insieme a tutte le altre, ovviamente, nel giorno di quell'inaspettato appuntamento erano fallite (in quello del messaggio registrato, quasi). Ma le ambizioni sono come le parole, una vale l'altra alla fine, senza peso (specifico), e dove credi che abbiano lasciato il segno del loro gravoso covare negli anni (tuoi e degli altri), trovi solo una fredda superficie perfettamente liscia, allineata al resto (inclinata). Insomma, quello scrittore che non si credeva più tale, che non si era mai creduto tale (che non aveva mai creduto, in generale, troppo faticoso) varcava la porta delle edizioni che l'avevano cercato inaspettatamente con una dignità rispolverata per l'occasione (con l'età gli andava un po' stretta). A venirgli incontro era una segretaria alta e bionda (prevedibile), di una gentilezza impeccabile (lucida come la targa sotto il campanello a cui aveva suonato), che lo faceva accomodare in una piccola sala d'attesa con un tavolino di vetro ingombro di riviste a cataloghi

and sex (what could be better). And to reading. I've always been a voracious reader (a book swine), everything interests me, no matter how it's written (a versatility that has turned out to be useful). But let's get to the point (the problem is understanding precisely where it is): this is how I earn my living (my enduring). It all happened without any warning (a sort of luckless lucky stroke). A winter afternoon (the light irremediably gone). They call but no one is at home, neither my wife nor I (no other humans around). So they leave a message on our voice mail (a prerecorded voice, honestly impersonal) -- they need to speak to me urgently, but I can't make out the name they leave: something or other publishers (somewhere or other). They'll call back (maybe they mean it's not worth their while). Two days later they turn up again (it was worthwhile, at least for them). The specified publishers fix an appointment for the following week (time and place certain). And the week goes by with me being normally convinced (half-way between the worst expectations and the highest hopes). I forgot to say (I always forget this) that besides conversation, cinema and sex, and reading, in those days (and now, too, unfortunately) I devoted myself to writing (the first thing I devoted myself to, actually, throughout the great void punctuating my existence). A superfluous devotion, the depositary of vague cinematographic ambitions (in the most Hollywoodian sense: someone happens to read me and before the final credits are on the screen I'm already at the top of all the best-seller lists), which on the day of that unexpected appointment had obviously failed, along with all the others (and on the day of the recorded message, almost). But ambitions are like words -- in the end they're more or less the same, without any weight (specific), and where you think they've left the mark of their burdensome brooding over the years (yours and others') you find only a cold, perfectly smooth surface, in line with the rest (inclined).

In short, the writer who doesn't believe in himself anymore, who had never believed in himself (who had never believed in general, it was too tiring) crossed the threshold of the publishers who had unexpectedly searched him out, his dignity brushed up for the occasion (with the passing of the years it had grown a bit tight). The woman who came to meet him was a tall blond secretary (predictable), impeccably polite (shiny as the nameplate under the doorbell), who had him take a seat in a small waiting room with a

(tutti delle edizioni, altrimenti a che scopo). Belli, interessanti, con ottime pubblicazioni (anche il suo autore preferito, una prosa assolutamente originale, innovativa). Alle pareti premi, locandine e qualche foto di scrittori famosissimi (i mostri sacri del secolo, gli unici con una faccia adatta a competere con la propria opera). Se ne stava piegato in una poltrona di panno verde (speranzoso), a pensare alle commissioni che lo aspettavano nel pomeriggio (tutte dietro la casa attuale, non si azzardava mai a sconfinare dal quartiere) quando qualcuno – non più la signorina di prima, un'altra altrettanto specchiata (uno sfoggio deliberato di personale ideale) – lo veniva a chiamare. Prego, mi vuole seguire? Certo, come no (sono qui per questo, cioè non proprio, spero che non mi porti fuori strada). E un lungo corridoio con molte porte chiuse, l'ultima a destra ad aspettare me (chissà da quanto). Quando sono entrato ho subito notato che il verde era cambiato in blu (in evoluzione cromatica) e bluette (regressa). E che la scrivania era troppo grande per l'omino pelato che vi sedeva dietro (un fantolino abbandonato sul sagrato di una chiesa). Poi non ho più avuto tempo per notare nulla, concentrato sulla proposta che mi veniva fatta. Perché io? (un conoscente comune aveva parlato di me e della mia dedizione superflua in termini lusinghieri). Perché io? (e di una mia cultura assolutamente eterogenea e superficiale). Perché io? (e del mio tempo libero). Perché io? (e della mia capacità di non stupirmi mai di niente). Ero sconcertato e stupito (invece) e anche molto divertito (quest'ultimo è il motivo principale per cui ho accettato). Ridevo tra me sulla strada del ritorno, in autobus (verso il mio quartiere, al sicuro). Chissà quando lo racconto a mia moglie... Sì, ma solo a lei. Mi è stato vietato di dirlo a chiunque altro, pena lo scioglimento del contratto (abbastanza generoso, lo ammetto). Ma poi a chi altro lo potrei raccontare? E a cosa mi servirebbe raccontarlo? E gradatamente l'incredulità allegra (e anche un po' orgogliosa, perché no) lasciava il posto a una stanchezza senza remissione (la mia stanchezza), un buco umido scavato proprio sotto le fondamenta della coscienza (per l'oscurità non se ne vede il fondo). E così, arrivato a casa, a mia moglie non dicevo più niente (ho acceso una sigaretta e mi sono seduto in televisione). E ancora non sa niente (né mai lo saprà). D'altronde non avrebbe motivo per nutrire alcun sospetto, la mia quotidianità scorre sempre identica (e poi chissà quanto durerà ancora, non è possibile saperlo, se dovrò

glass table covered with magazines and catalogues (all their publications, why else?). Attractive, interesting, with excellent works (even his favorite author, an absolutely original, innovative prose style). On the walls prizes, publicity posters and a few photos of very famous writers (the century's sacred monsters, the only ones with a face that could compete with their work). Folded into a green cloth armchair (hopeful), he was thinking about the errands in wait for him that afternoon (all near the house he lived in, he never risked leaving the neighborhood) when someone – not the same woman as before, another just as flawless (a deliberate display of the ideal figure) – came to call him. Excuse me, would you mind following me? Of course not (that's why I'm here, well not exactly, I hope she doesn't lead me in the wrong direction). And a long hallway with a lot of closed doors, the last on the right waiting for me (who knows since when). As soon as I entered I noticed that the green had changed to blue (chromatic evolution) and azure (regression). And that the desk was too large for the bald little man sitting behind it (an newborn baby abandoned on the church stairs). Then I had no more time to notice anything, concentrated as I was on the proposal being made. Why me? (a common acquaintance had spoken in flattering terms about me and my superfluous devotion). Why me? (and about my absolutely miscellaneous and superficial culture). Why me? (and about my free time). Why me? (and about my capacity never to let anything surprise me). I was taken aback and surprised (on the contrary) and also highly amused (that was the main reason I accepted). I laughed to myself all the way home on the bus (going back to my own neighborhood, to safety). Who knows when I tell my wife ... Yes, but only her. I was not allowed to tell anyone else or the contract would be cancelled (a fairly generous one, I have to say). But then, who else could I tell? And what use would telling be? And gradually the light-hearted disbelief (which also held a bit of pride, and why not) gave way to inexorable weariness (my weariness), a damp hole dug just beneath the foundations of consciousness (the bottom hidden by darkness). And so when I got home I said nothing to my wife (I lit a cigarette and sat down in front of the television). And she still knows nothing (and never will). After all, she has no reason to be suspicious, my daily life is the same as it was (and then who knows how long it will last, it's not possible

mentire ancora per molto). Certo, ci sono più soldi, ma i nostri conti bancari rimangono separati e io non ho mai aumentato le uscite (contengo per indole le spese). Tutto tace, insomma, all'apparenza (che è tutto). E (ma) da anni ho un nuovo lavoro (e la stessa casa). Lo svolgo diligentemente tutte le mattine dalle sei alle nove (tanto mi sveglierei comunque per l'insonnia senile) e qualche volta anche un'oretta il pomeriggio (dopo la siesta). Mia moglie pensa che io scriva (pudichi sfoghi post-post-post) e mi lascia tranquillo. E io mi dedico con una certa maestria (ci vuole, non è un impegno da poco) a scrivere (scrivo infatti) i tra-parentesi dell'autore più importante della casa editrice, il mio scrittore preferito (perché non se li scrive da sé? Non me l'hanno spiegato, e in verità non ho mai sentito l'esigenza di saperlo). Col tempo sono diventato piuttosto bravo, perfettamente integrato con la sua prosa pensiero (la sua seconda voce, a cappella), fuso con la sua musica (perfettamente in controtempo). E forse, poco a poco, sto cominciando a sperare anche in altro (comincia a non bastarmi). Ora che mi sono tanto specializzato (incisivizzato) forse potrei passare a qualche nuovo autore (uno alla volta) della casa editrice (chissà le altre). Un giorno di questi dovrò trovare il coraggio di parlarne con i responsabili (quelli che si sono manifestati tali). Comunque non c'è fretta, per ora va bene così, conservo un pochino di tempo per dedicarmi anche alle mie cose (una specificità pur compromessa nel profondo). E poi chissà che i restanti scrittori della casa editrice non siano già impegnati (accompagnati), che altri non siano stati assunti, per altri, con le mie stesse mansioni (magari non necessariamente per intenzionali tra parentesi, di cui è particolarmente ricco il mio autore). Altri esattamente come me, in tutto e per tutto (fuorché nelle mansioni, forse, ci sono molti altri aspetti del periodo). E chissà se addirittura non ci siano già altri che subentrano nella prosa del mio stesso autore? (altri esattamente come me, appunto, fuorché nelle mansioni. Ci sono molti altri aspetti del periodo, appunto). Chissà se il mio autore esiste realmente, e non sia piuttosto il risultato di un intelligente (o solo naturale) assemblaggio di costrutti. Se esistono gli scrittori (e i loro libri). Esiste almeno un solo scrittore? (e il suo libro completo?) Tutte domande inutili. Non è dato di saperlo, da contratto (una postilla in grassetto, in fondo). Tra parentesi.

to know if I'll have to lie much longer). To be sure there's more money, but our bank accounts are separate and I don't spend any more than I did (it's my nature to be thrifty). Everything is quiet, in a word, apparently (which is what counts). And (but) for years I've had a new job (and the same house). I work at it diligently every morning from six to nine (I'd wake up early anyway because of geriatric insomnia) and sometimes for another hour or so in the afternoon (after my siesta). My wife thinks I'm writing (demure post-post-post steam-letting) and doesn't interrupt. And I devote myself with some skill (necessary, it's not such an easy job) to writing (I do write) the parentheses of the publishing house's most important author, my own favorite author (why doesn't he write them himself? They didn't explain that to me and to tell the truth I've never felt the need to know). With time I've grown quite good at it, perfectly integrated with his prose thought (his second voice, a cappella), blended with his music (in perfect syncopation). And perhaps, little by little, I'm starting to hope for something else (this is starting to not be enough). Now that I've become so specialized (interpolated) maybe I could go on to some new authors (one at a time) of this publishing house (who knows, other houses as well ...). One of these days I have to find the courage to mention it to those in charge (those who have shown themselves to be). But there's no hurry, things are fine as they are for now, I reserve a little time for my own things (though deep down this specific capacity has been compromised). And then, who knows if the publisher's other writers aren't already committed (accompanied), if others haven't already been hired for the others, with the same job as mine (though not necessarily for parenthetical deliberation, which my author is particularly fond of). Others just like me in every way (except for their jobs, perhaps, after all a sentence has many other aspects). And who knows if there aren't already others who intervene in my author's prose? (others just like me, as I've said, except for their jobs. After all, as I've said, a sentence has many other aspects.). Who knows if my author actually exists or if he isn't rather the result of an intelligent (and only natural) assemblage of constructs. If writers (and their books) exist. Does at least one writer exist? (or a finished book?) All useless questions. Unknowable, by contract (a note in boldface at the bottom of the page). In parentheses.

LA SALVEZZA

*...Poi ho ritrovato una luce
intatta, che era una sorta di paradiso mal digerito...*

Amelia Rosselli

"Degli animali mondi, e di quelli immondi, degli uccelli e di tutti gli esseri che strisciano sul suolo entrarono a due a due con Noè nell'arca, maschio e femmina, come Dio aveva comandato a Noè" (Genesi 7, 8-9)

Amore mio,

neanch'io so perché ti scrivo, perché il mio primo impulso dopo tutto quello che è accaduto sia proprio di scrivere, e a te, che forse ora esisti solo in un mio ricordo stordito. So soltanto che è ancora una necessità, l'abbiamo fatto tanto in queste nostre ultime settimane che, malgrado tutto, non posso pensare a una giornata senza le mie parole a te, le tue a me. Come ogni mattina da quando ci siamo conosciuti, come ogni sera, mi riconosco così seduto a dirti delle ore che ho lasciato alle spalle, di quelle che mi aspettano. A pensare, con te, a questo nostro tempo, a dargli, attraverso il tuo sguardo, il tuo pensiero, il significato, l'importanza che insieme crediamo. Non potrei fare più a meno, neppure adesso, della certezza di questa nostra comune preghiera quotidiana, senza la quale la mia vita non detta cesserebbe di essere, la tua non ascoltata non sarebbe mai stata. Spesso, come in ogni preghiera degna di questo nome, mi sono chiesto se fossi davvero tu il destinatario prediletto, oppure se stessi scrivendo a un'astrazione, a un me stesso reso tollerabile dalla distanza. Di chi fossero le parole che ascoltavo, se c'era realmente qualcuno a suggerirle. Ma le poche volte che abbiamo goduto della fortuita opportunità di trascorrere insieme un istante sereno, in una quotidianità simulata, ho capito che eri tu, proprio tu, la mia interlocutrice elettiva, che esistevi

SALVATION

*... Then I found a light
intact, a sort of paradise
poorly digested ...*

Amelia Rosselli

"Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth. There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah"

(Genesis 7, 8.9, King James edition)

My darling,

I myself don't know why I'm writing to you, why my first impulse after everything that's happened is to write, and to write to you, who at this point may only exist as a stunned memory. I only know that it's still something I need to do, that we did so often in our last weeks, that despite everything I can't conceive of day without my words to you, yours to me. Just like every morning since we met, and every evening, I know myself sitting here like this to tell you about the hours I've left behind and the ones ahead. To reflect, with you, on my time, to give it through your eyes and your thoughts the significance, the importance that together we believe in. I couldn't, even now, do without the certainty of our daily shared prayer, without which my life, being untold, would no longer exist, and yours, being unheard, would never have existed. As with every prayer worth the name, I've often asked myself if the person chosen to receive these words was really you, or if I was writing to an abstraction, to a self made tolerable by distance. I've wondered whose words I was listening to, if there really was someone to suggest them. But those few times when by chance we had the opportunity to spend an instant of serenity together, in a pretence of normal everyday life, I understood that you, and only you, were my chosen interlocutor, that you really did exist, and

davvero; e non solo per me, come riflesso della mia necessità, ma per te stessa, e di conseguenza, dolorosamente, forse anche per qualcun altro. Questa mia lettera è di certo gratuita, l'ennesimo gesto dell'uomo gratuito che sai, ma è importante stare ancora una volta insieme nell'unico modo che ci è stato finora concesso. Così avrò la certezza che da qualche parte tu ora mi aspetti e che di conseguenza anch'io, da qualche parte, sto aspettandoti. Ti prego di ricordartelo, di ricordarmelo, perché è questo a tenermi ancora in vita, con te.

È l'alba, dormono tutti, mia moglie a fianco, i ragazzi. Una luce gelatinosa si sta riversando molle sulle colline intorno, riverbera i profili inanimati. Se tu fossi qui con me, fra poco potremmo avviarci, entrare pieni di speranza e allegria in questa terra per uomini nuovi. La terra della salvezza, una salvezza nient'affatto degna di questo nome, così ingiusta senza di te. Ma è stato sempre tutto molto ingiusto per noi. Ci siamo conosciuti tardi, troppo per il vecchio che sono al cospetto della tua giovinezza consolatoria, riparatrice, che avevo atteso per tutta la vita. La sorpresa innanzi a tanta felicità mi ha reso incerto, esitante, finché qualcuno ha voluto decidere per me. Subito, senza appello, dopo che per mesi ci eravamo trovati costretti a dividere con altri quello che insieme avremmo meravigliosamente moltiplicato. Ma le moltiplicazioni rientrano in tutt'altra sfera di miracoli, la stessa delle immacolate concezioni, quella dove la carne, la materia, si sazia e si rinnova. Un privilegio per pochi eletti. Io sono stato prescelto, se sono stato prescelto, per il languore e l'amputazione. Anche se quando sono stato chiamato, suppongo di essere stato chiamato, non ero nella condizione di valutare cosa sarebbe successo: con la tua famiglia, moglie legittima e figli, e tutte le varietà animali, a coppie. Considerata l'urgenza, mi sono limitato semplicemente a mettere sotto pressione tutti gli operai. Lavoravano a turni, giorno e notte, instancabili. Stavolta, però, non solo non avrebbero goduto del frutto del loro lavoro, ma il futuro passava per le loro mani senza coinvolgerli. Come schiavi sulla soglia ormai ultimata della tomba del faraone, ostacolo estremo al riscatto di una vita ultraterrena degna di questo nome, anche qui erano in gioco vita e morte, anche se in ordine rovesciato. Non lo sapevano, ovviamente. Erano scrupolosi operai di cantiere che eseguivano per l'ennesima volta quello che avevo ordinato loro con tempi più o meno serrati, a

not only for me, as a reflection of my need, but for yourself and therefore, painfully, perhaps for someone else as well. This letter is doubtlessly gratuitous, yet another gesture from the gratuitous man you know, but it is important to be together once again in the only way that has been granted us so far. This is how I can be sure that somewhere you are waiting for me, and therefore I am waiting for you somewhere, too. I beg you to remember this, to remind me of this, because it is this that keeps me alive, with you.

It is dawn, they're all asleep -- my wife at my side, the children. A gelatinous light is spread softly over the surrounding hills, reflecting inanimate forms. If you were here with me, soon we could set out, full of hope and high spirits as we enter this land meant for new men -- the land of salvation, a salvation not at all worthy of the name, since without you it is not fair. But nothing has ever been fair for us. We met late, too late for an old man like me before the consolation of your reparative youth, which I'd waited for all my life. My surprise at so much happiness made me uncertain, hesitant, until someone else decided for me. Immediately, without appeal, after months during which we were forced to share with others what you and I together could have multiplied, gloriously. But multiplications are part of a wholly other sphere of miracles, like immaculate conceptions, where flesh, matter itself, is satisfied and renewed. A privilege for the chosen few. I have been chosen, if indeed I have been chosen, for languor and amputation. Even if when I was called, and I suppose I was called, I was in no condition to imagine what might happen. With your family, legitimate wife and children, and all the species of animals, in pairs. The only ones meant to float. Considering how urgent it was, I merely concerned myself with putting pressure on the workers. They worked in shifts, day and night, tirelessly. This time, though, not only would they not enjoy the fruit of their labor, but the future was passing through their hands without involving them. Like slaves on the threshold of the finished tomb of the pharaoh, the final obstacle to the redemption of an afterlife worthy of the name, here as well life and death were at play, though in reverse order. They didn't know it, obviously. They were conscientious construction workers, doing for the umpteenth time what I ordered them to, more or less quickly according to the client's needs, men who applied all their professional skill to that final job.

seconda delle esigenze del cliente, che applicavano con professionalità le loro competenze a quella commissione estrema.

Doveva trattarsi di un'imbarcazione grandissima, davvero immensa, come non se ne erano mai costruite, come io stesso non mi ero mai sognato di progettare. Il comando era stato chiaro, per tutti noi. Moglie legittima e figli, animali accoppiati. Era un comando, tesoro mio, ti prego di ricordarlo. Dopo il quale non mi è restato che lasciarti, giorno dopo giorno, tentando di capire. Ma non ti ho mai lasciata, e non ho mai capito. Ho dovuto tenere fede a una vocazione, un impegno assoluti, senza ricordare alcuna vocazione, di aver piegato il capo ad alcun impegno. Una mattina come un'altra ho avviato i lavori di un progetto che non sapevo affatto di aver concepito, e ho cominciato a dirti addio. I lavori sono durati mesi, lunghi mesi a incolpare me stesso di non avere avuto il coraggio di difenderti, da cosa non mi era chiaro, di stupirmi, spaventarmi, arrabbiarmi, ribellarmi o dubitare. Controllavo scrupolosamente che tutto venisse eseguito secondo i piani, giorno dopo giorno, e la sera mi coricavo stanco e svuotato, ma con la certezza che proprio così dovessi essere, che in qualche modo dovevo rassegnarmi a morire poco per volta, prima di tutti gli altri. Gli altri. Perché non mi sono mai preoccupato di loro, del destino atroce del cosiddetto mio prossimo, quello più anonimo e lontano, ma anche il più vicino, parenti meno stretti, gli amici, i colleghi, conoscenti? C'eri solo tu, ci sei solo tu. Non ti potevo mettere in salvo, neppure avvisare, e morivo ogni giorno un poco, prima di te.

E poi una sera è stato tutto pronto. Com'erano orgogliosi i miei operai del risultato: non avevano mai realizzato, né visto, niente di simile. E tutti a complimentarsi con me per l'eleganza della linea, l'avanguardia della tecnica, la solidità, la capienza, il comfort degli interni. Chissà i committenti come sarebbero stati soddisfatti, avrebbero pagato di buon grado per un lavoro che era davvero unico nel suo genere. Buonanotte, siete voi a essere stati bravi, eccezionali, buona notte a tutti, ci vediamo lunedì mattina.

Sono rimasto da solo nella rimessa deserta, seduto nel buio. E poi ho chiamato mia moglie e i miei figli perché mi raggiungessero. E ho telefonato anche a te. Ogni singola parola di quella nostra conversazione mi si è incisa indelebile nella mente. Anche ora che è passato del tempo, credo molto tempo, sento fisicamente la tua voce, il soffio del tuo respiro sulla cornetta nelle pause in cui ti

It was to be an enormous ship, larger than any that had even been built or that I myself had ever dreamed of designing. The command had been clear, for all of us. Legitimate wife and children, animals in couples. It was a command, my darling, I beg you to remember that. After which, there was nothing left for me but to leave you, day after day, trying to understand. But I've never left you and I've never understood. I had to be faithful to a calling and a commitment, absolute, though I remembered neither any calling nor bowing my head to any commitment. One morning just like every other I began work on a project I didn't even know I'd conceived, and I began saying good-bye to you. The work lasted months, long months spent blaming myself for not having the courage to defend you, though it wasn't clear to me from what, or to be incredulous, frightened, angry, to rebel or doubt. Day after day I was there scrupulously making sure everything was being done according to plan. At night I went to bed tired and empty, but with the certainty that this was the way it had to be, that somehow I'd have to resign myself to dying a little at a time, before all the others. The others. Why did I never worry about them, the terrible fate of my so-called fellowmen, the anonymous distant ones as well as those close to me, relatives, friends, colleagues, acquaintances? There was only you, there is only you. I couldn't do anything to save you, not even warn you, and each day I died a little, before you did.

And then one evening everything was ready. How proud my workers were of the result! They' never made, or even seen, anything like it. And everyone complimented me on the elegance of line, the cutting-edge technology, the solidity, the roominess and comfort inside. Imagine how satisfied the customers would be, they'd pay gladly for a job that was truly unique. Good night, it's you who have been good at the job, exceptional, good night everyone, see you on Monday morning.

I was left alone in the empty boathouse, sitting in the dark. And then I called my wife and children to tell them to join me there. And I called you, too. Every single word we spoke is indelibly engraved in my mind. Even now that time has gone by, much time I believe, I can physically hear your voice, the sound of your breath on the receiver during the pauses when I told you I'd be leaving for a while, not to worry and to look after our cat, that I'd be back

dicevo che sarei partito per un po', di stare serena con il nostro gatto, che sarei tornato presto. Neanche il gatto mi avrebbe potuto seguire, non è di razza e i bastardi non sono contemplati da questo genere di destino. Solo coppie multispecie purissime, ufficialmente riconosciute, adatte a riprodursi in una continuità senza macchia. Qui non ci potremmo riprodurre noi, io e te, sarebbe un'anomalia, con conseguenze imprevedibili. A un certo punto della conversazione stentata mi hai annunciato che ti stavano suonando alla porta e hai riagganciato frettolosa, rimandandomi a un'altra non specificata telefonata a venire. È stata l'ultima volta che ci siamo parlati.

Quando sono arrivati mia moglie e i ragazzi avevo preparato loro una sorpresa: il lungo tavolo della dinette imbandito con ogni prelibatezza, le dispense stipate di cibo, i letti apparecchiati, fiori e musica. Mi aveva aiutato, come sempre, la devota allestitrice tecnica delle nostre scenografie domestiche, da quindici anni grata del nostro affetto e felice di farci felici. Che ora stavo miseramente tradendo. Abbiamo mangiato, brindato, cantato e ho proclamato pubblicamente che avremmo trascorso così un insolito fine settimana, godendoci fra di noi, per primi, il frutto tanto confortevole del duro lavoro di mesi. Soltanto al suo termine avrei avvisato il cliente che la sua committenza era stata ultimata. Il cliente, già. Il quale invece sapeva tutto, e lasciava che salutassi colpevole quella donna che si allontanava verso casa, dopo cena, con le mani arse dal detersivo e il sacco della pattumiera rigonfio, i capelli che con gli anni si erano fatti stopposi, radi. Poi siamo andati tutti a letto. I ragazzi nella grande cuccetta di prua erano già sprofondati in un sonno disordinato, senza coperte, mia moglie leggeva nella nostra, e io ho riprovato a chiamarti ma non mi hai più risposto. Era tardi, troppo tardi. Così ho raggiunto mia moglie, so che non ti fa piacere che la chiami col suo nome, che la mia ufficialità abbia un nome, e abbiamo chiuso la serata con le carezze di una vita di corpi vicini, avvezzi. Al buio di quella notte che prevedevo sarebbe durata a lungo, pur ignorando quel che sarebbe potuto esattamente accadere, per quanto, se potesse dirsi davvero notte, se ne sarebbero seguite ancora altre, e giorni. Fino ad allora mi ero attenuto a tutte le disposizioni che mi spettavano e ora potevo finalmente riposarmi, smettere di obbedire e di interrogarmi, potevo dimenticare. Non avevo che da dormire, dovevamo dormire tutti, e la salvezza si sarebbe crudelmente compiuta.

soon. Not even the cat could come with me, it's not a pure-breed and cross-breeds aren't included in this sort of destiny. Only couples of every pedigreed species, officially recognized ones fit to reproduce with immaculate continuity. Here we couldn't reproduce, you and I, it would be an anomaly with unpredictable consequences. At a certain point in our strained conversation you said someone was ringing the doorbell and you hung up right away, saying there'd be another, unspecified, call later on. That was the last time we spoke.

When my wife and children arrived, I'd prepared a surprise for them: the long dining-room table was laden with every possible delicacy, the pantry full of all kinds of food, the beds already made, flowers and music. As usual I'd been assisted by the loyal technical organizer of our domestic stage-sets, who for the last fifteen years had been grateful for our affection and happy to make us happy. And now I was despicably betraying her. We ate, made toasts, sang, and I announced that we were about to pass an unusual weekend, we'd be the first to enjoy the comforts of the fruit of months of hard work. Only when we'd finished would I let the customer know that his order was completed. The customer, of course, knew everything in fact, and permitted me to say a guilty good-bye to that woman as she started off for home after dinner, hands reddened by dish-washing detergent, burdened by a bag full of garbage to be disposed of, her hair grown coarse and stringy with the passing of years. Then we all went to bed. The children were already sleeping deeply in their berths in the ship's prow, their blankets thrown off, while my wife was reading in our bed. I tried to call you again, but you didn't answer. It was late, too late. So I joined my wife -- I know you don't like me to say her name, you don't like my official partner to have a name -- and we ended the evening with the embraces belonging to a life of bodies used to proximity. I lay in the darkness of that night, which I expected to be a long one. Though I didn't know exactly what might happen, I did know that if that really was what we call night others would follow, and days, too. Up to then I'd followed all the instructions I'd been given and now I could finally rest, stop obeying, stop asking myself questions, I could forget. I had only to sleep, we all had to sleep and our salvation would come, cruelly.

My wife mumbled in her sleep, turning her back to me. And your hollow moan in the receiver, before that attent silence and

Mia moglie si è lamentata, stava già dormendo, mi ha voltato le spalle. E il tuo gemito sordo, nel ricevitore, prima del silenzio attento e del campanello. La linea interrotta, il richiamo a vuoto e infine il sonno, assoluto, terribile, la scomparsa del mio, del nostro mondo.

E tutto si è compiuto da solo, risparmiandomi. Dentro al sonno, confuso e violento, mi giungeva il fragore dei passi degli animali che salivano nella parte dell'imbarcazione a loro riservata, sbattevano, si sovrastavano, spingevano, recalcitravano, i loro versi mescolati, l'intrecciarsi in un unico ululato di stupore, sconcerto, terrore, a cui si sono unite altre grida di altre specie e pianti, acuti, gravi, un raglio, un ruggito, a coppie rigorosamente contigue, voci sempre più lontane. Mi dibattevo, nel sonno, ma non riuscivo a reagire, subivo soltanto, incosciente, la deflagrazione sonora di quell'unico corpo di vittime e superstiti. A un certo punto mi è parso di sentirti chiamare il nostro gatto, soltanto una volta, appena, niente. Non riuscivo a reagire, ad aprire gli occhi, stordito dall'odore penetrante, intollerabile. Di fiati, pelo, pelli, escrementi, urina, di sudore e sangue e acqua putrida. Di legno fradicio.

Poi un urto violento, un boato e l'imbarcazione si è sollevata di colpo, come portata da un'onda anomala, spinta verso l'alto da un moto improvviso e continuo. Ho pensato che ci saremmo rovesciati, saremmo precipitati dall'alto in un vortice promiscuo, che ero stato aggirato, era la fine che giustamente avevo pensato di meritare. Ma il moto è aumentato, aumentato, più in alto, un risucchio potente verso l'incoscienza finalmente totale che mi era stata garantita, in cui avevo confidato.

Ed eccomi qui, un naufrago aggrappato al relitto di queste mie parole a te, le prime che sono in grado di pronunciare, in religioso silenzio. Dormono ancora tutti, se si può dire che abbiano dormito, se seguirà mai un vero risveglio. E mi manchi, non so sentire nient'altro. Soltanto la tua assenza assoluta, l'unica presenza che l'amore mi abbia mai davvero concesso. E ci sarai sempre di più, ora, essendoci sempre meno. Un giorno forse mi risponderai, ti rincontrerò, e allora nell'assolutezza si riaprirà un'incrinatura in cui si insinueranno il tuo corpo e il suo profumo, la voce, e per un poco saprò godere dell'approssimazione. Ma poi un altro addio, un'altra salvezza, mi riporteranno a me stesso, all'intierezza del privilegio di superstite.

the doorbell. The interrupted line, the useless attempt to call back, and finally sleep, absolute, terrible, the disappearance of my, of our, world.

And it all was accomplished on its own, saving me. In my confused and violent sleep I could hear the din of the animals climbing in the part of the ship reserved for them, moving and pushing to get on top, kicking and balking, their cries mixed and blending into a single howl of surprise and terror, joined by the shouts of other species and plants, high and low, a bray, a roar, all strictly paired, voices getting further and further away. I tossed in my sleep but I wasn't able to react, I could only unconsciously suffer the noisy deflagration of that single body of victims and survivors. At a certain point I thought I heard our cat, only once, faintly, then nothing. I couldn't react or even open my eyes, dazed as I was by the unbearable, penetrating stench. Of skin, hair, breath, excrement, urine, sweat and blood, of putrid water. Of soaked wood.

Then a violent boom, a crash, and suddenly the boat climbed up, as though lifted by an extraordinary wave, pushed upwards in a sudden continuous motion. I thought that we'd capsize, we'd be thrown into a dizzying whirlpool, that I'd been fooled and this was the end I'd rightly felt I deserved. But the movement grew and grew, higher and higher, a powerful undertow into the unconsciousness, finally total, I'd been guaranteed and counted on.

And here I am, a castaway clutching at the wreck of my words to you, the first I am able to pronounce, in devout silence. The others are still asleep, if we can call it sleep, or what follows a real awakening, and I miss you, I feel nothing else. Only your absolute absence, the only presence ever granted me by love. And I know you will be more and more present now, being here less and less. One day maybe you'll answer me, I'll meet you again and then a fissure will open in the absolute, where your body will enter with your scent, your heat and voice, and for a little while I'll be able to enjoy that approximation. But then another farewell and another salvation will bring me back to myself, to the full privilege of being the survivor.

I look out of the glass in front of me and try to find a direction. From where I am, above the horizon line, so far I can only follow the profile of a giant shadow over a landscape as yet vague. It's slanted, lying on its side, in a pool of light and muddy water. All

Guardo fuori dal vetro, davanti a me, e cerco di orientarmi. Da dove mi trovo, in alto rispetto alla linea dell'orizzonte, per ora posso seguire soltanto i contorni di un'ombra gigantesca a sovrastare il paesaggio ancora indistinto. Giace di sbieco, adagiata sul fianco, in una pozza di luce e acqua melmosa. Intorno, centinaia, migliaia di impronte animali, a perdersi nell'oscurità di ciò che non si è ancora svelato. Una barca immensa, abbandonata in un rimasuglio d'acqua morta, inclinata in un raggio.

O forse non c'è nessuna acqua, sono ancora le travi a reggere lo scafo, e intorno i passi degli operai nella polvere, le impronte del loro affaccendarsi intorno alla chiglia.

O forse non c'è nessuna barca. Le capriate reggono la volta celeste di un gioco, la sua cupola trasparente. È liscia, tra le mani, con quel finto relitto disposto all'interno. Quando la scuoti, come una neve leggera si solleva dal fondo e va a ricadere dovunque, rinnova la tempesta artificiale da cui tutto è superstite. L'uomo che ancora una volta non sa congedarsi e la sua illusione di salvezza.

around, hundreds, thousands, of animal prints as far as the eye can see into the darkness of what has not yet been revealed. A huge boat, abandoned in shallows of stagnant water, on its side in a ray of sun.

Or perhaps there is no water, perhaps the joists are still holding up the hull and around it there are the footprints of the workers in the dust around the keel.

Or perhaps there is no boat. The trusses support is the heavenly vault of a toy, its transparent dome, smooth to the hand, with fake wreckage inside. When you shake it, as light as snow it floats up from the bottom, to fall back down and begin anew the artificial storm that everything has survived. The man unable to say good-bye once again, and his illusion of salvation.

Il Dottor Cymbalus

by Luigi Capuana

Translated by Santi Buscemi and Brian Zuccala

Santi Buscemi teaches at Middlesex County College and has published seven textbooks and online learning tools. The son of Sicilian immigrants, he has translated Luigi Capuana's *C'era Una Volta* (as *Sicilian Tales*) and *The Marchese of Roccaverdina*, the writer's *capolavoro*, published by Dante University of America Press. His latest translation is of Capuana's *Teatro dialettale siciliano* with Edwin Mellen Press. His work appears in the *Journal of Italian Translation*, *Italica*, *Forum Italicum*, *Sicilia Parra*, *Primo* magazine, the *Times of Sicily*, and *ComUNICO*. He contributed to and helped edit *Voices from Dorothea's House*, for that Princeton Cultural Center's 100th anniversary. He is the author of an online course, *The Literature of Sicily: A History* for Dante University Press and has presented five dramatic readings of Capuana's plays, the last at New York's Italian-American Museum.

Brian Zuccala completed his MA in Filologia Moderna at the University of Urbino under the supervision of Salvatore Ritrovato and Antonio Corsaro. He is currently working towards the completion of his Ph.D in Italian Studies (a study of female characterization and literary theory in Capuana's fiction) at Monash University, under the supervision of Annamaria Pagliaro. He has co-edited with Salvatore Ritrovato a collection of essays on Pascoli, *Il seme di Urbino* (Raffaelli, 2013). His Masters thesis focused on "Il Foscolo politico," and portions of it appeared as essays and reviews in *Italian Studies in Southern Africa* and *Spunti e ricerche*. He teaches Italian culture and language at Monash as a teaching associate. With Annamaria Pagliaro he is editing a forthcoming, bilingual volume of collected essays on new approaches to Capuana studies.

Luigi Capuana (1841-1915) is an Italian novelist, journalist and critic canonized by the literary tradition primarily as a *verista* writer and as the major theorist of the naturalist movement in Italy. After entering the literary scene in 1865 with the short story *Doctor Cymbalus*, his prolific production, lasted for over four decades and comprised five novels, seven major collections of essays and several collections of short stories, plays and fairy tales. He explored varying literary territories such as the psychological novel and the novella fantastica going beyond the fairly restrictive naturalist image traditionally associated to his figure. His widely recognized masterpiece, *Il marchese di Roccaverdina* has appeared in English in 2013 (Trans. Santi Buscemi). Most of his major creative as well as critical works remain untranslated.

Il Dottor Cymbalus

di Luigi Capuana

Da due anni Hermann Strauss lavorava assiduamente a un *Nuovo sistema della Natura*; ma quel giorno la sua meditazione era stata troppo intensa. Perduto nella immensità d'un problema d'altissima metafisica, aveva finito coll'addormentarsi; e russava da più d'un'ora quando fu bruscamente svegliato da un insistente picchiare all'uscio.

- Avanti! - borbottò, sbadigliando e stirandosi sulla poltrona.

Comparve una gran cuffia dov'era affogata una grinzosa testa di vecchia.

- Ci è un giovane che desidera parlarle - biascicò la cuffia.

- Passi - rispose Hermann. - Chi diavolo può essere? -

E aveva appena terminato di pensar questa domanda, che un bel giovane, alto di statura, biondo, pallido e in abito da viaggio, si presentava sulla soglia.

- William Usinger!

I due amici si abbracciarono affettuosamente.

- Era arrivato quel giorno? -

- Sì; e ripartiva domani. Aveva bisogno di lui.

- Son qua. Ma siedì; fumiamo una pipa.

- Grazie - .

L'Usinger posò sul tavolino un grosso piego sigillato.

- Vo in America - egli disse; - lontanetto, è vero?

- Ci metterai un po' di più ad arrivare. Infine si va in capo al mondo e si ritorna.

- Si poteva anche non tornare ...

- Certamente, quando si trovava da star bene... Ah! È il tuo viaggio di nozze! - esclamò Hermann picchiandosi con la mano su la fronte e spalancando gli occhi cerulei sotto le sue lenti da miope.

Il silenzio di William lo sorprese.

- Hai già sposato?

- No. Ma parliamo di cose serie. Sono qui per un affare di grave interesse.

Doctor Cymbalus

By Luigi Capuana

For two years, Hermann Strauss had been working assiduously on a *New System of Nature*, but that day his concentration had been too intense. Lost in the immensity of a problem of advanced metaphysics, he had fallen asleep and had been snoring for more than an hour when he was abruptly awoken by an insistent knocking at the door.

- Come in! - he grumbled, yawning and stretching out on the easy chair.

There appeared a large bonnet, into which was sunk the wrinkled old head of an old woman.

- There's a young man who wants to speak to you - mumbled the bonnet.

- Show him in - Hermann responded. - Who the devil could it be? -

And as soon as he had finished pondering the question, a young man, tall, blonde, pale, in traveling clothes appeared at the threshold.

- William Usinger!

The two friends embraced affectionately.

Had he arrived that day?

- Yes, and he was leaving tomorrow. He needed him.

- I'm here. Sit down. Let's smoke a pipe.

- Thanks -.

Usinger placed a fat sealed envelope on the table.

- I'm off to America - he said; - Far away, isn't it?

- You'll take a long time getting there. Anyway, one goes to the end of the earth and comes back.

- One might even never come back ...

- Certainly, if one found a nice place to stay... Ah! It's your honeymoon! - exclaimed Hermann, smacking his forehead and opening wide his light blue short-sighted eyes behind his glasses.

William's silence surprised him.

- Have you already gotten married?

- No. But let's talk about serious matters. I'm here about some very important business.

- Non sei sposo?
- No - replicò William seccamente.
- O dunque?
- Parto per l'America.
- Ma che cosa è accaduto?
- Una cosa semplicissima: Ida sposa un altro.
- Tu l'abbandoni? Tu che mi scrivevi di amarla tanto?
- È lei che preferisce di sposare un francese.
- Francese per giunta! - esclamò Hermann dando un fortissimo

pugno sul tavolino.

- Oh, per me val lo stesso, quando l'amato non son più io!
- Povero William! Tu vuoi dimenticare, tu vuoi...
- T'inganni. Due donne non mi usciranno mai dal cuore: mia

madre e lei!

- A proposito, e tua madre?
- Non ha voluto ricevermi.
- Nemmeno per farsi vedere, per farsi adorare in silenzio? - William scosse il capo tristamente.
- Tua madre dev'essere un'altra!
- È lei! Ne ho in mano le più irrefragabili prove.
- Povero William!

- Mi sento vecchio, decrepito a venticinque anni. Senza famiglia, senz'affetti, senza speranze, senz'illusioni, che ci faccio fra voi?

- Hai ragione. Vai in America: abbandona questa vecchia Europa che casca a pezzi da ogni parte. Vai in America. Buon viaggio! Lì potrai presto rifarti il cuore. Buon viaggio! ... Ma è triste doversi dire addio forse per sempre!

- Ed ecco il motivo della mia visita - disse William molto commosso. - Questo plico sigillato contiene alcune carte importanti e le mie ultime volontà.

- Le tue ultime volontà?

- Riguardo a quel che lascio in Europa - soggiunse l'Usinger sorridendo. - Per l'esecuzione del mio testamento non bisogna aspettare la mia morte. Appena imbarcato, intendo non esser più vivo per nessuno di qui, cioè fra tre o quattro giorni. Non ammatirai; te lo avverto perché tu non stia in pensiero. Ho venduto tutto. Questo plico contiene, in biglietti, in obbligazioni, in cambiali, quas'intiera la somma che ne ho ricavata.

- E pel tuo viaggio? Pel tuo avvenire?

- You haven't gotten married?
- No - replied William dryly.
- And so?
- I'm leaving for America.
- But what's happened?
- It's very simple. Ida is marrying someone else.
- Are you abandoning her? You, who wrote to me that you loved her deeply?
- It's she who prefers to marry a Frenchman.
- A Frenchman of all things! - exclaimed Hermann, smashing his fist on the table.
- Oh, it's all the same to me, if I'm not the one she loves!
- Poor William! You want to forget, you want to...
- You're mistaken. Two women will always be in my heart: my mother and she!
- By the way, how is your mother?
- She's refused to see me.
- Not even to be seen, to be adored in silence? - William shook his head sadly.
- Your real mother must be some other woman!
- It is she! I have undeniable proof.
- Poor William!
- I feel old, decrepit, at twenty-five. Without family, without love, without hope, without illusions, what use is there to stay here among you people?
- You're right. Go to America: abandon this old Europe that's falling apart on all sides. Go to America. Bon voyage! There you can heal your heart. Bon voyage! ... But it's sad to say adieu, perhaps for always!
- And here's the reason for my visit - said William quite moved. - This sealed envelope contains some important papers and my last will and testament.
- Your last will?
- It's about some things I'm leaving behind in Europe - added Usinger, smiling. - There's no need to wait for my death to execute my will. As soon as I embark, I no longer mean to be alive for any-one here, that is in three or four days. Don't trouble yourself. I tell you this so you won't worry. I've sold everything. This envelope contains almost everything I've received from the sale, in bank

- Non dubitare, ci ho pensato. Accetti?

- Ma di cuore! -

Hermann avea le lacrime agli occhi. William, pallidissimo, faceva grandi sforzi per contenersi.

- Hermann - disse l'Usinger dopo alcuni momenti di silenzio; - promettimi di non aprire questo plico prima di quando ti ho detto!

- Anche più tardi, mio caro, se così ti fa piacere. Io già l'ho con me che non tento di distoglierti dalla tua trista risoluzione. Trattienti almeno un paio di giorni!

- Non posso, ho molte faccende da sbrigare. Volevo anzi, per far più presto, spedirti il plico colla posta; ma poi mutai pensiero. Ho voluto abbracciarti prima di lasciare l'Europa.

- Grazie, caro William! Mi hai fatto proprio piacere. Dove sei tu alloggiato?

- Alla Blaue Stern.

- Verrò a trovarti. Staremo insieme fino a stasera.

Quando Hermann Strauss rimase solo, accese la sua grande pipa, si calcò sulla fronte il berretto di pelle di volpe, incrociò le braccia e stette assorto, lungamente, cogli occhi fissi sul busto di Hegel collocato lì in faccia.

A un tratto si riscosse, si precipitò sul plico, ne ruppe i sigilli, prese il solo foglio scritto ch'esso conteneva, e, prima di averne letto mezza pagina, cacciò un urlo.

- Che io arrivi a tempo! Che io arrivi a tempo! - balbettava scappando fuori di casa.

La Blaue Stern era situata al punto opposto della città.

Hermann attraversò una viuzza, svoltò una cantonata, sboccò in una piazzetta, infilò due altre straducole contorte ed oscure, uscì nella via principale, e poi tirò diritto, correndo affannosamente, senza curarsi che la gente si fermasse a guardarlo. Giunto al portone dell'albergo non avea più fiato.

- William Usinger? - domandò al portinaio mezzo appisolato nel suo stambugino.

notes, bonds, and bills of exchange.

- And for your journey? Your future?

- Don't worry. I've thought about it. Do you accept?

- With all my heart!

Hermann had tears in his eyes. William, extremely pale, was making great efforts to contain himself.

- Hermann - said Usinger after a few moments of silence; - promise me that you won't open the envelope before the moment I have told you to open it!

- Even after that, dear friend, if that's what you want. I'm already angry at myself for not trying to dissuade you. But stay at least a couple of days!

- I can't. I've got a lot of business to finish. In fact, I wanted to mail you the envelope to save time, but I changed my mind. I wanted to embrace you before leaving Europe.

- Thank you, dear William! I'm so glad you did. Where are you staying?

- At *Blaue Stern*.

- I'll come and see you there. We'll be together at least until tonight.

When Hermann Strauss was alone, he lit his large pipe, he lowered his fox skin beret over his forehead, crossed his arms, and for some time remained absorbed, with his eyes fixed on the bust of Hegel in front of him.

All of a sudden, he roused himself, grabbed the envelope, broke the seal, and took out the single sheet of paper, on which something was written. But before he could read half a page, he let out a scream.

- I've got to get there in time! I've got to get there in time! - he stammered as he ran from the house.

The *Blaue Stern* was located on the other side of the city.

Herman crossed an alley, turned a corner, came upon a small square, made his way along two other dark and twisting lanes, exited onto the main street, and then went straight, running breathlessly, without caring that people stopped and gaped at him. By the time he arrived at the door of the hotel, he was out of breath.

- William Usinger? - he asked the doorman, who was dozing in his cubby hole.

Il portinaio si scosse, si strofinò gli occhi e, guardandolo in viso, chiamò:

- Resi! -

Comparve una donna sui trent'anni, una vera paesana, grassa, bionda, untuosa. Il portinaio accennò ad Hermann che parlasse con lei.

- William Usinger è in casa? - replicò Hermann che sembrava sui carboni accesi.

- Glielo dirò subito -.

E sparì dietro l'uscio da cui era sbucata.

Quei minuti di aspettazione parvero un secolo ad Hermann. Finalmente la Resi venne a dire che l'Usinger era andato fuori di buona ora e non era più tornato.

- Le sue valigie sono ancora qui? - domandò Hermann agitatissimo.

- Non ha valigie.

- Dovrà pagare il suo conto ...

- L'ha saldato.

Dove poteva trovarlo? Come raggiungerlo a tempo?

Hermann pestava coi piedi, si strizzava le mani, bestemmiava, guardando indeciso di qua e di là; quando eccoti l'Usinger.

- Ah! - urlò Hermann, correndogli addosso come se quello avesse tentato di scappare.

- Hai aperto la busta! - disse William con piglio severo.

- Sì! -

Hermann per precauzione lo teneva sempre pel vestito.

Montarono le scale, silenziosi. Entrati in camera, William buttò in un canto il suo berretto da viaggio e si lasciò cadere sopra una poltrona. Hermann rimase in piedi innanzi a lui.

- Aveva perduto il cervello?

Lo rimproverava affettuosamente.

- Poteva darsi. Ma così che credeva di fare?

Il suo dovere d'amico.

- Un dovere inutile.

- William!

- Voleva persuaderlo di amare la vita dopo tutto quello che lui sapeva? C'era forse il mezzo di strapparsi il cuore dal petto e non morire? Aveva lui il modo di renderlo freddo e insensibile

The doorman woke up, rubbed his eyes and, looking him in the face, cried out:

- Resi!

A woman about thirty years old appeared, a real peasant, blonde, fat, and greasy. The doorman gestured that Hermann should speak with her.

- Is William Usinger in? replied Hermann as if he were on tenterhooks.

- I'll let you know right away.

And she disappeared behind the doorway from which she had come.

Those few minutes of waiting seemed like a century to Hermann. Finally, Resi returned to tell him that Usinger had left early that morning and had not returned.

- Is his luggage still here? - Hermann asked in great agitation.

- He has no luggage.

- He'll have to pay his bill ...

- He's already paid it.

How could he find him? How could he reach him in time?

Hermann stamped his feet, wrung his hands, and cursed, looking aimlessly here and there when, suddenly, Usinger appeared.

- Ah! - screamed Hermann, running toward him as if Usinger had tried to escape.

- You opened the envelope! - said William looking at him sternly.

- Yes! -

As a precaution, Hermann continued to hold on to his friend's jacket.

They climbed the stairs silently. Having entered the room, William tossed his traveling cap into a corner and fell into an easy chair. Hermann remained standing in front of him.

Had he lost his mind?

He scolded him affectionately.

- Perhaps, but what did he believe he could achieve this way?

His duty as a friend.

A useless duty!

- William!

Was he trying to persuade him to love life even after what he

come il marmo?

- Sì! sì! - esclamò Hermann.

A quelle ultime parole dell'Usinger gli era balenata nella mente una luce improvvisa perciò lo abbracciava con effusione. William stava a guardarlo stupito.

- Il cervello del suo amico aveva dato la volta? -

Ma Hermann sorrideva, si fregava le mani dalla gioia:

- Gli bastava l'animo di sostenere una dolorosa operazione chirurgica?

William fece una mossa di offesa.

- Lo prendeva per un bimbo?

- Si sentiva l'animo di sostenere una dolorosa operazione chirurgica? - Glielo domandava seriamente.

- Perché?

- Per diventare freddo e insensibile come il marmo. Gli bastava l'animo? - Rispondeva.

- Oh, sì! - disse William. - Ma questo è impossibile.

- Meno di quel che supponi. Tu conosci certamente, almeno di fama, il dottore Franz Cymbalus, uno dei più grandi, anzi forse il più grande dei fisiologi viventi. Le sue scoperte sul sistema nervoso sono le conquiste più straordinarie della scienza moderna. È stato mio maestro e mi vuol bene. Andremo a trovarlo. Il dottor Cymbalus ti salverà.

- È dunque un Dio cotest'uomo?

- Uno scienziato; val quasi lo stesso.

- Non credere che io m'illuda - disse l'Usinger. - Se acconsento a venir da lui, è solamente per contentarti. Abita lontano?

- In una sua villetta, a poche miglia dalla città.

- Su, andiamo! -

E l'Usinger rispose con un'incredula scrollata di spalle al gran respiro di soddisfazione cacciato fuori da Hermann.

Il dottor Cymbalus era seduto sopra una panca di legno con due bimbi sulle ginocchia. Sorrideva, li accarezzava e rispondeva bonariamente alle vivaci domande di quelle due bionde testoline.

- *Domine, bona dies* - disse Hermann dietro il cancello, togliendosi di capo il berretto.

Il dottore lo riconobbe, mise a terra i due bimbi che si perdettero pei viali, e andò ad aprire facendo con la mano un affettuoso saluto.

had learned? Was there a way to rip one's heart out and not die? Did he have a way to turn him cold and insensible, like marble?

- Yes! Yes! - exclaimed Hermann.

A light suddenly flashed as Usinger said those last words, and he embraced his friend warmly. William looked at him stupefied.

Had his friend gone out of his mind?

But Hermann smiled, rubbing his hands together joyfully.

Did he have enough courage to undergo a painful surgery?

William's manner showed he was offended.

Did he take him for a child?

Did he have the courage to undergo a painful surgery? Hermann was asking this in all seriousness.

- Why?

To become as cold and insensitive as marble. Did he have enough courage? He had to answer.

- Oh, yes, said William. - But that's impossible!

- Less than you imagine. You certainly know, at least by reputation, Doctor Franz Cymbalus, one of the greatest, in fact, perhaps the greatest living physiologist. His discoveries on the nervous system are the most extraordinary conquests of modern science. He was my teacher, and he loves me. Let's visit him. Dr. Cymbalus will save you.

- Is this man some kind of god?

- A scientist; it's about the same.

- Don't think that I'm deluding myself - said Usinger. - If I agree to go to him, it's only to make you happy. Does he live far away?

- In his small villa, a few miles from the city.

- Let's go! - And Usinger responded with an incredulous shrug of his shoulders as Herman let out a great sigh of satisfaction.

Dr. Cymbalus was seated on a wooden bench with two children on his knees. Smiling, he caressed them and responded good humoredly to the lively questions posed by those two adorable blonde heads.

- *Domine, bona dies* - said Hermann from the gate as he removed his cap.

The doctor recognized him, set down the two children, who lost themselves along the pathways, and he went to open the gate

- Amico mio! - disse, introducendo i due arrivati. - Sono lietissimo di rivedervi. Signore, vorrei poter soggiungere altrettanto di voi; ma, se la memoria non m'inganna, non credo d'avervi veduto un'altra volta. Per questo non siete meno il ben venuto in casa mia.

- William Usinger - disse Hermann.

William fece un profondo inchino. Il dottor Cymbalus gli stese la mano.

- Maestro, il mio amico ha bisogno della sua scienza - disse Hermann, sorridendo all'Usinger.

- È ammalato?

- Più che ammalato: è deciso di ammazzarsi.

- Così giovane?

- Sí, maestro, così giovane!

- Non viene certamente da me perché gliene fornisca il mezzo - disse il dottore. - Ma entriamo in casa. Ragioneremo con più comodo -.

Il dottore condusse i due ospiti nel suo gabinetto di studio, un caos di libri, di carte, di mappe, di strumenti, di boccette, di vasi, di crani, di preparati anatomici, di scheletri umani. L'Usinger, entrando, sentí dei brividi per la schiena.

Il dottore sedette su la poltrona dietro il suo tavolino. I due amici gli sedettero di faccia.

Quella figura di vecchio scienziato era dolce e serena. La sua fronte spaziosa e solcata da rughe profonde, il suo l'occhio vivo e scintillante malgrado le veglie sostenute per mezzo secolo in pro della scienza e dell'umanità; il suo labbro quasi sempre sorridente, la posatezza delle sue maniere, la bontà della sua parola, tutto rivelava in lui una natura elevata; di quelle che, dal sapersi più grandi delle altre, attingono la virtù dell'umiltà che le fa venerande.

- Voi dunque volete morire? - disse il dottor Cymbalus con accento di paterna ironia.

- Sì, o signore - rispose l'Usinger freddamente.

Mentre Hermann raccontava, a grandi tratti, la dolorosa storia di William, il dottor Cymbalus teneva bassa la testa e gli occhi socchiusi; le sue labbra erano atteggiata a commiserazione profonda.

- Io non posso approvare la vostra risoluzione - egli disse all'Usinger quando Hermann ebbe finito. - I miei studi m'ispirano un immenso orrore per l'opera di rovina che voi meditate; forse,

with an affectionate greeting.

- My friend! - he said ushering the two visitors in. - I'm very happy to see you again. Sir, I would say the same to you but if my memory does not deceive me, I don't think I've met you before. But you're just as welcome in my home.

- William Usinger - said Hermann.

William bowed deeply, and Dr. Cymbalus extended his hand.

- Maestro, my friend is in need of your science - said Hermann, smiling at Usinger.

- Is he sick?

- More than sick; he's decided to kill himself.

- And so young?

- Yes, Maestro, so young!

- He's certainly not come to me for the means to do so - said the doctor. - But let's go into the house. We can discuss this more comfortably there -.

The doctor led his two guests into his study, a chaos of books, papers, maps, instruments, small bottles, vases, skulls, anatomical preparations, and human skeletons. On entering, Usinger felt shivers down his spine.

The doctor sat on an armchair behind the desk. The two friends sat facing him.

The countenance of the old scientist was both sweet and severe. His broad forehead was streaked with deep furrows, his eyes lively and sparkling, notwithstanding the vigils made over half a century on behalf of science and humanity. His lips nearly always smiling, his manner composed, his voice exuding kindness, all revealed an elevated nature, one of those belonging to someone who knows he is superior and who draws from that knowledge the virtue of humility.

- So, you want to die? - said Dr. Cymbalus with a touch of paternal irony.

- Yes, sir, - responded Usinger coldly.

While Hermann told William's painful story in broad terms, Dr. Cymbalus kept his head down and his eyes half closed. His lips expressed a profound commiseration.

- I cannot approve your decision - he said to Usinger when

perché mi trovo, più d'ogni altro, nel caso di misurarne la gravità. La mia vecchiezza e i miei studi mi autorizzano a tenervi questo linguaggio. Le vostre sventure sono grandi; però voi dimenticate che la Natura non toglie nulla senza dar dei compensi. Nel mondo vi sono molti esseri che paiono condannati alla perpetua servitù di altri esseri superiori; nascono, vivono, muoiono senz'un loro apparente profitto. Fra gli uomini, nella vita civile e in quella della intelligenza, succede lo stesso. Il genio potrebbe dirsi una tremenda schiavitù; la scienza, un'orribile catena. Tutta la gloria e tutte le ricchezze di questo mondo non valgono a compensare la più piccola parte dei dolori che l'artista e lo scienziato provano nella creazione delle loro opere e nella ricerca della verità, che è creazione anch'essa. Voi dite di voler morire perché vi è mancata la consolazione degli affetti domestici; ma chi vi dice che la Natura non v'abbia destinato ad esercitare le forze del vostro cuore e del vostro intelletto in una sfera assai più larga di quella della famiglia? La società si compone di tanti cerchi concentrici. La famiglia occupa il posto di mezzo; l'umanità l'ultimo, almeno nel mondo che noi abitiamo. Più in là della famiglia vi è la città; più in là di questa, la nazione; più in là ancora, le nazioni; un campo immenso, fecondissimo, ove quella piena d'affetto che vi tumultua nel cuore potrebbe trovare mille sfoghi. Quante vie non sono aperte alla vostra attività nell'istruzione, nella politica, nella milizia, nel commercio, nelle arti, nelle industrie, nelle scienze, perfino nelle occupazioni più spregevoli?

Per una sublime fatalità, ogni minima influenza del minimo atomo contribuisce, coi suoi mezzi, al grande edificio del progresso. La materia si trasforma e trasforma, alla sua volta, quello che noi chiamiamo spirito, pensiero. Vi siete mai reso conto della benefica legge del lavoro, la più perfetta esplicazione dell'amore? No, certamente. Per vostra mala sorte, vi siete invece concentrato in voi stesso; avete aumentato con crudele compiacenza la forza del male; avete già iniziato, isolandovi, quell'inconsiderata opera di distruzione che ora intendete di compire. Forse non avete mai provato la consolazione di beneficiare i vostri simili...

