

*Journal  
of Italian Translation*



Editor Luigi Bonaffini

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**Journal  
of Italian Translation**

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**Journal  
of Italian Translation**

*Editor*  
*Luigi Bonaffini*

**Volume I,      Number 2,      Fall 2006**

In each issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* we will feature a noteworthy Italian or Italian American artist.

In the present issue we feature the work of Nicolò D'Alessandro, a gifted and well-known graphic artist who lives and works in Palermo, Sicily.

### **Alcune considerazioni a proposito dei miei Tarocchi**

*di Nicolò D'Alessandro*

I *Tarocchi* sono comunemente conosciuti come un mazzo divinatorio di carte e sono soggetti a molte utilizzazioni anche da ciarlatani e maghi, ma nel loro significato più vero rappresentano cose completamente diverse. Il nome *Tarocchi* che deriva da *Tariqa*, nell'antica lingua dei Sufi, era usato per definire il "percorso". *Tariqa*, infatti, significa "Via — Sentiero" ed i Sufi, altri non erano che "Viandanti" che percorrevano strade spirituali per compiere "percorsi mistici" nel mondo.

I "Tarocchi" che sono una sorta di "codice", assumono il ruolo di immagini-tipo altamente simboliche, originarie-arcaiche, che fanno parte da sempre della memoria collettiva. In chiave filosofica, risultano essere il "modello originario" delle cose del mondo, del quale modello le manifestazioni sensibili della realtà non sono che imitazioni. Attraverso i simboli, le figure dovrebbero esprimere il lavoro interiore che l'uomo deve compiere per realizzare la propria evoluzione. In definitiva per attuare con consapevolezza il suo destino.

I "Tarocchi" sono composti da 78 carte. Di queste, 56 (quattro semi da quattordici) sono definiti Arcani minori, mentre gli altri ventidue sono chiamati Arcani maggiori o *archetipi* dal greco *archetypon*: archè, 'principio' + typon 'modello'. Affrontando la complessità del tema: gli *Arcani maggiori*, pubblicati in questa rivista *Journal of Italian Translation*, sono le icone delle quali mi sono interessato per moltissimi anni. Ho lavorato su queste tavole dal 1978 al 1984, disegnando a china su cartoncino il cui formato è di cm. 50 x 70.

# *Journal of Italian Translation*

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## Una doppia infedeltà

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Angela M. Jeannet

Mi occuperò qui solamente della traduzione di opere letterarie, lasciando da parte la questione della traduzione commerciale e scientifica e del lavoro d'interprete, anche se quelle attività sono affini e considerarle ci può insegnare molto. Prima farò delle osservazioni generali per entrare in argomento.

Al giorno d'oggi, contrariamente anche soltanto a 30-40 anni fa, nel campo della traduzione sono più numerosi e agguerriti i non-occidentali e devo dire che trovo più illuminanti le pagine di studiosi nuovi, per esempio i saggi raccolti in *Translation Studies (Translation Studies. Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline)*. Ed. Alessandra Riccardi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) che non gli studi tradizionali. È anche significativo che molti testi sulla traduzione scritti o curati da cinesi, indiani e italiani escano in veste inglese..... L'egemonia della lingua inglese e della cultura americana presenta nuove sfide a chi viene da altre culture, specialmente con il trasformarsi di assetti politici e sociali che includono migrazioni umane su scala mondiale. Come scrive Margherita Ulrych nella collezione che ho menzionato: "Translation not only reflects but also directs transcultural contacts and exchanges.....it is the means by which ideas, styles, and genres transit from one language and culture to another and is thus a powerful tool in the construction of languages and cultures; it can be the site for resistance by the receiving culture to the permeability of the incoming influence" (199). A questo proposito mi è parso particolarmente interessante il volume di Eugene Chen Eoyang dal titolo "*Borrowed Plumage*" (*Polemical Essays on Translation*). Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2003). Nonostante la sensibilità crescente per la complessità del tradurre, però, alcuni studiosi, perfino un George Steiner, tendono ancora a parlare della traduzione in termini primariamente linguistici come rivela l'uso in inglese degli acronimi SL e TL che corrispondono alle espressioni *Source Language* e *Target Language*. Si è consapevoli della dimensione culturale solo in seconda istanza.

È curioso poi che chi traduce si veda ancora con gli occhi di un pubblico per il quale tradurre è, per citare Gregory Rabassa in *Trans-*



lation. *The Theory and Practice* (ed. Avadhesh K. Singh. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1996), “a kind of bastard art, an intermediate form, and as such always vulnerable to attack” (21). Invece la presenza di chi traduce sta prendendo sempre più importanza di questi tempi, mano a mano che diventa più evidente la funzione fondamentale di ogni forma di traduzione nel plasmare e rivelare aspetti, eventi e rapporti all’interno del nostro mondo.

Sempre nel volume citato, *Translation Studies*, trovo un articolo che mi servirà d’avvio a un discorso che mi sta a cuore. Lawrence Venuti, traduttore dall’italiano in inglese, cita William Weaver il quale asserisce che “tradurre è in gran parte un’attività irriflessiva, con decisioni che si prendono inconsciamente e con scelte quasi istintive basate sulla conoscenza dell’autore e del periodo storico” (219). Sulla base di questa testimonianza, Venuti inizia un esame della traduzione in chiave psicoanalitica, enumerando le “differenze” irriducibili insite nella traduzione. “Translators...can never entirely avoid the loss that the translating process enforces on the foreign text, on its meanings and structures, figures and traditions. and translators cannot obviate the gain in their translating, the construction of different meanings, structures, figures and traditions and thereby the creation of textual effects that go far beyond the establishment of a lexicographic equivalence” (TS 219). Gli esempi e le analisi che Venuti presenta sono molto meno convincenti delle sue premesse (chi si basa su un metodo specifico spesso lo usa in modo troppo meccanico), ma il suo contributo—per me—porta la discussione nella direzione giusta.

Mi sono divertita a pensare a un titolo per queste mie poche parole sulla traduzione. Prima ho scritto: “La traduzione *in corpore vivi*”. Mi piaceva l’allusione alla vivisezione. Poi mi è venuta in mente un’espressione più leggera e magari sensuale “La doppia infedeltà” che sottolinea la “duplicità” del tradurre (Cees Koster, *Translation Studies* 26). E dirò qualcosa proprio su questo, cioè parlerò della traduzione in quanto ricerca di una fedeltà impossibile.

Alla base di ogni infedeltà c’è l’amore e la traduzione è un atto d’amore. Ma è un amore dalle cento facce. Per appassionarsi alla traduzione infatti bisogna amare profondamente non solo delle lingue specifiche ma proprio quello strumento multiforme della nostra umanità che è il linguaggio. Nel tradurre si attinge anche, coscientemente o no, alla conoscenza che il corpo ha raccolto e elaborato durante tutta la sua vita. L’amore viene dalla scoperta di

un'opera, scoperta che si vuole condividere con chi è al di fuori dei confini del nostro universo. Per esempio, è la passione che prese i giovani americani, come un William Weaver, quando arrivarono a Roma nel 1945 e scoprirono gli scrittori italiani, i Pavese, i Vittorini, i Silone. È la passione delle donne negli ultimi trent'anni che le ha portate a valorizzare de Cespedes, Ginzburg, Morante, Bianchini, Cutrufelli, Maraini. È l'aprirsi e il rivelarsi di paesi di antica civiltà come l'India e la Cina al nostro mondo che era rimasto chiuso nella propria ignoranza e senso di superiorità. Tradurre è la sfida all'incomunicabilità. È una forma di fiducia nell'altro, accompagnata dalla paura di non trovare le parole giuste per raggiungerlo

Come si arriva a tradurre? A chi sogna di costruire la macchina traduttrice perfetta ricordo che essa esiste già in miliardi di copie da migliaia di anni. Di piccole dimensioni, fa il suo lavoro senza neanche accorgersene a cominciare dal momento in cui esce dall'antro in cui è stata costruita. È ogni persona. Odori, suoni, sensazioni tattili, gesti, colori, diventano rapidamente per ognuno di noi parte di un raffinato complesso interpretativo. Su questo s'innesta la parola, nella versione che rimarrà la più intima, quella che chiamiamo "lingua materna". Eventi—fra cui la lettura—miti, sogni, idee, stili modellano poi l'universo esistenziale di ogni persona. In contatto con altri individui, tradurre l'esperienza in materia linguistica diventa una tecnica/arte di meravigliosa complessità.

E chi traduce per professione, dove si posiziona in questa storia? Ecco, qui troviamo gli amori molteplici e il desiderio di sperimentare una seconda, una terza, un'altra vita. Chi traduce vive più vite; **deve** vivere più vite. Nessuno al mondo, è vero—con buona pace dei reazionari—vive una vita singola. Tutti partono all'avventura in linguaggi diversi, lingue non materne, dialetti, patois, gerghi....Ma chi pratica la traduzione è consapevole sia della propria passione che dell'esistenza di altri amanti di quello strumento che lo affascina. Per soddisfare la propria passione si fa della traduzione un mestiere anche senza alcuna ricompensa eccetto il proprio godimento. E così chi scrive trova un amore simile al proprio in chi traduce.

Che cosa fa chi ama? Cerca di arrivare al cuore, all'essere più profondo dell'altro. Ma rimane sempre un millimetro al di qua. Lo stesso avviene per chi ama qualunque testo. L'impasto di esperienza vitale divenuta espressione linguistica per mano di chi scrive è una complessità che dà le vertigini. Tutto c'entra: il corpo e la mente, l'immaginazione e la concretezza, la storia e il sogno. Si chiama

“tradurre” l’uscire da sé, dal proprio universo, ed entrare nella vertigine altrui, un’avventura esaltante e presuntuosa. Uno abbandona il conosciuto—o meglio, ciò che è quasi conosciuto—e cerca di afferrare il quasi sconosciuto. Chi traduce si trova preso fra due universi che lo attraggono e lo eludono. Parlare d’infedeltà, come tanti hanno fatto, non si addice soltanto alla traduzione—la famosa “bella infedele”—ma anche al rapporto con l’universo di chi traduce con l’universo di origine. Si tratta insomma, inevitabilmente, di una doppia infedeltà.

Cosa concludo?

Non ha alcun senso parlare di “traduzione letterale” come si fa con gli studenti, o di “traduzione infedele” usando un vecchio cliché. C’è solo la “traslazione” di un mondo in un altro, cioè un tentativo di fedeltà totale destinato a fallire. Chi traduce porta tutta se stessa all’atto di tradurre. E trova davanti a sé una complessità che la sfida, che esige un lavoro minuzioso e audace. Oserei dire che c’è solo una traduzione possibile per ogni momento della vita individuale e per ogni momento storico (e qui cominciano altre complicazioni).

Chi traduce quindi deve possedere fino all’intimo due universi o più—e questo condanna al privilegio di sentirsi al tempo stesso profondamente radicati e disperatamente divisi.

Infine: ogni traduzione si propone, anche senza esserne cosciente, come seduzione verso la conoscenza del testo di origine. Perché ogni amante vuole che altri sappiano della sua buona fortuna. Nella certezza che nessuno arriverà mai alla

quasi-perfezione della propria lettura.

Stando così le cose, uno deve per forza meravigliarsi che ci siano persone disposte a affrontare, traducendo, un’insicurezza garantita. Ma non è anche straordinario che si osi amare?

### Opere utili

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## Translating Andrea Camilleri into English: an Impossible Task?

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by Gaetano Cipolla

Andrea Camilleri — who seems to have replaced Gesualdo Bufalino and Vincenzo Consolo as the current writer who best expresses the island's "sikelitude"—is enjoying tremendous popularity in Italy. His books seem to be ubiquitous and he seems to have an inexhaustible supply of them stashed away in his desk drawer. So much so that I saw an article in *Arte e Folklore di Sicilia*, a quarterly publication of Catania, which proclaimed in capital letters "Basta, Camilleri!" which I could readily translate with "Enough already, Camilleri!" making a rhyme without attempting to do so. At any rate, everyone who dabbles in translation or has an interest in it when the subject of Camilleri comes up, inevitably asks "how in the world can you translate Camilleri?" Needless to say, I count myself among those who have asked the same question. The straight and immediate answer that comes to my mind is that you really cannot translate Camilleri, if you expect to present an English-speaking Camilleri. But I would give the same answer to the question "how can you translate Dante, or Petrarch or Calvino?" Theorists of translation can tell you in two hundred pages or more that translation is an impossible task. The reality is, however, that translation has always been part of the literary world and it has been accomplished in various degrees of fidelity since the beginning of time. As a practicing translator I am more interested in the pragmatic aspect of translation that accomplishes every day something that presumably is impossible to do. Thus, it is true, Camilleri is impossible to translate, but I venture to say that his books will in fact be translated one after the other. Already the first translation has come out. It's *The Shape of Water, La forma dell'acqua*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli and I understand that two more novels will be coming out in April. Many more of Camilleri's books have been translated into French and Spanish, although I have no data on these. I do have a copy of *La forme de l'eau*, by the French translator Serge Quadrupani and I have been comparing it to the English translation to see how the two approached the subject.

As most of you know, if you have read any of Camilleri's books,

the problem of translation is complicated by the writer's intentional interspersing of his text with Sicilian words or expressions camouflaged as Italian and his frequent use of Sicilian especially in dialogues. It is clear that the conscious use of dialect, whether in an undiluted form or camouflaged, transformed or even parodic, constitutes the most obvious element of this writer's style. A translator faces three different challenges of various difficulties. The first is the fairly straight forward problem of translating Italian into English which ought not create much of a problem; the second is the frequent use of the Sicilian language—notice I said language, not dialect—in dialogues with people who for one reason or another speak in that language. This too should not represent an unsurmountable difficulty since Sicilian is a language like all the others and as such can and is normally translated to English. The easiest way of translating these dialogues is to add a qualifying sentence that says these words were spoken in Sicilian. Another way could be to translate the dialogues into slang or colloquial speech. The third and certainly the most difficult subtext to translate in Camilleri is his unpredictable and whimsical interspersing of the narrative with Italianized Sicilian words. The use of these words, in fact, distinguishes Camilleri from other Sicilian writers such as Vitaliano Brancati, Sciascia or Bufalino, who used Sicilian occasionally but always with transparent objectives. At any rate, it is probably the most recognizable feature of his style and no doubt contributed, in some measure, to the huge success of his work.

This kind of linguistic code-switching is not discussed by academic translation theorists and practitioners. No one, at least as far as I have been able to read, has addressed the problem from a theoretical or practical point of view. Luigi Bonaffini in an article on the translation of dialect poetry confirms that the American translators he has studied completely ignore the problem and proceed as if the original texts were written by a monolingual author. But this is a serious problem, especially when you translate from Italian which is unique among the romance languages for having dialects that are not dialects but different languages that boast of a long and important literary tradition. Thus, translation theorists are not much help to us in this endeavor. In my translation of Giovanni Meli's *Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza* I encountered some code-switching that I tried to differentiate from the regular text by using a more archaic/poetic diction than in the normal text. The text of the *Don Chisciotti*

is written in Sicilian but on two occasions the Knight of La Mancha quoted Petrarch. To encourage his squire to be more adventurous Don Chisciotti uses one of Petrarch's Italian lines: "un bel morire tutta la vita onora" which I rendered with "a worthy death brings honor to thy life", where the archaic-poetic word "thy" was meant to signal that it was a poetic quotation. But Camilleri's use of Sicilian goes beyond the occasional quotation. It constitutes an intrinsic part of his style and as such its function must be understood before any attempts can be made not to duplicate it—because that is impossible—but to come as close to it as possible. To develop a strategy the translator must understand what Camilleri is trying to accomplish by interjecting the Italianized Sicilian into his narrative. This task is not an easy one and it certainly would require a great more study than I have been able to devote to it. Nevertheless, a few observations can help us to orient ourselves as we attempt to offer solutions to the problem at hand.

With this in mind, I picked out at random a paragraph from one of the thirty stories in *Un mese con Montalbano*, the Sicilian police inspector whom the French liken to their Inspector Maigret. The story is entitled "La Sigla". Let's read the paragraph:

*Calorio non si chiamava Calorio, ma in tutta Vigata lo conoscevano con questo nome. Era arrivato in paisi non si sa da dove una ventina d'anni avanti, un paro di pantaloni ch' erano più pirtusa che stoffa, legati alla vita con una corda, giacchetta tutta pezze pezze all'arlecchino, piedi scavusi ma pulitissimi. Campava dimandando la limosina, ma con discrezione, senza dare fastiddio, senza spavintare fimmine e picciliddri. Teneva bene il vino, quando poteva accattarsene una bottiglia, tanto che nessuno l'aveva veduto a malappena brillo: e dire che c'erano state occasioni di feste che di vino se n'era scolato a litri.*

The italics are mine and indicate Sicilian words and expressions that the author uses throughout the book as an intrinsic component of his style. For the moment, we will postpone any consideration of how these stylistic devices characterize the text. But, as anyone can see, their employment has a definite impact on the reader, each word or expression is charged to express significant bits of meanings, nuances and color that cannot be completely ignored by the would-be translator without flattening the text, reduc-



ing a stereophonic sound into a single speaker.

The author here is making great demands on the translator. The italicized words are in effect Sicilian words that have been modified to sound Italian by changing a vowel or two, and they can be understood because the author placed them in a context that even non-Sicilians can guess at, even though they may not know the exact meaning. *Calorio* is thus the shortened form of *Calogero*, but it is not *Calorriu*, which is the exact Sicilian name. The word *paro* is the same as *paio* in Italian, but in Sicilian it would be written as *paru*. We can guess why Camilleri chose to use “*paro*” instead of “*paio*” (it is easier for Sicilian speakers to say “*paru*” instead of “*paio*”). The etymological equivalent of *pirtusa* in Italian is “*pertugi*” (holes), but in Italian they would identify physical holes in structures, not holes in clothing, as the Sicilian *pirtusa* does here. “*Dimandando la limosina*” would be “*domandando l’elemosina*” in Italian, but “*dumannannu a limosina*” in Sicilian. The double “*d*” of “*Senza dare fastiddio*” identifies it as Sicilian. “*Senza spavintare fimmine e picciliddri*” in Italian would be “*senza spaventare donne e bambini*” and in Sicilian “*senza fari scantari fimmini e picciliddri*”. The “*ddri*” ending of “*picciliddri*” identifies the speaker as a person from the area of Agrigento where the cacuminal sound of “*ddu*” as in “*Turiddu*” is pronounced as “*Turiddru*”. “*Accattarsene*” might not be readily understood as the equivalent of “*comprarsene*” if the context did not come to clarify it. In Sicilian, of course, the verb “*accattari*” from “*acheter*” commonly replaces the Italian “*comprare*.” The use of Italianized Sicilian or Sicilianized Italian as the case may be, was originally thought to be an impediment to non-Sicilians. In fact, in the first edition of *Il filo di turno*, the editor at Mondadori required Camilleri to add a glossary that would explain the Sicilian words to non-Sicilian readers. This feature has been dropped from subsequent books because it is in reality unnecessary for Italians. They can understand the text because Camilleri has become more skilled in placing them in a context that explains them better. Even if the terms are not understood exactly, Italians have a good idea of the possible meanings. At any rate, the presence of these words adds a certain strangeness to the narrative that the translator cannot ignore. The problem for non-Italians reading Camilleri in Italian is probably insurmountable because those who have learned Italian in school in a foreign country are notoriously poor at making connections between words that vary even very slightly

from the dictionary meanings. Such people have difficulty equating “limosina” with “elemosina” “paro” with “paio.”

Let us look at the paragraph in an attempt to discover whether the use of Sicilian adds dimensions of meaning and style that must be retained or somehow acknowledged by the translator.

The use of the form Calorio instead of Calogero has two purposes: it identifies the locus of the action and it suggests that the person has also been adopted as one of their own even though he is a foreigner. We are in Sicily and specifically in a town of which Saint Calogero is the Patron Saint. Vigàta is Camilleri’s fictional town, but it could be anywhere from Sciacca to Porto Empedocle. Saint Calogero, if I am not mistaken, is in fact the patron Saint of Sciacca and a few other towns in the Agrigento province. So perhaps a note should point this out. The term “paisi” is so close to “paese” it does not need an explanation, but it begins a series of interjections in Sicilian whose presence is highly subjective and unpredictable. There are cases when the Sicilian term used does not have an Italian counterpart and Camilleri uses it because the Sicilian is far more expressive and renders better what he had in mind. But in general, there does not seem to be any logic, either linguistically determined or contextually driven for the intrusion of such terms. Their presence does not seem to emerge out of a need to make a particular statement. One could ask Camilleri why he places Sicilian words into his narrative, I am confident he has been asked although I don’t know what his response may have been, but even if we knew what he said we would have to assess the effect that their presence has on the reader. I suggest that two of the reasons for the interjections are primarily to add color and to identify the narrator as a Sicilian. Ultimately it seems to me that Camilleri probably speaks like that himself, that is, from time to time, and in an unpredictable manner, he interjects Sicilian words into his speech. If that is so what purpose do the interjections have. I think that Camilleri uses this device for the purpose of making a connection with his listener, of somehow taking the reader into his confidence, by speaking a language that by its restrictive nature constitutes a “secret” jargon that both the writer and his listener understand. It is a method of drawing the readers into the web that he is spinning, an act of *captatio benevolentia*. Sicilians have been historically conditioned not to speak in their own language to strangers or anyone whom they do not know or trust. Camilleri, I think, is throwing in his Sicilian expressions as

hooks to draw readers into his world. As a literary ploy this is not new. Boccaccio establishes the same kind of relationship with his readers, a kind of complicity between author and reader that excludes some of the characters themselves. As Boccaccio lets us be a knowing audience, participants in the joke, Camilleri by using his Sicilianized Italian or Italianized Sicilian is forming a bond with the reader who understands—the trick is that after a while everyone understands—and the use of a different code does not exclude anyone.

These preliminary and somewhat tentative conclusions may be sufficient to start working on a strategy for the translation of Camilleri's text. Let's try to give a straightforward rendition of the paragraph without making any attempt at signaling the shift in code in the original.

Calorio's name was not Calorio, but in Vigata everyone knew him with that name. He had come to town, —nobody knows from where—about twenty years back, with a pair of pants more holes than fabric, tied at the waist with a rope, with a little jacket with so many patches he looked like a Harlequin, barefoot, but with very clean feet. He begged for a living, but discreetly, without bothering anyone, or scaring the women and children. He could hold his wine well, when he could afford to buy a bottle, so much so that nobody ever saw him even slightly drunk, in spite of the fact that there had been times during feast days when he had put away quite a few liters.

Few would argue that this is not a faithful rendition of the Italian text, in terms of the information conveyed. What is missing is the writer's voice, his gently mocking tone that emerges from his problematic use of the dialect. Having lost the metalinguistic component, i.e. the use of the dialect, the rendition is definitely flatter than the original. What options are open to a translator? It seems to me that if he wants to maintain a multilevel linguistic code he must couch his rendition with a least two, and possibly more, linguistic codes that would be accessible to the readers. If the audience for the novel is English, the translator could try to use standard English with American English as subtext. If he is American he might utilize expressions and idiomatic sentences that can be identified with a local dialect to render the Sicilianized Italian expressions. For ex-

ample, whenever possible he might interject Brooklinese or a local jargon of some kind into the stream of standard American English. Naturally the risk is great that the translator would introduce an alien dimensions into the novel, disregarding the fact that the action takes place in Sicily and such interjections would be considered out of sync with the environment. Failing this option, it seems to me, the only option left for the translator is to develop his own multiple level language made up of sequences that he himself considers normal and interjecting from time to time expressions that deviate in a consistent way from the dominant language. The types of deviation naturally would depend on the translator's background and preparation. But the deviations would not have to coincide with Camilleri's own departures from standard Italian. An attempt to make the deviations coincide with Camilleri's would probably be counterproductive. The translator would have to listen to his own voice and from time to time revert to his own subcode in a way that would mimic Camilleri's own procedure. With this in mind let us try a different rendition of the passage we have already translated.

'The following might be an improvement:

Calorio was not his name, but in Vigata the whole town knew him as Calorio. About twenty years back, he had *turned up* in town from God knows where, with a *pair of britches* that were *draftier than a barn* on account of the many holes, tied with a rope around his waist, and with a *raggedy* jacket so patched up *he looked like a circus clown*. He walked barefoot, but his feet were *spotless*. He *scraped along* by begging but without making a nuisance of himself, *never bothering nobody*, or *scaring the womenfolk or young'uns*. He held his liquor so well, when he could *scare up* enough to buy himself a bottle, that nobody ever saw him even *slightly pickled*; tough there had been times on Feast days when he had *put away* quite a few quarts.

The italicized words were chosen to convey a subtext normally associated with a slangy, folksy, homespun, Southern vocabulary that mimics though not in an obvious way what Camilleri is doing. Questionable grammatical structures like "never bothering nobody" or the use of local jargon "womenfolk and young'uns" or colloquial terms like "scare up," "pickled," or "scraped along" produce a multivoiced narrative that is akin to Camilleri's. No doubt this is

only an approximation of Camilleri's style. No translator expects a perfect correspondance between his version and the original. Translation is like riding a seesaw with the translator sitting on one end and the original author on the other. The translator's goal is to keep pace with the author, but he cannot help to rise higher at times or sink lower than the author. It is impossible to synchronize his movements so that they match perfectly with the author's. The important thing is to maintain a balance that allows peaks and valleys on either side. Some time the translator will overshoot the target, sometimes he will come up short. The important thing is to remain within an acceptable range of the author's text.

The sample translation of Camilleri's text was simply meant to point the way. I think that after a while the translator would develop a sub language that would serve him well whenever his fancy called for it. But it would be almost like speaking in falsetto. The danger to overdue it, of course, would be ever present. This danger must have dawned on Camilleri himself, for as his stories develop, he seems to lighten the dosage of the code-switching to a bare minimum and often dropping it altogether. In the *Forma dell'acqua* for example, in the last few chapters, except for one or two words, Camilleri uses standard Italian, almost as if he forgot to throw in a few of his trademark words or perhaps because he wanted to develop his detective conclusions and the words would have been a distraction.

When I learned that Stephen Sartarelli had translated *La forma dell'acqua* I bought a copy to see how he had solved the problems discussed above. And I must say, he solved the problem by completely ignoring it. In all fairness to him, I think Sartarelli did a creditable job. His translation is highly readable, accurate in terms of the content of Camilleri's text. He captures Camilleri's irony fairly well and I did not find any factual misreadings of the text. Nevertheless, Sartarelli's English text is monolingual, with one exception where he translates some Sicilian dialogue with American slang or colloquialism. But the code-switching that we have talking about is completely ignored. And I must say that the French translator who addressed the problem and claimed that he would occasionally intersperse his translation with Francitan terms, that is, a kind of modern provençal, if I understand it correctly, to provide a similar code-switching as Camilleri, does not seem to do much of it, although my French is probably not good enough to spot the code-switching. Allow me a brief comparison between the three texts:

Pino e Saro si avviarono verso il posto di lavoro *ammuttando* ognuno il proprio carrello. Per arrivare alla *mànnara* ci voleva quasi una *mezzorata* di strada se fatta *a pedi lento* come loro stavano facendo. Il primo quarto d'ora se lo passarono *mutàngheri*, già sudati e *impiccaticci*. Poi fu Saro a rompere il silenzio.

“Questo Pecorilla è un cornuto” proclamò.

“Un grandissimo cornuto” rinforzò Pino.

I have added the italics to the words that represent Camilleri's code-switching. Here is the French translation:

Pino et Saro se dirigèrent vers leur lieu de travail en tirant chacun sa carriole. Pour arriver au Bercail, il fallait une demi-heure de route, quand on la suivait à pas lents comme eux. Le premier quart d'heure, ils le passèrent sans mot dire, déjà tout pegueux de sueur. Puis ce fut Saro qui rompit le silence.

—Ce Pecorilla est un cornard, proclama-t-il.

—Un cornard de premiere grandeur, rajouta Pino.

And here is Sartarelli's rendition:

Pino and Saro headed toward their assigned work sector, each pushing his own cart. To get to the Pasture it took half an hour, if one was slow of foot as they were. The first fifteen minutes they spent without speaking, already sweaty and sticky. It was Saro who broke the silence.

“That Pecorilla is a bastard,” he announced.

“A fucking bastard,” clarified Pino.

As you can see, neither translator has acknowledged the code-switching or made an attempt to go beyond the surface meaning of the words and even at that level one could be picky and find unfelicitous renderings. Monsieur Quadruppani actually has Saro and Pino pulling a two wheeled “carriole” behind them when they are pushing it in front of them. “Carriole” is a Provençal word described as having two wheels, thus not equivalent to the one-wheel Italian “carriola” with which he probably wanted to mimic Camilleri's code-switching. In the process, however, he mistranslated the sentence. One could argue minor points in both translations, but let's take one word that both translated in a similar fashion: “mutàngheri” Surely it means more than “sans mot dire” and

“without speaking”. The word does not exist in Italian, but it’s understood because of the context. In Sicilian it means more than “taciturn,” “unspeaking,” it means an unwillingness to speak, a sullenness brought about by being engrossed in one’s thoughts, by mulling over things. It also means an inability to speak. *Mutàngaru* in the region of Agrigento describes also a deaf-mute who cannot speak clearly because he cannot hear. I would have said “brooding silently,” or “in bleak silence” or “stubbornly silent” or something like that. The word “ammuttando” is also more than “pushing” or the French “pulling” because the Sicilian is more than “spingere”. The word is strangely onomatopoeic. I can’t seem to pronounce it without moving my body forward, which is exactly why Camilleri chose it. He wanted to convey the considerable energy required to make the carts move forward. Simply *pushing* or *pulling* would not do.

I suppose it’s fair to ask how I would translate this passage. So here is my tentative version:

Pino and Saro started out toward their assigned work area, each leaning forward on his cart. It would take half an hour to walk to the pasture if you moved one foot after the other as slowly as they were doing. They spent the first quarter of an hour, already sweaty and sticky, stubbornly clinging to their silence. Then Saro was the first to speak.

“That Pecorilla is a cuckold!” he blurted out.

“A major cuckold,” Pino added.

Sartarelli’s use of the word “bastard” is probably more appropriate as an American epithet, but in using “cuckold” I wanted to retain a measure of the strangeness evoked by the code-switching in Camilleri’s text. Americans generally do not use the word and some would have to look it up in a dictionary. Hence “cuckold” would work almost the same way for Americans as one of Camilleri’s Sicilian words for Italians. In conclusion, while it is possible to achieve a similar effect in the English translation, it is very likely that the translator would adopt the minimax strategy, that is, he will try to obtain the maximum effect with the minimum of effort and in real life it takes too much time to imitate Camilleri’s style. Hence the English translations of his work will inevitably be monovocal.

**Eliot, Pound, Waley, Sayers:  
Notes Towards a Politics of Translation 1920-1960**

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The writings on translation by two household names of literary modernism – Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot – and by two minor modernist and late modernist figures – Arthur Waley and Dorothy L. Sayers – draw attention to how theories of translation have been instrumental in defining the politics of national and literary identity in the twentieth century. My analysis will focus on writers who enjoy the status of original authors (Pound and Eliot) and writers almost exclusively known for their translating activities (Waley) or enjoying popularity thanks to their detective fiction and academic credentials (Sayers). This comparison will look at the relationship between modernity and the past, genius and context, and elitism and democratization, always through the vantage point of theories of translation. This will lead me to explore how the politics of translation and the politics of literary history are intertwined.

**I. T.S. Eliot: Seneca's tragedies, 'italianità', and the birth of a nation**

In his preface to *Elizabethan Dramatists*, T.S. Eliot claims to have included 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation' (1927) in order to 'vindicate Seneca from the charge of being responsible for the horrors of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.'<sup>1</sup> However, what is presented as a mere 'vindication' of the role of Seneca is soon transformed into a theory which places translation at the centre of the poetic and linguistic renewal which makes of the Elizabethan period the founding moment in the history of English letters and identity.

The essay is divided into three sections, which analyse 'the character, virtues and vices of the Latin tragedies themselves'; the directions in which these tragedies influence Elizabethan drama; and 'the part they played in extending the influence of Seneca and their actual merit as translations and as poetry.'<sup>1</sup> Eliot wants to revive Seneca because no other author has been equally vilified in modern times and loved during the Renaissance; this Seneca is not Dante's 'Seneca morale', but the one usually chastised for his excess and bombast, the 'bad influence' on Renaissance literature. Seneca's tragedies, meant to be spoken rather than staged, are part of a 'non-theatrical drama' which is labelled by Eliot a 'curious freak', and linked, not unproblematically, to the notion of 'race': 'the theatre is a gift which has not been vouchsafed to every race, even of the highest culture. It has been given



to the Hindus, the Japanese, the Greeks; the English, the French, and the Spanish, at moments; in less measure to the Teutons and the Scandinavians. It was not given to the Romans, or generously to their successors, the Italians.<sup>2</sup> The classic association between Latin countries and instinct justifies the Romans' weakness for lowly comedy and circus and the Italians' love for the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the puppet show. Moreover, the questionable link between 'race' and genre allows Eliot to read Seneca as the product of Nero's decadent era and as a representative of a Roman 'latinità' characterised by a conflict between passion and duty (the only one present in Seneca) and by rhetoric (a sign of modernity for Eliot): Seneca does not epitomise bad taste, he embodies the Latin era.

This begrudging vindication soon develops into the arguments that Seneca's responsibility for the 'Tragedy of Blood' (that is, for the horrors usually claimed to disfigure Elizabethan drama) has been overestimated; his role in initiating a rhetoric of bombast 'misconstrued'; and his influence on Shakespeare and his contemporaries 'undervalued'.<sup>3</sup> Seneca's influence is not on the plots of the *Tragedy of Blood* and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, which derive instead from contemporary French and, above all, from Italian theatre, 'blood-thirsty in the extreme' and characterised by marvellous machinery and luxurious settings, revolving as it does around the spectacular and the sensational. Italian theatre had for Eliot everything it needed to dazzle the imagination 'of unsophisticated northerners emerging into a period of prosperity and luxury'.<sup>4</sup>

This rather predictable move in Eliot's argument is based on the links between Italian character, sophistication, and cruelty – a constant association in English literature, which has made ample use of Italy as a form of release of restraint.<sup>5</sup> Seneca is not a direct influence on English theatre; rather, Italian theatre has offered to Kyd and Peele their blood-thirsty plots. Seneca's influence, too big to be ignored, is on the language; without it, it would be impossible to even conceive of Elizabethan theatre. Most importantly, his influence derives from the translations of his tragedies which circulated at the time: the *Tenne Tragedies* (1559 e il 1566). Among them, *Troas* (1559), *Thyestes* (1560) and *Hercules Furens* (1561) by Jasper Heywood, *Oedipus* of Alexander Nevyle (1563), *Octavia of Nuce*, *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, *Hercules Oetaus* and *Hyppolitus* of John Studley (1566 and 1567). The publication of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's *Aeneid* in 1557 provides Elizabethan drama with its 'blank verse', immediately put to use into the English versions of Seneca's tragedies, which could not translate the solemn qualities of the Senecan iambic into the 'old fourteener' or the 'heroic couplet', and which therefore contributed both to the birth of the 'blank verse' and to the poetical renewal of the Elizabethan period. Such renewal is also based on radical modifications to the Seneca's texts: in Heywood's translation of the *Troas*, for instance, what was a simple mention of Achilles' ghost becomes a soliloquy of 13 stanzas, conceived for the stage and boasting a rhetorical quality which Peele

could not have equalled. Heywood and Studley still use the fourteeners, but they juxtapose it to the blank verse in the chorus – which gives the translators an opportunity for adding, reducing, omitting and substituting in order to increase the dramatic effect – thus creating a contrast between old and new. The Tragedy of Blood was born thanks to Heywood's translations, which marked the boundary between old and new versification.

Eliot links this historical moment to the issue of national identity by claiming that while Boccaccio and Machiavelli in Italy and Froissart and Joinville in France had already formed the local mind, the Elizabethan mind 'grew and matured through its verse rather than through its prose'. Prose evolved too, but much more slowly; the *Tenne Tragedies* demonstrate instead how the previously ubiquitous 'fourteener' will have to give way to the 'blank verse' of Henry Howard whose *Aeneid* is taken to be not only a model of dignity, but also apt to the bombast of Seneca. If the fourteener was good for comedy, this new verse makes language explode 'like new wine bursting old bottles'. The Elizabethan bombast is that still present in Chapman's *Iliad*, and will settle only much later, in the sobriety of Dryden and Hobbes.

Eliot reads the translations in the *Tenne Tragedies* as a historical passage from the old Tudor language, still chained to Chaucerian models, to the Elizabethan one, based on Seneca. Violence, excess, passion, and rhetorical are all linked to a sophisticated 'foreignness', that of Italy, following an ideological move which can be indeed traced back to the Elizabethan period. From Webster to Shakespeare, from Byron's carnival to Forster's Tuscany, 'italianità', excess, passion, violence, and rhetoric remain closely connected, and opposed to an idea of 'Englishness' as decorum, measure, but – surely – also as a limitation.<sup>6</sup>

Eliot thus redefines a central historical period through a theory of translation in which the influence of an Italianised Seneca and the invention of a Seneca of 'horrors', and 'dramatic theatre' are at the origins of the renewal of versification. Such a renewal is not only formal but also semantic, lexical, and epistemological. Eliot develops a notion of English tradition by distinguishing on the one hand its Anglosaxon past, a non-dramatic past, and on the other the foreign influence, or, even better, the Latin influence (a term which in this essay spans from ancient Rome to the Italian Renaissance). If the 'latinità' is a justification for the 'bombast' of Seneca, it is again the 'latinità', reincarnated into Italianness, which justifies the excesses of the Tragedies of Blood.