- Sí, - lo interruppe l'Usinger. - Ma soprattutto (può darsi ch'io sia un grande egoista) ho sempre pensato a me stesso. Io ammiro la grandezza delle cose da lei dette, e mi addoloro di trovarle indifferenti per me, cioè, troppo elevate pel mio cuore, per la mia

Hermann was finished. - My studies inspire in me an immense horror over the ruinous deed you're contemplating, perhaps because I find myself, more than anyone else, able to measure its seriousness. My age and my studies allow me to use this kind of language. Your misfortunes are great, but you forget that Nature does not take from us without providing compensation. In the world there are many beings who appear to be condemned to a perpetual servitude to other, superior beings; they are born, live, move about without achieving any apparent success. But the same happens to cultivated men, intelligent men. Genius can be said to be a powerful servitude, science a horrible chain. All of the glory and all of the wealth of this world cannot compensate for the smallest fraction of pain that the artist and the scientist experience in the creation of their works and in the search for truth, which itself is a creation. You say you want to die because you lack the consolation of domestic affection, but who is it that tells you that Nature has not destined you to exercise the powers of your heart and intellect in a much larger sphere than that of the family? Society is composed of many concentric circles. Family occupies the middle, humanity the last, at least in the world in which we live. Beyond the family is the community, beyond this the nation, beyond this all the other nations, an immense fertile field, where that flood of affection that surges in your heart can find a thousand outlets. Aren't there avenues open to you, in teaching, politics, the military, commerce, the arts, industry, science, even in more despicable occupations?

Because of a sublime fate, every influence of the smallest atom contributes, in its own way, to the grand edifice of progress. Matter transforms itself and transforms what we call spirit, thought. Have you ever considered the beneficial rule of work, the most perfect demonstration of love? Certainly not. Because of your bad luck, you have instead concentrated on yourself; you have strengthened with crude satisfaction the force of evil. By isolating yourself, you have begun that rash destructive act that you now intend to complete. Perhaps you have never experienced the consolation of helping your fellow man...

- Yes, interrupted Usinger. - But, above all (perhaps I'm a very selfish person), I've always thought about myself. I admire the things you've said, and it grieves me to find them unimportant, that is, too elevated for my heart, for my disposition, perhaps even for

indole, fors' anche per la mia stessa volontà. Ma se la sua scienza, o signore, non ha altri mezzi per giovarmi, mi affretto a chiederle scusa di questi momenti di noia. Li deve al mio buon amico Strauss; ma li perdoni a tutti e due.

- Maestro! - disse Hermann, stendendo le mani verso il dottore in atto di preghiera. - Maestro, bisogna salvare ad ogni costo quest'infermo di mente. L'ho qui condotto colla fiducia che lei lo avrebbe salvato.

- Ma in che maniera, caro Strauss? - domandò il dottore.

- Mi son ricordato a un tratto di quella sua straordinaria scoperta, della quale lei diceva di sentirsi atterrito; di quella scoperta che lei vuole portar con sé nella tomba, per non mettere nelle mani della fanciulla umanità un'arma così terribile e di così facile abuso.

Ebbene, Maestro, quella scoperta può strappare alla distruzione una vita vigorosa, un'intelligenza potente. Non vorrà lei stender la mano per salvare metà d'una creatura già decisa di perdersi intiera?

Il dottor Cymbalus guardava William fissamente. Questi aspettava con calma la risoluzione dello scienziato.

- E s'io vi rispondessi che non posso far nulla?

- Mi ammazzerei.

- Ma voi ignorate senza dubbio quello che Hermann mi chiede!

- No, signore. So che si tratta d'un'operazione colla quale rimarrei freddo e insensibile come un uomo senza cuore.

- È un'operazione che qualunque vecchio barbiere sarebbe capace di fare. Ma io provo ribrezzo a stender la mano sopra una creatura perfetta per guastarla senza riparo! Non vo' commettere un sacrilegio. Un ago, una lancetta basterebbero per turbare la meravigliosa armonia del vostro organismo. Qualcosa di voi perirebbe, come per incanto. Diverreste un uomo nuovo, una creatura senz'affetti...

- Non desidero altro - interruppe l'Usinger. - Le mie sventure provengono dal cuore. S'io fossi insensibile, se...

- Ah, ma un giorno voi potreste amaramente rimpiangere quello di cui ora volete disfarvi!

- No, non è possibile; soffro troppo.

- Badate! La scienza sarà impotente a darvi il minimo aiuto. È la sua inferiorità di faccia alla natura, è la sua miseria attuale. Per dispetto, come l'ebreo della leggenda, voi potreste buttar nell'oceano

my very will. But if your science, dear sir, has no other way to help me, I must hasten to beg your pardon for these tedious moments. Blame them on my good friend Strauss, but forgive both of us.

- Maestro! - said Hermann stretching his hands towards the Doctor and entreating him. - Maestro, at all costs, save this man, who is mentally ill. I brought him in the hope that you would save him.

- But how, dear Strauss? - asked the doctor.

- All of a sudden, I recalled that extraordinary discovery of which you said you felt terrified, of that discovery you said you wished to take with you to the grave in order not to put into the hands of a childish humanity a weapon so terrible and so easily abused.

And so, Maestro, that discovery can save from destruction a vigorous life, a potent intelligence. Don't you want to extend your hand to save half a creature who has decided to destroy himself entirely?

Dr. Cymbalus stared at William, who awaited the scientist's decision quietly.

- And if I told you that I could do nothing?

- I would kill myself.

- But, without a doubt, you don't know what Hermann is asking of me!

- No, sir. I know that it concerns an operation that would leave me cold and insensitive like a man without a heart.

- It's an operation some simple barber would be able to perform. But I loathe the idea of putting my hands on a perfect creature to mar him beyond repair! I don't want to commit a sacrilege. A needle, a lancet would be enough to disturb the marvelous harmony of your being. Something of you would perish, as if by magic, but you would become a new man, a creature without feelings...

- That's exactly what I want - Usinger interrupted. - My troubles stem from the heart. If I were insensitive, if...

- Ah, but some day you could bitterly regret losing that which you now want to get rid of!

- No, it's not possible; I suffer too much.

- Listen! Science will be unable to provide you with any help whatsoever. It's inferior in the face of Nature; it's really powerless. Out of spite, like the Hebrew of the legend, you could throw the

la preziosissima gemma del vostro sentimento. Ma nessuno badate! Ripeto, nessuno potrebbe più ripescarvela. Persistete ancora nella vostra risoluzione?

- Più che mai, mio signore!-

Il dottor Cymbalus appoggiò i gomiti sul tavolino, mise la testa tra le mani e stette a riflettere per due minuti. Hermann guardava il suo maestro, trattenendo il respiro. William aspettava, tranquillo, facendo girare tra le dita gli orli del suo berretto da viaggio.

- Avrei amato - disse il dottore - che più della mia scienza vi giovassero i miei consigli. La vita è una bella cosa; credetelo a un vecchio che non può star molto a lasciarla. Dite di no? Dio faccia che un giorno non mi abbiate a dar ragione!-

Il dottor Cymbalus scrisse una prescrizione sur un foglietto di carta e la porse ad Hermann:

- Dopo sei giorni di questa cura, tornate qui. Tenteremo -.

Hermann si precipitò sulla mano del maestro e la coperse di baci. William si sentiva stranamente commosso.

Una settimana dopo, Hermann e William picchiavano al cancello della villetta.

In un angolo della camera larga ed ariosa era preparato il letto pel paziente. Sopra il tavolino rotondo posto nel centro, vedevansi due boccette con liquidi rossi e nerastri, fasce ripiegate, filacce e una piccola borsa chirurgica.

William guardò questi apparati con occhio indifferente.

Il dottor Cymbalus gli ordinò di mettersi a letto, poi gli somministrò il cloroformio.

Mentre Hermann, aiutato dal servo del dottore, rivoltava bocconi il suo povero William reso insensibile, il dottore cavava fuori dalla borsina due aghi e una lancetta, preparava due fasce e stendeva sopra cuscinetti di filacce un po' di quei liquidi rossi e nerastri delle boccette, che subito si rapprendevano.

Era sopra pensiero.

- Lasciatemi solo - egli disse; - e non entrate prima che io suoni -.

Trascorsero dieci minuti; durante i quali Hermann, che origliava dietro l'uscio, non sentì altro nella camera che il passo affrettato del dottore dal letto al tavolino e dal tavolino al letto. Benché non dubitasse menomamente della riuscita, era agitatissimo, tremava,

most precious gem of your feelings into the ocean. But no one, listen! No one, would be able to salvage it. Your decision to do this is still firm?

- More than ever, sir!

Dr. Cymbalus leaned his elbows on the table, put his head between his hands, and remained like that, reflecting on the situation for two minutes. Herman watched his teacher, holding his breath. William waited quietly, twirling the edges of his traveling beret between his fingers.

- I would have loved - said the doctor - that you had gained more from my advice than from my science. This life is a beautiful thing; take it from an old man who will soon leave it. You don't agree? May God will that I never be proven right.

Dr. Cymbalus wrote a prescription on a piece of paper and handed it to Hermann:

- After you've taken this for six days, come back. We'll attempt it.

Hermann grasped the hand of the maestro and covered it with kisses. William felt himself strangely moved.

A week later, Hermann and William knocked at the gate of the small villa.

A bed for the patient had been prepared in a corner of a large and airy room. On a small, round table in the center of the room were two small bottles containing liquids of red and of a blackish hue, folded bandages, gauze, and a small surgical case.

William looked at the apparatus indifferently.

Dr. Cymbalus ordered him to get into bed and then administered chloroform.

While Hermann, helped by the doctor's servant, rolled poor William, now unconscious, face down, the doctor took from the case two needles and a lancet, prepared two bandages, and poured the red and the blackish liquids from the small bottles over the gauze pads. They quickly congealed.

He was lost in thought.

Leave me alone - he said; - and don't enter before I ring.

Ten minutes passed, during which Hermann, who was eavesdropping behind the door, heard nothing in the room other than the doctor's moving quickly from the bed to the table and from

non vedeva l'ora che l'uscio della stanza di William fosse stato aperto.

Il dottore suonò.

- Tenetevi pronti - disse, vedendo entrare Hermann e il servitore. - Appena si sveglierà, le sue convulsioni saranno tremende -.

Un lento mugolio annunciava da lì a poco il ritorno ai sensi dell'Usinger.

Le filaccine, trattenute da due fasce nel mezzo della spina dorsale e all'occipite, indicavano il posto dove l'operazione aveva avuto luogo. Non vi si scorgeva traccia di sangue.

William stirava le braccia con moto convulsivo, poi le lasciava cadere come sfinite. Tentò svoltarsi, ma non riuscì. Lo lasciarono fare. Il dottore aveva raccomandato intervenissero soltanto nel caso che quello cercasse di strapparsi le fasce.

Il mugolio diventava a poco a poco un urlo prolungato. William mordeva i cuscini, tormentava con le mani le lenzuola e le materasse, si agitava con tutta la persona, e urlava:

- Ahi! ahi! La morte! La morte! Ahi! Ahi! -

Quando videro che tentava di strapparsi le fasce, Hermann e il servo lo afferrarono ai polsi. Era livido, colla fisionomia contratta, cogli occhi terribilmente spalancati.

- Ahi! ahi! - continuava ad urlare. - La morte! La morte! -

- Vi è da temere, maestro? - domandò Hermann ansioso.

- Tutto va bene - rispose il dottore con la soddisfazione dello scienziato che ha ottenuto una vittoria.

William restò per alcuni minuti come un corpo inerte. Il dottor Cymbalus gli tastava il polso.

- Le convulsioni ricominciano; saranno le ultime, ma più violente -.

L'accesso riprese appena il dottore aveva terminato di parlare, ma non durò molto. William ricadde spossato.

- Lasciamolo riposare - disse il dottor Cymbalus. - Già si sviluppa la febbre. È la Natura che si solleva contro la violazione delle sue leggi! - William dormì tranquillamente quattr'ore di fila. Quando svegliossi, i suoi occhi smarriti si fissavano sulle persone e sugli oggetti intentamente, come per riconoscerli bene; poi passavan via, senza lasciar capire se gli avesse o no riconosciuti. Le sue mani brancicavano nel vuoto, sfregavano le coperte; poi si tastava il viso, il petto, lo stomaco, e tornava a brancicare qualcosa

the table to the bed. Although he had not the slightest doubt about the success of the surgery, he became very agitated. He trembled, waiting impatiently for the door to William's room to open.

The doctor rang.

- Get ready - he said, seeing Hermann and the servant enter.
- As soon as he awakes, his convulsions will be terrible -.

A slight whimper indicated that in a little while Usinger would regain consciousness.

The gauze pads, held by two bandages between the backbone and the occipital bone indicated the place where the surgery had occurred. No trace of blood could be seen.

William stretched out his arms convulsively, then let them fall as if exhausted. He tried to turn but was unable to. They let him alone. The doctor had recommended intervening only if he attempted to pull off his bandages.

Little by little, his whimpering became a prolonged scream. He bit the pillows, tortured the sheets and mattress with his hands, shook his entire body and screamed:

- Ahi! Ahi! Death! Ahi! Ahi! -

When they saw him attempt to strip off his bandages, Hermann and the servant grabbed his wrists. He was ashen, his face contracted, his eyes wide open in terror.

- Ahi, ahi! - he continued to scream. - Death! Death! -

- Is there anything to fear, Maestro? - asked Hermann anxiously.

- All is well - responded the doctor with the satisfaction of a scientist who knows he has achieved victory.

William remained there for a few minutes like a corpse. Dr. Cymbalus took his pulse.

- The convulsions are beginning again; they'll be the last but the most violent-.

The outbursts began as soon as the doctor finished speaking, but they did not last long. William fell back, exhausted.

- Let's him rest - said Dr. Cymbalus. - The fever has already started. It's Nature that's rising against the violation of its laws! - William slept peacefully for four hours in a row. When he woke, he fixed his puzzled stare on the people and objects around him to try to recognize them; then, he looked away without letting them know whether he had recognized them. His hands groped around,

invisibile. La sua voce era un lamento basso, interrotto, una specie di singhiozzo. Durò così due giorni. Al terzo riconobbe Hermann e gli strinse la mano: sorrise al dottore.

- Soffro molto - diceva; - soffro molto qui -. E gl'indicava il petto.

- Non è nulla - rispondeva il dottor Cymbalus. - Passerà -.

Quando questi gli tolse le fasce, Hermann vide su la spina dorsale e sull'occipite di William due piccolissime cicatrici, due graffiature nere; niente altro.

William si sentiva uscire a poco a poco da un profondo sbalordimento. Le idee gli erravano per la mente, gli sfuggivano, gli tornavano innanzi come nuvoloni sballottati da un temporale; poi cominciarono ad ordinarsi simili a una folla di persone entrate confusamente in una sala che riescono infine a trovar tutte il lor posto. Capiva che doveva essere accaduto qualcosa di straordinario dentro di lui; provava un vuoto immenso e un benessere ineffabile, ma non si ricordava bene: credeva d'aver sognato.

- Hermann, il dottor Cymbalus, il letto, la stanza, l'operazione subita non erano fantasmi creati dalla sua fantasia delirante? Si era forse ucciso, e quello stato di calma era la sua nuova esistenza in un mondo migliore? -

Finalmente ebbe la certezza della realtà.

- *Consummatum est!* - gli disse il dottor Cymbalus scotendo la testa tristamente.

- Ella è il genio del bene! - rispose William.

- Dite piuttosto il genio del male, capace di distruggere e non di edificare!

- Ah, dottore, come son lieto di non aver ascoltato i suoi consigli! Io gusto una pace, una felicità che non credevo possibili sulla terra! -

Infatti era una felicità vera. All'eccessivo tumulto dei suoi affetti succedeva un silenzio completo. I suoni gli aliavano intorno alle orecchie, sussurrandovi le loro note senza decidersi ad entrarvi. I colori venivano a posarglisi sulla retina colla delicata precauzione di chi non vorrebbe farsi scorgere.

Quella parola misteriosa della malinconia dei tramonti, del mormorio delle acque, del profumo dei fiori, delle linee della campagna, della serenità dei laghi, dell'altero slanciarsi dei monti

pulling at the covers; then, he touched his face, his chest, his stomach, and he began again to grope at something invisible. His voice uttered a deep disrupted lament, a kind of sighing. He remained that way for two days. On the third, he recognized Hermann and squeezed his hand, and he smiled at the doctor.

- I'm suffering a lot! - he said; - It hurts a lot here -. And he pointed to his chest.

- It's nothing - responded Dr. Cymbalus. - It will pass.

When the doctor removed the bandages, Hermann saw on the spine and occipital bone two tiny scars, two black scratches. Nothing else.

William felt himself arise from a profound shock. Ideas rambled through his mind, disappeared, then returned as before like big clouds tossed around by a storm. Then they began to organize themselves like a crowd of people who have entered a room in confusion, finally succeeding in finding their places. He understood that something extraordinary must have occurred within him; he felt an immense void and an ineffable sense of well-being, but he did not remember anything well: he believed he had been dreaming.

Weren't Dr. Cymbalus, the bed, the room, the operation he had undergone phantasms created by his delirium? Had he perhaps killed himself, and wasn't his state of tranquility his new existence in a better world?

Finally, he became certain of the reality.

- *Consummatum est!* - Dr. Cymbalus told him, shaking his head sadly.

- You are the genius of goodness! - responded William.

- Say instead, the genius of evil, able to destroy and not to build.

- Oh, doctor, how happy I am not to have taken your advice. I am enjoying a peace, a happiness I did not believe possible on earth!

Indeed, it was true happiness. A complete silence followed the tumult of his emotions. Sounds seemed to hover about his ears, whispering their notes without deciding to enter. Colors placed themselves on his retina, delicately so as not to be perceived.

He no longer heard nor understood that mysterious, melancholic word of the sunset, the murmur of water, the fragrance of flowers, the contours of the countryside, the serenity of the lakes,

al cielo, del mesto sprofondarsi delle vallate; quella parola misteriosa che tutti cerchiamo, che tutti ci sforziamo a riprodurre, poeti, romanzieri, pittori, scultori, maestri di musica, quella viva ed eterna parola dell'universa natura, lui non la sentiva più o non la intendeva. Viveva come circondato da un'immensa solitudine, tra le vaste ruine d'un mondo una volta animato. E si sentiva felice, e s'inorgogliva di se stesso.

- Come era superiore a quanto gli stava attorno! Nulla giungeva più a fare nessun'impressione su lui! - Ricordava sua madre, ricordava Ida Blümer, le sole creature ch'egli avesse immensamente amate e per le quali il suo cuore aveva tanto sofferto; ma non provava più né commozione, né rimpianto: Era vendicato di esse! - Gioiva del suo trionfo.

Durante questo tempo, avvenimenti inaspettati mettevano sossopra il palazzo, della contessa K***.

La sventura avea spetrato quel cuore di madre, e il pentimento e il rimorso la conducevano alla casa del figliuolo così spietatamente abbandonato, e, una volta, fatto scacciare dai suoi servitori.

William abitava insieme ad Hermann.

Quella stessa vecchia che un giorno lo introdusse nella stanza di studio del suo amico gli annunciò la visita d'una gran dama.

- Passi - rispose smettendo di lavorare.

Una signora vestita a lutto, con un fitto velo sul viso si presentava su la soglia. Esitava ad inoltrarsi.

William le era andato incontro. Allora quella signora avea sollevato il suo velo ed era rimasta a testa bassa innanzi a lui.

- Mia madre -.

William non si era scomposto.

Ma la signora, fulminata da quella freddezza, lo fissò in volto. Non vi traspariva nessun indizio di commozione repressa. Suo figlio la guardava attentamente, ma con impassibile tranquillità.

Al grido straziante della contessa, e al vederla inorridita, William avea alzate le spalle ed era tornato al tavolino, a disegnare figure di geometria.

Otto giorni dopo, passando davanti a la casa dove si espongono i cadaveri non riconosciuti delle persone perite di morte improvvisa o violenta, avea veduto molta gente affollarsi sull'uscio. La curiosità lo avea spinto ad entrarvi.

Sopra una bara giaceva il cadavere d'una giovine dai diciotto

the soaring of the mountains high into the heavens, the wistful falling of the valleys; that living and eternal word of universal Nature! That same mysterious word that we all seek, that we all strain to produce once again, poets, painters, novelists, sculptors, master musicians! He lived as if surrounded by an immense solitude, among the vast ruins of a once-animated world. And he was happy and took pride in himself.

How superior he was to what was around him! Nothing succeeded in making an impression on him anymore! He remembered his mother, he remembered Ida Blümer, the only creatures he had truly loved and for whom his heart had suffered so much; but he no longer felt any emotion, nor any regrets: He had avenged himself against them! And he enjoyed his triumph.

During this time, unexpected events put the palace of Countess K***** into turmoil.

These misfortunes had broken that maternal heart, and her regret and remorse brought her to the home of her son, whom she had so ruthlessly abandoned and whom she had once directed her servants to throw out of her house.

William lived with Hermann.

That same old woman who one day had conducted him into his friend's study announced the visit of a grand lady.

- Come in - he responded and stopped working.

A woman dressed in mourning, with a thick veil over her face presented herself on the threshold. She hesitated to enter.

William approached her. She raised her veil and stood before him with her head down.

- My mother -.

William was not ruffled.

But the lady, shocked by his coldness, stared him in the face. Not a trace of repressed emotion was apparent. Her son looked at her carefully but with impassive tranquility.

At a tortured cry from the countess and at seeing her horrified, William shrugged his shoulders and returned to the table to continue designing geometric figures.

Eight days later, passing in front of the house where unclaimed cadavers of persons who had died suddenly or violently were laid out, he saw a crowd of people around the doorway. Curiosity caused him to enter.

ai vent'anni.

Bella, vestita con eleganza, aveva i capelli rappresi sulla fronte e sul collo; gli abiti ancora bagnati indicavano il genere di morte scelto dalla infelice per finire i suoi giorni.

- È Ida Blümer - egli disse; - la riconosco -.

Condotto davanti al commissario, vi fece la sua deposizione. La vista di quel cadavere lo aveva lasciato indifferente.

Eran passati sei anni.

- Che cosa voleva dire quella stanchezza vaga, indefinibile che cominciava ad insinuarsi nella sua vita regolare e monotona? Quei confronti del passato col presente che gli erano stati cagione di tanta allegrezza, perché ora prendevano un accento di lieve rimprovero? -

Fu spaurito di questi sintomi e cercò di svagarsi.

- Ma come sfuggire la memoria? Si vedeva perseguitato da essa perfino nei sogni. Giorno per giorno, ora per ora, minuto per minuto la stanchezza e la noia aumentavano. Non poteva far nulla per arrestarle; si sentiva inetto a resistere.

- La gran legge del lavoro! - Aveva un bel ricordarsene; non gli riusciva di lavorare. Si stancava, si annoiava subito. Gli mancava qualcosa che gli rendesse caro il lavoro.

La sua solitudine gli faceva spavento. I momenti più tristi della sua vita gli parvero preferibili, immensamente, a quella calma di morte che l'operazione del dottor Cymbalus gli aveva procurata.

- Mamma! Ida! Mamma! Ida! - chiamava ad alta voce, chiuso nella sua stanza, senza voler vedere nessuno.

Tentava di riscuotersi con quei nomi dal torpore che lo teneva incatenato fra i suoi terribili nodi.

- Ma nulla! -

Quelle parole: "Mamma, Ida" gli risuonavano nell'orecchio come due voci che non avessero mai avuto alcun senso per lui.

- Ah! Quell'ore di pianto, di disperazione di strazio mortale passate a guardar da lontano le finestre del palazzo K*** nelle notti d'inverno! Ah! quell'ore d'agonia, quando si struggeva di abbracciare sua madre che, perduta tra le feste e i conviti, più non si ricordava di lui! Quelle erano state ore! E quando i furori della gelosia, i folli propositi di vendetta gli avevano sconvolto il cervello, al tradimento di Ida Blümer? Che emozioni! Che divini dolori!...

On top of a bier lay the body of a young woman between eighteen and twenty years old.

She was beautiful and elegantly dressed. But her hair was clotted with blood on her forehead and neck, and her clothes, still wet, indicated the kind of death this poor woman had chosen to end her days.

- It's Ida Blümer - he said; - I recognize her -.

Brought before the chief of police, he gave his deposition. But the sight of the body had left him indifferent.

Six years had passed.

What did that vague indefinable fatigue mean, which began to insinuate itself into his ordered and monotonous life? Those comparisons of the past with the present, which had caused so much happiness, why did they now take on an accent of slight reprimand?

He was frightened by these symptoms and sought to distract himself.

But how to flee from memory? He saw himself chased by it even into his dreams. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, his fatigue and his ennui increased. He could do nothing to stop it and felt himself unable to resist.

- The great command of work! - He was certainly aware of it, but he could not work. He became tired, bored quickly. Something in him that would render work valuable was missing.

His solitude scared him. The saddest moments of his life seemed preferable, immensely so, to that deathly calm that Dr. Cymbalus's operation had brought to him.

- Mamma! Ida! Mamma! Ida! - he called out loud, closed up in his room, not wanting to see anyone.

By calling those names, he had tried to rescue himself from that torpor that held him chained in its terrible bonds!

Nothing came of it!

Those words: "Mamma! Ida!" echoed in his ear like two voices that had never made any sense to him.

Ah! Those hours of tears, of desperation, of mortal torment as he had watched the windows of Palazzo***** from a distance on winter nights. Ah, those hours of agony when he consumed himself trying to embrace his mother who, lost in holiday parties and soirees, did not remember him! They were such hours! And

Ed ora, più nulla! Nulla!

Un giorno corse da sua madre.

La contessa K*** si preparava per un viaggio lontano. Nel momento che William saliva le scale del palazzo ricordando la trista scena di parecchi anni fa, essa trovavasi nel suo elegante salotto, abbandonata su una poltrona col viso fra le mani, piangente. Una cameriera levava della roba da un mobile antico incrostato di avorio e di madreperla, e nominato un oggetto, aspettava che la sua signora le rispondesse sí o no con un cenno del capo.

William irrompeva nella stanza.

La contessa pareva ammattita dalla gioia. Rideva, piangeva, lo abbracciava, lo carezzava, tornava ad abbracciarlo.

William non rifiniva dal baciarla:

- Il contatto di quelle labbra dovea fargli rivivere il cuore!

Chiamami figlio! Chiamami figlio!

- Figliuolo, figliuolo mio! - ripeteva la contessa.

Il rimorso, il pentimento, la gioia rendevano sublime l'accento di lei.

William smaniava; si scioglieva dalle braccia di sua madre, le metteva una mano sulla fronte per tenerle sollevato il volto:

- Voleva contemplarlo bene e assorbire tutti gli splendori di quegli occhi! Qui le tue mani, sul mio cuore! ... Premi forte! ... Ancora più forte! Ma no! No! Quel terribile gelo non voleva fondersi. Il suo cuore era morto per sempre! Non un palpito! Non una leggiera emozione! Baciava forse una statua? Era un'infamia! Oh! maledetta quella scienza che lo aveva così ridotto!-

La mattina dopo, senza dir nulla al suo amico, William Usinger prese la strada che conduceva alla villetta del dottor Cymbalus.

Era giorno di festa. Allegre brigate di uomini e di donne, sparse pei prati che fiancheggiavano la strada, conversavano allegramente o ballavano al suono del violino e del contrabasso. William si fermava a guardare quelle persone felici; ma non capiva più nulla di quella loro musica, e di quelle loro canzoni. Quei visi sorridenti gli sembravano atteggiati a scherno o a disprezzo per lui.

Il dottor Cymbalus lo ricevette colla sua solita cordialità.

William gli espose quel che provava.

- Io non v'ingannavo, figliuolo mio! - gli disse il dottore diventato tristo e meditabondo. - Forse sarebbe stato meglio vi

when the furies of jealousy, the insane plans to seek revenge for Ida Blümer's betrayal had ravaged his mind? What divine pain!... And now, nothing more! Nothing!

One day, he ran to his mother.

The Countess K was preparing for a long trip. When William climbed the stairs of the palace, recalling that sad scene a few years earlier, she was in her elegant salon, collapsed in her easy chair, her face in her hands, crying. A maid was taking clothes from an antique piece of furniture inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl. Having mentioned an article, she waited for her mistress to respond "yes" or "no" with a movement of her head.

William broke into the room.

The countess appeared to go mad with joy. She laughed, cried, hugged, and caressed him, then began to hug him again.

William could not stop kissing her. The contact of those lips should have made his heart come alive! - Call me son! Call me son!

- Son, my son! - repeated the countess.

The remorse, the regret, the joy rendered her tone sublime.

William was agitated. He freed himself from his mother's embrace, and he put a hand on her forehead to keep her face raised.

He wanted to contemplate and absorb the splendor of her eyes completely! - Put your hands here, on my heart! ... Press hard! ... Even harder! - But no! No! That terrible iciness would not melt. His heart was forever dead! Not even a beat! Not the slightest emotion! Was he perhaps kissing a statue? It was an abomination! Oh! Damn that science, which had reduced him to this! -

The morning after, without saying a word to his friend, William Usinger made his way to the street that led to Dr. Cymbalus's small villa.

It was a holiday. Happy groups of men and women spread across the grassy areas on the side of the road were conversing happily and dancing to the sound of a violin and a double-bass. William stopped to look at those happy people; but he no longer could relate to their music or their songs. Those smiling faces seemed to express only scorn or disdain for him.

Dr. Cymbalus received him with his usual courtesy.

William explained what he was experiencing.

avessi lasciato mettere in atto la vostra disperata risoluzione! Non credete per questo che vi fossi indotto da una vanità di scienziato, per tentar l'esperimento delle mie scoperte. Voi calunniereste il mio cuore d'onest'uomo che la scienza fa palpitare vivamente per qualunque creatura che soffre. Fui sedotto da una speranza; osai sperare che la natura non sarebbe stata inesorabile. Eravate così giovane! Avevate tanto sofferto! Ma la natura non muta le sue ineluttabili leggi.

- Addio dottore! - disse William.

- Abbiate coraggio, abbiate coraggio!

- Avrò coraggio -.

Il dottor Cymbalus dalla finestra del suo studio seguì con l'occhio il giovane che s'allontanava a capo chino. Lo vide fermarsi per consegnar qualcosa al servo poi sparire nel campo vicino, dietro un folto gruppo di alberi.

S'udì un'esplosione d'arma da fuoco.

Il dottore corse in fretta, accompagnato dal servo, verso il punto dove l'Usinger era scomparso.

William giaceva a terra immerso in un lago di sangue, col petto squarciato da una terribile ferita.

Quando il servo consegnò al dottore il foglio ricevuto alcuni momenti prima, il vecchio scienziato lo aperse tremando dalla commozione, colle lacrime agli occhi. Esso conteneva queste brevi parole:

«Lascio tutto il mio patrimonio al dottor Franz Cymbalus ed al mio amico Hermann Strauss perché con esso istituiscano una scuola gratuita dove si insegni ad AMARE!»

Firenze, settembre 1865

- I was not misleading you, my boy! - the doctor told him, becoming sad and pensive. - Perhaps it would have been better if I had let you fulfill your desperate resolution! Don't think that I was prompted to do this because of scientific vanity, to test my findings. You would defame the heart of an honest man, which science causes to beat vigorously for any creature that suffers. I was seduced by a hope. I dared to wish that Nature would not be relentless. You were so young! You had suffered so much! But Nature does not change its ineluctable laws.

- Farewell, doctor! - said William.

- Have courage! Courage!

- I will.

From the window of his study, Dr. Cymbalus followed the young man with his eyes as he walked away with his head down. He saw him stop to give something to a servant, then disappear into a nearby field behind a dense stand of trees.

The sound of a fire arm going off was heard.

The doctor ran quickly, accompanied by the servant, toward the place where Usinger had disappeared.

William lay on the ground in a pool of blood, his chest ripped open by a terrible wound.

When the servant gave the doctor the sheet of paper he had received a few moments before, the old scientist opened it, trembling with emotion, tears filling his eyes. It contained these brief words:

«I leave all of my possessions to Doctor. Franz Cymbalus and to my friend Hermann Strauss so that they might establish a free school to teach people how to LOVE!»

Florence, September 1865

Poems by Donna Pucciani

Translated by Daniela De Vincenti Marchese, Luciano Antonio Sestito, and Donna Pucciani

Daniela de Vincenti Marchese was born in Cosenza, Italy. After five years of classical studies, she became Doctor in Economia e Commercio graduating cum laude at the Università Federico II in Napoli, Italy. She taught Italian at College of DuPage and currently she manages and teaches her own Italian classes.

Luciano Antonio Sestito, born in Cutro (KR), a small southern town of Italy. Sestito graduated with his doctoral degree in architecture at the University of Florence. In the late 1970s, he taught Industrial Arts in Fiesole. Sestito moved to the United States where he received a Master's Degree in the Arts of Teaching from Aurora University. Retired now after teaching at a technical high school in DuPage County, Illinois for the past 18 years, Sestito enjoys teaching Italian, constructing stained glass window displays and woodworking.

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry on four continents in such diverse journals as *Poetry Salzburg, America, Istanbul Literary Review, Shi Chao Poetry*, and *Gradiiva*. Her work has been translated into Italian, Chinese, Japanese and German. In addition to five Pushcart nominations, she has won awards from the Illinois Arts Council and The National Federation of State Poetry Societies, among others. Her sixth and most recent collection of poems is *A Light Dusting of Breath* (Purple Flag Press, Virtual Artists Collective, Chicago, 2014).



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Windy Day* (giornata di vento), oil on canvas,
cm.89x147 (2016)

Aleatory

There's an order
to the universe, my father said,
and pointed to books on the shelf
that explained everything

except the randomness of things,
the way happiness and sadness
unravel like old socks,
or stars.

For Tony in Italy

Your oxygen tank follows you
like a stray cat

since the heat of October
rose in the mountain air

that you couldn't get enough of.
At the hospital, they drained

the fluids and gave you back
your lungs, fragile as flowers.

From one breath to another, Tonino,
remember how sturdy you once were,

and how strong is the pure
north Atlantic air between

Chicago and Cosenza.
Love the invisible force

that keeps you
filling and emptying.

Translation by Daniela De Vincenti and Donna Pucciani

Aleatorio

C'è un disegno
nell'universo, mio padre diceva,
e indicava i libri sullo scaffale
che spiegavano tutto

eccetto il caso delle cose,
il modo in cui la felicità e la tristezza
si sbrogliano come calzini vecchi,
o stelle.

Per Tony in Italia

La tua bombola di ossigeno ti segue
come un gatto randagio

dopo che il caldo di ottobre
si è sollevato nell'aria della montagna

e non puoi prenderne abbastanza.
In ospedale, hanno drenato

i fluidi e ti hanno restituito
i tuoi polmoni, fragili come fiori.

Fra un respiro e l'altro, Tonino,
ricorda quanto eri forte,

e come forte è l'aria pura
del nord Atlantico fra

Chicago e Cosenza.
Ama la forza invisibile

che continua
a riempirti e a svuotarti.

The Girls of St. Hilda's

Comforting, somehow,
Liz describes the class reunion.
Every year, school chums
gather like blackbirds in a tree,
singing for just one day
in a far corner of England.

The rest of the year, their faces
float like star dancers
among geraniums and folded socks,
hover like apples at the lip of a bowl,
drift like clouds in a crocodile sky.

Memories are silvery things.
They arrive at the hour of the traces
like little shells, bird skulls,
bits of straw, the puffed gills
of fish, a knife lodged in bread.

Once, everything was possible.
Then one spring, the smell of earth
was stronger than before, the scent
of lengthening shadows darker,
the irrevocable order of events
finally visible in the setting sun.

The children have left home,
husbands have died or play golf for escape.
The old scholars in pearls
have learned to be alone,
to make art from catastrophe,
traveling infinite distances every year
back into each others' arms,
sitting again at wooden desks with inkwells
among walls painted brown and cream,
then sipping strong tea and sherry in the parlour.

Translation by Luciano Sestito

Le Ragazze di Sant'Ilda

Confortante, in qualche modo,
Liz descrive la Riunione di Classe.
Ogni anno, gli amici più vicini di scuola
si radunano come uccelli neri su un albero
per un solo giorno cinguettando
in un lontano angolo di Inghilterra.

Il resto dell'anno, le loro faccie
galleggiano come stelle danzanti,
fra gerani e calzini ripiegati
come mele oscillanti sul bordo di una ciotola
si disperdono come nubi vaganti in un cielo di coccodrillo.

Le memorie sono cose argentate
arrivano all'ora delle tracce
come piccole conchiglie, teschi di uccelli
pezzetti di fieno, branchie gonfiate
di pesce, un coltello inserito nel pane.

Una volta, tutto era possibile.
Allora una primavera, l'odore di terra
era più forte di prima, il profumo
dell'allungarsi di ombre più scure,
l'irrevocabile ordine degli eventi
finalmente visibili nel tramonto del sole.

I bambini hanno lasciato casa,
mariti sono morti o giocano a golf per scappare.
Le vecchie alunne in perle
hanno imparato a stare da sole,
fare un'arte da una catastrofe,
viaggiando infinite distanze ogni anno
ritornando ognuno nelle braccia dell'altra,
sedendo ancora ai banchi di legno con calamai
fra pareti dipinte marrone e crema,
poi sorseggiando un te' forte ed uno sherry nel salotto.

The sleeves of their cashmere sweaters
brush the tops of pastries, the watercress memories,
the trays of crustless sandwiches
garnished with cucumber smiles.

Recollected

The photos emerge
from their hiding place in the cellar,

sepia fish, or paper ghosts
with white deckled borders.

Our fathers, long dead, boast
the cheerful sibilance of baldness,

a halo in the camera's flash.
Our mothers, bedecked

in aprons and strange eyeglasses,
flap like crows' wings.

Then ourselves, in jeans too tight
or loose, a scherzo of lapels

and weird hair. It hurts to laugh
at our remembered youth.

Take the day Grandma
sprayed her hair with starch.

We cleaned her up, then piled into
the Studebaker for New Year's fireworks.

Dolor squeezes through the cracks
of memory--the career that never was,

the shock of suicide. In the blur
of work, food, sleep, we sigh

Le maniche dei loro maglioni di cashmere
strofinano la parte superiore dei dolci, le memorie dei
[watercress,
i vassoi di sandwiches senza crosta,
guarniti con cetrioli sorridenti.

Memorizzati

Le foto emergono
da un posto nascosto nella cantina,

pesce seppia, o fantasmi di carta
con bianchi bordi adornati.

I nostri padri, morti da tempo,
esaltano l'allegro sibilo della calvizie,

un'aureola dal flash della macchina fotografica.
Le nostre madri abbellite

in grembiuli e strani occhiali
svolazzanti come ali di corvi.

Noi stessi allora, in jeans troppo stretti
o larghi, per scherzo con risvolti

e strane capigliature. Fa male ridere
della nostra ricordata gioventu` passata.

Prendi, ad esempio, il giorno che la Nonna
spruzzò con l'amido i capelli.

Noi la pulimmo, e poi stipati nella
Studebaker verso i fuochi d'artificio di Capodanno.

Il dolore preme sulle fessure
della memoria la carriera che mai fu,

lo shock del suicidio. Nell'offuscamento
del lavoro, mangiare, dormire, osserviamo

platitudes: we have our health,
we have each other,

knowing that even these gifts
will be snatched from our hands

as if we were children wanting too much.
Our ration, randomly appointed,

is an orange in a stocking
hung on the mantel for Christmas.

tante banalità: abbiamo la nostra salute,
abbiamo l'uno con l'altro,

sapendo che persin questi doni
verranno strappati dalle nostre mani

come se fossimo bambini che vogliono più del troppo.
La nostra porzione é a caso assegnata,

l'arancia nella calza
appesa alla mensola del camino.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Haftlinge*, terracotta and wire, cm.h78x53x17
(2008)

SPECIAL FEATURES

Poems by Emilio Villa

Translated by Gianluca Rizzo and Dominic Siracusa

Gianluca Rizzo is the Paganucci Assistant Professor of Italian at Colby College. He lives and works between Waterville, ME, and Boston. His research focuses on modern and contemporary macaronic writing, contemporary poetry, theater, and aesthetics. He published numerous articles, poems, and translations, both from English to Italian and vice-versa (in *Or*, *Chicago Review*, *l'immaginazione*, *il Verri*, *Autografo*, etc.). With Luigi Ballerini and Paul Vangelisti he edited an anthology of American poetry in translation entitled *Nuova Poesia Americana*, New York (Mondadori, 2009), which will be followed by an additional installment dedicated to the poetry of Chicago, forthcoming in 2016. With Massimo Ciavolella he edited the volumes *Like Doves Summoned by Desire: Dante's New Life in 20th Century Literature and Cinema* (Agincourt Press, 2013), and *Savage Words: Invectives as a Literary Genre* (Agincourt Press, 2016). He also edited and wrote the introduction to *Tutto il teatro* by Elio Pagliarani, published in 2013 by Marsilio. Oedipus just printed his first collection of verse entitled *Il lavoro meccanico: Un'apocalisse in quattro tempi*, as part of the series Megamicri, edited by Mariano Baino.

Dominic Siracusa received his PhD in 2014 from the University of California, Los Angeles with a dissertation entitled *Emilio Villa: A Poet of Biblical Proportions*. He completed his bachelor of arts degree in Italian studies at the American University of Rome and holds a master's degree in Italian literature from Middlebury College, Vermont. Siracusa has authored numerous translations of both poetry and prose by writers such as F.T. Marinetti, Enif Robert, Rosa Rosà, Angelo Lumelli, Flavio Ermini, Andrea Inglese, Carla Stroppa, Franco Rella, and Ranieri Teti. Together with Gianluca Rizzo, he has translated selections of futurist theater, poetry, and prose, as well as works by Burchiello, Cecco Angiolieri, Luciano Caruso, Mario Baino, and Andrea Camilleri. In 2011 Siracusa received the Academy of American Poets' prestigious Raiziss / de Palchi award for Italian poetry in translation, and in 2014 published *The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa* with Contra Mundum Press, a volume

that contains a vast selection of Villa's multilingual poetry as well as excerpts from his translation of the Hebrew Bible, his writings on ancient and modern art, and his visual poetry. Currently, Siracusa works as a free-lance translator and resides in San Francisco.

The introduction and the translation below are included in the anthology Those Who from Afar Look Like Flies, edited by Luigi Ballerini and Beppe Cavatorta, forthcoming from University of Toronto Press. For these and additional translations of poems by Villa, see also The Selected Poetry of Emilio Villa, edited by Dominic Siracusa, Contra Mundum Press, 2014.

Poet, visual artist, translator, critic and biblicist, **Emilio Villa** was born in Affori (Milan) in 1914. Throughout his whole life he displayed a fiercely independent spirit, both in everyday life and in matters of aesthetics. He never joined any of the schools, artistic groups or -isms that animated the Novecento, but rather preferred a proud isolation. His poems encompass modern and ancient languages, including Milanese, Italian, French, English, Latin, Greek, Sumerian, and Accadian. Fundamental to his formation were the years he spent at a Seminary school in Seveso, outside Milan. He published his first collection of verse, *Adolescenza* (Adolescence, 1934) while attending the Istituto Biblico in Rome, where he specialized in Sumerian and Ancient Semitic Philology. His subsequent collections *Oramai* (By Now, 1947) and *E ma dopo* (Yes But Later, 1950), deal with the trauma of war and the difficulties of post-conflict recovery. They display a strikingly original style, devoid of any paternalistic tone. In these two works he employs a rhetoric that clearly separates him from the contemporary Hermetic and Neo-realist production. Starting with *17 variazioni su temi proposti per una pura ideologia fonetica* (17 variations on proposed themes for a pure phonetic ideology, 1955), and *Heurarium* (1961) he began experimenting with languages other than Italian, eventually developing a distinctively fluid melange of tongues that became his most productive means of expression. A good example of this "macaronic" style (based in English) is *Brunt H Options, Seventeen Scatological Madrigals Captured by a Sweetromatic Cybernetogamic Vampire* (1968). Later, he focused primarily on dead languages, especially ancient

Greek and Latin. See, for instance, *Verboracula* (1981), *Le mûra di t; éb; é* (The Walls of T;éb; é, 1981), *Geometria Reformata* (1990), and *12 Sibyllae* (1995). He also translated from these ancient languages, adopting the same unconventional attitude found in his poetry: his version of Homer's *Odyssey* in Italian resonates with astounding modernity. He worked on an a-confessional edition of the Bible, parts of which survived in his Italian translation of the *Song of Songs*, the book of *Job*, and *Proverbs*. This unbiased and unapologetic rendition of the Book, however, encountered much resistance from specialists. Throughout his life Villa befriended and collaborated with a number of influential visual artists such as Alberto Burri, Eliseo Mattiacci, Mimmo Paladino and many others. He wrote extensively on contemporary art (*Gli attributi dell'arte odierna 1947-1967*, *The Attributes of Contemporary Art 1947-1967*, 1970), and its relation to the visual testimonies left by prehistoric communities (*L'arte dell'uomo primordiale*, *The Art of the Primordial Man*, 2005). He also created and printed a number of art books and ephemera, such as the short-lived *EX* (rivista-oggetto). Villa's preoccupation with the origin of languages (verbal as well as non-verbal) is the common thread that runs through his diverse artistic and critical endeavors. He excavates these languages to reach the deepest and most ancient layer of expression, in an effort to re-live the act of "naming" the world for the first time. From 1951 to 1952, he lived in Brazil, and worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Paolo. There, he collaborated with the renowned concrete poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, and with the famous Italian painter Gastone Novelli. Aside from this brief detour, he rarely left his beloved Rome. He died in Rieti in 2003.

G.R. & D.S.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *St. Martin* (San Martino), oil on canvas,
cm.40x60, (2015)

e fecero molte e figlie e figli, generazioni assai,
 come la sabbia innumere del muto, del perenne.
 ora avvenne. avvenne che la grand' arca là,
 senza la chiave, non fu calafatata per mancanza
 di materie prime *in loco*, e tutto invece
 tappata con lievito e bucce delle fave. ora avvenne.
 che le cimici moltiplicando come le stelle a fuoco
 del firmamento squartarono premendo il transatlantico,
 e infine avvenne che dall'alto iddio
 maledisse le cimici e noè e gli innocenti, e va bè,
 pargoli e le pudende e tutti, e così sia, transeat".
 attendiamo, pazienza che verrà, mettiamoci alla cosa:
 verrà quando nella sera nel paese poco
 dove incrociano al largo i cirri incandescenti delle secche
 pietanze e gli strilli della balera o dancing, in una prosa
 di vino, quando teneramente mulinando primavera fra le
 [stecche

e musicando spargerà per l'emisfero colorito, a grandi
 manciate le cavallette e i grani e le fontane
 del grano universale e del corniolo, e venire
 venire somma e un lume inimitabile di iridio
 (ci avrà i capelli
 che ci hanno il colore
 che ci ha il frumento
 e come il colore
 che come il firmamento
 che sono gli occhi suoi,
 o giuramento, sì,
 la sposerò.
 la sposerò davanti all'altare)
 ho da parlarvi teneramente mulinando da parlarvi
 di odio, della prudenza, e, con ironico fare,
 di cicli e vini vari e condimenti, e di ragioni?
 della grande saggezza di dopo l'imminente peccato originale
 o dei morti dei vivi e delle bestie tradizionali?
 dire quanto è lungo il verme che lavora nel mollo delle prime
 mele? o da insegnarvi guardare con il collo
 storto nel piatto dove mangi carnagione, smalto e sali?
 sì, sette anni di magra, sette,
 sette di siccità:
 non abbiamo torrenti
 se non quelli bruttati dal tannino, pozzi

and they made many girls and boys, generations a plenty,
 like the innumerable sand of silence, of the everlasting.
 now it came to pass. came to pass that the great ark there,
 without the key, was not caulked for lack
 of raw materials *in loco*, and everything instead
 plugged with yeast and the husks of beans. and it came to pass
 that the fleas multiplying like the firmament's
 fiery stars quartered pressing the transatlantic liner,
 and it finally came to pass that from on high god
 cursed the fleas and noah and the innocent, and okay,
 little children and pudenda and everyone, and so it be,
 [transeat⁴."

we wait, patience will come, let's get to the thing:
 it will come when in the evening in the little town
 where the incandescent clouds of dried meals cross off shore
 and the shouts of barn dances or halls, in a winy
 prose, when spring tenderly milling between false notes
 and musically will spread across the colored hemisphere,
 in great handfuls the grasshoppers and grain and fountains
 of the universal grain and the cornel tree, and venus
 supreme venus and a inimitable light of iridium
 (it will have hair
 that has the color
 that has the wheat
 and like the color
 that like the firmament
 that are her eyes,
 or promise, yes,
 i'll marry her.
 i'll marry her in church)
 i must speak to you tenderly milling to speak to you
 of hate, prudence, and, with irony,
 of cycles and different wines and condiments, and reasons?
 of the great wisdom following the imminent original sin
 or of dead of living and traditional beasts?
 or say how long is the worm working in the soft flesh of the
 [first
 apples? or should i teach you how to watch with neck turned
 to the plate where you eat complexion⁵, polish and salts?
 yes, seven years of low waters, seven
 seven of drought:
 we don't have torrents
 if not those soiled by the tannin, wells

non abbiamo che sciutti, che foppe
 basse: quali aride piene come le coppe ime
 allora, che retate e quale
 lume, quali immortali affogati
 potremo rimpiangere, potremo e scongiurare,
 piangere e sospirar?
 piazza dei cinisèi
 ohi romboli
 ohi rombolà
 non abbiamo ricchezze, né armi che i vegetali
 né canzoni insigni, né bellezza
 noi di qui: non abbiám là
 e nemmeno povertà:
 non abbiamo né ragione né pietà,
 non abbiamo il metro che misura
 le pertiche tradizionali: cosa diremo quali
 e quali vangeli decimali predicare? Anche le foglie esigue
 esigue al soffio esposte e dal vento
 ninnate sembran le povere ali senza corpo, e chi predica
 sistemi al popolo delle foglie, chi insegna
 il comunismo agli animali sulle soglie?
 e foglia e rifoglia
 rifoglia biondina
 l'amore si sfoglia
 l'amore e la vita.
 sovvenire non si può nei giorni
 se non ai casi estremi: pensando
 voi volete le parole belle, sagomate a spaghi, a trepidi
 contorni, volete le parole non parole, e tutto
 volete: il frutto i semi gli aghi adorni,
 ma tutto non si può, o magari
 tutto non si deve non conviene è brutto:
 forse dire cose altissime e lustrate o ideare
 sagome ideali e pure con la pertica
 della cuccagna: voi volete, volendo, le parole
 per quando insieme aperti gli occhi o quando
 gravi come le castagne li chiudiamo,
 comprendere volete e non comprendere
 per dopo il prossimo imminente già vicino altro peccato
 [originale
 col ciondolo leràì
 col ciondolo lerèra
 e già di là lontano si sfogano i galli impegnati della sera,

we don't have but dry, and shallow
ditches: which arid high waters full like lowly cups
then, what round up and which
light, which immortal death by drowning⁶
can we regret, can we implore,
weep and sigh?⁷
square in cinisello
eh rumble ling
eh ramble lang
we don't have riches, nor weapons other than vegetables
nor distinguished songs, nor beauty
us around here: we don't have over there
and not even poverty:
we don't have reason nor pity,
we don't have the standard that measures
the traditional rods⁸: what will we say which
and which decimal gospels will we preach? even small leaves
small exposed to the breath and lulled by the wind
they look like poor wings without a body, and who
preaches systems to the population of leaves, who
teaches communism to animals on thresholds?
and leafs and leafs
re-leafs blondie
love leafed through
love and life.
one cannot remember in the days
if not in extreme cases: thinking
you all want beautiful words, shaped like threads, with anxious
borders, you want words that aren't words, and you want
everything: the fruit the seeds the adorned needles
but everything one can't, or maybe
one shouldn't not worth it it's ugly:
maybe say lofty and polished things or devise
ideal shapes and even the greasy
pole⁹: you all want, if you want, words
when eyes are open together or when
heavy like chestnuts we close them,
you all want to understand and not understand
after the next imminent already close other original sin
with you swing a ling
with it swang a lang.
and already over there far away the tarred cocks of the night let
[off steam,

nel sugo lustrante della nafta, scocca
il murmure precipite, l'iridio costeggiando,
delle pianelle da muggiò, una falange
gli scialli morbidissimi di cinisello, la luganiga
livida nella città di monza e il buon odore
che sfolla controvento cresco e tra le frange:
soli soli saliranno in cima al campanile, pange
lingua gloriosi, a percepirvi insieme in fila transitare morti e

[vivi corrosi

morti dei vivi nel precipite sussurro dell'iridio
e non sai se l'olio che ci danno
è imbroglio, o inganno il vaglia.
transito! ma un po' alla volta col segreto
naturale della paglia e delle nespole spacciate,
dei papaveri caduti in mezzo ai grani,
un po' alla volta ma un po' piano capiremo
il dritto e il torto, i vani
nitriti sul filo trepidante, delle redini,
e l'unità e lo spirito, credi
tu che credo anch'io, credi e non credi, e sentiremo
le spalle più leggere sotto maglia, e l'unica
qui è di fare sempre un po' per bene.
ti vien voglia - di cantare piano
e fare marameo - col palmo della mano
ai profeti in carne ed ossa
ai mercanti sull'orlo della fossa.
beato chi a bella vista la luna anche di giorno trova
vagabondare tra la gente, piova o faccia bello,
e quando si avvita la nebbia intorno all'ultimo
corno della sera, e i bambini di milano
stanno ancora in giro con il brucio sul cavallo
e sotto ascelle per racimolare dai calcestri qualche cosa,
e ridonda un grande
prèmito rosso, i tonfi sani con misura della macchina stradale,
il tamburo selvaggio, il cuore delle brughiere
che si ascolta in tutti i campi, dalla biella
e dal pistone e dal pedale, o quasi
il furtivo grattare delle pianelle nel lustrante
della nafta, che passeggiano da muggiò, o i diti
della pioggia sulla vigneta del prevosto, o sugli scialli
o sulle foglie dei moroni tonti.
ma cosa saranno allora i paragoni fini? i conti? è roba

polishing in the juice of naphtha, the precipitous
murmur strikes, iridium coasting,
of slippers from muggiò, a phalange
the supplest shawls from cinisello, the livid
luganiga¹⁰ in the city of monza and the crisp smell
that scatters against the wind and between the fringe:
alone alone they will climb to the bell tower, pange
lingua gloriosi¹¹, to perceive the dead and living crossing in file
[corroded

dead of the living in the precipitous murmur of iridium
and you don't know if the oil they give us
is genuine, or if the money order is fake.
just passing through! but a little at a time with the natural
secret of hay and peddled medlars¹²,
of poppies fallen in the wheat fields,
a little at a time but a bit slower we shall understand
the wrong and the right, the vain
neighs on the trembling blade, of the reins,
and unity and the spirit, do you believe
that I believe as well, you do and do not believe, and we shall feel
our shoulders lighter under shirts, and the only thing
is to always do some good.

you feel the need – to sing slowly
and to cock a snook – with the palm of your hand
at prophets in flesh and blood
at merchants with one foot in the grave.
lucky are those who see the moon even in daytime found
roaming among the people, rain or shine,
and when the fog winds around the last
horn of the evening, and the children of milan
are still out with a burning in their crotch
and under armpits to collect something from the asphalt¹³,
and a great red tenesmus
abounds, the healthy measured beat of the street machine,
the wild drum, the heart of the moorlands
heard in all the fields, from the connecting rod
and the piston and the pedal, or almost
the stealthy shuffling of slippers in the polishing
of naphtha, that walk from muggiò, or the fingers
of rain on the parson's vineyard, or on the shawls
or on the leaves of dumb mulberry trees.
but then what will become of subtle comparisons? calculations?
is it for eating or for sleeping or is it a salary?

da mangiare o roba da dormire o è un salario?
è foglia passa d'autunno che cade sopra le rotaie
e fa slittare i tram in modo vario, o altro? ma
paragoni invece finì sono
le parole che aspettate, oppure
le cose che aspettate, come quell'uno
che aspetta in certi giorni venir giù la pioggia, e alla fin fine
dopo tutti i conti, dopo il vento e il vago prèmito,
scende con gentil misura, con circospezione, come
ai bambini il latte della tetta?
eh, no. non proprio
non propriamente queste cose qui,
col ciondolo lerài
col ciondolo lerèra.
o che si possa insegnare con parole
toccanti e colorate, quanto s'allevino per le stuoie
s'allevino i bigatti e i modi le tecniche le maniere?
ognuno parla come se stesso e tutti parliamo
nel mondo come tutti
cosa vogliamo
cosa dai germi e dagli insetti? trapelano
di foglia in foglia
e sfoglia e risfoglia
rifoglia biondina
l'amore la vita
perché noi tutti di qua siamo quei che ha paura, per remota
impazienza, non solo di morire ma di perdere una cosa
di quello che un tempo è stato guadagnato, di perdere
un tempo, con tanti pareri e oscure
manipolazioni, nel grande passato, la pelle, il vento,
il lustro, il liscio, il dolce, il buio che stormisce
di bruco in bruco, tra la particella, tra le cose, l'aura
e la corrente ariosa in policromi aghi sotto gli astri
magari, pungere i semi non maturi, un fragile magnete
in ogni sposa, il freddissimo intelletto
che spinge l'accattone a scegliersi, degli angoli, quell'angolo là!
passando e ripassando
con grande opinione

is it the withered leaf in autumn that falls on the tracks
and causes the tram to slip in a varied way, or something else? but
rather subtle comparisons are
words that you all wait for, or rather
the things you all wait for, like that one
who waits for the rain to fall on certain days, and at the very end
after all the calculations, after the wind and the vague tenesmus,
descends with gentle measure, with circumspection, like
milk from tit to child?

not quite. not really
not these things in the true sense,
with you swing a ling
with it swang a lang.

or that one can teach with words
touching and colorful, how many silkworms are
grown on mats and modes techniques manners?
everyone speaks as themselves and we all speak
in the world like everyone else

what we want
from germs and insects? they seep
from leaf to leaf
and leaf through and leaf again
leaf again blondie
love life

because everyone of us here is he who is scared, out of remote
impatience, not only to die but to loose something
that which was once earned, to loose
a time, with many opinions and obscure
manipulations, amid the vast past, the skin, the wind,
the luster, the smooth, the sweet, the darkness that rustles
from worm to worm, between the particles, between things, the

[breeze

and the airy current in polychrome needles under the stars
maybe, puncture immature seeds, a brittle magnet
in every bride, the cold intellect
that pushes the beggar to choose, out of corners, that corner there!
passing and passing again
with great consideration
between the two bizarre wings
of the afternoon of breakfast,
without knowing, one day
we're caught in that
thick local fog where cows

tra le due ali bislacche
del pomeriggio della colazione,
senza sapere, un giorno
si capita nel gran nebbione

nostrano dove le vacche
tutto hanno un solo, intorno,
colore beige, o viola o avano.
questi erano i mattini limpidi come un bicchiere
risciacquato in molti lavandini e bacinelle di zinco,
chiari i mattini stavano nelle robinie trasparenti, e stracche
gibigiane e rase e sventolate, e il rude e il pelo
gigante delle cotiche e la gente
che voleva coglionarvi qui, *in loco*,
quando il cranio roco del porcello che s'impunta mareggiava
senza quiete un'altra alba di cristalli, l'alta
bufera, la sete, un po' per volta, e prude le nature
in petto tormentando scarne uccelle, e ragazze
lombarde coi pedùli e le solette nylon velature.
una scarpa e una ciabatta chi se la lega chi se la gratta e
dente milanese che morda
intelligenza che non ricorda
formica che scivola sulla corda e
una scarpa e una ciabatta chi se la lega chi se la gratta e
malinconici milanesi
dalle pelli ben stirate
a tamburo e tamburelli e
per male o per bene che vada
milanesi siamo sempre quelli e
milanesi generosi, che vi pare
regalare caramelle
di puro zucchero alle belle
figliole di motta industriale?
un po' per volta col segreto ascolta
il maturare della paglia e delle nespole nel fuoco
sottilissimo, e un po' per volta
tutti noi noi capiremo il dritto o il torto,
la striglia, l'unità, il lungo e il corto
e il naturale; ascolta nei sinistri
tocca-tocca maturare primavera e
sentiremo la bocca più leggera, quando un'italia
animale molta nelle costole passerà, nel gran costato
malinconicamente, una conoscenza

everything have only one, around,
color, beige or purple or havana
these were the mornings limpid as a glass
rinsed in many sinks and zinc basins,
clear mornings in transparent locus trees, and worn out
glaring and smooth and fluttering, and the roughness
the gigantic hair of rinds and the people
who wanted to make a fool out of you here, *in loco*,
when the pig's raucous cranium that jibs wavering
another restless dawn of crystals, the high
storm, the thirst, a little at a time, and natures' itching
in the chest tormenting skinny birds, and lombard girls
in hiking boots and insert nylon stockings.
a shoe and a slipper those who tie it those who scratch it and
milanese tooth that bites
intelligence that does not recall
ant that slides on the rope and
a shoe and a slipper those who tie it those who itch it
melancholy milanese
with well ironed skins
taut like a drum and tambourine and
be it good times or bad times¹⁴
milanese we're always the same and
generous milanese, who to you seem
to give out candy
made of pure sugar to the beautiful
daughters of motta, the industrialist?¹⁵
a little at a time listen in secret
to the ripening of hay and medlars in the subtlest
fire, and a little at a time everyone of us
we will understand the right and the wrong
and the horse brush, the unity, the long and short
and the natural; listen in the sinisters
touch-touch ripening springs and
we will feel our mouths lighter, when a very
animal italy will run through our ribs, melancholically
through the great rib cage, a heroic,
musical, knowledge, or a learned invention, generated
by nice aspects and turmoil: and not the electric
or some other worn out light or similar burns,
but the frost above the eye brow, and there about
music watch it and watch again; and not the electric
(or some other worn out earthly light)

eroica, musicale, un'invenzione colta, generata
 di aspetti buoni e parapiglia: e non l'elettrica
 o qualche altra sfatta luce o simili bruciori,
 ma la brina sopra il sopra ciglia, e giù di lì
 la musica guardare e riguardare; e non l'elettrica
 (o qualche altra sfatta luce terrena)
 ma il murmure precipite dell'iridio, ma il lume
 inevitabile dell'iridio, nello smaglio lanceolato delle sere
 [immortali]

e su nel celeste
 poligono remoto
 tra iadi e pleiadi
 neghittose in moto
 bruciare grandi
 i grandi genitali
 sul lago ove ulisse
 faceva le imprese.
 altre favole ci sono, favole
 ancora, e la musica
 degli altri, la musica di quelli là che sembra
 non già la musica, ma il pantano della foppa, e beato
 chi ti trova la luna dirottata tra la gente sulle labbra
 timide dell'universo, nel murmure dell'iridio quando
 vicino a sera incerta tra la gente umanissima
 si rampica la nebbia sopra l'aeroporto
 verso la manica a vento, nel campo della breda, nel paesano
 spirito aranciato delle sere immortali
 che carezza le scene e flemmatica gli omeri e le balzane
 cose delle baggiane dalle smorte vene e dalle cosce
 lunghe di segala vegetale, quando
 sui fili dei celesti sali urlano le sirene delle aziende
 e il rubicondo respiro dei fuggiaschi solleoni e il luogo
 dei luoghi nottambuli allagati della lomellina,
 e le irrigazioni colore di viola nei momenti delicati:
 nelle congiunture: abbiamo per i nostri passi
 delle città, città sopra la terra, sotto la terra, e a filo
 di terra negli scantinati:
 e sassi deteniamo e galline di rarissimo colore e bisce
 di cristallo e le caraffe lisce ed il mastello
 al sole e cieli di iridio se fa bello
 e gazoze appannate per i defunti nel giorno dell'ufficio
 e cimase baluginanti colore cadmio nello smaglio
 lanceolato delle sere immortali!

but the precipitous murmur of iridium, but iridium's
inevitable light in the lanceolate unraveling of immortal
[evenings

and up in the remote
celestial polygon
between hyades and pleiades
slothful in motion
burning great
the great genitals
on the lake where ulysses
carried out his feats.
there are other fables, fables
still, and the music
of others, the music of those over there that doesn't
seem like music at all, but the morass of the ditch, and lucky
are those who find the high-jacked moon among people on the
timid lips of the universe, in the murmur of iridium when
close to an uncertain evening between the kindest people
the fog climbs above the airport
toward the windsock, into breda's field, in the rustic
orange-colored spirit of immortal evenings
caressing the scenes and soothing the shoulders and the
[eccentric

things of dumb girls with pale veins and long thighs
of vegetable rye, when
on the strings of celestial salts the factory sirens scream
and the rubicund breath of fugitive dog days and the place
of all night-owl places in the flooded lomellina,
and purple colored irrigations at delicate moments:
in the joints: on our walk
some cities, cities above ground, below ground and on the
level of basements:
and we hold pebbles and hens of the rarest color and snakes
of crystal and smooth pitchers and the basins
in the sun and skies of iridium if it's nice out
and gazosa¹⁶ fogged for the dead on the day of the service
and the flickering cadmium color roof in the lanceolate
unraveling of immortal evenings!
let's be serious! in the main sacristy
the altar boy
with a candle tickles the breasts
of doves that don't fly away
and the people that listen from the steps

siamo seri! in sagrestia
maggiore il chierichetto
stuzzica con un cero il petto
delle colombe che non volan via
e il popolo che ascolta dai gradini
il calmo fragore dell'aeronave
e il prevosto che cerca la chiave
nel tumulto dei bambini
e il popolo che sente sul sagrato
come a quota mica male
vola, quota lieve, quota
celeste, come ridere una trota
nella grande acqua universale,
e l'elica girare e fare argentea ruota!
e l'universo è qui, qui solamente a un pelo,
l'universo è qui, a un pelo di ciglio,
a un pelo di ciglio di zanzara le ali
umettate nel rorido lampaneggio
di improvvise compiète giallo cadmio,
pane salato, salso paese zafferano, serpi rifatti
in stato di cadavere, in statu
prisco: e scale di legname tutto a scuro dove sbatti
il menisco se scendi troppo di prescia.
ma o trapassati con veste di gracile sofferenza, lunga storia
di tenebre dentro la quale il nostro episodio si cancella
e alla cieca brandisce, si spuntano le nostre armi:
le bucce dei grilli
i noccioli di ciliegia,
la sansa dei marroni
affumicati, i semi
di girasole e di tomates:
e i trilli strozzati
nella strozza dei passerii
scuotendo le nostre trombe
o trapassati con veste di gracile sofferenza, fuoruscite
dalla crisalide brutta dei secoli celtici o spagnoli
o comunisti, fuori dalla custodia, fuori
a bere i soli balsamici succhi della vita
e della sorte: rispecchiatevi in fronte,
in piazza, alla fonte, sul fondo dei ramaioi,
specchiatevi nello spirito spirituale: lasciate
in tale guisa baluginare nell'opera del verbo
e delle interiezioni e dei vocaboli di scarto,

to the calm rumble of airships
and the parson looking for the key
amid the tumult of children
and the crowd that hears it in the churchyard
at an amazing height
how it flies, light height, celestial
height, as if nothing like a trout
in the great universal waters,
and the propeller turning and the silvery cartwheels!
and the universe is here, a hair away
a mosquito's eyelash away wings
moistened in the dewy sparkle
of improvised complines yellow cadmium,
salted bread, salty saffron country, snakes laid out
as corpses, in statu
prisco: and wooden ladder in the dark where you bump
your kneecap if you descend in haste.
but or deceased dressed in feeble suffering, long story
of darkness where our episode is erased
and blindly brandishes, are weapons dulled:
the crickets' shell
the cherries' pit
the chestnuts' residue
smoked, tomato
and sunflower seeds:
the strangled trills
in the throats of sparrows
rattling our trumpets
or deceased dressed in feeble suffering, exited from
the ugly chrysalis of celtic centuries or spanish
or communist, out of the sleeve, out
to drink the only balsamic juices of life
and fate: look at your faces in the mirror,
in the square, at the spring, at the bottom of ladles,
mirror yourselves in the spiritual spirit: in this
fashion let the cusp of iridium where lightening
grows weak and confused flicker
in the work of the verb and interjections and
second rate words, as in a real distance:
the green of your marvelous complexion, the frothy
gazosa on the slabs, and the harmonious
re-flourishing of mulberry trees, such is the fleeting
yet solemn fame amid the excellent scream of beasts.

come in una reale lontananza la cuspidè
di iridio dove il fulmine si strema e si confonde:
il verde della vostra mirabile carnagione, la gazosa
spumeggiante sulle lastre, e il rifiorire
concorde dei gelsi, tale è la rinomanza
caduca ma solenne nel grido eccellente delle bestie.
adesso lentamente
è venuto tardi, sì, ma tardi
sì, ma lentamente.

now slowly
it's late, yes, but late
yes, but slowly.

NOTES

1. The expression *Dominus sit in corde* (May the Lord be in my heart) is found in the *Munda cor Meum* (Cleanse my heart) section of a traditional Catholic mass.

2. Portuguese for "my honey."

3. *Stracchino* is a soft cheese from Lombardy and *Barbera* is wine produced in Piedmont.

4. Latin for "Let it go."

5. In the original, *Carnagione* is a play on words also referring to *Cacciagione*, meaning game caught for eating.

6. Most likely a reference to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*, section four: *Death By Water*.

7. Villa makes several references to popular Italian songs throughout the poem. For example, this verse, *piangere e sospirar* (weep and sigh), is a parody of "Quel mazzolin di fiori." Other verses reminiscent of popular Italian melodies are: *ohi rombolì / ohi rombolà* and *foglia e rifoglia / rifoglia biondina*... (nonsensical verses typical of nursery rhymes, translated here as *eh rumble ling / eh ramble lang* and *leaf and leafs / re-leafs blondie*), and *col ciondolo leràì / col ciondolo lerèra* (with you swing a ling / with it swang a lang) alludes to the song *Ciondolo* (Pendant). Here the verses refer to both a woman's pendant and the male member, both of which "swing."

8. A linear measure used by the ancient Romans, typically ten feet in length.

9. *Pertica della cuccagna* in the original: a traditional game played at Marti Gras in which someone must climb a greased pole to reach certain bounties, such as a leg of prosciutto or a wheel of cheese.

10. A type of sausage.

11. A medieval Latin hymn of the Roman Catholic Church

12. Italian proverb: *Col tempo e con la paglia maturano le nespole* (All good things come to those who wait).

13. *Calcestro* in the original. A cheap type of pavement composed of recycled materials from which children would collect various trinkets.

14. Similar to the old Milanese saying *Milanes-sem, Milanes-sarem, Milanes-restum* (Milanese we are, Milanese we'll always be and Milanese we'll remain).

15. The *Motta* family owned a chain of pastry shops in and around Milan.

16. *Gazosa* is a type of Italian carbonated soda, typically clear in color.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *St. Martin* (San Martino), terracotta, h.cm. 60
(2014)

**Voices in English
from Europe to New Zealand**

edited by

Marco Sonzogni

“Solidarity with the Anchovy”

by Gregory O’Brien

Translated by Elena Traina

Elena Traina (1990) is a writer, literary translator, and musician. She holds an MA in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia (UK), where she researched the translation of picture-books. She works as a freelance translator (English and Spanish into Italian) for a number of publishing houses, including La Vita Felice and Mondadori, and is researching Creative Writing as an academic discipline. Elena’s poetry collection, *Tre Concerti*, was awarded Best Poetry Collection at the 2012 Alda Merini National Prize *La Primavera della Poesia*. She is currently working at her first novel, *Amarantha*, and its musical soundtrack: an artistic and research project that combines Elena’s passion for creative writing and music.

Gregory O’Brien (1961) is a poet, editor and painter. O’Brien trained as a journalist in Auckland and worked as a newspaper reporter in Northland before returning to study art history and English at Auckland University. Apart from two years working as arts editor of the TV3 arts programme *The Edge* (1993-1994), he has written and painted full-time since 1984, first in Auckland, then in Wellington, where he still lives. O’Brien is one of New Zealand’s most prolific contributors to both arts and literature. His poems and short stories are widely anthologised, and he has published several acclaimed volumes of poetry. His works of non-fiction, particularly those directed at young readers, are highly regarded and have received major awards (from *The Oxford Companion of New Zealand Literature*, edited by Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, 1998)

See: <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/OBrien,%20Gregory.htm>).

Life as an Anchovy

Translating Gregory O'Brien's
"Solidarity with the Anchovy"

Elena Traina

Introduction

Imagine life as an anchovy. Sea water, waves, the depth of the ocean. But also fishing nets and tins and salt. Take all those things and assign them different meanings. Some can be straightforward, some more ambiguous, some fatally idiomatic. Now, try to translate the whole poem into a foreign language. Then watch the poem slowly float away, towards new shores or, maybe, to almost certain death by drowning.

Gregory O'Brien's "Solidarity with the Anchovy" is a complex text, and it was hard to choose what aspect of the poem to investigate from the translator's point of view. In this poem, sound, voice, meaning and even punctuation all offer food for thought and research. In this article, I present the strategies I have employed to translate the denotative and connotative aspects of the semantic repertoire belonging to the sea-centred world of an anchovy's life.

1. Idioms

In "Solidarity with the Anchovy," O'Brien creates a whole universe around a sole protagonist – the anchovy. The features of this universe cannot be understood through consideration of their denotative aspect only, as most references to the anchovy's world are charged with idiomatic power, ambiguity or hidden references.

When dealing with idioms related to the anchovy's world, I had three choices: to translate the literal meaning, to translate the figurative meaning, or to translate the idiom with another idiom. Ideally, when choosing the last option, at least an original feature must be preserved: either what the idiom means (as in how it is used in spoken or written language), or how it is related to the rest of the poem and to the anchovy's world.

In one case, I have succeeded in translating an idiom with another idiom which does both:

[...] women' stockings await you, fishnets	ma calze di donna vi attendono, reti but socks of woman you await nets per trarvi in salvo
to lift you	to draw-you in safe
	dall'alto mare.
out of your depths. ¹	from-the high sea

I chose to translate 'out of your depths' as 'dall'alto mare' [lit. 'from the high sea'], from 'essere/trovarsi in alto mare' [lit. 'to be in high sea'], an expression which unfolds from the same idea of the sea as a 'dangerous place'¹, from which one needs to be rescued.

Nonetheless, the following example shows how not all idioms find an equivalent match and a choice must be done:

[...] which is why	Ecco perché certo here-is why indeed quello che vi manca non è
you are worth more than	what that to-you is-lacking not is il sale.
your salt.	the salt

While 'worth one's salt' finds its equivalent in 'degno di tale nome' [lit. 'worthy of such name'], I wrote 'di certo non vi manca il sale' [lit. 'it is not salt that you lack'] as in *avere il sale in zucca* ['to have salt in one's pumpkin/head'], where 'salt' is a symbol of wisdom (cf. Lat. *Salis* > salt, wit), also found in the English idiomatic repertoire (cf. Eng. *A pinch/grain of salt* > Lat. *Cum grano salis*).

Where it was not possible to preserve the figurative use of a sea-related word, I preferred to stray from the original, creating a whole new image that acted as a prelude to what is following.

1 'Considerando il mare come luogo di viaggi lunghi o perigliosi (spesso in contrapp. a porto): [...] essere in alto m., essere ancora lontani dal compimento di un'opera, dal raggiungimento di un fine' (Treccani, available at: <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/mare/>)

[...] I address you midstream	[...] mi rivolgo a voi a metà sequenza
	(I) refl. turn to you at half sequence
this ocean a vast movie	quest'oceano un'immensa pellicola
	this ocean an immense film
starring each of you.	ognuno di voi un interprete.
	each of you a performer

I chose to translate 'midstream' as 'a metà sequenza' [lit. mid-sequence], losing the aquatic reference but: a) maintaining the idea of the poet addressing the anchovies in the middle of something, and b) anticipating the following metaphor of the ocean as a film (translated as *pellicola*, to refer both to the ocean surface and to the cinematographic term).

A similar strategy was used to translate the following image, that of the anchovy's career described as 'streamlined':

Like instruments in a case,	Come strumenti in custodia
	like instruments in case
	le vostre carriere seguono un
your careers are streamlined –	senso unico:
	the your careers follow one
	sense/way only
you simply follow your nose	
[...]	quello del vostro naso [...]
	that of-the your nose

Once again, I have privileged the actual meaning of the idiomatic word, translating 'your careers are streamlined' as 'le vostre carriere seguono un senso unico', in which 'senso' means both 'way/direction' (as in 'strada a senso unico', 'one-way street') and 'sense' as in the five senses. The reference to the five senses is an obvious anticipation of the following line, alluding to the sense of smell.

2. Ambiguity

In this poem, the collection of idioms and images related to the anchovy's world produces a literary game in which the poet disorients the reader, who is shown only glimpses of meaning(s). This masterly exercise is related to translation ambiguity, which 'occurs when a word in one language can be translated in more than one way into another language' (Tokovicz & Degani, 2010: 281).

A very fine example of ambiguity in O'Brien's poem is the use of the word 'sheet' in the last lines of the poem:

[...] I wrap this sheet
around you, this sheet

which is wrapped around
the both of us. Do you read me?

Isolating these lines, it is very hard to understand what type of sheet O'Brien is talking about. It could relate to the tradition of selling fish wrapped in newspaper, but there is no way to be sure. However, if we take a closer look at the images that precede the last lines, a whole new semantic dimension unfolds:

[...]

secure, preserved in salt

in oil you are professed,

blessed by the saint on the lid as

it is peeled back – heads down,

souls intact.

'Salt', 'oil', 'saint' and 'souls'. What do they all have in common? They are all mentioned in the Bible, and they all have Christian connotations. The presence of the saint, in particular, sanctifies the anchovy by evoking the religious connotations of the oil and salt – when we read 'salt', think of Matthew 5:13: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its savour, how can it be made salty again?'; when we read 'oil', think of the sacramental

oils: the Sacred Chrism, the Oil of the Catechumens and the Oil of the Infirm.

As for 'sheet', in the light of this new semantic field, it can be now interpreted as a shroud, or Shroud. It was hard to decide how to translate the word 'sheet', because I obviously did not want to feed the reader my own interpretation of the poem by privileging one meaning or the other. Incidentally, in the original poem the word 'sheet' occurs twice, which made it simple to decide to translate the same word in two different ways:

[...] I wrap this sheet	[...] Avvolgo questo foglio
	(I) <i>wrap this sheet/piece of paper</i>
around you, this sheet	intorno a voi, questo telo
	<i>around n/a you this sheet/cloth</i>
	che ci avvolge
which is wrapped around	that us wrap
	entrambi. Mi ricevete?
	both (Do) <i>me you-read/receive</i>
the both of us. Do you read	
me?	

In this way, we have both meanings displayed and the most interesting effect is that they now act as a metaphor for each other.

The Christian theme emerges in these last lines but it permeates the entire poem, with references to heaven (celestas and trumpets) and to the end of time. The line 'You are without contradiction' recalls Acts, 10:29: 'Therefore came I unto you *without gainsaying*, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?' (King James Bible). This verse varies from one version of the Bible to another; however, the original Greek has the adverb *anantirrétós*, meaning 'without contradiction'.

Ambiguity is also found in the very last line, 'Do you read me?'. Considering both meanings of the line (the literal one, and the military/telecommunications reference according to which 'read' means 'to hear and understand'), I was forced to privilege one or the other. I chose to translate it as 'mi ricevete?', which reads as a

translation of the secondary meaning. However, ambiguity has not been lost: in this particular sentence, the Italian verb *ricevere* can be read in two ways: as in ‘do you read me?’ and as in ‘do you receive me?’, the latter enhancing the previous image evoked by the poet, that of the poet joining the anchovies in a wrap of paper or cloth.

Conclusion

Individual idioms and images evoke multiple readings in the reader’s mind – both at a conscious and at a subconscious level – suggesting potentially infinite readings of the entire poem. Tackling O’Brien’s imaginative world in translation was a hard struggle against the risk of giving away too much, of offering the reader my own, limited interpretation of the poem.

The result of all my semantic choices (in addition to the choices I have had to make in the translation of the original poem’s sound, voice and punctuation) is a poem that offers the reader new images and meanings created by the Italian semantic repertoire itself, a poem that inevitably strays from the original, landing on new, exciting shores.

Works cited

O’Brien, G. 2013, *Beauties of the Octagonal Pool*, Auckland: Auckland University Press

Tokovicz, N. & Degani, T. 2010, ‘Translation Ambiguity: Consequences for Learning and Processing’ in *Research in Second Language Processing and Parsing*, vol. 7, pp. 281

(Footnotes)

- 1 All poetic excerpts from ‘Solidarity with the Anchovy’, in O’Brien, 2013



Photograph by Jason O'Hara



Solidarity with the Anchovy*for John Jenkins and Ken Bolton*

Are you listening, brothers?
There are consolations —

though your daughters
are far from flashy, your sons

washed up and your long summers
confined to the ice box

women's stockings await you
fishnets to lift you

out of your depths. You brave oceans
your only defence the way

you hold yourselves. Which is why
you are worth more than

your salt. And why
I address you midstream

the ocean a vast movie
starring each of you.

You dip your noses in black ink
and write the history of the world

unsullied page after unsullied
page. Maybe I am dreaming

but you shine
as dreams do, dug

like coal from pitch black
ocean. You are

without contradiction
even if both the violin bow

Solidarietà con l'acciuga

per John Jenkins e Ken Bolton

Siete in ascolto, fratelli?
Qualche consolazione c'è:

le vostre figlie saranno anche
faville sfiorite, i vostri figli

arenati e le vostre lunghe estati
confinare nel congelatore

ma calze di donna vi attendono, reti
per trarvi in salvo

dall'alto mare. Voi sfidate gli oceani
la vostra unica difesa

i vostri corpi erti. Ecco perché certo
quello che vi manca non è

il sale. E perché
mi rivolgo a voi a metà sequenza

quest'oceano un'immensa pellicola
ognuno di voi un interprete.

Intingete il naso nell'inchiostro
e scrivete la storia del mondo

una pagina immacolata
dopo l'altra. Forse sto sognando

ma voi brillate
come brillano i sogni, esumati

come carbone nel più nero
degli oceani. Siete

senza contraddizione;
anche se sia l'archetto di un violino

and the fuselage of jet planes
have so obviously been modeled

on you. Or so you would argue
if argument was in the anchovy's

nature. Certain things you will never
understand: staircases

traffic lights, the fourth draft of the poem,
much that lies beyond us

as well: Why a cellphone will never be
a celeste, even if a car horn

might one day become
a trumpet

played at the end of time
and, hopefully, well.

In houses by the sea we seek
your company, or proximity

to your nocturnal
navigations. This we

agree upon, as four fishes in a flat tin
are in accord

and as they were once collectively seduced
by blinking lights and fishnets,

hauled upwards into
the opaque air.

Like instruments in a case,
your careers are streamlined —

you just follow your nose
your future

che la fusoliera di un jet
sono stati modellati

a vostra immagine. O così ribattereste
se il dibattito fosse nella natura

dell'acciuga. Certe cose
non le capirete mai: scale,

semafori, la quarta bozza d'una poesia
e molto di ciò che giace oltre la nostra

comprensione. Perché un cellulare non sarà mai
una celesta, anche se un clacson

un giorno potrebbe diventare
una tromba

suonata alla fine dei tempi
in maniera decente, si spera.

Nelle case al mare desideriamo
la vostra compagnia, o di prender parte

alle vostre navigazioni
notturne. Su questo

siamo d'accordo, come quattro pesciolini
rinchiusi in una lattina

o mentre venivano sedotti collettivamente
da luci lampeggianti e reti da pesca,

sollevati dentro
l'aria opaca.

Come strumenti in custodia
le vostre carriere seguono un senso unico:

quello del vostro naso;
il vostro futuro

secure, preserved in salt
in oil you are professed,

blessed by the saint on the lid as
it is peeled back—heads down,

souls intact. I wrap this sheet
around you, this sheet

which is wrapped around
the both of us. Do you read me?

from *Beauties Of The Octagonal Pool* (Auckland: Auckland
University Press, 2012)

assicurato, conservato nel sale
nell'olio vi professate,

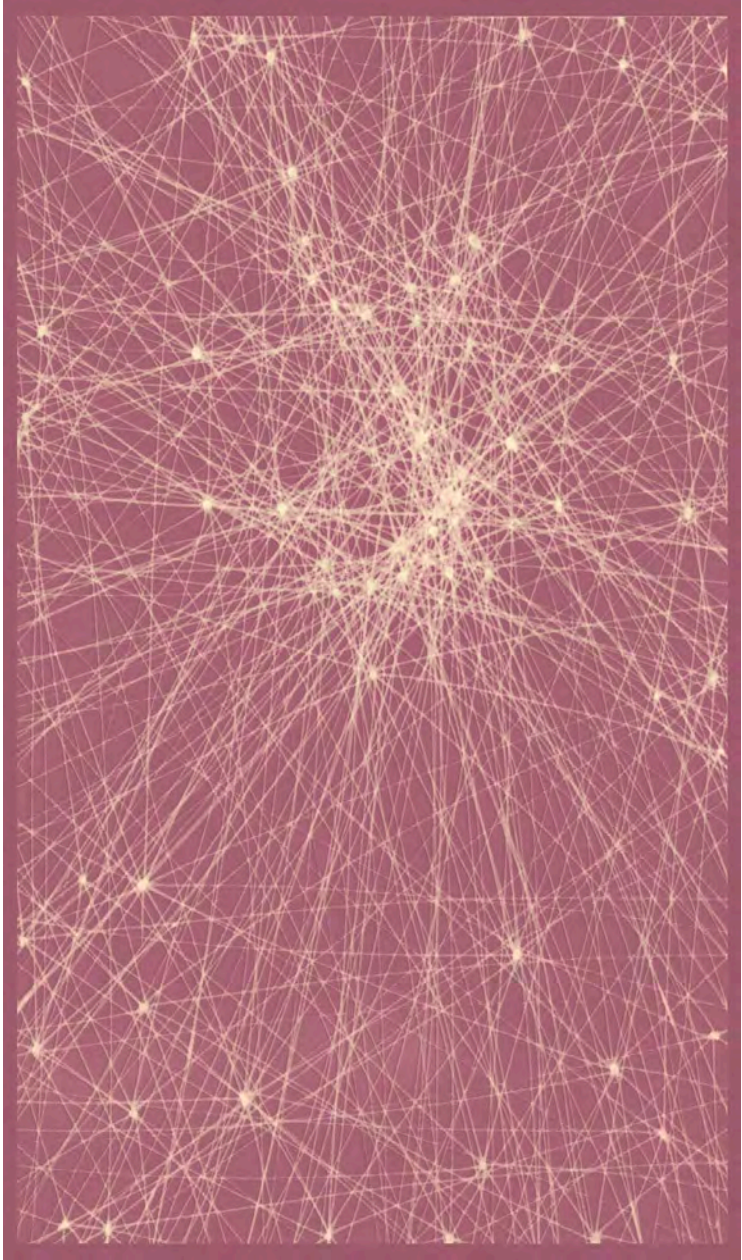
benedetti dal santo sul coperchio
mentre si apre tirando — a testa bassa,

le anime intatte. Avvolgo questo foglio
intorno a voi, questo telo

che ci avvolge
entrambi. Mi ricevete?



Vanni Macchiagodena, *La tempesta*, terracotta e legno, h. cm.170, 2008



Anna Allenbach

Recording Presence and Absence: The Poetry of Anna Ruchat

Translated by Anna Allenbach and Charlie Hann

Anna Allenbach (1980) is an artist and translator. Visual arts and translation may be perceived as distant disciplines but to Anna they represent two complementary elements of the same thing: life. As an artist, Anna is fascinated with water and specifically with the complexity of its simple formula, H₂O. As a translator, Anna has translated works by Peter Bichsel, Anna Kim, and Elisabeth Bronfen among others. She lives and works in Mendrisio, Switzerland.

Charlie Hann (1995) is a third year student of Ancient Greek, Latin, Italian, and Creative Writing at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Their hobbies include writing fantasy, literary translation, Latin prose composition, drawing, *Star Wars*, and *Doctor Who*. They come from Wellington where they have lived most of her life.

Anna Ruchat (1959) is a widely published and award-winning writer, literary translator, and editor. For twenty years, she worked for Italian publishing houses as a translator from German. She translates mainly prose (Thomas Bernhard; the correspondence between Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs; Viktor Klemperer's diaries 1933-1945; Kathrin Schmidt; and Norbert Gstrein, among others) and, in recent years, poetry (Stefan Hyner, Reidar Ekner, Philip Whalen). In 2002, with Giona Beltrametti and Stefan Hyner, she founded the Franco Beltrametti Foundation. She lives in Pavia, Italy, with her two daughters.



Anna Allenbach



Charlie Hann



Anna Ruchat

13th October 2005

for Cristina

What do you look for
when you push
like this
,
with your heels,
through the fog,
beyond the illuminated borders of the streets,
what do you feel
when you glimpse
the edge of that raincoat,
when a familiar step
on a cobblestone
punctures the silence,
complete deceit
or the arid whirlwind
of life?

Autumn 2007

to grandma

To step out of time
these days
is to climb up to the hospice
so I can visit you,
grey,
and greyer in the eyes,
and toothless,
during a meal that you swallow
straight from the tip of a spoon

direttamente dalla punta del cucchiaino

Arrivo la sera per non solcare troppo
il tuo presente senza dighe
il mio tutto crepato

Arrivo per ricordarti che sei viva
in quella stanza
dove da anni stai sepolta

Mi guardi
mi riconosci
e la prima cosa è il pianto, che
 chissà dove le nascondi ancora
tra la pelle ciondolante e le ossa esauste
tante lacrime

Subito mi dici del passato
di come ti occupa le giornate vuote
a te decrepita

I gesti dei tuoi cinquant'anni
il pianto di allora
la solitudine e una bambina tra le mani
tutto nel buco di un segreto piccolo
che non tace
e non ti fa morire

**

Te la ricordi la Sion
magra, piccola, che sul balcone sbatteva i tappeti
e con la voce un po' roca parlava e parlava e diceva
 [verrà.

Che sarebbe arrivato anche a Roma, diceva, anche in
Italia

I arrive in the evening so that I don't cut too much
through your undammed present,
my utterly cracked open one,

I arrive to remind you that you are alive
in that room
where you have been buried for years

You watch me,
you recognise me,
and you begin to cry.

Who knows where you still hide the tears,
between the hanging skin and exhausted bones,
so many,

Then you begin to talk to me about
the past, how it fills your empty days
for you, falling apart,

The actions of your fifty years,
how you cried back then,
your loneliness and a child between your hands,
all in a little keyhole of secrecy
that will not stay silent
and will not let you die.

**

Do you remember her our Sion,
a thin, small woman, who used to beat the rugs on the
[balcony
and to speak kind of rough, to speak and to say it
would
[come.

Even in Rome, she said, even in Italy, it would arrive,

IL GOLPE, come fosse la pioggia o l'alba di
domani

Sbatteva i tappeti la Sion, Encarnasion,
che veniva dall'Argentina e aveva visto
anche il Cile di Allende,
e sempre i militari, i militari
sbatteva i tappeti guardando il prato dietro la Marco
Polo
con le pecore
in quell'anticipo di primavera.

"Lo so io come succede"

lo sapeva la Sion
moglie di un dirigente comunista
in Argentina

un figlio ucciso in una fuga simulata
un genero desaparecido
e la figlia con la nipote
uscite dal paese per uno scambio
tra prigionieri e ostaggi.

Lo sapeva la Sion, che sarebbe arrivato
IL GOLPE, anche da noi
anche a Roma

Te la ricordi la Sion con il grembiule legato in vita
il dodici marzo
del '77

che stava lì sul balcone
dalla parte della Marco Polo
e non aveva fatto i letti
e non aveva sbattuto i tappeti

stava lì e aspettava
i carri armati.

THE COUP, as if it were tomorrow's rain or dawn

Sion shook out the carpets, Encarnasion,
who came from Argentina and had also seen
the Chile of Allende,
and soldiers, always soldiers.

She bet the carpets, watching the field behind the
Marco Polo
with the sheep
in spring's anticipation.

"I know how it happens"

Sion did know,
the wife of a communist party leader
in Argentina,

a son killed in a faked escape attempt,
a desaparecido son-in-law,
and her daughter and granddaughter
had left the country in an exchange
of prisoners and hostages.

Sion knew that it would arrive,
THE COUP, even among us,
even in Rome

Do you remember Sion, apron tied at her hips,
on the twelfth of March
of '77,

she was standing there on the balcony,
facing the Marco Polo,
and she hadn't made the beds,
and she hadn't shaken out the rugs,

standing there and waiting for
the tanks?

Luglio 2007

per Antonio Moresco

una sirena d'allarme
ti attraversa
lo sguardo

ma sorride
il volto stupito

Chi ti manca ? mi chiedi
nessuno
non mi manca nessuno davvero
salvo loro

i soliti
quelli che

nei momenti salienti della vita
se ne andavano in mia assenza
lasciandosi dietro una scia di futuro
ma non
le istruzioni per l'uso

for Antonio Moresco

in the important moments of life
 departed in my absence
 leaving behind a wake of the future
 but not
 the instruction manual

Per Franco Galato e Margherita

Quanta voglia di vita c'è ancora
dentro il tuo scheletro
raggricciato.

Quanto desiderio di esserci
nel corpo
 storpiato
che hai voluto portare fin qui

Sono vivo, guardate!

e viva è per me Margherita
 luminosa

che decifra parole deformi

e decifra te
 per noi
traducendoti fuori
dalla tua gabbia di dolore

10 aprile 2011

Spalanca il caso
 brutalmente
corridoi di panico
nel territorio del cuore.

La mente sterza
 i segnali
 cadono
come polvere
per poi ricomporsi
alla prima distrazione
in un disegno complesso

For Franco Galato and Margherita

What a will to live, still,
inside your shrunken
skeleton.

What a longing to exist
in your crippled
body
that you want to drag it here

Look, I'm alive!

and for me Margherita
lives luminous

to interpret misshapen words

and she deciphers you
for us,
translating you out
of your cage of pain.

10th April 2011

Open the case wide,
brutally,
corridors of panic
in the territory of the heart.

The mind swerves
the signals
that fall
like dust to the ground,
to then come back together
at the first distraction
in a complex design
of cruel

di spietate
impraticabili
convergenze.

Dicembre 2014

per Lauro

Oggi ti ho incontrato.
Era tuo quel procedere sospeso
di corpo oscillante nel freddo tuo
il gesto di spingere indietro i capelli folti
con un colpo brusco della testa
tuo
il sorriso indifeso.

Tua la strada
che calpestavi quand'eri studente
e ancora la morte aspettava
senza fretta
sul bordo del lago.

Incontro

Febbraio 2015

Uomo senza giorni sulle spalle
indossa
per uscire di casa
un'età neutra.

Come il pinguino imperatore
non sa volare
e a piccoli passi porta in giro
il suo freddo.

*Fa freddo nella storia
voglio andarmene*
Giorgio Caproni

ma è al fuoco
che il corpo invernale
chiede accoglienza

Disperanza

Di vita e di speranza regalavi pezzi come fiori
[coltivati
tra mente e pomodori. Un giorno m'hai detto "tuo
nonno,
mio principale, un uomo disperato ma normale, mi ha
[portato
quand'ho avuto la bambina,
delle rose e una copertina",

22nd of January 2015

*It's cold in this story,
I want to leave*
Giorgio Caproni

At the end
of a short journey,
 an intransitive
teenager halts
 between land and sea,
facing up a perpendicular dawn.

The night sky,
 icy,
won't ask questions.

But the fire's where
his body asks for
welcome in winter.

May 2015

Desperation

for Lucia

You gave away pieces of life and hope like flowers
 [cultivated
between the mint and the tomatoes. One day you told
me, ["Your grandfa-
ther,
my manager, a man desperate but secure,
brought me some roses and a baby blanket
when I had my daughter,"

Grey ashes potassium

allentiamo la presa
ogni luogo oggi
parla di te
ogni
luogo

now they stand
in that urn (rather ugly)
of painted clay

pottery

no one
will mix us again
and meanwhile your soul
transmigrates.
perhaps it will return incomplete
to try again
independently
of the ash
from that rather ugly urn.

There is no
place that talks about you
through the ash

Asche Asche Asche

let us slacken the grasp
every long today
every
place
talks of you.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *St. Martin (San Martino)*, wood, h.cm65 (2015)

“October Thought” by Seamus Heaney

Translated by Marco Sonzogni

Marco Sonzogni (1971) is an academic and writer. He is the editor of *Seamus Heaney. Poesie* (1966-2013) for Mondadori’s “I Meridiani” (2016). He lives and works in Wellington, New Zealand.

Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) is one of the most distinguished, acclaimed, and popular poets, essayists, and literary translators of the twentieth century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995 “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past”. “October Thought” is one of Heaney’s first poems to have been published, and appeared with the pseudonym “Incertus”. The original text and the Italian translation of “October Thought” are reproduced here courtesy of: the Estate of Seamus Heaney and Faber and Faber © 2016. The translator would like to thank Catherine Heaney, Lizzie Bishop and Emma Cheshire for their kindness and support.



October Thought

Starling thatch-watches and sudden swallow
Straight breaks to its mud-nest, home-rest rafter,
Up through dry dust-drunk cobwebs, like laughter
Flitting the roof of black-oak, bog-sod and rods of willow;
And twittering flirtings in the eaves as swallows quarrel.
Haystalks, straw-broken and strewn,
Hide, hear mice mealing the grain, gnawing strong
The iron-bound, swollen and ripe-round corn-barrel.

Minute movement millionfold whispers twilight
Under heaven-hue plum-blue and gorse-pricked with gold
And through the knuckle-gnarl of branches, poking the
[night,
Comes the trickling tinkle of bells well in the fold.

Gorgon (Michaelmas 1959: 27)

Pensiero d'autunno

Da cima di paglia sorveglia lo storno e ratta la rondine
irrompe al suo nido di fango, trave che arresta, accasante,
ragnatele ritratte salendo, piene di polvere, risa
scattanti sul tetto di quercia nera, piota e salice a fasce;
e nei cornicioni sbattere d'ali d'irascibili rondini e
[cinguettio.

Fieno stipato, spagliato e sparso,
secluso sentire sgranare di topi al pasto, robusto rodio
alla botte del mais, magliata di ferro, rigonfia e ripiena.

Minuti molteplici moti mormorano meriggio morente
sotto celeste pervinca-prugna puntato giallo-ginestra
e per nocchio di nocche di rami, pungenti la notte,
giunge gocciando da dentro l'ovile 'sto scampanello.

Frigoriferi / Refrigerators
A play in three acts by Mario Fratti

Translated by Carlotta Brentan

Carlotta Brentan is an actress and the official translator of the KIT Theater of New York. She recently translated *Farfalle* by Emanuele Aldrovandi, winner of the Mario Fratti NY Award 2016

Mario Fratti, professor emeritus of Italian literature at Hunter College, is an internationally acclaimed playwright and drama critic. Author of such works as *Suicide*, *The Cage*, *The Return*, *The Academy*, *Mafia*, *Races*, and *The Bridge*, he is best known for his musical *Nine* (inspired by Fellini's famous film, *8 1/2*) which in its original production in 1982 won the O'Neill Award, the Richard Rodgers Award, two Outer Critics Circle Awards, eight Drama Desk Awards, five Tony Awards, and in 2000 was a recipient of the Otto Award for Political Theater. In its 2003 revival, *Nine* won three Outer Critics Circle Awards and two Tony Awards. Fratti's nearly seventy plays have received some six hundred productions in two dozen countries and have been translated into many languages. Fratti was born in Italy but has been living in New York City since 1963. In addition to his writing achievements, he also serves as New York drama critic for European newspapers.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *The Bluejay* (La ghiandaia), oil on canvas, cm100x111 (2014)

I FRIGORIFERI

Dramma in tre atti di Mario Fratti

Personaggi:

Miss IRENE FLOWER, sorella gentile

Miss INES FLOWER (WILLY), sorella gemella

NICOLA, plurilaureato, cameriere italiano

L'ISPETTORE

RENÉE, infermiera francese (non parla, attrae)

GOLD, orango di famiglia (non parla, atterrisce)

Una villa quasi isolata nel Connecticut.

In alto, immediatamente sopra il sipario ancora chiuso, noteremo il mezzo busto della statua della Libertà Americana. Sarà una voce proveniente dalla statua ad annunciare: Musica "glaciale" di...

ATTO PRIMO**PRIMA SCENA**

Ambiente piuttosto scuro nonostante due ampie finestre, sul fondo. Fra di esse, cinque enormi frigoriferi. Portano lo stemma di un fiore e - in successione - le cinque lettere F, I, O, R, E. In ribalta, a sinistra, un apparecchio televisivo con il video rivolto alla poltrona occupata da Miss Irene, una signorina che ha forse superato i trent'anni ma che è ancora molto graziosa e piacente. In ribalta, a destra, scala e relativo sottoscala. Due grossi armadi, uno a destra ed uno a sinistra. Un lungo tavolo e sedie al centro della stanza. Una seconda poltrona è occupata da Miss Ines, sorella gemella, che legge voltandoci le spalle. È vestita esattamente come Miss Irene. L'orologio segna le undici. È domenica mattina.

Al levarsi del sipario e per alcuni secondi, immobilità assoluta. Sembra un quadro plastico. Miss Irene fissa il video succhiando un "lecca lecca". Nicola, con il vassoio in posizione d'offerta, fissa Miss Irene. Miss Ines, il cui volto ci appare solo di profilo, indistintamente, fissa Nicola.

THE REFRIGERATORS

A play in three acts by Mario Fratti

MISS PENNY DOVE, the gentle sister

MISS INEZ DOVE, her twin

NICOLA, a young Italian servant

POLICE INVESTIGATOR

RENEE, a French nurse (non-speaking: alluring)

GOLD, the family orangutan (non-speaking: chilling)

VOICES

Above the curtain which is still drawn a spotlight is directed on a bust of the Statue of Liberty. A voice (presumably hers) announces: "The Refrigerators"

The action takes place in the drawing room of the Dove home on an almost isolated estate in Connecticut. A Sunday morning. An actor might be used instead (made to look like the Statue of Liberty holding the torch). After he introduces the play, he goes to sleep – waking up only at the end, to speak the last lines.

ACT I

SCENE 1

A rather dark room – in spite of its two French doors upstage. There are five enormous refrigerators with the Dove trademark. Downstage, PENNY is seated watching television. She is a spinster type past thirty, but still very charming and attractive. Stage left is a staircase leading to the upper floor. Two old "armoires" – one at either end of the room. A long table with chairs in the center. Across the room, seated with her back to the audience and reading a book, is INEZ – the twin sister. She is dressed just like her twin sister Miss PENNY. We will call her INEZ-WILLY.

It is eleven o'clock. (We hear the chimes from a grandfather's clock strike eleven.) It is Sunday morning. As the curtain rises, everyone on stage is frozen, giving the impression of wax figures. Miss PENNY is watching television with a lollipop in her mouth. NICOLA, his eyes on Miss PENNY, is carrying a tray with two glasses and is caught in the position of passing a drink to Miss PENNY. Miss INEZ-WILLY who is seated with her back to the

VOCE: (dal televisore) "Macbeth – Atto quinto - Scena prima".

VOCE DI LADY MACBETH: "Ma la macchia v'è sempre! Cancellati, esecrabile macchia... cancellati, dico! Una, due, tre ore... L'inferno mugghia tenebroso – chi avrebbe creduto che il dannato vecchio avesse tanto sangue nelle vene? ... Ma queste mani non diverranno dunque più terse? ... Questo odore di sangue per tutto mi segue... I più eletti profumi d'Arabia non varranno a render tersa questa piccola mano... Oh! Oh! Oh!... Ma queste mie mani non diverranno dunque più terse? ... La macchia v'è sempre!".

(Interruzione musicale)

VOCE: (con sottofondo musicale) Lady Macbeth, poverina, non riuscì a liberarsi di quella macchia. Voi, massaie d'America, siete più fortunate! Avete la marca "Fiore"! Efficiente e moderna, lava fino al cuore!

(Motivo musicale: "È un amor... È un amor...") Se fosse ancora viva, la povera regina, le diremmo tutti in coro: "Lava con lavatrice "Fiore", Lady Macbeth. Lava anche l'anima, la marca "Fiore"! È un amore! "

(Motivo musicale: È un amor... È un amor...)

IRENE: (felicitissima, prendendo la bibita che Nicola le porge e dandogli in cambio il "lecca lecca") Hai visto, Nicki? La nostra marca! È un amore... Quel carosello commerciale ci costa un patrimonio ma che soddisfazione interrompere l'isolano!

NICOLA: L'isolano?

IRENE: William l'inglese! È scientificamente provato che interrompere la teletrasmissione ogni dieci minuti fa bene alla salute dell'americano medio. Si respira un po' quando sospendono quei delittoni! (Beve) (Con orgoglio infantile) Lava anche il sangue, la nostra marca "Fiore", hai sentito? In Italia, ne avevi mai viste?

audience but whose profile we see, has her eyes on NICOLA.

VOICE (coming from TV): Macbeth – Act 5 – Scene 1.

VOICE OF LADY MACBETH (from TV): Yet here's a spot. ... Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One; two. Why, then, 'tis time to do't. hell is murky! Fie, my Lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our powers to accompt? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? ... The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What! Will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my Lord, no more o' that! You mar all with this starting... here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh! ... wash your hands, put on your night-gown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave...

(musical interruption)

VOICE (with musical background, from TV): Lady Macbeth, poor thing, couldn't get rid of that spot! Housewives of America – you are more fortunate because you have a DOVE! DOVE washes whi-ter

It's thrilling

It's living

It's a living DOVE

(jingle: it's a love, it's a love...)

If the poor Queen were with us today we would serenade her: "Wash your wash with DOVE, Lady Macbeth, DOVE washes everything – it even washes your soul – it's a love!" (jingle: it's a love, it's a love...)

PENNY (happy and amused – handing her lollypop to NICOLA as she takes her glass from the tray): Did you see, Nicky? Our product! It's a love! ...that commercial costs us an arm and a leg, but it's worth it just to interrupt the old boy from Stratford!

NICOLA: The old boy?

PENNY: The Honorable William. It's been medically proven that television commercials every fifteen minutes help the average American. They say it's good for your health. After such horrors the interruptions give you a chance to breathe. (she takes a sip from her glass, and then with childish pride.) Our DOVE – our product – it even washes out blood, did you hear? Did you ever see our products in Italy?

NICOLA: Veramente...

IRENE: Dimenticavo, vieni dal meridione depresso. A Roma e Milano le mandiamo. Le capitali del miracolo. Tre al minuto, ne facciamo. Frigoriferi, condizionatori d'aria, lavastoviglie, sterilizzatori, lavatrici superautomatiche... Al cinema, le avevi viste mai?

NICOLA: Nei film americani, sissignora. In quelli italiani, purtroppo...

IRENE: Siete nazionalisti, lo so. Ci mettete solo le vostre: Fiat, Montecatini, Motta...

NICOLA: Veramente...

IRENE: Come son grandi, i vostri frigoriferi ?

(Mostra con orgoglio i cinque di famiglia: enormi)

NICOLA: Piccolini. Per case piccole, pasti piccoli... E un modesto paese, il nostro, sa. Uno stivale piccolo e corto. Perfino la statura degli uomini, spesso...

IRENE: Tu non sei tanto corto.

NICOLA: Mio padre era veneto. Venne a Napoli per fare il soldato... Restò incastrato.

IRENE: (ingenuamente) Incastrato dove?

NICOLA: (timido timido) Non si può dire... "dove".

IRENE: Perché?

NICOLA: (timidamente) Non è decante, in presenza di signorine. Dettaglio sessuale.

LADY MACBETH: (dal televisore) "... Indossa la tunica notturna! Non mostrarti così pallido! A letto, a letto! Dammi quella mano... "

(Ines si alza e va a spegnere il televisore)

IRENE: (con gratitudine) Grazie, sorellina. Tutto quel sangue... Sei sempre così premurosa, tu!

INES-WILLY: (che non ci ha ancora mostrato il volto; con voce dura, maschile) Ti rovini gli occhi, cara. (Ines-Willy si avvia verso la porta)

IRENE: Dove vai, cara?

INES-WILLY: Al mio lavoro.

IRENE: Tu lavori troppo, cara.

INES-WILLY: (ironica) Ah sì?

IRENE: Sai di quale lavoro sto parlando. Non dovresti.

NICOLA (hesitating): Not really...

PENNY: I forgot – you come from the South. We export them to Rome and Milan – the booming cities of the Italian miracle. They sell a DOVE every three minutes: refrigerators, air conditioners, dishwashers, sterilizers, laundromats... Didn't you see them in the movies?

NICOLA: Only in American films, Ma'am. In the Italian ones, unfortunately...

PENNY: Italians are terribly nationalistic. They only push their own products: Fiat, Motta, Olivetti...

NICOLA: To tell the truth...

PENNY: Are your Italian refrigerators big? (she motions with pride to the five enormous family refrigerators)

NICOLA: They're very small. For small houses, small meals... Our country is poor. A boot – small and short. Even the men are short...

PENNY: You're not so short.

NICOLA: My father comes from the North. He went to Naples in the Army and... got stuck there

PENNY (naively): Got stuck where?

NICOLA (embarrassed, timidly): I'm embarrassed to tell you... where

PENNY: Why?

NICOLA (embarrassed): Well... in the presence of two young ladies...

LADY MACBETH (from TV): To bed, to bed! Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed! (INEZ-WILLY gets up and turns off the television.)

PENNY (grateful): Thank you, sister. All that blood... You're truly considerate!

INEZ-WILLY (whose face we do not see: in a masculine and low pitched voice) You'll ruin your eyes, dear. (INEZ-WILLY starts to go to the door.)

PENNY: Where are you going, dear?

INEZ-WILLY: Back to my work.

PENNY: You work too much, dear

INEZ-WILLY (ironical) Do I?

PENNY: That kind of work, I mean. You shouldn't.

INES-WILLY: Mi piace troppo.

IRENE: La tua salute è più importante di... (Vago gesto in direzione dei frigoriferi)

INES-WILLY: Ah sì? Da quando?

IRENE: Da sempre. Dal nostro primo incontro... (Una pausa; fissano Nicola che ha evidentemente ascoltato)

INES-WILLY: (ad Irene, con severità) Siamo gemelle.

IRENE: Naturalmente. Intendevo dire... dal nostro primo incontro nel pancino di mamma... (A Nicola) Me lo ricordo benissimo... I gemelli sono speciali... una particolare affinità chimica... una specie di... sesto senso... (Ad Ines-Willy) E tu ricordi quell'articolo sulla vita dei gemelli! Se tu lavori troppo, sono io a stancarmi!

INES-WILLY: (ironica, alludendo ad una attività sessuale che Nicola ignora) ... se io godo, tu godi... contemporaneamente...

IRENE: (accesa) Quella è la parte che mi piace! Contemporaneamente, insieme... (Con passione) Baciarmi, sorellina. (Si baciano sulla bocca; Nicola ne è turbato, messo a disagio. Si tratta infatti di un "vero bacio")

INES-WILLY: (aggressiva, fissando Nicola) Che hai da guardare? Qualcosa che non va?

IRENE: (gentile) Son così ingenui, questi italiani. Mi ha già domandato una volta perché ci bacciamo sulla bocca. (A Nicola) Siamo gemelle!!! Così uguali, poi. E come se baciassimo uno specchio! (A Nicola). Ti sei mai baciato, tu, nello specchio?

NICOLA: No.

IRENE: È lo stesso come bacciar sè stessi. (Strizza l'occhio a Ines) Due corpi, un'anima! Così uguali! (Ora vediamo bene in volto Ines; ha un'espressione dura, maschile; non somiglia affatto ad Irene) (A Nicola) Non ti sembra ? ... Qual è il tuo parere? (Nicola non osa rispondere. Ines raccoglie dalla poltrona il libro che stava leggendo ed esce a destra, attraverso il sottoscala)

IRENE: (ripetendo) Perché non rispondi? Non ti sembriamo uguali?

NICOLA: Non tanto... (Ora che Ines è uscita, Nicola si sente meglio, più a suo agio. Depone il vassoio sul tavolo)

IRENE: Eppure lo dicono tutti, nei dintorni... Ne son tutti convinti. (Studia Nicola) Nonostante non ci siano amici... (Confidenzialmente) Son gelosi, capirai... E invidiosi della nostra ricchezza... E curiosi... Sorvegliano ogni momento della nostra vita. Per questo...

INEZ-WILLY: I like it.

PENNY: Your health is more important than... (vague gesture in direction of the refrigerators)

INEZ-WILLY: Is it? Since when?

PENNY: From the first time I met you... (a silence: they both look at NICOLA)

INEZ-WILLY (severe): We're twins.

PENNY: of course! From the first time I met you in mother's tummy, I meant. (to NICOLA) And I remember it... There's something special about twins... Something chemical, some sort of affinity which... (to INEZ-WILLY) And you read that article on twins! If you work too hard, I get tired.

INEZ-WILLY (ironical, allusive of some-thing NICOLA does not know): ...If I enjoy something, you enjoy it too at the same time...

PENNY: That's the part I like... At the same time, together... (with passion) Kiss me before you go, sister! (They kiss almost passionately on the mouth; NICOLA is embarrassed and feels uneasy.)

INEZ-WILLY (aggressively to NICOLA): Is something bothering you? What are you looking at?

PENNY (gently): These Italians - they are so naive. He's already asked me once why we kiss on the mouth. (to NICOLA) We are twins!!! Not ordinary twins but IDENTICAL twins. It's like kissing yourself in a mirror! (to NICOLA) Have you ever kissed yourself in a mirror?

NICOLA: No.

PENNY: It's like kissing yourself. (winking at INEZ-WILLY) Two bodies, one soul! We are ONE. (For the first time we see clearly INEZ-WILLY's face. "She" has a hard masculine look; there is no resemblance to her "twin" PENNY.) (to NICOLA) Don't you see it? How do we look to you? (NICOLA does not dare answer. INEZ-WILLY takes the book she left on the chair and exits left under the staircase.)

PENNY (insisting): Why don't you answer? Don't we look alike to you?

NICOLA: Not very...

(Now that INEZ-WILLY has left the room NICOLA is more at ease. He puts the tray on the table.)

PENNY: Yet all the people around here say we're IDENTICAL.

(Si trattiene)

NICOLA: Per questo? ...

IRENE: Ci mostriamo tanto spesso alla finestra, insieme. Perché ci vedano.

NICOLA: Da lontano.

IRENE: L'interessante è che vedano che siamo due, vestite allo stesso modo.

NICOLA: L'unica somiglianza.

IRENE: Ma se siamo gemelle!

NICOLA: E che significa? A volte...

IRENE: Noi siamo un caso unico, eccezionale. Guarda qua. (Da un cassetto estrae due fotografie accoppiate in un'unica cornice)

NICOLA: (studiandole) Questa è lei - lei. Due volte.

IRENE: Vedi? Lo dicono tutti.

NICOLA: Scherzi a parte. Che le è successo, a sua sorella? (Con ribrezzo) Ha una pelle... Che cosa l'ha deturpata così?

IRENE: Esagerato! È poi tanto brutto?

NICOLA: Brutto?

IRENE: Brutta, volevo dire.

NICOLA: Sa come siamo noi, in Italia. Di bocca buona. Ebbene, io con quella non ci dormirei.

IRENE: (divertita) Lo credo bene!

NICOLA: Scusi, sa. Le parlo a cuore aperto. Lei è splendida, lei è un fiore...

IRENE: (indicando i frigoriferi) Il marchio di famiglia.

NICOLA: (appassionatamente) Lei è sprecata, glielo giuro. Lei è... (Cerca inutilmente parole preziose; le "crea" con i gesti)

IRENE: Un fiore.

NICOLA: Così giovane, così desiderabile! Perché non si è mai sposata?

IRENE: Voi italiani non pensate ad altro Sesso, poi sesso, ancora sesso.

NICOLA: Voi ne avete paura.

They're convinced of it. (She watches NICOLA's reaction.) And they're not our friends (confidentially) They're jealous, you can understand, jealous of our wealth... and of course curious. They watch every move we make. That's why... (She refrains.)

NICOLA: That's why?

PENNY: We often stand by the window, together. So they can watch us.

NICOLA: From a distance.

PENNY: We want them to see us. We want them to know that there are two of us. Dressed alike.

NICOLA: That's the only resemblance.

PENNY: But we are real twins!

NICOLA: And what does that mean? Often there are cases when...

PENNY: We are a unique case - an exception. Look here. (From a drawer, she takes out two photographs that are in a double frame.) NICOLA (studying them): This is you. So is the other. It's the same face.

PENNY: You see? They all say that about us.

NICOLA: You're teasing me. What happened to your sister? (with disgust) what disfigured her? What's wrong with her skin?

PENNY: You're exaggerating! Is he that ugly?

NICOLA: HE?!?!!

PENNY: I meant to say "she". Is she that ugly?

NICOLA: You know how we Italians are. We like everything. But let me tell you - I couldn't go to bed with her!

PENNY (amused): I can believe it!

NICOLA: Forgive me if... I speak openly. You're wonderful, tender... like a dove...

PENNY (looking at the refrigerators): The emblem of our family.

NICOLA (passionately): But what a waste! Why, you're a... (Unable to find an expressive and appropriate word, he makes a suggestive and sensual gesture.)

PENNY: A dove.

NICOLA: So young--so desirable! Why aren't you married?

PENNY: You Italians think of nothing but sex. It's always sex with you.

NICOLA: American women are afraid of it.

IRENE: (divertita) Sì? Credi proprio?

NICOLA: L'ho letto in un libro.

IRENE: (con malizia) Hai avuto conferme in questi primi sette mesi d'America?

NICOLA: La prima conferma: lei. Una vera donna come lei - sprecata -. La seconda... (Si pente di un'incauta affermazione)

IRENE: La seconda?

NICOLA: (con imbarazzo) Come dire? .. Nemmeno... (Non ha il coraggio di continuare)

IRENE: Nemmeno? ...

NICOLA: Son solo un dipendente, qui... Dovrei essere più rispettoso...

IRENE: Su quale soggetto?

NICOLA: Stavamo parlando di matrimonio, amore, sesso...

IRENE: Parlane pure. Ci piace.

NICOLA: Piace che? Sesso?

IRENE: Il soggetto "sesso". È stato sempre uno dei nostri hobby, in questo paese. La tua seconda conclusione è quindi? ...