The birth of Englishness coincides with the birth of theatre, or, better, of a 'theatrical drama', a drama of action and not only of language, and prepares the ground for a Shakespeare who would be unthinkable without such translations. The Elizabethan period is thus the foundation of a notion of Englishness,<sup>7</sup> it is the historical locus in which tradition recognises its own origins. Tradition springs out of a cultural innovation which transla-

tion makes possible. Since for Eliot 'few things that can happen to a nation are more important than the invention of a new form of verse',<sup>8</sup> when he introduces Pound's *Selected Poems* he links his own free verse to the Elizabethan theatre, establishing a connection between his own originality and a period which simultaneously represents the origin, the change, and the development of a nation.<sup>9</sup>

## II. Pictorial visibility, translation and totalitarianism: Ezra Pound

In his introduction to Ezra Pound's literary essays, T.S. Eliot claims that 'any pioneer of a revolution in poetry – and Mr. Pound is more responsible for the XXth Century revolution in poetry than is any other individual – is sure to attack some venerated names.'<sup>10</sup> This is the well-known picture of Pound as a revolutionary, an image which Pound himself promoted and reproduced in his theories of translation focused on the shock of the new. Some of Pound's writings on translation, less known than his essay on Cavalcanti, can be helpful to reconsider the image of Pound as a solitary genius who, again in Eliot's words, 'invented' Chinese poetry 'as we know it today'.<sup>11</sup>

Translation connects two main aspects of Pound's thought: on the one hand, the notion that Chinese ideograms embody the natural link between thing and word, an idea which Pound inherits from Fenollosa; on the other hand, concepts of purity, order, coherence, will, and dynamism, which gradually coincide with a fascist idea of renewal based on authoritarianism and anti-semitism.

Pound's 1919 essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*<sup>12</sup> in which he transcribes and develops the late Ernest Fenollosa's notes, is an early theorisation of how the Chinese written character can be a source of innovation thanks to its non-arbitrary relation between thing and word:

But Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operation of nature. In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between thing and sign: all depends upon sheer convention. But the Chinese method follows natural suggestion. [...] One superiority of verbal poetry as an art rests in its getting back to the fundamental reality of *time*. Chinese poetry has the unique advantage of combining both elements. It speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sound. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dram[a]tic [sic]. In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their own fate.<sup>13</sup>

The hybrid nature attributed to the Chinese character enables Pound to believe that 'the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second world of metaphor, but has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigour and vividness than any phonetic language.'<sup>14</sup> The Chinese written character thus seems to possess the energy towards which poetry aspires and which attempts to reproduce by crowding – since it has no better tools – the highest number of meanings into one word or one line.<sup>15</sup>

Energy, a very important concept within Pound's process of innovation and one which finds a home in the Chinese character, will lead him to claim in 1937 that his 'version' of Confucius' *Ta Hio* is his 'most important work in the last three decades.'<sup>16</sup> In this essay Pound asserts that a 'diseased' and 'degraded' West is in urgent need of Confucius; connecting Confucian will and Dantean *directio voluntatis*, and ranging through a wide spectrum of medical metaphors spanning from the hypodermic needle to the straight jacket, Pound hails the forty-six characters of the *Ta Hio* as the beginning of a process of renewal which will invigorate a paradoxically ill-fed West. Translation, the moving across cultures, and the publication of works with both original and facing translation are thus presented as a way of regenerating the West linguistically and culturally.

The necessary character of the *Ta Hio* will be violently expanded upon in the essay 'Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)',<sup>17</sup> in which Pound defends his previous work from the accusations of having modernised Confucius and distinguishes between inclusion and ambiguity in translation. Pound's attacks against what he calls 'under-translation' (paradoxically seen as a sign of the translator's lack of humbleness) can be traced back to the difference he drew in 1920 between two kinds of obscurity in translation, one unjustifiably linked to the expression and one inherent in the 'thing', and thus defended in the name of modernist experimentalism:

Obscurities *not* inherent in the matter, obscurities due not to the thing but to the wording are a botch, and are not worth preserving in a translation. The work lives not by them but despite them. Obscurities inherent in the thing occur when the author is piercing, or trying to pierce into, uncharted regions; when he is trying to express things not yet current, not yet worn into phrases; when he is ahead of the emotional, or philosophic sense (as a painter might be ahead of the colour sense) of his contemporaries.<sup>18</sup>

In Pound avant-garde and translation are experimental activities which ought to be 'before their time', and yet they are closely connected to reac-

tionary ideological positions. Through Dante's Latin (whose *directio voluntatis* is evoked more than once) and ancient Greek, Pound claims that Mang Tsze, against Christian ethics, is in favour of an economy of abundance; through a sinister and violent anti-semitic attack, the author distinguishes between such an economy and what he describes as 'the semitic excess'. This is exemplary of the very problematic role which translation plays in Pound. What Pound describes as Mang Tsze's 'original' text, which is praised as Confucian because 'totalitarian',<sup>19</sup> is opposed to the 'semitic insanity' and to Socrates. It will have, according to Pound, 'a fresh impact on to more thoughtful minds.'<sup>20</sup>

Pound will go as far as claiming in 1941 in an article published on the *Meridiano di Roma* that:

Confucio ed il suo più grande commentatore Menzio, hanno un significato per noi oggi in Italia. Hanno una funzione nel programma educativo del Fascismo anche se non ce ne rendiamo pienamente conto. Mussolini e Hitler per magnifico intuito seguono le dottrine di Confucio. Re Vittorio Emanuele è un sovrano confuciano. Non basta leggere una sola volta una sua versione, bisogna, come io stesso continuo a fare, leggere e rileggere il testo originale e ideogrammatico col commento accanto.' [Confucius and his greatest commentator, Mang Tsze, have a significance for us in Italy. They have a role within the fascist educational programme even though we might not fully realise this. Mussolini and Hitler thanks to their magnificent intuition follow Confucius' doctrines. King Vittorio Emanuele is a Confucian sovereign. It is not enough to read once his translation, one must – as I do – read and reread the original text written in ideograms with its facing commentary].<sup>21</sup>

Pound's trajectory goes from the Chinese character's dynamism to the power of the fascist anti-semitic State.<sup>22</sup> The essay on Mang Tsze and its later ramifications raise the classic problem of the paradoxical proximity of avant-garde and fascism in English modernism.<sup>23</sup> In Pound, a past which is both geographically and temporally distant (twentieth-century Provence, thirteenth-century Tuscany, and the China of Confucius or Mang Tsze) is used to advocate for an urgent solution to the problem of a diseased and decadent society.<sup>24</sup> In this way, translating is ideologically aligned with a reactionary dynamism which coincides with order, hierarchy, and authoritarianism. China's alterity is transformed into a totalitarian model to emulate, producing a structure able to survive only by debasing another kind of alterity, which in Pound is Jewishness: following a classic reactionary model, Pound defines 'semitism' as the omnipresent threat, origin of a degraded and diseased society which can aspire to its renewal only by blindly

obeying a totalitarian regime. Such a regime is represented by Confucius and Mang Tsze, who represent a different kind of otherness able to rejuvenate a decadent society. Such Confucius and Mang Tsze are eminently Poundian characters, who are said to be different but mirror what is already there: the totalitarian state.<sup>25</sup>

### III. The invisible translator: Arthur Waley

Arthur Waley is the first twentieth-century writer to translate the great names in Chinese and Japanese poetry, giving shape to a picture of the East which will dominate the West for over a century. He is also the figure most frequently juxtaposed to Pound's modernist take on the Orient.<sup>26</sup> A comparison between Waley and Pound casts some light on the different connections that these two writers establish between translation and national identity; it will also question the frequent role of Pound as the only mediator between West and East in histories of literature.

Octavio Paz, in *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, claims that he has never been persuaded by Pound's theories of translation, but that he has always been fascinated by his activity as a translator, and in particular as a translator of Chinese poetry. Such a division enables Paz to praise the fresh quality of Pound's translations while rejecting the more problematic ideological implications of his theories of translation. Paz follows Eliot in saying that Pound invented Chinese poetry in the West, and both agree that Pound's great contribution has been to destroy the myth that translation can bring back an untainted idea of the original. For Eliot, the original is matter *an sich*, unknowable by definition: thus, every translation must be rethought as an interpretive exercise bound to its own time, able to enrich and renew the existing poetic tradition.<sup>27</sup> Pound the 'fabbro' [forger] and the artifex, rather than the theoretician, is rescued by the critical tradition: he is the artist who, according to Hugh Kenner's famous definition, 'never translates into something which already exists in English.'<sup>28</sup>

To avoid cleansing Pound's reputation as a practitioner from the debris of his anti-semitic theorisations and to redefine the link between translation and totalitarianism, it is politically useful to look at Arthur Waley (1889-1966).<sup>29</sup> Poet and translator at the margins of the Bloomsbury group, Waley has often been fashioned in literary histories as the anti-Pound: if Pound is the source of modern poetic revolution thanks to his translations able to invent the Orient, Waley is the learned translator from the Chinese and the Japanese, laboriously and painstakingly constructing the first bridge between modern East and West. Critics Ivan Morris and Jonathan Spence have attempted to vindicate Waley's importance in having altered forever the way in which the twentieth century conceives of the Orient by drawing attention to how twentieth century artists from Bertold Brecht (*Chinesische Gedichte*, 1939) to Blair Fairchild (*Songs from the Chinese*, 1922), Aaron Copland

(*Old Poems*, 1923), and Benjamin Britten (*Songs from the Chinese*),<sup>30</sup> had access to the East exclusively through Waley's translations.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 33. Suffice it to think of Shakespeare's Italy and of Byron's carnivals, but also of contemporary British crime fiction set in Italy, such as that produced by Michael Dibdin, or of Jeanette Winterson's Venetian 'passions'.

<sup>6</sup> Michele Marrapodi et. al (eds.), *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1988); Philip Dodd and Robert Colls (eds.) *Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1987); Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990); Alessandra Marzola, *Englishness* (Florence: Carocci, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Elizabethan', p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, edited and with an introduction by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), pp. x-xi.

<sup>10</sup> *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974 [1954]), p. xi.

<sup>11</sup> Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest Fenellosa and Ezra Pound *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, *Little Review*, 6:5, (September 1919), pp. 62-64; reprinted in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose, Contributions to Periodicals*, eds. Lea Baechler, James Longenbach and Walton A. Litz (New York: Garland, 1991), vol. III,

pp. 326-328; 331-336; 346-351; 361-364. Among the many works by Pound on the East see *Cathai* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), translated as *Catai*, ed. Mary de Rachelwiltz (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1987); *Plays Modelled on the No*, (1916) ed. Donald Gallup (Toledo: Friends of the University of Toledo Libraries, 1987); Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, *'Noh' or Accomplishment: A Study of the Classical Stage of Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1916); *Confucio. Ta Hsueh. Ta S'eu. Dai Gaku. Studio integrale*, Italian version by Ezra Pound and Alberto Luchini (Rapallo, 1942); *Testamento di Confucio, versione italiana di Ezra Pound e Alberto Luchini* (Venezia: Casa delle edizioni popolari, 1942); *Confucio. Studio integrale dell'asse che non vacilla*, (1928) con una nota di Achilles Fang (Milan, 1955). See also *Ezra Pound and Japan. Letters and Essays*, ed. Samehide Kodama (Redding Ridge: Black Swan, 1987) and Makoto Ueda, *Zeami, Basho, Yeats, Pound. A Study in Japanese and English Poetics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965).

<sup>13</sup> 'The Chinese Written Character', p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Chinese', 349-50.

<sup>15</sup> 'The Chinese', p. 362.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Immediate Need for Confucius', *Aryan Path*, (August 1937), reprinted in *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 89-94, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Mang-Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)', in *Selected Prose*, pp. 95-111.

<sup>18</sup> Ezra Pound, *Translators of Greek: Early Translation of Homer in Investigations of Ezra Pound Together with an Essay on the Chinese Written Character by Ernest Fenollosa* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), reprinted in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, pp. 249-275, pp. 268-269. See also *The Spirit of Romance* (Norfolk (Connecticut): New Directions, 1953), in which Pound writes: 'I resolved [...] that I would know the dynamic content from the shell, that I would know what was accounted poetry everywhere, what part of poetry was 'indestructible', what part *could not be lost* by translation, and – scarcely less important – what effects were obtainable in *one* language only and were utterly incapable of being translated.' p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Confucian is totalitarian', in *Mang-Tsze*, p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Confucian', p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> 'Confucio filosofo statale', *Meridiano di Roma*, 6: 9 (11 May 1941), pp. [1]-2, ristampato in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. VIII, pp. 119-120, p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> 'Alla comprensione della forza e del tono giusto del pensiero di Confucio, una comprensione della natura dell'ideogramma è indispensabile. L'ideogramma rappresenta più di una parola; cioè per tradurlo bisogna qualche volta adoperare tutta una frase. E in questa frase bisogna qualche volta indicare la fonte, ed il fondo dell'idea "graffiata".' 'Ta Hio', in *Meridiano di Roma*, 6: 46 (16 November 1941), p. 7; in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. VIII, pp. 149-150, p. 149.



<sup>23</sup> Charles Ferrall, *Modernist Writing and Reactionary Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> 'The first great distinction between Chinese taste and our own is that the Chinese *like* poetry that they have to think about, and even poetry that they have to puzzle over. This latter taste has occasionally broken out in Europe, notably in twelfth-century Provence and thirteenth-century Tuscany, but it has never held its own for very long.' 'Chinese Poetry', in *Today*, 3: 14 (April 1918), pp. 54-57; in *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose*, vol. III, pp. 84-86, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Julius, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Hugh Kenner, 'Introduction', *Selected Poems*, pp. xvi-xviii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ezra Pound: Translations*, with an introduction by Hugh Kenner (Norfolk (Ct): New Directions, 1979 [1954]), p. 9; my translation. The comparison between Waley and Pound is also made by Charles Tomlinson in his *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. xiii-xvii.

<sup>29</sup> Among his many translations I would like to list here: *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (London: Constable & Co, 1918 [1917]); *More Translations from the Chinese* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919); *The Poet Li Po Ad 701-762* (London: East and West Ltd, 1919); *Japanese Poetry. The «Uta»* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1919); *The NÇ Plays of Japan* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921); *Zen Buddhism and Its Relation to Art* (London: Benn, 1923); *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (London: Benn, 1923); *The Temple and Other Poems* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923); *The Pillow Book of Sei ShÇnagen* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928); *Translations from the Chinese*, illustrated by Cyrus LeRoy Baldridge (New York: A.A. Knopf [1941], 1964); *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Modern Library, 1960), translated into Italian as *Il Racconto di Genji* (Milan: Bompiani, 1947).

<sup>30</sup> Francis A. Johns, *A Bibliography of Arthur Waley* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 18.

**Traduzioni /Translations**



The Emperor, China ink,  
70x50 cm.

***Alla cieca***

**by Claudio Magris**

**translated by Anne Milano Appel**

Anne Milano Appel, a former library director and language teacher, has been translating professionally for more than ten years. She is active in both ALTA and ATA and is a member of PEN. Several of her book-length translations have been published, and shorter works that she has authored or translated have appeared in other professional and literary venues. Her translation of Stefano Bortolussi's novel *Head Above Water* was the winner of the 2004 Northern California Book Award for Translation. Her translation of *Terror: The New Anti-Semitism and the War Against the West*, by Italian journalist Fiamma Nirenstein, was published in 2005 by Smith & Kraus Publishers, and translations of books on Treviso and Venice were published by Vianello Libri, also in 2005. The novel *The Mosaic Crimes* by Giulio Leoni is forthcoming by Harcourt.

***Claudio Magris***

Claudio Magris was born in Trieste, Italy, in 1939. A versatile and prolific writer, his work includes essays, novels, plays and travelogues, often with a blending of genres. Among his works published by Garzanti are: *Dietro le parole* (1978), *Itaca e oltre* (1982), *Illazioni su una sciabola* (1984), *Danubio* (1986; published in the United States as *Danube* in 1989 to great acclaim), *Stadelmann* (1988), *Un altro mare* (1991), *Microcosmi* (1997, for which he received the Premio Strega and which appeared in English in 2001 as *Microcosms*), and *La mostra* (2001). His most recent works are the novel *Alla cieca* (2005) and the novella *Lei dunque capirà* (2006). A professor of German Literature at the University of Trieste, Magris is a regular contributor to the Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*. He lives in Trieste.

***Translator's Note***

The two works by Claudio Magris from which these passages are drawn are closely related thematically and metaphorically, though formalistically they are quite different. In the expansive, densely written *Alla cieca* (Garzanti, 2005), the novel that precedes *Lei dunque capirà* (Garzanti, 2006), one of the narrative voices, who composes inscriptions to be carved on headstones, explains that the story to be written on the tombstone must be concise yet provide all the essentials: gravestones are concentrated novels. Or better yet, he says, novels are expanded gravestones. If *Alla cieca* can be said to be an expanded commemorative stone, a *lapide dilatata*, the novella *Lei*

*dunque capirà* is indeed lapidary by contrast: a few brief lines carved simply and incisively on the marble of the page.

To be sure, there are similarities between the two works. The female protagonist of *Lei dunque capirà* shares an identity with the *donna-polena* (figurehead) and the *donna-scudo* (shield) of the earlier book; and each book recasts an ancient myth: Jason and the Argonauts in one, Eurydice and Orpheus in the other. Still, the formal differences are the most strikingly apparent. Unlike the collective "I" that narrates in *Alla cieca*, the novella takes the form of a monologue, the single voice of a self-styled Muse who in life – now she is in the afterlife – inspired her poet-husband to greatness. Whereas *Alla cieca* is an intense maelstrom, a veritable vortex of voices that is almost impenetrable, *Lei dunque capirà* is spare, essential, minimalist.

Since Magris is postmodern, in his hands the classical stories of Jason and the Argonauts, Eurydice and Orpheus become upended myths, archetypal narratives turned on their head. In *Alla cieca*, Jason and his crew bring Greek culture but also violence, civilization and barbarism, when they go in search of the Golden Fleece, and the fleece is sullied. Similarly the "Eurydice" of *Lei dunque capirà* is an anti-heroine, or at best an ambivalent figure. Like the ship's figurehead of *Alla cieca* with whom she is associated, she encapsulates both noble qualities and less noble ones. She is the woman who protects, the *donna-scudo*, but also the woman who can lead to ruin. Both figures are connected with abandonment and loss, as well as with deliverance and salvation.

Given Magris' obsession – love affair? – with the sea, it is not surprising that the icon that becomes the central metaphor is the *polena*, the carved figure on the prow of a sailing vessel whose gaze was intended to find the way. Nor is it surprising that ambivalence is the dominant note. Is Magris' figurehead a negative or a positive symbol? Does it show the way or is it symbolic of the events of history, of men's actions, that go along "alla cieca", indifferently? Magris' world – his sea – does not lend itself to binary distinctions. The answer, like the sea, like life itself, is ambiguous, or rather ambivalent, multi-valent. In a context that embraces the coexistence of opposites, of a multiplicity of values and meanings, the figurehead is both positive and negative... and more. In one sense it represents those who turn a blind eye, who look and move on: "guarda e passa" as Virgil tells Dante. Alternatively it is the image of a humanity that has lost its way, yet plows ahead sightlessly, gropingly through life's seas: an act of faith. Living is believing, one of *Alla cieca's* narrators tells us; it is faith that makes life what it is.



The Lover, China Ink, 70x50 cm.

*dal romanzo Alla cieca*  
*di Claudio Magris (Garzanti, 2005)*

*[Capitolo 8]*

Ho amato il mare più della donna, prima di capire che sono la stessa cosa. Ma questo l'ho capito tardi, tanto più tardi di quella sera a Londra, quando, scappando da quella ragazza, sono andato a sbattere nella squadra dell'arruolamento forzato, che mi ha trascinato su un barcone sul Tamigi e di lì a bordo del *Surprize*, una bella nave da guerra. Sì, sono scappato. Capita. Lei non ha mai provato la paura? Quel corpo che non è più tuo, neanche l'odore lo riconosci, un sudore acido – non ti comandi più, non puoi ordinarti di non sudare, di non avere quell'odore.

A me piace comandare – anche obbedire, è lo stesso, sono io che decido, anche di sottomettermi al Partito, per esempio. Si sa quello che si deve fare e sotto a chi tocca. Ma quella sera a Londra, sbarcato dalla *Jane*, in quella locanda, con quella ragazza, non sapevo chi comandava e chi obbediva. Il mio corpo era là, lontano, sudato, gelato; sentivo che nell'amore, neanche in quello di cinque minuti, non si comanda e non si decide. Come si fa, con una ragazza come quella, cosa le si dice, chi è che comincia, che cosa succederà...

Via, tagliare la corda, anche brutalmente se quella insiste, appena girato l'angolo passerà questa paura, questa vergogna. Mi potrò bere da qualche parte un boccale di birra fresca, che ora non mi vuole andar giù, ah la birra, fresca, schiumosa, senti di nuovo le braccia, le gambe; anche il sudore è diverso, un buon sudore. E una delizia quando la birra ti scende in gola e in pancia e quando, poco dopo, vai a pisciarla, anche l'uccello è nuovamente sciolto e disinvolto, ogni tanto ti gonfia chissà perché i pantaloni ma è affar suo e non gli badi, come quando ti viene su un rutto, tanto fa presto a tornare a posto.

D'accordo, quella volta la birra non l'ho bevuta, la squadra dell'arruolamento forzato mi ha beccato quasi subito, nel vicolo, prima che potessi infilarmi in un'altra taverna. Ma non è questo che conta. Mi dispiacciono assai di più quelle malignità insinuate dai miei biografi, più o meno tutti – Clune, Stephenson, Davies, e adesso anche quel Dan Sprod, che la sa così lunga. E vero che ho scritto di

*from* the Novel *Alla cieca*  
*by Claudio Magris (Garzanti, 2005)*

English Translation by Anne Milano Appel

**[Chapter 8]**

I loved the sea more than women, before I understood that they are one and the same. But I only understood this later, much later than that night in London when, fleeing from that girl, I ended up running into an impressment squad, that dragged me onto a scow on the Thames and from there on board a fine warship, the *Surprise*. Yes, I fled. It happens. Haven't you ever been afraid? That body that is no longer yours, you don't even recognize its odor, a sour sweat – you're no longer in control, you can't order yourself not to sweat, not to have that odor.

I like to be in command – also to obey, it's all the same, it's I who decide, even whether to submit to the Party, for example. You know what you have to do and under whose command. But that night in London – after disembarking from the *Jane* – that night in that tavern with that girl, I didn't know who was in command and who was obeying. My body was there, remote, sweaty, chilled; I felt that when it came to love, even the five-minute variety, no one is in command and no one decides. What do you do, with a girl like that, what do you say to her, who is it that makes the first move, what will it be like...

Go ahead, clear out of there, cut and run, even brutally if she won't take no for an answer, as soon as you turn the corner the fear will pass, the shame. I'll be able to get a pint of cold beer somewhere – beer I can't seem to get down now – ah yes, beer, cold, frothy, you can feel your arms again, your legs; even the sweat is different, a good sweat. It's a delight when the beer slides down your throat and into your belly, and when, soon afterwards, you go to take a piss, even your pecker is free and easy again, relaxed; every once in a while, who knows why, it makes your pants bulge, but that's its business and you don't pay any attention to it – any more than when you have to burp – especially since it's quick to settle back in place.

To be sure, that time I did not get to drink any beer, the forced labor impressment squad grabbed me almost immediately, in the alley, before I could slip into another tavern. But that's not what matters. What I find a lot more objectionable are those malicious



essere stato l'unico, tra i miei fratelli, a non venir allattato da mia madre, sono andato a controllare, e allora si sono sbizzarriti su questa mancanza del seno, non devo certo spiegare a Lei queste manie, che anche qui dentro non mancano... A par-te che non sono io a dire così, è Thomas, nelle *Avventure di Thomas Walter* – l'ho scritto in carcere a Newgate, quel romanzo, lo dice pure quel mio pignolo biografo, e ho inventato tutto – Oh dio tutto, non si inventa mai niente, se è per questo, e quando si scrive «io»... e come si potrebbe invece dire «lui», che è una bugia ancora più grande di «io»? Non vorrete mica dirmi che è con lui che state parlando adesso...

E va bene, quella volta non ho fatto l'amore, che lo scrivano pure. Mi piace una biografia che racconti tutto quello che uno non fa – Ma bisognava esserci, quella sera, per capire... quella confusione, nella taverna e fuori, strade affollate, grida, risse, qualcuno per terra, mezzo accoppato, i merciai ambulanti che gli passano accanto offrendo a squarciagola panpepato, la gente che corre ai banchi di mamma Proctor azzuffandosi per il posto migliore da cui assistere alle impiccagioni a Tyburn, i galli che si straziano nei combattimenti al Cockpit, l'orso incatenato che sbrana i cani al Bear Garden e quei baracconi con i loro mostri, quei bruti imbambolati...

E in tutta questa baraonda, due creature sole e perdute, io e te, ragazza senza nome, che cosa avremmo dovuto fare se non fuggire, senza dire neanche per cinque minuti false parole d'amore né simulare gesti d'amore? Quella sera sono fuggito, disertore del campo di battaglia dell'amore, feroce come tutti i campi di battaglia. Fossi sempre fuggito così, anche più tardi, forse adesso – poi invece non sono stato più capace di scappare né di mollare la bandiera – bisognerebbe averne sempre tre o quattro, di bandiere, se consegnassi quella giusta a chi di dovere, dicendo che l'hai strappata al nemico nella polvere della battaglia, ti prendi anche un premio, e ti paghi il vino all'osteria... e invece guarda dove ha finito per portarmi la bandiera rossa, sempre stretta in mano, altro che tagliare la corda –

### **[Capitolo 18]**

Mi scusi di nuovo, dottore, è stato solo un capogiro, per un momento non ho visto più nulla, solo un pulviscolo abbagliante che mi feriva gli occhi. Capita. Adesso è passato e tutto è chiaro, come il volto di Maria. Colpa di quella porta girevole, a vetri, del caffè Lloyd,

remarks insinuated by my biographers, more or less all of them – Clune, Stephenson, Davies, and now even that Dan Sprod, who thinks he’s so smart. It’s true that I wrote that I was the only one of my siblings not to be nursed by my mother – I went and checked – and so they had a great time with my having lacked the breast, surely I do not have to explain these obsessions to you, since they are common even in here... Aside from the fact that it is not I who says that, it is Thomas, in the *Adventures of Thomas Walter* – I wrote that novel in prison, in Newgate, even that pedantic biographer of mine says so, and I invented all of it – Oh God, all of it, no one ever invents anything, for that matter, and when one writes “I”... yet how could one say “he” instead, since it is an even greater lie than “I”? You don’t mean to tell me that he’s the one you’re talking to now...

All right then, that time I did not make love, let them go ahead and write it. I like a biography that recounts everything you don’t do – But you had to be there, that night, to understand... that confusion, in the tavern and outside, the crowded streets, the shouts and brawls, someone lying in the gutter, half dead, the peddlers passing nearby hawking honeyed fruit cake at the top of their lungs, people flocking to Mother Proctor’s Pews scuffling to get the best place from which to watch the hangings at Tyburn gallows, the roosters ripping each other to pieces in the cockfights at the Cockpit, the chained bear tearing the dogs limb from limb at the Bear Garden and those large tents with their monsters, those dazed brutes...

And in all this pandemonium, two lost, solitary creatures, me and you, a girl without a name, what should we have done if not flee, rather than uttering false words of love or faking loving gestures, even for five minutes? That night I fled, a deserter from the battlefield of love, savage like all battlefields. If only I had always fled like that, later on as well, perhaps now – later instead I was no longer able to flee, or abandon the flag. One should always have three or four of them, flags that is; if you hand over the right one to those concerned, saying that you tore it away from the enemy in the dust of battle, you will receive an award besides, and they will pay for your wine at the tavern... and instead, look where the red flag ended up taking me, that flag forever in my grip, a far cry from cut and run –

### **[Chapter 18]**

Forgive me again, doctor, it was only a sudden dizziness, for a moment I couldn’t see anything anymore, just a dazzling dust mote

a Fiume, dove andavamo qualche volta la sera. Una volta l'ho vista arrivare; io ero già dentro ad aspettarla, lei ha attraversato la strada, mi ha sorriso oltre la porta trasparente ed è entrata facendo scorrere i pannelli; mentre lei passava fra loro la sua figura e il suo vi-so si sono specchiati in quei cristalli che roteavano e si sono frantumati in cangianti riflessi, una manciata di schegge luminose e dissolte. Così, tra una porta girevole e l'altra, è sparita.

Devo essere rimasto tanto tempo a guardare il luccichio di quei battenti; anni seduto là dentro, mentre le porte girano sempre più lentamente e non entra nessuno. E comprensibile che a uno gli giri anche la testa e non ricordi nemmeno più bene chi è sparito fra un vetro e l'altro, di chi era quel sorriso. Per un attimo, per esempio, ho creduto, intravedendola sulla strada, che fosse Mangawana; che anche lei avesse attraversato il grande mare. Ero io che la chiamavo così, sotto i grandi eucalipti protesi sulle acque del Derwent, con quell'antico nome aborigeno, per canzonarla della sua pelle bruna come quella di mia madre. Era invece Maria – sì, era anche Mangawana, perché Maria era il mare in cui sfociano tutti i fiumi. Amare una donna non vuoi dire dimenticare tutte le altre, bensì amarle e desiderarle e averle tutte in lei. Quando facevamo all'amore sulla spiaggia solitaria della Levrera o in quella stanza a Miholaséica, c'era anche la foresta australe ai bordi dell'oceano, Terra Australis incognita.

Invece a Fiume, quel giorno... Quando Maria, vedendo-mi incapace di partire, mi ha preso per mano, se l'è passata sul seno e mi ha guidato verso la porta, nell'odore dell'alba, aiutandomi ad andare – il viaggio è l'inizio del ritorno, mi ha sorriso, ma io sapevo, almeno credo, che non ci sarebbe stato ritorno, per decreto degli dèi che io, con un arbitrio distorto del cuore, avevo inalzato più grandi del mio cuore e di quel sorriso.

Forse non l'ho mai amata come allora, quando mentivo il ritorno e m'imbarcavo alla ricerca del vello; mentre lei mi teneva ancora un istante le mani e insieme mi aiutava, dolce e indomabile, a staccare le mie, Issipile che saluta Giasone: «Parti, e gli dèi ti concedano di ritornare coi tuoi compagni / sani e salvi e portando al re il vello d'oro, / come tu vuoi e come ti è caro. Però quest'isola / e lo scettro che fu di mio padre saranno per te, se in futuro, / tornato in patria, vorrai venire qua ancora. / Ricordati, dunque, di Issipile anche

that was hurting my eyes. It happens. Now it's gone and everything is clear, like Maria's face. The fault of that revolving door, with the glass panels, at the cafe Lloyd, in Fiume, where we would go sometimes in the evening. One time I saw her arriving; I was already inside waiting for her, she crossed the street, smiled at me from beyond the transparent door and entered it, turning the panels; as she passed between them her figure and her face were mirrored in those revolving plates of glass and shattered into changing reflections, a handful of luminous, fragmented splinters. And so, between one revolving door panel and another, she disappeared.

I must have stayed there a long time watching those glittering door panes; years sitting inside there, as the door revolves more and more slowly and nobody enters. It's understandable that your head would spin too and after a while you don't even remember so well who it was that disappeared between one pane and the other, whose smile it was. For a moment, for instance, catching a glimpse of her in the street, I thought it was Mangawana; that she too had crossed the great sea. I was the one who called her that, under the huge eucalyptus trees leaning out over the waters of the Derwent: that ancient aboriginal name, to tease her about her dusky skin, dark like my mother's. Instead it was Maria – yes, she was also Mangawana, because Maria was the sea into which all rivers flow. Loving a woman does not mean that you forget all the others, but rather that you love them and desire them and have them all in her. When we made love on the solitary beach of Levrera island or in that room in Miholascica, there was also the austral forest at the edge of the ocean, *Terra Australis Incognita*, the unknown land of the South.

Instead in Fiume, that day... When Maria, seeing that I was incapable of leaving, took my hand, placed it on her breast, then led me toward the door, in the scented dawn, helping me to go – the journey is the beginning of the return, she smiled at me, but I knew, at least I think I did, that there would be no return, by decree of the gods whom I – by some distortion of my heart's will – had set above my heart and that smile.

Perhaps I never loved her as much as I did at that moment, when I lied about returning and embarked on the search for the fleece; while she held my hands a moment longer, and at the same time, gentle yet resolute, helped me disengage mine – Hypsipyle bidding farewell to Jason: "Go, and may the gods grant that you return with your companions safe and sound, bringing the king the golden fleece,

lontano, anche quando / sarai ritornato e...» – «Be', non sai andare avanti, come a scuola? Dai... Ecco, ripeti, "e lasciami una prole, ch'io possa seguire con tutto il mio cuore, / se gli dèi mi concedono di dare alla luce un tuo figlio."» – Basta, non siamo a scuola, a suggerire durante le interrogazioni... Non vorremo mica declamare tutto il libro, adesso, no? E non chiedetemi, per favore, se gli dèi... che ne so, che ne posso sapere... Neanche Giasone la guarda negli occhi, quando risponde solenne: «Issipile, possa quello che hai detto compiersi per il volere divino.» Quando li ho alzati, i miei occhi, lei non c'era più, sparita – no, era là, come sempre, ma non sapevo chi era, polena bellissima senza nome che la furia della tempesta ha divelto dalla nave affondata e vaga fluttuante sulle onde, i grandi occhi rivolti in alto, a un vuoto ancora più grande di quello del mare.

### **[Capitolo 39]**

Le piace? Guardi che viso - bellissimo e generico, dice la didascalìa, come dev'essere la bellezza, depurata di ogni scoria accidentale e particolare, di ogni dolorosa espressività individuale. Potessi cancellarle anche dal mio viso, come le piallo e spiano via dal volto di questa polena, le rughe incise dal mio cuore, mie e solo maledettamente mie. Una buona idea, dottore, questa di farci lavorare, di non la-sciarci immalinconire, le mani in mano; a ognuno il suo compito, la sua specialità. Ergoterapia, Arbeit macht frei, conosco la cura. Non mi lamento, perché mi diverto a scolpire e a intagliare queste donne di legno. Non avrei neanche bisogno, a dire il vero, di quei bei cataloghi illustrati che mi date per copiare le figure. Non sono un novizio, mi guadagnavo due soldi anche fabbricando o aggiustando un paio di polene per qualche nave che arrivava a Hobart Town con la prua e la figura di prua scalcagnate. Anche per questo non mi dispiace avere fra le mani quei seni di legno, piallarli finché diventano lisci ed è un gusto accarezzarli, oh niente sconcezze, per carità, è che mi ricordano quei lavoretti di allora, ho tentato anche di modellare quelle lab-bra imbronciate di Norah, avide e imperiose fino all'ultimo, ma...

Ho capito che il viso di queste donne che accompagnano gli uomini sul mare dev'essere levigato, sereno, imperturbabile; guai se mostrasse passione, personalità. Del resto, chi potrebbe azzardarsi a esibire una personalità? Solo un buffone, fatto di fasulla e

as you wish and hold dear. But this island and the scepter that was my father's will be yours, if in the future, having returned to your country, you wish to come here again. Remember Hypsipyle, therefore, even from afar, even after you have returned and..." – "Well, don't you know how the rest goes, like in school? Come on... Here, repeat after me, 'and leave me your progeny, whom I may care for with all my heart, if the gods grant that I give birth to your child.'" – Enough, we're not in school, prompting during an oral quiz... We don't want to recite the whole book, now, do we? And don't ask me, please, if the gods... what do I know, how can I know... Jason doesn't meet her eyes either when he solemnly replies: "Hypsipyle, may what you have said come to pass by the divine will." When I raised my eyes, she wasn't there anymore, she had disappeared – no, she was there, like always, but I didn't know who she was, a beautiful figurehead without a name that the fury of the storm tore from the sunken ship, that drifts along rising and falling with the waves, the large eyes turned upward, to a void even greater than that of the sea.

### [Chapter 39]

Do you like it? Look at that face – beautiful and generic, the caption says, like beauty should be, purified of every incidental, particular dross, of any doleful individual expressivity. Would that I could erase from my own face as well – the way I plane and smooth them from the face of this figurehead – the lines carved by my heart, that are mine and accursedly mine alone. A good idea, doctor, this idea of making us work, of not letting us grow melancholy, twiddling our thumbs; to each his own task, his specialty. Ergotherapy, *Arbeit macht frei*, I'm familiar with the treatment. I can't complain, since I enjoy sculpting and carving these women of wood. To tell the truth, I wouldn't even need those beautiful illustrated catalogs you give me to copy the figures from. I'm not a novice, I even earned a few bucks by making or repairing a couple of figureheads for ships that reached Hobart Town with their prow and figureheads in bad shape. Also, I like having those wooden breasts beneath my hands, planing them until they become smooth and it's a joy to caress them, oh nothing lewd, for heaven's sake, it's that they remind me of those odd jobs of those days, I've even tried to model those pouting lips of Norah's, eager and impelling up until the end, but...