NICOLA: Ebbene... Sua sorella è - per dirlo all'italiana - un "monumento di goffaggine" ... Se fosse povera, ebbene, morirebbe vergine, nessun dubbio. Ma giacché...

IRENE: (divertita) Giacché... ?

NICOLA: ... è probabilmente ricca. Quindi... Un marito alla meglio... Il mondo è pieno di miopi! (Irene scoppia a ridere) Mi perdoni. Con lei son così a mio agio che... dimentico la mia condizione...

IRENE: Dimentica pure! Mi piaci quando ti confidi.

NICOLA: (incoraggiato) Perché ha paura dell'amore?

IRENE: (civettuola) Paura, io?

NICOLA: Evidentemente. Se no...

IRENE: Se no... ?

NICOLA: Lei mi capisce... Io son qui, a sua disposizione... Giovane, forte, con vera esperienza in... Lei mi capisce... (Nicola tenta di abbracciarla)

IRENE: (evitandolo) Sta calmo, birichino. Non è vero che abbiamo paura dell'amore, noi americane... (Riflettendo) Che ci siano molti ostacoli, può esser vero...

PENNY (amused, sarcastic): Are we? You really think so?

NICOLA: I read that in a book.

PENNY (with malice): Is this the conclusion you've come to after seven months in America?

NICOLA: You've confirmed my first conclusion. A real woman like you - WASTED. My second conclusion is that (He stops in embarrassment.)

PENNY: Go on. Your second conclusion is that...?

NICOLA (uncertain): Well... not even...

PENNY: Not even...?

NICOLA: I'm only the butler, here... I should be more respectful...

PENNY: Respectful of what?

NICOLA: We were talking about marriage, love, sex...

PENNY: You don't have to be respectful on that. We like it in this country.

NICOLA: Like what? Sex?

PENNY: The subject of sex. It's one of our hobbies. What's your second conclusion after seven months in America?

NICOLA: Well... Your sister is - using an Italian expression - a monument of awkwardness. If she were poor, there would be no hope for her. She'd die a virgin. But being...

PENNY (amused): Being what?...

NICOLA: Rich, I assume... She had some chance to find some kind of husband. God knows there're plenty of near-sighted bachelors in the world! (PENNY bursts out laughing.) Forgive me. I feel so at ease with you that sometimes I forget myself...

PENNY: Well then, forget yourself! I like your forgetting... (vague gesture)

NICOLA (encouraged): Why are you afraid of love?

PENNY (charming): Am I?

NICOLA: Of course you are! Otherwise...

PENNY: Otherwise?

NICOLA: You know what I mean... I'm here... young, available - experienced... (NICOLA tries to make advances.)

PENNY (gracefully avoiding his advances): Aren't you the sly one? ...Just calm down...calm down... It's not true that we Americans are afraid of love... (reflecting) There are obstacles... That may be true.

NICOLA: Quali? L'amore non conosce ostacoli! (Con febbrile partecipazione) Io affronterei...

IRENE: (interrompendolo; descrivendo un po' la sua vita) La mamma, per esempio... Mia madre non volle perderci. Ci mise in Ditta. A controllare che non rubassero... La ricchezza è un terribile ostacolo. Si deve trovare un marito che abbia quanto te. O di più...

NICOLA: (rapidamente, serissimo) Conta solo l'amore!

IRENE: (quasi a sè stessa, continuando il discorso precedente). Quasi impossibile, nel nostro caso.

NICOLA: (alludendo a Ines) Nel caso di quella, forse. Chi la vuole? Ma nel suo... Io darei la mia vita per... (Non trovando una migliore espressione) Una creatura morbida come lei!

IRENE: Morbida!?

NICOLA: Soffice, tenera.

IRENE: Grazie. (Con una vena di tristezza) Anche Ines è sempre stata contraria al mio matrimonio.

NICOLA: Gelosia. È troppo brutta. Non saprebbe tollerare la sua felicità.

IRENE: Siamo identiche, guarda le foto.

NICOLA: Lo eravate, forse. Prima che il vetriolo.. .

IRENE: (ridendo di cuore) Ma è proprio così... brutta?

NICOLA: Doveva nascere maschio, quella. Nei suoi cromosomi...

IRENE: (con curiosità) Che hai detto? "Cromo... somi"?

NICOLA: (dottorale, ripetendo a memoria) I cromosomi - il cui numero è costante per ogni specie e che si trovano in ugual numero nella cellula riproduttiva femminile e in quella maschile - sono parte integrante del nostro sangue. Nella specie umana i cromosomi contenuti nel nucleo delle cellule sono quarantasei. Ventitre del padre, ventitre della madre. Non bisogna inoltre dimenticare che i cromosomi sono costituiti da elementi funzionali discreti detti geni. Ogni gene...

IRENE: (sempre più sorpresa dal suo eloquio) "Gene"?

NICOLA: Love knows no obstacles! (with feverish involvement) I could face any...

PENNY (interrupting; and talking now about her life): Mother ... My mother, for example, did not want to lose us... She put us in charge of the business so that we could protect it from embezzlers. Having millions can be an obstacle... We've got to find a husband who has as much as we – or more than we have...

NICOLA (very seriously; quickly): Only love counts!

PENNY (almost to herself, continuing her story): In our case – it's almost impossible.

NICOLA (referring to INEZ-WILLY): Impossible in HER case, maybe! But in yours... I'd give my life for... I'd give my life for... (Unable to find the words he wants) A creature "morbida" like you!

PENNY: MORBID?!

NICOLA: I meant to say ... In Italian "morbida" means soft, tender...

PENNY: Thank you. (with some sadness) Even Inez is against my getting married.

NICOLA: Jealousy. she's too ugly. She couldn't endure your happiness.

PENNY: We are identical. Look at the pictures.

NICOLA: Perhaps you were identical. Before something disfigured her...

PENNY (bursts out laughing): Is she really that ... ugly?

NICOLA: She should have been born a man. In her chromosomes...

PENNY (with curiosity): What did you say? "Chromo ... somes"?

NICOLA (repeating by heart, in a pedantic professorial tone): A chromosome is a red-shaped or threadlike body of chromatin in the cell nucleus, which splits longitudinally as the cell divides, one half going to the nucleus of each of the daughter cells. In the male and female germ cells which conjugate in sexual reproduction, the number of chromosomes is reduced to half that characteristic of the species, so the conjugation does not double the number of chromosomes in the fertilized egg...

PENNY (to herself, dreaming): Fertilized...

NICOLA (still professorial): The number may be either diploid or haploid. In the human species is haploid-- that is having half the

NICOLA: (sempre dottorale, felice di far sfoggio) Stavo appunto dicendo che ogni cromosomo contiene a sua volta un gruppo di migliaia di elementi che costituiscono tutti insieme il patrimonio ereditario. Questi artefici dell'eredità sono stati chiamati "geni" - ed al singolare, ripeto, "gene".

IRENE: (con ammirazione) Il genio sembri tu.

NICOLA: (lusingato, con fervore) Quella... (Indica la porta dalla quale è uscita Ines-Willy) Ha tanti geni maschili, quella ... (Gesto vago) Tanti. Sicuramente.

IRENE: Come lo sai?

NICOLA: Intuizione medica. La scienza dice infatti che nei cromosomi di tutti gli umani ci sono geni maschili e geni femminili. Se in noi maschi ci son troppi geni femminili, la Madonna ci accolga nel gran seno delle svolazzanti. Se in lei (Allude a Ines-Willy) ci son troppi geni maschili, San Giuseppe l'accolga nella squadra falegnami.

IRENE: Cioè? Spiega un po' meglio. La troppa cultura mi confonde.

NICOLA: Semplice. In ogni maschio c'è un pizzico di femminilità. E viceversa. Nel viceversa, sua sorella calza perfettamente.

IRENE: (sinceramente ammirante) Che erudizione! Che intuito!

NICOLA: Intuito?

IRENE: L'hai detto tu, mi pare.

NICOLA: Ho parlato di "intuizione medica", io.

IRENE: Credevo fosse la stessa cosa. Come fai a saper tanto?

NICOLA: Stavo per laurearmi anche in medicina. Sono un pluridottore, Miss Irene. Un plurilaureato. O quasi.

number present in the somatic cells, as most gametes...

PENNY: "Gametes"? What is that?

NICOLA (patiently explaining): A mature sex cell or germ cell. We have twenty three chromosomes in the male germ cell and twenty three in the female one. In each chromosome we have the hereditary units or genes... PENNY (more and more amazed by his knowledge): GENES?

NICOLA (happily exhibitionist): Thousands of them in each chromosome. Almost inconceivably minute, the genes are pictured as strung out like beads along the network of the cell nucleus. It is they that are inherited. It is they who determine the laws of heredity. Each genius...

PENNY (admiringly; interrupting): You are the Genius! How do you know all this?

NICOLA (flattered; with fervor): And I tell you more.. Your sister... (He points to the door from where INEZ-WILLY went out.) has more male genes than...! (vague gesture)

PENNY: How do you know?

NICOLA: Medical instinct. In fact science teaches us that in the human chromosomes there are male and female genes... If a man has too many female genes, he may find protection in the bosom of the Madonna among her fluttering female worshippers. If "she" (referring to INEZ-WILLY) has too many male genes, she may find protection in the strong arms of Saint Christopher among his virile truckdrivers!

PENNY: What did you say? I don't understand. You're too complicated for me.

NICOLA: It's simple. There's a pinch of female in every male. And vice-versa. You have a good example in your sister.

PENNY (showing sincere admiration): How erudite! What intuition!

NICOLA: "Intuition"?!

PENNY: I think you said that.

NICOLA: I only said "medical instinct."

PENNY: I thought it was the same thing. But how can you know so much? What are you, an M.D.?

NICOLA: I was about to get a degree in medicine. I'm a man with many degrees, Miss Penny. In effect I'm a multidegreed doctor. Or nearly.

IRENE: L'ho sentito dire, degli italiani. È una malattia vostra, credo. Tutti dottori.

NICOLA: Anch'io, sì.

IRENE: Dimmi di te, dimmi di te! Mi piace ascoltare storie.

NICOLA: (con finta modestia) Sono italiano. Genialità atavica, quindi. La cultura mi è affine. Maturità classica. Tre anni di medicina. Biennio ingegneria. Laurea in Legge. Avvocati siamo troppi, in Italia. Ho chiesto il visto per gli Stati Uniti. Nella quota "artisti". Sono scultore. Guadagno meglio come cameriere. Quindi... Le faccio la testa?

IRENE: La testa come?

NICOLA: Scolpita, plasmata.

IRENE: Due. Da mettere all'ingresso del giardino. Le due gemelle. Identiche.

NICOLA: Identiche?

IRENE: Ti pagheremo bene. Devono vederci sempre insieme, i vicini. Son così sospettosi...

NICOLA: Sospettosi perché?

IRENE: Considerano questa villa... misteriosa. (Nicola si guarda attorno; condivide quell'opinione) Anche tu?

NICOLA: Non sia mai! È divinamente suggestiva! La sua presenza, poi...

IRENE: Si domandano perché non usciamo mai...

NICOLA: ... e perché non vi sposate, scommetto.

IRENE: perfino se siamo ancora vive. Per questo ci mostriamo tanto spesso alla finestra. Ci guardano col binocolo.

NICOLA: E sono ancora convinti che siete "identiche"?

IRENE: Sì.

NICOLA: L'ho sempre detto che i sospettosi sono miopi. Che altro?

IRENE: Che altro che?

NICOLA: Che altro sospettano?

IRENE: Tutto... Che una possa assassinare l'altra, per esempio. Ci crederesti?

NICOLA: Lei, assassina? L'al - (Pensa all'"Altra"). Lei, no di certo. Lei è...

IRENE: Un fiore. Chi, allora?

PENNY: I've heard it's a sickness typical of Italians. You're all "Doctors" - they say.

NICOLA: Yes, I too am a doctor.

PENNY: Tell me about it - about your life - I'd like to know.

NICOLA (pretending to be "modest"): I'm Italian. Consequently, my ingeniousness is ancestral. Culture becomes us. I majored in the classics. Then I had three years of medical school. Two years of engineering. I got my degree in Law. But Italy has too many lawyers. So I applied for a visa to come to the States. I was accepted in the quota of "Artists." I am also a sculptor. However I earn more as a butler. That's why... Do you want me to do your head?

PENNY: My head? ...How?

NICOLA: A sculpture.

PENNY: Two. The Dove Sisters. At the gate of the driveway. "The twins." IDENTICAL.

NICOLA: Identical?!

PENNY: We'll pay you well. The neighbors must always see us together. They're so suspicious...

NICOLA: Why suspicious?

PENNY: They consider this house... a mystery. (NICOLA looks around the room. He shares this opinion.) You too?

NICOLA: Far from it! It's divinely suggestive! And... your presence here...

PENNY: They wonder why we never go out.

NICOLA: ...and why you've not married, I presume.

PENNY: They even wonder whether we're still alive. That's why we exhibit ourselves by the window so often. They watch with a telescope.

NICOLA: And they are still convinced that you're "identical?"

PENNY: Yes.

NICOLA: I've always said that the suspicious are short-sighted. What else?

PENNY: What do you mean "what else?"

NICOLA: What else do they suspect? PENNY: Everything... That one of us might have murdered the other, for instance. Would you believe it?

NICOLA: You, a murderer!! Never! (He thinks of INEZ-WILLY) Not you. You're...

PENNY (quickly): ...a "dove," I know. Who could - then?

NICOLA: (evitando) Nessuna.

IRENE: Fra le due?

NICOLA: Se vuol proprio costringermi ad una scelta...

IRENE: Ho capito. Noì, invece, ci amiamo. Appassionatamente.

NICOLA: Che avverbio!

IRENE: Significa: "molto".

NICOLA: Bacio sulla bocca... (Soffrendone) Quello... Quello non mi va giù... Mi innervosisce... Non posso proprio...

IRENE: Perché? E così innocente, fra sorelle !...

NICOLA: (facendosi coraggio) Scusi il mio ardire. In Italia siamo un po' ignoranti in materia. Ci protegge la Chiesa da tali notizie. E vero che...?

IRENE: Che...?

NICOLA: E un po' difficile... Non parlo di voi due, naturalmente. È vero che spesso, fra donne...?

IRENE: Fra donne...?

NICOLA: (imbarazzatissimo) Fra donne, insomma, amicizia... amore... Come quella poetessa greca...

IRENE: Amicizia, è vero. Molta, in America. C'è molta amicizia fra gli appartenenti allo stesso sesso. Ed amore in famiglia, ovviamente. Sorelle che adorano sorelle. Fratelli che... (Riappare da destra Ines-Willy, con il volto duro e sospettoso. Improvviso imbarazzo di Miss Irene e di Nicola il quale prende subito il vassoio ed assume nuovamente un atteggiamento ossequioso)

IRENE: (a Ines-Willy) Questi italiani... Ingenui come bambini. Non credono all'amore sororale.

INES-WILLY: (sospettosa) Non credono?

NICOLA: (giustificandosi) Io non mi permetterei...

IRENE: Non capiscono, volevo dire. È inconcepibile, per loro, il bacio fra sorelle, fratelli...

INES-WILLY: L'interessante è che sappia fare il suo mestiere: Servire. Il solito, per me.

(Autoritaria, a Nicola che è prontissimo; apre il quinto frigorifero - lettera E -. Ci appare un interno elegante, luminosissimo, fornito di ogni ben-di-dio. Nicola prepara una miscela verde per Ines-Willy. Lento oscuramento che dà più risalto al luminoso frigorifero.)

Siparietto

Breve commento di musica "glaciale".

NICOLA (evasive): No one...

PENNY: Between the two of us?

NICOLA (embarrassed): If you really oblige me to say which of the two could...

PENNY: You're wrong, you see. We love each other. Passionately.

NICOLA: Passionately?" Such a strong word...

PENNY: It only means "very much."

NICOLA: Those kisses on the mouth... (jealous) That... That I can't understand... It makes me nervous... I can't really...

PENNY: Why? It's so innocent - we're sisters!

NICOLA (gathering courage): Excuse my indiscretion. In Italy we are rather ignorant on the subject-The Church protects us from knowing too much. Is it true that...? (He hesitates.)

PENNY: That...?

NICOLA: It's a little difficult... Naturally--I don't mean the two of you but-is it true that... between women-often...?

PENNY: Between women...?

NICOLA (very embarrassed): I mean that... aaah... between women-friendship... love... Look at the greek poetess... Sappho...

PENNY: Friendship," yes. That's the word to use. In America friendship with members of the same sex is not unusual. And love for the family is of course natural. Sisters who love sisters. Brothers who...

(INEZ-WILLY appears from stage Left with a severe suspicious look. PENNY and NICOLA are surprised and show their embarrassment. NICOLA takes the tray and resumes again the attitude of the servile butler.)

PENNY (to INEZ-WILLY): These Italians... They are just like children. So naive! They don't believe in sisterly love.

INEZ-WILLY (suspicious; with aggressiveness): They don't?

NICOLA (justifying himself): I would never dare!!!

PENNY: I really meant they don't understand. For them it's inconceivable for sisters to kiss each other.

INEZ-WILLY: Who cares what he understands? What matters is that he knows his place: to be an efficient servant. (to NICOLA, with authority) The usual, for me! (NICOLA promptly opens the

SCENA SECONDA

(Domenica pomeriggio. Due rintocchi. Si apre il siparietto. L'orologio segna le due. Nicola sta spolverando i frigoriferi. Miss Irene, con gli occhi semiaperti, guarda il televisore. Telegiornale con le ultime notizie, intervallate da caroselli con annunci commerciali. Miss Irene si appisola. Si sveglia di colpo solo quando giunge il carosello "Marca Fiore").

VOCE; "Frigorifero Marca Fiore", massaie d' America, è un amore! (Musichetta: È un amor, È un amor, È un amor...) (Miss Irene sorride debolmente a Nicola, con intesa, con orgoglio; si appisola di nuovo) (Altre notizie dal telegiornale. Nicola, quando si è ben accertato che Miss Irene dorme, tenta di aprire con forza il frigorifero due (lettera I), il frigorifero tre (lettera O), il frigorifero quattro (lettera R). Gli è impossibile. Sta ancora tentando di forzare il frigorifero quattro quando appare da destra, come un fantasma, Ines-Willy)

INES-WILLY: (urlando) No!!! (Irene si sveglia di colpo e scatta in piedi, impaurita)

INES-WILLY: (dominandosi) Ti ho detto che quei frigoriferi - quei tre - non devono essere mai aperti. Mai, hai capito? Sono fuori uso. (Attenuando) Vecchi tipi, ricordi di famiglia, cari ricordi che nessuno ha il diritto di toccare. Nessuno, hai capito? Fuori uso, hai capito?

NICOLA: (mortificato e pentito) Agli ordini.

(Dal telegiornale giunge ora una notizia che interessa moltissimo Ines-Willy, Irene e - di conseguenza - Nicola. Durante la trasmissione del telegiornale e fino alla chiusura della TV, avremo continue interruzioni di Ines-Willy.)

fifth refrigerator. We see a bright light: a luxurious and fully stocked refrigerator. NICOLA takes out a pitcher of tomato juice for INEZ-WILLY. The room slowly darkens to a complete black-out. Now the only light left is a luminous light coming from the refrigerator which has remained open.

(TABLEAU CURTAINS or BLACKOUT)

Brief musical bridge

SCENE 2

Same as Scene I. Sunday afternoon. We hear two strokes from a clock. The tableau curtains open. The hands on the clock show two o'clock. NICOLA is dusting the refrigerators. PENNY, with eyes half open, is looking at television. It is a major network with the news of the day interrupted now and then by commercial messages. PENNY dozes off. She is abruptly awakened by the commercial: "Sign of the Dove"

VOICE (coming from TV): More news after this message... A "DOVE" refrigerator, *Housewives of America*, is a love! (jingle: it's a love, it's a love...)

(PENNY proud and happy, winks at NICOLA. She dozes off again. Another newscast is heard coming from television. When NICOLA is certain that PENNY is asleep, he tries to open the second refrigerator. He does not succeed. He then attempts to open the third and the fourth refrigerators. He is struggling with the fourth refrigerator when - like a phantom - INEZ-WILLY appears from Stage Left.)

INEZ-WILLY (screaming): No!!!

(PENNY, terrified jumps to her feet.) YOU MUST NEVER TRY TO OPEN any of those three refrigerators - I told you that before! They must never be touched. Do you understand? THEY DON'T WORK. (sentimentally; giving less importance) They are dear to our hearts only because it's the first "DOVE" model. They are family heirlooms. No one has the right to go near them - do you understand? No one has the right to touch them. NEVER!

NICOLA (mortified and repenting): As you wish - I promise.

(From the television, a news report which catches INEZ's attention and brings all three of them back to the TV set)

VOICE (from TV): We interrupt this program to bring you a special news report from Moscow: "The Russians have astonished

INES-WILLY: (contemporaneamente, a soggetto, per spezzare la trasmissione.) Hai sentito? Verissimo!... Proprio così... Esattamente!... Eh si!... Lo sapevo!... Quei dannati russi!... È vero!... L'ho sempre detto!... Ecco la conferma! (ecc., ecc.) (Ines-Willy salta, danza, si stropiccia le mani. È fuori di sé dalla gioia.)

VOCE DEL COMMENTATORE: (mentre i tre pendono dalle sue labbra) Due lucertole preistoriche, due "tritoni a quattro dita" che appartengono ad un ordine primitivo delle salamandre, sarebbero stati rianimati e restituiti alla vita dopo esser rimasti congelati per circa cinquemila anni. La notizia, di cui ha parlato Radio Mosca in una trasmissione in lingua inglese per l'estero, è stata pubblicata nel numero di dicembre della rivista letteraria "Neva" di Leningrado. Secondo questo articolo, intitolato "Il limite della vita e della morte", un gruppo di cercatori d'oro e geologi ha scoperto due batraci primordiali nel suolo eternamente gelato della Siberia. I due animali ritrovati risalirebbero all'era mesozoica - circa cinquemila anni fa. Il primo di essi è stato ritrovato a poco più di sette metri di profondità, il secondo a quattro metri. Sempre secondo la rivista, il primo dei tritoni si trovava a una temperatura di dieci gradi sotto zero. Quando la zolla di terra in cui era contenuto venne fatta sgelare, il tritone cominciò a muoversi. Il tritone è il batrace caudato più antico vissuto sulla terra. È stato così descritto il ritorno alla vita del batrace dopo cinquemila anni di congelamento...

INES-WILLY: (a Irene, con gran partecipazione) È possibile! È possibile!

VOCE DEL COMMENTATORE: (continuando) "Il suo ventre si mise a palpitare. Il prigioniero del gelo eterno fissò sugli uomini i suoi occhi sporgenti, poi si mise a mangiare delle zanzare, delle mosche, delle erbe e delle bacche selvatiche che mani umane gli porgevano ". L'animale visse per tre settimane in una scatola foderata di muschio; venne in seguito posta in un boccale d'alcool e sarebbe stato successivamente inviato ad un laboratorio della Università Lomonossov a Mosca, sul monte Lenin. Il secondo tritone visse tutta l'estate, al museo "Okhotsk-Kolyma". L'articolo ricorda anche la sopravvivenza di microrganismi per parecchie centinaia e migliaia d'anni e la scoperta, nel 1911, di microbi viventi nella mucosa della proboscide di un mammut scoperto in Siberia in stato di congelamento.

the world of biology with a report that Soviet scientists have revived two salamanders that had been frozen in the Siberian mud for 5,000 years. The Moscow broadcast said: Soviet geologists found something resembling a lizard at a depth of about 25 feet below the ground at a temperature of about fourteen degrees Fahrenheit. It revived after being kept at room temperature for some time. Scientists finally classed it as a four-toed triton, one of the oldest and most primitive orders of tailed amphibia that inhabited the earth in the Mesozoic era. Judging by the state of the earth in which it was found, biologists concluded that the triton had been asleep for about 5,000 years. It died after three weeks. Another triton was found frozen about 13 feet underground. This one also revived and lived practically all summer. Tritons are a form of salamander, and more or less resemble lizards, although they lack the lizards scales and claws. The Russians obviously did not mean that these particular lived in the Mesozoic age millions of years ago, but rather that they were of an order that did exist then.

INEZ (ad lib., during the whole news report from TV): It's possible... How lucky... Possible... Damn! How lucky!... Of course!... How true!...

A dispatch from Moscow said the broadcast was based on an article in the Leningrad monthly magazine *Neva* which reported on a geological expedition from Siberia. The Russian report did not name the geologists, did not give any exact location for the expedition, and did not indicate whether the age of the salamander had been established by any scientific means such as radiocarbon dating. When the piece of mud thawed out, the report said, the triton, the oldest and most primitive species among all the tailed amphibians which had ever inhabited the earth, began to move. This is how they describe the revival of the Soviet Salamander after five thousand years in the frozen ground of Northern Siberia... On awakening the creature behaved exactly as it had thousands of years ago. It ran around, ate and slept. It was not afraid of people, willingly ate wild berries, flies and mosquitos out of their hands.

How lucky!...

That's the way!...

Listen, listen!...

INES-WILLY: (a Irene, con entusiasmo) Senti là! Senti là! È possibile! È vero!

VOCE DEL COMMENTATORE: (continuando) Radio Mosca, nella sua trasmissione ha anche accennato alla possibilità di ibernazione, in un futuro più o meno prossimo, per astronauti destinati a lunghi voli spaziali.

INES-WILLY: (con disprezzo) Copiano tutto, quei barbari! (Breve intervallo musicale. Il solito motivetto: È un amor, È un amor... mentre Ines-Willy commenta.)

INES-WILLY: Dieci anni fa, l'ho sperimentato! Se ne accorgono adesso!

VOCE DEL COMMENTATORE: (continuando) Scetticismo in America. Il direttore della sezione erpetologia del Museo di Storia naturale di New York, Charles Bogert, ha dichiarato oggi che è possibile che tritoni o come si chiamano oggi, salamandre, siano rimasti in vita per cinquemila anni in stato di ibernazione, ma egli ne dubita, essendo dell'avviso che il fenomeno possa verificarsi solo per organismi semplici. Il prof. Bogert ha spiegato che le salamandre possono tollerare temperature di soli pochi gradi sotto zero ed ha aggiunto che è molto difficile poter asserire con certezza che le salamandre russe siano in effetti rimaste in stato di ibernazione per cinquemila anni. A sua volta, il direttore della sezione zoologica della Columbia University Francis Ryan, ha dichiarato che probabilmente le salamandre si trovavano in quel punto dove sono state trovate da meno tempo. Il Ryan ha dichiarato di essere d'accordo con precedenti valutazioni scientifiche secondo cui solo gli organismi monocellulari possono sopravvivere allo stato di ibernazione per un periodo molto lungo. Secondo Ryan, perché un essere vivente possa resistere a periodi prolungati di ibernazione è necessario che il congelamento sia istantaneo e interessi tutto il

(with enthusiasm to PENNY): Did you hear? Did you hear?
It's possible! It's true!
Exactly...
Precisely...
(always ad lib.)
I knew it!...
Damn them!...
I always knew it!...
God!...
Of course!...
(INEZ shows a growing excitement and involvement. "She"
jumps with joy)
I knew it!...
Those damned Russians!...
etc.

The article also mentions the survival for several thousands years of micro-organisms and the discovery in 1911 of living microbes in the trunk of a frozen mammoth found in Siberia.

INEZ-WILLY (to PENNY, excitedly): Did you hear? It's true! It's possible!

VOICE (continuing): Because salamanders are vertebrates, as are human beings, the Russians speculate about the possibility of quick-frozen astronauts. Moscow said it previously had not been believed that vertebrates could survive lengthy hibernation, adding "We already know that the crews will need to carry with them vast quantities of food and oxygen to reach other planets. These facts will make it necessary to have spacecraft of an incredible size. However, if the crewmen were in a state of deep hibernation, they would need neither food nor oxygen. The Russians talk glowingly of the find as a great step forward on the road to imposing deliberate suspended animation on space travelers. Sort of instant astronauts - just thaw them out and turn them loose on another planet revived just before landing.

INEZ-WILLY (with contempt): They copy everything, those barbarians!

(Short commercial: the "DOVE" motif... jingle: it's a love... it's a love... as INEZ-WILLY speaks to PENNY)

INEZ-WILLY: Ten years ago I experimented on that! And they're just discovering it now!

corpo, ciò che è assai difficile per esseri dalle dimensioni di una salamandra. John Ostrum, un docente della famosa università di Yale e vicedirettore di paleontologia vertebrata al Museo Peabody, ha dichiarato oggi a New Haven, che se l'annuncio russo corrisponde a verità, esso è estremamente interessante. Ostrum ha detto che organismi semplici sono stati congelati e quindi riportati in vita, ma che non si conosce alcun esempio di un animale superiore, come un vertebrato, che sia stato rivitalizzato dopo essere stato congelato. La difficoltà maggiore - ha detto - è che il ghiaccio creatosi attorno alle cellule non si scioglierebbe uniformemente. Alcune parti critiche del corpo avrebbero potuto morire per mancanza di nutrimento dal momento che l'animale non potrebbe aver ripreso una circolazione normale sino a che non fosse stato completamente disgelato". È l'ibernazione ipotermica per tutti la nuova promessa della scienza contemporanea? (Solito motivetto: È un amor, È un amor...)

VOICE (continuing): - RED SALAMANDER REVIVAL DOUBTED - The Soviet claim to have restored life to the two salamanders has confounded herpetologists, amazed zoologists, and left most biological researchers skeptical.

Dr. John Strong, head of the department of herpetology at New York's Museum of Natural Science, said it might have been possible for the sleepy salamanders to survive that long, but he was inclined to doubt it. For one thing, he declared, salamanders are like winter tourists in Florida-they can't stand cold weather.

Dr. Raymond Hale, Columbia University zoologist, frankly said of the deep-frozen salamanders "I suggest they got there recently. Successful freezing of a living organism for prolonged periods," he maintained "requires instant freezing of the entire body," and he found it difficult to believe that this occurred in the case of the salamanders.

Dr. Nathan Fein, curator of amphibians and reptiles at the Chicago Natural Sciences Museum said he never heard of such an incident affecting animals, except in the case of dried snails found tombs in Egypt. They revived when exposed to humid air, he said, but they weren't actually dead.

Graham Willis of the Brookfield Zoo maintained that he had only heard tales of mammoths up in Alaska being revived supposedly after thousands of years.

Dr. Kurt Schar, who is in charge of herpetology at the California Academy of Sciences, said that the animals in question were probably beas known as "Hynobius Keyserlingii". They are indeed the descendants of a very old group that existed as far back as Mesozoic days nearly 200 million years ago.

Dr. Ingram, assistant curator of vertebrate paleontology at Peabody Museum, said simple organisms have been frozen and revived. But he said he knew of no example of a higher animal, such as a vertebrate, being revived after being frozen. He declared "The biggest difficulty is that ice around the cells would not melt uniformly. Cells in some critical part of the body might die for lack of nourishment since the animal would have no circulation until fully thawed."

Will the new hope of contemporary science be the hypothermic hibernation for everyone? (the same jingle: DOVE... It's a love, It's a love...)

INES-WILLY: (felice, spegnendo il televisore) “Ibernazione ipotermica”, hai sentito? È una realtà! È una realtà! È il mio principio, hai visto? E gli ho dedicato una vita! (Si ricorda di Nicola, lo congeda con ampio gesto.) Va su, a rifarmi il letto!

NICOLA: L’ho già...

INES-WILLY: Cambia le lenzuola.

NICOLA: Veramente, le ho già...

INES-WILLY: (con imperio, quasi urlando) Va! (Nicola, umile umile, sale a destra la scala.)

INES-WILLY: (fregandosi le mani dalla soddisfazione) L’ho sempre detto, io! Una vita, una vita al servizio della scienza! Valeva la pena, vedi? La tecnica dell’“ipotermia” che impropriamente chiamano anche “ibernazione artificiale”, fa passi da gigante, lo vedi? Lo sapevo! Lo sapevo! ... 30 gradi, 25, 15... sempre più avanti! Sul filo della morte. L’uomo osa sempre di più! (In vena di spiegazioni) Il raffreddamento, con conseguente “anabiosi” ...

IRENE: Che è l’“ana... biosi”?

INES-WILLY: (con sicurezza) Sopravvivenza a condizioni esterne incompatibili con la vita attiva - riducendo al minimo, fino ad una apparente sospensione completa, qualsiasi manifestazione vitale. (Miss Irene non ha capito niente ma si accontenta.) Dicevo - Il raffreddamento con conseguente “anabiosi” non solo permette all’organismo di superare circostanze sfavorevoli alla vita attiva, bensì gli permette pure di prolungare la vita.

IRENE: La voglio anch’io, allora, la voglio anch’io!

INES-WILLY: (ignorandola) In questo periodo (Indica i frigoriferi) l’organismo non consuma e non si consuma; esso è come in una parentesi che non conta nel computo normale dell’ esistenza.

IRENE: E noi? E noi?

INES-WILLY: (carezzandola “paternamente”) Dopo, cara, dopo. (Continuando) Un uomo sano - sottoposto a tale trattamento - potrebbe vivere millequattrocento anni.

IRENE: (indicando il secondo frigorifero) E una donna?

INES-WILLY: Un po’ meno.

INEZ-WILLY (enthusiastically, while turning off the television): "Hypothermic hibernation" - did you hear that? It's here! It's fact! It's my theory! And I have dedicated my life to it! (INEZ-WILLY, being now aware of NICOLA, signals for him to leave.) Go up and make my bed!

NICOLA: I've already...

INEZ-WILLY: Then change the linens.

NICOLA: I've already done that too.

INEZ-WILLY (commanding - almost shouting): Just go!

(NICOLA meekly goes upstairs.)

INEZ-WILLY (rubbing "her" hands with satisfaction): I've always said It was worth dedicating my life to science! It was worth it. The hypothermic technique - improperly called "artificial hibernation" or "suspended animation" is making giant strides. Do you realize it? I knew it! I knew it! ...Below zero. Thirty degrees... twenty, fifteen... on the verge of death. Man challenges the impossible - the unknown. Man is always moving forward! (inclined to give details) Cooling, with consequent anabiosis...

PENNY: What's "ana...biosis?"

INEZ-WILLY (with assurance): resuscitation after apparent death. Recovery after suspended animation. Survival in external conditions incompatible with active life - reducing to a minimum, as far as an apparent complete suspension, any manifestation of life.

(PENNY has understood nothing but accepts it.)

I was trying to explain that... Cooling with consequent anabiosis not only permits the organism to overcome conditions which are unfavorable to active life, but also to prolong life.

PENNY: I'd like that! I want that! I'll buy it!

INEZ-WILLY (ignoring her comment): During the state of being frozen (points to the refrigerators) the organism doesn't consume and doesn't waste away; it's like being in a parenthesis that doesn't count in the normal life span.

PENNY: And for us? What about us?

INEZ-WILLY (with a paternal caress): Later, dear, later. (continuing) Submitting a healthy man to such an experiment, he could reach the age of fourteen hundred years.

PENNY (pointing to the second refrigerator): And a woman? How about a woman?

INEZ-WILLY: The same.

IRENE: Non è giusto! Non è giusto!

INES-WILLY: E gli invertebrati? ! Il verme trichina può resistere trent'anni incistato in un muscolo, pensa! Una farfalla può trascorrere in letargo un inverno moltiplicando per otto, nove volte la consueta durata dell'esistenza!

IRENE: (indicando i frigoriferi) Anche loro?

INES-WILLY: Se lo volessimo. Comunque, il primato di longevità è finora detenuto dai microbi vivi scoperti dal paleontologo Dombrowski il quale li ha trovati in certi sali del periodo devoniano estratti dalle macchine perforatrici alla profondità di mille metri sottoterra; la loro età è stata valutata a circa trecentoventi milioni di anni.

IRENE: Così tanto? E noi?

INES-WILLY: Siamo vertebrati.

IRENE: (indicando i frigoriferi) E loro?

INES-WILLY: Anche. (con circospezione, guardandosi attorno.) Parla piano. Quell'italiano dev'essere una spia.

IRENE: Ti è tanto antipatico?

INES-WILLY: Sì.

IRENE: Eppure è quasi medico. Come te. Un quasi collega.

INES-WILLY: Lo trovo dappertutto. Con quel naso lungo, alla ricerca di chi sa che!

IRENE: Nicki? Davvero? Non prolungherai la vita pure a lui, spero?

INES-WILLY: No di certo.

IRENE: Ma ti sembra giusto che... ?

INES-WILLY: Sssshhh!

IRENE: (indicando i frigoriferi) ... che i nostri nemici - proprio loro... ?

INES-WILLY: (infervorato nella sua spiegazione) Pensa, è stato dimostrato che semi di piante, spore di funghi, cisti di Protozoi, corpiccioli di Rotiferi e di Tardigradi sono capaci di resistere al disseccamento completo, alla mancanza d'aria, al freddo di duecentocinquanta gradi sotto zero!!!

IRENE: (tutto d'un fiato) Ti sembra giusto che proprio i nostri nemici debbano sopravvivere restando giovani e belli?

INES-WILLY: (felice) Ci credi, allora? Credi veramente nelle mie teorie? Non hai più il dubbio che "quelli" possano morire? (Indica nuovamente i frigoriferi)

PENNY (looking at the second refrigerator): It's not fair! It's not fair!

INEZ-WILLY: And how about invertebrates?! The worm "trichinella" can live up to thirty years encysted in a muscle - imagine! And in a state of hibernation a dormant butterfly can multiply its life span eight or nine times!

PENNY (pointing to the refrigerators) What about them?

INEZ-WILLY: If we so desire. However the record for longevity till now is held by living microbes discovered by the paleontologist Dombrowski who found them in certain salts of Devonian period drilling one thousand yards underground. Their age has been evaluated at about three hundred twenty million years.

PENNY: As much as that? Is there any hope for us?

INEZ-WILLY: We're vertebrates.

PENNY (pointing to the refrigerators): Are they?

INEZ-WILLY: Of course! (looks around the room, suspiciously) Lower your voice. That Italian must be a spy.

PENNY: You find him that loathsome!

INEZ-WILLY: Yes.

PENNY: And yet he's a doctor like you-- or nearly one. He could have been your colleague.

INEZ-WILLY: He's everywhere. With that long nose snooping around-God knows for what!

PENNY: Nicky?! Really?! I hope you're not going to prolong his life too. Are you?

INEZ-WILLY: Certainly not!

PENNY: But do you think it's fair that...?

INEZ-WILLY: Sssshhh!

PENNY (pointing to the refrigerators): ...that those who wronged us - our real enemies...?

INEZ-WILLY (excited by "her" own explanations): Imagine - it has been proved that seeds from plants, spores from mushrooms, cysts from protozoons, corpuscles from rotifera and from tardigrades are capable of withstanding complete desiccation, lack of air, and cold down to 250 degrees below zero!!!

PENNY (in one breath): Do you think it's fair that those who opposed us-our real enemies--should outlive us in youth and beauty?

INEZ-WILLY (happy): You believe it then? You really believe in my experiments? You no longer doubt that "they" could die as

IRENE: (molto femminile, cercando calore) No... Ho sempre avuto tanta fiducia in te... (Ines-Willy la evita e continua a "declamare" con felicità e partecipazione.)

INES-WILLY: Il congelamento spinto di organismi è ormai allo studio della scienza spaziale in ogni laboratorio che si rispetti. Sono in corso esperimenti per conservare a bassissima temperatura uova e sperma di organismi animali che potrebbero essere inviati nello spazio in una provetta in modo che con il disgelo potrebbero procreare e gli esseri nati continuare il viaggio spaziale...

IRENE: (con rapimento) "Procreare" ...

INES-WILLY: Né dimentichiamo gli astronauti. Il pilota verrà messo a bordo della nave spaziale e raffreddato prima ancora del lancio del missile. Controlli automatici stabiliti prima dell'inizio del viaggio lo risveglieranno decine o addirittura centinaia di anni più tardi, quando avrà raggiunto la destinazione. E sarà giovane e vigoroso quasi quanto al momento della partenza.

IRENE: (con rapimento) "Giovane e vigoroso" ...

INES-WILLY: Non essere indecente. Tre vantaggi per un astronauta che si addormenti in un frigorifero volante: nessun consumo di ingombranti derrate, nessuna psicosi della solitudine, nessun invecchiamento. Un orologio atomico, basato sulla disintegrazione radioattiva, garantirà il risveglio "a tempo" con tutte le operazioni automatiche di reviviscenza...

IRENE: A proposito di reviviscenza, il tuo "orologio atomico" ...

INES-WILLY: (indicando tre leve nel sotto-scala) Si chiama "Electroson". Quello del Dipartimento di Stato permette ai viaggiatori spaziali di dormire ventitre ore su ventiquattro. (Con orgoglio) Quello mio... permette ai sedentari del Connecticut di dormire ventiquattro ore su ventiquattro.

IRENE: "Dormire"... Ti consideri anche tu un "sedentario"?

INES-WILLY: In un certo senso... La vita che conduco...

IRENE: Ti riposi molto...

INES-WILLY: Dormo sì, dormo volentieri. Ma mi sveglio anche presto! (Si sono nel frattempo avvicinati. Irene al frigorifero numero due (lettera I) e Ines-Willy al frigorifero numero quattro (lettera R).)

a result? (points again to the refrigerators)

PENNY (with feminine warmth): There was never a doubt... I've always had complete faith in you...

(INEZ-WILLY, ignoring her advances, zestfully continues declaiming.)

INEZ-WILLY: Total freezing of organisms is now under study in every major laboratory. Experiments are under way to conserve at very low temperature eggs and sperm of animal organisms which could be sent into space in a phial so that-thawing out-they could procreate and the new born beings could continue their journey into space.

PENNY (with rapture): "Procreate" ...

INEZ-WILLY: And we shouldn't forget the astronauts. Before launching a missile, an astronaut will be frozen and put on board a spacecraft. Automatic controls which have been set before starting the flight will wake him up ten or maybe one hundred years later, as the craft draws near the planet. He will be as young and vigorous as the day he left.

PENNY (with rapture): "Young and vigorous" ...

INEZ-WILLY Don't be obscene. Three advantages for an astronaut who sleeps in a flying refrigerator:

- no consumption of foods or oxygen.
- no psychosis of solitude or boredom.
- no aging.

And what is more the body in such a state is better able to resist the worst infectious diseases than in an ordinary state. An atomic clock, working on radioactive disintegration, will awaken him at the precise moment by automatic operations necessary for revival...

PENNY: Speaking of "revival," your "atomic clock" ...

INEZ-WILLY (pointing to three levers on the wall, under the staircase): It's called "electroson." The one the State Department has can put space travellers to sleep twenty-three hours out of twenty-four. (with pride) My "Electroson" can put any sedentary citizen from Connecticut to sleep for twenty-four hours out of twenty-four hours.

PENNY: "To sleep" ... Do you consider yourself a "sedentary?"

INEZ-WILLY: In a certain sense... The life I lead...

PENNY: You don't waste your energy...

INEZ-WILLY: It's true. I sleep a lot. I like to sleep. But I get

IRENE: (ad occhi bassi, con imbarazzo) Volevo dire... a proposito di... "risveglio" ... e il tuo? ...

INES-WILLY: Non capisco.

IRENE: (con tenera timidezza) Mi trascuri, da un po'...

INES-WILLY: (giocherellando nervosamente col frigorifero R.) Sto mettendo a punto i miei studi... una certa depressione fisica... comprensibile...

IRENE: Non dormiamo più insieme da...

INES-WILLY: Ma abbiamo quaranta camere! Con quella spia di Nicola fra i piedi non sarebbe prudente!...

IRENE: (giocherellando nervosamente con il frigorifero I) È domenica, la nostra domenica - ricordi? .. Il giorno nostro - il primo... (Si avvicina lentamente a Ines- Willy, con timidezza. L'abbraccia poi improvvisamente. Bacio appassionato. Per chi non l'avesse capito sinora, InesWilly è un uomo travestito da "gemella".)

INES-WILLY: (ricomponendosi) La prossima, te lo giuro... la prossima... Un'altra settimana di studio e poi... (Irene è triste, molto avvilita) Ti voglio bene, lo sai... (Irene, a volto basso, non risponde. Sono di nuovo: Irene, vicino al frigorifero I e Ines-Willy vicino al frigorifero R. Si fronteggiano a volto chino, mani giunte, basse)

Lento oscuramento

Siparietto

Breve commento di Musica "glaciale"

SCENA TERZA

Domenica notte. I dodici rintocchi della mezzanotte. Si apre il siparietto. L'orologio segna le dodici. Siamo nella semioscurità. La poltrona di Irene è ora occupata da Nicola. Occhi incollati al video. Un film di cow-boys. Cavalli, inseguimenti, urla selvagge,

up early!

(During the preceding dialogue, PENNY and INEZ-WILLY have slowly moved toward each other. PENNY is now standing by refrigerator two, INEZ-WILLY is by refrigerator four.)

PENNY (embarrassed and avoiding “her” eyes): You were talking about... “revival” What about yours?... When will you?...

INEZ-WILLY: I don’t understand.

PENNY (with tenderness, timidly): Lately... You’ve neglected me.

INEZ-WILLY (nervously, running “her” hand on refrigerator number four). I’m concluding my experiments... You should understand... I’m physically exhausted...

PENNY: We haven’t slept together since...

INEZ-WILLY: With forty empty rooms! And Nicky spying on us! It wouldn’t be wise.

PENNY (nervously, running her hand on refrigerator number two): It’s our Sunday - don’t you remember? ...our day--the first time...

(PENNY approaches INEZ-WILLY timidly. She embraces “her” by surprise. There is a passionate kiss.)

INEZ-WILLY (recomposing “herself”) Next Sunday, I promise you... Next Sunday... One more week of work and then...

(PENNY is dejected and sad.)

I love you... You know it...

(PENNY, looking down, avoiding INEZ-WILLY’s eyes, does not answer. They are back at their former places. PENNY is near the second refrigerator; INEZ-WILLY is near the fourth one. They are facing each other with heads down, arms straight down and hands in a praying position. We see their profiles as the room darkens slowly.)

(TABLEAU CURTAINS or BLACKOUT)

brief musical bridge

SCENE 3

(Same as Scene 1. Sunday night. We hear the twelve strokes of midnight. The tableau curtains open. The hands of the clock show twelve o’clock. The room is lighted only by the TV set. PENNY’s armchair is now occupied by NICOLA. His eyes are glued to the

colpi di pistola. Intervallati, al solito, da annunci commerciali. Fra essi: VOCE DEL COMMENTATORE: "Lavastoviglie Marca Fiore, massaie d'America! È un amore! " (Musichetta: È un amor, È un amor...) (Ancora il film: gran galoppo di cavalli, crepitio di armi da fuoco... Un gran silenzio.) Questo gran silenzio permette a Nicola di udire passi pesanti che scendono dalla scala di destra. Vorrebbe chiudere il televisore. Non fa in tempo. Rinuncia. Si nasconde dietro la poltrona. Scende Ines-Willy, con circospezione. Vede il televisore acceso. Mima rimproveri per Irene che è stata tanto "distratta" da dimenticarlo acceso; lo spegne. Silenzio assoluto. Atmosfera misteriosa, nella quasi completa oscurità. Ines-Willy va nel sottoscala, abbassa la terza leva. Un alone di luce viene irradiato dal quarto frigorifero (lettera R). Notiamo a destra una manopola fosforescente. Ines-Willy la aziona. Primo scatto. Secondo scatto. Al terzo scatto, la porta del frigorifero si apre lentamente. All'interno, seduta, una splendida fanciulla vestita da infermiera francese: Renée. È immobile come una statua. Quarto scatto: Renée comincia a muoversi, poi si alza, esce come una sonnambula e, con le braccia tese in avanti, si dirige alla scala che comincia a salire lentamente. È evidentemente abituata a questo itinerario. Ines-Willy chiude in fretta il frigorifero e la segue. Scompaiono al piano superiore. Nicola, stupefatto ed impaurito, esce da dietro la poltrona. Guarda verso la scala, apre timidamente il frigorifero. Gli è facile, ora. La maniglia non è più bloccata. Guarda con curiosità l'interno; è complicatissimo: un intreccio di fili ed interruttori. Sembra una modernissima "sedia elettrica". Infila all'interno la mano sinistra. Ne ha una fortissima scossa. Bestemmia, incomprensibilmente, tenendosi la mano ferita e mugolando di dolore)

FINE DEL PRIMO ATTO

television. It's a western movie with all the action, wild cries, horses, shooting that one expects to find in this kind of film. After a short time, the film is interrupted by the usual commercials. One of them is "our DOVE message.")

VOICE (with musical background, from TV): Housewives of America - you are more fortunate because you have a "DOVE!" DOVE washes whiter, it's thrilling, it's living, it's a living DOVE! (jingle: it's a love, it's a love...)

(Back to the film: action, shooting, then a long silence. During this silence, NICOLA is aware of heavy footsteps coming down the stairs. He is unable to turn off the television in time, but manages to hide behind the armchair. INEZ-WILLY is descending with caution. "She" realizes that the television is on and reproaches PENNY with miming gestures, thinking that, in her distraction, she had forgotten to turn it off. INEZ-WILLY turns it off.

COMPLETE SILENCE

Mysterious atmosphere, in an almost complete darkness. INEZ-WILLY goes under the staircase, pulls down the third lever. A halo of light streams out from the fourth refrigerator. We notice at right a phosphorescent knob. INEZ-WILLY turns it. We hear the first click, the second click. At the third click, the refrigerator door slowly opens. Seated inside is RENEE, a sexy French nurse. She is motionless as a statue. With the fourth click, RENEE starts to move, gets up, walks out like a sleep walker in a trance with her arms stretched out in front of her. She moves toward the stairs and slowly proceeds to go up. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THIS PROCEDURE IS FAMILIAR TO HER. INEZ-WILLY quickly closes the refrigerator door and follows her up. They disappear upstairs. NICOLA, shocked and frightened by what he has seen, comes out from his hiding place, looks at the stairs, timidly opens the refrigerator door. It is not locked and he succeeds this time in opening it. He looks inside with curiosity: it is very complicated, with many wires and switches. It gives the impression of a "Do it yourself" electric chair. He puts his left hand inside and receives a strong electric shock. Swearing and muttering to himself, he moans with pain as he holds his injured hand.

CURTAIN

To be continued in the next issue



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Sibilla*, terracotta e legno, h. cm.145, 2007

Re-Creations:
American Poets in Translation

Edited by Michael Palma

Poems by T. S. Eliot

Translated by Barbara Carle

Barbara Carle is a poet, translator, and critic. She is the author of four books of creative writing, three of them bilingual, and of five books of translation, three bilingual and two trilingual. She has written extensively on Italian poetry and contemporary Italian poets. She currently teaches at California State University in Sacramento. Her most recent work is titled *Sulle orme di Circe*, Ghenomena, 2016.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. After graduating from Harvard, he spent a year in Paris and then lived the last fifty years of his life in London. At the beginning of his career, poems such as “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Portrait of a Lady” brought a new note of modernism into English-language poetry. His position as the pre-eminent avant garde poet in English was solidified with *The Waste Land* (1922). With its faultless rhythms and brilliant imagery, his work also revealed a gift for memorable phrase-making: “April is the cruellest month” and “This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper.” The enormous and in some ways astonishing influence of his poetry and criticism led to his being awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948. A fascinating, complex figure, Eliot has entered into popular culture in remarkable ways. His tortured first marriage has provoked several biographical studies, as well as a play (and film), *Tom and Viv*. And his collection of light verse, *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*, was the inspiration for the second-longest-running show in Broadway history.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *San Martino*, terracotta, h. cm.90, 2006

Preludes**I**

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.

II

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.
With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

III

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters,
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where

Preludi**I**

La serata d'inverno si sistema
col profumo di bistecche nel viottolo
Le diciotto
Il residuo bruciacchiato di giornate fumose
Ed ora uno scroscio burrascoso avvolge
gli scarti sudici
di foglie appassite intorno ai tuoi piedi
e i giornali dagli spiazzì abbandonati
I rovesci fanno tremare
le veneziane e le pentole
e all'angolo della strada
una solitario cavallo da vettura sbuffa e fuma
e poi ogni lampione fa lume

II

La mattina si riprende
con l'odore stantio di birra
dalla strada di segatura calpestata
con tutti i piedi fangosi che premono
verso le bancarelle di caffè mattutine.
Con le altre mascherate
che il tempo rilancia
si pensa a tutte le mani
che alzano vecchie veneziane
in mille stanze ammobiliate

III

Gettasti la coperta dal letto
giacevi e aspettavi
sonnecchiavi, e guardavi la notte
svelare mille immagini sordide
che componevano la tua anima;
tremolavano sul soffitto
e quando tutto il mondo ritornò
la luce si insinuava tra le persiane
udivi passeri nelle grondaie,
avesti una tale visione della strada
perché la strada capisce a stento;
seduta sull'orlo del letto, dove

You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

The Boston Evening Transcript

The readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript*
Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.

When evening quickens faintly in the street,
Wakening the appetites of life in some
And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*,
I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to
[La Rochefoucauld,
If the street were time and he at the end of the street,
And I say, "Cousin Harriet, here is the *Boston Evening*
[*Transcript*."

dispiegavi le carte dai capelli,
o stringevi le piante gialle dei piedi
nelle palme delle mani sudicie.

IV

La sua anima si distendeva stretta attraverso i cieli
che svaniscono dietro un isolato di città,
o sono calpestati da piedi insistenti
alle cinque e alle sei o alle sette;
e piccole dita tozze riempiono la pipa,
e i giornali della sera, e gli occhi
rassicurati da certe certezze,
la coscienza di una strada annerita
impaziente di assumersi il mondo.

Mi commuovono i capricci che si svolgono
intorno a queste immagini, si aggrappano:
La nozione di una infinitamente dolce
infinitamente dolente cosa.

Asciuga la bocca con la mano e ridi;
i mondi girano come le donne antiche
che fanno rifornimenti nei campi vuoti.

Il Corriere della Sera di Boston

I lettori del *Corriere della Sera di Boston*
ondeggiando come un campo di grano turco al vento.

Quando la sera si accelera leggermente per la strada
risvegliando l'appetito per la vita in alcuni
e portando agli altri il *Corriere della Sera di Boston*
salgo le scale, suono il campanello, mi rivolgo
faticosamente, come si farebbe per salutare

[La Rochefoucauld con un inchino,
se la strada fosse il tempo e lui in fondo alla strada,
e io dico "Cugina Harriet, ecco il *Corriere della sera di*
Boston."

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,
And lived in a small house near a fashionable square
Cared for by servants to the number of four.
Now when she died there was silence in heaven
And silence at her end of the street.
The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet—
He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.
The dogs were handsomely provided for,
But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.
The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,
And the footman sat upon the dining-table
Holding the second housemaid on his knees—
Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.

When Mr. Apollinax visited the United States
His laughter tinkled among the teacups.
I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,
And of Priapus in the shrubbery
Gaping at the lady in the swing.
In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's
He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.
His laughter was submarine and profound
Like the old man of the sea's
Hidden under coral islands
Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green
[silence,
Dropping from fingers of surf.

I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinax rolling under a chair,
Or grinning over a screen
With seaweed in its hair.
I heard the beat of centaurs' hoofs over the hard turf
As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon.

Zia Elena

La signorina Elena Slingsby era la mia zia nubile,
e abitava in una piccola casa vicino a una piazza elegante
accudita da un totale di quattro domestici.
Ora quando morì ci fu un silenzio in cielo
e silenzio in fondo alla sua strada.
Le persiane furono chiuse e l'impresario di pompe funebri
[si asciugò i piedi
Si rendeva conto che una cosa del genere era già accaduta.
I cani furono generosamente mantenuti,
ma dopo poco tempo anche il pappagallo morì.
L'orologio di Dresda continuò i suoi tic tac sulla caminiera,
e il lacchè si sedette sulla tavola da pranzo
mentre teneva la servetta in ginocchio—
che era sempre stata così attenta mentre la padrona viveva.

Il signor Apollinax

Quando il signor Apollinax visitò gli Stati Uniti
le sue risate tintinnavano tra le tazze di tè.
Pensai a Fragilion, quella timida figura fra le betulle,
e a Priapo fra i rovi
che adocchiava la dama sull'altalena.
Nel palazzo della signora Flacca, dal professor Channing-
[Ghepardo
rideva da irresponsabile feto.
Le sue risate erano sottacquee e profonde
quale vecchio del mare
nascosto sotto le isole di corallo
dove i corpi preoccupati di uomini annegati derivano nel
[verde silenzio,
cadendo da dita di spuma.

Del signor Apollinax cercai la testa che rotolava sotto la
[sedia,
ghignando sullo schermo
con le alghe nei capelli.
Udii i battiti degli zoccoli dei centauri sul terreno indurito
mentre il suo secco e appassionato parlare divorava il
[pomeriggio.

“He is a charming man” — “But after all what did he
[mean?” —
“His pointed ears . . . he must be unbalanced.” —
“There was something he said that I might have challenged.”
Of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah
I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon.

La figlia che piange

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair –
Lean on a garden urn –
Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair –
Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise –
Fling them to the ground and turn
With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather
Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

“Un uomo charmoso” — “Ma dopo tutto cosa voleva
[dire?” —
“le sue orecchie appuntite... sarà squilibrato.” —
“Avrei potuto oppormi ad alcune cose che ha detto.”
Della matrona Signora Flacca, del Professor e la signora
[Ghepardo
mi ricordo una fetta di limone, un amaretto già morsicato.

La figlia che piange

Fermati sul gradino più alto delle scale —
appoggiati sull'anfora del giardino —
tessi tessi il sole tra le chiome —
afferra i fiori con doloroso stupore —
riversali per terra e volgiti
con un guizzo di rancore nello sguardo
ma tessi tessi il sole tra le chiome.

Perciò avrei desiderato che lui si congedasse,
perciò avrei voluto che lei continuasse a piangere,
così lui si sarebbe avviato
come l'anima si congeda dal livido corpo lacerato,
come la mente abbandona il corpo che ha usato.
Dovrei trovare
qualche modo indicibilmente leggero e flessuoso,
per portarci ad un reciproco accordo sontuoso,
semplice e sleale quale un sorriso o una stretta di mano.

Si è allontanata, ma con l'autunno
impegnò la mia fantasia per molti giorni,
molti giorni e molte ore:
le chiome sulle braccia e le braccia colme di fiori.
E mi domando come sarebbero stati insieme!
Avrei dovuto smarrire un gesto e una posa.
Qualche volta questi pensieri meravigliano ancora
i turbamenti di mezzanotte e la quiete pomeridiana.

Ode

*To you particularly, and to all the Volscians
Great hurt and mischief.*

Tired.
Subterrene laughter synchronous
With silence from the sacred wood
And bubbling of the uninspired
Mephitic river.

Misunderstood
The accents of the now retired
Profession of the calamus.

Tortured.
When the bridegroom smoothed his hair
There was blood upon the bed.
Morning was already late.
Children singing in the orchard
(Io Hymen, Hymenæe)
Succuba eviscerate.

Tortuous.
By arrangement with Perseus
The fooled resentment of the dragon
Sailing before the wind at dawn.
Golden apocalypse. Indignant
At the cheap extinction of his taking-off.
Now lies he there
Tip to tip washed beneath Charles' Wagon.

Ode

*A te soprattutto, e a tutti i volsci
tanto male e ogni disgrazia*

Shakespeare, *Coriolano*, Atto IV, Scena V.

Tediato.

Sotterraneo ridere simultaneo
col silenzio del sacro bosco
e il gorgogliare del non ispirato
fiume mefitico.

Mal capito.

Gli accenti dell'ormai pensionato
mestiere del calamo.

Torturato.

Quando lo sposo si sistemò i capelli
v'era sangue sul talamo.
La mattina era già inoltrata.
I fanciulli cantavano nell'orto
(Io Hymen, Hymenaeae)
Succuba eviscerate.

Tortuoso.

D'intesa con Perseo
il beffato rancore del drago
salpò all'alba prima del vento.
Apocalisse d'oro. Sdegnato.
alla banale estinzione della sua fuga
Ora vi giace
da cima a fondo spazzato succubo della carrozza di Carlo.

Poems by Charles Martin

Translated by Luigi Bonaffini

Charles Martin was born in New York City in 1942. He graduated from Fordham University and earned a Ph.D. at the State University of New York–Buffalo. His books of poetry are *Room for Error* (1978), *Passages from Friday* (1979), *Steal the Bacon* (1987), *What the Darkness Proposes* (1996), *Starting from Sleep: New and Selected Poems* (2002), and *Signs and Wonders* (2011). In addition to a critical study, *Catullus* (1992), he has published a number of distinguished translations: *The Poems of Catullus* (1979; revised, 1990), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2003; Harold Morton Landon Translation Award), and *The Bhagavad Gita* (2012, with Gavin Flood). His current translation projects include the *Medea* of Euripides and a selection of the sonnets of G. G. Belli, a number of which have appeared in previous issues of *The Journal of Italian Translation*. The poet in residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York from 2005 to 2009, Martin has received an Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Bess Hokin Prize from *Poetry* magazine, and a Pushcart Prize. He teaches at Syracuse University and lives in Syracuse with his wife, the writer Johanna Keller.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Thirst (La sete)*, terracotta, h.cm.60 (2009)

Where We Are Now

Back in that time when we were very new
To one another, I thought (with delight
In fresh discoveries by day and night
And lengthy absence to be gotten through
Before we came together to undo
The work of deprivation at first sight
Once more of one another) I would write
This poem out and send it off to you;

But where the two of us are now and whether
We are there together,
I could not have said: I was like someone gazing
Into the wrong end of a telescope,
And whether passionate and playful phrasing
Might be a portent, he could only hope.

For a Child of Seven, Taken by the Jesuits

The little criminal is seized and shaken
Like a snow globe; locked in a place without
Light or supper, he'd rather have been taken
By the red Indians he's read about
In Classic Comic Books. There, the precocious
Seven-year-old absorbed atrocities
Of line and color scarcely less atrocious
Than the events themselves: Alice on her knees
In the glum forest, facing death or worse
From Magua, empurpled in his rage,
While those who love her ignorantly traverse
The awkward contours of a far-off page
Through thick and thin, through smudgy and grotesque:
A tightly rolled-up scroll on Father's desk.

Dove siamo ora

Parecchio tempo fa, quando ancora
Ci conoscevamo poco, pensai (con piacere
In nuove scoperte giorno e notte ogn'ora
E lunghe assenze da dover trascorrere
Prima che ci riunissimo a disfare
L'opera di astinenza nel rivedere
L'un l'altra) di mettermi a scrivere
Questa poesia da mandare a te;

Ma dove siamo noi due adesso e se
Sono là insieme a te,
Non avrei potuto dirlo: ero come un tale
Che guarda nel telescopio dalla parte errata,
E se un fraseggio appassionato e gioviale
Servisse da presagio, lui attende e spera.

Per un bambino di sette anni, preso dai Gesuiti

Il piccolo criminale viene preso e scrollato
come un globo di neve; chiuso in un posto senza
luce o cena, avrebbe preferito essere stato catturato
dagli indiani rossi di cui era venuto a conoscenza
nei fumetti classici. Lì dentro il precoce
settenne assorbiva atrocità
di linee e colori appena meno atroci
degli eventi stessi: Alice in ginocchio là
nella tetra foresta, ad affrontare la morte
o peggio da parte di Magua, paonazzo per la collera,
mentre quelli che le vogliono bene attraversano
inconsapevoli gli sciatti contorni di una pagina lontana,
nella buona e cattiva sorte, nel macchiato e nel grottesco:
Una pergamena arrotolata strettamente sulla scrivania del
[Padre.

The Flower Thief

At last he struck on our block and snatched
 Geraniums out of the flowerpots
 And window boxes we had left unwatched,
 Plucked the plants whole, took flower, stem and roots,

Danced down the street in glee and merriment,
 Every so often letting out a whoop,
 Asperging us with soil mix as he went,
 Until he settled on an empty stoop.

And there gazed on his prizes, fascinated
 By something in them only he could see,
 While those who called the local precinct waited,
 Watching him with or without sympathy.

He learned the essence of geranium.

We learned that the police don't always come.

Souvenir

1/
 Somehow it had escaped
 By the time that we had flown
 Back to New York City
 And on to our new home—
 That slender insect, shaped
 From a green husk of corn
 Twisted until crickety
 On a cobbled street in Rome.

2/
 A Chinese emigrant,
 Perched by a cardboard box,
 Fashioned these vegetal
 Crickets and grasshoppers;
 His wiry fingers bent
 And tied the sheathes to flex
 In forms that would appeal
 To bargain-hunting shoppers.

Il ladro di fiori

Alla fine colpì nel nostro quartiere
E strappò i gerani da dentro i loro vasi
E dalle incustodite fioriere,
Divelse piante intere, prese fiore, gambo e base,

Ballò per la strada allegro e felice,
Dando un grido di gioia di volta in volta,
Per via aspergendoci con un misto di terriccio,
Fino a fermarsi su una gradinata vuota.

E lì guardò i suoi trofei, affascinato
Da qualcosa in essi che solo lui vedeva,
Mentre quelli che chiamarono il commissariato
Erano, compresivi o no, tutti in attesa.

Imparò l'essenza del geranio.

Noi imparammo che la polizia non sempre viene.

Souvenir

1/
In qualche modo era scappato
Prima che fossimo tornati
In aereo a New York City
E poi a casa nostra –
Quell'insetto esile, formato
Da una pannocchia verde di granturco
Contorta fino a sembrare un grillo
Su una strada di sanpietrini a Roma

2/
Un emigrante cinese,
Appollaiato presso una scatola di cartone,
Creava queste cavallette
E questi grilli vegetali
Le sue dita asciutte tese
A piegare e legare le guaine
Per torcerle in forme da piacere
A chi cerca un'occasione

3/

Bagged up in plastic, tied
With little wire collars,
Like goldfish in their bowls
Waiting for adoption,
Each silent cricket vied
For euros or for dollars
And waited to be sold:
It had no other option.

4/

If it *had* been poverty,
The dull incessant grind
Of want which went unheeded,
That snatched up and replanted
Him here in Italy,
What put it in his mind
To sell what no one needed
And almost no one wanted?

5/

Was it just ignorance
Of the foreign market —
That and the optimist's
More than half-filled glass?
*"What every Roman wants
Is a good cornhusk cricket —
With a few deft ties and twists
My dream will come to pass!"*

6/

That isn't even funny:
He sleeps on a low cot in
A single crowded room
On the shift assigned him.
He owes his landlord money.
He fears he's been forgotten
By his family back home:
Will Good Luck ever find him?

3/

Chiusi in sacchetti di plastica, legati
Con piccoli collari
Di filo di metallo, come pesci rossi
Nella loro boccia in attesa d'adozione
Tutti i grilli a gara silenziosi
Per euro o per dollari
E aspettavano d'essere venduti:
Non avevano altra opzione.

4/

Se fosse *stata* la miseria,
L'incessante, noiosa routine
Della necessità disattesa e viva
Che lo portava via e poi lo ripiantava
Qui in Italia,
Cosa gli mise in testa infine
Di vendere ciò che a nessuno serviva
E che quasi nessuno voleva?

5/

Era solo ignoranza del modo
In cui funziona il mercato straniero –
E poi l'ottimismo del bicchiere
Pieno più che a metà
*"Quello che ogni romano agogna
È un buon grillo di foglie di mais
Con qualche sapiente laccio e nodo
Si avvererà il mio sogno!"*

6/

La cosa non è nemmeno comica:
Dorme su una branda bassa
In un affollato monolocale
Durante il turno che gli hanno assegnato.
Deve soldi al suo padrone di casa
Teme di essere stato dimenticato
Dalla sua famiglia nel paese natale:
La Buona Sorte gli sarà mai amica?

7/

Perhaps: *Que sera, sera*.
 But now among the fakes,
 The *faux* Gucci scarves and shoes,
 The double-A batteries
 And plastic ephemera,
 He stands by his box and makes
 A life he did not choose,
 From what would otherwise

8/

Be overlooked as waste
 (As he himself might be
 In this world's new order):
 But how shall the genuine
 Not be wholly effaced
 From life and memory
 And taught to slip the border —
 How, if not by design?

The Twentieth Century in Photographs

Different faces, formats all the same:
 A profile set beside a frontal view
 And nothing else included in the frame
 Save, at the bottom, for a coded row

Of numbers dashes letters that replaces
 A name best left unsaid by those who knew it.
 Two aspects of one face there, not two faces.
 Behind each is a blank wall, we intuit,

More like an edge each one could be tipped over
 Once photographed. Impossible to read
 These inexpressive faces and recover
 The thoughts of those who have been so long dead,

Who died, in fact, before the photographer
 Had time to fix them in his clear solution.
 Although their eyes meet ours now, we are
 Still not there yet: no stay of execution.

7/

Forse: *Que sera, sera.*

Ma adesso tra oggetti posticci,

Faux sciarpe e scarpe di Gucci,

Le batterie AA

E roba di plastica effimera

Sta accanto alla sua scatola e si fa

Una vita che sua mai non era,

Dalle cose che sarebbero altrimenti

8/

Trattate come scoria

(Come forse lui stesso in fondo

Nel nuovo ordine di questo mondo):

Ma come potrà ciò che è genuino

Non essere annientato del tutto

Da vita e memoria

E imparare a passare il confine

Se non per disegno voluto?

Il Novecento in fotografia

Volti diversi, stessa dimensione:

Un profilo accanto a uno scatto frontale

E nient'altro incluso nella cornice, ad eccezione,

Giù in fondo e in codice, di una fila

Di numeri trattini lettere che sostituisce

Un nome meglio non detto da chi lo conosceva.

Due aspetti della stessa faccia, non due facce.

Dietro ognuno c'è una parete vuota, s'intuisce,

Più come un orlo su cui ognuno si può ribaltare

Una volta fotografato. Impossibile leggere quei volti

Tanto inespressivi e poi recuperare

I pensieri di quelli da tanto tempo morti,

Che morirono prima che il fotografo, in realtà,

Avesse il tempo di fissarli nella sua chiara soluzione

Anche se i loro occhi ora incontrano i nostri, non siamo là

Ancora: nessun rinvio dell'esecuzione.

Getting Carded

We couldn't know what we would lose
When the ENDANGERED SPECIES sign
Began to turn up in our zoos —
A small white card propped up on a
Shelf in front of the cage or pen
Of one selected for this honor,
Translated from its habitat
Into a compact modern flat.

By what ENDANGERED, or by whom,
It couldn't know until too late:
One day it woke up in this room
Where it patrols compulsively
The borders of its shrunken state
And stares at what it cannot see:
Far dominions, other powers.
Its glance keeps on avoiding ours.

You wonder why it didn't learn,
You wonder why — though it seems not
Even to share your mild concern.
Time to move on: the fourth grade class
Behind us wants to claim our spot
And press its faces to the glass.
We leave ENDANGERED and its text
And wonder who'll get carded next.

Con il cartellino

Non sapevamo cosa avremmo perso
Quando il cartello SPECIE IN VIA D'ESTINZIONE
Cominciò ad apparire nei nostri zoo –
Su un ripiano davanti alla gabbia o recinzione
Di uno d'essi scelto per quest'onore
Comparve un cartellino bianco.
Tradotto dal suo habitat
In un locale moderno e compatto

ESTINZIONE a causa di che o di chi
Poteva saperlo solo troppo tardi;
Un giorno si svegliò qui,
In questa stanza dove fa guardia
Ossessiva ai suoi angusti confini
E guarda quello che non può vedere:
Terre lontane, altri poteri nascosti,
I suoi occhi evitano i nostri.

Tu ti domandi perchè non fece attenzione,
Tu ti domandi - anche se neanche pare
Condividere la tua leggera apprensione.
È ora di andare avanti: la classe della quarta elementare
Dietro di noi reclama il nostro posto
E premono il volto sul vetro.
Noi lasciamo ESTINZIONE e il suo testo
E ci domandiamo a chi altro toccherà ben presto.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Il poeta*, legno di noce, h. cm.110, 2011

Classics Revisited

Poems from Dante's
Vita Nuova

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

Poems from Dante's *Vita Nuova*

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

From the introduction to *Dante's Lyric Poems*, Mineola: Legas
1999.

by Giuseppe Di Scipio

1265-1321) began writing poetry at age 18, around the year 1283, as can be determined from the first poem in the *Vita Nuova* (c.1290-93) entitled "A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core". He was deeply influenced by Provençal vernacular love poetry. Love as the subject of poetry, according to Dante himself, had been employed one hundred and fifty years earlier (c.1150) by Provençal troubadours who wished their ladies, unskilled in Latin, to understand their amorous words (*Vita Nuova* 25:4-6). With this date Dante probably alludes to the flourishing of such poetry, rather than to its actual beginning which goes back to Guillaume of Aquitaine, Count of Poitiers (1071-1126). The author of the *Vita Nuova* attributes the merit of developing vernacular poetry to the Provençal and their "langue d'oc," and that of vernacular prose to the northern "langue d'oïl," with the narrative of the deeds of the Trojans and Romans and the Arthurian romances. The Italian model, the Sicilian "school" of poetry, born and cultivated around the figure of Frederick II, "stupor mundi," was an imitation of that poetry. Italian literature, therefore, is considered an imitation of a foreign culture, as Giosuè Carducci has observed. This is quite a notable factor in Dante's own poetic mission to raise the Italian vernacular to a level of dignity ("volgare illustre") achieved partly in the *Vita Nuova* and fully in the *Divine Comedy* (the same can be said of the vernacular prose in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*). This awareness lit up Dante's indefatigable impulse to master language and technique so as to make him boldly claim his superiority to the Latin masters in *Inferno* 25, and by implication his equality, in Italian, to Homer by adding a canto to Ulysses' epic in *Inferno* 26. His ultimate aim was to compose the kind of "love poetry" one finds in the verses in praise of Beatrice as she takes her place in the Mystic Rose of Paradise (*Paradiso* 31:79-90).

The *Vita Nuova*, therefore, is not only “coscienza e storia” of Dante’s poetry, as De Robertis states, but also a theory of poetry and poetics in the same way that Dante’s love for Beatrice generates a theory or doctrine of love: Dante’s own “stil novo.” Dante’s lyrical production, spanning the period from his adolescence to the early post-exilic years (1302-1308), is difficult to arrange chronologically. It seems to me, however, that a comprehensive view of Dante’s lyric poetry, as presented in this volume of Joseph Tusiani’s translation, provides a concrete understanding of Dante’s poetic growth and constant experimentation with forms, techniques and themes. The poems contained in this volume represent Dante’s earliest attempts at the art of “dire parole in rima,” as well the mature poems found in the *Convivio*. Indeed, some of them may have been written at the same time as the *Divine Comedy*, namely the *Inferno*. In the *Vita Nuova*, as he is about to record the work’s first sonnet describing the miraculous appearance of Love, he states that he had already dwelled on the art of writing poetry. If when he wrote the sonnet “A ciascun’alma presa e gentil core” (3: 9) he was eighteen, as determined by the narration in the *Vita Nuova*, the poems of correspondence with Dante da Maiano were written even earlier than 1283, if not at the same time. The concepts they contain and the language he used to express them are strongly reminiscent of the “Sicilian School.” Dante’s verses, then, were all written before the *Inferno* (c.1308), with the possible exception of the poem “Amor, da che convien pur ch’io mi doglia” (“O Love, since I must suffer more and more,”) written in 1307-1308 and the two Eclogues to Giovanni del Virgilio (1319-1320). One can easily discern how the poetic journey is clearly set beginning with the *Vita Nuova* and sustained, with the desire of experimentation throughout his poetic experience, culminating in his Latin Eclogues. Dante never intended to collect his lyric poetry. He only did it for the *Vita Nuova*, selecting the ones he thought should be part of this “libello,” written between 1283-1292.

The *Vita Nuova*, whose first printed edition appeared in 1576 in Florence, was most probably assembled as a book in the years 1292-1293. Its title and content has a Pauline ascendancy in the Apostle’s concept of the *novus homo*, Adam being the old man; Jesus the new. As a result of the death of the woman who inspired his poetry — Beatrice Portinari, who died in 1290 — the young Dante decided

to record in a systematic and meaningful way the extraordinary events and episodes of their early life which left an indelible mark on his very being as a poet, as a man and as a Christian. The book is narrated in prosimetrum, under the literary guidance, influence and tradition of Boethius' *De consolatione Philosophiae* and Martianus Cappella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. Thus, the *Vita Nuova*, while being an autobiography and a hagiographic narration of the Vita Sanctae Beatricis, is the manifesto of the stil novo poetry. It is the coherent final product of a poet as if in a workshop of innovations and experimentations. It is also the initial chapter of a larger book, the *Divine Comedy*, in which the main characters, a man and a woman, are finally reunited for the benefit of the young viator whose life and mission Beatrice had helped define, after a period of confusion, ignorance, darkness and even depravation. The *Vita Nuova* is, therefore, by its nature, polysemous, just as Dante will declare the Paradiso polysemous in the Epistle to Cangrande, and it calls for an attentive reader because of its many levels of understanding. The first part of the *Vita Nuova*, chapters 1-18, contains Dante's early poetry written to sing the beauty of Beatrice and the effects of her presence on the young lover. The second part is marked by the protagonist's resolve to speak in praise of her, for in this his beatitude fully resides. Thus, chapter 19 records the most famous canzone "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore". The theme of the lady's praise continues until chapter 27, and includes the celebrated sonnet "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare" which represents a turning point in Dante's poetics and in his philosophy of love. In terms of chronology the rhymes dealing with Beatrice's death, beginning with 19

"Li occhi dolenti per pietà del core" (ch.31) and ending with "Videro li occhi miei tanta pietate" (ch.35) reach the year 1291. One can probably place the rhymes found in chapters 36-38 during the years 1291-1293: "Color d'amore e di pietà sembianti," "L'amaro lagrimar che voi faceste," and "Gentil pensero che parla di vui". The very last period in the *Vita Nuova* is marked by the poet's return to the contemplation of Beatrice's death (39- 41) and his longing to reach her in the Empyrean. To Dante's early period (1274-1287) belong the rhymes for his youthful loves and the correspondence with Dante da Maiano, all written under the influence of the Sicilian school and Guittone d'Arezzo. The poem to Lippo Pasci de'

Bardi (XLVIII) and Dante's reply to an unknown poet are also of this period. The poem to Messer Betto Brunelleschi, though difficult to place chronologically, was surely written before 1300, as Contini suggests.

La Vita Nuova**A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core**

A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core
 Nel cui cospetto ven lo dir presente,
 In ciò che mi rescrivan suo parvente,
 Salute in lor signor, cioè Amore.
 Già eran quasi che atterzate l'ore
 Del tempo che onne stella n'è lucente,
 Quando m'apparve Amor subitamente,
 Cui essenza membrar mi dà orrore.

Allegro mi sembrava Amor tenendo
 Meo core in mano, e ne le braccia avea
 Madonna involta in un drappo dormendo.
 Poi la svegliava, e d'esto core ardendo
 Lei paventosa umilmente pascea:
 Appresso gir lo ne vedea piangendo.

O voi che per la via d'Amor passate

O voi che per la via d'Amor passate,
 Attendete e guardate
 S'elli è dolore alcun, quanto 'l mio, grave;
 E prego sol ch'audir mi sofferiate,
 E poi imagnate
 S'io son d'ogni tormento ostale e chiave.
 Amor, non già per mia poca bontate,
 Ma per sua nobiltate,
 Mi pose in vita sì dolce e soave
 Ch'io mi sentia dir dietro spesse fiate:
 "Deo, per qual dignitate
 Così leggiadro questi lo core have?"

Or ho perduta tutta mia baldanza,
 Che si movea d'amoroso tesoro;
 Ond'io pover dimoro,
 In guisa che di dir mi ven dottanza,
 Sì che volendo far come coloro
 Che per vergogna celan lor mancanza,
 Di fuor mostro allegrezza,
 E dentro da lo core struggo e ploro.

The New Life**To Every Loving, Gentle-Hearted Friend**

To every loving, gentle-hearted friend,
to whom the present rhyme is soon to go
so that I may their written answer know,
greetings in Love's own name, their lord, I send.
The third hour of the time was near at end
when every star in heaven is aglow:
'twas then Love came before me, dreadful so
that my remembrance is with horror rent.

Joyous appeared he in his hand to keep
my very heart, and, lying on his breast,
my lady, veil-enwrapped and full asleep.
But he awakened her, and of my heart,
aflame, he humbly made her, fearful, taste:
I saw him, finally, in tears depart.

You, Who Along the Road of Love Proceed

You, who along the road of Love proceed,
stop, and pay kindly heed
if there be any grief as grave as mine.
I beg you but to listen to my plea,
and then you will agree
that to all torment I am door and key.
Not for the little goodness that's in me —
for his own noble breed
did Love so sweet a life to me assign
as made me often times behind me hear,
"O God, what dignity
could give this man a heart so rich and rare?"

All of my boldness I have lost today,
which from my loving treasure used to stir,
and so in poverty
now dwell I, most afraid all this to say.
And, eager still to imitate all those
who out of shame their inner want conceal,
bliss I without reveal,
but weep within and fret from all my woes.

Piangete, amanti, poi che piange Amore

Piangete, amanti, poi che piange Amore,
 Udendo qual cagion lui fa plorare.
 Amor sente a Pietà donne chiamare,
 Mostrando amaro duol per li occhi fore,
 Perchè villana Morte in gentil core
 Ha miso il suo crudele adoperare,
 Guastando ciò che al mondo è da laudare
 In gentil donna sovra de l'onore.

Audite quanto Amor le fece orranza,
 Ch'io 'l vidi lamentare in forma vera
 Sovra la morta imagine avvenente;
 E riguardava ver lo ciel sovente,
 Ove l'alma gentil già locata era,
 Che donna fu di sì gaia sembianza.

Morte villana, di pietà nemica

Morte villana, di pietà nemica,
 Di dolor madre antica,
 Giudicio incontastabile gravoso,
 Poi che hai data matera al cor doglioso
 Ond'io vado pensoso,
 Di te blasmar la lingua s'affatica.
 E s'io di grazia ti voi' far mendica,
 Convenesi ch'eo dica
 Lo tuo fallar d'onni torto tortoso,
 Non però ch'a la gente sia nascoso,
 Ma per farne cruccioso
 Chi d'amor per innanzi si notrica.
 Dal secolo hai partita cortesia
 E ciò ch'è in donna da pregiar vertute:
 In gaia gioventute
 Distrutta hai l'amorosa leggiadria.
 Più non voi' scoprìr qual donna sia
 Che per le proprietà sue canosciute.
 Chi non merta salute
 Non sperì mai d'aver sua compagnia.

Since Love Is Weeping, Weep You, Lovers, Too

Since Love is weeping, weep you, lovers, too,
and hear the reason that now makes him moan.
Love, whose sad grief is now overtly known,
is calling every lady in his view,
for wicked Death with bitter want of rue
in gentle hearts his cruelty has shown,
wrecking whatever praise on earth is due
to a gentle lady above virtue's own.

Listen how greatly Love has honored her!
For I have seen him truthfully lament
the loveliness of her dead image spent.
Often uplifting to the sky his gaze,
he wondered where that gentle soul had fled,
that seemed down here so winsome and so glad.

Villainous Death, O Pity's Foe, and Old

Villainous death, O pity's foe, and old
mother of misery;
O incontestable and grievous fate
that showed my aching heart so prompt a bait,
pensiveness is my mate
as I, to blame you, this my tongue make bold.
If I now say you lack a graceful mold,
it also must be told
you show your want of straightness most unstraight,
oh, not to hide from all mankind your state,
but just to make more great
the grief of those that Love does feed and hold.
Kindness you've banished from our century,
and what in woman is as virtue known.
Gladness of youthful years away is thrown,
and wholly wrecked all loving pleasantry.
No longer do you care if one there be
who all these qualities today may own.
Men not deserving of salvation
should never hope to share her company.

Cavalcando l'altr'ier per un cammino

Cavalcando l'altr'ier per un cammino,
 Pensoso de l'andar che mi sgradia,
 Trovai Amore in mezzo de la via
 In abito leggier di peregrino.
 Ne la sembianza mi pareva meschino,
 Come avesse perduta segnorìa;
 E sospirando pensoso venia,
 Per non veder la gente, a capo chino.

Quando mi vide, mi chiamò per nome,
 E disse: "Io vegno di lontana parte,
 Ov'era lo tuo cor per mio volere;
 E recolo a servir novo piacere".
 Allora presi di lui sì gran parte
 Ch'elli disparve, e non m'accorsi come.

Ballata, i' voi' che tu ritrovi Amore

Ballata, i' voi' che tu ritrovi Amore,
 E con lui vade a madonna davante,
 Sì che la scusa mia, la qual tu cante,
 Ragioni poi con lei lo mio signore.

Tu vai, ballata, sì cortesemente,
 Che senza compagnia
 Dovresti avere in tutte parti ardire;
 Ma se tu vuoi andar sicuramente,
 Retrova l'Amor pria,
 Chè forse non è bon senza lui gire;
 Però che quella che ti dee audire,
 Sì com'io credo, è ver di me adirata:
 Se tu di lui non fossi accompagnata,
 Leggeramente ti faria disnore.

Con dolze sono, quando se' con lui,
 Comincia este parole,
 Appresso che averai chesta pietate:
 "Madonna, quelli che mi manda a vui,
 Quando vi piaccia, vole,
 Sed elli ha scusa, che la m'intendiate.
 Amore è qui, che per vostra bieltate

The Other Day, Horse-Riding on a Road

The other day, horse-riding on a road
that made my going hateful most to me,
Love in the midst of it I chanced to see,
wearing a pilgrim's garment, light and odd.
I looked at him, who seemed most poorly clad
and as bereft of all his sovereignty;
sighing, he walked along, and pensively,
his forehead bent as if to shun the crowd.

Just as he saw me, called me he by name,
saying, "I have arrived from far away,
where once your spirit dwelt, as I had willed,
and now I want it with new pleasure filled."
'Twas then I had on him so strong a claim,
he disappeared, and how, I cannot say.

Ballad, I Want You to Find Love Again

Ballad, I want you to find Love again,
so that you may him to my lady bring;
and so the pretext you describe and sing
my lady and my lord will ponder then.

So sweetly, ballad, you now seem to fare,
that with no company
you should be firm and bold in every thought;
yet, if you wish to venture free of care,
Love you must firstly see,
as wondering without him pays it not.
The one who now should listen to your thought
is—I believe—most cross today with me
so that were Love to hide from you away
somewhat embarrassed you would seem to be.

With a soft sound, when you with him abide,
begin to utter these
sweet words, to win her utmost courtesy:
"My lady, he who sent me to your side
begs you, if you so please,
not to disdain his most entreating plea.
'Tis Love, who for your beauty cannot be,

Lo face, come vol, vista cangiare:
 Dunque perchè li fece altra guardare
 Pensatel voi, da che non mutò '1 core".

Dille: "Madonna, lo suo core è stato
 Con sì fermata fede
 Che 'n voi servir l'ha 'mpronto onne pensiero:
 Tosto fu vostro, e mai non s'è smagato".
 Sed ella non ti crede,
 Di' che domandi Amor, che sa lo vero:
 Ed a la fine falle umil preghero,
 Lo perdonare se le fosse a noia,
 Che mi comandi per messo ch'eo moia,
 E vedrassi ubidir ben servidore.

E di' a colui ch'è d'ogni pietà chiave,
 Avante che sdonnei,
 Che le saprà contar mia ragion bona:
 "Per grazia de la mia nota soave
 Reman tu qui con lei,
 E del tuo servo ciò che vuoi ragiona;
 E s'ella per tuo prego li perdona,
 Fa' che li annunzi un bel semblante pace".
 Gentil ballata mia, quando ti piace,
 Movi in quel punto che tu n'aggie onore.

Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore

Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore;
 E hanno in lor sì gran varietate,
 Ch'altro mi fa voler sua potestate,
 Altro folle ragiona il suo valore,
 Altro sperando m'apporta dolzore,
 Altro pianger mi fa spesse fiate;
 E sol s'accordano in cherer pietate,
 Tremando di paura che è nel core.

Ond'io non so da qual matera prenda;
 E vorrei dire, e non so ch'io mi dica:
 Così mi trovo in amorosa erranza.
 E se con tutti voi' fare accordanza,
 Convenemi chiamar la mia nemica,
 Madonna la Pietà, che mi difenda.

far though he look, save in this place alone:
so, though he gaze on features not your own,
you know that changeless still his heart you see."

Tell her, "My lady, in such faithfulness
has all his spirit lain,
his mind is firm in only serving you,
enchanted as he is by nothing less."
If she believes me not,
tell her to question Love, who knows what's true;
and then, oh beg her with humility,
if she should find it grievous to forgive,
someone to send to bid me not to live,
and an obedient servant I will be.

And say to him, the key to piety:
lest he should love no more,
all my good reasons I will quickly tell:
"Oh, for the sake of my sweet poetry,
stay with her evermore,
and of your servant say whate'er you will;
and if your plea can make her pitying still,
announce to her more beauty that is peace."
Now go, O gentle ballad, when you please,
and seek the greatest honor among men.

All of My Thoughts Can Only Speak of Love

All of my thoughts can only speak of Love,
greatly endowed with such variety
that one compels me all his might to see,
madly another does his valor prove,
another makes me hope as well as grieve,
and still another brings but tears to me:
on begging but for pity they agree,
such are the fears that in my heart still live.

Thus, with no subject wherefrom to commence,
I wish to speak, and know not what to say,
in such a lovely labyrinth am I!
And if for peaceful living now I sigh,
invoke I must my only foe today —
my Lady Mercy in my sole defense.

Con l'altre donne mia vista gabbate

Con l'altre donne mia vista gabbate,
 E non pensate, donna, onde si mova
 Ch'io vi rassembri sì figura nova
 Quando riguardo la vostra beltate.
 Se lo saveste, non poria Pietate
 Tener più contra me l'usata prova;
 Chè Amor, quando sì presso a voi mi trova,
 Prende baldanza e tanta securtate,

Che fere tra' miei spiriti paurosi,
 E quale ancide, e qual pinga di fore,
 Sì che solo remane a veder vui:
 Ond'io mi cangio in figura d'altrui,
 Ma non sì ch'io non senta bene allore
 Li guai de li scacciati tormentosi.

Ciò che m'incontra ne la mente more

Ciò che m'incontra ne la mente more
 Quand'io vegno a veder voi, bella gioia;
 E quand'io vi son presso, io sento Amore
 Che dice: "Fuggi, se 'l perir t'è noia .
 Lo viso mostra lo color del core,
 Che, tramortendo, ovunque pò s'appoia;
 E per la ebrietà del gran tremore
 Le pietre par che gridin: "Moia, moia"" .

Peccato face chi allora mi vide,
 Se l'alma sbigottita non conforta,
 Sol dimostrando che di me li doglia,
 Per la pietà, che 'l vostro gabbo ancide,

La qual si cria ne la vista morta
 De li occhi, c'hanno di lor morte voglia.

Spesse fiate vegnonmi a la mente

Spesse fiate vegnonmi a la mente
 Le oscure qualità ch'Amor mi dona,

Like Others, You So Baffle and Amaze

Like others, you so baffle and amaze,
lady, my glance, I know not where to view
a beauty so delightful and so new
that may compare with what enchants my gaze.
Pity, if this you knew, would have no ways
to treat me still as she is wont to do,
for, finding me so closely bound to you,
Love grows so stubborn, and so bold and brazen,

he pierces through my frightened spirits well,
some of them slaying, forcing some elsewhere,
till he alone can most endure your eyes:
therefore, I take on other men's disguise,
but not so thoroughly as not to share
the grief of those who're tortured down in hell.

Whatever Meets Me, Dies Within My Mind

Whatever meets me, dies within my mind,
if I but see you, bliss so fair and great;
and when I'm near you, Love is close behind,
telling me "Run, if death you shun and hate."
You on my features my heart's color find,
spreading about though destined to abate;
and so much tremor seems the stones to bind,
"Die! Die!," in madness they all seem to state.

Surely he does commit a grievous sin,
who, seeing me, soothes not my shaken soul,
if only by the token of a sigh
for Pity's sake, which your deceit does kill,

and which appears in the extinguished sheen
of these my eyes that only wish to die.

Often Within My Mind Come Back to Me

Often within my mind come back to me
all the dark qualities that Love makes mine;

E venmene pietà, sì che sovente
 Io dico: "Lasso! avviene elli a persona?"
 Ch'Amor m'assale subitanamente,
 Sì che la vita quasi m'abbandona:
 Campami un spirto vivo solamente,
 E que' riman, perchè di voi ragiona.

Poscia mi sforzo, chè mi voglio atare;
 E così smorto, d'onne valor voto,
 Vegno a vedervi, credendo guerire:
 E se io levo li occhi per guardare,
 Nel cor mi si comincia uno tremoto,
 Che fa de' polsi l'anima partire.

Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore'

Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore,
 I' vo' con voi de la mia donna dire,
 Non perch'io creda sua laude finire,
 Ma ragionar per isfogar la mente.
 Io dico che pensando il suo valore,
 Amor sì dolce mi si fa sentire,
 Che s'io allora non perdessi ardire,
 Farei parlando innamorar la gente:
 E io non vo' parlar sì altamente
 Ch'io divenisse per temenza vile;
 Ma tratterò del suo stato gentile,
 A rispetto di lei leggeramente,
 Donne e donzelle amorose, con vui,
 Chè non è cosa da parlarne altrui.
 Angelo clama in divino intelletto
 E dice: "Sire, nel mondo si vede
 Maraviglia ne l'atto che procede
 D'un'anima che 'nfin qua su risplende.
 Lo cielo, che non have altro difetto
 Che d'aver lei, al suo signor la chiede,
 E ciascun santo ne grida merzede.
 Sola Pietà nostra parte difende,
 Chè parla Dio, che di madonna intende:
 "Diletti miei, or sofferite in pace
 Che vostra spene sia quanto me piace
 Là 'v'è alcun che perder lei s'attende,

and, in great pity, oftentimes I pine,
saying, "How can all this in one man be?"
For Love assails me, oh, so suddenly,
that I at once see my whole life decline:
only one spirit does not yet resign —
the one that speaks of you relentlessly.

Eager to help myself, my best I do,
and, as I am, bereft of worth, and pale,
come to you, hoping to be healed anew.
But if I lift my eyes and at you gaze,
such thunder does in this my heart prevail,
it does the soul from these my pulses chase.

Ladies, Who Understand Love's Every Way

Ladies, who understand Love's every way,
with you I must my lady's worth unfold,
not that I think her praises can be told,
but I will simply talk to ease my mind.
Musing upon her wonder, so I say,
I feel so tenderly by Love controlled
that, should I not grow suddenly less bold,
my words would surely kindle all mankind.
So I will not such lofty phrases find
as might encumber all my heart with fear.
In the most simple way, how sweet and dear
she is, I will now tell you, and how kind.
O loving maidens, what I say to you
would to all other ears sound most untrue.
Upon God's intellect an angel calls;
"Sire," he says, "on earth the wonder's seen
of one whose life proceeds with such a sheen,
as far as here in heav'n this soul shines bright."
Heaven, that short of its perfection falls
without her, begs its Lord to intervene,
and all imploring Saints are joining in.
Mercy alone defends us in our plight
till God, who understands my lady's might,
"O my beloved," says, "most peacefully
bear that your hope remain as I decree
there, where is one who dreads to lose her sight,

E che dirà ne lo inferno: 'O mal nati,
Io vidi la speranza de' beati'''.

Madonna è disiata in sommo cielo:
Or voi' di sua virtù farvi sapere.
Dico, qual vuol gentil donna parere
vada con lei, che quando va per via,
Gitta nei cor villani Amore un gelo,
Per che onne lor pensero agghiaccia e pere;
E qual soffrisse di starla a vedere
Diverria nobil cosa, o si morria.
E quando trova alcun che degno sia
Di veder lei, quei prova sua vertute,
Chè li avvien, ciò che li dona, in salute,
E sì l'umilia ch'ogni offesa oblia.
Ancor l'ha Dio per maggior grazia dato
Che non pò mal finir chi l'ha parlato.

Dice di lei Amor: "Cosa mortale
Come esser pò sì adorna e sì pura?".
Poi la riguarda, e fra se stesso giura
Che Dio ne 'ntenda di far cosa nova.
Color di perle ha quasi, in forma quale
Convene a donna aver, non for misura:
Ella è quanto de ben pò far natura;
Per essempro di lei bieltà si prova.
De li occhi suoi, come ch'ella li mova,
Escono spirti d'amore inflammati,
Che feron li occhi a qual che allor la guati,
E passan sì che 'l cor ciascun ritrova:
Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso,
Là 've non pote alcun mirarla fiso.

Canzone, io so che tu girai parlando
A donne assai, quand'io t'avrò avanzata.
Or t'ammonisco, perch'io t'ho allevata
Per figliuola d'Amor giovane e piana,
Che là 've giugni tu dichì pregando:
"Insegnatemi gir, ch'io son mandata
A quella di cui laude so' adornata".
E se non vuoi andar sì come vana,
Non restare ove sia gente villana;
Ingegnati, se puoi, d'esser palese

and will in hell to each lost spirit say,
'The hope of all the Blest I saw one day.'

My lady's longed for in the highest heaven,
and so I must reveal her virtue's glow.
If gentleness a lady wants to know,
let her go with her, for, as she goes by,
by Love all wicked hearts are frozen so,
all their thoughts perish in the gelid blow;
and those who could withstand her, noble so,
would soon become as noble, or would die.
And when a worthy person lifts his eye
and gazes on her, he'll experience
her worth — salvation as his recompense,
and sin's forgotten in humility.
A grace God gave her, that is greater still:
who spoke to her, he shuns eternal ill."

Love says of her, "How can a mortal thing
be so adorned with beauty, and so pure?"
Gazing on her again, he now can swear
God wanted to create a wonder new.
Nearly perlaceous in her coloring,
as moderate as other women share:
she is the best Nature on earth can bare,
a paragon and proof of beauty true.
Out of her eyes, howe'er she looks at you,
such love-enkindled spirits soon depart,
the eyes they pierce and go straight to the heart
of any man that comes within her view.
Painted upon her face Love shines so bright,
no one can fixedly sustain its light.

My Song, how well I know your words will reach
many a woman when I bid you go.
I warn you now, who have been taught to grow
as Love's own daughter, youthful and so plain:
wherever you arrive, say and beseech,
"Teach me to find the one to whom I go,
the one whose very praises make me glow."
And, if you do not wish to fare in vain,
from every wicked, loveless crowd abstain.
Try, if you can, only to meet and find

Solo con donne o con omo cortese,
Che ti merranno là per via tostana:
Tu troverai Amor con esso lei;
Raccomandami a lui come tu dèi.

Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa

Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa,
Sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone,
E così esser l'un senza l'altro osa
Com'alma razional senza ragione.
Fàlli natura quand'è amorosa,
Amor per sire e 'l cor per sua magione,
Dentro la qual dormendo si riposa
Tal volta poca e tal lunga stagione.

Bieltate appare in saggia donna pui,
Che piace a gli occhi sì, che dentro al core
Nasce un disio de la cosa piacente;
E tanto dura talora in costui,
Che fa svegliar lo spirito d'Amore.
E simil face in donna omo valente.

Ne li occhi porta la mia donna Amore

Ne li occhi porta la mia donna Amore,
Per che si fa gentil ciò ch'ella mira;
Ov'ella passa, ogn'om ver lei si gira,
E cui saluta fa tremar lo core,
Sì che, bassando il viso, tutto smore,
E d'ogni suo difetto allor sospira:
Fugge dinanzi a lei superbia ed ira.
Aiutatemi, donne, farle onore.

Ogne dolcezza, ogne pensiero umile
Nasce nel core a chi parlar la sente,
Ond'è laudato chi prima la vide.
Quel ch'ella par quando un poco sorride,
Non si pò dicer nè tenere a mente,
Sì è novo miracolo e gentile.

women or men in love, who'll be so kind
as to escort you on the shortest lane.
You'll see Love in her company, I trust:
to him remember me then, as you must.

Love and a Gentle Heart Are But One Thing

Love and a gentle heart are but one thing,
as the philosopher in his sentence wrote;
so they without each other live dare not
as rational spirit without reasoning.
'Tis nature, when in love, makes Love a king,
and in his mansion lodges then the heart,
wherein he rests, as in his habitat,
either in brief or lengthy slumbering.

Beauty in a wise lady then appears,
which so delights the eye, the heart is taken
with longings of the thing that pleases so;
and this delight at times so long endures
it makes Love's very spirit soon awaken.
The same a woman feels about man's awe.

My Lady Carries Love Within Her Eyes

My lady carries Love within her eyes,
whereby whate'er she looks at gentle grows.
Towards her, where she passes, each man draws,
and, greeted by her, tremblingly replies.
His forehead bent, he pales and nearly dies,
so deeply his defects he sees and knows.
Envy and pride dare not stay to her close:
then help me, ladies, praise her to the skies.

Every most humbling thought and every bliss
rise in the heart of one who hears her speak,
so that who sees her first is firstly blest.
And if her faintest smile be manifest,
to tell it, word is vain, and mind is weak
so new and dear a miracle it is.

Voi che portate la sembianza umile

Voi che portate la sembianza umile,
 Con li occhi bassi, mostrando dolore,
 Onde venite, che 'l vostro colore
 Par divenuto de pietà simile?
 Vedeste voi nostra donna gentile
 Bagnar nel viso suo di pianto Amore?
 Ditelmi, donne, chè 'l mi dice il core,
 Perch'io vi veggio andar sanz'atto vile.

E se venite da tanta pietate,
 Piacciavi di restar qui meco alquanto,
 E qual che sia di lei, nol mi celate.
 Io veggio li occhi vostri c'hanno pianto,
 E veggiovi tornar sì sfigurate
 Che 'l cor mi triema di vederne tanto.

Se' tu colui c'hai trattato sovente

Se' tu colui c'hai trattato sovente
 Di nostra donna, sol parlando a nui?
 Tu risomigli a la voce ben lui,
 Ma la figura ne par d'altra gente.
 E perchè piangi tu sì coralmemente,
 Che fai di te pietà venire altrui?
 Vedestù pianger lei, che tu non pui
 Punto celar la dolorosa mente?

Lascia piangere noi e triste andare
 (E fa peccato chi mai ne conforta),
 Che nel suo pianto l'udimmo parlare.
 Ell'ha nel viso la pietà sì scorta
 Che qual l'avesse voluta mirare
 Sarebbe innanzi lei piangendo morta.

Donna pietosa e di novella etate

Donna pietosa e di novella etate,
 Adorna assai di gentilezze umane,
 Ch'era là 'v'io chiamava spesso Morte,

Oh, You, Who Show Such Countenance of Woe

Oh, you, who show such countenance of woe,
with obvious sorrow in your bended gaze,
where are you coming from? Upon your face
nothing but pity's color is aglow.
Did you see Love's own tears in sadness flow,
mingled with hers — the fount of gentleness?
Oh, tell me, ladies, what my heart can guess,
for I behold you so submissive go.

And if you come from so much piety,
oh, for a while remain beside me here,
and all you know of her hide not from me.
Your eyes, I see, have shed too many a tear,
for you return in such great misery,
this heart of mine is overwhelmed with fear.

Are You the One Who of Our Lady Spoke

Are you the one who of our lady spoke
many a time, addressing us alone?
Her voice you liken to Love's very own,
but like somebody else she seems to look.
What makes you now so heartily bemoan,
that other people of your grief partake?
Have you seen her in tears, that you should make
whatever pains your mind so plainly known?

Oh, let us weep and still in grief proceed,
who heard her speak and tearfully lament
(sinful is he, who ever comforts us).
Such pity was on her face evident
that, had one dared to see her as she was,
one would have, weeping, in her presence died.

A Kindly Lady in Her Youthful Years

A kindly lady in her youthful years,
greatly adorned with human gentleness,
stood there, where I for Death did often long.

Veggendo li occhi miei pien di pietate
E ascoltando le parole vane,
Si mosse con paura a pianger forte.
E altre donne, che si fuoro accorte
Di me per quella che meco piangia,
Fecer lei partir via,
E appressarsi per farmi sentire.
Qual dicea: "Non dormire".
E qual dicea: "Perchè sì ti sconforte?"
Allor lassai la nova fantasia,
Chiamando il nome de la donna mia.
Era la voce mia sì dolorosa
E rotta sì da l'angoscia del pianto,
Ch'io solo intesi il nome nel mio core;
E con tutta la vista vergognosa
Ch'era nel viso mio giunta cotanto,
Mi fece verso lor volgere Amore.
Elli era tale a veder mio colore,
Che facea ragionar di morte altrui:
Deh, consoliam costui "
Pregava l'una l'altra umilmente;
E dicevan sovente:
"Che vedestù, che tu non hai valore? "
E quando un poco confortato fui,
Io dissi: "Donne, dicerollo a vui.
Mentr'io pensava la mia frale vita,
E vedea 'l suo durar com'è leggiere,
Piansemi Amor nel core, ove dimora;
Per che l'anima mia fu sì smarrita
Che sospirando dicea nel pensiero:
Ben converrà che la mia donna mora. —
Io presi tanto smarrimento allora
Ch'io chiusi li occhi vilmente gravati,
E furon sì smagati
Li spirti miei, che ciascun giva errando;
E poscia imaginando,
Di caunoscenza e di verità fora,
Visi di donne m'apparver crucciati,
Che mi dicean pur: — Morra'ti, morra'ti. —
Poi vidi cose dubitose molte
Nel vano imaginare ov'io entrai;
Ed esser mi pareva non so in qual loco,
E veder donne andar per via disciolte,

Seeing my eyes so sadly filled with tears,
and hearing all my words of emptiness,
fearful, she started weeping, loud and strong.
And other women, when they noticed me
because of her who wept with me along,
suddenly bade her go,
and, to be heard, drew closer to my bed.
"Oh, sleep no more," some said;
some other, "Why your sadness so prolong?"
Out of my recent vision so I came,
calling repeatedly my lady's name.
So was my voice by bitter sobbing rent,
and so by anguish broken every word,
that her name echoed in my heart alone.
Yet notwithstanding what was evident—
shame that had gravely on my face appeared—
Love bade me turn towards them with a moan.
My pallor was so pitifully shown,
it made all of them think my death was near.
"Let's comfort this man here,"
they begged each other with humility,
and often said to me,
"What did you see, that makes you sad and wan?"
And after I was somewhat comforted,
"Ladies, I'll tell you everything," I said.
Musing on my frail life with every thought,
and seeing how short were its remaining days,
here in my heart—his home—I heard Love cry,
which made my soul so utterly distraught,
it soon addressed my mind with all its sighs,
"My lady, too, my lady, too, will die."
Oh, such was at that moment my dismay,
I closed my eyes, so heavy and afraid,
and all my spirits swayed
so lifeless, each meandered lost and blind.
'Twas then that in my mind,
straying from truth and knowledge far away,
sad women's faces I beheld convening,
"You will die! You will die!" all of them keening.
Many a doubtful object then I viewed
in the strange nightmare that my fancy kept.
It seemed to me I was I know not where,
and 'long that road I saw a multitude

Qual lagrimando, e qual traendo guai
Che di tristizia saettavan foco.
Poi mi parve vedere a poco a poco
Turbar lo sole e apparir la stella,
E pianger elli ed ella;
Cader li augelli volando per l'are,
E la terra tremare;
Ed omo apparve scolorito e fioco,
Dicendomi: — Che fai? non sai novella?
Morta è la donna tua, ch'era sì bella. —
Levava li occhi miei bagnati in pianti,
E vedea, che parean pioggia di manna,
Li angeli che tornavan suso in cielo,
E una nuvoletta avean davanti,
Dopo la qual gridavan tutti: Osanna;
E s' altro avesser detto, a voi dire'lo.
Allor diceva Amor: — Più nol ti celo;
Vieni a veder nostra donna che giace. —
Lo imaginar fallace
Mi condusse a veder madonna morta;
E quand'io l'avea scorta,
Vedea che donne la covrian d'un velo;
Ed avea seco umiltà verace,
Che pareva che dicesse: — Io sono in pace —
Io divenia nel dolor sì umile,
Veggendo in lei tanta umiltà formata,
Ch'io dicea: — Morte, assai dolce ti tegno;
Tu dèi omai esser cosa gentile,
Poi che tu se' ne la mia donna stata,
E dèi aver pietate e non disdegno.
Vedi che sì desideroso vegno
D'esser de' tuoi, ch'io ti somiglio in fede.
Vieni, chè 'l cor te chiede. —
Poi mi partia, consumato ogne duolo;
E quand'io era solo,
Dicea, guardando verso l'alto regno:
— Beato, anima bella, chi te vede! —
Voi mi chiamaste allor, vostra merzede".

of women, who, disheveled, wailed and wept,
making a flame of sadness round me glare.
Then, slowly, very slowly in the air,
I saw the sun and the night-star appear,
shedding a mingled tear;
I saw birds falling from the firmament,
and the earth tremble bent;
and, raucous, pale, a man said then and there,
"Are you, are you here still? Did you not hear?
Dead is your lady, who was once so fair."
I lifted then my gaze, which tears had stained,
and saw (they looked to me like rain of manna)
angels returning quickly to their sky,
borne by a blessed cloudlet, light and faint,
behind which they, as one, sang all "Hosannah!"
If they had spooked else, oh, so would I.
"Now I must tell you," I heard Love reply;
"Come! See our lady, lying now so still."
That vision brought my will
there, where my lovely lady lifeless lay.
I looked at her, until
women I saw who wrapped her in a veil:
there, of such true humility possessed,
my lady seemed to say, "In peace I rest."
So humble grew I in my misery,
seeing so much humility on her mien,
that I said, "Death, I hold you very dear.
A thing of gentleness you must now be,
for on my lady you indeed have been,
and must now have compassion and no sneer.
Willingly, see, I come, and without fear,
into your kingdom, for I look like you.
Come, to my heart be true!"
When grief was spent, I moved from there away,
and, when alone I lay,
I said, still gazing at the lofty sphere,
"Blessèd, fair soul, those who enjoy your view!"
'T was then your voices called me, thanks to you."

Io mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core

Io mi senti' svegliar dentro a lo core
 Un spirito amoroso che dormia:
 E poi vidi venir da lungi Amore
 Allegro sì, che appena il conoscia,
 Dicendo: "Or pensa pur di farmi onore";
 E 'n ciascuna parola sua ridia.
 E poco stando meco il mio signore,
 Guardando in quella parte onde venia,

Io vidi monna Vanna e monna Bice
 Venire inver lo loco là 'v'io era,
 L'una appresso de l'altra meraviglia;
 E sì come la mente mi ridice,
 Amor mi disse: "Quell'è Primavera,
 E quell'ha nome Amor, sì mi somiglia".

Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare

Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare
 La donna mia quand'ella altrui saluta,
 Ch'ogne lingua deven tremando muta,
 E li occhi no l'ardiscon di guardare.
 Ella si va, sentendosi laudare,
 Benignamente d'umiltà vestuta;
 E par che sia una cosa venuta
 Da cielo in terra a miracolo mostrare

Mostrasi sì piacente a chi la mira,
 Che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core,
 Che 'ntender no la può chi no la prova;
 E par che de la sua labbia si mova
 Un spirito soave pien d'amore,
 Che va dicendo a l'anima: "Sospira".

Vede perfettamente onne salute

Vede perfettamente onne salute
 Chi la mia donna tra le donne vede;

I Felt a Loving Spirit Suddenly

I felt a loving spirit suddenly,
past a long slumber, in my heart arise;
from far away then Love I seemed to see,
so glad, I could his face ill recognize.
He told me, "Do your best to honor me,"
and laughter in each word I did surmise.
With my lord there, I was still eagerly
watching his steps, when I, to my surprise,

saw Mona Vanna and Mona Beatrice
coming towards me, where I still was standing—
one bliss pursuing still another bliss.
And—here is what I am reminded of—
Love said, "The first is Springtime, but the second
resembles me so much, her name is Love."

So Winsome and So Worthy Seems to Me

So winsome and so worthy seems to me
my lady, when she greets a passer-by,
that every tongue can only babble shy
and eager glances lose temerity.
Sweetly and dressed in all humility,
away she walks from all she's praised by,
and truly seems a thing come from the sky
to show on earth what miracles can be.

So much she pleases every gazing eye,
she gives a sweetness through it to the heart,
which he who does not feel it fails to guess.
A spirit full of love and tenderness
seems from her features ever to depart,
that, reaching for the soul, says softly "Sigh."

Perfectly One does All Salvation See

Perfectly one does all salvation see,
who among women sees my lady's face;

Quelle che vanno con lei son tenute
Di bella grazia a Dio render merzede.
E sua bieltate è di tanta vertute
Che nulla invidia a l'altre ne procede,
Anzi le face andar seco vestute
Di gentilezza, d'amore e di fede.

La vista sua fa onne cosa umile;
E non fa sola sè parer piacente,
Ma ciascuna per lei riceve onore.
Ed è ne li atti suoi tanto gentile,
Che nessun la si può recare a mente,
Che non sospiri in dolcezza d'amore.

Si lungiamente m'ha tenuto Amore

Si lungiamente m'ha tenuto Amore
E costumato a la sua signoria,
Che sì com'elli m'era forte in pria,
Così mi sta soave ora nel core.
Però quando mi tolle sì 'l valore
Che li spiriti par che fuggan via,
Allor sente la frale anima mia
Tanta dolcezza che 'l viso ne smore,

Poi prende Amore in me tanta vertute
Che fa li miei spiriti gir parlando,
Ed escon for chiamando
La donna mia, per darmi più salute.
Questo m'avvene ovunque ella mi vede,
E sì è cosa umil, che nol si crede.

Li occhi dolenti per pietà del core

Li occhi dolenti per pietà del core
Hanno di lagrimar sofferta pena,
Sì che per vinti son remasi omai.
Ora, s'ì' voglio sfogar lo dolore
Che a poco a poco a la morte mi mena,
Convenemi parlar traendo guai.
E perchè me ricorda ch' io parlai

so those who walk now in her company
must give God thanks for such a lavish grace.
So great and mighty can her beauty be,
envy in other ladies leaves no trace;
they go, instead, in like humility,
mantled in faith, and love, and gentleness.

Everything humble in her presence grows,
for such is she, that through her pleasantness
honor on other women she bestows.
She has in all her ways such loveliness
that nobody can e'er recall her glow
without a sigh of loving tenderness.

Love Still Retains Me in His Sovereignty

Love still retains me in his sovereignty,
to which I've been accustomed for so long
that, just as he before was harsh and strong,
he reigns now in my heart most tranquilly.
But when it robs me of my valiancy,
and all my spirits seem a fleeting throng,
in my frail soul I taste a bliss so strong
it makes my features pallid instantly;

and Love regains such power in me then,
he makes my every spirit fare about,
talking and calling out
my lady, so that I more grace obtain.
Where'er she sees me, this occurs to me,
yet none believes how humble she can be.

These Eyes, that Grieve in Pity for My Heart

These eyes, that grieve in pity for my heart,
have known the suffering of every tear,
so utterly are they by now undone.
Today, if I decide to vent my smart,
which to my death so slowly brings me near,
I must at the same time both speak and moan.
And since I well remember that I spoke,

De la mia donna, mentre che vivia,
Donne gentili, volentier con vui,
Non voi parlare altrui,
Se non a cor gentil che in donna sia;
E dicerò di lei piangendo, pui
Che si n'è gita in ciel subitamente,
E ha lasciato Amor meco dolente.
Ita n'è Beatrice in l'alto cielo,
Nel reame ove li angeli hanno pace,
E sta con loro, e voi, donne, ha lassate:
No la ci tolse qualità di gelo
Nè di calore, come l'altre face,
Ma solo fue sua gran benignitate;
Chè luce de la sua umilitate
Passò li cieli con tanta vertute,
Che fe' maravigliar l'eterno sire,
Sì che dolce disire
Lo giunse di chiamar tanta salute;
E fella di qua giù a sè venire,
Perchè vedea ch'esta vita noiosa
Non era degna di sì gentil cosa.
Partissi de la sua bella persona
Piena di grazia l'anima gentile,
Ed èssi gloriosa in loco degno.
Chi no la piange quando ne ragiona,
Core ha di pietra sì malvagio e vile
Ch'entrar no i puote spirito benegno.
Non è di cor villan sì alto ingegno,
Che possa imaginar di lei alquanto,
E però no li ven di pianger doglia:
Ma ven tristizia e voglia
Di sospirare e di morir di pianto,
E d'onne consolar l'anima spoglia
Chi vede nel pensiero alcuna volta
Quale ella fue, e com'ella n'è tolta.
Dannomi angoscia li sospiri forte,
Quando 'l pensiero ne la mente grave
Mi reca quella che m'ha 'l cor diviso:
E spesse fiате pensando a la morte,
Venemene un disio tanto soave
Che mi tramuta lo color nel viso.
E quando 'l maginar mi ven ben fiso,
Giugnemi tanta pena d'ogne parte,

O gentle ladies, willingly with you
about my lady while she was alive,
none will I now address
but ladies who a gentle heart possess.
Weeping, I then will speak of her again,
who to her heaven went so suddenly,
leaving Love grieving here on earth with me.
To the high heaven Beatrice is gone,
up to the realm where angels dwell in peace,
and lives with them. To you she bade farewell.
'Tis no degree of cold on her has won,
nor of such heat as makes all others cease:
it only was her goodness' great appeal.
So did her shining humbleness excel,
it passed the heavens with such wondrous worth,
it moved to marvel the eternal Sire,
so that a sweet desire
pricked Him to call such worthiness from earth,
and made her to himself go from down here:
for well He saw this life of suffering
had not been made for such a gentle thing.
Her gentle spirit, full of gentle grace,
at last departed from her beauteous frame,
and chose in glory its most worthy home.
He who weeps not, when talking of her trace,
harbors a heart of wickedness and shame,
to which no kindly spirits ever come.
No mind, if heart is wicked, may so roam
as to imagine in the least her lot:
therefore no grief or weeping will transpire.
But sadness and desire
of tears and sighs and death, and every thought
that fails to comfort for a loss immense,
conquer those souls that even once recall
the thing she was, now taken from us all.
Ah, so much anguish nearly halts my breath
when the least thought to this my grievous mind
brings back the one who split my heart in me;
and oftentimes, when thinking but of death,
so sweet a longing does all of me bind,
the color from my face fades utterly.
And when the imagining is sharp in me,,
from everywhere I'm struck by such dismay

Ch'io mi riscuoto per dolor ch'i' sento;
 E sì fatto divento
 Che da le genti vergogna mi parte.
 Poscia piangendo, sol nel mio lamento
 Chiamo Beatrice, e dico: "Or se' tu morta?";
 mentre ch'io la chiamo, me conforta.