I realized that the face of these women who accompany men at sea must be polished, serene, imperturbable; woe if it were to show passion, personality. Besides, who would dare display a personal-

interscambiabile carne anziché di buon legno che non truffa – se è quercia è quercia e se è cirmolo è cirmolo, non c'è trucco, mentre la carne, specialmente quella umana, è sempre sofisticata. In ogni caso, gli uomini sospesi sugli abissi hanno già troppa furia nel cuore e chiedono serenità ossia impersonalità incolore come l'acqua.

Bella questa illustrazione, una bianca polena ignota conservata, scrivono sotto, al Museo Marittimo di Anversa. Se la si guarda di fronte ha un'espressione dolorosa, ma quando stava in prua, il luogo per cui era stata fatta, non si mostra-va di fronte, bensì di profilo ai marinai e quel profilo è impassibile, generico, chiarezza non offuscata da alcuna angoscia. «Solo la nobile semplicità e la serena grandezza posso-no sostenere la vista della Gorgone, reggere come una cariatide l'intollerabile peso del reale...» Ben detto nell'opuscolo, ma il fatto è che a noi invece casca addosso, ci schiaccia, ci spappola la testa. Guardi un po' Lei, in quelle lastre nel Suo cassetto, che poltiglia è il mio cervello.

Pensi un po' se il viso nobile e inespressivo di questa polena di Anversa potrebbe mai ridursi così, neanche Dachau non gli farebbe né caldo né freddo. Per forza; dietro e dentro non c'è niente e nessuno può fargli nulla, a questo niente, nessun pugno può stringerlo e stritolarlo, ecco perché mi piacciono tanto, queste figure di prua. Mi piace anche scolpirle e costruirle. Potessi copiarle tutte, le figure di questo catalogo, ignare di passione, di dolore, di identità, così sì che varrebbe la pena di essere immortali... Qui sta scritto che Thorvaldsen, maestro di scultura neoclassica, ha fatto il suo apprendistato nell'officina di suo padre, che intagliava polene per la flotta danese, come me, creatore di queste figure che nessuno potrà mandare ai lavori forzati.

Guardi come vengono bene, il torso cresce da un vortice di vento che, alla base, sembra incresparsi le onde e prolungarsi nella veste fluttuante, linea ondulata che si disperderà nell'informe, ma intanto... E quegli occhi spalancati sull'oltre, su imminenti e inderogabili catastrofi. Gli occhi di Ma-ria... altro che i miei, ciechi... ecco, gli occhi li faccio così, scavando il legno, creando una cavità, soltanto il vuoto può reggere la vista del vuoto; guardi quanta segatura per terra, sono gli occhi delle mie polene triturate e fatti polvere, come faceva mio fratello Urban con gli zaffiri e gli smeraldi, occhi azzurri e verdi, freddi come il mare d'Islanda...

ity? Only a fool, made of phony, interchangeable flesh rather than of good wood that doesn't con you – if it's oak it's oak and if it's pine it's pine, there's no ruse, while flesh, especially human flesh, is always deceptive. In any case, men suspended over the depths already have too much fury in their hearts and require serenity, namely, impersonality as colorless as water.

Here's a beautiful illustration, a plain, unknown figurehead preserved, it says below, at the Maritime Museum of Anversa. If you look at her from the front she has a doleful expression, but when she was at the prow, the place for which she was made, she wasn't seen from the front; rather she displayed her profile to the sailors, and that profile is impassible, generic, a clarity unclouded by any anguish. "Only noble simplicity and serene greatness can sustain the sight of the Gorgon, bear like a caryatid the intolerable weight of reality..." Well said in the booklet, but the fact is that when it comes to us, on the other hand, it comes crashing down on us, it flattens us, it crushes our head to a pulp. Take a look at those X-rays in your drawer, at how mushy my brain is.

Just imagine whether the noble, inexpressive face of this figurehead of Anversa could ever be reduced to this, even Dachau would leave her cold. How could it be otherwise; inside and out there is nothing, and nobody can do anything to this nothingness, no fist can squeeze it and crush it, that's why I like them so much, these prow figures. I also like to carve and sculpt them. I wish I could copy all of them, all the figures in this catalog, unacquainted with passion, with sorrow, with identity – unaware like that, of course being immortal would be worth it... It says here that Thorvaldsen, a master of neo-classic sculpture, served his apprenticeship in the studio of his father, who carved figureheads for the Danish fleet – like me, creator of these figures that nobody will be able to send to forced labor camps.

Look how well they turn out, the torso grows out of a whirlwind that, at the base, seems to ripple the waves and continue on to the fluttering garment, an undulating line that will dissolve into amorphousness, but meanwhile... And those eyes wide open on the beyond, on imminent, unavoidable catastrophes. Maria's eyes... a far cry from mine, blind... there, this is how I do the eyes, carving out the wood, creating a cavity, only emptiness can sustain the sight of emptiness; look at how much sawdust there is on the floor, it's the eyes of my figureheads, ground up and pulverized, as my brother Urban used to do with sapphires and emeralds, blue eyes and green eyes, as cold as the Iceland sea...



**[Capitolo 79]**

Vede come me la cavo bene, con queste donne di legno che mi date da modellare, così mi distraigo e non mi vengono brutte idee per la testa? A proposito, so di uno che aveva tagliato la testa alla polena della sua nave; sarà stata una vendetta d'amore, ma io queste cose non le capisco... se ci si lascia, vuoi dire che ci si doveva lasciare, no? Con le donne, gli uomini, le polene, le rivoluzioni, quando è finita, è finita. Anche con Maria – no, con Maria non finirà mai, è questo il disastro – Certo che con le polene, a leggere le storie scritte in questo calendario – sì, lo so, catalogo, insomma un libro, gliel'ho già detto che con quelle illustrazioni e fotografie di donne con le tette seminude mi ricorda i calendari dei barbieri di una volta – con quelle donne di legno, dicevo, bisogna andarci cauti, guardi cosa scrive la didascalia di questa qui, Atalanta, si chiama, sta a La Spezia, e per lei si sono ammazzati ben due uomini, il custode che passava ore ad accarezzarla e a baciarla, e poi si è sfracellato buttandosi giù nel bacino di carenaggio, e un ufficiale tedesco, un certo Kurtz, che se l'è addirittura portata in camera prima di spararsi. Ma dico, hanno più sale in zucca i marinai che ne approfittano solo per sfogarsi un po', è comprensibile, con tutti quei mesi per mare, il viaggio fin quaggiù è lungo, e allora si può capire, ma almeno niente tragedie, è già tanto... E invece queste maligne vorrebbero la tua perdizione, la tua tragedia... polene maledette, streghe, magari messe a bruciare insieme alla streghe vive, come quella donna fiamminga che serviva da modella, arse tutte e due sul rogo, mentre lo scultore se l'è cavata con le due mani mozzate.

A me non le taglierete, vero? Non si sa mai, ne ho viste tante, in posti più o meno come questo... Mi comporto bene, non faccio sciocchezze, sono rispettoso. E come si fa a non essere rispettosi, con queste figure bellissime? Guardi questa bocca incantevole, che sorriso indecifrabile, lo stesso con cui è sprofondata quel giorno con la sua nave, la *Falk-land*, presso le Scilly, dice il libro. Ecco, sprofondare negli abissi sorridendo così – Non che sia facile modellarlo, quel sorriso di legno... E quelle Euridici che rientrano nelle tenebre...

**[Capitolo 84]**

Questa è Galatea. È stata trovata su una spiaggia africana dopo il naufragio, ed è stata adorata dagli indigeni come una dea; altre

**[Chapter 79]**

See how well I get by, with these women of wood that you give me to model so that I am distracted and don't get any nasty ideas in my head? By the way, I heard of someone who cut the head off of his ship's figurehead; it must have been a lover's revenge, but I don't understand these things – if two people leave each other, it means they were meant to leave each other, right? Whether it be women, men, figureheads, revolutions, when it's over, it's over. Even with Maria – no, with Maria it will never be over, that's the tragedy. Of course with figureheads, judging from the tales written in this calendar – yes, catalog, I know, in a word a book, I already told you that those illustrations and photographs of women with half-naked breasts remind me of the calendars in the barbershops of one time – with those wooden women, as I was saying, you have to be careful, look at what the caption says about this one, Atalanta, she's called, she's in La Spezia, and at least two men killed themselves for her, a caretaker who spent hours caressing and kissing her, and then smashed himself by leaping into the dry dock, and a German official, a certain Kurtz, who actually brought her into his room before shooting himself. I'm telling you, the sailors who use them just to find a little release have more common sense, it's understandable, all those months at sea, the voyage down here is long, so one can understand, but at least there are no tragic scenes, that's something... Instead these malicious bitches want to bring about your ruin, your misfortune... accursed figureheads, sorceresses, even made to burn with living sorceresses, like that Flemish woman who served as a model, both of them burned at the stake, while the sculptor got away with both hands lopped off.

You won't cut mine off, will you? You never know, I've seen a lot things in places like this more or less... I behave well, I don't do anything foolish, I'm respectful. How could you not be respectful, with these beautiful figures? Look at this enchanting mouth, the unreadable smile, the same smile she wore when she sank that day with her ship, the *Falkland*, near the Scilly Isles, the book says. Just think, to sink into the depths smiling like that – Not that it's easy to model that wooden smile... And those Eurydices who return to the shadows...

**[Chapter 84]**

This is Galatea. She was found on an African beach following a shipwreck, and was worshipped like a goddess by the aborigines;

sono finite a adornare locande e taverne, così i marinai si sentivano un po' a casa anche quando scendevano a terra.

Vede, le polene le hanno sfrattate dal mare e si barcamenano come possono, ne ho scoperta più d'una sotto l'acconciatura esposta in vetrina da un parrucchiere o sotto il vestito in un negozio d'abbigliamento — ben mascherata, un manichino come si deve, ma a me non è sfuggita. Però ho fatto finta di niente, ognuno si arrangia come può. Una, legga qui, quella della *Rebecca*, una baleniera di New Bedford, l'abbiamo sepolta fra i sassi in riva al mare. Sotto le ossa dell'onda, si dice in Islanda, abbiamo bevuto la birra in suo onore, la sua birra funebre; pure le donne devono averla, è giusto, ci siamo ubriacati e abbiamo cantato sulla sua tomba di rena e di sassi l'ufficio dei defunti. Anche sconcezze, come è giusto; la morte è sconcia e il dolore è sconcio. Vorrei pisciare sulla mia tomba, su una tomba bisogna annaffiare i fiori, no? Lo faccio anche, quando nessuno mi vede, là nel parco di Saint David.

Su quella di *Rebecca* abbiamo solo rovesciato della birra, ma non l'abbiamo fatto apposta, è che eravamo un po' ubriachi; del resto le onde l'hanno lavata via subito, quell'odore rancido è svanito nella salsedine e adesso non c'è più niente, neanche la tomba, la marea l'ha grattata e risucchiata via, forse ora lei fluttua in alto mare, corrosa dall'acqua, legno che non si distingue più da qualsiasi altro relitto d'un naufragio. Anche un viso di carne si guasta presto, i pesci lo divorano ed è subito irriconoscibile, un'irriconoscibile immondizia del mare. Maria l'ho spinta io, in alto mare e sotto il mare; l'ho buttata in pasto agli squali e così hanno risparmiato me. Feroci zanne l'hanno strappata dalle mie braccia — no, sono io che l'ho lasciata andare, che l'ho ficcata fra quelle zanne, ancora più avida, perché il suo cuore sanguinava e le bestie al sapore del sangue si eccitano ancora di più, gli aguzzini frustano con più allegria quando vedono il rosso colare dalle schiene.

Così è sparita in quel mare scuro, in quell'ombra. Ma ho letto che qualche volta le polene naufragate ritornano. Maria è sparita nel mare aperto, la nave è dileguata all'orizzonte e quando ho sentito dire che stava ritornando in porto ho anche sentito dire che tornava

other figures ended up adorning inns and taverns, so that the sailors might feel a little more at home even when they were on land.

You see, the figureheads were evicted from the sea and so they manage as best they can, I've discovered more than one of them displaying a coiffure in a beauty salon window or modeling a dress in an apparel store – well disguised of course, a proper mannequin, but she did not escape my notice. Still, I pretended not to notice anything, everyone gets by any way they can. We buried one of them – read what it says here – the one from the *Rebecca*, a whaling ship from New Bedford, among the rocks by the sea. Under the bones of the waves, as they say in Iceland, we drank beer in her honor, her funeral beer; women should have one too, it's only fair, we got drunk and sang the office for the dead on her grave of sand and stones. Lewdness too, as is fitting; death is lewd and sorrow is lewd. I'd like to piss on my grave, the flowers on a grave have to be watered, don't they? I even do it, when nobody can see me, there in the park of Saint David.

On the figurehead from the *Rebecca* all we did was pour some beer, but we didn't do it on purpose, it's just that we were a little drunk; besides the waves quickly washed it away, that rank odor vanished in the salt sea air and now there is nothing anymore, not even the grave, the tide scraped and sucked it away, maybe now she rises and falls on the open sea, corroded by the water, wood that is no longer distinguishable from any other remains of a shipwreck. Even a face composed of flesh soon deteriorates, the fish devour it and it quickly becomes unrecognizable, an unrecognizable piece of refuse from the sea. It was I who pushed Maria, on the open sea and under the sea; I threw her to the sharks as food and so I was spared by them. Savage teeth tore her from my arms – no, it was I who let her go, who shoved her into those jaws, all the more voracious because her heart was bleeding and the brutes get even more excited at the taste of blood, the slave drivers lash out more enthusiastically when they see red trickling down their captives' backs.

And so she disappeared in that dark sea, in that obscurity. But I read that sometimes shipwrecked figureheads return. Maria disappeared in the open sea, the ship vanished on the horizon and when I heard that it was returning to port I also heard that it was returning without her – she was no longer there, they must have treacherously thrown her overboard, of course, how could I think that one small push...

senza di lei – lei non c’era più, l’avranno buttata fuori bordo a tradimento, certo come potevo pensare che una piccola spinta...

Ho letto, nel catalogo, di uno scultore che aveva scelto la sua bellissima donna quale modello per la figura di prua della nave su cui lei partiva per un lungo viaggio – per lei, poco dopo, il più lungo di tutti, è morta. Lui ogni giorno guardava sconsolato il mare, non poteva credere che fosse morta e quando la nave è rientrata in porto ha visto, ritta in prua, la polena, identica a lei – si è gettato in acqua per an-darle incontro, smanioso di abbracciarla, ma è andato sot-to. Gonfio, stordito, acqua nel naso nella bocca nelle orecchie, impossibile veder passare la nave, se lei c’era o non c’era. Non c’era, Euridice sparisce; guardi che bella, questa Euridice che si asciuga le lacrime con un lembo del mantello che l’avvolge. Sta anche lei a La Spezia, scrivono sotto; vediamo se mi riesce di rifarla bene, quel mantello è l’acqua buia, la notte, il fondo del mare, me lo tirerò sulla testa e staremo là sotto, vicini, abbracciati...

I read, in the catalog, of one sculptor who had chosen his beautiful girlfriend as the model for the figurehead of a ship on which she was leaving on a long voyage – for her, soon afterwards, the longest voyage of all: she died. Every day he watched the sea disconsolately, he could not believe she was dead and when the ship re-entered the port he saw the figurehead, standing upright on the prow, identical to her – he leaped into the water to go to her, longing to embrace her, but he went under. Waterlogged and dazed, water in his nose in his mouth in his ears, it was impossible to see the ship as it passed by, to see whether she was there or not. She wasn't there, Eurydice vanishes; look how beautiful she is, this Eurydice wiping her tears with the edge of the mantle that envelops her. She too is in La Spezia, the caption says; we'll see if I am able to successfully recreate her, that mantle is the dark water, the night, the bottom of the sea, I will pull it over my head and we will stay under there, close together, clinging to one another...

***dal romanzo*** Lei dunque capirà  
**di Claudio Magris (Garzanti, 2006)**

***[prime pagine]***

No, non sono uscita, signor Presidente, come vede sono qui. Ancora grazie per il permesso speciale, davvero eccezionale, me ne rendo conto, non creda che non Le sia grata; anche lui era tutto emozionato, non avrebbe mai creduto di ottenerla, quando l'aveva chiesta, l'autorizzazione a entrare nella Casa, a venire a prendermi. Certo temeva di non aver-La ringraziata abbastanza, tanto che qualcuno – non ho visto bene chi, in questa luce fioca; qui dentro si vede poco, un'ombra scivola via prima che la si possa guardare in viso, a parte che tutti si assomigliano, ci assomigliamo, è logico, in una Casa come questa – qualcuno ha creduto che lui all'ultimo momento volesse tornare indietro per ringraziarLa ancora una volta di questa Sua concessione e che fosse stato per questo che... Se poi è andata com'è andata, non è colpa di nessuno – cioè è colpa mia, comunque non importa chi e cosa faccia uno qui dentro. Almeno così pensano quelli che stanno là fuori, per i quali non contiamo proprio più nulla.

Per lui invece sì contavo e conto, eccome, se si è presa la briga di venir fin quaggiù e non si è arreso, come gli altri, ai severi regolamenti della Casa di Riposo che vietano agli ospiti – nel loro, nel nostro interesse – di ricevere visite e di mettere a repentaglio la propria pace e la propria tranquillità, figuriamoci poi di uscire, si capisce, ci mancherebbe, trovarsi in quella bolgia, in quel caos di traffico e di gente maleducata o peggio, per non parlare del tempaccio, da cui qui almeno siamo al riparo. Ma lui mi vuole proprio bene, è innamorato come il primo giorno; ha preso una bella scuffia e non poteva stare senza di me, da quando la mia salute, peggiorata di colpo, mi ha costretta a farmi ricoverare nella Casa di Riposo – bella, comoda e ben attrezzata, niente da dire – e piangeva e sbraitava e si lasciava andare, barba lunga e senza nemmeno cambiarsi di biancheria. A ogni amico che incontrava attaccava un bottone sulla sua disgrazia e solitudine; non gli bastava sapermi vicina e ben curata, meglio là che a casa o in ospedale, diceva, questo è sicuro, però io da solo come faccio, giro per le stanze vuote come fossero di un altro, di

***from*** *Lei dunque capirà*  
by Claudio Magris (Garzanti, 2006)  
Translated by Anne Milano Appel

***[opening pages]***

No, I didn't leave, Mr. President, as you can see, I am still here. Thank you again for the special authorization, truly exceptional, I realize that, don't think I'm not grateful to you. He too was all excited, he never thought he would be granted permission to enter the Home, when he requested it, so he could come and get me. Of course he was afraid he hadn't thanked you enough, and in fact someone – I couldn't see who, in this faint light; you can't see well in here, a shadow slips away before you can see its face, aside from the fact that they all look alike, *we* all look alike, it's logical, in a Home like this – someone thought that at the last moment he turned back to thank you once again for your special consideration and that was why... The fact that things then turned out the way they did is nobody's fault – that is, it's my fault, but it doesn't matter who does what in here. At least that's what those outside think: for them we don't matter at all anymore.

For him, however, I certainly mattered and still matter, very much so, if he took the trouble to come all the way down here and did not give up, like the others, at the Rest Home's strict regulations prohibiting its guests – in their, in *our* interest – from receiving visits that would put our peace and tranquility at risk. Not to mention going out, just imagine, that's all we'd need, to find ourselves in that infernal madhouse, that bedlam of traffic and bad-mannered people or worse, not to mention the awful weather, from which here at least we are sheltered. But he really loves me, he is as much in love as on the first day; he fell head over heels and couldn't be without me. When my health unexpectedly deteriorated, he forced me to enter the Rest Home to recover – an attractive, comfortable, well equipped place, no doubt about it – and he bawled and ranted and let himself go completely, needing a shave and not even changing his underwear. He bored every friend he met with a long story about his misfortune and how lonely he was. It wasn't enough for him to know that I was close by and well cared for, better there than at home or in the hospital, he would say, that's for sure, but how can I manage all alone, I wander around the empty rooms as if they were someone



un estraneo, se apro un cassetto è sempre quello sbagliato, mi scaldo il caffè del giorno prima, disgustoso, e il letto, il letto vuoto... Dalla sua parte vedo ancora il lieve avvallamento del suo corpo, si esaltava; è impossibile, lo so, le lenzuola sono state cambiate chissà quante volte da quella volta, ma è là, sì, là, ripeteva, quel vuoto leggero accanto a me, con me, la sua assenza al mio fianco, compagna della mia vita, neanche i libri riesco più a trovare, era lei che li teneva in ordine, no, non potete capire...

Dopo un po' anche gli amici se lo levavano di torno, quella malinconia instancabile dava fastidio alla gente e anche quel suo battersi il petto, quel suo accusarsi di chissà quali colpe... È naturale, dicevano, facciamo tutti così, quando uno sta male mica possiamo far altro, le Case di Riposo ci sono per questo, per i nostri cari, per il loro bene quando stanno male, perché quando stanno male – e Dio sa se non stavo male, con quella maledetta infezione, neanche mi avesse morsa un serpente velenoso, un fuoco e un gelo e uno svanire in tutto il corpo – non sappiamo come aiutarli, cosa fare di loro. Per questo esistono le Case di Riposo. Bisogna rassegnarsi, anzi essere contenti e in pace con la propria coscienza, quando li accompagniamo e li affidiamo a quel personale così qualificato.

Ma lui no, al cuore non si comanda, diceva, il cuore si spezza, e se gli dici di non spezzarsi si spezza lo stesso, come il mio, protestava, ah, non ce la faccio, saperla là, in quell'ambiente, in quei cameroni o in quelle stanzette, in quell'alveare, lei in mezzo a tutti quegli altri, incartapecoriti come mummie, sporchi; so che li puliscono subito, tutto è sempre tenuto in ordine, anche il giardino, ma intanto lei, lei così bella e delicata e trasognata – sì, mi vede così, è proprio un tesoro d'uomo, il mio uomo – con quel suo viso e con quel suo sorriso inscalfibili dagli anni, in mezzo a tutti quegli altri – lei magari starà anche bene, aggiungeva, non le manca niente, lo so, però io, io come faccio senza di lei, beata lei e misero me, pietà pietà dell'infelice amante... Se pen-sate che esageri, diceva agli amici, vuol dire che non avete cuore né sentimento, non avete poesia nel cuore, chi potrà giammai capire la mia pena e il mio tormento, la sofferenza, il dolore di un poeta...

E si metteva a scrivere, su quei suoi quaderni che conosco bene; scriveva il mio nome e poi qualcosa d'altro e di nuovo il mio nome e ancora qualcosa, ma dopo strappava il foglio e lo buttava via, perché

else's, a stranger's, if I open a drawer it's always the wrong one, I reheat the coffee from the day before, revolting, and the bed, the empty bed... On her side I can still see the slight depression left by her body, he would get carried away; it's impossible, I know, the sheets have been changed who knows how many times since then, but it's there, yes, there, he repeated, that slight hollow beside me, *with* me, her absence at my side, my life's companion, I can't even find my books anymore, it was she who kept them in order, no, you can't understand...

After a while even his friends avoided him, that persistent melancholy was annoying to people, not to mention the breast-beating, accusing himself of goodness knows what failings... It's the accepted thing, they would say, everyone does it, when someone is ill there's nothing else to be done, Rest Homes are there for that reason, for our loved ones, for their benefit when they are ill, because when they are ill – and God knows I was ill, with that damned infection, fire and ice, the breakdown of my entire body, worse than if I had been bitten by a venomous snake – we don't know how to help them, what to do for them. That's why Rest Homes exist. We have to resign ourselves, indeed be content and at peace with our conscience, when we accompany them there and entrust them to that qualified staff.

But not him, oh no, you can't rule the heart, he would say, the heart breaks, and if you tell it not to break, it breaks just the same, like mine, he mourned, oh, I can't go on, thinking of her there, in that place, in those large wards or tiny cells, in that rabbit warren, surrounded by all those others, shriveled up like mummies, soiled; I know they clean them up right away, everything is always kept in order, even the garden, but meanwhile she, she who is so beautiful and delicate and dreamy – yes, that's how he sees me, he's truly a darling man, my man – with that face and that smile untouched by the years, in there with all those others – she may even be comfortable, he added, she doesn't lack for anything, I know, but I, what will I do without her, lucky her, poor me, have mercy, have mercy on this poor devil of a lover... If you think I'm exaggerating, he would tell his friends, it means you have no heart and no feelings, you have no poetry in your heart, who can ever understand my pain and my torment, the suffering, a poet's grief...

And he would start to write, in those notebooks of his that I am so familiar with; he would write my name and then something else, and again my name and something more, but afterwards he tore up

capiva che non gli veniva niente da dire. Di queste cose se ne intende, ce l'ha nel sangue, si accorge subito se gli vengono fuori delle banalità – lui si è sempre perdonato tutto, con le donne poi si permetteva di cambiare le carte in tavola come gli pareva e pretendeva anche di essere compreso e compatito, così sensibile e vulnerabile com'era... – ma con le parole no, non si perdonava niente, sentiva subito quando non andava e non tirava a fregare.

In fondo, solo quando eravamo insieme si sentiva tranquillo, sicuro – anche di quello che scriveva, dopo che me l'aveva letto e aveva visto nei miei occhi – anzi, diceva, sulla tua bocca, quando le labbra prima un po' imbronciate si dischiudono lievemente, quasi un sorriso, no, non ancora, ma... – Io gli ele sforbiciavo, certo, le sue parole – lui, eccessivo e smodato e magnanimo, com'è sempre stato, profondava parole a piene mani e io gli ele sbucciavo, buttavo via la scorza, il tor-solo e anche tanta polpa, quando era necessario. Lui non ne sarebbe stato capace, avido e incontinente e compulsivo com'era, sempre un boccone e un bicchiere di troppo, ma da me si lasciava mettere a dieta e sapeva che, se restava qualcosa sul piatto dopo che avevo passato tutto al setaccio, era veramente qualcosa di buono. Con te, diceva, vicino a te so chi sono e non sono niente male.

### **[*pagine finali*]**

Là dietro, diceva mostrandomi le ferree porte della Casa, quando le vedevamo in lontananza passeggiando alla periferia della città, si possono guardare in faccia le cose. Qui fuori possiamo solo guardare quelle porte, le cui lucide scaglie convesse riflettono le immagini spezzate delle cose, che si allungano oblique o si gonfiano turgide se ci spostiamo un po' indietro o in avanti, si assottigliano si dilatano si spiaccicano – conosciamo solo quelle fuggevoli caricature, non la verità, nascosta dall'altra parte, dietro quegli specchi di bronzo. Ma io, amore mio, mi dicevi, non posso più cantare solo le fate morgane di quegli specchi, quei riflessi illusori. Il mio canto deve dire le cose, la verità, ciò che tiene unito o disgrega il mondo, costi quello che costi. Anche la vita – non gli ho chiesto se la sua o la mia – oppure ammutolire, che per me sarebbe peggio che morire.

E allora, signor Presidente, ho avuto una fitta al cuore; una luce, una folgore che squarcia il buio ma anche l'anima, perché ho capito che cosa mi avrebbe subito chiesto e ho capito che era finita. La strada

the sheet and threw it away, because he realized that he couldn't think of anything to say. He knows about these things, it's in his blood, he notices immediately if he comes out with something trite – he always excused anything he did, with women he allowed himself to shift his interest whenever he pleased and he also expected to be understood and forgiven, given that he was so swayable and susceptible... – but with words, no, there he excused nothing, he sensed at once when something wasn't right and did not aim to deceive.

In short, only when we were together did he feel entirely serene, confident, even about what he wrote, after he had read it to me and had seen in my eyes – rather on your mouth, he would say, when my lips, pouting a bit at first, opened slightly... almost a smile, no, not yet, but... I would prune his words, of course – excessive, immoderate and magnanimous as he has always been, he lavished words profusely and I pared them for him, discarding the rind, the core and even a lot of the pulp, when it was necessary. He would not have been capable of it, fervent, unrestrained and compulsive as he was, always a morsel and a glass too much, but he let himself be put on a diet by me and he knew that, if something remained on the plate after I had passed everything through the sieve, it was truly something good. With you, he would say, with you at my side I know who I am and I'm not so bad.

***[final pages]***

Behind there, he would say, showing me the impenetrable doors of the Home when we glimpsed them from afar as we strolled around the outskirts of the city, you can see things as they are. Here outside we can only see those doors, whose gleaming convex plates reflect splintered images of things that lengthen obliquely or expand and swell – stretching out, inflating, shrinking – if we move backward or forward a little. All we know are those ephemeral travesties, not the truth that is hidden on the other side, behind those bronze mirrors. But I, my love, he would say to me, can no longer celebrate only the mirages of those mirrors, those illusory reflections. My verse must be about reality, the truth, that which holds the world together or dissolves it, no matter what the cost. Even if the cost is life – I did not ask him whether he meant his or mine – or else fall silent, which for me would be worse than death.

At those words, Mr. President, I felt a stab in my heart; a flash of light, a thunderbolt that shatters the darkness but also the spirit,

sbarrata, il ponte caduto, l'abisso invalicabile. Mi pareva già di sentirlo chiedermi della Casa, e di Lei, signor Presidente, della Fondazione e di noi e di cosa c'è veramente qui dentro e di come sono veramente le cose, i cuori, il mondo. Sì, perché anche lui, signor Presidente, è persuaso – come tutti, come me prima di venire qui – che una volta entrati nella Casa si veda finalmente in faccia la verità – non più velata, riflessa e deformata, mascherata e truccata come la si vede là fuori, ma direttamente, faccia a faccia. Cantare il segreto della vita e del-la morte, diceva, chi siamo donde veniamo dove andiamo, ma duro è il confine, la penna si spezza contro le porte di bronzo che nascondono il destino, e così si resta fuori ad almanaccare inutilmente sul trascorrere e sul permanere, sull'ieri sull'oggi e sul domani, e la penna serve solo a succhiarsela in bocca, perché soltanto il Vero grande e terribile è degno del canto – almeno del suo, non lo diceva ma lo pensava – e quel Vero lo si conosce soltanto dietro le porte.

Là fuori, signor Presidente, si smania di sapere; anche chi fa finta di disinteressarsene darebbe non so cosa per saperlo. Lui poi smania più di tutti, perché è un poeta e la poesia, dice, deve scoprire e dire il segreto della vita, strappare il velo, sfondare le porte, toccare il fondo del mare dov'è nascosta la perla. Forse, ho pensato, era venuto a prendermi soprattutto – soltanto? – per questo, per sapere, per interrogarmi, perché gli raccontassi ciò che sta dietro queste porte e lui potesse afferrare la sua lira e inalzare il canto nuovo, inaudito, il canto che dice ciò che nessuno sa.

Me lo vedevo, aggrappato a me, ad attendere le mie parole, i suoi occhi verdi febbrili... e come avrei potuto dirgli che... Lei ha già capito, signor Presidente. Come dirgli che, qui dentro, a parte la luce tanto più fioca, è come là fuori? Che siamo dietro lo specchio, ma che quel retro è anch'esso uno specchio, uguale all'altro. Pure qui gli oggetti mentono, si dissimulano e trascolorano come meduse. Siamo in tanti, come là fuori; ancora di più, il che rende ancora più difficile conoscersi. Ho parlato con qualcuno, ma nessuno sa da dove viene – sì, la città, i genitori, va bene, anche i nonni, sebbene la memoria s'indebolisca, ma di quello che lui cerca, il segreto dell'origine, della fine, nessuno sa niente. Facciamo anche amicizia, ogni tanto perfino un flirt o magari qualcosa di più, un amoretto, un amore, ma presto anche qui non si sa più che differenza ci sia tra l'uno e l'altro ed è subito la solita sol-fa, incomprensioni e malintesi. Presto non si sa

because I realized what it was that he would immediately ask me and I knew that it was all over. The road impassable, the bridge collapsed, the abyss insurmountable. It seemed to me that I could already hear him asking me about the Home, and about you, Mr. President, about the Foundation and about us and about what it's really like inside here and about how things, love, the world, really are. Of course, because he too, Mr. President, is convinced – like everyone, like me before I came here – that once you enter the Home you finally see the truth as it is – no longer veiled, reflected and distorted, disguised and made-up as it is seen on the outside, but directly, face to face. Oh to sing the secret of life and death, he would say, who we are where we come from where we are going – but crossing the boundary is hard, the pen breaks against the bronze doors that conceal destiny, and so you are left outside to muse hopelessly over passing on and remaining, over yesterday today and tomorrow, and all you can do with the pen is put it in your mouth and suck it, because only the great, appalling Truth is worthy of verse – at least of his verse, he didn't say it but he thought it – and that Truth can only be known behind the doors.

There outside, Mr. President, people yearn to know; even those who pretend they have no interest in knowing would give anything to know. He yearns more than anybody, because he's a poet and poetry, he says, should uncover and tell the secret of life, tear away the veil, break down the doors, reach the bottom of the sea where the pearl is hidden. Maybe, I thought, he had come to get me primarily – only? – for this reason, to know, to question me, so that I might tell him what lies behind these doors and he could take up his lyre and extol a new, unprecedented song, a song that tells what no one else knows.

I could just see him, clinging to me, awaiting my words, his green eyes feverish... and how could I tell him that... You see my point, Mr. President. How could I tell him that here inside, aside from the light that is so much fainter, it is just the same as outside? That we are behind the mirror, but that the back is also a mirror, no different from the other. Here too objects lie, disguising themselves and changing color like medusas. There are a lot of us, like outside; even more of us, which makes it even more difficult to know one another. I've spoken with some of them, but nobody knows where they come from – the city, yes, their parents, sure, even their grandparents, although the memory grows dimmer – but what he is seek-

più se ci si vuol bene o è solo un'abitudine, e poi tutto il resto, mugugni ripicche dispetti, insomma proprio come in famiglia.

Del resto, perché dovremmo saperne di più di quelli là fuori, di più di noi stessi quando eravamo là fuori? E anche Lei, signor Presidente, perché qui dovremmo averLa vista? Supponiamo, come supponevamo, che ci sia qualcuno che dirige tutta la baracca, ma chi sia e come sia e com'è fatto... perché dovremmo saperlo? Quei malanni e quelle magagne che ci hanno spedito in questi corridoi e in queste buie valli, quei piccoli accidenti al cuore o al cervello, il morbo velenoso di un serpente o di un rubinetto del gas non aiutano a capire meglio quest'immenso labirinto del prima e del dopo, del mai e del sempre e dell'io e del tu e del...

Siamo dall'altra parte dello specchio, che è pure uno specchio, e vediamo solo un pallido volto, senza essere sicuri di chi sia. Se uno si rompe una gamba, non pretende per questo di vedere il Presidente, e rompersi la testa non aiuta di più. Il fiume scorre, il sangue scorre, un argine si rompe, l'acqua trabocca e inonda i campi, il nuotatore va sotto, beve, riemerge, continua a nuotare senza vedere nulla né nel meriggio accecante né al buio della notte.

Dirgli che io, anche qui dentro, non ne so più di lui? Gli sarebbe venuto un colpo, al mio vate. Mi figuravo le sue lamentele, un uomo finito, un poeta cui hanno rubato il tema; avrebbe pensato che quella congiura cosmica era tutta una manovra contro di lui, per metterlo a terra, per condannarlo al silenzio. Se avesse detto agli altri che qui dentro è come là fuori lo avrebbero fatto a pezzi, specie le sue smaniose ammiratrici che lo venerano come un maestro di vita, e se avesse taciuto si sarebbe sentito un codardo. Ma soprattutto che figuraccia, venir fin qua dentro, fin quaggiù, per scoprire che non ne valeva la pena, che dietro la porta non c'è niente di nuovo.

Già me lo vedevo, straziato smarrito atterrito inviperito impermalito seccatissimo con me che gli avevo guastato tutto – e poi i giorni e le notti insieme, io al suo fianco e lui che mi guarda di traverso, la scassamarroni che gli ha fatto cascare il palco, spaventato che lo spifferassi agli altri, imbarazzato a farsi vedere in giro con me, lui partito come un eroe verso il mondo sconosciuto e tornato con le pive nel sacco. E quando fosse venuta, per lui o per me, l'ora di tornare di nuovo, e definitivamente, nella Casa, che disastro la ripetizione degli addii, ridotti a convenevoli. Di colpo mi sono sentita stanca,

ing, the secret of the initial origin, of the final end, nobody knows anything about that. We even form friendships, from time to time even a flirtation or maybe something more, a little fling, a love affair, but here too it soon becomes impossible to tell the difference between one and the other and before long it's the same old story, misunderstandings and mix-ups. In next to no time you no longer know if you love each other or if it's just routine, and then all the rest, whining vindictiveness fits of pique, in short just like back home.