Pianger di doglia e sospirar d'angoscia
 Mi strugge 'l core ovunque sol mi trovo,
 Sì che ne 'ncrescerebbe a chi m'audesse:
 E quale è stata la mia vita, poscia
 Che la mia donna andò nel secol novo,
 Lingua non è che dicer lo sapesse:
 Però, donne mie, pur ch'io volesse,
 Non vi saprei io dir ben quel ch'io sono,
 Sì mi fa travagliar l'acerba vita;
 La quale è sì 'nvilita
 Che ogn'om par che mi dica: "Io t'abban- dono",
 Veggendo la mia labbia tramortita.
 Ma qual ch'io sia, la mia donna il si vede,
 E io ne spero ancor da lei merzede.

Pietosa mia canzone, or va piangendo;
 E ritruova le donne e le donzelle
 A cui le tue sorelle
 Erano usate di portar letizia;
 E tu, che se' figliuola di tristizia,
 Vatten disconsolata a star con elle.

Venite a intender li sospiri miei

Venite a intender li sospiri miei,
 Oi cor gentili, chè pietà 'l disia,
 Li quai disconsolati vanno via,
 E s'e' non fosser, di dolor morrei;
 Però che gli occhi mi sarebber rei,
 Molte fiate più ch'io non vorria,
 Lasso! di pianger sì la donna mia
 Che sfogasser lo cor, piangendo lei.

Voi udirete lor chiamar sovente
 La mia donna gentil, che si n'è gita

that at the ache I feel right then I start,
and so distraught I grow,
shame causes me from every crowd to stray.
Afterward, in laments and tears I go,
calling my Beatrice. I say, "You're dead!"
and so, in calling her, am comforted.

Weeping from grieving, sighing from dismay
so wreck my heart, wher'ever I am alone,
I'd move whoever my lament could hear.
And what my whole existence has been, after
my lady went to her new century,
no tongue would ever know how to reveal:
and so, my ladies, even if I would,
I could not tell you what I am today.
My life has now become such bitterness,
a thing of such distress,
that "I abandon you," men seem to say,
seeing my every feature grown so dumb.
Whate'er I am, my lady now can see,
and, oh, may she reward me finally.

Wander about in tears, O my sad Song,
and all those girls and ladies find once more,
to whom your sisters bore —
accustomed so were they — delight and gladness.
And you, who are the daughter of great sadness,
go there and with them live forevermore.

Come, Gentle Hearts, and Heed My Every Sigh

Come, gentle hearts, and heed my every sigh,
for it is pity that now wishes so.
Away all of my sighs in sadness go,
and yet I would of grief, without them, die.
Guilty these eyes of mine would prove if they,
oh, much more often than I so would wish,
should mourn my lady with the utmost woe,
and soothe, in mourning her, my heart's dismay.

Come! You will hear them sigh and often call
my gentle lady, oh, my lovely lady,

Al secol degno de la sua vertute;
 E dispregiar talora questa vita
 In persona de l'anima dolente
 Abbandonata de la sua salute.

Quantunque volte, lasso! mi rimembra

Quantunque volte, lasso! mi rimembra
 Ch'io non debbo già mai
 Veder la donna ond'io vo sì dolente,
 Tanto dolore intorno 'l cor m'assembra
 La dolorosa mente,
 Ch'io dico: "Anima mia, chè non ten vai?
 Chè li tormenti che tu porterai
 Nel secol, che t'è già tanto noioso,
 Mi fan pensoso di paura forte".
 Ond'io chiamo la Morte
 Come soave e dolce mio riposo,
 E dico: "Vieni a me" con tanto amore,
 Che sono astioso di chiunque more.
 E' si raccoglie ne li miei sospiri
 Un sono di pietate,
 Che va chiamando Morte tuttavia:
 A lei si volser tutti i miei disiri,
 Quando la donna mia
 Fu giunta da la sua crudelitate;
 Perchè 'l piacere de la sua bieltate,
 Partendo sè da la nostra veduta,
 Divenne spirital bellezza grande,
 Che per lo cielo spande
 Luce d'amor, che li angeli saluta,
 E lo intelletto loro alto, sottile
 Face maravigliar, sì v'è gentile.

Era venuta ne la mente mia

Primo cominciamento

Era venuta ne la mente mia
 La gentil donna che per suo valore

gone to her virtue's worthy century.
For often they despise this life already –
here in the body of this grieving soul,
bereft of its salvation utterly.

Always – Unhappy Me! – When I Recall

Always – unhappy me! – when I recall
that nevermore shall I
behold my lady (O distressing thought!),
such is the sorrow gathered 'round my soul
by this sad fancy brought,
that, "My poor soul," I say, "why don't you go?
The torments you will be escorted by
through this already boring century
makes me foresee a terror far more strong."
Therefore for Death I long,
the only sweet and easeful rest to me,
and, "Come! Oh, come!," with ardent love I say,
all envious of those who pass away.
A sound of mercy gathers in my sighs,
a sound that more and more
Death, only death is calling none the less:
To her all of my longings wished to soar
the very day my Lady
was overcome by all her cruelty,
because, as soon as severed from our gaze,
her beauty's great delight
into a spiritual, great beauty grew,
which now in heaven casts
a light of love that greets the angels' sight,
and makes their intellects, high though they be,
marvel – such is, indeed, her courtesy.

Back to My Mind the Thought Had Come Anew

First Beginning

Back to my mind the thought had come anew
of that so gentle lady paced by God

Fu posta da l'altissimo signore
 Nel ciel de l'umiltate, ov'è Maria.

Secondo cominciamento

Era venuta ne la mente mia
 Quella donna gentil cui piange Amore,
 Entro 'n quel punto che lo suo valore
 Vi trasse a riguardar quel ch'eo facia.
 Amor, che ne la mente la sentia,
 S'era svegliato nel destrutto core,
 E diceva a' sospiri: "Andate fore
 Per che ciascun dolente si partia".

Piangendo uscivan for de lo mio petto
 Con una voce che sovente mena
 Le lagrime dogliose a li occhi tristi.
 Ma quei che n'uscian for con maggior pena,
 Venian dicendo: "Oì nobile intelletto,
 Oggi fa l'anno che nel ciel salisti".

Videro li occhi miei quanta pietate

Videro li occhi miei quanta pietate
 Era apparita in la vostra figura,
 Quando guardaste li atti e la statura
 Ch'io faccio per dolor molte fiate.
 Allor m'accorsi che voi pensavate
 La qualità de la mia vita oscura,
 Sì che mi giunse ne lo cor paura
 Di dimostrar con li occhi mia viltate.

E tolsimi dinanzi a voi, sentendo
 Che si movean le lagrime dal core,
 Ch'era sommosso da la vostra vista.
 Io dicea poscia ne l'anima trista:
 "Ben è con quella donna quello Amore
 Lo qual mi face andar così piangendo".

the highest Lord in the becoming heaven
of all humility, where Mary's too.

Second Beginning

That gentle lady Love is weeping for
had come all of my mind to repossess,,
right at the point when her great worthiness,
brought you pay attention to my chore.
Feeling her presence in my thoughts, therefore,
Love in the wreckage of my heart awoke,
and, "Out! Go out!," to every sigh he spoke,
which made them all depart then, sad and sore.

Weeping, they all were banished from my breast,
with that same sound which very often brings
to these my grieving eyes sad tears of love.
But those which left with greater suffering
kept murmuring, "O intellect so blest,
it is a year today you soared above."

These Eyes of Mine Could Very Plainly See

These eyes of mine could very plainly see
the great compassion in your person shown,
when all my acts and ways you looked upon,
so strange because of constant misery.
'Twas then I noticed all your scrutiny
of this my dark life's present quality,
and I grew then afraid lest I make known
through every glance the abjection of my state.

So from your presence I went fast away,
feeling new tears arising from the heart,
suddenly by your watching moved and stirred.
And then these words in my sad soul I heard,
"With that kind lady Love has come to stay,
who keeps me weeping in my woeful smart."

Color d'amore e di pietà sembianti

Color d'amore e di pietà sembianti
 Non preser mai così mirabilmente
 Viso di donna, per veder sovente
 Occhi gentili o dolorosi pianti,
 Come lo vostro, qualora davanti
 Vedetevi la mia labbia dolente;
 Sì che per voi mi ven cosa a la mente,
 Ch'io temo forte non lo cor si schianti.
 Eo non posso tener li occhi distrutti
 Che non regardin voi spesse fiate,
 Per desiderio di pianger ch'elli hanno:
 E voi crescete sì lor volontate,
 Che de la voglia si consuman tutti;
 Ma lagrimar dinanzi a voi non sanno.

L'amaro lagrimar che voi faceste

"L'amaro lagrimar che voi faceste,
 Oi occhi miei, così lunga stagione,
 Facea lagrimar l'altre persone
 De la pietate, come voi vedeste.
 Ora mi par che voi l'obliereste,
 S'io fosse dal mio lato sì fellone
 Ch'ì' non ven disturbasse ogne cagione,
 Membrandovi colei cui voi piangeste.

La vostra vanità mi fa pensare,
 E spaventami sì, ch'io temo forte
 Del viso d'una donna che vi mira.
 Voi non dovrete mai, se non per morte,
 La vostra donna, ch'è morta, obliare".
 Così dice 'l meo core, e poi sospira.

Never Did Glow of Love and Pity Take

Never did glow of love and pity take
hold of a lady's face so wondrously,
for meeting gentle glances frequently
or heeding weeping or lamenting plea,
as it does now of yours, whene'er you see
in front of you my melancholy face;
and so you stir my mind consequently,
fiercely afraid I am my heart may break.
I cannot keep these eyes, though wrecked and spent,
away from gazing more and more at you
so is their yearning for more crying deep.
And so do you their longing still augment,
they're only eagermost to cry anew,
yet in your presence know not how to weep.

The Bitter Tears of Bitter Agony

"The bitter tears of bitter agony,
that you, poor eyes of mine, so long have shed,
made other people all around you sadly
weep from pity, as you well could see.
You would forget all this, it seems to me,
if I were on my part so wholly bad
as not to make you think again, instead,
of her for whom you wept so wretchedly.

Pensive I grow for this your foolishness,
and frightened so, that very much I dread
'tis someone else's sight you're conquered by.
Never must you forget, my eyes, — unless
Death come to close you — your sole mistress, dead."
So speaks my heart, and soon it heaves a sigh.

Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri

Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri,
 Che nascon de' penser che son nel core,
 Li occhi son vinti, e non hanno valore
 Di riguardar persona che li miri;
 E fatti son che paion due disiri
 Di lagrimare e di mostrar dolore,
 E spesse volte piangon sì, ch'Amore
 Li 'ncerchia di corona di martiri.

Questi pensieri, e li sospir ch'eo gitto,
 Diventan ne lo cor sì angosciosi
 Ch'Amor vi tramortisce, sì lien dole;
 Però ch'elli hanno in lor, li dolorosi,
 Quel dolce nome di madonna scritto,
 E de la morte sua molte parole.

Gentil pensiero che parla di vui

Gentil pensiero che parla di vui
 Sen vene a dimorar meco sovente,
 E ragiona d'amor sì dolcemente
 Che face consentir lo core in lui.
 L'anima dice al cor: "Chi è costui
 Che vene a consolar la nostra mente,
 Ed è la sua virtù tanto possente
 Ch'altro penser non lascia star con nui?"

Ei le risponde: "Oi anima pensosa,
 Questi è uno spiritel novo d'amore,
 Che reca innanzi me li suoi desiri;
 E la sua vita, e tutto 'l suo valore,
 Mosse de li occhi di quella pietosa
 Che si turbava de' nostri martiri".

Pity! Because of All the Many Sighs

Pity! Because of all the many sighs
that from the thoughts of this my heart are born,
my eyes are vanquished now and powerless
ever to meet anyone else's eyes.
Eyes? Mine are rather two desires for cries,
so much to weep and show their grief they yearn!
And tears they shed so oft, a martyr's crown
Love all about them in a circle ties.

All of these thoughts, and every sigh I heave,
so agonized in this my heart become,
Love, too, grows pale, so much for it he grieves;
for, carven in their bosom, all of them
mournfully bear my lady's blissful name,
with many an echo of her mortal day.

A Gentle Thought Reminding But of You

A gentle thought reminding but of you
comes often here to dwell and stay with me,
conversing still of love so tenderly,
it makes my heart agree and find it true.
The soul says to the heart, "Who can he be,
that comes to give our mind a solace new,
and is so worthy and so strong to view,
no other thought dare keep us company?"

The heart replies to it, "Oh, pensive soul,
this is a youthful spirit of new love,
that now before me its own longing brings.
All of its life and all its worthiness
from the sweet glances of that lady move,
who used to be perturbed by our distress."

Deh peregrini che pensosi andate

Deh peregrini che pensosi andate
Forse di cosa che non v'è presente,
Venite voi da sì lontana gente,
Com'a la vista voi ne dimostrate,
Che non piangete quando voi passate
Per lo suo mezzo la città dolente,
Come quelle persone che neente
Par che 'ntendesser la sua gravitate?

Se voi restate per volerlo audire,
Certo lo cor de' sospiri mi dice
Che lagrimando n'uscirete pui.
Ell'ha perduta la sua Beatrice;
E le parole ch'om di lei pò dire
Hanno virtù di far piangere altrui.

Oltre la spera che più larga gira

Oltre la spera che più larga gira
Passa 'l sospiro ch'esce del mio core;
Intelligenza nova, che l'Amore
Piangendo mette in lui, pur su lo tira.
Quand'elli è giunto là dove disira,
Vede una donna, che riceve onore
E luce sì, che per lo suo splendore
Lo peregrino spirito la mira.

Vedela tal, che quando 'l mi ridice
Io no lo intendo, sì parla sottile
Al cor dolente che lo fa parlare.
So io che parla di quella gentile,
Però che spesso ricorda Beatrice,
Sì ch'io lo 'ntendo ben, donne mie care.

O Pilgrims, Who So Sad and Pensive Go

O pilgrims, who so sad and pensive go
maybe for something that you fail to see,
have you from far away just come to me,
just as your countenance now seems to show?
Right through the midst of this sad town you go
without a sign of tears or misery,
like people walking on most casually,
utterly unaware of grievous woe.

If you but stay awhile to hear the news —
deep in my heart I am so sure of this —
not without weeping will you leave from here.
This town of ours has lost its Beatrice,
and any word about her one may use
suffices to make all shed many a tear.

Beyond the Sphere that Runs Its Farthest Gyre

Even beyond the widest-wheeling sphere
a sigh can soar, that has my heart for sire:
a new intelligence that, weeping, Love
deposits in it, makes it climb still higher.
When it attains the goal of its desire,
it sees a lady that all men revere,
a lady whose new splendor is so dear
the pilgrim spirit cannot but admire.

Such it beholds her, its report I fail
to comprehend, so subtly it addresses
the very grieving heart that bids it speak.
I know, of that sweet one it longs to tell,
for oftentimes it mentions Beatrice:
dear ladies, so I understand quite well.

Beginnings: Seven Classic Literary Embarkations

Translated by Peter D'Epiro

Peter D'Epiro was born in the Bronx to parents from Esperia, Italy. He earned a BA and MA from Queens College and a PhD in English from Yale University and is the author or coauthor of five books, including *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World*. His articles, poems, and translations have appeared in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *The Formalist*, *Paideuma*, *the new renaissance*, and *Italian Americana*. He has completed a verse translation of Dante's *Inferno*, of which five cantos have appeared in periodical publication, three of them in *JIT*, which has also published his verse translation of Leopardi's "La ginestra," his translation into Italian of Pound's "Canto I," and a critique of Montale's Italian translation of *Hamlet*. He has worked as an English teacher and managing editor of a medical journal and lives in Ridgewood, New Jersey, with his wife, the medical writer Nancy Walsh.

I. "Cantico delle creature"

St. Francis of Assisi, author of the earliest Italian poem that the world has treasured, left no other writings in the vernacular, all his other known works consisting of Latin prose. He apparently composed it later in the same year, 1224, that he received the stigmata, after hearing a voice promising him eternal bliss in heaven. This oldest religious lyric in Italian was thus conceived as a hymn of cosmic praise to the God who had vouchsafed to Francis the knowledge of his soul's salvation while he was still in the body.

At first, this laudatory poem in irregular verse of elemental sublimity comprised only the first seven stanzas of the lyric we know. It took a rhapsodic form that may have been inspired by Psalm 148 in the Vulgate (whose third verse, for example, is "laudate eum sol et luna, laudate eum omnes stellae et lumen") or perhaps by "The Song of the Three Young Men" (in the fiery furnace) of Daniel 3:52-90 (which features verses like, "Benedicite, sol et luna, Domino: laudate et superexaltate eum in saecula. / Benedicite, stellae caeli, Domino").

Whatever its ultimate source, the poem derives much of its

power from evoking a creation as fresh as the dawn of time, when all was still vibrant with new life—a whole universe alive with God's praise. The sun, moon, wind, water, fire, and earth seem to fulfill their functions as if they were conscious agents and are referred to as our brothers, sisters, and mother, according to the gender of the Italian nouns. This not only associates them with our own human families and the Christian family of *Frati Minori* and Poor Clare sisters, but also, at least in our more secular minds, with a much older family—one that Hesiod might well have praised: the pagan nature gods such as Apollo, Artemis, Zephyr, Amphitrite, Hephaestus, and Gaea.

After the addition of an eighth stanza on those who pardon others and suffer in patience their infirmities and troubles, Francis, toward the end of his life in 1226, reverted to the "family motif" with the insertion of the stanza on Sister Bodily Death, from which all escape is futile. As his own death approached, and his weary suffering flesh—"Brother Ass," he called it—demanded release from the blindness of glaucoma and the torments of tuberculosis and malaria, Francis praised God for providing the boon of mortality. If the earlier part of his poem depended on personifications that vivified the insentient, he caps his lyric by "mortifying" the sentient (the reader, the "*homo vivente*")—and we are so mortified on reading that chilling memento mori that our impulse is, indeed, to "*scappare*."

The canticle is the first masterpiece in a powerful line of religious and mystical literature in Italian that passed memorably through Francis's fellow Franciscan, the poet Iacopone da Todi, and culminated in the exquisite Tuscan prose of St. Catherine of Siena in an Italy already on the cusp of the Renaissance.

II. *Vita Nuova* (I-VI)

The little book that Dante composed, sometime in 1292-1295, to contextualize many of his early lyrics within a prose narrative frame has been called his "Life of St. Beatrice." Endowing it with a title that can mean "New Life" as well as "Early Life," he weaves a story about a young man's initiation into both love and his poetic vocation through the figure of a beautiful young woman he calls Beatrice ("she who beatifies"). She is an angel, or at least a *donna angelicata*, who has been sent to earth by God to bring humankind

to salvation by the example of her ineffable goodness and grace.

Is Dante's Beatrice, who was early identified with Bice Portinari, a Florentine married to the wealthy banker and knight Simone dei Bardi, merely a symbol, a real woman, or both? No one will ever know with certainty, but there's something about the intensity and passionate power of Dante's treatment of her that makes it hard to believe she was a figment of an admittedly unbounded poetic imagination.

The combination of romantic ardor and adolescent infatuation with the worship worthy of a "saint's life" out of medieval hagiography gives this early work of Dante's its peculiar charm. On the one hand, the narrator (whom we might as well call Dante) exhibits most of the physical and psychological symptoms of the "disease" of love as treated in the Provençal troubadour tradition. He sighs, weeps copiously, goes deathly pale, trembles, and experiences palpitations. His senses go blank in Beatrice's presence, and he has multiple dreams and visions concerning his lady (whom he barely seems to know). Yet, before the brief book comes to an end, the little Florentine girl we first see in her ninth year comes to be revered as a saint, almost a Christian goddess, with some of the salvific attributes of Christ himself. Even the number nine, with which she is repeatedly associated, is the number of the Trinity (a miraculous theological mystery) multiplied by itself to indicate that, like the Triune God, Beatrice too is a miracle.

Her beatific salutation of Dante when he was eighteen years old led him to versify, in his earliest known poem (translated below), a dream of Love feeding Dante's heart to Beatrice, signaling his complete and excruciating devotion to her. According to courtly love conventions laid down by the troubadours long before, the identity of his lady must be kept secret, and he thus feigns love for another woman to serve as a "screen" for concealing the truth. When this lady leaves the city and Dante acquires a new screen, Beatrice interprets this as fickleness in love and denies him her greeting (her *saluto*, which Dante puns on as *salute*—"health" or indeed "salvation"), which had been all his bliss.

After composing a number of poems about his consequent suffering, he realizes the only joy remaining to him was to write in honor of his lady's many excellences, so he gives himself wholly to singing her praises. Five months after the death of her father,

however, Beatrice herself dies in June 1290, at age 25. If Poe was right that the death of a beautiful woman was "the most poetical topic in the world," Dante chose his subject wisely.

But now a beautiful and compassionate young lady—*la donna gentile*—whom he first sees looking down from a window at his sorrowing self becomes someone in whose company Dante begins to take much pleasure. He catches himself before falling irrecoverably in love with her and, after a vision in which he imagines Beatrice in the same crimson dress in which he had first seen her, and as young as she then had been, he banishes all thought of his incipient love interest and rededicates himself to the memory of "*la gloriosa donna de la mia mente*."

In the final poem of the work, Dante has a vision of a sigh of his mounting up to heaven and seeing Beatrice who, far from consuming his heart as she had done in the first lyric of the *Vita Nuova*, is being honored there and dwells in radiant glory. This makes him decide to stop writing poems in her honor until he has learned his poetic craft so thoroughly that he can someday say of her "what has never been said of any woman." At the end of the book, his presentation of himself as the most spiritualized of idealized lovers merges with his aspiration to create a supreme work of art with his sainted lady at its center. Though it might have been the vaguest of sketches in his mind at the time, we gratefully know it as the *Divine Comedy*.

Although Dante was certainly not the earliest of the *stilnovisti*, he epitomized their aesthetics in the incantatory prose and the fervent, lapidary verse of the *Vita Nuova*, especially in the canzone *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* and the sonnet *Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare*. In our era of ubiquitous memoirs, we can underestimate the audaciousness of his genre-bending work. Writing in the vernacular instead of the dignified Latin of scholars, Dante paints a portrait of the artist as a young platonic lover, including a focus on his adolescent quirks, dreams, daydreams, and visions, as well as on the links between his early poetic endeavors and his amatory emotions. Besides being the first Western poet to act as his own anthologist, he also makes of his *libello* a primer in poetic composition, showing how his poems are constructed and anticipating by many centuries William Carlos Williams's statement that "a poem is a small (or large) machine made out of words."

It was left to Petrarch to bring Dante's quasi-divine lady down to earth. His invention of the sonnet cycle allowed him to omit the prose narrative of life events and incorporate the emotional background of his verse into the poems themselves—three hundred sixty-six of them, one for each day of a leap year. He too writes about an unattainable woman, Laura, who dies during the course of the narrative, allowing the poet to devote the last one hundred poems to ruminations on what she has meant in his life, memory, and poetry. After him, according to Ernst Robert Curtius, the sonnet cycle “spread almost like an epidemic disease,” as poets of the caliber of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare in England, not to mention scores of other European sonneteers, bewailed and bemoaned their lady loves.

To provide a sense of the entire opening sweep of the *Vita Nuova*, including the first of the thirty-one poems interspersed in it, I have translated the first six of the work's forty-two chapters. I have also divided the Italian text into paragraph breaks that reflect those of the translation.

III. *Inferno* (Canto I)

In the *Divine Comedy*, the saintly Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* becomes the cosmic guide of the last part of the *Purgatorio* and the entire *Paradiso*, coming to life here more than when she was presented as alive in that earlier work. In the initial canto of the *Inferno*, she is referred to indirectly as someone who will lead Dante to Heaven, but some of the other links between the beginning of the epic and its conclusion in Canto 33 of the *Paradiso*, where Beatrice is mentioned for a final time, can serve to suggest the intricate system of correspondences that enriches the texture of this medieval “miracle of song.”

The trajectory of the poem takes Dante from a harsh and dense forest—what he calls *la selva erronea di questa vita* in the *Convivio*—to a place where matter, space, and distances do not exist and time has been left behind. Whereas in the third line of the *Inferno* the right path for Dante is *smarrita* (lost), in the last canto of the *Paradiso* he claims he himself would be *smarrito* if he tried to take his eye away from God's light shining down on him, preventing him from straying in thought, will, or desire. Instead of fleeing from the three beasts that block his path in the first canto, Dante, at the very

end of the poem, is wholly rapt in his vision of the three Persons of the Trinity.

Rescuing him from the three beasts is the shade of Virgil, who will be his guide throughout most of the otherworldly journey. The unregenerate protagonist of Canto I, who feels profound shame at finding himself before his poetic father and *autore*, dares lift his gaze at the end of the poem to his heavenly Father, the author of his very being. Dante calls Virgil the *lume* of all other poets at their first meeting, but in the final canto he has progressed so far as to be illuminated by the *semplice lume*, *vivo lume*, and *alto lume* of God himself.

During his first colloquy with Virgil, Dante confesses to the love that bade him study the ancient Roman poet's *volume*—the *Aeneid*, which profoundly inspired his poetic undertaking and is mirrored, paraphrased, imitated, invoked, challenged, and even corrected throughout the vast expanse of the *Commedia*. In the last canto of the poem, Dante's vision, immensely strengthened by what he has experienced and learned on his journey, gazes fixedly at the divine light and sees therein all the disparate substances and qualities of our material world united by God's infinite Love as if gathered in a single *volume*—all those entities that are scattered in our earthly reality like leaves torn from a book, even one as magnificent as Virgil's.

This image of scattered leaves reappears in an even more literal form in this final canto as the last allusion to Virgil's text (*Para.* 33.65-66), when Dante refers to his memory of the Beatific Vision, lost forever (as is Virgil in Limbo) like the tree leaves on which the Cumaean Sibyl writes her unread oracles, before the wind sweeps them away forever (*Aeneid* 3.441-452; 6.74-76). All that remains for Dante is the sweetness of the vision and of the Love that "moves the sun and the other stars"—harking back one final time to the first canto (*Inf.* 1.38-40), in which the poet evokes Divine Love's first setting in motion of the sun and stars in the act of Creation itself.

IV. *Galateo ovvero de' costumi* (I)

Giovanni Della Casa (1503-1556) was the Tuscan-born prelate who composed a work so seminal in its field that *galateo* became an Italian synonym for etiquette. Appearing posthumously in Venice in 1558, the book was, for Giacomo Leopardi, "one of the most

elegant and Attic prose works of the sixteenth century."

In its opening chapter, we find that *la diritta via* refers not to the "the right path" of a Christian life in harmony with God's commands, as implied in the third line of Dante's *Inferno*, but to the acquisition of good manners. Here *virtù* refers not to the aristocratic ethos and strenuous accomplishments of Castiglione's Renaissance courtier, nor the indomitable *übermenschlich* will of Machiavelli's Renaissance prince—much less Dante's three theological and four cardinal virtues—but to the polite behaviors and winning ways that oil the wheels of everyday bourgeois life. In a left-handed compliment, Francesco De Sanctis said of Della Casa's book and its chief model, "The *Galateo* and the *Book of the Courtier* are the two best prose writings of that time, representing a polished and elegant society, entirely on the surface . . . , which placed the primary importance of life in manners and usages." What had happened?

The Council of Trent had opened in 1545, and the pulse of social and intellectual life in Italy no longer beat to the individualistic rhythms that had led to the quasi-materialism and near paganism of certain strains of the Italian Renaissance. The Church had set its jaw against the every-man-his-own-inner-light anticlericalism that characterized the Protestant Reformation, and in this new Italian world of reactionary Spanish domination in the political sphere and that of the Tridentine Church in all others, the prize for "standing out" went to the person who most "fit in." In this atmosphere, Della Casa, the elegant Petrarchan sonneteer, emulator of Cardinal Bembo's humanistic prose, and occasional author of humorously salacious verses, became the absentee archbishop of Benevento who, as papal nuncio to Venice, established the Inquisition there in 1547 and devised the first Index of Prohibited Books in 1549, in accordance with the Council of Trent's decrees. He also never got over his disappointment at being denied a cardinal's hat.

In the persona of "an ignorant old man" instructing a young relative (Della Casa's unnamed nephew, Annibale Rucellai, who also went on to pursue an ecclesiastical career), the opening chapter entices the reader by promising to supply the information necessary for getting ahead in Italian society by leapfrogging over even one's more gifted, but less refined, contemporaries. Obviously, such a work will include many unsurprising reminders of the essentials, like table manners, but Della Casa's tart wit spices up what could

have been a bland recital of rules by memorably associating prohibitions with the type of idiot who usually flouts them, as in, "After you're done blowing your nose, don't open your handkerchief and look in it, as if expecting pearls or rubies to have cascaded into it from your brain."

The often-delightful *Galateo* frequently articulates the assumption undergirding its philosophy of conformity: The main goal of interpersonal dealings is not self-expression, but the avoidance of offense. Wearing idiosyncratic clothes, for example, is as much a silent reproach to others who are properly garbed for an occasion as contradicting another speaker is a vocal one. Yet Della Casa clearly states that though the forms current in polite society are to be observed, they are not to be overdone, as in the excessive "foreign and barbarous" ceremoniousness and all the empty titles, affectation, and bowing and scraping inflicted on Italy as a result of Spanish hegemony.

The author's serene, dignified opening section of the *Galateo* may be contrasted (after a book's worth of detailing the awful manners of his contemporaries) with the frantic heaping together of dreadful behaviors in his final chapter, a Swiftian nightmare vision teeming with Yahoos who actually have to be told not to stick out their tongues, pick at their beards, stretch while grunting, laugh like imbeciles at their own jokes, grimace like buffoons while telling stories — "and what should I say of those who emerge from their home office into company with a pen behind their ear? . . . or drape a leg over the table? or spit in their hands? or other innumerable gaucheries? They could never all be listed, and I'm not even going to try. In fact, some would perhaps venture to say that I've already mentioned too many."

What might Archbishop Della Casa say (or sputter), were he able to witness *our* behavior in restaurants and behind the wheel, or when trolling online or braying into phones?

V. *Aminta* (prolog)

The conformity and reverence for "the rules" of Giovanni Della Casa are upended in the desire for a primeval rustic freedom in the lyrical pastoral drama *Aminta*. Its author, Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), was born in Sorrento and spent his first decade basking in the idyllic panoramas of the Bay of Naples, but his little gem of a

play was first performed in Ferrara before the refined court of Alfonso II d'Este in 1573, two years before the young poet completed his epic of the First Crusade, *Gerusalemme Liberata*. The madness that soon afterward manifested itself plagued him for the rest of his life, one of its forms being a paranoid religious terror that he was guilty of heresy and needed to find Inquisitors adept enough at pinpointing it.

The bucolic nostalgia of *Aminta* was as old in Italy as that of the Sicilian Greek Theocritus and the Virgil of the *Eclogues*. In Tasso's version, Silvia, a huntress nymph in the virgin chorus of Diana, scornfully refuses the love of the shepherd Aminta, grandson of Pan. When a satyr prepares to rape Silvia by binding her to a tree nude (she had been bathing at a fountain), Aminta saves her, but she flees in embarrassment without even a word of thanks, hurrying off to join Diana's hunt. Aminta soon hears that Silvia has been eaten by wolves in a hunting mishap and decides to jump off a cliff to end it all. Silvia, who survived the lupine attack just fine, is told that Aminta has killed himself for love of her and feels a sudden access of guilt and pity that even more suddenly turns into love.

Luckily, some vegetation has broken Aminta's fall, but as he lies on the ground badly shaken, he appears quite dead. A weeping Silvia approaches his inert frame and, on seeing he's still alive, leaps on him, shrieking "like a Bacchante," and smothers him in kisses. The play ends with an overlong epilog spoken by Venus, which serves as a bookend to her son Cupid's prolog. The goddess asks the lords and ladies of the aristocratic audience whether they know the whereabouts of her missing son and, on receiving no reply, archly speculates they must all be hiding Love within their hearts.

The prolog spoken by Cupid, translated below, is a charmingly urbane introduction to a work in which the god of love is indeed the presiding deity, but the most admired set piece in *Aminta* is the chorus "*O bella età de l'oro*" at the end of the first act. In this canzone, empty *Onore* ("honor" as chastity) is decried as the cruel pseudo-virtue that put an end to the uninhibited joy in spontaneous sensuality of the Golden Age. That fabled epoch was golden not because of Nature's eternal spring and its paradisiacal "milk-and-honey" aspects, but because of its lack of amorous restraint. Nature's law was simply "*s'ei piace, ei lice*," which, in the parlance of our time, might be rendered, "If it feels good, do it." Glorifying a pagan Eros,

the chorus harks back to a mythic era of freedom from hypocritical strictures and bids Honor go bother the powerful of this world and leave the humble folk alone to love as they please. The song ends with a translation of Catullus's somber lines counseling a *carpe diem* philosophy, since there is nothing beyond death:

*Amiam: ch   'l Sol si muore e poi rinasce,
A noi sua breve luce
S'asconde, e 'l sonno eterna notte adduce.*

But this ancient sentiment, recast in choice Italian by a belated Renaissance poet, was not yet destined to prevail. Five years after Tasso's death, Giordano Bruno would be burned at the stake as a heretic in Rome's Campo de' Fiori, bringing the final curtain down on what was left of the Italian Renaissance.

VI. "All'Italia" (first two stanzas)

Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837), the greatest Italian poet since Tasso, derived from the earlier master's *Aminta* the names Silvia and Nerina as pseudonyms for two of his poetic heroines, sang Tasso's praises in "Ad Angelo Mai," and claimed that "the first and only *pleasure*" he experienced during his five-month initial visit to Rome was that of weeping at Tasso's tomb. While Tasso's tragic life epitomized for Leopardi the romantic theme of the lonely, misunderstood genius, oppressed by society and unhappy in love, some of the early poems in the latter's *Canti* are inspired by a love of fatherland at the very dawn of the Risorgimento, when the French occupation of Italy was replaced by the reintroduction of the old tyrannies by the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

"All'Italia," a 140-line, seven-stanza poem (of which only the first two are translated below), was written in Leopardi's "horrible, detestable, execrated" hometown of Recanati in September 1818 and published later that year in Rome with "Sopra il monumento di Dante." These two works now open the *Canti*, a collection of forty-one poems – thirty-six lyrics and five fragments – that features numerous masterpieces of Italian verse, among them "L'infinito," "La sera del di di festa," "La vita solitaria," "Alla sua donna," "A Silvia," "Le ricordanze," "La quiete dopo la tempesta," "Il sabato del villaggio," "A se stesso," and the incomparable "La ginestra."

Taking his cue from Ugo Foscolo's recent epistolary novel, *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*, which details the protagonist's patriotic anguish, the twenty-year-old Leopardi of "All'Italia" also joins his voice to those of two older literary titans: Dante, who in Canto 6 of the *Purgatorio* laments the shame of "serva Italia" (the servile mistress of a bordello) and Petrarch, who opens his canzone "Italia mia" with an evocation of the mortal wounds in Italia's beautiful body. In this early poem, Leopardi's stately diction borders at times on the rhetorical and grandiloquent, and his histrionic call for arms at the end of the second stanza may seem ridiculous for a sickly youth who went on to worship a married woman who called him "my little hunchback," but his passionate phrasing is commensurate with the severity of the political situation: a Habsburg, Bourbon, and Papal State Italy haunted by the ubiquitous relics of its ancient Roman precursor.

The poem goes on to remind us that although Italians had been engaged in mortal combat recently, it was not to free their own native land, but for the French in their disastrous 1812 invasion of Russia. Then, in greatest possible contrast to these pathetic deaths for the imperial aspirations of foreigners, Leopardi switches his focus to the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, when the Spartan king Leonidas and his three hundred warriors died fighting against the massive invasion forces of the Persian king Xerxes. The last three stanzas of "All'Italia" are a vigorously imagined recreation in Italian of the Greek poet Simonides's lost ode on this quintessential act of patriotic self-sacrifice, and Leopardi implies that he would willingly assume the role of Italy's heroic bard, if only his contemporaries would do something meriting sublime song.

The theme of the glorious past versus the debased present continues in the second of the *Canti*, "Sopra il monumento di Dante," in which the poet urges the Italians of his day to honor "that infinite company of immortals" from their history, such as Dante, since there are none to honor in the present. "Ad Angelo Mai," the third poem of the collection and once confiscated by the Austrian censorship, again features Dante, this time heading a list of Italian icons: Petrarch, Columbus, Ariosto, Tasso, Alfieri. But the speaker lives in "a dead century," enveloped by a miasmal tedium, "an age of mud" that seems more obtrusively ugly the more it is contrasted with ancient Roman virtue and Italy's earlier cultural giants.

In the sixth of the *Canti*, "Bruto Minore," the speaker is the leader of the conspiracy against Caesar, Brutus the Younger, who, stunned after his defeat at Philippi in 42 BC, prepares to commit suicide in defiance of the fate that seems to delight in allowing the worse side to win wars. The solution to an intolerable present now seems to be self-slaughter, or at least the eternal oblivion of death, rather than any hope of political or societal amelioration. Despite many moments of love, tenderness, and sympathy, the *Canti* go on to articulate an all-encompassing despair of life and what it has to offer, culminating in the comparison of humans, in "La ginestra," to the inhabitants of an anthill crushed by a falling apple.

VII. *Pensieri* (I)

Moving from Leopardi's "All'Italia" to the first of his *Pensieri* is like going from Lord Byron haranguing his Greek rebel troops to Schopenhauer philosophizing to a near-empty lecture hall in Berlin. About two-thirds of the one hundred and eleven items of the *Pensieri* were derived from entries written in 1820-1823 in Leopardi's massive notebook, the *Zibaldone*, but these were selected, revised, and added to in Naples during his final years (1833-1837), and the collection was first published posthumously with his works in 1845.

The *Pensieri* were described by the author in a letter of March 2, 1837, three months before his death, as "reflections on the characters of men and on their conduct in society." Giovanni Getto, the editor of a 1967 Italian edition of Leopardi's selected works, has spoken of their "cold and aggressive atmosphere," and the collection is indeed a classic of misanthropy in its pervasive pessimism and cynicism. It portrays society as hopelessly corrupt and hypocritical and may be taken as the author's summation of what life had taught him.

Although Leopardi's multiple maladies and disappointing love life have been blamed for his depressing view of existence as tragedy relieved only by intervals of ennui (*la noia*), he saw himself as someone whose prodigious studies, periodic forays into society, and unblinking passion for truth resulted in a profound disillusionment with all the meretricious joys and pleasures that life offers. The first of the *Pensieri*, translated in its entirety below, sets the bitter tone for his collection of insights into human folly, shortsightedness, and intractable narcissism. Here I've provided capsule summaries of a score of them that I find most revealing of

Leopardi's general frame of mind during much of his short, sad, but highly productive life:

6. Death is not an evil, but the greatest of all evils is old age. "Nonetheless, men fear death and want to live to be old."

8. People will gossip about any aspect of your life they may happen to know, no matter how damaging.

10. We know that the majority of teachers to whom we entrust our children for education are not educated themselves, yet we don't seem to understand that they can't give what they themselves haven't received.

12. We hate when others succeed quickly and easily at what we have labored long and painfully to achieve.

14. Teachers and especially parents would be saddened if they reflected that, no matter how much effort and expense are devoted to educating children, almost all of them will be corrupted by society.

21. In conversation, we either bore the other person by talking about ourselves or get annoyed by listening to our interlocutor doing the same thing.

26. In our adversity, our friends are often gladdened or scornful; in our good fortune, they are often angry or resentful.

28. The human race is divided into bullies and bullied.

30. We praise the past and denigrate the present, just as most travelers praise home while away from it and, once back, claim home is worse than all the places they visited.

34. The young often feign melancholy because they think it goes over well, but as they get older they see that people universally flee from true melancholics. In the long run, people understandably want to laugh, not cry.

52. People who offer to do anything in the world for you just want to think of themselves as benefactors and will flee at the first actual request you make of them.

70. Most adults continue to live, in most respects, like children.

81. Like some authors, people we meet are often interesting at first, but become less so afterward because at a certain point they begin repeating themselves.

83. We often respect, as a group, a small assemblage of people whom individually we might consider of no account at all.

89. True misanthropes rarely live apart from society, but are

instead to be sought in the very midst of the world because this practical experience of life is precisely what gives rise to hatred of others.

97. If you know anyone, no matter how highly civilized, for a long time, you will marvel at discovering more than one weirdness, absurdity, or bizarreness in them and their habits.

99. "In general, wanting to be what we are not ruins everything in the world."

106. The world laughs at what it should admire and speaks ill of what it envies.

109. Individuals are almost always just as wicked as they need to be. Those with no wickedness at all must not need it at all.

110. "It is curious that almost all people of much worth have simple manners and that simple manners are almost always taken as a sign of little worth."

San Francesco d'Assisi**Cantico delle creature**

Altissimu, omnipotente, bon Signore
tue so le laude la gloria e l'honore
et omne benedictione.

Ad te solo, Altissimo, se confano
et nullu homo ene dignu te mentovare.

Laudato sie, mi Signore cun tutte le tue creature
spetialmente messor lo frate sole
lo qual jorna et allumini noi per loi.
Et ellu è bellu e radiante cun grande splendore:
de te, Altissimo, porta significatione.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per sora luna e le stelle;
in cielo l'hai formate clarite et pretiose et belle.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per frate vento
e per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo,
per lo quale a le tue creature dai sustentamento.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per sor'acqua,
la quale è multo utile et humile et pretiosa et casta.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per frate focu
per lo quale ennallumini la nocte;
ed ello è bello et jocundo et robustoso et forte.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per sora nostra matre terra,
la quale ne sustenta et governa,
et produce diversi fructi con coloriti fiori et herba.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per quelli che perdonano per lo tuo
[amore
et sostengo infirmitate et tribulatione:
beati quelli che sosterranno in pace,
ca da te, Altissimo, sirano incoronati.

St. Francis of Assisi

Canticle of the Creatures

Most high, most powerful, most gentle Lord,
yours be the praise, the glory, and the honor —
all these and every blessing that is made.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and none of us is worthy to speak your name.

Be praised, my Lord, be praised with all your
[creatures,
especially our brother, Master Sun,
through whom you bring us day and give us light.
He is, Most High, a vibrant sign of you,
shining so beautifully with splendor bright.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and stars:
In Heaven you formed them — lovely, precious, clear.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Wind and air,
and every kind of weather, cloudy and fair,
by which you give your creatures what they need.

Be praised, my Lord, be praised for Sister Water,
who is so useful, precious, chaste, and humble.

Be praised, my Lord, be praised for Brother Fire:
You use him to illuminate the night —
such a lively, strong, robust, and lovely sight.

Be praised, my Lord, for Mother Earth, our sister,
who supports us all and takes good care of us,
and brings forth fruits and grass and colored flowers.

Be praised, my Lord, when men forgive for love of you,
and bear infirmity and tribulation:
Blessèd are those who suffer all in peace,
for they, Most High, shall all be crowned by you.

Laudato si', mi Signore, per sora nostra morte corporale,
da la quale nullu homo vivente po scappare:
guai a quelli che morranno ne le peccata mortali,
beati quelli che trovarà ne le tue sanctissime voluntati,
ca la morte secunda nol farrà male.

Laudate et benedicete mi Signore et rengratiate
et serviteli cun grande humilitate.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living person can escape.
Woe to all those who die in mortal sin,
and blessed are those she finds in your holy will:
The second death will do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, you creatures, render
[thanks,
and serve him with profound humility.

Dante Alighieri

Vita Nuova (I-VI)

I

In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemblare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenza.

II

Nove fiate già appresso lo mio nascimento era tornato lo cielo de la luce quasi a uno medesimo punto, quanto a la sua propria girazione, quando a li miei occhi apparve prima la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice li quali non sapeano che si chiamare. Ella era in questa vita già stata tanto, che ne lo suo tempo lo cielo stellato era mosso verso la parte d'oriente de le dodici parti l'una d'un grado, sì che quasi dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me, ed io la vidi quasi da la fine del mio nono. Apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore, umile e onesto, sanguigno, cinta e ornata a la guisa che a la sua giovanissima etade si convenia.

In quello punto dico veracemente che lo spirito de la vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera de lo cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente, che apparia ne li menimi polsi orribilmente; e tremando disse queste parole: *Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi*. In quello punto lo spirito animale, lo quale dimora ne l'alta camera ne la quale tutti li spiriti sensitivi portano le loro percezioni, si cominciò a maravigliare molto, e parlando specialmente a li spiriti del viso, sì disse queste parole: *Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra*. In quello punto lo spirito naturale, lo quale dimora in quella parte ove si ministra lo nutrimento nostro, cominciò a piangere, e piangendo disse queste parole: *Heu miser, quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!*

D'allora innanzi dico che Amore signoreggiò la mia anima, la quale fu sì tosto a lui disposata, e cominciò a prendere sopra me tanta sicurtade e tanta signoria per la virtù che li dava la mia imaginazione, che me convenia fare tutti li suoi piaceri compiutamente. Elli mi comandava molte volte che io cercasse per vedere

Dante Alighieri

The New Life (I-VI)

I

In that part of the book of my memory before which little can be read, there is a rubric that says: *Incipit vita nova*. Under that rubric I find the words that I intend to transcribe into this little book – or if not all of them, at least the meaning they had for me.

II

Nine times already since my birth had the heaven of light returned almost exactly to the same point, with respect to its proper motion, when the glorious lady of my mind first appeared before my eyes – she who was called Beatrice even by many who did not know her name. During the time she had been in this world the starry heaven had moved eastward by the twelfth part of a degree, so that she appeared to me almost at the beginning of her ninth year, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth. She appeared clad in the noblest of colors, a chaste and subdued crimson, girt and adorned in the fashion most suitable to her tender years.

At that moment, I say in all truthfulness, the vital spirit, which resides in the innermost chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that it manifested itself most fearfully in even the most distant of my pulses. And in trembling it uttered these words: *Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi*. At that moment the animate spirit, which resides in the lofty chamber to which all the spirits of the senses bring their perceptions, began to marvel exceedingly and, addressing specifically the spirits of sight, uttered these words: *Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra*. At that moment the natural spirit, which resides in that part that ministers to our sustenance, began to weep, and in weeping uttered these words: *Heu miser, quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!*

From that point on, I say, Love became the lord of my soul, which was wed to him so early in life, and he began to exercise such undisputed mastery over me, by virtue of the power conferred on him by my imagination, that I had no choice but to carry out his wishes in every detail. Many times he bade me seek out and gaze on this youngest of the angels, and so, throughout my childhood, I

questa angiola giovanissima; onde io ne la mia puerizia molte volte l'andai cercando, e vedeala di sì nobili e laudabili portamenti, che certo di lei si potea dire quella parola del poeta Omero: *Ella non pareva figliuola d'uomo mortale, ma di deo.*

E avvegna che la sua imagine, la quale continuatamente meco stava, fosse baldanza d'Amore a signoreggiare me, tuttavia era di sì nobilissima virtù, che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse senza lo fedele consiglio de la ragione in quelle cose là ove cotale consiglio fosse utile a udire. E però che soprastare a le passioni e atti di tanta gioventudine pare alcuno parlare fabuloso, mi partirò da esse; e trapassando molte cose le quali si potrebbero trarre de l'esempio onde nascono queste, verrò a quelle parole le quali sono scritte ne la mia memoria sotto maggiori paragrafi.

III

Poi che furono passati tanti die, che appunto erano compiuti li nove anni appresso l'apparimento soprascritto di questa gentilissima, ne l'ultimo di questi die avvenne che questa mirabile donna apparve a me vestita di colore bianchissimo, in mezzo a due gentili donne, le quali erano di più lunga etade; e passando per una via, volse li occhi verso quella parte ov'io era molto pauroso, e per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo, mi salutò molto virtuosamente, tanto che me parve allora vedere tutti li termini de la beatitudine. L'ora che lo suo dolcissimo salutare mi giunse, era fermamente nona di quello giorno; e però che quella fu la prima volta che le sue parole si mossero per venire a li miei orecchi, presi tanta dolcezza, che come inebriato mi partio da le genti, e ricorsi a lo solingo luogo d'una mia camera, e puosimi a pensare di questa cortesissima.

E pensando di lei, mi sopraggiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m'apparve una maravigliosa visione: che me pareva vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco, dentro a la quale io discerneva una figura d'uno signore di pauroso aspetto a chi la guardasse; e pareami con tanta letizia, quanto a sé, che mirabile cosa era; e ne le sue parole dicea molte cose, le quali io non intendevo se non poche; tra le quali intendevo queste: *Ego dominus tuus.* Ne le sue braccia mi pareva vedere una persona dormire nuda, salvo che involta mi pareva in uno drappo sanguigno leggermente; la quale io riguardando molto intentivamente, conobbi ch'era la donna de

often went in search of her and saw in her such a noble and praiseworthy bearing that certainly one could say of her, in the words of the poet Homer, "She seemed no daughter of mortal man, but of a god."

And it came to pass that her image, which was with me always, emboldened Love to lord it over me, but it was also of such singular virtue that it never permitted him to exercise his sway without the faithful counsels of reason, in those matters requiring such counsels to be heeded. But because my dwelling on the passions and deeds of such early youth might strike some as mere make-believe, I shall take leave of the subject and, skipping over much that could be drawn from the same text that gave rise to these revelations, I shall proceed to the words inscribed in my memory under ampler headings.

III

After the passage of so many days as had brought round nine full years since the above-recorded appearance of this noblest of creatures, it happened on the last of those days that this admirable lady appeared to me dressed in purest white, flanked by two gentlewomen of riper years. Passing through a street, she turned her eyes in the direction where I stood trembling with fear and, in her ineffable courtesy, which is today rewarded in the life of eternity, she greeted me most virtuously, so that I then seemed to experience the utmost limits of blessedness. The hour at which she greeted me so sweetly was exactly the ninth of the day and, since this was the first time she uttered words meant for my ears alone, I felt such rapture that I staggered away from everyone, as if inebriated, and sought the solitary refuge of my room, where I began thinking of this most courteous of women.

And while lost in thought of her, I fell into a soothing sleep, during which I had an astonishing vision. I seemed to see in my room a mist the color of fire, within which I could make out the form of a lord fearful to look upon, but nonetheless endowed with such inner joy that he seemed a most wondrous thing. Of the many words he spoke, I understood but few, among which the following: *Ego dominus tuus*. In his arms I seemed to see a sleeping figure, naked but for a crimson cloth loosely draped around it. Intently fixing my gaze on it, I realized it was the lady of the salutation—

la salute, la quale m'avea lo giorno dinanzi degnato di salutare. E ne l'una de le mani mi pareva che questi tenesse una cosa la quale ardesse tutta, e pareami che mi dicesse queste parole: *Vide cor tuum*.

E quando elli era stato alquanto, pareami che disvegliasse questa che dormia; e tanto si sforzava per suo ingegno, che le faceva mangiare questa cosa che in mano li ardea, la quale ella mangiava dubitosamente. Appresso ciò poco dimorava che la sua letizia si convertia in amarissimo pianto; e così piangendo, si ricogliea questa donna ne le sue braccia, e con essa mi pareva che si ne gisse verso lo cielo; onde io sostenea sì grande angoscia, che lo mio deboletto sonno non poteo sostenere, anzi si ruppe e fui disvegliato. E mantenente cominciai a pensare, e trovai che l'ora ne la quale m'era questa visione apparita, era la quarta de la notte stata; sì che appare manifestamente ch'ella fue la prima ora de le nove ultime ore de la notte. Pensando io a ciò che m'era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti li quali erano famosi trovatori in quello tempo: e con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l'arte del dire parole per rima, propuosi di fare uno sonetto, ne lo quale io salutasse tutti li fedeli d'Amore; e pregandoli che giudicassero la mia visione, scrissi a loro ciò che io aveva nel mio sonno veduto. E cominciai allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *A ciascun'alma presa*.

A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core
nel cui cospetto ven lo dir presente,
in ciò che mi rescrivan suo parvente,
salute in lor signor, cioè Amore.

Già eran quasi che atterzate l'ore
del tempo che onne stella n'è lucente,
quando m'apparve Amor subitamente,
cui essenza membrar mi dà orrore.

Allegro mi sembrava Amor tenendo
meo core in mano, e ne le braccia avea
madonna involta in un drappo dormendo.

Poi la svegliava, e d'esto core ardendo
lei paventosa umilmente pascea:
appresso gir lo ne vedea piangendo.

Questo sonetto si divide in due parti; che ne la prima parte saluto e domando risponsione, ne la seconda significo a che si dee rispondere. La seconda parte comincia quivi: *Già eran*.

she who had deigned to greet me earlier in the day. And in one of his hands that lord seemed to be holding something that was all aflame, saying to me the while: *Vide cor tuum*.

Shortly afterward he seemed to awaken the sleeping woman and prevail on her to eat of the flaming thing he was holding — which she did most timorously. At that, his joyfulness gave way to bitter weeping and, as he wept, he gathered up the lady in his arms and seemed to rise heavenward with her. This caused such anguish within me that my slumber was no match for it, and I awoke with a start. And immediately I began to reflect and discovered that the hour at which this vision had appeared to me had been the fourth of the night, which — as is now plain to me — is the first of the last nine hours of night. Thinking over what I had seen, I decided to recount it to many of the famed poets of the time and, since I had already made some progress in the art of composing verse, I resolved to write a sonnet in which I would extend my greetings to all the faithful servants of Love and, describing for them what I had seen in my sleep, ask them to interpret my vision. The result was the sonnet that begins, *To every gentle heart and soul in thrall*.

To every gentle heart and soul in thrall
 Before whose eyes these words of mine may wend,
 That you may write me what you think, I send
 Greetings in Love, the master of you all.
 The first three hours of night had cast their pall
 Over the heaven that gleaming stars attend,
 When suddenly I saw Lord Love descend,
 Whose aspect is still dreadful to recall.

Cheerful he seemed to me, but in his keeping
 He had my heart, and in his arms he held
 My lady, wrapped up in a cloth and sleeping.
 He woke her then; the heart, which flames were sweeping,
 She fed upon, in fear, as if compelled.
 And when he took his leave, I saw him weeping.

This sonnet is composed of two parts: In the first, I send greetings and request an answer; in the second, I set forth what is to be responded to. The second part begins with the words, *The first three hours*.

A questo sonetto fue risposto da molti e di diverse sentenzie; tra li quali fue risponditore quelli cui io chiamo primo de li miei amici, e disse allora uno sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore*. E questo fue quasi lo principio de l'amistà tra lui e me, quando elli seppe che io era quelli che li avea ciò mandato. Lo verace giudicio del detto sogno non fue veduto allora per alcuno, ma ora è manifestissimo a li più semplici.

IV

Da questa visione innanzi cominciò lo mio spirito naturale ad essere impedito ne la sua operazione, però che l'anima era tutta data nel pensare di questa gentilissima; onde io divenni in picciolo tempo poi di sì fraile e debole condizione, che a molti amici pesava de la mia vista; e molti pieni d'invidia già si procacciavano di sapere di me quello che io volea del tutto celare ad altrui. Ed io, accorgendomi del malvagio domandare che mi faceano, per la voluntade d'Amore, lo quale mi comandava secondo lo consiglio de la ragione, rispondea loro che Amore era quelli che così m'avea governato. Dicea d'Amore, però che io portava nel viso tante de le sue insegne, che questo non si potea ricovrire. E quando mi domandavano "Per cui t'ha così distrutto questo Amore?" ed io sorridendo li guardava, e nulla dicea loro.

V

Uno giorno avvenne che questa gentilissima sedea in parte ove s'udiano parole de la regina de la gloria, ed io era in luogo dal quale vedea la mia beatitudine; e nel mezzo di lei e di me per la retta linea sedea una gentile donna di molto piacevole aspetto, la quale mi mirava spesse volte, maravigliandosi del mio sguardare, che pareva che sopra lei terminasse. Onde molti s'accorsero de lo suo mirare; e in tanto vi fue posto mente, che, partendomi da questo luogo, mi sentio dicere appresso di me: "Vedi come cotale donna distrugge la persona di costui"; e nominandola, io intesi che dicea di colei che mezzo era stata ne la linea retta che movea da la gentilissima Beatrice e terminava ne li occhi miei.

Allora mi confortai molto, assicurandomi che lo mio secreto non era comunicato lo giorno altrui per mia vista. E mantemente pensai di fare di questa gentile donna schermo de la veritade; e tanto ne mostrai in poco tempo, che lo mio secreto fue creduto sapere da

Many poets answered this sonnet, each with his own different interpretation. Among the respondents was he whom I now refer to as the foremost of my friends, who on that occasion wrote the sonnet that begins, *You saw, it seems to me, a precious thing*. And this was the beginning, as it were, of the friendship between us, when he learned that it was I who had sent him the poem. No one at the time perceived the true meaning of my dream, though it is now quite obvious to even the simplest of souls.

IV

After I experienced that vision the normal functioning of my natural spirit was disrupted because my soul was wholly given up to the contemplation of this most gracious woman. In a short time I thus grew so weak and frail that the sight of me became a grievous burden to many of my friends, while a number of envious souls did their utmost to discover what I wanted to keep completely hidden. Realizing the ill intent behind the questions they posed, I answered – by the will of Love, who bade me act according to the counsels of reason – that it was indeed Love who thus had me in his power. I admitted to being under Love's sway, for my face bore so many signs of him that it was futile to deny it. But when they asked me, "For whose sake has Love so ravaged you?" I would just look at them, and smile, and say nothing.

V

It came to pass one day that this most gracious woman was present while the Queen of Glory was being praised, and I, from where I sat, could gaze on my bliss. In the direct line between us was seated an attractive gentlewoman who kept glancing at me, marveling at my gaze, which seemed aimed at her. Many noticed the looks she gave me and drew such conclusions from them that, on leaving that place, I heard voices behind me saying, "Do you see how such-and-such a woman is causing that man to waste away?" and when they mentioned her name, I realized they were referring to the lady who had been sitting directly in the line of vision between my most gracious Beatrice and me.

At that, I was greatly relieved, assuring myself that my gazing had not, on that occasion, given away my secret. And I immediately decided to make use of that gentlewoman as a screen for the

le più persone che di me ragionavano. Con questa donna mi celai alquanti anni e mesi; e per più fare credente altrui, feci per lei certe cosette per rima, le quali non è mio intendimento di scrivere qui, se non in quanto facesse a trattare di quella gentilissima Beatrice; e però le lascerò tutte, salvo che alcuna cosa ne scriverò che pare che sia loda di lei.

VI

Dico che in questo tempo che questa donna era schermo di tanto amore, quanto da la mia parte, sì mi venne una voluntade di volere ricordare lo nome di quella gentilissima ed accompagnarlo di molti nomi di donne, e specialmente del nome di questa gentile donna. E presi li nomi di sessanta le più belle donne de la cittade ove la mia donna fue posta da l'altissimo sire, e compuosi una pistola sotto forma di serventese, la quale io non scriverò: e non n'avrei fatto menzione, se non per dire quello che, componendola, maravigliosamente addivenne, cioè che in alcuno altro numero non sofferse lo nome de la mia donna stare se non in su lo nove, tra li nomi di queste donne.

truth, putting on such convincing shows that, soon after, most of those who spoke of me thought they had discovered it. By means of this woman I escaped detection for several years and more and, to confirm everyone's notions, I wrote a few little poems for her, which I have no intention of transcribing here, unless they deal in some way with that most gracious Beatrice. Thus I omit them all, except for one that can be interpreted as praising *her*.

VI

While this woman was serving as a screen for such great love, I felt a desire to set down the name of that most gracious lady among those of many others, and especially with that of this gentlewoman. I thus recorded the names of the sixty most beautiful women of the city in which my lady had been placed by the Most High, and I wrote an epistle in the form of a *serventese*, which I shall not transcribe. Nor would I have mentioned it, but for something remarkable that took place during its composition: My lady's name would not fit, among those of the other women, in any position other than the ninth.

Dante Alighieri*Inferno***Canto I**

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant' è amara che poco è più morte;
ma per trattar del ben ch'í' vi trovai,
dirò de l'altre cose ch'í' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com' í' v'intrai,
tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.

Ma poi ch'í' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
là dove terminava quella valle
che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,
guardai in alto e vidi le sue spalle
vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle.

Allor fu la paura un poco queta,
che nel lago del cor m'era durata
la notte ch'í' passai con tanta pietà.

E come quei che con lena affannata,
uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,
si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,
così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.

Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso,
ripresi via per la piaggia diserta,
sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso.

Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta,
una lonza leggera e presta molto,
che di pel macolato era coverta;

e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto,
anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino,
ch'í' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto.

Dante Alighieri*Inferno***Canto I**

Midway along this life we journey through,
I found myself in a dark wood, astray,
For the right path was wholly lost to view.
Ah, how difficult it is for me to say
How wild that forest was, how harsh and dense –
The thought alone revives all my dismay!
Death's bitterness is scarcely more intense;
But I will treat of all I chanced to find,
So as to tell what good I salvaged thence.
How I entered it I cannot call to mind:
I was so drowsy at that point I could
Do nothing but leave the one true way behind.
But when I'd crossed the valley of that wood
Which had transfixed my very heart with dread,
A hill appeared not far from where I stood,
And, looking up, I saw high overhead
Its shoulders vested with that planet's light
Which guides men right, whatever path they tread.
Then was I able to allay the fright
That had maintained its vigil in my breast
Through all the anguish I endured that night.
And just as someone who, with panting chest,
Has made his way to shore from the deep sea
Turns back to gaze at the deadly waters crossed,
So too my mind, continuing to flee,
Turned back to look again upon that trail
That never yet let living man go free.
I rested briefly from the night's travail,
Then started up that desert mountainside,
My firm foot always the nearer to the vale.
I'd just begun, when see what I espied! –
A leopard, light and nimble in its pace,
And covered with a thickly-spotted hide.
Nor would it move from right before my face,
But had so blocked the way I thought to climb
That more than once I turned to leave that place.

Temp' era dal principio del mattino,
e 'l sol montava 'n sù con quelle stelle
ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino
mosse di prima quelle cose belle;
sì ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
di quella fiera a la gaetta pelle
l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
ma non sì che paura non mi desse
la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.

Questi pareva che contra me venisse
con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
sì che pareva che l'aere ne tremesse.

Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,
e molte genti fé già viver grame,
questa mi porse tanto di gravezza
con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista,
ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza.

E qual è quei che volentieri acquista,
e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista;
tal mi fece la bestia senza pace,
che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco
mi ripigneva là dove 'l sol tace.

Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio pareva fioco.

Quando vidi costui nel gran deserto,
"Miserere di me," gridai a lui,
"qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"

Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo già fui,
e li parenti miei furon lombardi,
mantoani per patria ambedui.

Nacqui *sub Iulio*, ancor che fosse tardi,
e vissi a Roma sotto 'l buono Augusto
nel tempo de li dèi falsi e bugiardi.

Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che 'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.

Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?
perché non sali il dilettoso monte
ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?"

The time of day was morning's early prime;
 The sun was rising with those stars that went
 To bear it company when Love Sublime
 First moved those things, so fair and excellent.
 The hour and sweet season of the year
 Gave cause for hope and firm encouragement
 Against that speckled creature and my fear.
 Yet, even so, my resolution fled
 When suddenly I saw a lion appear,
 Which seemed to come against me with its head
 Uplifted high, with hunger-maddened stare,
 So that the air appeared to quake with dread.
 And then a she-wolf came, which seemed to bear
 Within her famished frame a craving will—
 To many nations had she brought despair.
 Such terror did the sight of her instill,
 Such heaviness she worked within my veins,
 That I lost hope of going up the hill.
 And just like one who's avid in his gains
 Until the day he loses what he'd won,
 When, in his thoughts, he sorrows and complains,
 So by that restless beast was I undone,
 Which, step by step advancing, made me go
 Back toward that place where silent is the sun.
 While I was rushing to ruin down below,
 Someone appeared before me as I ran,
 Whose voice, through long disuse, seemed faint and low.
 And seeing him in that desert, I began
 To cry, "Have mercy on me" with voice aflame,
 "Whatever you are, a shade or living man!"
 "Not man," he said, "though once I held that name.
 Both of my parents were of Lombardy,
 And Mantua the town from which they came.
Sub Julio was I born, though tardily,
 And lived at Rome in good Augustus' days,
 When gods were liars, steeped in falsity.
 I was a poet, and I sang to praise
 Anchises' righteous son who came from Troy
 When haughty Ilium was set ablaze.
 But you, why seek those regions that destroy,
 Instead of climbing this delightful mount,
 Which is both source and cause of every joy?"

"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?"
rispuos' io lui con vergognosa fronte.

"O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.

Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore.

Vedi la bestia per cu' io mi volsi;
aiutami da lei, famoso saggio,
ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi."

"A te convien tenere altro viaggio,"
rispuose, poi che lagrimar mi vide,
"se vuo' campar d'esto loco selvaggio;

ché questa bestia, per la qual tu gride,
non lascia altrui passar per la sua via,
ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide;

e ha natura sì malvagia e ria,
che mai non empie la bramosa voglia,
e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria.

Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia,
e più saranno ancora, infin che 'l veltro
verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.

Questi non ciberà terra né peltro,
ma sapienza, amore e virtute,
e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro.

Di quella umile Italia fia salute
per cui morì la vergine Cammilla,
Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.

Questi la caccerà per ogne villa,
fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,
là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.

Ond' io per lo tuo me' penso e discerno
che tu mi segui, e io sarò tua guida,
e trarrotti di qui per loco eterno;

ove udirai le disperate strida,
vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti,
ch'a la seconda morte ciascun grida;

e vederai color che son contenti
nel foco, perché speran di venire
quando che sia a le beate genti.

"And are you then that Virgil and that fount
From which proceeds so rich a stream of speech?"
I answered him with shame on my account.
"O glory of all poets, light of each,
May my long, loving studies serve me now,
Which bade me search for all your book could teach.
My master, you, my author! I avow
It was from you alone that I first learned
That style whose beauty set honor on my brow.
But see the beast – the reason why I turned.
Against her, famous sage, O lend your aid!
For her, the blood within my veins is churned."
"Now quite a different journey must be made
By you," he answered when he saw me cry,
"To flee this savage place to which you've strayed,
Because the beast that makes you weep and sigh
Forbids a man to climb up any higher,
Besetting him until she makes him die.
Her nature is all viciousness and ire,
Her greedy maw impossible to sate:
The more she feeds, the greater her desire.
With many creatures is she known to mate,
And shall with many more – until the Hound
Shall come to deal this beast her deadly fate.
He will not feed on loot or others' ground,
But wisdom, love, and valor in great store;
And felt and felt his hour of birth shall bound.
He'll save shamed Italy, for which those four –
Virgin Camilla, Turnus, Nisus, and
Euryalus – all died from wounds of war.
He'll hunt her through each city in the land
Till into Hell she shall again be thrown,
From where she came, at primal envy's command.
I thus determine, for your good alone,
That you should follow where I lead, and go
Through an eternal place you shall you be shown.
There shall you hear despairing shrieks of woe,
There shall you witness ancient souls in pain,
Who all bewail the second death below.
Then shall you see those spirits who remain
Content within the fire, for they believe
That someday they shall see the blest domain.

A le quai poi se tu vorrai salire,
anima fia a ciò più di me degna:
con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire;
ché quello imperador che là sù regna,
perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge,
non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna.

In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;
quivi è la sua città e l'alto seggio:
oh felice colui cu' ivi elegge!"

E io a lui: "Poeta, io ti richieggo
per quello Dio che tu non conoscesti,
acciò ch'io fugga questo male e peggio,
che tu mi meni là dov' or dicesti,
sì ch'io veggia la porta di san Pietro
e color cui tu fai cotanto mesti."

Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.

If there you would ascend, you shall receive
 A worthier guide to take you in her care;
 To her shall I entrust you when I leave.
 For that great Emperor who rules up there —
 Since I rebelled against his law — by rights
 Forbids that to his city I repair.
 Though everywhere he reigns, he *rules* those heights;
 There is his city and his lofty seat —
 Happy are they he chooses for those sights!"
 I answered him: "O poet, I entreat
 You by that God you did not recognize,
 To help me flee this evil beast's deceit,
 And worse to come, and lead me where my eyes
 May see Saint Peter's gate and look upon
 Those souls on whom you say such sorrow lies."
 He then set out; behind him, I moved on.

Giovanni Della Casa

Galateo ovvero de' costumi (I)

Trattato di Messer Giovanni Della Casa nel quale, sotto la persona d'un vecchio idiota ammaestrante un suo giovanetto, si ragiona de' modi che si debbono o tenere o schifare nella comune conversazione, cognominato *Galateo ovvero de' costumi*.

I

Con ciò sia cosa che tu incominci pur ora quel viaggio del quale io ho la maggior parte, sì come tu vedi, fornito, cioè questa vita mortale, amandoti io assai, come io fo, ho proposto meco medesimo di venirti mostrando quando un luogo e quando altro, dove io, come colui che gli ho sperimentati, temo che tu, caminando per essa, possi agevolmente o cadere, o come che sia, errare: acciò che tu, ammaestrato da me, possi tenere la diritta via con la salute dell'anima tua e con laude et onore della tua orrevole e nobile famiglia. E perciò che la tua tenera età non sarebbe sufficiente a ricevere più principali e più sottili ammaestramenti, riserbandogli a più convenevol tempo, io incomincerò da quello che per avventura potrebbe a molti parer frivolo: cioè quello che io stimo che si convenga di fare per potere, in comunicando et in usando con le genti, essere costumato e piacevole e di bella maniera: il che non di meno è o virtù o cosa a virtù somigliante.

E come che l'esser liberale o costante o magnanimo sia per sé senza alcun fallo più laudabil cosa e maggiore che non è l'essere avenente e costumato, non di meno forse che la dolcezza de' costumi e la convenevolezza de' modi e delle maniere e delle parole giovano non meno a' possessori di esse che la grandezza dell'animo e la sicurezza altresì a' loro possessori non fanno: perciò che queste si convengono essercitare ogni dì molte volte, essendo a ciascuno necessario di usare con gli altri uomini ogni dì et ogni dì favellare con esso loro; ma la giustizia, la fortezza e le altre virtù più nobili e maggiori si pongono in opera più di rado; né il largo et il magnanimo è astretto di operare ad ogni ora magnificamente, anzi non è chi possa ciò fare in alcun modo molto spesso; e gli animosi uomini e sicuri similmente rade volte sono costretti a dimostrare il valore e la virtù loro con opera. Adunque, quanto quelle di gran-

Giovanni Della Casa

Galateo, or a Book of Etiquette (I)

A treatise by Messer Giovanni Della Casa discussing the modes of conduct to be followed or shunned in our dealings with others, presented in the guise of an ignorant old man teaching a young family member, and titled *Galateo, or a Book of Etiquette*.

I

Since it so happens that you have barely set out on the journey of which I, as you see, have already completed the greater part – the journey of this mortal life – and because of my deep love, I have decided to accompany you, pointing out the various places where I, who know them all, fear you might easily stumble or go astray while passing through them. If you consent to be taught by me, I trust that you will hold to the right path, thereby preserving the health of your soul and adding to the praises and honor of your noble and honorable family. And since your tender age will not admit of loftier or subtler teachings, I shall reserve them for a more suitable time and begin with what many would perhaps regard as frivolous, namely, what I deem necessary for being polite, pleasant, and well-mannered in our dealings and associations with others – qualities that are nonetheless either virtues or at least similar to them.

Although being generous, or steadfast, or magnanimous is, in itself, doubtlessly greater and more praiseworthy than being pleasant and well-mannered, yet the suavity of one's manners and the decorum of one's ways, deportment, and speech may perhaps prove just as useful to their possessors as magnanimity and fearlessness to theirs. This is because the humbler qualities must be used many times every day, since each of us is required to deal and converse with others daily, but justice, bravery, and the other nobler and loftier virtues are put into practice less frequently. Neither the generous nor the magnanimous person is required to act magnificently all the time – in fact, no one can do so, at any level, very often. Similarly, the brave and the bold are only rarely required to demonstrate their strength and valor with deeds. Thus, by as much as the latter qualities surpass the former in magnitude

dezza e quasi di peso vincono queste, tanto queste in numero et in ispessezza avanzano quelle: e potre' ti, se egli stesse bene di farlo, nominare di molti, i quali, essendo per altro di poca stima, sono stati, e tuttavia sono, apprezzati assai per cagion della loro piacevole e gratiosa maniera solamente; dalla quale aiutati e sollevati, sono pervenuti ad altissimi gradi, lasciandosi lunghissimo spatio adietro coloro che erano dotati di quelle più nobili e più chiare virtù che io ho dette. E come i piacevoli modi e gentili hanno forza di eccitare la benivolenza di coloro co' quali noi viviamo, così per lo contrario i zotichi e rozzi incitano altrui ad odio et a disprezzo di noi.

Per la qual cosa, quantunque niuna pena abbiano ordinata le leggi alla spiacevolezza et alla rozzezza de' costumi (sì come a quel peccato che loro è paruto leggieri, e certo egli non è grave), noi veggiamo non di meno che la natura istessa ce ne castiga con aspra disciplina, privandoci per questa cagione del consortio e della benivolenza degli uomini: e certo, come i peccati gravi più nuocono, così questo leggieri più noia o noia almeno più spesso; e sì come gli uomini temono le fiere salvatiche e di alcuni piccioli animali, come le zanzare sono e le mosche, niuno timore hanno, e non di meno, per la continua noia che eglino ricevono da loro, più spesso si ramaricano di questi che di quelli non fanno, così adiviene che il più delle persone odia altrettanto gli spiacevoli uomini et i rincrescevoli quanto i malvagi, o più.

Per la qual cosa niuno può dubitare che a chiunque si dispone di vivere non per le solitudini o ne' romitorii, ma nelle città e tra gli uomini, non sia utilissima cosa il sapere essere ne' suoi costumi e nelle sue maniere gratioso e piacevole; senza che le altre virtù hanno mestiero di più arredi, i quali mancando, esse nulla o poco adoperano; dove questa, senza altro patrimonio, è ricca e possente, sì come quella che consiste in parole et in atti solamente.

and, so to speak, heft, the former have the edge in terms of sheer numbers and frequency of use. And if it were right to do so, I could name many who, held in little esteem in other respects, are valued highly solely for their attractive and gracious manner, by whose aid and promotion they have attained the highest dignities, leaving very far behind those endowed with the nobler and more illustrious virtues that I have mentioned. And just as pleasant and courteous ways have the power to elicit the goodwill of those we live with, so do boorish and uncouth manners prompt others to regard us with loathing and contempt.

For this reason, although the law has ordained no penalty for boorish and disagreeable manners (which it has viewed as a minor fault, and certainly it is not a criminal one), we nonetheless see that nature itself chastises us for it with the harsh punishment of depriving us of the company and goodwill of others. Certainly, just as serious faults are more harmful, so these minor ones are more annoying, or at least annoy more frequently. And although we fear wild beasts but are not afraid of small creatures like mosquitoes and flies, nonetheless, because of the constant annoyance they cause us, we complain more often of them than of the others. Thus it comes about that most people loathe annoying and disagreeable persons as much as they do evil ones, or even more.

This is why no one can doubt that, for whoever decides to live, not in desert wastes or hermit retreats, but in cities and among human beings, it is extremely useful to know how to be gracious and pleasant in one's habits and manners. It also goes without saying that the other virtues require ampler means for their enactment, and, lacking these, are of little or no use, whereas those I am discussing are rich and powerful without other resources, consisting solely of words and behaviors.

Torquato Tasso*Aminta***Prologo**

AMORE, in abito pastorale.

Chi crederia che sotto umane forme
e sotto queste pastorali spoglie
fosse nascosto un Dio? non mica un Dio
selvaggio, o de la plebe de gli dei,
ma tra' grandi e celesti il più potente,
che fa spesso cader di mano a Marte
la sanguinosa spada, ed a Nettuno
scotitor de la terra il gran tridente,
ed i folgori eterni al sommo Giove.
In questo aspetto, certo, e in questi panni
non riconoscerà sì di leggiro
Venere madre me suo figlio Amore.
Io da lei son constretto a fuggire
e celarmi da lei perch'ella vuole
ch'io di me stesso e de le mie saette
faccia a suo senno; e, qual femina, e quale
vana ed ambiziosa, mi respinge
pur tra le corti e tra corone e scettri,
e quivi vuole che impieghi ogni mia prova,
e solo al volgo de' minstri miei,
miei minori fratelli, ella consente
l'albergar tra le selve ed oprar l'armi
ne' rozzi petti. Io, che non son fanciullo,
se ben ho volto fanciullesco ed atti,
voglio dispor di me come a me piace;
ch'a me fu, non a lei, concessa in sorte
la face onnipotente, e l'arco d'oro.
Però spesso celandomi, e fuggendo
l'imperio no, che in me non ha, ma i preghi,
c'han forza porti da importuna madre,
ricovero ne' boschi, e ne le case
de le genti minute; ella mi segue,
dar promettendo, a chi m'insegna a lei,
o dolci baci, o cosa altra più cara:

Torquato Tasso

Amyntas

Prolog

(Enter Cupid in shepherd's garb)

Now who would think that in this human form,
Beneath the shepherd's clothing that I wear,
A god were hid? and not a woodland god
Or one who's deemed a minor deity,
But mightiest of the great heaven-dwellers,
Who often makes the bloody sword of Mars
Fall from his hand, who makes great Neptune drop
The trident by whose means he shakes the earth,
Who causes Jove to set aside his lightning.
Now surely in this guise and in these clothes
My mother Venus would not recognize
Her own son Cupid — me — so easily.
I am constrained to flee my mother's presence
And hide myself from her because she wants
To make me use my power and my arrows
As *she* sees fit. And since she is a woman —
And since she's vain and quite ambitious, too —
She bids me go mid courts and crowns and scepters,
Urging me on to do my utmost there,
While only to my lowly ministers,
My younger brothers, does she ever grant
To live within the woods and use their weapons
On rustic hearts. But I who am no child —
Although my face and all my deeds are childlike —
Have only one desire: to do as I please;
For to *my* lot it fell, and not to hers,
To wield the mighty torch and golden bow.
And so, I often hide myself and flee
From her entreaties (for she can't *command* me),
Which have a pleading mother's force behind them,
And seek out shelter in the woods and huts
Of humble folk. She tries to track me down,
Promising those who tell her where I am
Sweet kisses or the gift of something dearer,

quasi io di dare in cambio non sia buono,
a chi mi tace, o mi nasconde a lei,
o dolci baci, o cosa altra più cara.
Questo io so certo almen: che i baci miei
saran sempre più cari a le fanciulle,
se io, che son l'Amor, d'amor m'intendo;
onde sovente ella mi cerca in vano,
che rivelarmi altri non vuole, e tace.
Ma per istarne anco più occulto, ond'ella
ritrovar non mi possa ai contrasegni,
deposto ho l'ali, la faretra e l'arco.
Non però disarmato io qui ne vengo,
che questa, che par verga, è la mia face
(così l'ho trasformata), e tutta spira
d'invisibili fiamme; e questo dardo,
se bene egli non ha la punta d'oro,
è di tempre divine, e imprime amore
dovunque fiede. Io voglio oggi con questo
far cupa e immedicabile ferita
nel duro sen de la più cruda ninfa
che mai seguisse il coro di Diana.
Né la piaga di Silvia fia minore
(che questo è 'l nome de l'alpestre ninfa)
che fosse quella che pur feci io stesso
nel molle sen d'Aminta, or son molt'anni,
quando lei tenerella ei tenerello
seguiva ne le caccie e ne i diporti.
E, perché il colpo mio più in lei s'interni,
aspetterò che la pietà mollisca
quel duro gelo che d'intorno al core
l'ha ristretto il rigor de l'onestate
e del virginal fasto; ed in quel punto
ch'ei fia più molle, lancerogli il dardo.
E, per far sì bell'opra a mio grand'agio,
io ne vo a mescolarmi infra la turba
de' pastori festanti e coronati,
che già qui s'è inviata, ove a diporto
si sta ne' dì solenni, esser fingendo
uno di loro schiera: e in questo modo,
in questo luogo a punto io farò il colpo,
che veder non potrallo occhio mortale.
Queste selve oggi ragionar d'Amore
s'udranno in nuova guisa: e ben parassi

As if I were incapable of giving,
 To those who hush or hide me from her eyes,
 Sweet kisses or the gift of something dearer.
 At least this much I know for sure: *My* kisses
 Will always be much dearer to the girls,
 If I, who am Love, know anything of love.
 And so, she often looks for me in vain,
 When no one wishes to reveal my secret.
 But yet I'll make assurance double sure,
 Lest she discover Cupid by his badges,
 And so I've set aside wings, bow, and quiver.
 Nevertheless, I do not come unarmed,
 And this, which seems a staff, is Cupid's torch
 (For thus have I disguised its form): It breathes
 Invisible fire. And this arrow here,
 Although it does not have a golden tip,
 Is of celestial temper, instilling love
 Wherever it strikes. Today I'll use this dart
 To make a gaping and incurable wound
 In the stony heart of the cruelest nymph
 That ever joined the chorus of Diana.
 By no means will the wound of Silvia
 (For that is what this savage nymph is called)
 Be less than that which I myself inflicted
 Upon Amyntas, many years ago,
 Which made him—just a boy then—trail behind
 This maiden in the hunt and in their pastimes.
 And so that she may feel the blow more deeply,
 I'll wait till pity has begun to thaw
 The solid ice that now surrounds her heart,
 Encasing it in rigorous chastity
 And virgin splendor: At that point when she
 Has softened, will I shoot my dart at her.
 And that I may accomplish at my ease
 So fine a deed, I'll mingle with the crowd
 Of garlanded and joyful shepherds who
 Are coming here (for here they celebrate
 Their festivals), and I will make believe
 That I am one of them. And in this way,
 Within this very place I'll strike my blow,
 Invisible to every mortal eye.
 Today these woods will hear much talk of Love
 In novel fashion; thus, it is quite fitting

che la mia deità sia qui presente
in se medesima, e non ne' suoi ministri.
Spirerò nobil sensi a' rozzi petti,
raddolcirò de le lor lingue il suono;
perché, ovunque i' mi sia, io sono Amore,
ne' pastori non men che ne gli eroi,
e la disagguaglianza de' soggetti
come a me piace, agguaglio. E questa è pure
suprema gloria e gran miracol mio:
render simili a le più dotte cetre
le rustiche sampogne; e, se mia madre,
che si sdegna vedermi errar fra' boschi,
ciò non conosce, è cieca ella, e non io,
cui cieco a torto il cieco volgo appella.

That my divinity should here be present –
Itself, and not by means of ministers.
I'll swell these rustic breasts with noble feelings
And sweeten every sound their tongues let fall,
Because, wherever I am, I'm always Love,
No less in shepherds than in mighty heroes –
And inequality among my subjects,
As I see fit, I equalize. And this
I deem my greatest miracle and glory:
To make their country bagpipes sound as honeyed
As learned lyres do. And if my mother,
Who hates to see me roaming through the woods,
Can't understand all this, *she's* blind, not I,
Whom the blind mob mistakenly calls blind.

Giacomo Leopardi***Canti (I)*****All'Italia (prime due strofe)**

O patria mia, vedo le mura e gli archi
E le colonne e i simulacri e l'erme
Torri degli avi nostri,
Ma la gloria non vedo,
Non vedo il lauro e il ferro ond'eran carchi
I nostri padri antichi. Or fatta inerme,
Nuda la fronte e nudo il petto mostri.
Oimè quante ferite,
Che lividor, che sangue! oh qual ti veggio,
Formosissima donna! Io chiedo al cielo
E al mondo: dite dite;
Chi la ridusse a tale? E questo è peggio,
Che di catene ha carche ambe le braccia;
Sì che sparte le chiome e senza velo
Siede in terra negletta e sconsolata,
Nascondendo la faccia
Tra le ginocchia, e piange.
Piangi, che ben hai donde, Italia mia,
Le genti a vincer nata
E nella fausta sorte e nella ria.

Se fosser gli occhi tuoi due fonti vive,
Mai non potrebbe il pianto
Adeguarsi al tuo danno ed allo scorno;
Che fosti donna, or sei povera ancella.
Chi di te parla o scrive,
Che, rimembrando il tuo passato vanto,
Non dica: già fu grande, or non è quella?
Perchè, perchè? dov'è la forza antica,
Dove l'armi e il valore e la costanza?
Chi ti discinse il brando?
Chi ti tradì? qual arte o qual fatica
O qual tanta possanza
Valse a spogliarti il manto e l'auree bende?
Come cadesti o quando

Giacomo Leopardi

Canti (I)

To Italy (first two stanzas)

My native land, I see the walls and arches,
 the columns, and the statues, and the empty
 towers of our ancestors,
 but I do not see their glory,
 the laurel and the armor that once decked
 our ancient fathers. Rendered helpless now,
 you show your naked brow and naked breast.
 Ah me, how sorely wounded,
 how bruised and bloodied! oh, what you now seem,
 most lovely lady! I beseech the heavens,
 the earth: oh tell me, tell me,
 who has reduced her to this? And worst of all,
 both of her arms are weighted down with chains,
 so that, with locks disheveled and unveiled,
 she sits upon the ground, distraught, abandoned,
 hiding her face from view
 between her knees, and weeps.
 Weep indeed, my Italy, for you have cause,
 born to surpass all nations
 in both propitious and in evil fortune.

Even if your eyes were two flowing fountains,
 your tears could never hope
 to tally all your injuries and shame:
 a lady once, and now a wretched slave.
 Who writes or speaks of you
 that, bearing all your former pride in mind,
 does not reflect: *Once great, she now lies low?*
 Why, o why? where is that ancient might,
 those arms, that valor, and that constancy?
 Who has stripped you of your sword?
 Who betrayed you? What cunning or what effort
 or what resistless power
 could strip you of your diadem and mantle?
 How did you fall, and when,

Da tanta altezza in così basso loco?
Nessun pugna per te? non ti difende
Nessun de' tuoi? L'armi, qua l'armi: io solo
Combatterò, procomberò sol io.
Dammi, o ciel, che sia foco
Agl'italici petti il sangue mio.

from such a height to such a lowly station?
And no one fights for you? None of your sons
defends you? Arms! bring arms! I all alone
will clash in battle, only I will fall.
And grant me, heavens, that my blood
may kindle fires in Italian hearts.

Giacomo Leopardi***Pensieri (I)***

Io ho lungamente ricusato di creder vere le cose che dirò qui sotto, perché, oltre che la natura mia era troppo rimota da esse, e che l'animo tende sempre a giudicare gli altri da se medesimo, la mia inclinazione non è stata mai d'odiare gli uomini, ma di amarli. In ultimo l'esperienza quasi violentemente me le ha persuase: e sono certo che quei lettori che si troveranno aver praticato cogli uomini molto e in diversi modi, confesseranno che quello ch'io sono per dire è vero; tutti gli altri lo terranno per esagerato, finché l'esperienza, se mai avranno occasione di veramente fare esperienza della società umana, non lo ponga loro dinanzi agli occhi.

Dico che il mondo è una lega di birbanti contro gli uomini da bene, e di vili contro i generosi. Quando due o più birbanti si trovano insieme la prima volta, facilmente e come per segni si conoscono tra loro per quello che sono; e subito si accordano; o se i loro interessi non patiscono questo, certamente provano inclinazione l'uno per l'altro, e si hanno gran rispetto. Se un birbante ha contrattazioni e negozi con altri birbanti, spessissimo accade che si porta con lealtà e che non gl'inganna, se con genti onorate, è impossibile che non manchi loro di fede, e dovunque gli torna comodo, non cerchi di rovinarle; ancorché sieno persone animose, e capaci di vendicarsi, perché ha speranza, come quasi sempre gli riesce, di vincere colle sue frodi la loro bravura. Io ho veduto più volte uomini paurosissimi, trovandosi fra un birbante più pauroso di loro, e una persona da bene piena di coraggio, abbracciare per paura le parti del birbante: anzi questa cosa accade sempre che le genti ordinarie si trovano in occasioni simili: perché le vie dell'uomo coraggioso e da bene sono conosciute e semplici, quelle del ribaldo sono occulte e infinitamente varie. Ora, come ognuno sa, le cose ignote fanno più paura che le conosciute; e facilmente uno si guarda dalle vendette dei generosi, dalle quali la stessa viltà e la paura ti salvano; ma nessuna paura e nessuna viltà è bastante a scamparti dalle persecuzioni segrete, dalle insidie, né dai colpi anche palesi che ti vengono dai nemici vili. Generalmente nella vita quotidiana il vero coraggio è temuto pochissimo; anche perché, essendo scompagnato da ogni impostura, è privo di quell'apparato che rende le cose spaventevoli;

Giacomo Leopardi

Reflections (I)

For a long time I refused to believe the truth of what I am about to say, not only because it was too remote from my own nature — and the mind always tends to judge others with reference to its own constitution — but also because I have never been inclined to hate humankind, but to love it. Eventually, experience persuaded me, almost violently, to believe it — and I am sure that those readers who have had extensive and diversified dealings with others will readily admit that what I am about to say is true. All others will consider it exaggerated, until experience (if they ever have occasion to experience human society in depth) makes it quite plain to see.

I say that the world consists of scoundrels in league against honest men, and of the cowardly against the brave. Whenever two or more scoundrels find themselves together for the first time, they easily — as it were by outward signs — recognize one another for what they are and come to a speedy agreement. Or, if their interests forbid this, they at least exhibit a certain natural inclination, as well as profound respect, for one another. If a scoundrel has a deal or some business with other scoundrels, it very often happens that he behaves fairly and refuses to cheat them; if with honest people, it is absolutely inevitable that he will break his word and, at his earliest convenience, seek to ruin them completely — even if they are sturdy souls capable of avenging themselves — because he hopes to overcome their bravery, as he almost always does, by his deceptions. Many times have I seen very cowardly men, on finding themselves between a scoundrel even more cowardly than themselves and a decent person brimming with courage, embrace the cause of the scoundrel out of fear. In fact, this never fails to happen whenever ordinary people find themselves in similar situations, for the ways of the decent, courageous man are aboveboard and uncomplicated, while those of the scoundrel are devious and infinitely varied. Now, as we all realize, the unknown is more frightening than the known; and you may easily guard against a brave man's revenge — for your very fear and cowardice will save you. But no amount of cowardice and fear will protect you from the hidden wiles and machinations — as well as the blows in the open — that will come

e spesso non gli e creduto; e i birbanti sono temuti anche come coraggiosi perché, per virtù d'impostura, molte volte sono tenuti tali.

Rari sono i birbanti poveri: perché, lasciando tutto l'altro, se un uomo da bene cade in povertà, nessuno lo soccorre, e molti se ne rallegnano, ma se un ribaldo diventa povero, tutta la città si solleva per aiutarlo. La ragione si può intendere di leggeri: ed è che naturalmente noi siamo tocchi dalle sventure di chi ci è compagno e consorte, perché pare che sieno altrettante minacce a noi stessi; e volentieri, potendo, vi apprestiamo rimedio, perché il trascurarle pare troppo chiaramente un acconsentire dentro noi medesimi che, nell'occasione, il simile sia fatto a noi. Ora i birbanti, che al mondo sono i più di numero, e i più copiosi di facoltà, tengono ciascheduno gli altri birbanti, anche non cognitivi a se di veduta, per compagni e consorti loro, e nei bisogni si sentono tenuti a soccorrerli per quella specie di lega, come ho detto, che v'è tra essi. Ai quali anche pare uno scandalo che un uomo conosciuto per birbante sia veduto nella miseria, perché questa dal mondo, che sempre in parole è onoratore della virtù, facilmente in casi tali è chiamata gastigo, cosa che ritorna in obbrobrio, e che può ritornare in danno, di tutti loro. Però in tor via questo scandalo si adoperano tanto efficacemente, che pochi esempi si vedono di ribaldi, salvo se non sono persone del tutto oscure, che caduti in mala fortuna, non racconcino le cose loro in qualche modo comportabile.

All'opposto i buoni e i magnanimi, come diversi dalla generalità, sono tenuti dalla medesima quasi creature d'altra specie, e conseguentemente non solo non avuti per consorti né per compagni, ma stimati non partecipi dei diritti sociali, e, come sempre si vede, perseguitati tanto più o meno gravemente, quanto la bassezza d'animo e la malvagità del tempo e del popolo nei quali si abbattano a vivere, sono più o meno insigni; perché come nei corpi degli animali la natura tende sempre a purgarsi di quegli umori e di quei principii che non si confanno con quelli onde propriamente si compongono essi corpi, così nelle aggregazioni di molti uomini la stessa natura porta che chiunque differisce grandemente dall'universale di quelli, massime se tale differenza è anche contrarietà, con ogni sforzo sia cercato distruggere o discacciare. Anche sogliono essere odiatissimi i buoni e i generosi perché ordinariamente sono sinceri, e chiamano le cose coi loro nomi. Colpa non perdonata dal genere umano, il quale non odia mai tanto chi fa male, né il male stesso,

your way from cowardly foes. Generally speaking, true courage is feared very little in everyday life because, unaccompanied by any bravado, it is deprived of the means that render things terrifying, and thus it is often dismissed. But scoundrels are feared as if they were truly courageous, for by virtue of their swaggering, they are often taken at their word.

Rarely do you find scoundrels who are poor, for, setting all else aside, if an honest man lapses into poverty, nobody comes to his aid and many are delighted by it, but if a scoundrel becomes poor, the entire city flocks to his rescue. The reason is easy to understand. All of us are naturally touched by the misfortunes of our friends and associates because they seem to strike us as threats against ourselves. And if we at all can, we readily provide a remedy – for to neglect to do so would seem to imply only too clearly our tacit consent that, in the event, the same should be done to us. Now scoundrels, who are in the majority in this world and the most abundant in resources, consider all other scoundrels – even those they have never met – as their friends and associates, and in times of need feel obliged to help them on account of that “league” which, as I have said, exists among them. Indeed, it would seem scandalous to them if someone known to be a scoundrel should be allowed to remain conspicuously poor, since society, which always pays lip service to virtue, reflexively considers poverty in such cases to be a condign punishment, and this would redound to the disgrace – and perhaps even to the actual detriment – of scoundrels as a whole. That is why they act so efficaciously to do away with this scandal that we see few examples of scoundrels that have fallen on hard times who (unless they are total unknowns) are not able to repair their fortunes in some tolerable fashion.

At the other extreme, because they are wholly unlike the general run of humanity, people who are good and magnanimous are considered by the majority as almost creatures of a different species and, as such, are not only not viewed as associates and comrades of their own, but deemed ineligible for basic human rights and, as may always be seen, persecuted more or less severely according to whether the baseness of mind and the wickedness of the times and the nation in which it is their misfortune to live are more or less pronounced. As with the bodies of living creatures, nature always strives to purge itself of those humors and elements that are alien

quanto chi lo nomina. In modo che più volte, mentre chi fa male ottiene ricchezze, onori e potenza, chi lo nomina è strascinato in sui patiboli, essendo gli uomini prontissimi a sofferire o dagli altri o dal cielo qualunque cosa, purché in parole ne sieno salvi.

to the ones that constitute those bodies, so, in large aggregates of human beings, that same nature demands that whoever differs markedly from the mass of those people, especially when the difference is also one of opposition, must be searched out with the most diligent effort and destroyed or driven out. The good and the magnanimous are also thoroughly detested because they are usually truthful and call things by their proper names — a fault totally unforgiveable by the human race, which never hates the evil-doer, or the evil itself, as much as the one who mentions it. In fact, while the evil-doer often obtains wealth, honors, and power, he who calls it evil is dragged to the gallows, since humans are quite ready to endure anything at all from one another or the heavens above, as long as they can shield themselves from the words that describe it.

A Garland of Gozzano

Translated by Michael Palma

Michael Palma has published two poetry chapbooks, *The Egg Shape* and *Antibodies*; two full-length collections, *A Fortune in Gold* and *Begin in Gladness*; and an online chapbook, *The Ghost of Congress Street*. His fully rhymed translation of Dante's *Inferno* was published by Norton in 2002 and reprinted as a Norton Critical Edition in 2007. His most recent publications are translations of Maurizio Cucchi, Giovanni Raboni, and Paolo Valesio (with Graziella Sidoli). Forthcoming volumes include a translation of the poetry of Ennio Contini and *Faithful in My Fashion: Essays on the Translation of Poetry*.

This little anthology of Guido Gozzano's poetry and fiction is presented here to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of his death—at age 32, from tuberculosis—in August of 1916. Even in this brief group one can trace Gozzano's development over the dozen or so years of his necessarily foreshortened career, from the seriousness and morbid preoccupations of the post-adolescent (a sensibility beyond which many of his contemporaries never progressed) to the mordant humor and calm acceptance of the inevitable that characterize his later work. For a century critics have debated whether or not Gozzano was one of the *crepuscolari* and whether or not his formalism impeded the development of Modernism, but ultimately he endures for neither categorical nor historical reasons; rather, he remains a living presence in the canon because of the artistry of his writings and the pleasure that they continue to give.

All of these translations are published here for the first time. It has been a great pleasure for me to reinvolve myself with Gozzano's work. As the first Italian poet I ever translated, he has an importance for me that transcends his considerable artistic achievement. And the occasion brings with it a sobering awareness. My volume of Gozzano translations, *The Man I Pretend to Be*, Princeton University Press, was published in 1981, two years before the centenary of his birth. The time that has passed from then till now is longer than his entire life.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Figura con capelli rossi*, legno di mandorlo, h. cm110, 2012

La preraffaelita

Sopra lo sfondo scialbo e scolorito
surge il profilo della donna intenta,
esile il collo; la pupilla spenta
pare che attinga il vuoto e l'infinito.

Avvolta d'ermesino e di sciamito
quasi una pompa religiosa ostenta;
niuna mollezza femminile allenta
l'esilità del busto irrigidito.

Tien fra le dita de la manca un giglio
d'antico stile, la sua destra posa
sopra il velluto d'un cuscin vermiglio.

Niuna dolcezza è ne l'aspetto fiero;
emana da la bocca lussuriosa
l'essenza del Silenzio e del Mistero.

La falce

I

Giugno. Per le finestre il sole inonda
la bella stanza d'una luce aurina:
freme la messe ai solchi della china,
la messe ormai matureggiante e bionda.

La bruna sposa sede alla vicina
cuna ancor vuota: pare ch'Ella asconda
un gran segreto quando l'occhio inchina
al seno stanco che l'amor feconda.

È la cuna ancor vuota, ma Ella sente
che l'ora dell'avvento è assai vicina
che ben presto il Messia sarà presente.

E a quel pensiero il bruno capo inchina
al lavoro sottil, le mani adopra
su le fasce su i lini su la trina.

The Preraphaelite

Upon a background of bleached barrenness
rises her profile, focused and austere,
her slender neck. Her dull eye seems to peer
into the infinite, the emptiness.

In sarsenet and in samite she is dressed
as in a proud religious atmosphere.
Nothing of feminine softness eases here
the slenderness of the unyielding breast.

She holds a lily, in the older fashion,
clutched in her left hand, as her right hand sits
upon the velvet of a bright red cushion.

Nothing of sweetness in her fierce dignity:
from her lascivious mouth there emanates
the essence of Silence and of Mystery.

The Scythe

I

June. And through the windows sunbeams glide,
flooding the room with an aurelian glow:
the yellow harvest ripples, row on row,
ripening on the slopes of the hillside.

Beside the empty cradle the dark bride
sits, with a secret She appears to know,
awesome and hidden, as She looks below
to see the weary womb love fructified.

The cradle is still empty, but it draws near,
the hour of the advent, and She knows
that very soon the Messiah will be here.

And at that thought the dark head bows. She goes
back to the delicate work: her fingers move
over the linen, the lace, the swaddling clothes.

II

Ottobre. Per i vetri Autunno inonda
la bella stanza delle luci estreme:
vanno i bifolchi cospargendo il seme
su per la china con canzon gioconda.

La sposa agonizzante in su la sponda
del letto sta riversa e più non geme
e accanto a lei nato e morto insieme
è il bambino difforme. Una profonda

quiete è d'intorno: sopra il lin vermiglio
tutto di sangue che un baglior rischiara
la sposa muore, bianca come il giglio.

La Morte, intanto, il feretro prepara:
a l'alba di diman la madre e il figlio
saran racchiusi nella stessa bara.

Suprema quies

Serrati i pugni bianchi come cera
giace supino in terra arrovesciato
e la faccia pel rivo insanguinato
è quasi nera.

Con orrido rilievo l'apertura
della ferita tutto il sangue aduna
su la nuca, sul collo, su la bruna
capellatura.

Giace supino. E non sembra dolore
la bella bocca. Quasi ch'Egli avvinga
ancor la Donna e la sua bocca attinga
tutto il piacere.

Due lumi sopra un cofano. Quei lumi
rischiarano il silenzio sepolcrale:
allineati stan nello scaffale
mille volumi

II

October. Through the glass late sunbeams glide,
flooding the room with Fall's extremity.
The ploughmen sing a joyful melody,
scattering the seed on the hillside.

No longer crying out in pain, the bride
is heaped on the bed in her last agony.
An infant twisted in deformity
lies near, who at one stroke was born and died.

Deep quiet settles everywhere: upon
the blood-red linen falls a livening ray
where lily-white she lies, her dying done.

Death, meanwhile, sets to work without delay:
together in one coffin mother and son
tomorrow will be sealed at break of day.

Suprema quies

Hands closed in wax-white fists and head thrown back,
he lies stretched on the earth, his body sprawled,
and the face where bloody rivulets have crawled
is almost black.

In horrible relief the open red
wound collects the blood and drips it down
on his neck and on his nape and on the brown
hair of his head.

He lies stretched out. There seems no misery
in the handsome mouth. It is as if once more
He holds Her, and his mouth starts to explore
all ecstasy.

Two candles on a chest. They light the weighted
sepulchral silence of the room: light falls
on a thousand books in rows along the walls,
illuminated

che alluminava un mastro fiorentino
d'orifiamme e d'armille in cento nodi.
Aperti sul divano soni i «Modi»
dell'Aretino

e sul divano è un guanto che rimosse
qui, nell'entrar, la Donna del Convito
ed un mazzo sfasciato ed avvizzito
di rose rosse.

Guata con gli occhi di mestizia pieni
in capo al letto sull'arazzo infisso
dolentemente immoto il crocifisso
di Guido Reni.

Notte e silenzio intorno. Tutto tace.
Come in un sogno d'armonia perplessa
al Poeta ventenne è già concessa
l'ultima pace.

La beata riva

Quegli che sazio della vita grigia
navigò verso l'isole custodi
una levarsi intese fra melodi
voce più dolce della canna frigia:

«Uomo! Ritorna sulle tue vestigia
al dolce mondo! Pel tuo bene m'odi!
Ché l'acqua stessa dei canori approdi
quella è che nutre la palude stigia».

«Con un fiore il passato si cancella!»
«Cancellerai la faccia della Madre
e della Sposa?» – «Tu sola mi piaci!»

«L'amarsi è bello!» – «Ma tu sei più bella!»
«Fra queste braccia soffrirai!» – «Leggiadre!»
«Verrà la Morte.» – «Pur che tu mi baci!»

by a master Florentine in a rich plan
 of oriflammes and armlets interwoven.
 Aretino's *Positions* is lying open
 on the divan

and a glove, removed on her arrival by
 the Lady of the Banquet, lying near
 a bouquet of red roses scattered here,
 broken and dry.

Set in its tapestry, achingly motionless,
 the Guido Reni crucifix is staring
 from the bedstead, with its full eyes bearing
 deep mournfulness.

Night and silence. Stillness without cease.
 As in a dream of perplexing harmony
 the Poet at twenty is given the gift to be
 in ultimate peace.

The Blessed Shore

Sated with gray life he sailed away
 toward islands held by a voice that he could hear
 rising amid the melodies sounding clear
 and sweeter than the Phrygian pipes play.

"Man! For your own good, hear me when I say
 Turn back to the sweet world that you held dear!
 This water lapping with the music here
 nurtures the swamp of Stygian decay."

"With a flower I can make the past a blur!"
 "Can you blur your Mother's face, and blur the face
 of your Wife?" — "You are my only ecstasy!"

"Caring is lovely!" — "But you are lovelier!"
 "You will suffer in these arms!" — "A sweet embrace!"
 "Death will come." — "So long as you kiss me!"

Speranza

Il gigantesco rovere abbattuto
l'intero inverno giacque sulla zolla,
mostrando, in cerchi, nelle sue midolla
i centonovant'anni che ha vissuto.

Ma poi che Primavera ogni corolla
dischiuse con le mani di velluto,
dai monchi nodi qua e là rampolla
e sogna ancora d'essere fronzuto.

Rampolla e sogna – immemore di scuri –
l'eterna volta cerula e serena
e gli ospiti canori e i frutti e l'ire

aquilonari e i secoli futuri...
Non so perché mi faccia tanta pena
quel moribondo che non vuol morire!

Nemesi

Tempo che i sogni umani
volgi sulla tua strada:
la chioma che dirada,
le case dei Titani,

o tu che tutte fai
vane le nostre tempre:
e vano dire *sempre*
e vano dire *mai*,

se dunque eternamente
tu fai lo stesso gioco
tu sei una ben poco
persona intelligente!

Cangiare i monti in piani
cangiare i piani in monti,
deviare dalle fonti
antiche i fiumi immani,

Hope

The giant oak tree that had been cut down
lay through the winter stretched out in the mud,
showing in rings, in marrow and in blood,
the hundred and ninety years that it had known.

But when once more with velvet hands the Spring
was opening corollas everywhere,
from crippled knots the oak buds here and there
and dreams of all its branches blossoming.

It buds and dreams – with no more memory
of shadows – a blue serene eternity
and singing guests and fruits and northwind's high

furies and all the centuries yet to be.
I don't know why it pains me so to see
that dying thing that doesn't want to die.

Nemesis

Time who down your stream
sweep every human dream:
the hair that thins and whitens,
the houses of the Titans,

you who make it pointless
for us to say *forever*,
for us to utter *never*,
and pointless to be dauntless,

if you can find delight
in the same game endlessly,
really, it seems to me
you aren't very bright.

Changing dirt to mountains
and mountains into dirt,
making mighty rivers spurt
out of ancient fountains,

cangiar la terra in mare
e il mare in continente:
gran cosa non mi pare
per te, onnipossente!

Giocare con le cellule
al gioco dei cadaveri:
i rospi e le libellule
le rose ed i papaveri

rifare a tuo capriccio:
poi cucinare a strati
i tuoi pasticci andati
e il nuovo tuo pasticcio:

ma, scusa, ci vuol poca
intelligenza! Basta –
di' non ti pare? – basta
il genio d'una cuoca.

Bada che non ti parlo
per acrimonia mia:
da tempo ho ucciso il tarlo
della malinconia.

Inganno la tristezza
con qualche bella favola.
Il saggio ride. Apprezza
le gioie della tavola

e i libri dei poeti.
La favola divina
m'è come ai nervi inquieti
un getto di morfina,

ma il canto più divino
sarebbe un sogno vano
senza un torace sano
e un ottimo intestino.

Amo le donne un poco –
o bei labbri vermigli! –
Tempo, ma so il tuo gioco:

changing land to sea
and sea to continents
seems no big thing to me
for you, omnipotence!

Playing a whimsical game
with cells of dead bodies:
doing the very same
with roses and with poppies

and toads and dragonflies:
cooking in layered crusts
your pies already dust
and your brand new pies:

pardon me, but it isn't
a job that takes much brains—
don't you agree?—the brains
of a cook would be sufficient.

I'm not talking, mind,
out of my acrimony.
In time I've learned to grind
the worm of melancholy.

I can outwit sadness
with any pretty fable.
The wise man laughs in gladness
for the pleasures of the table

and books of poetry.
The divine fable serves
when I get jittery
like morphine for the nerves,

but the most divine of carols
would be a hollow ballad
without a healthy gullet
and a first-rate set of bowels.

I love the ladies some—
their sweet lips of vermilion—
but Time, I know your game:

non ti farò dei figli.

Ah! Se noi tutti fossimo
(Tempo, ma c'è chi crede
di darti ancora prede!)
d'intesa, o amato prossimo,

a non far bimbi (i dardi
d'amor... fasciare e i tirsi
di gioia; – premunirsi
coi debiti riguardi),

certo – se un dio ci dèmini –
n'avrebbe un po' dispetto;
gli uomini l'han detto:
ma «chi» sono gli uomini?

Chi sono? È tanto strano
fra tante cose strambe
un coso con due gambe
detto guidogozzano!

Bada che non ti parlo
per acrimonia mia:
da tempo ho ucciso il tarlo
della malinconia.

Socchiudo gli occhi, estranio
ai casi della vita:
sento fra le mie dita
la forma del mio cranio.

Rido nell'abbandono:
o Cielo o Terra o Mare,
comincio a dubitare
se sono o se non sono!

Ma ben verrà la cosa
«vera» chiamata Morte:
che giova ansimar forte
per l'erta faticosa?

Né voglio più, né posso.
Più scaltro degli scaltri

I won't make you children.
If we had all combined
(though some believe it proper
to offer Time fresh fodder),
dear creatures of my kind,

to do no procreation
(the darts of love... enclosing
the staves of pleasure – using
due consideration),

surely, if there's an all-seeing
god, it would irk him a tad.
So human beings have said:
but "who" are human beings?

Who am *I*? How do *I* know
how from such freakish things
came this two-legged thing
they call guidogozzano?

I'm not talking, mind,
out of my acrimony.
In time I've learned to grind
the worm of melancholy.

Eyes half shut, distant from
life's every twist and turning,
my fingers have me learning
the shape of my cranium.

I laugh with abandon, I
truly begin to doubt
whether they're real or not,
the Earth, the Sea, the Sky.

Then comes, it's evident,
that "real" thing they call Death:
why should I waste my breath
in the arduous ascent?

I can't, and I don't wish.
The slyest of the sly,

dal margine d'un fosso
guardo passare gli altri.

E mi fan pena tutti,
contenti e non contenti,
tutti pur che viventi,
in carnevali e in lutti.

Tempo, non entusiasmo
saper che tutto ha il dopo:
o buffo senza scopo
malnato protoplasma!

E non l'Uomo Sapiente,
solo, ma se parlassero
la pietra, l'erba, il passero,
sarebbero pel Niente.

Tempo, se dalla guerra
restassi e dall'evolvere
in Acqua, Fuoco, Polvere
questa misera Terra?

E invece, o Vecchio pazzo,
dà fine ai giochi strani!
Sul ciel senza domani
farem l'ultimo razzo.

Sprofonderebbe in cenere
il povero glomerulo
dove tronfiaggia il querulo
sciame dell'Uman Genere.

Cesserebbe la trista
vicenda in vita e in sogno.
Certo. Ma che bisogno
c'è mai che il mondo esista?

from the border of a ditch
I watch them all go by.

I pity all of them, all
the content and the discontent,
all those not yet spent,
in mourning and carnival.

Knowledge of transmutation
brings no enthusiasm:
misbegotten protoplasm,
a joke with no explanation.

And not Homo Sapiens
alone: if they could talk,
sparrow, grass, and rock,
what would be the sense?

Time, what if you just
stopped war and evolution,
the wretched Earth's dilution
into Water, Fire, Dust?

Ancient Madman, why
not finish all this racket?
We'll launch our final rocket
into the final sky.

This globule where the rash
of querulous Humanity
swaggers in its vanity
would settle into ash.

This sad rotisserie
of life and dream would be over
forever. But when was there ever
a need for the world to be?

L'altro

L'Iddio che a tutto provvede
poteva farmi poeta
di fede; l'anima queta
avrebbe cantata la fede.

Mi è strano l'odore d'incenso:
ma pur ti perdono l'aiuto
che non mi desti, se penso
che avresti anche potuto,

invece di farmi gozzano
un po' scimunito, ma greggio,
farmi gabrieldannunziano:
sarebbe stato ben peggio!

Buon Dio, e puro conserva
questo mio stile che pare
lo stile d'uno scolare
corretto un po' da una serva.

Non ho nient'altro di bello
al mondo, fra crucci e malanni!
M'è come un minore fratello,
un altro gozzano: a tre anni.

Gli devo le ore di gaudi
più dolci! Lo tengo vicino;
non cedo per tutte *Le Laudi*
quest'altro gozzano bambino!

Gli prendo le piccole dita,
gli faccio vedere pel mondo
la cosa che dicono Mondo,
la cosa che dicono Vita...

The Other

God, who fulfills all his plans as
it pleases him, could if he'd wanted
have made me a poet who chanted
of heaven in orthodox stanzas.

But the odor of incense is odd
to my nose: although you didn't aid me
I can still pardon you, God,
when I realize you could have made me

instead of this fellow gozzano,
a bit silly, but still his own master,
a gabrieldannunzian: ah now,
that would have been a disaster!

And Lord, please preserve my amazing
style which distills the pure essence
of a schoolboy who's quick at his lessons
with a soupçon of servingmaid's phrasing.

Amid coughing and caring, no other
of all the world's plums comes to me.
My style's like my own younger brother,
another gozzano, aged three.

He sugars the hours and days as
I keep him close by all the time.
I won't trade him for all of *The Praises*,
this baby gozzano of mine.

And holding his little hand safe
in mine as we tramp through the world
I show him this thing they call World,
I show him this thing they call Life...

Nell'Abazia di San Giuliano

Buon Dio nel quale non credo, buon Dio che non esisti,
(non sono gli oggetti mai visti più cari di quelli che vedo?)

Io t'amo! Ché non c'è bisogno di creder in te per amarti
(e forse che credo nell'arti? E forse che credo nel sogno?)

Io t'amo, Purissima Fonte che non esisti, e t'anelo!
(Esiste l'azzurro del cielo? Esiste il profilo del monte?)

M'accolga l'antica Abazia; è ricca di luci e di suoni.
Mi piacciono i frati; son buoni pel cuore in malinconia.

Son buoni. «Non credi? Che importa? Riposati un poco sui banchi.
Su, entra, su, varca la porta. Si accettano tutti gli stanchi.»

Vi seggo – la mente suasa – ma come potrebbe sedervi
un tale invitato dai servi e non dal padrone di casa.

– «Riposati, o anima sazia! Riposati, piega i ginocchi!
Chissà che il Signore ti tocchi, chissà che ti faccia la grazia.»

– «Mi piace il Signore, mi garba il volto che gli avete fatto.
Oh, il Nonno! Lo stesso ritratto! Portava pur egli la barba!»

«O Preti, ma è assurdo che d'omini sul tutto inumano ed amorfo
quell'essere antropomorfo che hanno creato gli uomini!»

– «E non ragionare! L'indagine è quella che offuscò il lume.
Inchìnati sopra il volume, ma senza voltarne le pagine,

In the Abbey of San Giuliano

Good Lord who is nothing to me, who isn't and never has been,
(aren't the things never seen more dear than the things I can see?)

I love you! I needn't, it seems, believe to keep you in my heart
(and can I believe in the arts? and can I believe in the dream?)

I love you, Most Sanctified Fountain, who isn't, and yearn for
[you too!
(Is the blue of the sky really true? Is there such a thing as a
[mountain?)

They welcome me in the old Abbey, abundant with light and
[with sound,
The monks make my spirit rebound: they're good for the heart
[that's unhappy.

They're good. "So you're not a believer? No matter. Come, rest
[for a bit.
Come in at the door. We receive here all of the weary. Come sit."

I follow — my mind free of doubts — but follow with all the
[observance
of someone invited by servants and not by the head of the house.

—"Rest, spirit that's fed overmuch! Rest, and fall down on your
[knees!
Who knows how His mercy may seize, who knows how you
[may feel His touch?"

—"I like Him, and like all the more the face that you've given
[Him there.
It's Grandpa! Same portrait — same hair, right down to the
[whiskers he wore!

But, Priests, it's absurd to pretend that all that's nonhuman,
[amorphous,
is ruled by this anthropomorphic being created by men."

—"It's not to be reasoned! These rages for inquiry snuff the light
[out!
Bend over the scriptures, without reading and turning the pages,

o anima senza conforti, e pensa che solo una fede
rivede la vita, rivede il volto dei poveri morti.»

– «O Prete, l'amore è un istinto umano. Si spegne alle porte
del Tutto. L'amore e la morte son vani al tomista convinto.»

La bella preda

I

Fanciullo formidabile: soldato
dell'Alpi e tu mi chiedi
ch'io celebri il tuo gesto in versi miei!
Non trovo ritmi – oimè! – non trovo rime
così come vorrei
al tuo gesto sublime!
Ma sai tu quanto sia bello il tuo gesto,
simbolica la spoglia
dell'aquila regale che t'offerse
l'Altissimo – redento! – a guiderdone
della baldanza tua liberatrice?
La vittima che dice:
Terra d'Italia è questa!
a consenso palese
dei cieli sommi nella santa gesta?

II

Tu non sapevi. Solo con te stesso
e coi fratelli in una forza sola,
sostavi sulla gola
vertiginosa, l'anima in vedetta,
protetto dalla vetta
signoreggiata. Il cuore
batteva impaziente dell'assalto.
Il cielo era di smalto
cerulo, nel silenzio intatto come
quando non era l'uomo ed il dolore...
Era il meriggio alpino,

splendeva il sole nella valle sgombra.
In larghe rote s'annunciò dall'alto
l'olocausto divino,
la messaggiera, disegnando un'ombra.

III

Che pensasti nell'attimo? Colpisti.
Bene colpisti. Il vortice dell'ale
precipitò ventandoti sul viso.
E l'aquila regale
ecco immolasti sul granito alpino
come sull'ara sacra alla riscossa
del popolo latino.
E la tua mano rossa
fu del sangue ricchissimo aquilino.
Battezzasti così con la tua mano,
nella stretta che tutti ebbero a gara,
commentando l'augurio e la bravura,
battezzasti così con la tua mano
tutti i compagni tuoi,
dal giovinetto imberbe al capitano!

IV

Sarcasmo inconsapevole! E tu mandi
oggi la spoglia a noi che con bell'arte
le si ridoni immagine di vita;
ma quale arte iscaltrita
può simulare l'irto palpitare
di penne e piume, il demone gagliardo
tutto rostro ed artigli e grido e sguardo
nell'ora che si scaglia?
Nessuna sorte è triste
in questi giorni rossi di battaglia:
fuorché la sorte di colui che assiste...
E – sarcasmo indicibile per noi
scelti ai congegni ed alla vettovaglia –
tu strappasti l'emblema degli eroi
ed a noi mandi un'aquila di paglia!...

noon, sun's splendor filled the empty vale.
Turning in broad circles the shadow grew
larger and larger, down
came the messenger, came the holocaust divine.

III

What were you thinking of just then? You struck.
You struck well. Then the vortex of the wings
plummeted, the wings fanned across your face,
and the majestic thing
lay sacrificed on the granite mountainside
as on that altar dedicated to
the revolt of the Latin race.
And your hand was red
with the rich thickness of the eagle's blood.
So you baptized them with your bloody hand,
in the narrow gorge where all your comrades vied
to read the omen and praise your mastery,
so you baptized them with your bloody hand,
all of your company,
from the beardless youth to the captain in command.