For that matter, why should we know more than those on the outside, more than we ourselves knew when we were out there? And as for you, Mr. President, why should we have seen you here? We assume, as we used to assume, that there is someone running the whole shebang, but who he is and what he's like and how he came to be... why should we know that? Those ailments and infirmities that sent us to these corridors and to these dark vales, those small calamities of the heart or brain, the venomous bane of a snake or of a gas valve do not help us to better understand this immense labyrinth of before and after, of never and always, of I and you and...

We are on the other side of the mirror, but it is still a mirror, and all we see is a pallid face, without being certain whose it is. If someone breaks a leg, he doesn't expect to see the President because of it, and breaking one's head doesn't help any more so. The river flows, blood flows, a dike breaks, the water overflows and floods the fields, the swimmer goes under, takes in water, re-emerges, goes on swimming without seeing anything, either in the blinding midday light or the dark of night.

Tell him that I, even here inside, know no more than he does? He would have had a shock, that bard of mine. I could just picture his complaints, a man who was done for, a poet whose theme had been stolen from him; he would think that that cosmic conspiracy was all a scheme against him, to break him, to condemn him to silence. If he told others that here inside it's just the same as outside, they would rip him to shreds – especially his fervent female admirers who worship him as a guru – and if he kept quiet about it he would have felt like a coward. But above all, how humiliating, to come as far as here, all the way down here, only to find out that it wasn't worth it, that behind the door there is nothing to report.

I could just see him, tormented dismayed panicky furious annoyed extremely irritated with me for having spoiled it all for him – and then the days and nights together, me at his side and him look-



sfinita; ricominciare, cucinare, lavare, fare all'amore, andare a teatro, invitare qualcuno a cena, ringraziare per i fiori, parlare, equivocare e fraintendersi, come sempre, dormire alzarsi rivestirsi...

No, impossibile, non ce l'avrei fatta, non ce la facevo. Mi sentivo di colpo così stanca. Ma forse avrei stretto i denti e inghiottito la mia stanchezza e avrei tirato avanti. Le donne sanno farlo, lo fanno quasi sempre, anche quando non sanno più perché o per chi. Anche l'idea di averlo di nuovo sempre fra i piedi non è che mi... ma soprattutto l'idea di dover tacere, cambiar discorso quando lui avrebbe chiesto, avrebbe voluto sapere, lui così sensibile, così fragile...

Ecco dunque perché, signor Presidente. No, non è come hanno detto, che si è girato per troppo amore, incapace di pazienza e di attesa, e dunque per troppo poco amore. E nemmeno perché, se fossi tornata con lui, da lui, non avrebbe più potuto cantare quelle canzoni melodiose e struggenti che dicevano il dolore della mia perdita e di ogni perdita e avevano fatto il giro del mondo, diffuse dai juke box e poi dai cd, amate da tutti, che avrebbero continuato ad amarle solo se le avesse cantate ancora e ne avesse cantate altre come quelle, lo strazio per la mia lontananza, il vento che muoveva le corde della sua lira, che lo faceva poeta solo se era senza di me per la pena di essere senza di me.

Conosco questo stupido pettegolezzo. No, signor Presidente, non è per questo motivo indegno e banale che si è voltato e mi ha perduta. È una calunnia di colleghi invidiosi che vogliono dipingerlo come un narciso egoista per fargli perdere il favore del pubblico, magari gli stessi che hanno diffuso pure quelle voci sui bei ragazzi con i quali si sarebbe consolato della mia lontananza, mandando su tutte le furie quelle sue adoranti ammiratrici, capaci per gelosia di cavargli gli occhi. No, signor Presidente. Sono stata io. Lui voleva sapere e io gliel'ho impedito. Dio sa se non mi è costato. Sì, è vero, ero stanca, ormai mi ero abituata, quasi affezionata alla Casa e ai suoi ritmi. Ma mi sarebbe tanto piaciuto uscire per un po' – solo per un po', lo sapevamo entrambi – in quella luce d'estate – almeno per un'estate, un'estate su quella piccola isola dove io e lui... Anche da sola, anche senza di lui sarei stata felice di fare una passeggiata da quelle parti.

Ma l'avrei distrutto, uscendo con lui e rispondendo alle sue inevitabili domande. Io, distruggerlo? Piuttosto farmi mordere da

ing at me crooked, the spoiler who brought the curtain down on his stage, scared that I would blab it to the others, embarrassed to be seen with me, he who departed for the unknown world like a hero and returned empty-handed. And when the time came, for him or for me, to return to the Home again, this time for good, what a farce having to repeat goodbyes reduced to conventionalities. All of a sudden I felt exhausted, spent; the thought of starting all over again, cooking, washing, making love, going to the theater, inviting people to dinner, thanking them for the flowers, talking, misunderstanding and misinterpreting one another, as always, sleeping getting up getting dressed...

No, impossible, I couldn't have done it, I couldn't do it. I felt so tired all of a sudden. Still, perhaps I would have gritted my teeth and swallowed my fatigue and I would have carried on. Women can do this, they do it almost all the time, even when they no longer know why or for whom. Even the idea of having him always underfoot again, it's not like it... but especially the idea of having to keep quiet about it, changing the subject whenever he asked, whenever he wanted to know, given how sensitive, how fragile he is...

So that's the reason why, Mr. President. No, it's not what people have said, that he turned around because of excessive love, unable to be patient and wait, and therefore because of too little love. Nor because, if I had gone back with him, to him, he would no longer have been able to sing those sweet, poignant songs that expressed the ache of losing me, of every loss, songs that had gone around the world, dispensed by juke boxes and later by CD's, loved by everyone, who would continue to love them only if he still sang them and others like them, his torment over my absence, the wind that moved the strings of his lyre, that made him a poet only if he was without me, for the sorrow of being without me.

I've heard that silly gossip. No, Mr. President, it was not on account of such a pitiful, trite reason that he turned around and lost me. It is a lie by envious colleagues who want to depict him as a narcissistic egotist to make him lose favor with the public, maybe the same ones who spread those rumors about the pretty boys whom he supposedly consoled himself with in my absence, infuriating all those adoring female admirers of his, jealous enough to scratch his eyes out. No, Mr. President. It was me. He wanted to know and I prevented him. God knows it cost me. Yes, it's true, I was tired, by now I had gotten used to it, I had almost become attached to the

un serpente cento volte più velenoso di quella banale infezione, piuttosto.

Lei dunque capirà, signor Presidente, perché, quando eravamo ormai prossimi alle porte, l'ho chiamato con voce forte e sicura, la voce di quando ero giovane, dall'altra parte, e lui – sapevo che non avrebbe resistito – si è voltato, mentre io mi sentivo risucchiare indietro, leggera, sempre più leggera, una figurina di carta nel vento, un'ombra che si allunga si ritira e si confonde con le altre ombre della sera, e lui mi guardava impietrito ma saldo e sicuro e io svanivo felice al suo sguardo, perché già lo vedevo ritornare straziato ma forte alla vita, ignaro del nulla, ancora capace di serenità, forse anche di felicità. Ora infatti, a casa, a casa nostra, dorme, tranquil-lo. Un po' stanco, si capisce, però...

Home and its routines. Still, I would have loved to go out for a little while – just for a little while, we both knew it – into that summer light – at least for one summer, a summer on that small island where he and I... Even by myself, even without him I would have been happy to go walking there.

But I would have destroyed him, by going with him and answering his inevitable questions. Me, destroy him? I'd sooner be bitten by a serpent a hundred times more venomous than that tedious infection, rather than that.

You will therefore understand, Mr. President, why, when by then we were almost at the doors, I called to him in a strong, firm voice, the voice from when I was young, on the other side, and he – I knew he would not be able to resist – he turned around, as I felt myself being sucked back, lighter and lighter, a paper doll in the wind, a shadow that lengthens retreats and merges with the other shadows of the evening, and he watched me, turned to stone, but safe and sound, and I vanished happily before his eyes, because I could already see him returning to life tormented but strong, ignorant of the void, still capable of serenity, perhaps even of happiness. Now in fact, at home, our home, he is sleeping quietly. A little tired, it's understandable, but...

**LE ARANCE D'ORO**  
**by Luigi Capuana**  
**translated by Santi Buscemi**

**Santi Buscemi** is a professor of English at Middlesex County College in Edison, NJ, where he chaired the English Department (1974-2003). He has also taught at Rutgers University. The former president of the New Jersey College English Association and the New Jersey Association for Developmental Education, he has presented at several professional conferences in the US and was a keynote speaker at the University of Natal (South Africa) conference on language instruction in 2000. He is the author and co-author of six college texts on writing published by McGraw-Hill.

The following selection is from Luigi Capuana's *C'era Una Volta*. Buscemi's translation of Capuana's "I tre anelli" appeared in the summer 2004 issue of *Forum Italicum*. Prof. Buscemi is the son of Sicilian immigrants from the province of Agrigento.

**Luigi Capuana**

Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) was born in Mineo, Sicily. After studying law at the University of Catania, he began to write plays for a company of amateur actors and showed an intense interest in popular poetry. In 1864, he moved to Florence, then capital of Italy, and began his career as a literary critic by writing for *La Nazione*. Florence also introduced him to the work of Balzac and of other French novelists. By 1877, Capuana was in Milan writing for *Corriere della Sera*. In 1902, he was appointed to the chair of aesthetics and stylistics at the University of Catania.

As a literary critic, Capuana established a reputation for objectivity and analytical acumen. He is also remembered for having championed theories of romantic naturalism in works such as *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea* (1880-82). In addition, his ability to expose the psychology of his characters won him lasting fame as a novelist. Among his best works in this genre are *Giacinta* (1879), *Profumo* (1891), *Le Paesane* (1894), and his masterpiece, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* (1901). He also wrote several children's books, including a collection of fairy tales, *C'era Una Volta...* (1862)

**A Note on Translation**

I have tried to retain as much of the sinewy and sometimes startling character of Capuana's prose as much as possible. In cases where literal translation was impossible or inappropriate, I tried to capture the author's intent and the energy of his language in way that would appeal to readers familiar with fairy tales popular in the English-speaking world. In a few cases, I relied on contemporary figures of speech to capture what appeared to be the author's clear intent. I am indebted to my good friend Nino Russo for his help in translating a number of particularly difficult idiomatic expressions and for all of his encouragement.

## *LE ARANCE D'ORO*

**di Luigi Capuana**

Si racconta che c'era una volta un Re, il quale avea dietro il palazzo reale un magnifico giardino. Non vi mancava albero di sorta; ma il più raro e il più pregiato, era quello che produceva le arance d'oro. Quando arrivava la stagione delle arance, il Re vi metteva a guardia una sentinella notte e giorno; e tutte le mattine scendeva lui stesso a osservare coi suoi occhi se mai mancasse una foglia. Una mattina va in giardino, e trova la sentinella addormentata. Guarda l'albero... Le arance d'oro non c'erano più!- Sentinella sciagurata, pagherai colla tua testa.- Maestà, non ci ho colpa. È venuto un cardellino, si è posato sopra un ramo e si è messo a cantare. Canta, canta, canta, mi si aggravavano gli occhi. Lo scacciai da quel ramo, ma andò a posarsi sopra un altro. Canta, canta, canta, non mi reggevo dal sonno. Lo scacciai anche di lì, e appena cessava di cantare, il mio sonno svaniva. Ma si posò in cima all'albero, e canta, canta, canta..., ho dormito finora! Il Re non gli fece nulla. Alla nuova stagione, incaricò della guardia il Reuccio in persona. Una mattina va in giardino e trova il Reuccio addormentato. Guarda l'albero...; le arance d'oro non c'erano più! Figuriamoci la sua collera!- Come? Ti sei addormentato anche tu? - Maestà, non ci ho colpa. È venuto un cardellino, si è posato sopra un ramo e si è messo a cantare. Canta, canta, canta, mi s'aggravavano gli occhi. Gli dissi: cardellino traditore, col Reuccio non ti giova! Ed esso a canzonarmi: il Reuccio dorme! il Reuccio dorme! Cardellino traditore, col Reuccio non ti giova! Ed esso a canzonarmi: il Reuccio fa la nanna! il Reuccio fa la nanna! E canta, canta, canta..., ho dormito finora! Il Re volle provarsi lui stesso; e arrivata la stagione si mise a far la guardia. Quando le arance furon mature, ecco il cardellino che si posa sopra un ramo, e comincia a cantare. Il Re avrebbe voluto tirargli, ma faceva buio come in una gola. Intanto aveva una gran voglia di dormire! - Cardellino traditore, questa volta non ti giova! - Ma durava fatica a tener aperti gli occhi. Il cardellino cominciò a canzonarlo: - Pss! Pss! Il Re dorme! Pss! Pss! Il Re dorme! E canta, canta,

## *THE GOLDEN ORANGES*

by Luigi Capuana

Trans. Santi Buscemi

It is said that there was once a king, who had a magnificent garden behind his royal palace. Every type of tree could be found in the garden, but the rarest and most valued was the one that produced golden oranges. When the season for the oranges arrived, the king ordered a sentry to guard it night and day. And every morning he came down himself to inspect the oranges with his own eyes to make sure that not even one leaf was missing. One morning, he went into the garden and found the sentry asleep. He looked at the tree...The golden oranges were gone!Oh, wretched sentry, you will pay with your head.Majesty, it is not my fault. A goldfinch landed on a branch and began to sing. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that my eyes became heavy. I drove him from that branch, but he then flew to another. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that I could not fight off my sleepiness. I drove him from that branch too, and as soon as he stopped singing, my sleepiness disappeared. However, he then perched on the top of the tree and he sang, and sang, and sang. I have been sleeping until this very moment!"The king did not hurt the man. The next season, he placed the prince himself in charge of guarding the tree. One morning he went into the garden and found the prince asleep. He looked at the tree...the golden oranges were gone!Imagine his anger!What? Even you fell asleep?"Majesty, it is not my fault," said the prince. A goldfinch landed on a branch and began to sing. He sang, and sang, and sang so much that my eyes became heavy. I told him, 'Traitorous goldfinch, don't fool with the prince!' But he simply mocked me: 'The prince is falling asleep! The prince is falling asleep.' 'Traitorous goldfinch,' I said, 'don't fool with the prince!' But he simply mocked me: 'The prince is falling asleep! The prince is falling asleep!' And he sang, and sang, and sang...I have been sleeping until this very moment!" The king wanted to try guarding the tree himself. And when the oranges ripened, the goldfinch perched on a branch and began to sing. The king wanted to pull him down, but the garden was covered in darkness and the king felt very sleepy. Traitorous goldfinch, this time you will not succeed, but he had a hard time keeping his eyes open. The goldfinch began to serenade him:"Hush! Hush! The king is sleep-



canta, il Re s'addormentava peggio d'un ghiro anche lui. La mattina apriva gli occhi: le arance d'oro non ci eran più! Allora fece un bando per tutti i suoi Stati: - Chi gli portasse, vivo o morto, quel cardellino, riceverebbe per mancia una mula carica d'oro. Passarono sei mesi, e non si vide nessuno. Finalmente un giorno si presenta un contadinotto molto male in arnese: - Maestà, lo volete davvero quel cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete. Il Re lo prese per le spalle, e lo messe fuor dell'uscio. Il giorno appresso quegli tornò: - Maestà, lo volete davvero quel cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete. Il Re lo prese per le spalle, gli diè una pedata e lo messe fuor dell'uscio. - Ma il giorno appresso, quello, cocciuto, ritornava: - Maestà, lo volete davvero il cardellino? Promettetemi la mano della Reginotta, e in men di tre giorni l'avrete. Il Re, stizzito, chiamò una guardia e lo fece condurre in prigione. Intanto ordinava si facesse attorno all'albero una rete di ferro; con quelle sbarre grosse, non c'era più bisogno di sentinella. Ma quando le arance furon mature, una mattina va in giardino...; l'arance d'oro non c'eran più. Figuriamoci la sua collera! Dovette, per forza, mettersi d'accordo con quel contadinotto. - Portami vivo il cardellino e la Reginotta sarà tua. - Maestà, fra tre giorni. E prima che i tre giorni passassero era già di ritorno. - Maestà, eccolo qui. La Reginotta ora è mia. Il Re si fece scuro. Doveva dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone? - Vuoi delle gioie? Vuoi dell'oro? Ne avrai finché vorrai. Ma quanto alla Reginotta, nettati la bocca. - Maestà, il patto fu questo. - Vuoi delle gioie? Vuoi dell'oro? - Tenetevi ogni cosa. Sarà quel che sarà! E andò via. Il Re disse al cardellino: - Ora che ti ho tra le mani, ti vo' martoriare. Il cardellino strillava, sentendosi strappare le penne ad una ad una. - Dove son riposte le arance d'oro? - Se non mi farete più nulla, Maestà, ve lo dirò. - Non ti farò più nulla. - Le arance d'oro sono riposte dentro la Grotta delle sette porte. Ma c'è il mercante, col berrettino rosso, che fa la guardia. Bisogna sapere il motto; e lo sanno due soli: il mercante e quel contadino che mi ha preso. Il Re mandò a chiamare il contadino. - Facciamo un altro patto. Vorrei entrare nella Grotta delle sette porte, e non so il motto. Se me lo sveli, la Reginotta sarà tua. - Parola di Re? - Parola di Re! - Maestà, il motto è questo: "Secca risecca! Apriti, Cecca." - Va bene. Il Re andò, disse il motto, e la Grotta s'aperse. Il contadino rimase

ing! Hush! Hush! The king is sleeping!" And as he sang, and sang, and sang, the king himself fell into a deep sleep. In the morning, he opened his eyes; the golden oranges were gone! Therefore, he proclaimed throughout his realm: "Whoever brings me this goldfinch, dead or alive, will receive a mule loaded with gold as a reward." However, six months later, no one had come forward. Finally, one day there appeared a crusty old peasant, who was shabbily dressed: "Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him." The king grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him out the door. The next day, he returned. "Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him." The king grabbed him by the shoulders, gave him a strong kick, and put him out the door. However, the peasant was stubborn, and the next day he returned. "Majesty, do you truly want that goldfinch? Promise me the hand of the princess, and in less than three days you shall have him." Annoyed, the king called for a guard and had the peasant thrown into prison. Meanwhile, he ordered that an iron net be built around the tree; such a barrier eliminated the need for a guard. When the oranges had ripened, the king went into the garden one morning... and the golden oranges were gone. Imagine his anger! Now he was obliged to come to terms with the crusty old peasant. "Bring me the goldfinch alive, and the princess is yours." "Majesty, within three days." And before three days had passed, he returned. "Majesty, here he is. Now the princess is mine." A dark look came over the king's face. "Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought. "Do you want jewels? Do you want gold? You can have as much as you want. But as for the princess, say no more." "But, Majesty, that was our agreement," said the peasant. "Do you want jewels? Do you want gold?" "Keep all you have," answered the peasant. "Whatever happens, happens!" And he went on his way. The king turned to the goldfinch. "Now that I have you in my hands, I am going to torture you." The goldfinch shrieked as he felt his feathers being pulled out one by one. "Where are the golden oranges hidden?" "I will tell you, Majesty, if you stop torturing me." "I will stop," said the king. "The golden oranges are hidden in the grotto of the seven doors. However, guarding them is a merchant wearing a red cap. You need to know the magic words, and only two people know them: the merchant and the peasant who captured me. The king called for the peasant. "Let's make another agreement. I want

fuori ad attenderlo. In quella grotta i diamanti, a mucchi per terra, abbagliavano. Vistosì solo, sua Maestà si chinava e se ne riempiva le tasche. Ma nella stanza appresso, i diamanti, sempre a mucchi, eran più grossi e più belli. Il Re si vuotava le tasche, e tornava a riempirle di questi. Così fino all'ultima stanza, dove, in un angolo, si vedevano ammonticchiate le arance d'oro del giardino reale. C'era lì una bisaccia, e il Re la colmò. Or che sapeva il motto, vi sarebbe ritornato più volte. - Uscito fuor della Grotta, colla bisaccia in collo, trovò il contadino che lo attendeva. - Maestà, la Reginotta ora è mia. Il Re si fece scuro. Dovea dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone? - Domanda qualunque grazia e ti verrà concessa. Ma per la Reginotta nettati la bocca.

- Maestà, e la vostra parola? -

Le parole se le porta il vento. -

Quando sarete al palazzo ve ne accorgete. Arrivato al palazzo, il Re mette giù la bisaccia e fa di vuotarla. Ma invece di arance d'oro, trova arance marce. Si mette le mani nelle tasche, i diamanti son diventati tanti gusci di lumache! Ah! quel pezzo di contadinaccio gliel'avea fatta! Ma il cardellino la pagava. E tornò a martoriarlo.

- Dove sono le mie arance d'oro? -

Se non mi farete più nulla, Maestà, ve lo dirò.

- Non ti farò più nulla. - Son lì dove le avete viste; ma per riaverle bisogna conoscere un altro motto, e lo sanno due soli: il mercante e quel contadino che mi ha preso. Il Re lo mandò a chiamare:

- Facciamo un altro patto. Dimmi il motto per riprendere le arance e la Reginotta sarà tua.

- Parola di Re? - Parola di Re! - Maestà il motto è questo: "Ti sto addosso: Dammi l'osso."

- Va bene. Il Re andava e ritornava più volte colla bisaccia colma, e riportava a palazzo tutte le arance d'oro. Allora si presentò il contadino: - Maestà, la Reginotta ora è mia. Il Re si fece scuro. Dovea dare la Reginotta a quello zoticone? - Quello è il tesoro reale: prendi quello che ti piace. Quanto alla Reginotta, nettati la bocca. - Non se ne parli più. E andò via. Da che il cardellino era in gabbia, le arance d'oro restavano attaccate all'albero da un anno all'altro. Un giorno la Reginotta disse al Re: - Maestà, quel cardellino vorrei tenerlo nella mia camera. - Figliuola mia, prendilo pure; ma bada che non ti scappi. Il cardellino nella camera della Reginotta non cantava più. - Cardellino, perché non canti più? - Ho il mio padrone che piange. - E perché

to enter the grotto of the seven doors, but I don't know the secret words. If you tell me them, the princess is yours. "Your word as king?" "My word as king!" "Majesty, the magic words are these: "Dry, dry, very dry!" "Open up, open up, say I." "Very well." When the king uttered the magic words, the entrance to the grotto opened. The peasant waited outside and waited for him. Within the grotto on the ground was a pile of diamonds, shining brilliantly. Seeing that he was alone, the king stooped down and filled his pockets. But in the next room, the diamonds, also in a pile, were bigger and more beautiful. The king emptied his pockets, and he refilled them with these. Thus it was until he came to the last room, where he saw the golden oranges of the royal palace piled up in a corner. Nearby, there happened to be a knapsack, and the king filled it. Now that he knew the magic words, he would return over and over again. As he left the grotto with the knapsack on his back, he found the peasant waiting for him. "Majesty, now the princess is mine." A dark look came over the king's face. "Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought. "Ask for whatever reward you want and I will grant it to you.," said the king. "But as for the princess, say no more." "But you gave your word, Majesty." "My word is gone with the wind." "When you return to the palace, you will realize what you have done." Back at the palace, the king put down the knapsack and emptied it. But instead of golden oranges, he found rotten oranges. He put his hands in his pockets, and he found that the diamonds had turned to snail shells. This is the work of that crusty old peasant! But the goldfinch would pay for it. And he decided to torture the bird. "Where are my golden oranges?" "I will tell you, Majesty, if you stop torturing me." "I will stop," said the king. "They are where you saw them; however, to get them back, you will need to know other magic words, and only two people know them: the merchant and the peasant who captured me." - The king sent for the peasant. "Let's make another agreement. Tell me the magic words to get back the oranges and the princess will be yours." "Your word as king?" "My word as king!" "Majesty, here are the magic words: "I am coming after you; Give me your bones." - "Very well." The king came and went many times with a full knapsack, and returned all of the golden oranges to the royal palace. Therefore, the peasant returned: "Majesty, now the princess is mine." A dark look came over the king's face. "Must I give the princess to this lout?" he thought. "Here is the royal treasure: take what you like. But as for the princess, say on more." "There is nothing more to

piange?- Perché non ha quel che vorrebbe.- Che cosa vorrebbe?- Vorrebbe la Reginotta. Dice: "Ho lavorato tanto, E le fatiche mie son sparse al vento." - Chi è il tuo padrone? Quello zotico?- Quello zotico, Reginotta, è più Re di Sua Maestà.- Se fosse vero, lo sposerei. Va' a dirglielo, e torna subito.- Lo giurate?- Lo giuro. E gli aperse la gabbia. Ma il cardellino non tornò. Una volta il Re domandò alla Reginotta:- O il cardellino non canta più? È un bel pezzo che non lo sento.- Maestà, è un po' malato. E il Re s'acchetò. Intanto la povera Reginotta viveva in ambascia:- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone! E come s'avvicinava la stagione delle arance, pel timore del babbo, il cuore le diventava piccino piccino. Intanto venne un ambasciatore del Re di Francia che la chiedeva per moglie. Il padre ne fu lieto oltremodo, e rispose subito di sì. Ma la Reginotta:- Maestà, non voglio: vo' rimanere ragazza. Quello montò sulle furie:- Come? Diceva di no, ora che avea impegnato la sua parola e non potea più ritrarla?- Maestà, le parole se le porta il vento. Il Re non lo potevan trattenere: schizzava fuoco dagli occhi. Ma quella, ostinata:- Non lo voglio! Non lo voglio! Vo' rimanere ragazza. Il peggio fu quando il Re di Francia mandò a dire che fra otto giorni arrivava. Come rimediare con quella figliolaccia caparbia? Dallo sdegno, le legò le mani e i piedi e la calò in un pozzo:- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare! E la Reginotta zitta. Il Re la calò fino a metà.- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare! E la Reginotta zitta. Il Re la calava più giù, dentro l'acqua; le restava fuori soltanto la testa:- Di' di sì, o ti faccio affogare! E la Reginotta zitta.- Dovea affogarla davvero? E la tirò su; ma la rinchiuse in una stanza, a pane ed acqua. La Reginotta piangeva:- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone! Per mantenere la parola ora patisco tanti guai! Il Re di Francia arrivò con un gran seguito, e prese alloggio nel palazzo reale.- E la Reginotta? Non vuol farsi vedere?- Maestà, è un po' indisposta. Il Re non sapeva che rispondere, imbarazzato.- Portatele questo regalo. Era uno scatolino tutto d'oro e di brillanti. Ma la Reginotta lo posò lì, senza neppur curarsi d'aprirlo. E piangeva.- Cardellino traditore, te e il tuo padrone! - Non siamo traditori, né io, né il mio padrone. Sentendosi rispondere dallo scatolino, la Reginotta lo aperse.- Ah, cardellino mio! Quante lagrime ho sparse.- La tua sorte volea così. Ora il destino è compito. Sua Maestà, conosciuto chi era quel contadino, le diè in dote l'albero che produceva le arance d'oro, e il giorno appresso la Reginotta sposò il Re di Francia. E noi restiamo a grattarci la pancia.

say," responded the peasant, and he went away. Because the goldfinch was in a cage, the golden oranges stayed on the tree from one year to the next. One day, the princess said to the king: "Majesty, I want to keep the goldfinch in my room." "My child, please take him; but be careful not to let him escape." Once in the princess's room, the goldfinch no longer sang. "Goldfinch, why don't you sing anymore," asked the princess. "Because my master is crying." "And why is he crying?" "Because he lacks what he desires." "What does he want?" "He wants the princess. He says: 'I have worked so hard, but all of my efforts have been scattered by the wind.'" "Who your master? That lout?" "Yes, that lout, princess, but he is more of a king than his Majesty." "If this is true, I will marry him. Go tell him that and return right away." "Do you swear it?" "I swear it." And, so, she opened the cage. But the goldfinch did not return. One day, the king asked the princess: "Why doesn't the goldfinch sing anymore? I have not heard him for quite a while." "Majesty, he is a little ill." And the king accepted this excuse. Meanwhile, the poor princess lived in anguish. "Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master!" And as the season of the oranges got near, the princess got more and more depressed in fear of what her father might say. Meanwhile, there arrived an ambassador from the king of France, who wanted to marry the princess. Her father was extremely happy, and he quickly gave his consent. However, the princess refused: "Majesty, I don't want to marry. I want to remain a maid." The king became furious. "What? Are you saying 'no' now that I have given my word and can no longer take it back?" "Majesty, words are blown away by the wind." The king was beside himself; fire was coming out of his eyes. But she was obstinate: "I don't want him. I don't want him. I want to remain a maid." It got even worse when the King of France sent word that he would arrive within eight days. How was the king to deal with his stubborn daughter? He became so angry that he tied her hands and feet, and he lowered her into a well: "Say, yes, or I will let you drown!" But the princess remained silent. The king then lowered her half way down. "Say yes, or I will let you drown!" But the princess remained silent. The king then lowered her even further into the water with only her head above it. "Say yes, or I will let you drown!" But the princess remained silent. "Must I truly drown her?" asked the king. And he pulled her up, but he locked her up in a room, giving her only bread and water. The princess cried: "Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master! I must suffer so much just so I can

**IL CAVALLO DI BRONZO****di Luigi Capuana**

C'era una volta un Re e una Regina, che avevano una figliuola più bella della luna e del sole, e le volevano bene come alla pupilla degli occhi. Un giorno venne uno, e disse al Re:- Maestà, passavo pel bosco qui vicino, e incontrai l'Uomo selvaggio. Mi disse: "Vai dal Re, e digli che voglio la Reginotta per moglie. Se non l'avrò qui fra tre giorni, guai a lui!". Il Re, sentendo questo, fu molto costernato e radunò il Consiglio di corona:- Che cosa doveva fare? L'Uomo selvaggio era terribile: poteva devastare tutto il regno.- Maestà, - disse uno dei ministri - cerchiamo una bella ragazza, vestiamola come la Reginotta e mandiamola lì: l'Uomo selvaggio sarà contento. Trovarono una ragazza bella come la Reginotta, le fecero indossare uno dei più ricchi abiti di lei, e la mandarono nel bosco. Dovea dire che lei era la figlia del Re. Il giorno appresso quella ragazza tornò indietro.- Che cosa è stato?- Maestà, trovai l'Uomo selvaggio, e mi domandò: "Chi sei?". "Sono la Reginotta." "Lasciami vedere." Mi sbottonò la manica del braccio sinistro e urlò: "Non è vero! La Reginotta" dice "ha una voglia in quel braccio!" e mi ha rimandato. Se fra due giorni non avrà lì la sposa, guai a voi! Il Re non sapeva che cosa fare, e radunò di bel nuovo il Consiglio di corona:- L'Uomo selvaggio sa che la Reginotta ha una voglia nel braccio sinistro; è impossibile ingannarlo.- Maestà, - disse il ministro - cerchiamo un'altra ragazza, chiamiamo

keep my word." The king of France arrived with a great retinue, and he took lodgings in the royal palace. "And the princess? Won't you let me see her?" "Majesty, she is a little ill." The king did not know what to respond, for he was embarrassed. "Take this gift to her," said the king of France. It was a small box made of gold and diamonds. However, the princess put it aside without desiring to open it. And she cried. "Traitorous goldfinch, you and your master!" "We are not traitors, neither I nor my master." Hearing this response from within the box, the princess opened it. "Oh, my goldfinch! I have shed so many tears." "That was your fate, princess. But now your destiny is fulfilled." His majesty, realizing who the peasant was, gave him as a dowry the tree that produced the golden oranges. The next day, the King of France and the princess were wed. And about these two, that's all that can be said.

### ***The Bronze Horse***

by Luigi Capuana

translated by Santi Buscemi

There once was a king and queen who had a daughter more beautiful than the moon and the sun, and they loved her more than the pupils of their own eyes. One day, someone came and said to the king: "Majesty, I was traveling through the nearby forest and I met a the savage. He said: 'Go to the king and tell him that I want to marry the princess. If she is not here within three days, woe to him!'" Hearing this, the king was very concerned, and he called together the royal council. What were they to do? The savage was terrifying; he could devastate the entire kingdom. "Majesty," said one of the ministers, "let's find a beautiful young girl, dress her up to look like the princess, and send her to him; the savage will be happy." They found a girl as beautiful as the princess, and they had her put on one of the most expensive of her outfits, and they sent her into the forest. She was told to say that she was the daughter of the king. The next day, the girl returned to the palace. "What happened?" asked the king. "Majesty, I found the savage, and he asked me: 'Who are you?' 'I am the princess.' 'Let me see,' he said, and he unbuttoned the sleeve of my left arm and screamed: 'It's not true! The princess has a birthmark on this arm!' and he sent me back. If the princess is not with him within two days, woe is you!" The king did not know what to



un pittore che le dipinga una voglia simile a quella della Reginotta, vestiamola con uno dei suoi vestiti, e mandiamola lì. Questa volta l'Uomo selvaggio non avrà da ridire. Trovarono un'altra bella ragazza, le fecero dipingere una voglia sul braccio, simile a quella della Reginotta, l'abbigliarono con uno dei più ricchi abiti di lei e la mandarono nel bosco. Doveva dire che lei era la figlia del Re. Ma, il giorno appresso, quella ragazza tornò indietro. - Che cosa è stato? - Maestà, trovai l'Uomo selvaggio e mi domandò: "Chi sei?". "Sono la Reginotta." "Lasciami vedere." Mi osservò tra i capelli e urlò: "Non è vero! La Reginotta" dice "ha tre capelli bianchi sulla nuca". Se domani la sposa non sarà lì, guai a voi. Il povero Re e la povera Regina avrebbero battuto il capo nel muro. - Dunque dovean buttare quella gioia di figliuola in braccio all'Uomo selvaggio? - Maestà, - dissero i ministri - facciamo un ultimo tentativo. Cerchiamo un'altra ragazza. Il pittore le dipingerà la voglia sul braccio, le tingerà di bianco tre capelli sulla nuca; poi le metteremo indosso uno dei vestiti della Reginotta e la manderemo lì. Questa volta l'Uomo selvaggio non avrà più da ridire. Ma il giorno appresso ecco quella ragazza che torna indietro anch'essa. - Che cosa è stato? - Maestà, trovai l'Uomo selvaggio e mi domandò: "Chi sei?". "Sono la Reginotta." "Lasciami vedere." Mi osservò il braccio sinistro: "Va bene!". Mi osservò tra i capelli, sulla nuca: "Va bene!". Poi prese un paio di scarpine ricamate e mi ordinò: "Calza queste qui". E siccome i miei piedi non c'entravano, urlò: "Non è vero!". E mi ha rimandato dicendo: "Guai! Guai!". Allora i ministri: - Maestà, ora succede certamente un disastro! Per la salvezza del regno, bisogna sacrificare la Reginotta! Il Re non sapeva rassegnarsi: avrebbe dato anche il sangue delle sue vene invece della figliuola! Ma il destino voleva così, e bisognava piegare il capo. - La Reginotta si mostrava più coraggiosa di tutti: infine l'Uomo selvaggio non l'avrebbe mangiata! Indossò l'abito da sposa, e accompagnata dal Re, dalla Regina, dalla corte e da un popolo immenso, tra pianti ed urli strazianti, s'avviò verso il bosco. Arrivata lì, abbracciò il Re e la Regina confortandoli che sarebbe tornata a vederli, e sparì tra gli alberi e le macchie folte. Non si seppe più nuova di lei né dell'Uomo selvaggio. Passato un anno, un mese e un giorno, arriva a corte un forestiero, che chiede di parlare col Re. Era un nanetto alto due spanne, gobbo e sbilenco, con un naso che pareva un becco di barbogianni e certi occhietti piccini piccini. Il Re non aveva voglia di ridere; ma come vide quello sgorbio non seppe frenarsi. - Che cosa voleva? - Maestà, - disse il Nano - vengo a farvi una proposta. Se mi

do, and he called the royal council together again: The savage knows that the princess has a birthmark on her left arm; it is impossible to fool him." "Majesty," said one of the ministers, "let's find another young woman; we will paint a birthmark on her similar to the princess's. Let's dress her in one of her outfits, and send her to him. This time the savage won't complain." They found another beautiful young woman and on her arm, they had painted a birthmark similar to the princess's. They dressed her in one of the most expensive of the princess's outfits, and they sent her into the forest. She was to say that she was the daughter of the king. However, the next day, the young woman came back. "What happened?" asked the king. "Majesty, I found the savage, and he asked me: 'Who are you?' 'I am the princess.' 'Let me see.' He looked through my hair and screamed: 'It's not true; the princess has three white hairs on the nape of her neck.' If the princess is not with him tomorrow, woe is you." The poor king and the poor queen wanted to beat their heads against the wall. Why should they throw that joy of a daughter into the arms of the savage? "Majesty," said the ministers, "let's try again. We will look for another young woman. The artist will paint the birthmark on her arm, and he will dye three hairs on the nape of her neck white. Then, we will have her wear one of the princess's dresses and we will send her to him. The savage will not know the difference. But the next day, even this young woman came back. "What happened?" said the king? "Majesty, I found the savage and he asked me: 'Who are you?' 'I am the princess.' 'Let me see.' He looked at my left arm: 'Very well!' he said. He looked through the hair on the nape of my neck. 'Very well!' Then he took a pair of embroidered slippers and commanded: 'Put these on.' And because my feet would not fit into them, he yelled: 'It's not true!' And he sent me back saying, 'Woe! Woe!'" Therefore the ministers said: "Majesty, a tragedy is sure to occur! In order to save the kingdom, you will have to sacrifice the princess! The king could not resign himself to this; he would rather sacrifice the blood of his own veins than give up his daughter. But fate would have it this way, and he had to submit. The princess showed herself to be more courageous than them all. After all, the savage would not eat her! She put on a wedding gown, and accompanied by the king, the queen, members of the court, and an immense number of subjects, she made her way toward the forest amid weeping and heart-rending cries. Once she arrived, she embraced the king and queen, assuring them that she would return and see