IV

Unwitting sarcasm! And today you send
your trophy back to us, for our fine art
to endow it with the look of life again,
But where's the art that can
cunningly counterfeit the throbbing breast,
the bristling plumes and feathers, the glorious
demon all cry and beak and eye and claw
in the instant of its thrust?
There isn't any fate
we can call sad, in these red days of war:
except for that of those who stand and wait...
And—unspeakable sarcasm to us chosen
for munitions and provisions and no more—
you tore the emblem of heroes from the horizon
and send us back an eagle stuffed with straw!...

Il bel segugio

– Quella donna ti guarda!

– Quella donna mi ama!

Era il mezzogiorno, l'ora elegante su quella linea tramviaria che restituiva la folla per bene al sobborgo più aristocratico della città. E la carrozza di tutti, nel rigido mattino invernale, odorava di pellicce fini, di violette, di essenze, come un'automobile padronale.

– Ma ti guarda veramente!

– È innamorata di me. Ti stupisce poi tanto?

Il bellissimo Claudio Serra barcollò sulla piattaforma, per poco non accecò il suo amico con la sigaretta, volto a volto, e non infisse i pattini nelle reni d'un signore venerabile.

– Non vacillare per l'emozione.

– Non vacillo. Ci sono abituato. Sarà la decima volta che l'incontro a quest'ora e sempre mi guarda così. Deve essere da poco a Torino e deve abitare in una palazzina della nuova Piazza d'Armi...

Claudio sorrideva largamente, con tutti i suoi denti abbaglianti.

– Ed ora non ridere per far vedere i denti belli, – osservò l'amico brutto ed implacabile. – Sembri la *réclame* di un dentifricio...

– Cretino!

– E non volgerti di profilo per esporre il tuo naso perfetto. Sembri l'Italia, sui « nichelini », di Leonardo Bistolfi.

– Cretino!

In due cose Claudio era perfetto: bellezza e pattinaggio. In pattinaggio aveva conseguito, di quei giorni, i massimi allori: il primo premio nella gara internazionale. E la sua bellezza era di quelle che fanno volgere tutti: uomini e donne; ricordava un centurione romano ingentilito dall'eleganza moderna, stilizzata da un sarto londinese. Ventiquattr'anni, ricco, buon ragazzo, molto sciocco, molto vano, molto sensuale: adoratissimo dalle donne.

– Ma guarda come ti guarda! È una indecenza.

Claudio si volse, sorprese negli occhi della sconosciuta tale palese abbandono che ne arrossì, guardò altrove, turbatissimo.

– Diventi rosso come un'educanda!

– Non è vero!

The Handsome Bloodhound

- That woman's looking at you!
- That woman's in love with me!

It was noon, the fashionable hour on that line, when the streetcar brought the well-dressed crowd back to the city's poshest suburb. In the bitter winter morning, the public car was as fragrant with fine furs, violets, and perfumes as a private automobile.

- But really, she's looking at you!
- She's crazy about me. You find that so amazing?

Stunning Claudio Serra staggered on the platform, nearly blinding his friend with his cigarette, and nearly ramming his skates into the kidneys of a venerable gentleman.

- Don't go all to pieces over it.

— I'm not going to pieces. I'm used to it by now. This is about the tenth time I've come across her on this run, and she always stares at me like that. From the look of her, she must have come to Turin a short while ago, and she must live in one of those villas in the new Piazza d'Armi.

Claudio smiled broadly, with all his dazzling teeth.

— And don't laugh to show your teeth off, observed his ugly and unyielding friend. — You look like a toothpaste ad.

- You moron!

— And don't turn your profile to put your perfect nose on display. You look like Bistolfi's "Italy," on the coins.

- Moron!

Claudio was perfect in two things: good looks and skating. In skating he had won what nowadays are the highest laurels, first prize in international competition. And his looks were the kind that made everyone turn, men as well as women. He called to mind a Roman centurion refined by modern elegance, styled by a London tailor. Twenty-four years old, rich, a good fellow, very foolish, very vain, very sensual: women adored him.

- But look at how she's looking at you! It's indecent.

Claudio turned, and he caught in the woman's eyes a look of such open abandon that he turned red and looked the other way. He was shaken.

- You're blushing like a schoolgirl!
- No, I'm not!

Ma Claudio arrossì anche di più.

La sconosciuta sedeva all'estremità della carrozza, abbandonata nell'angolo, rifugiata in una immensa volpe nera policaudata, dalla quale non emergeva, in basso, che la gonna breve e succinta, il piede minuscolo nella calzatura maschile, in alto, due liste sottili di capelli neri, due occhi neri, protetti da un cappellino di velluto, senza ornamenti. Elegantissima. E quegli occhi non avevano pace. Iridi d'onice fosca che roteavano sullo smalto quasi cerulo, da destra a sinistra, dal basso in alto: ora imperiosamente velati dalle ciglia abbassate, con uno sforzo palese della volontà, ora rivolti al paesaggio nevoso con una simulazione ingenua di curiosità improvvisa; ma richiamati quasi subito verso il giovane, rivolti a lui con una passione, con una tenerezza immemore di tutti e di tutto.

- Una signora per bene?

- Si direbbe di sì.

- Quanti anni le dà?

- Quaranta.

- Oh! Trentacinque al più.

- Mettiamo trentacinque, per farti piacere, ma ne ha quaranta.

- Già, perchè non guarda te, brutto mandrillo!

Ma l'amico brutto aveva ragione. Non ostante la sua grazia giovanile, i capelli neri, gli occhi bellissimi, quella donna non era più giovane. Quando il sole riverberato dalla neve la investiva violento, appariva il mento estenuato, dal profilo stanco, dalle gote un po' cave: primi segni degli anni.

- Con tutto questo è desiderabilissima.

- Non dico di no. Guarda, se ne va...

La sconosciuta s'era alzata, aveva suonato, incerta; poi aveva parlato al fattorino, era scesa dalla piattaforma anteriore.

- Hai visto? Non ha voluto scendere di qui. Temeva di venir meno passandoci accanto.

Claudio Serra si volse e vide la signora già lontana, nel gran piano nevoso, immobile ancora, che lo fissava sempre.

- Bisogna che tu ti conceda.

But Claudio turned even redder.

The woman was sitting at the end of the car, abandoned in the corner, sheltered in an immense black many-tailed fox coat. From below the coat emerged only a glimpse of skirt and a tiny foot in a masculine shoe, from above it two slender bands of black hair and two dark eyes shielded by an unadorned little velvet hat. The height of elegance. And those eyes were not at peace. Dark onyx irises rolling on an almost blue enamel, right and left, up and down: now imperiously veiled, with an obvious effort of the will, by a lowered eyelash, now turning to the snowy landscape with an artless pretense at sudden curiosity, but returning almost at once to the young man, coming back to him with a passion, with a tenderness that was oblivious to everyone and everything.

— A lady of quality?

— I'd say so.

— How old do you make her out to be?

— Forty.

— Oh! Thirty-five at the most.

— We'll put down thirty-five, just to make you happy, but she's forty.

— Sure, because she's not looking at you, mandrill!

But his ugly friend was right. Despite her youthful grace, black hair, and lovely eyes, the woman was no longer young. When the sunlight reflected off the snow it attacked her aggressively, pointing up the small sag of her chin, her tired profile, her slightly hollowed cheeks: the first signs of age.

— With all of that she's still delectable.

— I'm not denying it. Look, she's getting off.

The woman had stood up and rung the bell, uncertainly. She spoke to the conductor, and then she left the car from the front platform.

— Did you see that? She didn't want to get off at this end. She was afraid to even walk past us.

Claudio Serra turned and looked at the lady, already in the distance, standing still in the wide expanse of snow, still staring at him.

— You've got to give in to yourself.

— You're right. I'm going to follow her.

And without even saying goodbye to his friend, Claudio

- Hai ragione. La seguo.

E senza salutare l'amico, Claudio balzò dal tram, che proseguiva vertiginoso.

La signora camminava ora frettolosa, in lontananza. Il giovane la seguì, quasi correndo. Si era nel nuovo quartiere della città; fra distese di neve, ville nuovissime e ville in costruzione: un terreno sconosciuto e malagevole. Claudio dovette attraversare un campo in diagonale per raggiungere la fuggitiva, affondò nella neve fino alla caviglia. Due volte cadde ginocchioni nel pattume, si rialzò di scatto, s'urtò il ginocchio con i pattini aguzzi e pesanti.

- Dannazione!

Si soffregò la parte dolente, proseguì correndo, zoppicando un poco. L'adescatrice era scomparsa. Riapparve all'angolo di un giardino. Claudio affrettò il passo, guadagnò terreno. La signora gli sfuggiva, paurosa, quasi correndo; giunse alla porta di casa, una villa signorile, alzò la mano per suonare, poi parve misurare la distanza che la separava dall'inseguitore e non suonò; si volse, addossata alla porta, come chi si decide alla lotta con un aggressore notturno.

Claudio Serra le era dinnanzi, i pattini nell'una mano, il cappello nell'altra: più bello, più scimunito che mai.

- Signora...

- Signore...

Ansimavano entrambi, senza trovar parola.

- Signore, c'è un malinteso...

Era toscana. La fresca parlata sconcertò più ancora Claudio che, da subalpino illetterato, non amava le donne buone parlatrici.

- Un malinteso da dissipare subito...

- Ma no, signora, sono lusingato...

- Lusingato di che?

Claudio sorrise, con tutti i suoi denti splendidi.

- Ha ragione. L'ho fissato troppo e troppo teneramente, non è vero?

- Sì, ho visto che mi guardava...

- E lei ha potuto credere? Alla mia età? Ah! Come siamo lontani! Che delusione anche per me, perchè nella voce... nello sguardo... e così, vicino, non lo ricordo quasi più...

leaped from the streetcar, which went dizzily on.

Now the lady was walking rapidly in the distance. The young man followed her, almost running. He was in the new section of the city. Amid the piles of snow there were new houses and houses still being built: a rough and unfamiliar terrain. To overtake the fugitive Claudio had to cut diagonally across a field, and he sank into the snow up to his ankles. Twice he landed on his knees in some garbage, and he jumped right up again, hitting his knee with the sharp, heavy skates.

— Damn it!

He rubbed the sore spot and went on running, limping a little. The temptress had disappeared. Then she came in sight again, in the corner of a garden. Claudio quickened his pace and gained on her. The lady fled from him, fearfully, almost running. She came to the door of a house, an elegant villa, and she raised her hand to knock. Then she seemed to measure the distance between herself and her pursuer, and she didn't knock. She turned and leaned against the door, like someone deciding to grapple with an attacker in the night.

Claudio Serra stood before her, his skates in one hand, his hat in the other: more handsome, more idiotic than ever.

— Madam...

— Sir...

They were both panting. Neither one found a word.

— Sir, there is some misunderstanding...

She was Tuscan. Her pure speech made him feel even more uncomfortable. Claudio, like a subalpine illiterate, didn't care for well-spoken women.

— A misunderstanding to be cleared up at once...

— Why no, madam, I'm flattered...

— Flattered by what?

Claudio smiled, with all his splendid teeth.

— You're right. I was gazing at you too much and too tenderly, wasn't I?

— Yes, I saw you looking at me.

— And you could believe...? At my age! Ah, how far apart we are! And besides, what a disappointment to me, because in your voice... in your look... and up close like this, you hardly remind me of him at all...

La signora alzò la borsetta a maglie d'oro dalla quale pendevano amuleti minuscoli, cercò un disco gemmato: l'aprì, lo pose sotto gli occhi del giovane perplesso.

- Non trova che le assomiglia?

- A chi?

- A lei.

Claudio passava un terzo della sua vita dinnanzi allo specchio, si conosceva bene; dovette convenire:

- Veramente. Si direbbe il mio ritratto.

- No, il ritratto di mio figlio.

Claudio trasecolò, guardò la signora che lo guardava con occhi lustri. Balbettò un complimento inopportuno.

- Per carità, non madrigali! Ho quarantatrè anni e da che me l'hanno ucciso li confesso candidamente. Non sono più donna, non sono più di questo mondo!

Fece balzare con l'unghia le lamine interne

- Eccolo bimbo, a quattr'anni, a vent'anni: laureando in legge; eccolo sottotenente...

Quest'ultima fotografia aveva il nome e la data e la croce fatale: Battaglia delle Due Palme. Libia, 12 marzo 1912.

La signora suonò; la porta s'aprì subito automaticamente.

- Le direi di favorire; ma non sono in casa mia; sono ospite, per poco tempo, di miei cugini...

Claudio s'inclinò, con un volto così contrito, che la signora n'ebbe pietà, s'affacciò alla porta socchiusa.

- E mi perdoni, sa, povero figliolo...

- Si figuri.

La signora parve considerarlo nel suo impaccio grottesco; sorrise tra le lacrime, già presa, già distratta dall'insanabile arguzia fiorentina.

- È strano... vicino non lo ricorda più. S'allontani...

Claudio obbedì.

- Un passo ancora... Ecco: così l'illusione è perfetta: mi spezza il cuore. S'avvicini, più ancora... ecco: non gli somiglia più... Ma non si confonda, eh! È strano, a sei passi lei mi fa piangere, a due passi...

The lady raised her gold mesh handbag, from which some small charms were hanging, and looked for a jeweled disc. She opened it, and held it under the bewildered young man's eyes.

— Don't you see the resemblance?

— To who?

— To you.

Claudio had spent a third of his life in front of the mirror, and he knew himself thoroughly. He had to agree:

— Certainly, I'd say it was my portrait.

— No, it's a portrait of my son.

Claudio was astonished. He looked at the lady, who was looking at him with shining eyes. He stammered some inapt compliment.

— Please, no flattery! I'm forty-three years old, and since they've killed him for me I admit it freely. I'm no longer a woman, I'm no longer of this world!

She turned over the inside layers with a fingernail.

— Here he is when he was a baby, at four, at twenty: a law student. Here he is as a second lieutenant...

This last photograph had a name and a date and a memorial cross: Battle of Two Palms. Libya, March 12, 1912.

The lady knocked. The door opened at once, automatically,

— I'd invite you in, but this isn't my house. I'm staying with some relatives for a little while.

Claudio bowed, with so contrite a face that the lady took pity on him, and came forward in front of the half-open door.

— And pardon me, you know, poor fellow...

— Not at all.

She seemed to be contemplating him in his grotesque embarrassment. She was smiling between her tears, already caught, already carried away by that incurable Florentine wit.

— It's strange... Up close you don't remind me of him any more. Move back.

Claudio obeyed.

— One more step... There: now the illusion is perfect. It's heart-breaking. Now come closer, a little more... There: now you don't look like him anymore. Isn't that remarkable? It's strange, at six paces you make me cry, at two paces...

— At two paces?

– A due passi?

– A due passi mi fa ridere...

Risero entrambi.

Ella parlò ancora, a porta quasi chiusa.

– E si lasci guardare, quando c’incontreremo, guardare ad una certa distanza: m’è caro soltanto così.

Claudio tentò di ribattere con una reminiscenza drammatica.

– La statua di carne, allora...

– Precisamente – corresse la fiorentina bizzarra – il pupo vivente.

E la porta si chiuse.

— At two paces you make me laugh.

They both laughed.

She spoke once more:

— And let me look, whenever we happen to meet, let me look at you from a certain distance. It's only at that distance that you're dear to me.

Claudio tried to come back with a theatrical recollection.

— The statue of flesh¹, then.

— Exactly — the odd Florentine wit ran on, — the live marionette.

And the door closed.

1 *La statua di carne* was an 1862 play by Teobaldo Ciconi (1824-1863); it was first filmed in 1912.

PAMELA-FILM

Madamigella Ottempati (in paese da molti anni i maligni sostituivano la *O* con un'*A*), aveva un delicato nome goldoniano: si chiamava Pamela.

Pamela! Un viso a fossette, un profilo alla Watteau, due occhi profondi, due labbra rosse, dal sorriso triangolare...

Oimè! Pamela aveva sessant'anni e non possedeva nulla di tutto questo. Il tempo non l'aveva potuta imbruttire. Chi la ricordava ventenne, la ricordava così: orrida e maschia, angolosa ed ossuta, leggermente gibbosa e leggermente claudicante, col profilo grottesco di certi palmipedi esotici: il naso enorme complicato di strane protuberanze, la bocca fessa fino agli orecchi, gli occhi piccolini e verdi protetti dai sopraccigli congiunti in un sopracciglio solo, densissimo, prominente come certi mustacchi...

In molti casi la natura è perversa. Nessuna vista è più pietosa di certe anime condannate a soggiornare tutta una vita in un corpo deforme, come prigionieri espanti in una prigione spaventosa una colpa non loro.

Eppure a vent'anni Pamela Ottempati aveva avuto il suo raggio di sole. Era stata fidanzata con il segretario di un notaio. Il destino crudele le aveva rapito il promesso sposo quasi alla vigilia delle nozze, con una polmonite fulminante. Da quel giorno la vergine vedova non si era più depilato il mento villosa, nè aveva più cosparsa di cipria la lucentezza livida del naso. Il tempo, le pratiche religiose l'avevano consolata di quella spina. Ma più tardi Pamela aveva avuto il secondo e, forse, più grave dolore della sua vita: la lite col fratello, un fratello molto più giovane di lei, bell'uomo, di temperamento opposto, nato al guadagno, al piacere, all'avventura. La lite era stata tremenda per la povera zitella che s'era visto carpire gran parte dei suoi beni ed era rimasta sola nella vecchia casa provinciale, col suo cane, il suo gatto, le sue galline, la sua fantesca. Gli anni le avevano inacidito il carattere, l'avevano fatta implacabile con tutti e con tutto, non tenera che per le cose di religione e di beneficenza. Non aveva più rivisto il fratello da quindici anni, ma ne aveva notizie indirette, di quando in quando. Era stato all'estero, in Francia, in Inghilterra, aveva accresciuta la

PAMELA FILMS

Mademoiselle Ottempati (for many years the evil minds of the countryside had changed the O to an A¹) had the delicate name of a Goldoni heroine: she was called Pamela.

Pamela! A dimpled face, a Watteau profile, two deep eyes, two red lips, a cupid's bow of a smile...

Alas, Pamela was sixty years old, and she didn't have any of those things. Time had never had the chance to disfigure her. Those who remembered her at twenty remembered her this way: frightful and masculine, angular and bony, with a slight limp and a slight hump, with the grotesque profile of certain exotic webfoots: a huge nose made more problematic by strange protuberances, a mouth cleft all the way to her ears, tiny green eyes hidden under eyebrows that ran together into a single eyebrow, as dense and prominent as some mustaches.

In many instances nature is perverse. There is no sight more pitiful than those souls condemned to spend an entire life in a misshapen body, like prisoners atoning in some horrible prison for a crime they didn't commit.

And yet at twenty Pamela Ottempati had had her ray of sunshine. She had been engaged to marry the secretary of a notary. Almost on the very eve of the wedding, cruel fate had carried off the bridegroom-to-be with an attack of fulminant pneumonia. From that day forward the virgin widow no longer plucked the hairs from her chin, she no longer sprinkled powder over the livid sheen of her nose. Time and religious usages had eased the sting. But much later Pamela had had the second and perhaps the heaviest sorrow of her life: the quarrel with her brother, a brother much younger than herself, a handsome man, her temperamental opposite, a man born for profit, for pleasure, for adventure. The quarrel had remained horrible for the poor old spinster, who had seen the greater part of her property extorted, and who lived alone in the old country house with her dog, her cat, her chickens, and her maid. The years had soured her nature, had made her unyielding with everything and everyone, tender only in the operations of charity and religion. She hadn't seen her brother for fifteen years, but from time to time she had some indirect news of him. He'd lived abroad, in France

1 *Attempato* means "elderly."

sua fortuna, poi s'era rovinato, poi si era arricchito ancora come impresario teatrale, poi come fabbricante di *films*. Una vita fortunata e fortunosa, sregolata e peccaminosa, della quale Pamela non voleva nemmeno sentir raccontare i particolari. E da tre anni la vecchia zitella viveva in angoscia più grande: il fratello era ritornato in Italia, si era stabilito a Torino fondandovi una grande Casa cinematografica. E in tre anni la Casa aveva prosperato incredibilmente, gareggiando tra le prime sul mercato della pellicola.

Ormai Pamela era rassegnata a vedere il suo cognome illibato sui giornali, accanto ai titoli più scellerati; qualche *film* della Casa giungeva anche al cinematografo di Vareggio e allora, passando accanto ai grandi cartelli murali effigianti delitti ed amplessi, uomini efferati e donne discinte, Pamela abbassava gli occhi e corrugava i sopraccigli enormi, mormorando feroce:

– Anche il disonore! Il danno, lo scorno e il disonore!

E aveva quasi rinunciato da tre anni alle sue già rarissime gite in città. E non aveva rivisto il fratello, nè gli aveva perdonato più mai.

Non gli perdonò nemmeno quando improvvisamente morì.

La morte del grande industriale fece scalpore ovunque, fu commentata dai giornali, commentatissima nel mondo cinematografico. Nella piccola città di provincia, poi, non si parlava d'altro:

- Quarantatrè anni!
- Un uomo bellissimo!
- Quasi milionario!
- Gaudente!
- Sano e robusto!
- Troppo sanguigno!
- Apoplezia!
- Fulminante!

La morte l'aveva infatti ghermito in ferrovia, tra Genova e Nizza, mentre si concedeva alcuni giorni di riposo, di vacanza rosea con la sua amica di quel momento, la divinamente bella Diana Carmeli, una stella della pellicola, quella che un poeta famelico, sfamato dalla Casa, aveva detta « la Duse del silenzio ».

and in England, he'd made his fortune and thrown it all away, he'd grown rich again as a theatrical impresario and then as a film producer. An eventful life and a lucky one, dissolute and sinful, the particulars of which Pamela preferred not to hear recited. And for three years now the old spinster had lived in a terrible agony: her brother had come back to Italy, he had settled in Turin, where he had founded a huge motion picture studio. And in three years the studio had prospered fantastically, holding its place among the leaders in the movie market.

Pamela had grown resigned by now to seeing her unsullied surname in the public prints, next to the most scurrilous titles. A few of the studio's films had even come to the theater at Vareggio, and then, walking past the wall posters that depicted crimes and embraces, brutal men and half-undressed women, Pamela would lower her eyes and furrow her enormous eyebrows, muttering fiercely:

— Dishonor too! Damage, disgrace, and dishonor!

And for three years she had all but renounced her already rare trips to the city. And she hadn't seen her brother again, nor had she ever forgiven him.

She still hadn't forgiven him when he suddenly dropped dead.

The death of the great magnate caused a sensation everywhere, it was commented on in all the newspapers, and it obsessed the movie world. In the small provincial city, they talked of nothing else.

— Only forty-three years old!

— Such a handsome man!

— Practically a millionaire!

— A bon vivant!

— So hale and hearty!

— Too hot-blooded!

— Apoplexy!

— Fulminant!

The dead man had in fact been carried off on a train between Genoa and Nice while permitting himself a few days' rest, a rosy vacation with his lady of the moment, the divinely lovely Diana Carmeli, a star of the silver screen whom a starving poet, fed by

Madamigella Pamela non aveva voluto sentire, non aveva voluto sapere. Inorridiva. Non piangeva il fratello, ma non sapeva darsi pace di quella morte sciagurata che chiudeva una vita sciaguratissima, rabbriviva nella certezza di quell'anima perduta.

– Preghe, preghi per la sua pace. Sarà un gran conforto per lei.

– Pregare per la sua pace? Ma è morto in dannazione!

– Nessuno ha il diritto di dir questo, signorina – osservava un sacerdote meno severo ed implacabile della sua devota. – Nessuno può sapere che cosa avvenga di un'anima nell'ora dell'ultimo addio.

Madamigella Ottempati non si consolava. Accomodava i falsi *bandeaux* bluastri sui sopraccigli baffuti, accarezzava Bob, il cagnolino decrepito, sospirando senza conforto, ripetendo a se stessa:

– Dannato! Dannato per l'eternità!

Una settimana dopo quella morte Pamela ebbe una lettera dell'avvocato Quinteri.

Era costui un vecchio amico di famiglia, leale e fidatissimo, che già l'aveva assistita, con non brillante successo nelle vicende col fratello, molti anni prima.

L'avvocato, dopo qualche parola di condoglianza, si permetteva – data la confidenza e l'amicizia antichissima – di domandarle se pensava a provvedere per le formalità legali, e profferiva ancora una volta, qualora ne occorresse, tutti i suoi servigi e tutti i suoi consigli nella difficile circostanza.

– La difficile circostanza?

– L'eredità, signorina – commentava la vecchia serva. – Lei è l'unica erede. Vede che avevo ragione io...

L'eredità di quello sciagurato... Pamela non dormì tutta la notte, e all'alba si alzò più spaventosa che mai.

– Parto. È necessario ch'io veda l'avvocato, che io gli parli subito. Dammi la roba.

Dinnanzi alla lastra offuscata del grande specchio dell'Impero, Pamela indossava i suoi indumenti cittadini: una camicetta a pizzi e a perline, una gonna larghissima – non aveva

the studio, had dubbed "the Duse of silence."

Mademoiselle Pamela didn't want to hear, she didn't want to know. She was horrified. She didn't mourn her brother, but she didn't know how to make her peace with that deplorable death that had closed the most deplorable of lives. She shuddered in the certainty that his soul was lost.

—Pray, pray for the repose of his soul. It will be a great comfort to you.

—Pray for his repose? But he died in damnation!

—No one has the right to say that, Signorina, observed a priest less severe and unyielding than his disciple. —No one can know what happens with a soul in the hour of the last farewell.

Mademoiselle Ottempati was not consoled. She adjusted the bluish false bandeaux over her mustachioed eyebrows, caressed her decrepit lapdog Bob, sighed without comfort, and repeated to herself:

—Damned! Damned for all eternity!

A week after his death Pamela had a letter from the lawyer Quinteri.

He was an old friend of the family, loyal and highly reliable, who had assisted her many years before, with not especially brilliant results, in the business with her brother.

The lawyer, after a few words of condolence, permitted himself— given the confidence and the longstanding friendship that existed between them—to inquire as to whether she had given thought to taking care of the legal formalities, and proffered yet once again, should any occasion ever require, all of his services and all of his counsel under the difficult circumstances.

—The difficult circumstances?

—The inheritance, Signorina, said her old servant. —You're the only heir. You see, I was right...

The inheritance of that scoundrel... Pamela didn't sleep all night, and at dawn she arose more terrified than ever.

—I'm going out. I need to see the lawyer. I need to talk to him right away. Give me the stuff.

Standing before the tarnished sheet of the large Empire mirror, Pamela donned her city garments: a lace blouse studded with little pearls, a broad skirt— she had never renounced, for the turning

rinunziato mai, per volger di anni o mutar di foggie, alle tre sottane inamidate e al busto ad imbuto – s’adattava sulle spalle una mantellina cardinalizia, tipo 1890, s’accomodava sulle false chiome stoppose un cappellino gracile dove tremavano tre squallide penne di pavone fermate dalla testa di un pappagallo.

– Bisognerà che la signorina pensi al lutto.

– Ci penserò in città. Tanto prevedo di doverci stare per qualche giorno. Chissà che novità m’aspettano!

– Novità consolanti! Vorrei essere io nei suoi panni, signorina!

– Ma chissà quanti guai!

– Con l’avvocato Quinteri può esser sicura di tutto.

Pamela Ottempati adattò a Bob la collarina e la catenella di gala ed uscì sospirando:

– Dio me la mandi buona!

Pamela non aveva mai saputo spiegarsi l’attenzione della quale era fatta segno nelle vie cittadine.

– Tanta curiosità per una forestiera di più! Sono più pettegoli in città che in provincia! – mormorava feroce, sogguardando i monelli, i giovanotti, le signore che si fermavano, si volgevano al suo passaggio. – Dopo tutto non sono un mostro e non mi vesto come queste svergognate...

Per sfuggire a quella scia d’ammirazione inesplicabile, prese una carrozza. Nello studio dell’avvocato Quinteri, in attesa, aspirò con voluttà l’atmosfera notarile: l’odore dell’inchiostro inacidito, il fetido putrido della carta bollata la riportavano ai suoi vent’anni, alle sue speranze, al suo amore defunto. Oimè! Aveva dinnanzi il panciuto avvocato Quinteri che le parlava in tono solenne, gli occhi al soffitto, le cinque dita dell’una mano appuntate sulle cinque dell’altra:

– ...Lei non deve dunque inquietarsi. Ha quattro mesi di tempo per la denuncia di successione, per le attestazioni giudiziarie necessarie ad immetterla nel quieto possesso delle sostanze dismesse morendo dal povero suo signor fratello. Il destino le rende ad usura ciò che altra volta le aveva tolto.

– Va bene, ma dove sono questi quattrini?

– Il danaro sciolto non è molto: forse quarantamila. Quasi tutto il capitale, ottocentomila lire circa, è investito nella fabbrica.

of the years or the shifts of fashion, her three starched soutanes or her funnel-shaped corset—she arranged an 1890-style cardinal's cape around her shoulders, and adjusted on her brittle false hair a frail little hat from which there dangled three dreary peacock feathers fastened to a parrot's head.

— The signorina will have to see to mourning.

— I'll see to it in the city. I expect I'll be obliged to stay there for a few days. Who knows what news is waiting for me there!

— Comforting news! I wish I was in your shoes, signorina.

— But who knows how much trouble!

— With that lawyer Quinteri I'd feel secure about everything.

Pamela Ottempati hooked up Bob's dress collar and chain, and went out sighing:

— God help me!

Pamela had never been able to explain all the attention she received in the streets of the city.

— Such a lot of curiosity over a stranger! They're worse gossips in the city than they are in the country!, she muttered fiercely, stealing glances at the little imps, the young men, the ladies who stopped and turned to watch her go by. — After all, I'm not a monster and I don't dress like one of these hussies...

To escape from that trail of inexplicable wonderment, she took a carriage. In Quinteri's chambers, waiting for the lawyer, she breathed in the legal atmosphere with a sensual pleasure: the odor of sour ink and the putrid smell of stamped paper carried her back to her twenties, her hopes, her dead love. Alas! It was potbellied Quinteri who was before her, talking in solemn tones, his eyes on the ceiling, the five fingers of one hand pressed against the five fingers of the other.

— ...So you really needn't be concerned. We have four months to file the declaration of succession, the judicial attestations necessary for the smooth transfer of the property left behind by your poor brother's death. Destiny repays with interest what it took away once before.

— That's all very well, but where is this money?

— The cash on hand isn't much: maybe forty thousand. Almost all the capital, around eight hundred thousand lire, is tied up in the business.

- Allora liquidi subito.
- Liquidare? Ma sarebbe una pazzia! Lei non realizzerebbe la quinta parte.
- Trovi un compratore. Io non voglio essere la proprietaria di un luogo turpe.
- Un luogo turpe... ha torto, mia cara signorina. L'Ottempati-Films gode fama di essere una rinnovatrice morale ed artistica fra le altre Case del genere. Vuol pensarci intanto? E degnarsi prima di una visita?
- M'accompagna lei?
- L'accompagno io. Lei alloggia all'Albergo Concordia, vicinissimo alla fabbrica. Troviamoci domani, alle nove e mezzo dinnanzi alla Casa. Va bene così?

Alle nove dell'indomani madamigella Ottempati già misurava a grandi passi la piazzetta dinnanzi ai cancelli aperti, roteando nell'una mano l'ombrello massiccio, reggendo con l'altra la catenella di Bob.

Azzardava uno sguardo negli immensi cortili: varie cose l'incuriosivano: una gabbia di scimmie, un gran rosaio fiorito, due bimbi vestiti da paggio che riposavano giocando con un levriere. S'avventurò timidamente, visitò le consorelle prigioniere, aspirò una rosa senza raccogliarla, accarezzò un bimbo che fuggì ridendo. Quando si volse per uscire, il cancello era ingombro da una serie di automobili, dalle quali scendeva un drappello di soldati napoleonici. Questi parvero rivolgersi verso di lei, salutarla di lontano:

- Tulipier!
- Ciao, Tulipier!
- Bravo Tulipier!

Ridevano, schiamazzavano. Parlavano di lei? Sbigottita, si rifugiò in una porticina, seguì un andito buio, riuscì in un corridoio luminoso, per fuggire dall'altro cancello; ma l'altro cancello era chiuso. Tornò indietro, passò tra due fondali settecenteschi, si smarri.

- Tulipier, ascolta!...

Le voci echeggiavano, la seguivano. Essa fuggì, quasi di corsa, passò altri corridoi, riuscì in una immensa gabbia vetrata, divisa a piccoli teatri, a quinte, ingombra e complicata come un

— Then liquidate at once.

— Liquidate? But that would be madness! You wouldn't realize a fifth of what it's worth.

— Find a buyer. I've no wish to be the proprietor of a filthy place.

— A filthy place... my dear signorina, you're mistaken. Among the other studios, Ottempati Films enjoys a reputation as a force for moral and artistic renewal. In the meantime, wouldn't you prefer to think it over? And to deign to pay a visit first?

— Will you go with me?

— I'll go with you. You're staying at the Hotel Concordia, right near the studio. We'll meet tomorrow at half past nine, in front of the main gate. Is that all right?

At nine the next morning Mademoiselle Ottempati was already in the little square in front of the open gates, measuring it with broad strides, rotating her massive umbrella in one hand and holding Bob's chain in the other.

She hazarded a glance into the immense courtyard: a number of things stirred her curiosity: a cage of monkeys, a large rosebush in bloom, two little boys dressed as pages playing with a greyhound, She timidly ventured forward, she looked at the imprisoned sisters, she breathed in one of the roses without plucking it, she patted one of the little boys, who ran away laughing. When she turned to go out, the gate was blocked by a row of automobiles, from which a troop of Napoleonic soldiers were descending. They seemed to turn toward her, waving at her from across the courtyard,

— Tulipier!

— Hi, Tulipier!

— Bravo Tulipier!

They were laughing and shouting. Were they talking to her? Frightened, she hid in an alcove. She went down a dark passage, and came out in a brightly lit corridor. She fled to the other gate, but the other gate was closed. She turned back the other way, she passed between two eighteenth-century backdrops, she was lost.

— Tulipier, listen!...

The voices reverberated, they followed her. She fled, nearly running, she went down other corridors, she came out into a huge glass cage, divided into little theaters, backstage, cluttered and as

labirinto. Alcuni soldati romani le impedivano il passo. Sfuggì. Si trovò in un salone da ballo, tra signore scollate e gentiluomini in isparato. Un operatore l'investì con violenza:

– Tulipier! Passa via! Mi guasti la scena, buffone.

Pamela arretrò a destra, tra un gruppo di fachiri e di baiadere. Ebbe chiuso ogni scampo, si vide perduta, s'addossò ad un'ara di Visnù, volgendosi alle difese, con Bob che abbaiava furiosamente, stretto sotto l'ascella, l'ombrello massiccio roteante nella destra. Il tremito le scuoteva il mento barbuto, le agitava gli enormi sopraccigli, il cappellino dalle tre penne squallide. I soldati di Giulio Cesare, i soldati di Napoleone, i Bramini, le fecero cerchio, acclamandola:

– È Tulipier! Che artista!

– Come si trucca!

– Non si direbbe truccato!

– Sembra una strega autentica!

– Bravo Tulipier! Evviva Tulipier!

E un sacerdote di Brahma, più entusiasta degli altri, la ghermì alle ginocchia, la sollevò in alto, sulla turba conclamante. Pamela gettò un grido e svenne tra le braccia dell'avvocato Quinteri, sopraggiunto.

– Mascalzoni! Che cosa fanno? È la signorina Ottempati, loro legittima proprietaria.

Confortata di cordiali e di parole, madamigella Ottempati rinvenne poco dopo nelle quiete sale della Direzione. Rifiutò di visitare la fabbrica, rifiutò l'automobile profferta. E volle lasciar subito la casa dell'oltraggio. A nulla valsero le scuse degli artisti, a nulla le parole persuasive dell'avvocato Quinteri.

E l'indomani e il giorno dopo e sempre Pamela fu irremovibile.

– Liquidare, liquidare a qualunque costo.

Una Casa anglo-americana fiutò il buon colpo. Ebbe la fabbrica nella settimana per 300 mila lire. Pamela ricevette quel tesoro con un brivido di gioia e di paura. Ma si mondò da ogni scrupolo

intricate as a maze. Some Roman soldiers blocked her way. She fled. She found herself in a ballroom, amid ladies in low-necked gowns and gentlemen in fancy dress. A cameraman pushed her roughly:

— Tulipier, get out of the way! You're spoiling the shot, you fool!

Pamela moved to her right, into a crowd of fakirs and dancing girls. Every escape was shut off, she saw that she was lost, she leaned against an altar of Vishnu and turned to defend herself, squeezing Bob— who was barking furiously— under her arm and waving the massive umbrella in her right hand. Her trembling set her hairy chin to quivering, it shook her enormous eyebrows and her little hat with its three dreary feathers. The soldiers of Julius Caesar, the soldiers of Napoleon, and the Brahmins formed a circle around her, applauding:

— It's Tulipier! What an artist!

— What makeup!

— It doesn't even seem like makeup!

— You look like a real witch!

— Bravo Tulipier! Hooray for Tulipier!

And a priest of Brahma, more carried away than the others, grabbed her by the knees and lifted her above the cheering mob. Pamela let out a shriek and collapsed into the arms of Quinteri, who had just arrived.

— You scoundrels! What are you doing? This is Signorina Ottempati, your lawful proprietor!

Comforted by cordials and by words, Pamela revived a little later in the quiet of the executive office. She refused to tour the studio, she refused the proffered automobile. She wanted to get away at once from this house of outrage. She cared nothing for the apologies of the artists, nothing for the persuasive words of Quinteri.

And the next day and the day after and forever, Pamela was immovable.

— Liquidate, liquidate at any price.

An Anglo-American firm smelled a real killing. Within a week it had the studio for three hundred thousand lire. Pamela received this treasure with a shiver of joy and dread. But she

offrendone 25 mila all'erigendo Ospedale di Vareggio, ed altre 25 mila alla « Protezione della Giovane ».

Così si verificò ancora una volta, nell'oscillare delle cose umane – secondo che iteosofi insegnano – la legge del perfetto equilibrio.

purged herself of all her qualms by donating twenty-five thousand for the building of the Vareglia Hospital, and another twenty-five thousand to the Society for the Protection of the Young.

Thus in the fluctuations of human affairs was verified once again — as the theosophists teach us — the law of perfect equilibrium.



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**Traduttori a duello /
Dueling Translators**

Edited by

Gaetano Cipolla

Traduttori a duello / Dueling Translators

A text of poetry or prose, translated by ten equally skilled translators, will result in ten different texts. In theory, the different versions should convey the kernel meaning, that is, the basic message contained in the original text. This section of *Journal of Italian Translation* will test this theory by asking our readers to translate a text chosen by the editor, using whatever style or approach they consider best. The submissions will then be printed with the original text. We will publish as many entries as possible.

The challenge for this issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* was a poem by Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni, "La follia delle donne," from *Lirici del Settecento*, Milano-Napoli, Riccardo Ricciardi Editore. We have received two translations of the poem: one by Florence Russo and the other by Onat Claypole.

La follia delle donne di Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni

Non v'è in bosco pastorella
che non creda d'esser bella,
anzi ognuna giureria
che l'uguale non vi sia.
Di sé altera va la bionda,
vuol che ogn'altra si nasconda,
tener crede incatenati
tutti i cor ne' crin dorati.
Col crin nero un'altra al fonte
a specchiarsi vien la fronte,
e in quel nero crede poi
che Amor tenda i lacci suoi.
Vuol la grande e ben cresciuta
la più bella esser tenuta
perché a lei su l'altre pare
ritta in piè poter regnare.
Vuol la picciola in opposto
fra le belle il primo posto,
e in compenso dell'altezza
fa giuocar la gentilezza.

Vien la bella ben nudrita,
larga in busto e stretta in vita,
e si stima quella sola
che per gli occhi il cor consola.
La magretta se ne ride
ed in suo favor decide
ché si crede un picciol fusto
tutta grazia e tutta gusto.
Vuol la ninfa dottoressa
adorata esser anch'essa.
vuol di sé, perché ha studiato
tutto il mondo innamorato.
Baldanzosa l'ignorante
pompa fa d'un bel sembiante.
Vien la bella che si vanta
d'esser bella oltre i quaranta,
e ancor vuole e ancora crede
tutti i cuori far sue prede.
Ma una bella in fresca età
viene e grida: Chi va là?
E in virtù d'anni diciotto
ai quaranta fa cappotto.
Ogni bianca senz'aiuto
di sospiri vuol tributo,
vuol col vivo suo candore
fra le belle il primo onore.
Ma superba vien la bruna,
né vuol cedere ad alcuna,
piena il cor d'ardite voglie
perché il bruno il bel non toglie.

The Folly of Women
Translated by Florence Russo

There's no rustic shepherdess
who thinks she does not possess
beauty, she would even swear
that no one can equal her.
The blond woman with great pride

Thinks all others should just hide.
She believes her golden mane
Can keep every heart in chain.
Now a woman with black hair
In the fountain checks her wares
And thinks love has set his snares
In the blackness of her hair.
The tall girl who's been well fed,
Thinks no one is better bred
'cause by standing on her feet
All the others can't compete.
The petite lass wants to stand
In first place throughout the land
and to make up for her height
makes her kindness her real might.
The plump lass who has been blest
With slim waist and ample chest
Is convinced she can console
With her eyes a troubled soul.
The slim girl derides the notion
And opts for her own promotion
For she thinks she's a cute package
Filled with charm and tasteful baggage.
And the nymph who's educated
wants to be, too, venerated
'cause she studied and she strove
the whole world should be in love.
The audacious uninformed
Comes to boast her shapely form.
Then the beauty comes along
Who at forty still looks young,
And she wants and still can say
Every heart can be her prey.
But a filly in her prime
Comes and yells: you're past your time!
And her eighteen years will trump,
Leaving forty in the dump.
Every pale one without aid
A tribute of sighs wants paid.

For her lively purity
She expects the first to be.
The brunette comes with great pride
And for none will stand aside.
In her heart bold wants hold sway,
'cause brown won't strip fair away.

Women's Folly
Translated by Onat Claypole

No young shepherd girl alive
thinks that she is not beautiful,
in fact, she readily would swear
there's no girl who can compare.
The blond woman takes great pride
and wants others to go hide,
She is convinced her golden curls
can keep captive every heart.
With black hair another comes
to the fountain there to see
a reflection of her face,
and she thinks the god of love
set its nets in her black hair.
The well-nourished and tall lass
wants to be deemed the most fair
'cause it seems that she can reign
above others just by standing.
But the woman who is small
wants first place among all women;
To make up for her short height,
she throws in her great gentility.
The well-fed now steps right up,
ample chest and a small waist,
and she thinks that she alone
can bring solace to men's heart.
The thin girl just laughs at that

And she opts in her own favor
for she offers a neat bundle
full of charms and classic taste.
The nymph holding a Ph.D.
wants to be loved by the world
because she invested in study.
The pretentious ignoramus
boasts she has a comely shape.
Then the beauty comes along
who claim she is still good looking
even though she is past forty,
and she wants and still believes
that her looks can prey on hearts.
But a girl who's in her prime
shows up saying: Who goes there?
And her eighteen years of age,
make the one who's in her forty
bite the dust. The pale-hued woman
without aid, expects tributes of sighs
from each man because she's pure,
and first place among the fair.
The brunette then strides with pride
who won't bow to anyone,
her heart's filled with some daring yearnings,
because she thinks a dark complexion
cannot minimize one's beauty.



Vanni Macchiagodena, *Figura con fermaglio n. 3*, terracotta, h. cm.110, 2005

For the next issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* I have selected a poem from Carlo Salustri (Trilussa) "Er baccalà in guazzetto," from *Tutte le poesie*, Mondadori: Milano, 1963.

Li sogni quasi sempre so' compagni
a certe idee politiche che nascheno
seconno de li generi che magni.
Io, presempio, ciò fatto osservazione:
quanno me fanno er baccalà in guazzetto
la notte ciò una spece d'oppressione
che me nizzico e nàzzico p' el letto:
e m'insogno le cose
più brutte e più noiose...
L'antra sera, defatti,
che ne magnai tre piatti,
me parse de vede che Nina mia
giocava a acchiapparella in mezzo a un prato
con un tenente de cavalleria.
Apersi l'occhi subito e pensai:
— Che brutto sogno! Forse sarà stato
er baccalà in guazzetto ch'ho magnato...
Nina, 'ste cose qui, nu' le fa mai... —
Ma disgrazziatamente,
quela stessa matina,
vado ar Pincio, e chi trovo? trovo Nina
a spasso còr medesimo tenente!
Ch'avrebbe fatto un antro ar posto mio?
Se sarebbe arabbiato! Cicche e ciacche!
Du sganassoni e... addio!
Io, invece, chiusi l'occhi còr bisogno
de crede ch'era un sogno,
e dissi: — Sarà stato
er baccalà in guazzetto ch'ho magnato...

Book Reviews

Seamus Heaney. *Death of a Naturalist*. London: Faber and Faber, 2016 (1966); Seamus Heaney. *Morte di un naturalista*. Translated into Italian by Marco Sonzogno. Milano: Mondadori ("Lo Specchio"), 2014. By Roya Jabarouti.

Naturalism has always encouraged writers to engage with the relationship between with 'Mother Nature' and human beings. Half a century after its first publication (1966), Faber and Faber has reprinted *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) – an original and powerful collection of poems that immediately brought national and international recognition to its author: the Irish poet (and later Nobel Laureate) Seamus Heaney (1939-2013). It is thus worthwhile to re-read this book and reflect on the linguistic and poetic qualities that were unanimously recognized when it came out. Indeed, almost all the reviews published at the time saluted Heaney's debut praising the richness, directness, and sensuality of the language with which he had vividly and imaginatively rendered rural themes, images, emotions.

* * * * *

Heaney was born in a Catholic family in the mainly Protestant County Derry, in Northern Ireland. As the eldest of nine children, he experienced an "intimate", "physical" and "creaturely" existence which made him as "susceptible" and "impressionable" to the outside world as, in his words, the surface of drinking water in a bucket rippling "delicately, concentrically, and in utter silence". Even as a school boy, Heaney rejoiced in reading the poems that were "upfront" representations of their world. He read Keat's for the sensuality of his language; he favoured Hopkins', Forest's and Chaucer's poetic language for their intensity and accuracy. Similarly, he absorbed the war poetry of Wilfred Owen and explored the poetic style of Lowell, Bishop and Kavanagh, among others, finding even more reasons to credit poetry's "ability" and "responsibility" to "pity the planet".

Indeed, these readings 'crossed' his own experience: brought up in Northern Ireland during World War II, Heaney experienced

first-hand the Troubles in Northern Ireland as well as the political tensions and conflicts on the international stage, from the Cold War to the Gulf War to the terrorist attacks on New York and London. Heaney describes in particular his childhood experience of war time as “pre-reflective,” “pre-literate” and “pre-historical”: a time when he eagerly followed the adventure tales of British agents and tuned his ears to the frequencies of foreign languages. This, in fact, was the beginning of his journey into the “wilderness of the world beyond” and to the “wideness of languages”. In his Nobel Lecture, *Crediting Poetry*, Heaney recalls this period as the starting point of “a journey where each point of arrival—whether in one’s poetry or one’s life turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination”.

The journey of Heaney’s education was equally intense and formative. From his school days at Anahorish School and St Columb’s College to his undergraduate studies at Queen’s University of Belfast followed by his postgraduate studies at St Joseph’s Teacher Training College in Belfast, which heralded the career of an inspiring teacher that would take Heaney to the *podia* of Harvard and Oxford, where he held the prestigious titles of Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory and of Professor of Poetry respectively. The most prestigious recognition would come 1995, when the Swedish Academy bestowed on Heaney (who was 56 at the time) the Nobel Prize in Literature “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past.” Heaney continued to write and lecture till his death on August 30, 2013.

Nature is the everyday source of human wonder and amazement. It is not surprising that Heaney drew a great deal of his poetic imagination from the life and landscape of rural Ireland. His familiarity with the rhythms cycles, tools as well as with human and animal habitats in his native countryside informs and shapes his poetry. This familiarity, however, goes beyond exposure to the elements of the natural world around him. The ‘modernity’ and ‘maturity’ of Heaney’s relationship with nature in all its forms can be inferred from the title of his first collection. His approach to Nature is precisely what distinguishes his verse from the poetry of another great Irish poet and Noble Laureate, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), with whom he is often compared (Robert Lowell

famously called Heaney the greatest Irish poets since Yeats).

Death of a Naturalist (1966) consists of 34 poems, written from the late 1950s and early 1960s until the poet's honeymoon in London 1965, when he delivers to his publisher, Faber and Faber, the last poem to be included ('The Diviner'). The poems render his childhood experiences with, and observations of, the rural life around him. The collection was immediately and unanimously praised for its author's skilful use of metaphor and alliteration and a distinctive language, both sensorial and sensual, that enabled him to precisely and vividly re-create nature in all its aspects.

'Digging' – arguably his most widely known and anthologized poem – is the 'gate' to Heaney's debut as a poet. Repeated, metaphorically, a number of times in many of the other poems the act of "digging" provides the primary material of his poetics. With a "squat pen" resting "between my [his] finger and my [his] thumb", yet with the power of a snugged "gun", the poet excavates his cultural heritage. The extended spade-pen metaphor, in *Digging*, portrays a scene from the poet's childhood: a window from which he meticulously and admiringly observes his father "stooping in rhythm". The closing lines, however, informs the reader that the poet has chosen to follow another path: unlike "his old man," Seamus "has no spade. Instead, he sets out to restore "culture to itself" and commits to poetry as "a dig for finds that end up being plants". 'Digging', in fact, carries the force of an initiation: it roots out Heaney's vacation to writing and in particular to poetry.

Although Heaney understood the example and value of rural life, he did not indulge in a nostalgic representation of a sympathetic Mother Nature. This theme is metaphorically illustrated in *Death of a Naturalist* and reaches a climax in 'At a Potato Digging', where Heaney brings a historical evidence for the unsympathetic aspect of nature: The Great Famine in Ireland (1845-1852).

In the title-poem, in the short space of two stanzas, Heaney articulates the evolution of a child-like, naïve explorer of Nature into an adult observer who is acutely aware of nature's "punishing" side. A reliable witness, he notices the metamorphosis of "nimble swimming tadpoles" into "angry frogs" gathered for "vengeance". It could be argued that Heaney's poetics is epitomized in this poem: a dissonant cacophony of noises surrounds the young naturalist, who finds himself "sickened" by the "bass chorus" of the frogs

and decides to turn and run away. Similarly, 'An Advancement of Learning' presents a graphic illustration of the "obscene threats" one can encounter in nature. This impression stretches across nine quatrains. However, there is a strong sense of accomplishment towards the end: Heaney closes the poem with an explicit attempt to cross "the bridge" and tackle the "cold, wet-furred, small-clawed" terror of rats.

The earthy clamor of the opening line in "Churning Day" recalls the "soil-reek" of Derry: "A thick crust, coarse-grained as limestone rough-cast". Likewise, there is a parody of a colorful childhood experience in the alliterative sounds of 'Blackberry-Picking'. The poem resonates with the familiar theme of falling from innocence to experience: the fermentation of the once glossy, wine-thickened blackberries into rotting and stinking fruit covered with "rat-grey fungus". There is also a classic reference to the interference of "that" human lust and hunger in this process, which is for Heaney disappointing yet inevitable. Once again, towards the end of the poem, Heaney manifests a deepening and developing of consciousness: there is a shift from a sheer descriptive tone to the wise statement of the final line: "Each year, I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not".

In 'The Diviner', gladly but modestly, the poet sets out to spread this wisdom and to ensure its perpetuity in his poetry. Heaney finds an analogy between his poetic vocation and the diviner's "nervous, but professionally unfussed" broadcasting of water. He relishes in what the two share: the privilege of having "the greet hedge" as the source of inspiration and the gift to seize the "secret stations". Nonchalantly but professionally, the diviner grips the "expectant" wrist of the bystanders to help them to realize this magical experience as well: Heaney credits the magical power of a poet to discover, interpret, and transmit a message, which becomes *his* message. The self-conscious satisfaction with writing and with poetry is even more explicit in the closing poem, 'Personal Helicon': to dig for roots and to perpetuate his knowledge, the "big-eyed Narcissus" falls in love with his own reflections. Here Heaney does not resort to any metaphor: the poem is, in fact, a myth in itself. Thus Heaney closes the book articulating the ultimate purpose of his poetic vocation: "I rhyme / To see myself".

Heaney's debut collection establishes and explores a direct

relationship between his experiences as a child and his early readings. As already mentioned, and as he put it himself, Heaney begun as a poet when his roots were crossed with his reading. *Death of a Naturalist* is a rich and earnest illustration of Heaney's technique: his ability to employ different styles, themes, and narratives, absorbing the example of poets as different as Wordsworth, Kavanagh, and Hughes among others. Their impact is particularly evident in poems like 'Turkey Observed', 'At a Potato Digging', and 'The Barn'.

Still, the most impressive quality of Heaney's first collection is that each and every poem bear witness to an already assured voice narrating personal and yet relatable experiences. Heaney's poems articulate an extension of consciousness as the result of a deep interchange between his senses and his mind and the working of Nature: an exchange, as it were, that yields character and creativity as well as guidance and gratification. Mother Nature educates the innocent explorer, paving the way for the birth of an adult dignity: Heaney the poet.

* * * * *

Heaney's first book of poems was the last to be translated into Italian. Heaney's poetry begins to appear in Italian translation in the early 1980s, when a cycle of sonnets centred on the poet's countryside cottage and lifestyle is published ("I sonetti di Glanmore", translated by Gabriella Morisco, *Almanacco dello Specchio*, 10, Milano, Mondadori, 1981: "Glanmore Sonnets", in *Field Work*, 1979). In the early 1990s, the publication of *Attraversamenti* (translated by Anthony Oldcorn, Milano, Scheiwiller, 1990: "Crossings", in *Seeing Things*, 1991); of *Scavando. Poesie scelte (1966-1990)* (edited and translated by Franco Buffoni, Roma, Fondazione Piazzolla, 1991: *New Selected Poems, 1966-1987*) and of *Station Island* (translated and annotated by Gabriella Morisco and Anthony Oldcorn, Milano, Mondadori, 1992: *Station Island*, 1984) heralds an growing interest in and commitment to Heaney's poetry (especially by Italy's most influential publisher: Mondadori) that quickly becomes an intense and lasting exchange, culminating with the forthcoming publication of *Poesie (1966-2013)*, Heaney's selected poems, in Mondadori's prestigious series "I Meridiani" (2016).

Heaney's collections of poems (ten out of twelve, plus his award-winning translation of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*) and his collections of essays (all three, plus his Nobel Lecture) are now available in Italian — a language with a very long and authoritative tradition of poetry translation that includes not only some of Italy's most distinguished poets and literary translators but also philosophers and philologists from Dante to the present. The Italian catalogue of Heaney's work is thus very rich: *Attenzioni* (edited by Massimo Bacigalupo and translated by Piero Vagliani, Roma, Fazi, 1996: *Preoccupations. Selected Prose 1968-1978*, 1980); *Una porta sul buio* (translated by Roberto Mussapi, Parma, Guanda, 1996: *Door into the Dark*, 1969); *Sia dato credito alla poesia* (translated by Marco Sonzogni, Milano, Archinto, 1997: *Crediting Poetry*, 1995); *Veder cose* (translated by Gilberto Sacerdoti, Milano, Mondadori, 1997: *Seeing Things*, 1991); *Il governo della lingua. Prose scelte 1978-1987* (translated by Massimo Bacigalupo, Roma, Fazi, 1998: *The Government of the Tongue*, 1988); *North* (translated by Roberto Mussapi, Milano, Mondadori, 1998: *North*, 1975); *La lanterna di biancospino* (translated by Francesca Romana Paci, Parma, Guanda, 1999: *The Haw Lantern*, 1987); *La riparazione della poesia: lezioni di Oxford* (translated by Massimo Bacigalupo, Roma, Fazi, 1999: *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*, 1995); *The Spirit Level* (translated by Roberto Mussapi, Milano, Mondadori, 2000: *The Spirit Level*, 1995); *Beowulf* (translated by Massimo Bacigalupo, Roma, Fazi, 2002: *Beowulf*, 1999); *Electric Light* (translated by Luca Guerner, Milano, Mondadori, 2003: *Electric Light*, 2001); *District and Circle* (translated by Luca Guerner, Milano, Mondadori, 2009: *District and Circle*, 2006); *Catena umana* (translated by Luca Guerner, Milano, Mondadori, 2011: *Human Chain*, 2010); *Morte di un naturalista* (translated by Marco Sonzogni, Milano, Mondadori, 2014: *Death of a Naturalist*, 1965) to mention the most important titles. Regrettably, Heaney's plays (*The Cure at Troy*, his 1990 version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *The Burial at Thebes*, his 2004 version of Sophocles' *Antigones*) have yet to be translated — an omission that one hopes will be filled in the not too distant future, given Italy's dramaturgic tradition from antiquity to the twentieth century.

All the Italian translations published to-date contain a critical introduction and explanatory notes that enable the reader to follow the development of each collection, the wide ranging sources

of Heaney's imagination, as well as the specific challenges faced by the translators. Sonzogni joins a long list of scholars, literary translators, and poets who have rendered Heaney's poetry in the Italian language. A good example of Sonzogni's approach to poetry translation is his version of 'Personal Helicon', where the thorny paradigms of 'fidelity' and 'freedom' are not mutually exclusive but rather humbly combined to preserve as much of the original spirit and structure as possible while offering the Italian reader 'another' poem:

PERSONAL HELICON

for Michael Longley

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

A shallow one under a dry stone ditch
Fructified like any aquarium.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch,
A white face hovered over the bottom.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
With a clean new music in it. And one
Was scaresome for there, out of ferns and tall
Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

ELICONA PERSONALE

a Michael Longley

Da bambino non potevano tenermi lontano da pozzi
e vecchie pompe con argano e secchio.
Adoravo la discesa nel buio, il cielo intrappolato, gli olezzi
d'erbaccia acquatica, funghi e umido muschio.

Uno, in una mattonaia, aveva un'asse marcia sul colmo.
Gustavo l'intenso impatto quando un secchio
vi cadeva alla fine di una corda a piombo.
Così profondo che non vi si vedeva specchio.

Uno, sotto un muretto a secco, poco profondo,
fruttificava come un acquario. E se tiravi
lunghe radici dal pacciame sul fondo,
un viso bianco vi aleggiava.

Altri avevano echi, restituivano i richiami
con una nuova nitida musica. E un altro
metteva paura perché laggiù, tra felci e digitali,
attraverso il mio riflesso schizzò un ratto.

Adesso, curiosare tra radici, tastare il limo,
contemplare, Narciso dai grandi occhi, qualche sorgente
va oltre ogni dignità di adulto. Rimo,
per potermi vedere, per rendere il buio echeggiante.

Roya Jabarouti recently moved from Iran to New Zealand to research metaphor as an interdisciplinary, translational concept using as a case study the poetry and prose of Seamus Heaney. Her research has led to an article to be published in a leading journal of semiotics ("A Semiotic Framework for the Translation of Conceptual Metaphors", *Signata*, 7/1 – *Translating: Signs, Texts, Practices*). She is a PhD Candidate in Literary Translation Studies in the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University of Wellington.

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