darete mezzo regno e la Reginotta per moglie, io andrò a liberarla dalle mani dell'Uomo selvaggio.- Magari! - rispose il Re. - Non mezzo, caro amico, ma ti darei il regno intiero.- Parola di Re non si ritira.- Parola di Re!Il Nano partì.E non era trascorsa una settimana, che il Re riceveva un avviso:"Domani, allo spuntar del sole, si trovasse presso il bosco, colla Regina, con la corte e con tutto il popolo, per far festa alla sua figliuola, che ritornava!"Il Re e la Regina non osavano credere: dubitavano che quello sgorbio si facesse beffa di loro: pure andarono. E allo spuntar del sole, ecco il Nanetto gobbo e sbilenco, che conduceva per mano la Reginotta vestita da sposa, come quando era entrata nel bosco per l'Uomo selvaggio.Figuriamoci che allegrezza!Le feste e i banchetti non ebbero a finir più. Ma di notte non se ne parlava, e della metà del regno nemmeno.Il Re, ora che aveva lì la figliuola, e che l'Uomo selvaggio era stato ucciso dal Nano, non intendeva più saperne di mantener la sua parola. Il Nano, di quando in quando, gli domandava:- Maestà, e le mie nozze?Ma quello cambiava discorso: da quell'orecchio non ci sentiva.- Maestà, e la mia metà del regno?Ma quello cambiava discorso: da quell'altro non ci sentiva neppure.- Bella parola di Re! - gli disse il Nano una volta.- Ah, nanaccio impertinente!E il Re gli tirò un calcio alla schiena, che lo fece saltare dalla finestra.- Doveva esser morto!Andarono a vedere in istrada; ma il Nano non c'era più. Si era rizzato di terra, si era ripulito il vestitino, ed era andato via, lesto lesto, come se nulla fosse stato.- Buon viaggio! - disse il Re tutto contento.Ma la Reginotta, da quel giorno in poi, diventò di malumore; non diceva una parola, non rideva più, andava perdendo il colorito.- Che cosa ti senti, figliuola mia?- Maestà, non mi sento nulla; ma... chi dà la sua parola la dovrebbe mantenere.- Come? Lei dunque voleva quel Nano gobbo e sbilenco?- Non intendevo dir questo; ma... chi dà la sua parola la dovrebbe mantenere.Anche la Regina non viveva tranquilla:- Quel Nano era potente: aveva vinto l'Uomo selvaggio; doveva tramare qualche brutta vendetta!Il Re rispondeva con una spallucciata:- Se quello sgorbio gli veniva un'altra volta dinanzi!Ma la Reginotta ripeteva:- Chi dà la sua parola, la dovrebbe mantenere!Intanto essendosi sparsa la notizia che la Reginotta era stata liberata dalle mani dell'Uomo selvaggio, il Reuccio del Portogallo mandò a domandarla per moglie.La Reginotta non disse né di sì, né di no; ma il Re e la Regina non vedevano l'ora di celebrare le nozze.Il Reuccio di Portogallo si mise in viaggio, e per via incontrò un uomo, che conduceva un gran carro con su un cavallo di bronzo, che pareva

them, and she disappeared among the trees and the thick bushes. From that point, nothing was heard about her or about the savage. However, after a year, a month, and a day, there came to court a stranger who wished to speak with the king. He was a dwarf, about eighteen inches tall, hunchbacked and lop-sided, with a nose that looked like a barn owl's and with beady little eyes. If you give me half the kingdom as well as the hand of the princess in marriage, I will free her from the hands of the savage. "Of course!" answered the King. "And not just half, dear friend; I will give you the entire kingdom." "A king cannot break his promise." "I give you my promise." And the dwarf left. And before a week passed, the king received a message: "Tomorrow at sunrise, come to the edge of the forest with the queen, the court, and all of the people to celebrate the return of your daughter!" The king and queen did not dare to believe it: They believed that this runt was trying to trick them. Yet they went. And at sunrise, there appeared the hunchbacked, lop-sided dwarf, who was leading the princess by the hand. She was dressed as a bride, just as she had been she entered the forest to meet the savage. Imagine what happiness! The celebrations and the banquets never ended. However, no one ever spoke of the wedding or of giving half the kingdom away. Now that he had his daughter and the savage had been killed by the dwarf, the king no longer knew how to keep his word. From time to time, the dwarf asked him: "And what about my wedding, Majesty?" But he always changed the subject, for he would hear none of that. "And what about my half of the kingdom, Majesty?" But he always changed the subject, for he would hear none of that either. "The king's promise is worthless!" once said the dwarf. "Oh, impertinent dwarf!" said the king, and he threw a shoe at his backside so hard that it made him jump out of the window. They went to search for him in the street, but he was gone. He had gotten up from the ground, had cleaned himself off, and had run away very quickly. It was as if he had never been there. "Have a good trip!" said the King quite happily. However, from that day forward, the princess became melancholic. She refused to speak and to laugh, and she had lost the color in her cheeks. "What's wrong, my daughter?" - "Majesty, nothing is wrong with me, but one who gives his word should keep it." "What? Did you want that hunchbacked, lopsided dwarf?" "I am not saying that, but one who gives his word should keep it." Even the queen wasn't happy. "That dwarf was powerful; he had defeated the savage. He might very well seek a terrible

proprio vivo.- O quell'uomo, dove lo portate cotesto cavallo di bronzo? - Lo porto a vendere. Il Reuccio lo comprò e ne fece un regalo a suo suocero. Il giorno delle nozze era vicino. La gente accorreva in folla nel giardino del Re, dove il cavallo di bronzo era stato collocato su un magnifico piedistallo. Restarono tutti meravigliati: - Par proprio vivo! Par di sentirlo nitrire! Scese a vederlo anche il Re con la corte; e tutti: - Par proprio vivo! Par di sentirlo nitrire! Solo la Reginotta non diceva nulla. Il Reuccio, stupito, le domandò: - Reginotta, non vi piace? - Mi piace tanto, - rispose lei - che sento una gran voglia di cavalcarlo. - Fecero portare una scala, e la Reginotta montò sul cavallo di bronzo. Gli tastava il ciuffo, gli accarezzava il collo, lo spronava leggermente col tacco; e intanto diceva scherzando: - Cavallo, mio cavallo, Salta dal piedistallo; Non metter piede in fallo, Cavallo, mio cavallo. Non ebbe finito di dir così, che il cavallo di bronzo si scosse, agitò la criniera, dette fuori un nitrito, e via con un salto per l'aria. In un batter d'occhio cavallo e Reginotta non si videro più. Tutti erano atterriti; non osavano fiatare. Ma in mezzo a quel silenzio scoppia a un tratto una risatina, una risatina di canzonatura! - Ah! Ah! Ah! Il Re guardò, e vide il Nano che si contorceva dalle risa con quella sua gobbetta e quelle sue gambine sbilenche. Capì subito che quel cavallo fatato era opera del Nano. - Ah! Nano, nanuccio - gli disse pentito; - se tu mi rendi la mia figliuola, essa sarà tua sposa, con mezzo regno per dote. Il Nano continuava a contorcersi dalle risa: - Ah! Ah! Ah! E a vedergli fare a quel modo, tutta quella gente ch'era lì, cominciarono a ridere anch'essi, e poi perfino la Regina: - Ah! Ah! Ah! Si tenevano i fianchi, non ne potevano più. Soltanto quel povero Re rimase così afflitto e scornato, che faceva pietà. - Ah! Nano, nanino bello; se tu mi rendi la mia figliuola, essa sarà tua sposa con mezzo regno per dote. - Maestà, se dite per davvero, - rispose il Nano prima dovette riprendervi quel che mi deste l'altra volta. - Che cosa ti diedi? - Un bel calcio nella schiena. Il Re esitava: avea vergogna di ricevere un calcio in quel posto, davanti al popolo e la corte. Ma l'amore della figliuola gli fece dire di sì. Si rivoltò colle spalle al Nano e stette ad aspettare la pedata: però il Nano volle mostrarsi più generoso di lui; e invece di menargli il calcio, disse: Cavallo, mio cavallo, Non metter piede in fallo; Torna sul piedistallo, Cavallo, mio cavallo. In un batter d'occhio, cavallo e Reginotta furono lì. Allora il Nano disse al Re: - Maestà, datemi un pugno sulla gobba! Non abbiate paura. Il Re gli diede un pugno sulla gobba e questa sparì. - Maestà, datemi una tiratina alle gambe! Non abbiate paura! Il Re gli diede una tiratina alle gambine, e

revenge!"The king responded with a shrug of his shoulders: "If that hunchback comes back here again, I will take care of him!" But the princess repeated: "One who gives his word should keep it!" In the meantime, the news spread that the princess had been freed from the hands of the savage. The prince of Portugal sent word that he wanted to marry the princess. The princess said neither yes nor no, but the king and queen could not wait to celebrate the marriage. The prince of Portugal started his journey, and on the way he met a man who was driving a large cart with a bronze horse in it, which looked as if it were alive. "Dear sir, where are you taking that bronze horse?" "I am going to sell him." The prince bought the horse, and gave it as a gift to his future father-in-law. The day of the wedding neared. The people flocked to the king's garden, where the bronze horse had been placed on a magnificent pedestal. They were all astonished: "He looks as if he were alive. It's as if we could hear him neigh." Even the king came down with the court to see him; and all of them said: "He looks as if her were alive. It's as if we could hear him neigh." Only the princess said nothing. Amazed, the prince asked her: "Princess, don't you like it?" "I like it a lot," she answered, so much so that I really want to ride him."They called for a ladder, and the princess mounted the bronze horse. She stroked his forelock, she caressed his neck, she spurred him lightly with her heel , and all the while she said jokingly: "My horse, my horse, Jump from the pedestalDon't slip, My horse, my horse." She hadn't stopped saying this before the bronze horse rose up, shook his mane, gave out a mighty neigh, and went off with a leap into the air. In the wink of an eye, the horse and the princess were no longer to be seen. The king watched, and he saw the dwarf who was writhing with laughter, he with his little hump and his crooked little legs. He knew right away that what the horse had done was the work of the dwarf. Sorrowfully, the King said: "Oh dwarf, little dwarf, if you bring back my daughter, she shall be your wife and you shall have half the kingdom as a dowry. But the dwarf continued to writhe with laughter: "Ah, ha, ha!" And seeing him react in that way, everyone who was there also began to laugh. And finally, even the queen began to laugh. "Ah, ha, ha !They held their sides, and they couldn't stand it any longer. Only the poor king now felt scorned and humiliated, a pitiful sight. "Oh dwarf, dear dwarf; if you return my daughter, she shall be your wife and you shall have half of the kingdom as a dowry." "Majesty, if you are telling the truth," responded the dwarf, "you must first take back what

queste, di bòtto, si raddrizzarono.- Maestà, afferratemi bene, la Regina per le braccia e voi pei piedi, e tiratemi forte. Il Re e la Regina lo afferrarono l'uno pei piedi, l'altra per le braccia, e tira, tira, tira, il Nano, da nano che era, diventò un bel giovine di alta statura. Il Reuccio del Portogallo si persuase ch'era di troppo e disse:- Datemi almeno quel cavallo: farò la strada più presto. Montò sul cavallo di bronzo, e dette le parole fatate, in un colpo sparì. La Reginotta e il Nano (lo chiamarono sempre così) furono moglie e marito. E noi restiamo a leccarci le dita.

you gave me the last time.” “And what was that?” “A good kick in the backside.” The king hesitated; he was ashamed to have someone kick him in that place, especially in front of all of his people and his court. However, his love for his daughter made him consent. He turned his back to the dwarf and waited for the kick; however, the dwarf wanted to show himself to be more generous than he and, instead of kicking him, he said: “My horse, my horse, Don’t slip, Return to the pedestal, My horse, my horse.” In the blink of an eye, the horse and the princess reappeared. Then, the dwarf said: “Majesty, punch me in my hump! Don’t be afraid.” The king punched him in his hump, and it disappeared. “Majesty, give my legs a little pull! Don’t be afraid!” And the king gave the tiny legs a little pull, and suddenly they straightened out. “Majesty, take hold of me—the queen by the arms and you by the feet—and pull me hard.” The king and the queen grabbed hold of him, one by the feet and the other by the arms, and they pulled and pulled. With that, the dwarf ceased to be a dwarf and became a handsome, tall young man. The prince of Portugal realized that he could not marry the princess, and he said: “At least give me the horse so I can travel home faster.” He mounted the bronze horse, said the magic words, and disappeared in one fell swoop. The princess and the dwarf (they always called him that) became husband and wife. And here we remain, just licking our fingers.





Death

***Three Poems by Alfredo De Palchi***

*Translated by Barbara Carle*

**Barbara Carle** is poet, translator, and critic. She is author of *Altre contingenze/Other Contingencies*, a translation of Rodolfo Di Biasio's poetic anthology accompanied by a critical essay, and most recently, *New Life, Gradiva*, 2006, and *Don't Waste My Beauty/Non guastare la mia bellezza*, Caramanica, 2006. This book won the foreign section of the National Frascati award in 2000 and was rendered into Italian by Antonella Anedda and Carle.

**Alfredo De Palchi** was born in 1926 near Verona. He grew up with his mother and grandfather and as a teenager was tortured by the Fascists and the Partisans. He was then imprisoned for six years. (His prison experiences are recounted in *The Scorpion's Dark Dance*, Xenos Books, 1993) He lived in Paris before coming to the United States in the late sixties. De Palchi has authored eight books of poetry, from *Sessioni con il mio analista*, Mondadori, 1967, to *Paradigma*, Hebenon/Mimesis, 2006. (*Paradigma* contains all of De Palchi's poetry from 1947 through 2005) Four of his books were published in the United States in bilingual editions. De Palchi has resided in New York City for over thirty years, yet maintains strong ties to his native Italy. He is editor of the prestigious New York literary journal, *Chelsea* and directs Chelsea Editions.

Alfredo De Palchi's poetic style is unique. It consists of writing no American poet would undertake. Although his poetic line is drawn out, his poems do not tell stories. They are always based on a precise physical or concrete experience, which is then arrested and transformed. We can say that his style is devoid of sentimentality. De Palchi is not afraid to confront sex and eroticism with shattering metaphoric visions. The three poems here translated (all from *Paradigma*, Mimesis Hebenon, 2006) are typical of his work from a thematic and stylistic standpoint, the erotic amorous vein, the transgressive spirituality, and the ever-present memory of wartime traumas all merge into distinctly charged poetic entities.

Serrarti nel cuore  
prensile di filamenti urticanti a medusa  
quanto il suolo trattiene d'inverno i tuberi  
spingendoli a crescere alle albe  
di esplosioni esuberanti della tua figura  
arata di zolle luccicanti dei solchi  
che ti instradano per la luce  
che si fulmina nell'arcata immensa e fulmina  
la temporale ubbidienza a crollare  
alle spalle la violenza  
i timbrici metallici che timbrano i timpani  
il primordiale frastuono che a onde echeggia nell'aria  
e nell'orecchie che dal suolo percepisce  
i frantumi dell'universo che si restringe  
e si espande come tu fai  
il rollio del ventre in rollio  
in cui si placa il mio cuore di medusa.

(26 aprile 2004)

I clasp you  
in my prehensile heart whose filaments sting like jellyfish  
just as the ground keeps bulbs in winter  
pushing them to grow in the dawns  
of your figure's exuberant explosions  
ploughed by glittering clods of furrows  
transporting you through the light  
that thunders in the immense arch and thunders  
the temporal obedience to collapsing violence from the rear  
the timbrous metals that timbre our tympanums  
the primordial din echoing on waves through the air  
and in my ears, which, from the ground capt  
the shivers of universe that contract  
and expand as you do  
the roll of your tummy in the rolling  
appeasement of my jellyfish heart.

Mi lascio al terrore  
per scontrarmi con la raffica  
addosso una vetrina di tessuti che mi riflette  
livido di torture  
e di collera che m'induce  
a sgozzare con lame di crocifissi  
i becchini che si parlano  
dal 1945 recitando alle sedie  
e in pile di libri bugiardi—dico  
mi lascio,  
però ancora qui  
preciso che li confronto vili  
fissando il parabellum che mi buca le gambe  
lestamente come allora ventisette aprile  
1945.

(27 aprile 2004)

I give in to the terror  
so that I can clash with the burst  
against a fabric store window that reflects me  
livid from torture  
and rage inducing me  
to slaughter with crucifix blades  
gravediggers who've been slighting each other  
since 1945 acting in chairs  
and in piles of lying books—I say  
give in,  
but still here  
I mean that I'm confronting those vile men  
as I eye the parabellum searing my legs  
nimble as it did then on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April  
1945.

(27 April 2004)

Muori di morte  
che t'insegue con l'abecedario della conversione  
per debellare dalla mente pazza di luce  
il satana che ti preme  
a consolarti nelle preghiere  
che nemmeno il signore ascolta—

ti offri l'immolazione della storia  
inutile d'ogni parabola  
e spreco delle scritture che narrano  
della vergogna fisica,  
dell'ardore per l'immagine trafitta di spini  
e di chiodi,  
di una lancia che gli spacca il costato  
e dell'imitare l'invenzione parziale della vicenda  
con un lancio di spugna imbevuta di aceto  
al falegname che si tramuta da illusionista  
a figlio di dio.

(28 aprile 2004)

You die of the death  
that pursues you with the conversion primer  
to wipe out of your mind mad with light  
the satan who presses you  
to console yourself with prayers  
that not even the lord hears—

You offer yourself the immolation of history  
useless for any parable  
and I waste writings that tell  
of physical shame,  
of passion for the image pierced by spines  
and nails,  
by a spear that breaks his ribs,  
and of imitating the partial invention of the affair  
by throwing a vinegar soaked sponge  
to the carpenter who transmutes himself from magician  
to the son of god.

(28 April, 2004)







## ***C'era una volta Beirut***

***di Fernanda Pivano***

***(da Cos'è più la virtù, il capitolo quattro, le pagine 29-32)***

Una quindicina di anni dopo la fine della guerra andammo a Beirut, che era allora una splendida città con il lungomare costellato di alberghi favolosi, quelli che la furia criminale dei fabbricanti di armi avrebbe distrutto una ventina d'anni dopo falciando tante vite umane col pretesto di questa o quella ideologia.

In uno di questi alberghi, il Phoenicia, col nome inglese pronto per ituristi americani, ci diedero una bellissima camera con la terrazza sul mare accogliendoci con un enorme cesto di frutta.

"Coi complimenti del direttore" diceva il biglietto posato sulla frutta, secondo un costume ormai scomparso o in via di scomparsa.

Il bar all'aperto era sistemato più in basso della piscina, e stando lì seduti si vedevano i nuotatori dal basso invece che dall'alto. Non so se le bellissime ragazze che si alternavano a nuotare a rana erano stipendiate dalla direzione a far spettacolo un po' porno per i privilegiati clienti o se cercavano clienti in proprio; ma l'idea funzionava comunque benissimo.

A parte la piscina l'albergo era così piacevole che ci fermammo lì qualche giorno senza far niente, riposandoci da un viaggio faticosissimo in Medio Oriente. Poi ci mettemmo alla ricerca della solita guida disposta a trasportare le macchine fotografiche.

Non ricordo come si chiamava l'uomo orribile che ingaggiammo faute di mieux.

Era basso, grasso, puzzolente, sporco: le aveva tutte ed era così sgradevole che invece di fissarlo per l'indomani gli demmo appuntamento dopo tre giorni, nella speranza di trovare qualcun altro.

Affittammo una macchina e da soli girammo per la città, per le colline lì attorno cosparse di cedri profumati e attraverso quartieri "veri" non destinati ai turisti. Visitammo uno dei musei più belli mai visti, comprammo qualche pezzo per la mia collezione etnografica, Lino fece decine di rulli di fotografie.

L'indomani Lino disse:

"Perché non andiamo a Damasco?"

"A Damasco?" dissi. "Senza guida?"

"Che bisogno c'è della guida?" fu la risposta.

"Così partimmo in macchina da soli per Damasco. La strada presto cominciò a snodarsi nel deserto e sui due lati vedevamo ogni tanto beduini a gruppetti di quattro o cinque per volta: avremmo voluto fermarci e parlare con loro, ma senza interprete non c'era neanche da pensarci. Non ricordo

## ***Once There Was Beirut***

by **Fernanda Pivano**

translated by **Blossom S. Kirschenbaum**

Some fifteen years after the end of the war [World War II] we went to Beirut, which was then a splendid city, its shoreline studded with fabulous hotels, those that the criminal madness of munitions makers would have destroyed some twenty years later, mowing down so many human lives on the pretext of this or that ideology.

In one of these hotels, the Phoenicia, its English name ready for American tourists, we were given a very lovely room with balcony overlooking the sea, a room that welcomed us with an enormous basket of fruit.

"With the compliments of the manager," said the card placed on the fruit, according to a custom now vanished or in the process of vanishing.

The open-air bar was set up at a lower level than the swimming pool, and once we were seated there the swimmers could be seen from low down instead of from above. I don't know if the gorgeous girls who took turns swimming the breaststroke were paid by the management to display themselves in that tantalizing way for the privileged clientele or if they were looking for clients themselves; but nonetheless the concept worked marvelously well.

Even apart from the pool the hotel was so pleasant that we stayed there for several days just doing nothing, resting after a very exhausting trip in the Middle East. Then we set about looking for the usual guide willing to carry around photographic equipment.

I don't recall the name of the horrible man whom we hired *faute de mieux*. He was short, fat, foul-smelling, dirty: he had everything wrong with him, and he was so disagreeable that instead of hiring him for the next day we made an appointment with him for three days later, hoping to find someone else.

We rented a car and on our own went touring around the city, through the hills around there covered with aromatic cedars and through "true" neighborhoods not meant for tourists. We visited one of the most beautiful museums ever seen, we bought some item for my ethnographic collection, Lino took tens of rolls of photographs.

The next day Lino said:

"Why don't we go to Damascus?"

"To Damascus?" I said. "Without a guide?"

"What do we need a guide for?" was the reply.

Thus we left by car on our own for Damascus. The road soon began to stretch out through the desert and on both sides we saw every so often Bedouins in little groups of four or five at a time. We'd have liked to stop and speak with them, but without an interpreter there was no use thinking fur-

quanto durò quel viaggio felice: ci fermammo solo quando ci bloccò la polizia di frontiera.

Non c'era ancora la guerra, o forse c'erano le prime avvisaglie, ma a quel posto di confine ci fecero stare sei ore. Nessuno era capace di leggere l'alfabeto occidentale e i poliziotti continuavano a passarsi l'un l'altro i nostri passaporti e a rigirarli fra le mani con aria sospettosa. Era una situazione senza speranza.

"Vedrai che non ce la faremo a tornare a Beirut in serata" dissi. Pensai: "Chissà dove mi toccherà dormire."

Finalmente arrivò un soldato che sapeva l'inglese. In pochi minuti ci lasciarono passare, tutti improvvisamente sorridenti e amichevoli; ma quando arrivammo a Damasco era pomeriggio tardi, il museo era chiuso e ci mettemmo a girare alla cieca in cerca di un albergo.

E inutile descrivere quello che trovammo. Invece trovammo, al bazaar ancora aperto, un rosario di legno e qualche collana d'argento che ho portato per anni e porto ancora adesso; e passammo la sera a camminare per le strade buie di terriccio, con gli odori medio-orientali a base di montone, le finestre chiuse e la totale mancanza di allettamenti per i turisti.

L'indomani mattina eravamo sulla porta del museo prima che aprissero, e quando ci lasciarono entrare ricevemmo il nostro premio: c'erano decine di statue e statuine sumere, quelle famose che si vedono sulle copertine di tutti i libri sui Sumeri. Le didascalie erano perfette: uno che non sapesse niente sulla storia di quei luoghi usciva che sapeva tutto.

Ripartimmo convinti che quello di Damasco, con quello di Beirut, era uno dei musei meglio sistemati del mondo e ci avviammo verso l'autostrada. Passando davanti a uno spaccio di scarpe occidentalizzate riconoscemmo o credemmo di riconoscere da una sua strana acconciatura uno dei beduini visti il giorno prima lungo la strada: era accoccolato per terra e stava rigirando tra le mani con aria pensosa e diffidente un paio di scarpe da donna, di quelle da terzo mondo, passate di moda da dieci anni.

Pensai:

"Va proprio tutto in merda." Dissi:

"Speriamo che non le comperi."

"Che cosa?" chiese Lino che stava fotografando il beduino.

"Niente" dissi. "Niente."

Quando arrivammo alla frontiera stavo ancora pensando al mio beduino e lo dimenticai soltanto per le difficoltà di uscita anche più farraginose di quelle di entrata.

Arrivammo in albergo a sera avanzata e trovammo quella guida orribile ad aspettarci. Finse che avevamo sbagliato giorno, che ci aveva aspettato fin dal mattino, pretese di essere pagato. Che noia. Ma non c'erano altre guide disponibili, e lo fissammo per l'indomani.

"Bisogna andare al Castello" disse perentorio.

La sera leggemmo sulla Guide Bleu che cos'era il Castello e l'indomani

ther about it. I don't recall how long this happy journey lasted: we stopped only when the police barred the way at the frontier.

The war hadn't started yet, or maybe there were the first skirmishes, but at this border post we were detained for six hours. No one was capable of reading the western alphabet and the border police kept on passing our documents from one to the other and turning them between their hands with a suspicious manner. It was a hopeless situation.

"You'll see that we won't make it back to Beirut this evening," I said. I thought:

"Who knows where I'll end up sleeping."

At last a soldier arrived who knew how to speak English. In a few minutes they let us go through, all of a sudden smiling and friendly; but when we reached Damascus it was late afternoon, the museum was closed and we set out blindly wandering in search of a hotel.

There's no point describing what we found. Instead we found, at the still open bazaar, a rosary of wooden beads and some silver necklace that I've worn for yeas and still wear now; and we spent the evening walking through the darkened unpaved streets, their middle-eastern odors overlaid on the smell of cooked goat-meat, the windows shut and a total absence of accommodations for tourists.

Next morning we were at the door of the museum before it opened, and when they let us in we received our reward: there were tens of Sumerian statues and figurines, those famous ones seen on the dust-jackets of all the books about the Sumerians. The identifying note-cards were perfect: someone who had never heard anything about the history of those places left knowing all.

We left again convinced that the one in Damascus, along with the one in Beirut, was one of the better arranged museums in the world and we went on our way toward the highway. Passing in front of a westernized shoe shop we recognized or thought we recognized from his strange attire one of the Bedouins seen the day before along the street. He was squatting on the ground and in a pensive and diffident way he kept turning between his hands a pair of women's shoes, the kind from the third world, ten years out of date.

I thought:

"Everything's turning to shit." I said:

"Let's hope he doesn't buy them."

"What's that?" asked Lino, who was busy photographing the Bedouin.

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing."

When we arrived at the frontier I was still thinking about my Bedouin and I forgot him only on account of the difficulties of crossing back again, even more muddled than those of entering.

We arrived at the hotel in the late evening and found that horrible guide waiting for us. He pretended that we had forgotten which day it was,

ci trovammo sull'antica spiaggia fenicia. I ragazzini stavano nell'acqua fino al ginocchio: avevano già rastrellato la sabbia e ora guardavano sott'acqua in cerca dei chicchi romani verdastri che loro vendono ai turisti come fenici e che io disciplinata comprai insieme a una bella stella in rilievo su una moneta rotonda fascinosamente ossidata. Avevo in mente che Lino se ne facesse un anello ma Lino non se lo fece mai.

La visita al Castello dei Crociati la ricordo male. Lino, come sempre, fotografava tutto senza occuparsi di me e mentre giravo per i corridoi al buio tra mura alte, nere e viscide, venni inaspettatamente aggredita dalla cosiddetta guida che mi saltò addosso.

"Make love, make love" mi alitava addosso mentre mi dibattevo urlando. Lino attraverso lo spessore dei muri non sentiva e quando riuscii a divincolarmi cominciai a correre come in un sogno angoscioso, proprio come in quei labirinti di cui si parla tanto adesso nei convegni letterari, inseguita dalla guida che rideva alla Lovecraft. Più correvo più mi perdevo e precipitai in un'angoscia da raccontare in analisi.

Per puro caso finii, guidata da un filo di luce, a una specie di finestra dove Lino si appoggiava per fotografare l'esterno e mi misi a urlare:

"Lino! Lino!"

Senza voltarsi a guardarmi gridò:

"Stai ferma!"

Finì quello che stava facendo, poi chiese:

"Cosa c'è?"

Ormai mi ero calmata.

"Niente" dissi per evitare una cazzottatura. Forse.

Quando ci avviammo verso l'uscita la guida, che si era fatta pagare in anticipo, era scomparsa.

"Che farabutto" disse Lino.

"Eh, sì" dissi. E gli raccontai la mia storia.

Non ne parlammo mai più. L'indomani partimmo, coi dolci declivi coperti di cedri fissati nella memoria, al di là della distruzione sanguinosa in agguato per loro.

**Note:** "Once There Was Beirut" is a translation by Blossom S. Kirschenbaum of the self-contained fourth chapter of Fernanda Pivano's novel *Cos'è più la virtù: romanzo quasi d'amore* (Milano: Rusconi, 1986; republished 1997).

that he had waited for us since morning; he made out that he expected to be paid. What a nuisance. But there were no other guides available, and we came to an agreement with him for the next day.

"We must go to the Castle," he said peremptorily.

That evening we read in the Blue Guide about what the Castle was and the next day there we were on the ancient Phoenician beach. Young boys were in the water up to their knees. They had already raked through the sand and now they were looking around underwater for greenish Roman shards of glass that they sell to tourists as Phoenician and that I complying with the rule bought along with a lovely star in relief on a round coin fascinatingly oxidized. I had in mind that Lino should make a ring out of it but Lino never made it.

The visit to the Crusaders' Castle I recall poorly. Lino, as always, photographed everything without paying attention to me and while I wandered through the corridors in the darkness between high walls, dank and black, I was unexpectedly attacked by the so-called guide, who leapt upon me from behind.

"Make love, make love," he panted in English behind me while I tried to decide whether to scream. Lino on the other side of the thickness of the walls did not hear and when I managed to break loose I began to run as in an anxiety nightmare, through those very labyrinths about which so much is said these days at literary conferences, closely pursued by the guide who was laughing like a maniac out of the stories of H. P. Lovecraft. The more I ran the worse I got lost, and I threw myself into a state of anguish fit to tell in psychoanalysis.

By pure chance I ended up, guided by a thread of light, at a sort of window where Lino was leaning to photograph the outside, and I set up a clamor.

"Lino! Lino!"

Without turning to look at me he cried "Hold it!"

He finished what he was doing, and then he asked:

"What is it?"

By this point I had calmed down.

"Nothing," I said to avoid stirring up an argument. Maybe.

When we went toward the exit the guide, who had made us pay in advance, had disappeared.

"What a sleaze-bag," said Lino.

"Oh, yes," I said. And I told him my story.

We never spoke of it further. The next day we left, with the sweet-scented slopes covered with cedars fixed in memory, beyond the bloody destruction that lay in wait for them.



## ***L'onore perduto***

by **Riccardo Cordiferro**

***Translated by Emelise Aleandri***

Emelise Aleandri's photographic histories, *The Italian-American Immigrant Theatre of New York City* and *Little Italy* were published by Arcadia. She just completed the first book in a multi-volume series on the Italian-American Immigrant Theatre for Edwin Mellen Press. She is Artistic Director of the Frizzi & Lazzi Music and Theatre Company. As an actress, she created film roles as Eleonora Duse in *Penguins and Peacocks*, in Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* and *Summer of Sam*, performed in the Walnut Street Theatre's *Italian Funerals and Other Festive Occasions*, and Lou La Russo's *Sweatshop Off-Broadway*. She has produced three documentaries: *Teatro: The Legacy of Italian-American Theatre*, *Festa: Italian Festival Traditions* and *Circo Rois: Che Bella Vita!* She originated the nationally-aired cable TV show, *Italics*.

### ***Riccardo Cordiferro***

Riccardo Cordiferro (1875-1940), pseudonym for poet, playwright, journalist and political activist, Alessandro Sisca, emigrated to the U.S. in 1892. In 1893, he, his father Francesco and brother Marziale, founded *La Follia*, a newspaper which was widely read in the major Eastern Italian colonies. His most popular play, the four-act social drama, *L'Onore Perduto*, premiered in 1901. *L'Onore Perduto's* derives from "Cecilia," a traditional Italian dirge, whose premise is familiar from Victorien Sardou's *Tosca*. Cordiferro's version, encased in the structure of domestic melodrama, occurs in 1900's Little Italy, and illustrates his topical, social and political theses. Adapted from his similarly titled poem, it exposes the dishonesty of some Italian-American bankers and their tragic exploitation of Italian immigrants, and touches on the emancipation of women.

### ***On the text itself***

The text of *L'Onore Perduto* is in the form of a 124 page typescript, almost certainly typed by Riccardo Cordiferro himself. Attributing it to the playwright is supported by the following evidence: first, the same old, erratic typewriter with out of line keys was used in the typing of many of his scripts, correspondence and other writings; secondly, as Cordiferro typed, he revised, thought better of, reconsidered, edited bits of dialogue and stage directions, then changed or eliminated them by typing over some, or crossing out others with the typewriter's X key. Fortunately, before word processing existed, the playwright's thinking and rethinking are laid out right on the page. Cordiferro also edited manually in what is clearly his own, characteristic handwriting.

Cordiferro was not a professional typist, and the default right margin on his typewriter was so fixed that if he found he could not fit a word on a line as he typed, he would X it out and add it on the next line. The script is replete with not only literary changes but corrections of typographical errors, misspellings, capitalization, punctuation, missing words, layout, form and grammar. Corrections were made manually or mechanically and a rare few escaped Cordiferro's proofreading. The manuscript is undated, with no indication when it was typed and edited. The play was completed in 1900 and premiered in 1901. The date of this manuscript, therefore, could fall anywhere between 1900 and its last production in 1933.

#### Something about the theatre

Italian-American theatre begins in New York City. The first amateur phase of this vital ethnic theatre emerged when the waves of Italian immigrants began pouring into America in the 1870's, bringing both performers and audiences necessary for theatrical entertainments. Audiences, composed of the displaced men and women of Italy, were hungry for entertainment, recognition, a support system and social intercourse, all emotional needs which the theatres and the nightclubs helped to satisfy. All these factors contributed to creating an original theatrical expression: the Italian-American immigrant theatre. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a great variety of dramatic forms and entertainments were essayed on Italian-American stages.

First and foremost, audiences came to the theatre expecting to be entertained. The hardworking laborers came to the theatre either alone or with families in tow to escape the harsh reality of their lives, to be dazzled by the glamour of the costumes and the beauty of the performers, to be reminded of home by hearing the plays of their homeland and other European theatres spoken, if not in Italian, then translated into their own Neapolitan, Sicilian or Northern Italian regional dialects, to laugh at the antics of their own regional stock character of the commedia dell'arte tradition, to be stirred by the patriotic sentiments and grandeur of the historical dramas, to be moved by the emotions played out in the melodramas, and to be reassured by the well-ordered universe depicted therein. Italian and European writers were introduced to immigrant audiences, many of whom had never before experienced the theatre or the classics of literature. The Italian-American experience also furnished subject matter for original plays written by Italian immigrant playwrights, among them Riccardo Cordiferro.

two scenes, short ones: see attachment



*Justice, china ink, 70x50 cm*

***L'onore perduto***  
**di Riccardo Cordiferro**

ATTO II, SCENA IV  
 SOFIA E GIUSEPPE

*(Passano parecchi minuti. SOFIA si siede e appoggia la testa stanca sul lettuccio di IDA. Ad un ta tratto si sente bussare alla porta. SOFIA si alza, va ad aprire la porta e indietreggia spaventata, nel vedere GIUSEPPE ESPOSITO, che si avvanza con aria spavalda.)*

SOFIA

*(che si e' riavuta dallo spavento; fulminando coi suoi sguardi GIUSEPPE ESPOSITO)*

Voi in casa mia?...E come osate?...Che volete?...

GIUSEPPE

*(Smettendo la sua aria spavalda; con fare amichevole, insinuante)*

Via...via...Fate sempre la sostenuta voi! Siate ragionevole una volta!

SOFIA

*(Scostandosi da lui; con accento fermo, energico, risoluto)*

Io vi dico di uscir subito, altrimenti mi metterò a gridare, e farò correre della gente...

GIUSEPPE

*(Ancora insinuante, avvicinandosele sempre piu')*

E perché poi?...Io non voglio farvi alcun male. Sono venuto soltanto a trovarvi. *(pausa)* Sono un vostro amico, infine, un amico di vostro marito...

SOFIA

*(Scattando e scostandosi ancora da lui)*

Voi un amico?...Voi!... E con quale sfacciataggine osate affermarlo? In casa mia voi non ci dovete venire...

GIUSEPPE

*(Senza scoraggiarsi, cercando di persuaderla con le buone)*

Ma che male vi ho fatto? Io vi rispetto...vi stimo...

SOFIA

*(Con veemenza. Minacciosa e terribile.)*

Voi siete un miserabile, una spia, un traditore!

**Lost Honor**

by **Riccardo Cordiferro**

ACT II, SCENE IV  
SOFIA and GIUSEPPE

*(Several minutes pass. SOFIA sits and rests her tired head on IDA's bed. Suddenly a knock is heard at the door. SOFIA gets up, goes to open the door and shrinks back, frightened at the sight of GIUSEPPE ESPOSITO who boldly comes closer.)*

SOFIA

*(who has recovered from her fright; her eyes glaring at GIUSEPPE ESPOSITO)*  
You in my house? . . . How dare you? . . . What do you want? . . .

GIUSEPPE

*(Losing his brazenness, adopting a friendly manner)*  
Now now . . . You always act aloof! Be reasonable for once!

SOFIA

*(Getting out of his way; with a firm, energetic, resolved tone of voice)*  
I'm telling you to get out immediately, otherwise I'll scream and people will run in here.

GIUSEPPE

*(Still acting friendly, always getting closer to her)*  
What for? . . . I don't want to bring any harm to you. I came here only to find you. *(pause)* I am your friend, after all, a friend of your husband's.

SOFIA

*(Springing up and getting away from him again)*  
You a friend? You! . . . With what audacity do you dare say that? You should not be in my house.

GIUSEPPE

*(Without getting discouraged, trying to persuade her with his pleasant manner)*  
But what harm have I done? I respect you . . . I admire you.

SOFIA

*(With vehemence. Menacing and terrible.)*  
You are a despicable sneak, a traitor!

GIUSEPPE

GIUSEPPE

*(Mal celando la sua ira. Con un gesto di minaccia)*

Ah, tacete!...

SOFIA

*(Con piu' forza. Impedendogli di avanzarsi)*

Si, ve lo ripeto: un miserabile, una spia, un traditore! poiche' avete fatto arrestare mio marito senz'alcuna ragione, e l'avete fatto arrestare perche' io vi ho sempre respinto, rifiutando sempre le vostre offerte, disprezzando sempre il vostro denaro.

GIUSEPPE

V'ingannate...Non sono stato io che ho fatto arrestare vostro marito. Ma se cio' fosse vero, l'avrei fatto per punire il vostro orgoglio. *(pausa)* Se voi aveste accondisceso, Alberto...

SOFIA

Non sarebbe ora in carcere...Ma non sono una donna senza onore io, e voi ben mi conoscete!

GIUSEPPE

Ma ora non l'avete piu' il vostro Alberto!

SOFIA

Ho il suo amore!

GIUSEPPE

Che ve ne fate? L'amore e' un'ironia quando si soffre la fame!

SOFIA

L'amore vince tutto . . .anche la miseria... Io non desidero altro al mondo che l'amore di mio marito!

GIUSEPPE

*(avvicinandosele: stendendo una mano verso di lei per sfiorarle il viso, per toccarle il mento)*

Come siete bella! Pero' non avrei mai supposto che, maritata, vi foste fatta pregar tanto, per... concendermi i vostri favori... *(Con maggiore insistenza, avvicinandosele di piu')* Ma... ascoltatevi. *(Le mostra una borsa piena di monete)* Se io vi offrissi questa borsa? Vedete ...e' piena di dollari.

SOFIA

*(Scattando come una molla. Scagliandosi verso di lui, come una belva ferita.)*  
Vile, mille vile! Voi mi fate pieta'...Mi fate schifo...Non c'e' somma che basti a

*(Poorly hiding his anger. With a menacing gesture)*

Oh, shut up! . . .

SOFIA

*(Louder. Preventing him from coming closer)*

Yes, I'll say it again: a despicable spy, a traitor! because you had my husband arrested without any reason, and you had him arrested because I always rejected you, always refused your advances, always despised your money.

GIUSEPPE

You're mistaken . . . It wasn't I who had your husband arrested. But if that were true, I would have done it to punish your pride. *(pause)* If you had given in to me, Alberto . . .

SOFIA

Would not be in jail now . . . But I am not a dishonorable woman, and you know that very well!

GIUSEPPE

But now you no longer have your Alberto!

SOFIA

I have his love!

GIUSEPPE

What does that do for you? Love is an ironic joke when you suffer from hunger!

SOFIA

Love conquers everything . . . even poverty . . . I don't want anything else in this world but my husband's love!

GIUSEPPE

*(Coming closer to her; extending his hand towards her to lightly touch her face, to touch her chin)*

How pretty you are! But I never thought that when you married I would be made to beg you so much, to . . . grant me your favors . . . *(With greater insistence, coming even closer to her)* But . . . listen to me. *(He shows her a wallet full of money)* What if I were to offer you this wallet? Look . . . its full of dollar bills.

SOFIA

*(Bolting up like a spring. Rushing toward him like a wounded, wild beast.)*

Coward, a thousand times coward! I Pity you . . . You disgust me . . . No amount of money would be enough to buy my honor. Get out . . . Get out! . . . *(loudly, showing him the door)*

pagare l'onore. Uscite...Uscita:...(con forza, additandogli la porta)

GIUSEPPE

*(Diventando piu' audace, e piantandosi immobile nel mezzo della camera, con sogghigno beffardo)*

E se io vi dicessi che non voglio uscire, che non usciro' da qui nemmeno con la forza, che... *(Riesce finalmente ad afferrarla per la vita)* ti voglio, insomma, che ti desidero Sofia!?

SOFIA

*(Divincolandosi e gridando forte)*

Ahi : . Ahi : . . Non sara' mai! . . . *(si slancia in un batter d'occhio verso un armadio; prende in un attimo una pistola e voltandosi improvvisamente)* Non sara' mai! *(Indicandogli nuovamente la porta; puntandogli l'arma sul viso)* Uscite! o faccio fuoco!

GIUSEPPE

*(Guardando la pistola tremante, e fremente di sdegno)*

Aspettate...Cosi', dunque, vi ribellate a chi vuole aiutarvi? *(prende la borsa che nella colluttazione gli era caduta a terra, e se la mette in tasca, guardando sempre l'arma rivolta verso di lui)* Me ne andro', si...me ne vado...ecco...

SOFIA

*(Seguendolo fino all'uscio con l'arma in pugno, pronta a far scattare il grilletto, se egli indugiasse ancora un altro minuto.)*

Esci, esci da qui, miserabile...

FINE DELL' ATTO SECONDO



GIUSEPPE

*(Becoming bolder, and planting himself to a spot in the middle of the room, with a mocking smile)*

And if I told you I don't want to go, that I wouldn't leave even by force, that . . .  
*(He finally succeeds in grabbing her at the waist)* I want you, finally, that I desire you Sofia!?

SOFIA

*(Struggling and screaming loudly)*

Oh! Oh! It will never be! *(In the blink of an eye she rushes to the cupboard; in a flash she pulls out a pistol and suddenly turns around)* It will never be!  
*(Again showing him the door; pointing the gun in his face)* Get out or I'll shoot!

GIUSEPPE

*(Watching the trembling pistol, and shaking with anger)*

Wait . . . So this is the way you attack someone who wants to help you? *(He picks up his wallet which had fallen to the floor during the scuffle, and puts it in his pocket, always watching out for the gun aimed toward him)* I will go, yes . . . I'm leaving . . . see . . .

SOFIA

*(Following him to the door, grasping the gun, ready to pull the trigger if he lingers another minute longer.)*

Get out, get out of here, you bum . .

END OF ACT II

ATTO IV, SCENA XI  
ALBERTO E GIUSEPPE

GIUSEPPE

*(Entra e, vedendo Sofia distesa sul divano, immagina che sia addormentata e dice a fior di labbra:)*

Dorme...*(Poi chiama ALBERTO che non si e' ancora accorto della presenza di GIUSEPPE.) (ALBERTO in preda ai suoi foschi pensieri, non ode. Giuseppe lo chiama ancora una volta.)* Alberto...

ALBERTO

*(ALBERTO si volta spaventato, poiche' gli sembra d'aver riconosciuta la voce di GIUSEPPE)*

Chi e' . . . *(poi fissandolo in volto, come volesse fargli comprendere con quello sguardo che la sua ora e' suonata.)* Ah. . . sei tu: . . .

GIUSEPPE

*(Sorpreso di vederlo cosi' pallido e sconvolto.)*

Che?...Ti senti male? *(Breve pausa)* Coraggio pero'. Ora guarirai... *(ALBERTO trema in tutta la persona e guarda torvo il suo nemico senza preferir parola.)*  
Ma tu tremi? Che cosa hai?

ALBERTO

*(Senza togliergli gli occhi d'addosso, con un'espressione tremenda di sdegno a stento represso.)*

Nulla .....

GIUSEPPE

E tua moglie .... dorme? Io son venuto a visitarti, per vederti finalmente libero e compiacermene. Ti ho visto e me ne vado. Qualche altro giorno staremo assieme lungo tempo. Oggi, sei stanco e hai bisogno di riposo. *(Va per andarsene, ma non si e' neppure avviato verso ha porta che ALBERTO gli si scaglia addosso, afferrandolo per la gola.)*

ALBERTO

Aspetta...

GIUSEPPE

*(Che capisce ormai, tutto, disperato e tremante com' e' un uomo il quale stia per annegarsi.)*

Che?...Che cosa vuoi?...

ALBERTO

*(Guardandolo fiso, con una mano stretta al collo di GIUSEPPE, con l'altra*

ACT IV, SCENE XI  
ALBERTO and GIUSEPPE

GIUSEPPE

*(He enters and seeing SOFIA stretched out on the sofa chair, guesses that she is asleep and says under his breath)*

She's sleeping . . . *(Then he calls ALBERTO who is not yet aware of GIUSEPPE's presence. ALBERTO is taken up with his gloomy thoughts, and doesn't hear him. GIUSEPPE calls him again.)* Alberto . . .

ALBERTO

*(ALBERTO turns around startled because he thinks he has recognized GIUSEPPE's voice.)*

Who is it? *(Then staring him in the face, wanting to make him understand that with his look alone his hour has come.)* Ah! . . . it's you! . . .

GIUSEPPE

*(Surprised to see him so pale and upset.)*

What? Do you feel sick? *(Short pause)* Take heart, because now you will get healthy . . . *(ALBERTO's whole body trembles and he gives his enemy a surly look without saying a word.)* But you're trembling? What's the matter with you?

ALBERTO

*(Without taking his eyes off him, with a tremendous expression of indignation and repressed suffering.)*

Nothing . . .

GIUSEPPE

And your wife . . . is she sleeping? I came to visit you, to enjoy seeing you finally free. I have seen you and now I'm going. Some other day we'll spend a longer time together. Today, you're tired and you need to rest. *(He starts to leave but he has hardly started toward the door when ALBERTO rushes at him, grabbing him by the throat.)*

ALBERTO

Wait . . .

GIUSEPPE

*(Who understands everything by now, desperate and trembling like a man who is about to drown.)*

What? . . . What do you want? . . .

ALBERTO

*(Watching him fixedly with one hand holding GIUSEPPE's throat tightly, and*

Mia moglie dorme di sonno eterno, perche' tu, o assassino, l'hai costretta a morire...

GIUSEPPE

*(Pallido come un cadavere, senza opporre alcuna resistenza ad ALBERTO.)*  
Io?...Ma che c'entro io?

ALBERTO

*(Stringendolo con piu' forza al collo, inchiodandolo con le spalle al muro col braccio che gli resta libero.)*

Rettile, vigliacco... osi anche atteggiarti a innocente?... Sei stato tu che mi hai fatto arrestare, per abusare della poverta' in cui si sarebbe trovata mia moglie e arrenderla ai tuoi desideri. Tu hai vinto, perche' ella temeva ch'io morissi in carcere.....hai vinto, promettendole la mia liberta' ..... Ma devi morire...ah, si, devi morire...(Segue una lotta disperata a corpo a corpo. GIUSEPPE riesce a cacciar dalla tasca un grosso coltello a serramanico; lo apre coi denti e lo brandisce per colpire ALBERTO. Questi, con una rapida mossa, glielo strappa, e, impugnandolo, colpisce ripetutamente GIUSEPPE.)

GIUSEPPE

*(Oramai perduto irremissibilmente, grida con quanto fiato ha in gola)*  
Aiuto! Aiuto! ...Mi assassinano!

ALBERTO

*(Lo afferra per le braccia, con quanta forza ha nei muscoli; indi, lo sbatte a terra, e gli piomba, rapido, addosso, mettendogli un ginocchio sulla pancia, di modo che GIUSEPPE trovasi nella impossibilita' di muoversi.)*

Devi morire, si ...Muori, o assassino! *(Crivellandolo di coltellate, mentre GIUSEPPE si dibatte e grida invano pieta'.)* Tu non hai il dritto di vivere in mezzo a gli uomini...Muori...muori...

*(GIUSEPPE getta un ultimo straziante lamento. ALBERTO, calpestandolo e alzando l'arma insanguinata)* Ah, ora sono soddisfatto! Ho vendicato il mio onore!

FINE DEL DRAMMA

*with the other ready to brandish a murder weapon.)*

My wife sleeps the eternal sleep because you, you murderer, have forced her to die . . .

GIUSEPPE

*(Pale as a corpse, without offering any resistance to ALBERTO.)*

Me? . . . But what has this got to do with me?

ALBERTO

*(Squeezing his throat with more force, nailing his shoulders to the wall with his free arm.)*

Snake, villain . . . you even dare to pretend you are innocent? . . . It was you who had me arrested, to take advantage of the poverty in which she lived and to use her for your own purposes. You won, because she was afraid that I would die in jail . . . you won, because you promised her my freedom . . . . But you have to die . . . ah, yes, you must die . . . *(A desperate hand to hand struggle ensues. GIUSEPPE succeeds in pulling a switchblade knife out of his pocket; He opens it with his teeth and brandishes it to stab ALBERTO. The latter, with a quick motion, snatches it from him and, seizing him, repeatedly stabs GIUSEPPE.)*

GIUSEPPE

*(By this time irrevocably lost, he screams with whatever breath he has in his throat)*

Help! Help! . . . He's killing me! . . .

ALBERTO

*(He grabs him with his arms, with whatever force his muscles have; then, he throws him to the ground and rapidly pounces on him, kneeling on his stomach so that GIUSEPPE finds it impossible to move.)*

You will die, yes . . . Die, you murderer! . . . *(Riddling him with knife wounds, while GIUSEPPE struggles and cries in vain for mercy.)* You don't have the right to live among men . . . Die . . . die . . . *(GIUSEPPE utters a final, agonizing cry. ALBERTO, treading on him and raising his bloody arm) Ah, now I am satisfied! I have avenged my honor!*

END OF THE DRAMA



The Fool

***Il doge***

**di Aldo Palazzeschi**

**translated by Antonio Melchior**

**Aldo Palazzeschi** (born Aldo Giurlani in 1885) is arguably the most important of the early Italian modernists. His long and productive writing career goes from 1905 to 1972 and is remarkable for its variety. *Il Doge* was published in 1967, when Palazzeschi was in his eighties, and a full six decades after his debut.

Much of Palazzeschi's work is yet to be translated into English. The translation of *Il Doge* from which these pages are excerpted is meant as a step towards a fuller understanding of Palazzeschi for readers of English, providing for the first time a sample of his late narrative work. It aims to offer a readable and accessible English version of *Il Doge* that is nevertheless faithful to the complexity of the original. By minimally breaking up a few of the longer paragraph-length sentences, adding a little unobtrusive punctuation, and making explicit a few transitions that are only suggested in the original, this translation attempts to give readers of English as clear an idea as possible of Palazzeschi's comic brio and verbal inventiveness.

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## *Il Doge*

Da *Il doge* di Aldo Palazzeschi

## *Il Doge*

Nelle prime ore della mattina e dai punti strategici della città, gli altoparlanti annunziarono che alle dodici precise alla Loggia del Palazzo Ducale si sarebbe affacciato il Doge.

L'annuncio in questi termini circoscritto, non aggiungeva né accennava minimamente alle ragioni né il perché di un tale avvenimento che non produsse nei veneziani sorpresa alcuna ma solo una ridda di supposizioni immagini e commenti, voci discordi su quello che il Doge in tale circostanza avrebbe esposto, come si sarebbe comportato.

Diceva taluno che lo avrebbe fatto esclusivamente per tener viva un'antica e gentile consuetudine, naturalissima per chi detiene il compito di governare un popolo, mantenendo con lui il continuo ed affettuoso contatto, e rivolgendo alla cittadinanza un commosso, benedicente saluto quale auspicio di felicità, di generale benessere, di vita prospera sana e lunga per ognuno da quel luogo che è certamente, oltre che celeberrimo, fra le cose più belle che l'uomo abbia visto.

Altri invece, davano per sicuro che si era affacciato soltanto per annunziare la più orrenda delle sventure, forse la guerra e qualche cosa, forse, di più calamitoso ancora della guerra ma non dicevano che, si guardavano bene dal dirlo: una catastrofe senza esempio, senza nome e senza riparo, come a nessun popolo e in nessun tempo era mai avvenuto. I pessimisti non tardano a prender quota in un frangente come questo.

Ed altri ancora, in vena di poesia nel senso più elevato, affermavano quasi lo avessero visto, che sarebbe apparso per sposare il mare, impresa della massima semplicità per un uomo nel caso suo e col quale, da epoca remotissima e per un numero incalcolabile di volte erasi unito nel modo più felice in matrimonio, senza mai risentire stanchezza o sazietà di un tale vincolo, il naturale sconforto come avviene a qualche altro non solo, ma riuscendo a rispettare la fedeltà assoluta nel carattere sacro del patto, cosa che non capita ogni giorno né al primo venuto e che il Doge medesimo, in altra sede matrimoniale



**Il Doge**  
**from Il Doge by Aldo Palazzeschi**  
**Translated by Antonio Melchior**

***The Doge***

In the first hours of the morning and from strategic points throughout the city, loudspeakers announced that at exactly 12:00 o'clock noon, the Doge would appear at the Loggia of the Ducal Palace.

The announcement was strictly limited to these circumstances, neither adding nor even minimally alluding to the reasons for or the cause of such an event, which produced no surprise at all among the Venetians, but only a jumble of conjectures, ideas, and comments; of differing opinions about what the Doge would say under these circumstances, and how he would behave.

Some people said that the Doge was doing this only to keep alive a venerable custom, one very natural for a ruler, that allowed him to stay in uninterrupted and loving touch with his people, and that he would simply direct to the citizenry a warm, benevolent greeting that would be an omen of happiness, of general wellbeing, and of a long, healthy, and prosperous life for every single person hailing from that special place, which is not only really famous but also certainly among the most beautiful things ever seen.

Others instead were sure that he would appear only to announce the most horrible of misfortunes, maybe war or maybe something even more calamitous than war, but they didn't say what. You bet they were careful not to say it: an unparalleled catastrophe, nameless and inexorable, unlike anything that had ever happened to any people in the world. The pessimists' numbers always soar in situations like these.

Still others, in a poetic vein of the highest refinement, stated, almost as if they could see it, that the Doge would appear in order to "marry the sea," a task of maximum simplicity for a man of his caliber and position, one, moreover, who had already happily entered this state of matrimony countless times, since the most remote antiquity, without ever tiring or growing weary of such a bond, not only not suffering the natural despondency to which other mortals are subject, but even managing always and with absolute fidelity to respect the sacred character of the union, something that not just any-

sacra altrettanto, non era riuscito a conservare al medesimo livello. E da quell'altezza dominante, d'impareggiabile splendore e fascino arcano, avrebbe gettato nel Bacino di San Marco il rituale anello che vi sarebbe caduto producendo una traiettoria luminosa come allorquando nelle notti d'estate le stelle vi cadono dal cielo.

Altri infine, di spirito familiare all'eccesso, casalingo del tutto e pacifico ad ogni costo, negati al volo, ma che per loro immensa fortuna sono portati a veder roseo sempre e dappertutto al fine pratico di non recare alla propria persona nessun genere di scosse o turbamento, il minimo disturbo, e in modo accentuato sull'ora che digeriscono, pronosticavano che una volta alla Loggia, il Doge si sarebbe limitato a dispensare sorrisi, sorrisi e baci, un numero infinito di baci col regal gesto della mano, e sorrisi in una quantità che sfugge a qualsiasi calcolo e controllo, tanto che ce ne sarebbero stati a dovizia per ciascuno, neppure un cittadino sarebbe partito a vuoto. Come il buon padre nella gioia della propria famiglia allorché viene festeggiato il suo giorno natalizio.

Le donne da parte loro, chiedevano con insistenza che rivelava un'impaziente bramosia, incontenuta nel modo più infantile e bizzarro, se col Doge si sarebbe affacciata anche la Dogaressa, e formulavano le più fantastiche, colorite previsioni sul conto di quella: come si sarebbe presentata e comportata davanti al popolo la prima donna di Venezia, discutendo minutamente, con scoppiettante vivacità sopra la forma ed il colore del suo vestito tessuto d'oro e trapunto di gemme, contando una per una le file di perle che partendosi dal collo sarebbero discese a coprirle la persona fino a terra; e tutte socchiudevano gli occhi davanti all'abbagliante scintillio che simile ad una leggendaria imperatrice di Bisanzio ne avrebbe coronata la chioma lussuosa: brillanti, rubini, smeraldi, zaffiri, ametiste... E taluna, che con inconfutabile autorità si dichiarava aggiornata relativamente ai segreti e alle vicende di quell'augusta dimora, satura di grandezza e circondata del più impenetrabile mistero, fra due sospiri ed abbassando il timbro della voce aggiungeva come nonostante il bel sorriso che una volta davanti al popolo le appariva stampato sul labbro, la Dogaressa non sarebbe riuscita a nascondere gli occhi arrossati dalle lacrime per essere dotato il Doge, oramai chi lo ignorava a Venezia? oltre che di un formidabile ingegno e un coraggio a tutta prova, di una virilità fuor del comune e dell'usato, come soltanto ad uomo di eccezionale natura e del più alto lignaggio può essere concesso, eccessiva né più né meno,

one can do and that the Doge himself, in another matrimonial arena just as sacred, had not quite been able to maintain at the same level. From his high lordly seat, they said, with its unrivalled splendor and arcane fascination, he would throw into St. Mark's Basin the ceremonial ring, which in its fall would produce a brilliant trail, like that of falling stars on a summer night.

Others, finally, those with an excessively prosaic spirit, entirely homespun and tranquil at all costs, completely incapable of flights of fancy, but, luckily for them, inclined always to see everything through rose-colored glasses, thereby sparing themselves any jolts or anxieties, or even minimal disturbances, especially when it might upset their digestion, predicted that once on the loggia, the Doge would limit himself to dispensing smiles, smiles and kisses, an infinite number of kisses delivered with a regal gesture of the hand, and so many smiles that they would confound any attempt to keep track of them or to calculate their number, so many that there would be more than enough for everyone, and not even one citizen would leave empty-handed. The Doge would be like a good father in the midst of his family's happiness when they celebrate the day of his birth.

The women, for their part, asked, with an insistence that betrayed a certain impatient want, a yearning that was unchecked in the most infantile and bizarre way, if the Dogess would be appearing with the Doge. And they concocted the most fantastic and vivid predictions about how the First Lady of Venice would appear and behave. They discussed in minute detail and with crackling liveliness the style and color of her dress, which would be woven with gold and studded with jewels, and they counted, one by one, the rows of pearls that starting at her neck would cover her royal person entirely; and they all dreamily closed their eyes at the thought of the blinding sparkles that would cover her luxurious mane as if she were a legendary Byzantine empress: diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, amethysts ... but alas, someone, who with irrefutable authority claimed to be in the know of the secrets and vicissitudes of that august household that was saturated with such greatness and surrounded by the most impenetrable mystery, between two sighs and lowering the tone of her voice added that despite the beautiful smile that at one time seemed to her people a permanent feature of her face, the Dogess would be unable to hide the redness that tears had brought to her eyes, tears that were the result of the Doge's being endowed (was there anyone in Venice who did not yet know it?) not only with a formidable mind and indomitable courage, but also with

spaventosa senz'altro e per la quale, al suo insaziabile ardore in tal campo, le grazie ed i favori di una sola donna non producevano nemmeno vento. Ciò che lasciava affondare nel cuore della povera Dogaressa ogni giorno di più un implacabile assillo alimentandone la gelosia nella forma più crudele che una donna abbia sofferto.

Conoscendo il grande amore, la struggente curiosità e l'entusiasmo che per il loro Doge i veneziani hanno sempre avuto, una cosa soltanto ci sorprende in questo fatto rendendoci ammirati fino a toglierci il respiro non potendoci togliere il cappello come si usava nel secolo scorso quando tutti per un nonnulla si scappellavano e per il gusto di scappellarsi era buono ogni pretesto, un vero peccato, ma qualche cosa ci dovevamo togliere per un caso veramente straordinario, ed è che a nessuno fosse balenato nel cervello sia pure con un fugacissimo pensiero, di rivolgergli il minimo rimprovero, nel tono più deferente e affettuoso beninteso, devoto fino alla prostrazione se vogliamo, per il motivo semplicissimo di non essersi lasciato vedere durante troppo tempo, di aver tenuto celata la propria persona per un periodo così lungo, privando i propri sudditi di quella che rappresenta la gioia più viva per loro: vedere, ammirare e salutare il Capo dello Stato, e che noi giudichiamo come un segno di disciplina, d'amore e di rispetto da portarsi universalmente quale esempio.

Ma il tempo, che durante l'accidia ci si presenta nel passare intollerabilmente lungo, da parere eterno, diviene poi tutto il contrario una volta passato, tanto che sul finire di un'intera esistenza per lunga e tribolata che sia e sgangherata a tutta possa, ci appare un sogno, un sogno vago, fugacissimo e leggero, che possiamo definire un lampo, un soffio come quando si spegne la candela: *pfu!*, e per i veneziani, resta facile capirlo, era come non avessero veduto il Doge da qualche giorno. Ragione per cui alle nove di quella mattina la Riva degli Schiavoni già brulicava di popolo in attesa, e che passeggiando su e giù si esercitava in discussioni e previsioni di circostanza, appassionate e svariatissime come abbiamo riferito, e tutti col naso rivolto in su nell'impazienza che la regale Loggia venisse aperta al loro sguardo.

Una mattina di fine agosto e in quel preciso momento allorché la calura dell'estate ormai in declino, diviene per tale brezza marina un pungente tepore che simile a una carezza annunziando l'autunno precoce delizia la pelle del viso, e fa socchiudere gli occhi in una luce palpitante comunicandoti un senso di vertigine voluttuoso.

an uncommon, outsized virility, such as can only accrue to a man of exceptional nature and of the highest lineage, neither more nor less than excessive, frightening certainly, and because of which to his insatiable fervor in the field of love, the graces and favor of one single woman did not constitute even a mildly cooling breeze. This produced an implacable torment in the Dogess's heart and fanned her jealousy in the cruelest way that a woman ever suffered.

Knowing the great love, the consuming curiosity, the enthusiasm that the Venetians have always had for their Doge, only one thing surprises us in this affair, leaving us in a state of wonder and taking our breath away (and something had to be taken away, since we can no longer remove our hats as people used to do in the last century, when they would take off their hats at the drop of a hat and when, for the sheer pleasure of de-hatting, any excuse was good. Too bad we can't anymore. But something had to be doffed, given this extraordinary circumstance): that it didn't occur to anyone, not even as a flicker of an idea, to reprimand the Doge, even mildly, even in the most (of course) deferential and affectionate tone, devoted to the point of prostration, even. And this for the very simple reason that he had not let himself be seen for much too long, having withheld his person for a very extended period, thereby denying his subjects their most vivid pleasure: to see, admire, and salute their Chief of State, something we judge to be a sign of discipline, love, and respect worthy of universal emulation.

But time, which during our moments of sloth appears to us intolerably slow in its passing, so that it seems eternal, quickly becomes quite the opposite once it has passed, so that at the end of it, even the longest life, brimming with tribulations and boisterousness, seems to us but a vague dream, evanescent and light, which we could even call a flash, or a puff like the one that blows out a candle: *pfu!* So the Venetians, one can easily understand, now that they would be seeing him again, felt like it had only been a few days since they had seen the Doge. So at nine that morning the Riva degli Schiavoni was already swarming with expectant citizens walking back and forth while they exercised themselves in discussions and predictions, passionate and extremely varied, as we have previously noted. They all walked around with their noses in the air, impatient to have the regal loggia opened to their view.

It was a late August morning at exactly the moment when the summer heat, which is already tapering off, is turned by a soft sea breeze into a prickle of warmth that caressingly announces an early

I marmi che alla città imperiale compongono un abito vetusto, rivelano la sensibilità pronta e delicatissima della loro anima rispecchiando le iridescenze dell'acqua sotto il magistero della luce che li fa cambiar di rilievo e di colore da un momento all'altro.

D'avorio e di corallo era il Palazzo Ducale irradiato dal sole e ai suoi piedi in quel silenzio il Bacino di San Marco un favoloso tappeto di smeraldo increspato d'argento su cui le gondole, i motoscafi e tante piccole imbarcazioni sfiorando l'acqua con ritmo di danza o lievemente scivolando, recavano i nuovi ospiti appartenenti a tutte le categorie di tutte le parti del mondo: a coppie a frotte a branchi in gruppi o file indiane, in comitive, carovane, compagnie... e dappertutto una quantità inverosimile di valigie, accatastate, allineate, soprammesse, formanti architetture variopinte, originali e grottesche. E valigie lungo la Riva portate a mano a sacco a braccia a spalle da uomini che procedendo in forma di sandwich fra due valigie si facevano largo fendendo la folla con palese difficoltà e ripetendo in ritmica cadenza un *varia!... varia!...* d'inconsapevole civetteria più che di precauzione o di consenso, chiedendo d'essere ammirati nel faticoso ruolo, giacché il loro consiglio, così pieno di saggezza, come accade troppo spesso alle cose di questa natura, tutti si guardavano dall'accoglierlo non spostandosi di un millimetro dopo avere visto. E a te vien fatto di pensare se il vero saggio sia quello che propone la virtù o l'altro che la respinge in allegria. Valigie che in prossimità dei grandi alberghi venivano caricate e scaricate dai motoscafi e dalle gondole sulle quali s'imbarcavano o sbarcavano i pellegrini della bellezza sposata questa volta, e con formula piena, all'originalità; seguiti dai domestici carichi di valigie, e mentre che osservandole con assuefatta consuetudine molti le guardavano senza neppur vederle, altri si domandavano che cosa ci potesse essere dentro a tante valigie così grandi e così belle: fastose e geniali toilettes di dive e dame che avrebbero figurato nelle serate dei festivals, del cinema della musica e del teatro di prosa; nei balli dei palazzi, notti di fiaba, e delle navi di passaggio; nei ricevimenti presso gli alberghi di lusso o nelle beatitudini di un panfilo ancorato alla riva, culla bianca e oro di un vecchio signore favolosamente ricco.

autumn and delights the surface of your skin, making you close your eyes in a quivering light and hitting you with a lush dizziness.

The marble which is the handsome attire of the regal city displays the bright and delicate sensitivity of its soul, mirroring the iridescence of the water as it is orchestrated by the light of the day, changing its shape and color from one moment to the next.

The ivory and coral of the Doge's Palace was bathed in sunlight. In that silent glow, St. Mark's Basin was a gorgeous carpet of emerald with silver ripples on which gondolas, motorboats, and so many other little vessels, skimming the water with dance-like rhythms or lightly gliding on its surface, transported all manner of guests, from all over the world: they came in pairs, in droves, in packs, in groups and in single file; in parties, caravans, and companies ... and everywhere, an unbelievable number of suitcases: thrown together, lined up, piled high, forming the most varied architectures, original and grotesque; suitcases placed along the shore that were taken—handled, clutched, embraced, shouldered—by men who then bumpily drove their way through the crowds looking like human sandwiches with their suitcase bread, uttering a cadenced *watch it! watch it!* that seemed more like unconscious coquettishness than a warning, like a request for admiration in their difficult task. It may as well have been that, for, taken as advice, wise as it was, their words, as too often happens in cases like this, were meticulously unheeded. People noted the advance of the human suitcase sandwiches and proceeded not to move by even a fraction of an inch. And you have to wonder who's wiser, the person who gives sensible advice or the one who laughingly rejects it. The suitcases near the major hotels were loaded onto and unloaded from motorboats and gondolas that were boarded and disembarked by strange pilgrims whose appearance was a marriage of beauty and oddness. They were followed by their servants, who were also weighed down with suitcases. Some looked at these suitcases with the familiarity of habit, without really seeing them, while others asked themselves what there could be in such big, beautiful suitcases: perhaps sumptuous and startling outfits belonging to divas and other elegant ladies who would cut stunning figures at the various festivals celebrating cinema, music, theater; at palace dances, in fairy-tale nights, in passenger ships; at receptions held in luxury hotels or in the glory of a yacht anchored at the shore, the gold and white crib of a fabulously rich old-timer.

### ***Gian Carlo Fusco***

Born in La Spezia in 1915, Fusco died in 1984 and was primarily known as a brilliant journalist and raconteur, who wrote for some of Italy's best known newspapers and magazines (*Il Giorno*, *Il Mondo*, *L'Europeo*). His several books, nearly all republished in the last five years, are captivating evocations of the underside of Italian life from the late 1930s through the 60s. *Quando l'Italia tollerava* (1955) is a "scientific" investigation of Italy's then-legal brothels. *Duri a Marsiglia* (1974) examines the underworld of organized crime in Marseilles between the two world wars. *Guerra d'Albania* (1961), and *Le rose del ventennio* (1958) offer behind-the-scenes looks at war and bourgeois social life under the Duce. Only one of Fusco's works has been translated into English: a chapter about the anarchist Ezio Taddei from his book, *Gli indesiderabili*, translated by Gregory Conti, which appeared in *Raritan*, Vol. XXV, Number 4, Spring 2006.

*L'Italia al dente* (1960), from which this story is taken, is a rather typical Fusco production: a collection of eight stories, all off-beat and very entertaining while at the same time full of interesting historical information and intriguing observations of Italian popular culture. The special ingredient in this case is the ingenious touch of composing each of the stories around the preparation and consumption of a particular recipe for pasta and, in fact, the stories themselves read very much like tales told around the dinner table over coffee and dessert.

### ***Gregory Conti***

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pa, Gregory Conti teaches English at the University of Perugia, where he has been living since 1985. His literary translations include three books by Rosetta Loy (*First Words* (Metropolitan Books, 2001), *Hot Chocolate at Hanselmann's*, University of Nebraska Press, 2003, and *The Water Door*, Other Press, 2006), *The Banality of Goodness: The Story of Giorgio Perlasca*, by Enrico Deaglio (University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) as well as extracts and short stories by Mario Rigoni Stern, Gian Carlo Fusco, and Vitaliano Brancati, published in *Raritan*, *Beacon*, and the on-line journal *Words Without Borders*. Conti has also published several essays and book reviews on translation as well as introductory essays for



three of his four books. He is now working on a translation of *Corpo* by Tiziano Scarpa (Einaudi, 2004), extracts of which will be published in the Winter and Spring issues of *Raritan* in 2007.

### ***D'Annunzio's Guitar***

In 1925 (or 1926), when Fusco was 10 (or 11) years old, his navy officer father brings him along on a "mission" to Gabriele D'Annunzio's villa on Lake Garda. The Italian Navy has decided to honor the "Imaginator" by installing the prow of a navy ship in the gardens of his villa. The story gives us a fascinating and unusual portrait of D'Annunzio, seen through the eyes of a young boy, who quickly becomes the object of the bard's affectionate attentions. At the banquet celebrating the installation, the "soldier-poet" explains the origins of a pasta recipe from his native Abruzzi – *spaghetti alla chitarra* – served to the boy by two scantily clad "sisters of Saint Clare."

***La “chitarra” dell’Imaginifico*****Gian Carlo Fusco**

Da *L’Italia al dente*, pp. 20-26, ©2002 Sellerio editore, via Siracusa 50, Palermo, sellerioeditore@iol.it

Non ricordo esattamente l’anno. Ma se non fu nel 1923, fu certamente nel 1926, che la Marina Militare italiana decise di donare a Gabriele D’Annunzio, sistemandogliela fra le amene verzure del Vittoriale, la prora della nave “Puglia”. Cimelio ambitissimo dal Poeta Soldato, perché su quella tolda, nel 1920, a Spalato, era stato ucciso il comandante Tommaso Gulli. L’incarico di quell’operazione, dal taglio estetico della prora, alla collocazione su un apposito basamento, fu dato al colonnello del Genio Navale Umberto Pugliese. Il quale, quando venne il giorno della solenne consegna a D’Annunzio, ottenne dal Ministero di potersi scegliere i quattro o cinque ufficiali che lo avrebbero accompagnato a Gardone. Fra gli altri, scelse mio padre. Il quale, nella sua qualità di capitano commissario, aveva curato la pratica “ Stanziamento fondi relativo omaggio prora nave Puglia a G. D’Annunzio”.

Mio padre, Carlo Fusco, nato fra i monti del Sannio, era arrivato alla Marina da Guerra percorrendo, come tanti giovani meridionali di buona volontà, la strada, spesso miracolosa, indicata da un cartello segnaletico che dice: “Arrivare, il più presto possibile, al primo stipendio”. E come tantissimi italiani che frequentano scuole a indirizzo tecnico, disprezzava profondamente le questioni tecniche e si occupava, appassionatamente, di letteratura. Le sue letture, per quanto assidue ed attente, erano piuttosto disordinate. Come tutti quelli della generazione nata sotto Crispi e maturata sotto Giolitti, il suo interesse per l’arte, ivi compresa la poesia, era soprattutto, se non esclusivamente, estetico. Va da sé che il sommo dei suoi sommi fosse Gabriele D’Annunzio.

Quando mio padre fu informato ufficialmente che il colonnello Pugliese lo aveva incluso nel gruppetto dei suoi accompagnatori, l’idea che stava per conoscere, in persona, l’Imaginifico, alias Ariel Armato od Orbo Veggente, lo mise in uno stato quasi febbrile. Che diventò ancora più acuto e vibrante, allorché gli venne l’idea di portarmi con sé al Vittoriale. Perché (disse) sarebbe stato un vero delitto non approfittare dell’occasione per farmi “vedere, da vicino”

***D'Annunzio's "Guitar"***  
***by Gian Carlo Fusco***  
***Translated by Gregory Conti***

From *L'Italia al dente*, pp. 20-26, ©2002 Sellerio editore, via  
Siracusa 50, Palermo, sellerioeditore@iol.it

I don't remember exactly what year it was. But if it wasn't 1925 then it was surely 1926 that the Italian Navy decided to donate to Gabriele D'Annunzio, installing it for him among the delightful gardens of the Vittoriale – his estate on Lake Garda – the bow of the ship "Puglia." A relic long-desired by the Soldier Poet, because it was on that deck, at Split in 1920, that Captain Tommaso Gulli was killed. The charge for the operation, from the aesthetic cut of the bow to its placement on a specially built base, was given to the Colonel of the Naval Engineers, Umberto Pugliese, who, when the day came for the solemn consignment to D'Annunzio, obtained permission from the Ministry to choose the four or five officers who would accompany him to Gardone. Among the others, he chose my father, who in his role as commissary captain, had dealt with the paperwork for the "Appropriation of funds regarding donation bow ship Puglia to G. D'Annunzio."

My father, Carlo Fusco, born in the mountains of the Sannio region between Naples and Benevento, had arrived in the Navy, like a lot of young southerners of good will, by taking that often miraculous road marked by a sign that says, "Make your way, as soon as possible, to your first pay check." And like so many Italians who attend technical schools, he had the most profound contempt for technical questions and dedicated himself, passionately, to literature. His reading, despite all of his assiduity and attention, was rather haphazard. Like all those of the generation who were born under Crispi and came of age under Giolitti, his interest for art, including poetry, was first and foremost, if not exclusively, aesthetic. It goes without saying then that his supreme poet of all supreme poets was Gabriele D'Annunzio.

When my father came to know officially that Colonel Pugliese had included him in the small group of his companions, the idea that he was about to meet, in person, "the Imaginator," alias "Ariel Armed" or "the Seer," launched him into an almost febrile state. His agitation became more and more acute and vibrant until he got the

l'ultimo Grande Italiano. Stavamo cenando. Il mio nonno materno, a capotavola, interruppe la degustazione di una magnifica pera, con accompagnamento di parmigiano stravecchio, per dire che nell'ottobre del 1862, quando aveva quattro anni, suo padre lo aveva portato al forte del Varignano, a vedere Garibaldi ferito ad Aspromonte. Mia nonna contemplava, come sempre, mio nonno, tacendo. Mia sorella Franca, tre anni più piccola di me, s'era addormentata sulle ciliegie. Mia madre, donna di gran carattere, si accese una "Macedonia Oro" (roba di quel tempo) e disse: "Beh! L'ultimo dei grandi italiani! E Mussolini?". "Cosa c'entra!" scattò mio padre, con la giacca del pigiama sui pantaloni da ufficiale. "Mussolini è grande in un settore del tutto diverso! E quanta deferenza, quando incontra D'Annunzio!".

Mio padre chiese al colonnello Pugliese il permesso di aggregarmi alla spedizione. Naturalmente, a sue spese. Il colonnello girò la richiesta al Ministero della Marina. Il Ministero, previo il parere favorevole della Direzione del Personale, rispose di sì. Si era in giugno. Avevo appena compiuto non so se 10 o 11 anni. Mancava una settimana alla partenza. Mi fu acquistato un vestito alla marinara bianco, completo di berretto con la scritta "Regia Nave Dante Alighieri". Dovetti imparare a memoria il sonetto "O giovinezza!" ("O giovinezza, ah me, la tua corona! su la mia fronte è già quasi sfiorita...") nell'eventualità che l'Imaginifico mi chiedesse di recitargli qualcosa di suo. Su indicazione di mio padre, il siciliano Rosario Tafuri, noto alla Spezia come "barbiere degli ammiragli", eliminò i miei riccioli sbarazzini con un geometrico taglio all'Umberto. Adeguato al carattere militare della "missione al Vittoriale" (nei carteggi ministeriali era così definita).

Partimmo agli sgoccioli di quel giugno, con un treno del tardo pomeriggio, che dalla Spezia ci portò a Genova. Da dove, cambiando treno, alle prime luci del giorno, arrivammo a Milano. Lì la "rappresentanza" guidata dal colonnello Pugliese fece tappa, fin verso mezzogiorno, in un albergo a pochi passi dalla stazione.

Quindi, si rimise in viaggio per Brescia. Dove, appena scesa dal treno, fu distribuita su due grandi automobili scure e circa un'ora dopo scaricata nell'Eremo di Gabriele, proprio di fronte alla villa denominata "La Priorà". L'abitazione vera e propria del Filibustiere del Quarnaro. Il quale ci stava aspettando davanti alla porta della villa, con un gigante barbuto alle spalle. Me l'ero immaginato non

idea of taking me with him to the Vittoriale. Because (he said) it would be a real crime not to take advantage of the opportunity to “see, first hand” the last Great Italian. We were eating dinner. My maternal grandfather, at the head of the table, interrupted his savoring of a magnificent pear, accompanied by thin slices of aged parmigiano, to say that in October of 1862, when he was four years old, his father had taken him to the fort at Varignano to see Garibaldi, wounded at Aspromonte. My grandmother, as always, gazed at my grandfather in silence. My sister Franca, three years younger than me, had fallen asleep over a bowl of cherries. My mother, a woman of strong character, lit up a “Macedonia Oro” (a brand of the time) and said, “Ha! The last of the great Italians! And Mussolini?” “What about him,” my father shot back, wearing the shirt of his pajamas over the pants of his officer’s uniform. “Mussolini is great in a completely different sector! And what deference whenever he encounters D’Annunzio!”

My father asked Colonel Pugliese for permission to include me on the expedition. At his expense, naturally. The colonel forwarded the request to the Ministry of the Navy. The Minister, upon the favorable opinion of the Director of Personnel, said yes. It was June. I had just turned 10 or maybe 11. We had a week to go before our departure date. They bought me a white sailor suit complete with a beret that had written on it, “Royal Ship Dante Alighieri.” I had to learn by heart the sonnet “Oh, Giovinezza!” (Oh, Youth!) (Oh, youth, woe is me, your wreath / on my forehead has nearly withered...) in case the Imaginator should ask me to recite one of his works. On instructions from my father, the Sicilian Rosario Tafuri, known in La Spezia as the “admirals’ barber” eliminated my unruly curls with a geometric cut, in keeping with the military character of the “mission to the Vittoriale” (as it was defined in the ministerial correspondence).

We left in the waning days of June, on a late afternoon train from La Spezia to Genoa, from where, after changing trains, we arrived in Milan at the first light of day. There the “detail” led by Colonel Pugliese, took a brief rest until just before noon, in a hotel in the vicinity of the station. Thereafter, the delegation departed again for Brescia, where, upon stepping off the platform, it was divided into two large black cars and about one hour later dropped at the Hermitage of Gabriele, right in front of the villa known as “The Priory.” This was the actual residence of the Buccaneer of Quarnaro himself, who was waiting for us in front of the entrance to the villa, with a

molto alto, ma snello. Invece, era più tozzo che basso. Indossava un abito di gabardine di un marrone molto chiaro. Sulla camicia avorio serpeggiava una cravatta verde ramarro. Calzava scarpe bianche dalla mascherina cannella traforata. La testa, perfettamente calva, era un po' incassata fra le spalle. Aveva l'occhio destro coperto da una benda nera.

“Alalà! Siate i benvenuti, uomini del mare!” salutò, -con voce sottile e una punta di cantilena. Poi, porgendo una ciotola di legno, soggiunse: “Date il vostro obolo al poverello!”

Consegnò al gigante barbuto la ciotola dov'erano cadute alcune monete, quindi strinse tutte le mani, s'informò, facendomi una carezza, chi fosse il “giovannissimo nostromo biondo e bianco”. Poi c'invitò a contemplare la “fatidica prora”, che solo qualche ora prima alcuni arsenalotti, venuti da Venezia, avevano finito di sistemare sul basamento, in mezzo ai cipressi. Di lì, cominciò la visita al Vittoriale. Con brevi tappe al Cortile degli Schiavoni, all'Arengo, al Frutteto, al Laghetto delle Danze, alla Valletta dell'Acqua Pazza e a quella dell'Acqua Savia. Alla fine del giro, ch'era durato circa due ore e durante il quale, di tanto in tanto, il Vate mi aveva accarezzato una guancia, ci ritrovammo davanti alla “Prioria”.

“Ora i miei fidi uscocchi vi accompagneranno alla locanda” disse D'Annunzio. “Ma stasera vi aspetto alla mia mensa, per un modesto rancio. Alalà!”.

“Alalà!” echeggiò la “rappresentanza”. Poi, mio padre, un po' timidamente, s'informò:

“Posso portare mio figlio anche stasera?”.

“Non puoi! Devi!” rispose l'Imaginifico. “Come potrebbe mancare all'appello la presenza augurale del giovanissimo nostromo biondo e bianco?”.

Non era una tavola da pranzo, quella dove sedemmo qualche ora dopo. Era una specie di altare, sul quale piatti e posate occupavano il minimo dello spazio indispensabile, in mezzo a una selva di cimeli e oggetti dal misterioso significato. Schegge d'elica, statuette di bronzo e d'argento, calici ecclesiastici, brandelli di damasco, di raso e di broccato, pugnali di tutte le foggie, caschi da aviatore, una decina fra orifiamma, gagliardetti e drappelle, fiale di cristallo colorato, un nastro da mitragliatrice con tutti i proiettili... Guardavo quel bricabracche a bocca aperta. Che stessi sognando? No. Perché sentii la mano di D'Annunzio, che mi aveva voluto accanto, sfiorarmi i

bearded giant standing behind him. I had imagined him not very tall, but thin. Instead, he was more stocky than short. He had on a light brown gabardine suit with an ivory shirt and a serpentine bright green tie. His feet were clad in white shoes with cinnamon-red perforated tips. His head, perfectly bald, was tucked down a little between his shoulders and his right eye was covered by a black band.

"Alalà! Welcome, men of the sea!" he greeted us, in a thin voice with a slightly singsong cadence. Then, holding out a wooden bowl, he said, "Give your alms for the poor!"

He handed over the bowl, into which a few coins had dropped, to the bearded giant and then shook everybody's hands and inquired, caressing my cheek, who was this "white little blond boatswain." Then he invited us to admire the "fateful prow", which just a few hours earlier some shipyard workers, come from Venice, had finished installing on its base among the cypress trees. There began our tour of the Vittoriale with brief stops at the Schiavoni Court, the Arengo, the Orchard, the Lake of the Dances, the Valley of l'Acquapazza or Wild Waters, and the Valley of l'Acquasavia or the Wise Waters. At the end of the tour, which lasted about two hours and during which, from time to time, the Bard caressed my cheek, we found ourselves once again in front of the "Priory."

Now my faithful uskoks will accompany you to your lodgings," D'Annunzio said. "But this evening I expect you at my mess, for a modest ration. Alalà!"

"Alalà," the "detail" echoed. Then, a bit timidly, my father inquired, "May I bring my son this evening as well?"

"Not only may you! You must!" responded the Imaginator. "How could we ever do without the auspicious presence of our white little blond boatswain?"

The table we sat down to a few hours later was not a dinner table. It was a kind of altar, on which plates and silverware occupied the bare minimum of space, surrounded by relics and objects of mysterious significance. Propeller shards, statuettes in bronze and silver, ecclesiastical chalices, shreds of damask, satin, and brocade, daggers of all shapes and sizes, aviator helmets, a dozen or so among them of oriflammes, pennants, and streamers, phials of colored crystal, a machine-gun ammunition belt with all its bullets...I looked around at all that bric-a-brac with my mouth hanging open. Was I dreaming or what? No, because I could feel D'Annunzio's hand –

capelli, mentre la sua voce cantilenante mi chiedeva: "Ti piacciono, piccolo nostromo, tutte queste cose che ricordano le mie gesta guerresche?".

Riuscii ad esalare un flebile "sì!".

"Bene!" fece lui. Poi, agitò un grosso campanello d'argento, dicendo: "Ora le mie fedeli clarisse cominceranno a servirci!".

Infatti, pochi istanti dopo entrarono le clarisse. Due donne dai capelli corvini, lunghi sulle spalle, che recavano ognuna un vassoio di metallo dorato (che fosse proprio oro?) colmo di pastasciutta fumante. Nonostante l'appellativo di "clarisse", riferito alle monache di Santa Chiara, le due donne indossavano corte tunichette trasparentissime, sotto le quali erano completamente nude. Così che lasciavano intravedere, nettissimo, folto e tenebroso, il "bosco d'amore" che faceva chiazza sotto l'addome. Era la prima volta che i miei occhi si posavano sull'"angolo fermo di Venere". Talmente ferino, nelle due ancelle del Vate, che andavano servendo la pastasciutta sorridenti e disinvolte, da procurarmi non solo stupore, ma addirittura spavento. Cos'erano quelle macchie? Una malattia? Due micini neri accovacciati al calduccio? Un segno di lutto insolito? Quando Suora Pecchia (seppi in seguito che si chiamava così) arrivò ad empirmi il piatto, i miei occhi le restarono inchiodati sulla selva del pube. Mentre tutti gli occhi dei commensali erano fissi su di me. E quelli di mio padre, che oltre ad essere un fervente d'annunziano era anche un moralista, avevano un'espressione perplessa e severa, sotto le sopracciglia aggrondate. L'Imaginifico avvertì l'imbarazzo che il mio impatto infantile con la pelliccia segreta della donna aveva creato attorno alla tavola. E cercò di deviare in qualche modo la mia attenzione.

"Hai guardato bene, nostromo giovinetto, i maccheroni la mia ancella divota t'ha messo nel piatto?".

"Sì!" mentii, inghiottendo saliva.

"Hai notato la loro foggia singolare, curiosa?".

Guardai il piatto per la prima volta e notai che gli spaghetti non erano di forma cilindrica, come quelli di casa.

"Mi sembrano... quadrati" balbettai.

"Quasi!" fece il Vate, accarezzandomi i capelli sagomati all'Umberto. "Questa è la pasta caratteristica dell'Abruzzo, ch'è la mia terra! E nomata pasta alla chitarra. E sai perché, piccolo marinaio biondo e bianco?".

"No!" bisbigliai.



he'd insisted that I sit beside him – touching my hair as his singsong voice asked me, "Do you like them, my little boatswain, all these things that recall my military exploits?"

I managed to exhale a feeble, "yes!"

"Good!" he said. Then he started shaking a big silver bell, saying, "Now my faithful Clarisses will begin serving us!"

Indeed, a few seconds later the Clarisses made their entrance. Two women with long raven hair, down to their shoulders, each of whom was carrying a gilded metal tray (could it have been real gold?) piled high with steaming hot pasta. Despite the title of "Clarisse," in reference to the nuns of Saint Clare, the two women were wearing short and utterly transparent little tunics, under which they were completely naked. So that it was quite easy to make out, distinct, dark, and thick, the "forest of love" forming a patch under their bellies. It was the first time that my eyes had come to rest on "Venus's feral triangle." So feral, in fact, in the case of the Bard's two maidservants, gliding around serving the pasta, smiling and self-possessed, that I was not only stupefied but actually afraid. What were those dark stains? A disease? Two black kittens holed up to keep warm? Some strange sign of mourning? When Sister Pecchia (as I learned afterwards she was called) came over to fill my plate, my eyes remained glued on the tangle of her pubis. While the eyes of everyone else at the table were glued on me. And those of my father, who in addition to being a fervent D'Annunzian was also a moralist, had a puzzled, severe expression beneath his knitted eyebrows. The Imaginator noticed the embarrassment around the table caused by my infantile impact with woman's secret fur, and he tried somehow to divert my attention.

"Have you looked carefully, my young boatswain, at the macaroni that my devoted maidservant has put on your plate?"

"Yes!" I lied, swallowing my saliva.

"Have you noticed their singular, curious shape?"

I looked down at my plate for the first time and noticed that the spaghetti were not cylindrical like the spaghetti we had at home.

"They look...rectangular" I muttered.

"Almost!" said the Bard, caressing my close-cropped hair. "This is the characteristic pasta of Abruzzo, my homeland! It's called *pasta alla chitarra*. And do you know why, my little blond white sailor?"

"No," I murmured.

"Because once upon a time the dough was cut with the strings

“ Perché un tempo la sfoglia veniva tagliata proprio con le corde di una chitarra. Al posto della quale venne poi usato un istrumento, munito di alcuni fili metallici ben tesi. Si dice che l’arnese sia stato ideato da un ciabattino di Palena, sulle pendici della Maiella, chiamato Manicone. Questa è la storia di questa pasta abruzzese. La rammenterai, angeluzzo marino?”.

“ Sì! ”.

La ricordo, infatti, ogni volta che mi capita di mangiare spaghetti alla chitarra. E insieme ad essa ricordo anche le due macchie nere che mi apparvero, misteriose, attraverso un velo di un lievissimo color rosa.

of a guitar. Which later on was replaced by a tool, furnished with tightly stretched metallic strings. It is said that this utensil was conceived by a shoemaker from Palena, on the slopes of Mt. Maiella, whose name was Manicone. That is the story of this pasta from Abbruzzo. Will you remember it, my little angelic sailor?

"Yes!"

Indeed, I remember it every time I happen to eat spaghetti *alla chitarra*. And along with it I also recall the two black patches that appeared to me, mysteriously, through the folds of a pallid pink veil.

***Michelangelo Buonarroti***  
***Burlesque Poems***  
Translated by Anthony Mortimer

**ANTHONY MORTIMER**

ANTHONY MORTIMER is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He also taught for many years at the University of Geneva and has been Visiting Research Fellow at Merton College, Oxford. Professor Mortimer has published widely in the fields of Renaissance poetry and Anglo-Italian literary relations. Among his recent publications are *Variable Passions: A Reading of Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis'* (AMS, New York, 2000) and *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance* (Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2005). His verse translations from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* appeared in Penguin Classics in 2003 and his versions of Michelangelo are scheduled for the same series in 2007. Also forthcoming in 2007 are his translations of *The Sacred Epigrams of Angelus Silesius* (AMS).

Of his Michelangelo translations Anthony Mortimer writes:

Coming to Michelangelo after translating Petrarch, I found that the major difficulty was to give a sense of the difference between the two poets while still making it clear that Michelangelo remains within the Petrarchan tradition. I also needed to convey something of the sheer difficulty of Michelangelo's syntax without making him so obscure as to baffle English readers. I do not think that sixteenth-century love poetry can be really adapted to a twenty-first century idiom and thus I am not afraid of the occasional archaism or of echoing Shakespeare, Sidney or Milton where this seems appropriate. I want to remind the reader of the literary context that Michelangelo shares with other major Renaissance poets. The same strategy dictates my approach to rhyme. Without rhyme of some kind, a sonnet degenerates into fourteen (so why not fifteen?) lines of blank verse. My solution has been to exploit every variety of assonance and consonance, from full rhyme to the merest echo, in order to give an impression of the original rhyme scheme without indulging in the excesses of rhyme-forcing.



**Michelangelo Buonarroti****Burlesque Poems**

Translated by Anthony Mortimer

*I' ho già fatto un gozzo in questo stento,  
 come fa l'acqua a' gatti in Lombardia  
 o ver d'altro paese che si sia,  
 c'a forza 'l ventre appicca sotto 'l mento.*

*La barba al cielo, e la memoria sento  
 in sullo scrigno, e 'l petto fo d'arpia,  
 e'l pennel sopra 'l viso tuttavia  
 mel fa, gocciando, un ricco pavimento.*

*E lombi entrati mi son nella peccia,  
 e fo del cul per contrapeso groppa,  
 e ' passi senza gli occhi muovo invano.*

*Dinanzi mi s'allunga la corteccia,  
 e per piegarsi adietro si ragroppa,  
 e tendomi com'arco soriano.*

*Però fallace e strano  
 surge il iudizio che la mente porta,  
 ché mal si tra' per cerbottana torta.*

*La mia pittura morta  
 difendi orma', Giovanni, e 'l mio onore,  
 non sendo in loco bon, né io pittore.*

Caudate sonnet written while MB was working on the Sistine Chapel (1508-12) and addressed to Giovanni di Benedetto di Pistoia, poet and later Chancellor of the Florentine Academy. The caudate sonnet adds one or more 'tails' to the standard 14 lines and is frequently a vehicle for satire. For an even more grotesque self-portrait, see 267. In the autograph the poem is

***Michelangelo Buonarroti***

***Burlesque Poems***

Translated by Anthony Mortimer

I've got a goitre from this job I'm in –  
bad water does it up in Lombardy  
to peasants, there or in some other country –  
because my belly's shoved against my chin.

Beard skyward, nape of neck pressed back upon  
my hump, I'm hollow-chested like a harpy;  
the brush keeps dripping till my face looks gaudy,  
more like mosaic than anything you'd tread on.

Somehow my loins have climbed into my gut,  
and as a counterweight I use my arse,  
and where my feet are going eyes don't know.

In front my hide is all stretched out and tight,  
behind my bending makes it floppy loose,  
and I'm as curved as any Syrian bow.

No wonder that my mind is so  
far out of joint that it gets nothing right;  
show me the crooked barrel that shoots straight.

Giovanni, now you know my state,  
defend my poor dead painting and my honour;  
this is no place for me, and I'm no painter.

illustrated by a small sketch of himself in the awkward posture described.  
1) Goitres were traditionally associated with the northern provinces of Italy.  
20) MB frequently insists that he is a sculptor by profession and a painter  
only by necessity.

## 71

*I l'ho, vostra mercè, per ricevuto  
e hollo letto delle volte venti.  
Tal pro vi facci alla natura i denti  
co' 'l cibo al corpo quand'egli è pasciuto.  
I' ho pur, poi ch'i' vi lasciai, saputo  
che Cain fu de' vostri anticedenti,  
né voi da quel tralignate altrimenti,  
ché, s'altri ha ben, vel pare aver perduto.  
Invidiosi, superbi, al ciel nimici,  
la carità del prossimo v'è a noia,  
e sol del vostro danno siete amici.  
Se ben dice il Poeta di Pistoia,  
istieti a mente, e basta; e se tu dici  
ben di Fiorenza, tu mi dai la soia.  
Qual preziosa gioia  
è certo, ma per te già non si intende,  
perché poca virtù non la comprende.*

## 85

*Com'io ebbi la vostra, signor mio,  
cercand'andai fra tutti e cardinali  
e diss'a tre da vostra part'addio.  
Al Medico maggior de' nostri mali  
mostrai la detta, onde ne rise tanto  
che 'l naso fe' dua parti dell'occhiali.  
Il servito da voi pregiat' e santo  
costà e qua, sì come voi scrivete,  
n'ebbe piacer, che ne ris'altro tanto.  
A quel che tien le cose più secrete  
del Medico minor non l'ho ancor visto;  
farebbes'anche a lui, se fusse prete.  
Ecci molt'altri che rinegon Cristo  
che voi non siate qua; né dà lor noia,  
ché chi non crede si tien manco tristo.  
Di voi a tutti caverò la foia  
di questa vostra; e chi non si contenta*

1532-34. A caudate sonnet, possibly for Giovanni di Benedetto da Pistoia (see 5). The violent tone seems to go beyond the jocular Berni tradition. 12-13) The Poet is Dante who inveighs against Pistoia in the *Inferno*, 25, 10-



71

Yes, I received it, thankyou for your pains,  
and twenty times I've read all you have written.  
May nature give you teeth, for what you've bitten  
you still can't chew, but spit it out again.

Since we last met I've learned, in fact, that Cain  
was the great founder of your family tree,  
and you're no bastard offspring, since you see  
as your own loss whatever others gain.

Like all proud envious enemies of heaven,  
you cannot bear your neighbours' charity  
and only seem in love with your own ruin.

Think of the Poet, what he had to say  
about Pistoia, that's enough; and even  
if you praise Florence you're not fooling me.

A precious jewel, I agree,  
but one that vulgar minds can't comprehend,  
and not a place that needs you for a friend.

85

No sooner was your letter given me  
than I sought out a clutch of cardinals  
and passed your greetings to the chosen three.

The greatest Medico of all our ills  
laughed so much at the message that he blew  
his nose too hard and broke his spectacles.

The reverend holy man who's served by you  
both here and there – that's what you say, at least –  
liked it so much he burst out laughing too.

I haven't seen the one who knows the best-  
kept secrets of our Medico the Less,  
but it would fit him if he were a priest.

And there are many others who would curse  
the name of Christ to have you here again;  
no harm in that, nobody thinks them worse  
for lack of faith. I'll use your letter then

12: 'Ah Pistoia, Pistoia, why do you not resolve to burn yourself to ashes and last no longer, since you outgo your own ancestors in wickedness?'

*affogar possa per la man del boia.*

*La Carne, che nel sal si purgh' e stenta,  
che saria buon per carbonat' ancora,  
di voi più che di sé par si rammenta.*

*Il nostro Buonarroto, che v'adora,  
visto la vostra, se ben veggio, parmi  
c'al ciel si lievi mille volte ogn'ora;  
e dice che la vita de' sua marmi  
non basta a far il vostro nom'eterno,  
come lui fanno i divin vostri carmi.*

*Ai qual non nuoce né state né verno,  
dal temp' esenti e da morte crudele,  
che fama di virtù non ha in governo.*

*E come vostro amico e mio fedele  
disse: – Ai dipinti, visti i versi belli,  
s'appiccon voti e s'accendon candele.*

*Dunque i' son pur nel numero di quelli  
da un goffo pittor senza valore  
cavato a' pennell' e alberelli.*

*Il Bernia ringraziate per mio amore,  
che fra tanti lui sol conosc' il vero  
di me; ché chi mi stim' è 'n grand'errore.*

*Ma la sua disciplin' el lum' intero  
mi può ben dar, e gran miracol fia,  
a far un uom dipint' un uom da vero. –*

*Così mi disse; e io per cortesia  
vel raccomando quanto so e posso,  
che fia l'apportator di questa mia.*

*Mentre la scrivo a vers'a verso, rosso  
diveng'assai, pensando a chi la mando,  
send' il mio non professo, goffo e grosso.*

*Pur nondimen così mi raccomando*

1534. Poem in the terza-rima form known as 'capitolo', widely but not exclusively used for comic or satirical verse. This burlesque verse-letter is a reply to Francesco Berni who had written a poem, purportedly addressed to the painter Sebastiano del Piombo in Rome, but obviously intended for MB. MB replies by impersonating del Piombo and compounds the joke by making himself the supposed bearer of the letter. Berni had exalted MB over contemporary Petrarchist poets: 'he says things, and you say words'.

1-3) Carrying out precise instructions in Berni's poem.

4-6) Pope Clement VII, Giulio de' Medici; hence the pun.

7-9) The Pope's cousin Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici ('Medico the Less') whom Berni claims to serve both in Florence and in Rome ('here and there').

to root out all this lust for you, and let  
the hangman drown anyone who complains.

The Carnesecchi, dried and salted meat,  
(but tender as a cutlet that one fries)  
forgets himself; you're all he thinks about.

By Buonarroto you're so idolised,  
trust me, that ever since your letter came  
he seems uplifted higher than the skies,  
and says that he could never give your name  
eternal life, for all his skill with stone,  
the way your heavenly songs have done for him:  
summer and winter pass, but they remain  
unharméd, untouched by cruel death and time,  
which cannot conquer virtuous renown.

And then he said, as your good friend and mine:  
– See votive offerings hung and candles lit  
before the paintings at a holy shrine;

among such paintings I must surely fit,  
but as a worthless botch some dauber makes,  
splashed with a clumsy brush from dirty pots.

Thank Berni with my love, for what I'm like  
in honest truth is known to him alone:  
to praise and puff me is a bad mistake.

But by his teaching I can still be shown  
the light; and what a marvel it would be  
to make a real man from a painted one! –

That's what he said; and I most heartily  
commend him to you as the man assigned  
to give this letter safe delivery.

As I write out these verses line by line,  
I blush to think who will receive this scrawl,  
this rude crude stuff; poetry's not my line.

But nonetheless I shall commend as well

10-12) The cardinal's secretary, Francesco Maria Molza, poet and humanist.  
19-21) MB plays on the surname of the Pope's secretary Monsignor Pietro  
Carnesecchi (dried meat). The lines now have a sinister overtone that MB  
could not have intended: in 1567, after Carnesecchi had been found guilty of  
heresy, his body was burned and beheaded.

22) MB himself.

25-30) MB parodies the immortalizing topos. Berni's burlesque manner could  
hardly be expected to call forth such high-flown praise.

32-42) Replying with mock-modesty to Berni's jocular praise of MB as some-  
one before whom he would like to burn incense and hang votive offerings.

*anch'io a voi, e altro non accade;  
d'ogni tempo son vostro e d'ogni quando.*

*A voi nel numer delle cose rade  
tutto mi v'offerisco, e non pensate  
ch'i' manchi, se 'l cappuccio non mi cade.*

*Così vi dico e giuro, e certo siate,  
ch'i' non farei per me quel che per voi:  
a non m'abbiate a schifo come frate.*

*Commandatemi, e fate poi da voi.*

## 267

*I' sto rinchiuso come la midolla  
da la sua scorza, qua pover e solo,  
come spirto legato in un'ampolla:  
e la mia scura tomba è picciol volo,  
dov'è Aragn' e mill'opre e lavoranti,  
e fan di lor filando fusaiuolo.*

*D'intorn'a l'uscio ho mete di giganti,  
ché chi mangi' uva o ha presa medicina  
non vanno altrove a cacar tutti quanti.*

*I' ho 'mparato a conoscer l'orina  
e la cannella ond'esce, per quei fessi  
che 'nanzi di mi chiamon la mattina.*

*Gatti, carogne, canterelli o cessi,  
chi n'ha per masserizi' o men viaggio  
non vien a vicitarmi mai senz'essi.*

*L'anima mia dal corpo ha tal vantaggio,  
che se stasat' allentasse l'odore,  
seco non la terre' 'l pan e 'l formaggio.*

*La toss' e 'l freddo il tien sol che non more;  
se la non esce per l'uscio di sotto,  
per bocca il fiato a pen' uscir può fore.*

*Dilombato, crepato, infranto e rotto  
son già per le fatiche, e l'osteria  
è morte, dov'io viv' e mangio a scotto.*

*La mia allegrezza' è la maninconia,  
e 'l mio riposo son questi disagi:*

54) 'my cowl': Sebastiano del Piombo had become a friar in 1531. Hence also the pun on 'brother' in 57.

my own poor self and say that I am ever  
and always yours; and now I think that's all.

To you, whom I account most rare, I offer  
all that I am; and even if I lost  
my cowl, you must not think that I would waver.

That's what I say and swear, and you may rest  
assured I'd serve you better than myself;  
don't look on me, a brother, with disgust.

Command me, sir: and then do it yourself.

267

I'm locked up here like pulp within the rind  
or like a genie trapped inside a bottle;  
I live like this, poor, lonely and confined.

It takes no time to look around my tomb  
where thousands of Arachne's workers sit,  
each spinning his own bobbin at the loom.

Around my door I find huge piles of shit  
since those who gorge on grapes or take a purge  
can find no better place to void their guts.

I've learned by now to be a proper judge  
of piss and of its pipe, seen through the cracks  
where dawn's light filters through into my cage.

Dead cats, full chamberpots, jugs from a jakes –  
no guest but leaves such household gifts as these  
and then there's one less trip for them to make.

Within the body soul enjoys such ease  
that, if the plug were pulled to free a fart,  
it would not stay behind for bread and cheese.

That blocked back door stops soul from flying out,  
and coughs and colds are keeping death at bay  
by checking breath escaping through my throat.

Lumbagoed, ruptured, knackered – that's the way  
my toil has left me; death has come to be  
the tavern where I live and eat, and pay.

My happiness consists in melancholy  
and these discomforts are my only rest:  
just ask for trouble and God grants it free.

Seeing me, you'd say the hag who haunts the feast

55) *A comic version of the conventional 'at-your-service' ending.*

*che chi cerca il malanno, Dio gliel dia.*

*Chi mi vedess' a la festa de' Magi  
sarebbe buono; e più, se la mia casa  
vedessi qua fra sì ricchi palagi.*

*Fiamma d'amor nel cor non m'è rimasa;  
se 'l maggio caccia sempre il minor duolo,  
di penne l'alma ho ben tarpata e rasa.*

*Io tengo un calabron in un orciuolo,  
in un sacco di cuoio ossa e capresti,  
tre pilole di pece in un bocciuolo.*

*Gli occhi di biffa macinati e pesti,  
i denti come tasti di stornamento  
c'al moto lor la voce suoni e resti.*

*La faccia mia ha forma di spavento;  
i panni da cacciar, senz'altro telo,  
dal seme senza pioggia i corbi al vento.*

*Mi cova in un orecchio un ragnatelo,  
ne l'altro canta un grillo tutta notte;  
né dormo e russ'al catarroso anelo.*

*Amor, le muse e le fiorite grotte,  
mie scombiccheri, a' cembali, a' cartocci,  
agli osti, a' cessi, a' chiassi son condotte.*

*Che giova voler far tanti bambocci,  
se m'han condotto al fin, come colui  
che passò 'l mar e poi affogò ne' mocci?*

*L'arte pregiata, ov'alcun tempo fui  
di tant'opinion, mi rec'a questo,  
povero, vecchio e servo in forz'altrui,  
ch'i son disfatto, s'i non muoio presto.*

Date uncertain. Capitolo. A burlesque portrait of the artist as an old man. Only at the end (46-55) does the poem's comic verve give way to personal bitterness.

4-6) A complaint against cobwebs. Arachne challenged the goddess Athena to a weaving contest and was transformed into a spider as punishment for her presumption.

16-21) The fact that MB suffers from both constipation and respiratory problems has the paradoxical consequence of keeping him alive since the soul cannot escape with his breath.

28) A reference to the 'Befana', a comic witch-like figure who, in Italian folklore, rewards and punishes children on the Feast of the Epiphany.

of the Three Kings; my house too fits the part  
near palaces put up at such great cost.

No flame of love is left within my heart;  
if greater ills drive out a lesser one,  
they've clipped the wings my soul had at the start.

My skin's a sack for gristle and old bones,  
I've got a hornet buzzing in my head,  
and in my bladder there are three black stones.

My eyes like blueish powder, ground and pounded,  
my teeth like keys from some botched instrument –  
they move, a sound comes out and then goes dead.

My face is ghastly, but, if I were sent  
to frighten birds, my clothes alone would scare  
crows from dry furrows in a time of want.

I feel a cobweb forming in one ear  
a cricket in the other sings all night;  
can't sleep for my catarrh, and yet I snore.

Love and the muses, bowers of delight,  
my scrawls and scribbles, end up as a lot  
of tavern-bills, bog-paper, brothel notes.

Making all those big dolls, I wonder what  
the point was, if my end is still like one  
who swims across the sea, then drowns in snot.

The art for which in bygone days I won  
golden opinions brings me here at last  
poor, old and servant to another's will,  
so that I'm done for, if I don't die first.

29-30. MB's Roman house in 'Macel de' corvi' was not all that uncomfortable, but it must have seemed cramped by comparison with the luxurious palaces being built in the neighbourhood.

36) MB suffered from kidney stones.

46) MB's love poetry does not, in fact, exploit the classical and pastoral conventions suggested by 'muses' and 'bowers'.

49) A dismissive reference to his own monumental sculpture.

54) MB frequently compared his work in Rome to slavery.

## Sonetti alla notte

Translated by Anthony Mortimer

## 101

*Perché Febo non torce e non distende  
d'intorn' a questo globo freddo e molle  
le braccia sua lucenti, el vulgo volle  
notte chiamar quel sol che non comprende.*

*E tant'è debil, che s'alcun accende  
un picciol torchio, in quella parte tolle  
la vita della notte, e tant'è folle  
che l'esca col fucil la squarcia e fende.*

*E s'egli è pur che qualche cosa sia,  
cert'è figlia del sol e della terra;  
ché l'un tien l'ombra, e l'altro sol la cria.*

*Ma sia che vuol, che pur chi la loda erra,  
vedova, scura, in tanta gelosia,  
c'una lucciola sol gli può far guerra.*

Date uncertain, but before 1546, probably 1535-41. The first of four sonnets (101-104) exploring different attitudes towards night. The poems are later than the famous sculpture of Night in the Medici chapel. .

1-4) Night is essentially a negative quality, an absence. Phoebus: the sun-god.



**Night Sonnets**

**Translated by Anthony Mortimer**

101

Since Phoebus does not clasp, does not encase  
this cold damp globe with arms that make it bright,  
the common people give the name of Night  
only to that which he does not embrace.

So weak is night that in a given place  
its life is taken by a man who lights  
a little torch – so feeble it takes flight  
as soon as flint and tinder rend its space.

And if we say night really is some thing,  
surely she's daughter of the earth and sun;  
one holds the shade, only the other makes it.

Yet be that as it may, they're surely wrong  
who praise night's peace, obscure and barely won,  
so fragile that a firefly's war can break it.

*10-11) Earth is like the womb holding the darkness that has been created by the sun.  
In traditional Aristotelean theory only the male seed was seen as active in procreation.*

*O notte, o dolce tempo, benché nero,  
con pace ogn' opra al fin assalta;  
ben vede e ben ntende chi t'exalta,  
e chi t'onor' ha l' intelletto intero.*

*Tu mozzi e tronchi ogni stanco pensiero,  
ché l'umid' ombra ogni quiet' appalta,  
e dall'infima parte alla più alta  
in sogno spesso porti, ov'ire spero.*

*O ombra del morir, per cui si ferma  
ogni miseria a l'alma, al cor nemica,  
ultimo delli afflitti e buon rimedio;  
tu rendi sana nostra carn' inferma,  
rasciugli i pianti e posi ogni fatica,  
e furi a chi ben vive ogn'ira e tedio.*

## 103

*Ogni van chiuso, ogni coperto loco,  
quantunche ogni materia circumscrive,  
serba la notte, quando il giorno vive,  
contro al solar suo luminoso gioco.*

*E s'ella è vinta pur da fiamma o foco,  
da lei dal sol son discacciate e prive  
con più vil cosa ancor sue specie dive,  
tal c'ogni verme assai ne rompe o poco.*

*Quel che resta scoperto al sol, che ferve  
per mille vari semi e mille piante,  
il fier bifolco con l'aratro assale;  
ma l'ombra sol a piantar l'uomo serve.  
Dunche, le notti più ch'e dì son sante,  
quanto l'uom più d'ogni altro frutto vale.*

102. Date uncertain. See note to 101. Though the praise of night is a conventional renaissance topos, it may be worth remembering that Michelangelo liked to work at night

102

O night, O sweetest time, though black of hue,  
with peace you force all restless work to end;  
those who exalt you see and understand,  
and he is sound of mind who honours you.

You cut the thread of tired thoughts, for so  
you offer calm in your moist shade; you send  
to this low sphere the dreams where we ascend  
up to the highest, where I long to go.

Shadow of death that brings to quiet close  
all miseries that plague the heart and soul,  
for those in pain the last and best of cures;  
you heal the flesh of its infirmities,  
dry up our tears and shut away our toil,  
and free the good from wrath and fretting cares.

103

All pent-in places, every covered room,  
and any space that matter hems around,  
preserves the night, even when day comes round,  
against the sunshine's light and luminous game.

Since night is vanquished by mere fire and flame,  
its heavenly powers are driven out and banned  
by what's far baser than the sun; their stand  
is broken more or less by a glow-worm.

What still lies open, naked to the sun,  
teeming with myriad seeds and plants, gives way  
to the fierce peasant and the plough's assault;

but only darkness serves to plant a man.  
Therefore the night is holier than the day,  
as man's worth more than any other fruit

103. Date uncertain. See note to 101.

7-8) *Repeating the idea that concluded 101.*

12) The probably jocular assumption that the procreative act usually takes place at night.

## 104

*Colui che fece, e non di cosa alcuna,  
il tempo, che non era anzi a nessuno,  
ne fe' d'un due e diè 'l sol alto all'uno,  
all'altro assai più presso diè la luna.*

*Onde 'l caso, la sorte e la fortuna  
in un momento nacquer di ciascuno;  
e a me consegnaro il tempo bruno,  
come a simil nel parto e nella cuna.*

*E come quel che contrafà se stesso,  
quando è ben notte, più buio esser suole,  
ond'io di far ben mal m'affliggo e lagno.*

*Pur mi consola assai l'esser concesso  
far giorno chiar mia oscura notte al sole  
che a voi fu dato al nascer per compagno.*

104. Date uncertain. See note to 101.

1-4) In the Sistine Chapel MB had portrayed God separating light from darkness and creating the sun and the moon.

5-8) Reflecting the astrological belief that character is largely influenced by the position of the stars and planets at the moment of birth.

9-11) An obscure tercet, but the sense seems to be that the speaker makes his

104

He who created time from nothingness  
(but after man's creation, only then)  
split time in two: one half held high the sun,  
the other had the moon that's near to us.

From these were born, before the moment passed,  
the fortune, fate and chance of every man;  
I was assigned the dark time for my own,  
as what my birth and cradle suited best.

I copy what I think fate says I am,  
and, as the night grows blacker when it's late,  
my growing evil brings more grief and shame.

Yet there's one consolation; power to turn  
into the clearest day my long dark night  
is given the sun that's yours since you were born.

situation worse by deliberately acting out what he believes fate has ordained for him.

12-14) The association of the beloved with the sun is frequent in MB, but the last line could point to Febo del Poggio who, by virtue of his name, has been associated with the sun since his birth. Moreover, the whole four-sonnet sequence starts out with a reference to Phoebus (101, 1).

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## I

**Gobbo ricorda la sua giovinezza**

Lasciatemi parlare della sofferenza  
perché fui un giovane freddo senz'amore  
in un'ampia casa, così buia che soffocava il riso.  
Correvo da mia madre con dei sassi  
solo per lasciarli cadere sotto uno sguardo cupo  
tanto duro che mi sentivo gettato in un bagno gelato.  
Le sue parole, come il canto stridulo della cicala, trapassarono  
l'aria chiusa di lunghi pomeriggi estivi.  
Ricordo le mani piegate di mio fratello  
nella bara, come baciai una nocca.  
Piansi, arso dentro dalle fiaccole delle processioni  
tenute da monaci in ombra incappucciati nel loro nero passaggio  
per le strade anguste del mio paese,  
atterrendo il mio cuore per sempre.

## V

**Gobbo, riguardo i suoi anni di studio**

La biblioteca era un monastero;  
i suoi libri un santuario immortale.  
Come un monaco rinchiuso assetato di paradiso,  
bevvi parole, e presso candele morenti  
m'inginocchiai tremante nel freddo, gli occhi  
indolenziti. Arrivai a scoprire Bellezza.  
Scrissi poesie, sussurrando parole al cielo.  
Sentii le voci angeliche dei giovani  
cantare amore. È vero, fui felice.  
Eppure, in questi lunghi anni tra i libri morii.  
La mia schiena raggrinzì e non potei correre  
con mio fratello. Una ragazza mi chiamò storpio.  
Invisibile la cattedrale della mia bellezza intima.  
La collera striscì, un tarlo nella mia mente.



I

**Gobbo remembers his youth**

Let me tell you about suffering  
because I was a boy cold without love  
in a large house, so dark it stifled laughs.  
I would run to my mother with stones  
only to drop them under a grim gaze  
so harsh I felt tossed in a freezing bath.  
Her words, like a cicada's shrill chirp, pierced  
the close air of long summer afternoons.  
I remember my brother's folded hands  
in the coffin, how I kissed one knuckle.  
I cried, torched inside with processional fires  
held by shadowed monks cowed in their black walk  
through my town's narrow streets,  
terrifying my heart forever.

V

**Gobbo, regarding his years of study**

The library was a monastery;  
its books a deathless sanctuary.  
As a closeted monk thirsts for heaven,  
I drank words, and beside dying candles  
I knelt shivering in the cold, my eyes  
aching. I came to discover Beauty.  
I wrote poems, whispering words to the sky.  
I heard the angelic voices of youths  
singing "amore." Truly, I was happy.  
Yet, during these long years with books I died.  
My spine wrinkled up and I couldn't run  
with my brother. A girl called me crooked.  
Invisible, the cathedral of my inner beauty.  
Rage crawled, a gnawing in my mind.

## IX

**Gobbo comprende che potrà solo immaginare l'amore**

Talvolta penso che l'amore sia un telaio.  
O forse il suono di un telaio  
ordito nella voce di una giovane donna  
che canta mentre lavora nel calore estivo.  
Non è mai la giovane in sé, mai  
nessuna in particolare, solo una voce, un sorriso, uno sguardo.  
Ah Nerina, ah Silvia,  
quando vi salutavo, il saluto esplodeva  
in frammenti di piccanti fantasie, schegge  
di desiderio (sì, lessi Werther), e mi allontanavo  
contraendo le labbra in un bacio  
che non avrei mai dato.  
Mi scottarono sogni deliquescenti?  
No. Furono loro il mio vero amore, massicci come oro.

## XXIV

**Ancora Gobbo, il poeta**

La mia disperazione non è mai rimasta incolta.  
Sul suo terreno scuro, seminai fregi.  
Questi divennero colline solitarie, notti al chiaro di luna,  
momenti sacri nei campi dopo la pioggia.  
Catturai nel mio diario, in note staccate,  
la vita del mio paese, una vita che potevo assaporare  
solo dalla finestra del mio studio  
dove rimanevo a contemplare un mondo a me chiuso  
per sempre. La mia solitudine crebbe  
come la luna sottile, bassa nel cielo sereno.  
Immaginate: la prima lucciola dell'estate  
fluttuante languida, la mente esalante  
il suo fiato sottile nella fitta sera.  
Indugia la mia poesia, un silenzio.

IX

**Gobbo realizes he will only imagine love**

Sometimes, I think that love is a loom.  
Or maybe the sound of a loom  
raddled into the voice of a young girl  
who sings as she works in the summer heat.  
It is never the girl herself, never  
anyone particular, only a voice, a smile, a gaze.  
Ah Nerina, ah Sylvia,  
when I greeted you, the greeting exploded  
into shards of piquant fancy, splinters  
of desire (yes, I read *Werther*), and I walked  
away pursing my lips into a kiss  
that I would never give.  
Did deliquescent dreams scald me?  
No. They were my real love, solid like gold.

XXIV

**Again: Gobbo, the poet**

My despair never lay fallow.  
Onto its dark soil, I broadcast vignettes.  
These grew into lonely hills, moonlit nights,  
sacred moments in fields after rain ends.  
I captured in my journal, staccato,  
"life in my town, a life I could relish  
only from the window of my study  
where I stood, gazing down at a world closed  
forever to me. My loneliness waxed  
like the thin moon low in the cloudless sky.  
Imagine: the first firefly of summer  
languidly floating, the mind exhaling  
its thin breath into the thick evening.  
My poetry lingers, a silence.

*A Selection  
of Carlo Betocchi's Poetry*

I still remember with affection and pleasure the day when I met Carlo and his wife Emilia in their cozy home in the heart of old Florence. It was then that I fully appreciated the humility of this great poet and loved the totally unselfish way with which he praised my poetry and encouraged me to continue along my chosen path. "If I had power," he told me, "I would publish your Haggadahs right now. But I am only a poor agrarian student doing a stint for *Approdo Letterario* (a literary magazine in Turin, Northern Italy)." Well, my dear friend is dead now, and I intend to present to the American reader, to the student of Italian poetry, and to the reader of poetry in general, a concise selection of Carlo's works.

After thirty years of relative obscurity, Betocchi has proved to be one of the major Italian poets of the twentieth century from his first book, *Realtà vince il sogno* (*Reality Beats Dreams*, 1932) to the four collections published by Mondadori, Milan, where his poems have been chronologically ordered: *L'Estate di San Martino* (*Indian Summer*, 1961), *Un Passo un altro passo* (*Step by Step*, 1967), *Prime e Ultimissime* (*First and Last Poems*, 1974), *Poesie del Sabato* (*Sabbath Poems*, 1980).

To me, Betocchi is a writer who communicates clearly, but also one who has persistently investigated the riddle of things, and felt the need to translate that enigma into the mirror of his poetry. Take, for example, *Reality Beats Dreams*, where a Franciscan spirit animates the core of Betocchi's view of the world. The poet's mood can be merry, at times elegiac or brooding, but his temperament is already rooted in reality: "I enjoy the brown earth,/and the indestructible/certainty of its things/is locked inside my heart." Working hard with one's hands is what redeems man from his spiritual transgressions. Even love, that in Betocchi always starts with the purest intent, is modified with the passing of time into something tedious or murky. But his companion, Emily, with her clarity of soul and her innocence steers the poet to higher aims:

To be more lonely, and wander  
where you are no longer,  
or in a space inside my breast,

when your love purls from where  
 you overflow with it, proves that the tale  
 of love is sweeter than love that depletes us.  
 ("To His Beloved")

Initially close to visual Rimbaud and visionary Campana, Betocchi ultimately opted for Laforgue and especially Eliot, who restored to readers Dante's sense of mercy. Yet in Betocchi there is also a morbidity, a restless dissatisfaction that prevents him from entirely trusting the will of God. This pessimism was further accentuated during the war, with its heavy burden of fatalities that made the poet realize how hard it is to remain serene in death's throes. During the war, the motherland became absurd. In it everything turned to aridity, degradation and ruin:

You know the stone larks,  
 the sandstone pebbles waiting  
 for you on the road, immobile,  
 in the evening hours;

you who return and kick them with your foot,  
 and a white cloud ascends,  
 the laid calcareous pebbles  
 blue like the neck of victims

of the marsh hunters when  
 it is evening, and they limp off to die  
 together with the worn  
 street pebbles: this is not being snarled

in hedges, or falling into lakes—  
 now a white cloud climbs up  
 the mountains, becomes dying,  
 you know, narrower always

the path of death, and the blue most intense.  
 ("*On the Way*")

Mother, Florence with her human roofs, memories of his prodigal youth are the themes woven into Betocchi's incessant probing of his soul in search of the truth. This progressive exfoliation of the self is also reflected in the poet's metrical stance. Betocchi had always

looked at music as something suspicious. The danger of song, he called it—an easy and gratuitous consolation. In this spirit, *Indian Summer* opens a new page in his creative progress. Patience becomes the cardinal virtue in this collection and a firm belief that the single poet is less than the sum of his worthy peers. It is the common opus that has value, the valiant people who daily work, writers in their solitude, all witnesses to the suffering of the just:

Among the many usual sounds, this morning  
 blessed luck gladdens me with one  
 like crickets in the fields or the continuous  
 trilling of a cicada. It arises  
 from the shop of a craftsman  
 or a mechanic: irregular or steady  
 off the diurnal clangor of the street,  
 frail and true for its feigning  
 a rustic tune that in its way consoles me.  
 I know it for a fact—true, humble sound  
 of a craftsman—and the rest is fiction.

(“In the Pinti Quarter”)

Likewise, in *Indian Summer* even talking about assonances becomes arbitrary. The strophic scaffolding is abolished, and when there is a precise strophic arrangement, as in “*The Ditches of the Lowland*,” the quatrains obey a conceptual motivation, endorse a logical proposition, not a metrical reality:

The ditches of the lowland  
 carry bemired waters  
 from which sprout weeping tops  
 of crimson willows:

they move slowly, a-rocking,  
 like unambitious people  
 looking inside time for  
 something that stirs up living.

(“The Ditches of the Lowland”)

The penitential walk continues in *Step by Step*, where the poet consistently compares himself to a stone that only the compassion of God can look upon, and in *The First and Latest* and *Sabbath Poems*. Besieged by misfortune, old age, the death of his dear ones, the poet

is just about ready to give up. The long steps of prose accompany his last compositions: a poetics of extreme reduction, of Lenten poverty—the stigma of his unique way of being a Christian. Thirsty for solitude and silence, melancholy rises over troubles in the poet's renewed, almost sanctified memory of Emily. Filtered through Petrarch and John Donne, conjugal love blooms into a series of outstanding sonnets that breathe the air of Paradise. The joyous utterances well mask the extreme refinement of form, where music becomes meaning, meaning is easily transformed into song.

Near the end of his verse, and of his life, Betocchi dances like David, and like David howls in despair. In this see-saw of dread and celebration, he strives to etch the honest, beautiful things of this transient world:

*What exists does not change nor memory  
pine away at birds' songs nor is life turned  
into a humdrum story for the morning  
blood-tinted flowers... If you are not here*

*even silence harbors minuscule hells  
where inert will in fluctuating mirrors  
is nothing but non-presences reflected.  
John, Peter, lovely names of men called out*

*loudly in the rooms, this is the earth! O lark,  
leopard, oak, mermaid, and you grass evoked  
in myriad appellations, water, stone,  
distances, and a live man's intense look.*

*("Words Are Awakenings")*

**Ned Conдини's** books of poetry include *Rimbaud in Umbria*

(Multigraf, 1993), *quartettsatz* (Bordighera, 1996) and *La morte e la fanciulla* (L'Autore Libri Firenze, 2005). He has published translations of Jane Tassi's *ANDSONGSONSONGLESSNESS* (Bordighera, 2002) into Italian and Giorgio Caproni (*The Earth's Wall*, Chelsea Editions, 2004) from the Italian. His short stories and poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Partisan Review*, *Italian Americana*, *Chelsea*, *The Village Voice* and elsewhere. He won the PEN/Poggioli Award in 1986 for his translations of Mario Luzi and placed first in the Winning Writers War Poetry Contest in 2002.



*Da Reality Beats Dreams***A Emilia**

Che ne sarà del vento in Paradiso,  
il vento che riporta la memoria,  
che ne sarà, del vento, in Paradiso?

Al vento, se l'ascolta, il disadorno  
spirito è esilio, al vento, chi l'ascolta,  
io t'amo e sopra i vetri si fa giorno.

Dal buio della notte entra quel vuoto  
nell'alba che fa il vento del mattino,  
—È il vento, dissi, non è la speranza

nostra, ha un'altra voce: e sembra, il giorno,  
di finestre ignote; e il volto ti ritorna  
pallido, e si confonde senza linee

col mio, è un solo amore.

*From Reality Beats Dreams*

**To Emily**

What will happen to wind in Paradise,  
the wind that brings memory back,  
what will happen to wind in Paradise?

To the wind, if it listens to it, the bare  
spirit is exile; if one listens to it,  
I love you, from the windows day is breaking.

From the night's darkness a void enters the dawn  
that carries morning wind, —It is the wind,  
I said, not our hope,

it has another voice: the day peeps out  
of unknown windows; and your face becomes  
pale again, and without edges it mingles

with mine, it is one love.

Da *Indian Summer*

**Sera trasecolata ad albergo tra i monti Lepini**

Ahi! stanza diseguale  
nel freddo d'inverno  
cui è canto il latrare

d'un cane... Anima  
d'egoista, mie scabre  
pareti,

o nucleo d'iniqua  
stoltizia in cerca  
di preda;

un ragno di tristezza  
è in agguato  
nel cubico gelo;

e il secolare stellato  
pullula di canili  
se ascolto.

From: *Indian Summer*

**Awesome Night at an Inn on the Lepini Mountains**

Curséd disjointed room  
in a wintery cold  
whose song is a dog's barking...

Soul  
of a selfish man,  
my rough-cast walls,

o core  
of shameful folly  
that's looking for its prey;

a spider of distress  
lies in wait in the cubic  
freeze, and the ancient

starred sky if I  
listen is a tremendous  
yelp of dogs.

**Stando con donne che cavano ghiaia da un fiume,  
in Ciociaria**

*a Tommaso Santoro*

Dal letto del fiume, risalendo in lunga fila per l'argine con una cofana (grossa secchia) colma di ghiaia sulla testa, le donne avevan per cottimo di scaricare ciascuna quaranta cofane di ghiaia nel mucchio presso la strada: andavano lentamente, cantando, per aiutarsi a procedere unite. Il sorvegliante segnava una tacca nella buccia d'una bacchetta d'ontano ad ogni viaggio.

Verga d'ontano, i segni  
che t'intaccano, da flauto  
silenzioso, il dorso, son le quaranta  
cofane di ghiaia che sull'alto

capo van delle donne  
che le ascessero dal fiume  
tentennando in un lume  
di silenzio, e ripercorre

la tua buccia il passo  
affaticato di costoro,  
come a ritroso il coro  
rattristato che fanno.

Sei un numero e ti canto;  
maligna stagna l'acqua  
sotto il sole: ad ogni tacca  
la buccia si distacca, essica un volto.

**With Women Sifting Gravel From a River  
in Ciociaria**

*to Tommaso Santoro*

From the riverbed, in a long line climbing the bank with a *cofana* (big pail) filled with gravel on their heads, women were hired to unload forty pails each onto a pile by the road: they moved along slowly, singing, to help each other stay together. The overseer cut a notch on the bark of an alder cane after each trip.

Alder rod, the marks that nick  
your back like a silent flute  
are the forty pails of gravel  
that lie on the stately heads

of the women who carried them  
up from the river,  
hesitant  
in a gleam of silence,

and your bark retraces  
their tired steps,  
backs up the sad  
chorus they sing.

You are a number and I sing you;  
vicious water stagnates  
under the sun: each notch  
peels the bark off, dries up a face.

***Nine Sonnets by G.G. Belli***  
***Translated by Charles Martin***

Charles Martin's books of poems include *Steal the Bacon* and *What the Darkness Proposes*, both nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. His most recent book of poems is *Starting from Sleep: New and Selected Poems* (2002), a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Award. He has published a translation of the poems of Catullus and a critical introduction to the Latin poet's work. His verse translation of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (Norton, 2003) won the Harold Morton Landon Award. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *The Hudson Review*, *Boulevard*, *The Threepenny Review*, and many other magazines and anthologies. He is the recipient of a Bess Hokin Award from *Poetry*, a 2001 Pushcart Prize, and fellowships from the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2005, he received an Award for Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is currently a Visiting Professor in the English Department of Syracuse University. In 2005, he was named Poet in Residence at the Poets' Corner of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

***Some Notes on G.G. BELLI***

My first encounter with the work of G.G. Belli came when I opened William Jay Smith and Dana Gioia's anthology, *Poems from Italy*, and discovered his "Er Giorno der Giudizzio" in Anthony Burgess's brilliant, though (as I later realized) rather free, translation. I had never even heard of Belli before, and I wrote to the editors expressing my delight in his extraordinary voice and my amazement that this light had been hidden so long under such a great bushel.

Dana Gioia promptly supplied me with a copy of Burgess's *ABBA ABBA*, the only novel I've ever read with a rhyme scheme for a title, and one in which a dying John Keats encounters Belli in Rome and sets him on the path to writing poetry in dialect. However improbable a fiction, it was clearly a labor of love on Burgess's part, and, best of all, it contained twenty or so more of the British novelist's versions of the Italian poet's sonnets.

Labors of love seem more common than not in connection with Belli: another kind of introduction to the poet came in the form of Eleanor Clark's pioneering essay on Belli in *Rome and a Villa*. Her essay still seems to me to be the best thing written on Belli in English.

\*

Because there is no one like Belli, one keeps trying to find his *semblables* in that canon where he most certainly belongs. It is a sign of his own significance that he tends to be compared to writers whose names are now adjectives. Burgess thought him Joycean in his linguistic inventiveness, and surely he is Whitmanesque in the largeness of his populist sympathies, as well as Chekhovian in his clarity and compression. In this latter quality perhaps he outdoes even Chekhov, squeezing an entire short story into fourteen lines. Among our contemporaries, he perhaps most resembles Salman Rushdie, whose essay "Is Nothing Sacred?" raises many of the same questions that Belli explored in his sonnets almost two centuries ago with his yoking together of the sacred and the blasphemous, and his exposure of the hypocrisies of power, both religious and secular. His *saeva indignatio*: Swiftian.

\*

Not only does Belli resemble Burgess's Joyce, but he also resembles the indefatigably prolific Burgess as well. His translators should perhaps work together in teams, on eight-hour shifts.

\*

Any Belli sonnet is both the script for a performance and a performance in itself, and so there seems to me little point in translating it into something other than a rhymed and metered sonnet: into prose, say, or free verse, or into what our current Poet Laureate might call a McSonnet. I have usually followed the rhyme schemes of my originals, though for the most part allowing myself four rhymes in the first eight lines to Belli's two.

\*

The question of dialect is a thorny one, but I refuse to feel guilty for not speaking, say, Lallans Scots, into which some may feel that Belli could be more appropriately translated than into English. I have tried to bring Belli's sonnets across into the dialect of English that I speak and those sub-dialects that I am more or less at home in.

\*

I have not yet allowed myself to think about his recantation.

—Charles Martin



**LA PPIU MMEJJ' ARTE**

Da principio, fascevo l'ortolano:  
 Male. Me messe a ffà er libbraro: peggio.  
 Risòrze allora de mutà mmaneggio,  
 E mme diede ar mestiere der ruffiano.

In questo, te confesso da cristiano  
 Nun zolo sce guadagno, ma ssaccheggio:  
 E un terzo ar meno der Zagro-Colleggio  
 Vonno la marcanzia da le mi' mano.

Io servo Monzignorre, io Padr'Abbati,  
 Io maritate, io vedove, io zitelli....  
 E ll'ho ttutti ognisempre contentati.

Perch'io sò onesto e nun tiro a la pelle,  
 L'ommini mii sò rrichi e intitolati  
 E le me donne pulitucce e belle.

**ER ZAGRIFIZIO D'ABRAMO****I**

La Bbibbia, chè un spesce d'un'istoria,  
 Dische che ttra la prima e ssicon'arca  
 Abbramo vorze fa dda bbon Patriarca  
 N'ojjocaustico a Ddio sur Montememoria.

Pijjò dunque un zomaro de la Marca,  
 Che ssenza complimenti e ssenza bboria  
 Stava a ppasce er trifojjo e la scicoria  
 Davanti a casa sua come un monarca.

Poi chiamò Isacco e disse: "Fa' un fasscetto,  
 Pijja er marraccio, carca er zomarello  
 Chiama er garzone, inflete er corpetto,

Saluta mamma, schercheme er capello,  
 E annamo via, perché Ddio bbenedetto  
 Vó un zagriffizzio che nnun pòi sapello."

### THE BEST OF ALL TRADES

I started selling produce: too much scrimping.  
Next, I became a bookseller: did worse.  
Resolved then on another change of course  
And gave myself up to the trade of pimping.

In this field, I confess as a Christian man,  
Not only do I profit, but I pillage!  
A third of the members of the Sacred College  
Line up to take the merchandise at hand.

Abbots and Monsignors are my clients,  
And husbands, widows, lonely spinsters, who  
Can count on satisfaction with reliance.

For I'm honest, and my prices are the best,  
And all my men are titled and well to do,  
And my women all are beauties and well dressed.

### THE SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM

#### I

The Bible, that's a kind of history,  
Says that between the first and second ark,  
Abraham wished (like a good Patriarch)  
To sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah.

So, from the Marches, he brought back an ass  
Devoid of pretense, conceit or trickery,  
Who chomped the clover and the chicory  
Before his home, an emperor of grass.

Then he told Isaac, "Get firewood and pack it,  
Take the sharp cleaver, call the household slave,  
Load up the donkey, put on your best jacket,  
"Say your goodbyes to Mamma, find my hat,  
And we're off, for God Almighty wants to have  
A sacrifice: I'll say no more than that."

1.2 *first and second ark*: Abraham lived in the time between Noah's Ark  
and the Ark of the Covenant

## II

Doppo fatta un boccon de colazione  
 Partitno tutt'e cquattro a ggiorno chiaro,  
 E ccaminorno sempre in orazzione  
 Pe cquarache mmijo ppiú dder centinaro.

"Semo arrivati: aló," disse er vecchione,  
 "Incòllete er fasscetto, fijo caro:"  
 poi, vortannose in là, ffesce ar garzone:  
 "Aspettatemi cqui vvoi cor zomaro."

Saliva Issaco e ddisceva: "Papà,  
 Ma dditemi, la vittima indov'è?"  
 "e llui j'arisponneva: "Un po'ppiu in la."

Ma cquanno finarmente furno sú,  
 Strillò Abbramo ar fijjolo: "Isacco, a tté,  
 Faccia a terra: la vittima sei tu."

## III

"Pascenza," disse Isacco ar zu padraccio,  
 Se bbutta s'una pietra inginocchione  
 E cquer boja de padre arza er marraccio  
 Tra ccap' e ccolo ar povero cojjone.

"Fermete, Abbramo: nun calà cquer braccio,"  
 Strilla un Angiolo allora da un cantone:"  
 "Dio te vorze provà cco sto setaccio..."  
 Bbee, bbee...Cchi è cquest'antro! è un pecorone.

Inzomma, amisci cari, io ggìa ssò stacco  
 D'aricontavve er fatta la distesa.  
 La pecora mori: fu ssarvo Isacco:

E cquella pietra che mm'avete intesa  
 Mentovà ssur piú bbello de l'acciacco,  
 Sta a Roma, in Borgo-novo, in d'una chiesa.

I

After a bite, the three men and the beast  
Set on their journey at the break of day  
And traveled over a hundred miles at least,  
Walking and praying the entire way.

At last the old man said, "We're here: let's go,  
"You haul up the firewood, dear Son."  
Then to his slave he said, "Wait here below  
And watch the donkey till I come back down."

While they were climbing, Isaac asked him, "Pop,  
Tell me, where is the victim to be found?"  
And he responded, "Not now, Son: don't stop."

And when at last, the peak came into view,  
Abraham cried out, "Face down, on the ground,  
Isaac: the only victim here is you."

III

Said Isaac to his father, "Think this over!"  
And knelt down on a sacrificial rock.  
That butcher of a parent raised the cleaver  
And poised it at the throat of his poor cock.

An angel from a corner cries, "Arrest  
"That arm of yours! Hold steady, Abraham,  
God seeks to prove you: this has been a test..."  
*Baa, Baa...* Who is this here? Why, it's a ram!

In sum, dear friends, I really must be brief:  
This lengthy narrative has exhausted me;  
The ram was slain and Isaac given life.

And the very rock you heard me speak of some,  
At my tale's bloody climax, you can see  
In a church in the Borgo-novo, here at Rome.

**LOTTE A CASA**

Cor zu' bbravo sbordone a mmanimanca,  
 Du' pellegrini a or de vemmaria  
 Cercaveno indov'era l'osteria,  
 Perc'uno aveva male in d'una scianca.

Ce s'incontra er zor Lotte, e je spalanca  
 Er portone dicenno: "A casa mia"  
 E loro je risposeno: "Per dia  
 Dimani sarai fio dell'oca bianca".

Quelli ereno du' angeli, fratello,  
 Che ar vedelli passà li Ghimorrini  
 Se sentinno addrizzà tutti l'uscello.

E arrivonno a strillà, fiji de mulo:  
 "Lotte, mannesce ggiù li pellegrini,  
 Che cce serveno a noi pe ddajje in culo".

Roma, 17 gennaio 1832

**LOTTE AR RIFRESCO**

Già a Ssodema e Gghimorra ereno cotte  
 Tutte le ggente arrosto com'e ttrijje,  
 E dde tante mortissime famijje  
 Pe caso la scàppo cquella de lotte.

Curze er Padriarca finamente a notte  
 Senza mai pijjà ffiato e staccà bbrijje:"  
 ma cqua, ssiconno er zolito, a le fijje  
 Je venne fantasia de fasse fotte.

Ma ppe vvìa che nun c'era in quer contorno  
 Neppure un cazzo d'anima vivente,  
 Disseno: "E bbono tata." E ll'ubbriacorno.

Poi fatteje du smorfie ar dumpennente,  
 Lí dda bbone sorelle inzin'a ggiorno  
 Se spartirno le bbotte alegramente.

### LOT AT HOME

With walking sticks in their left hands, there came  
A pair of pilgrims at the midnight hour  
Seeking an inn where they could rest and shower,  
For one of them was going a bit lame.

Fell in with Lot, who took them off the street,  
Opened his door, invited them inside:  
"My house is yours," he said. And they replied,  
"Tomorrow, by God, you'll be with the elite."

Brother, those were two angels out of heaven,  
And at the sight of them cruising the town,  
Every Gomorran cock felt itself stiffen.

Arriving, they cried out, those loathsome mutts,  
"Give us the pilgrims, Lot—just send 'em down,  
So we can shove it right into their butts."

### LOT GOES TO A PARTY

Now Sodom and Gomorrah were still hot,  
Their residents, like mullets, barbecued,  
And every family in the neighborhood  
By chance had perished, but not that of Lot.

The patriarch at full speed fled, afraid,  
Scarce pausing to take breath until night came;  
At which point, both his daughters had the same  
Desire, as usual, for getting laid.

But there wasn't one prick with a drop of spunk  
To be found in that region; consequently  
They said, "Dad'll do fine." And got him drunk.

The sisters simpered at his *dumpennente*\*  
And happily took turns with him in the bunk  
Till morning, when Lot was a quite-well-spent-he.

\* *dumpennente*: Belli's own word for the male genitals, from the description of Christ's crucifixion in the Latin hymn, "*Stabat Mater*", which begins "*Dum pendebat...*" "While he was hanging..."

**LI SPIRITI (III)**

Tu conoschi la moje de Fichetto:  
 Bè, lei giura e spergiura ch'er zu' nonno,  
 Stanno una notte tra la vej'e 'r zonno,  
 Se senti ffà un zospiro accapalletto.

Arzò la testa, e ne sentì un siconno.  
 Allora lui cor fiato ch'ebbe in petto  
 Strillò: Spirito bono o maledetto,  
 Di' da parte de Dio; che cerchi ar monno?"

Dice: "Io mill'anni addietro ero Badessa,  
 E in sto logo che stava er dormitorio  
 Cor un cetrolo me sfonnai la fessa.

Da' un scudo ar piggionante, a don Libborio,  
 Pe ffamme li sorcismi e dì una messa,  
 Si me vòì libberà dar purgatorio".

**LI SPIRITI (IV)**

Un mese, o ppoco ppiù, doppo er guadagno  
 De la piastra, che ffece er zanto prete,  
 Venne la pasqua, e 'r gabbiano che ssapete  
 Cominciò a lavorà de scacciaragno.

"Ch'edè? Un bucio ar zolaro! Oh, pprete cagno",  
 Fece allora er babbeo che conoscete:  
 "Eccolo indove vanno le monete!  
 Va che lo scudo mio cerca er compagno?"

Doppo infatti du' notte de respiro,  
 Ecchete la Badessa della muffa  
 A daje giù cor zolito sospiro.

"Sor don Libborio mio, basta una fuffa",  
 Strillò quello; "e le messe, pe sto giro,  
 Si le volete dì, ditele auffa".

**THE SPIRIT WORLD (III)**

You know Fichetto's wife? That one'll swear  
Her grandpa heard a woman give a moan  
Behind the bed board, as he lay alone,  
Almost asleep. He had an awful scare!

He raised his head—she gave another one.  
"O Spirit," cried he, "That's more than I can bear!  
Tell me why you, for good or ill, appear;  
What do you seek to do or have undone?"

"I was an Abbess here once, ages back,"  
She said, "and in the convent's dormitory,  
A pickle poked me in my nether crack.

"Give a fiver to the tenant, Father Gorey,  
For the mass and exorcism that I lack  
In order to be sprung from Purgatory."

**THE SPIRIT WORLD (IV)**

A month or so goes by after the killing  
Made by that holy priest (five liras, net).  
Easter's come round; his victim (whom you've met)  
Begins to sweep the cobwebs from his ceiling.

"What's this I see? A hole! Oh, rotten Father,"  
That fool you know of cries out in complaint:"  
"Just look at where that money of mine went!"  
Is my coin up there searching for another?"

Two nights of slumber undisturbed go by  
Before there comes again, to his dismay,  
The old Abbess with her familiar sigh.

He cries aloud, "Now once is quite enough,""  
"Dear Father Gorey—if you wish to say  
Any more masses, put them on the cuff!"



**ER CONFESSORE**

Padre... — Dite il confiteor. — L'ho detto. —  
L'atto di contrizione? — Già l'ho ffatto. —  
Avanti dunque. — Ho detto cazzo-matto  
A mi' marito, e j'ho arzato un grossetto. —

Poi? — Pe una pila che me róppe er gatto  
Je disse for de me: "Si' maledetto";  
E è cratura de Dio! — C'e altro? — Tratto  
Un giuvenotto, e ce sò ita a letto. —

E lì cosa è successo? — Un po' de tutto.—  
Cioè? Sempre, m'immagino, pel dritto. —  
Puro a riverzo... — Oh che peccato brutto!

Dunque, in causa di questo giovanotto,  
Tornate, figlia, con cuore trafitto,  
Domani, a casa mia, verso le otto.

**THE CONFESSOR**

Father? Begin with the Confiteor.  
*I did.* Act of Contrition? *Yes.* Commence.  
*I called my husband "dickbrain".* Is there more?  
I stole from him a dollar fifty cents.

What else? *When Pussy broke a pot, I said,*  
I was so angry with her, "Go to hell!  
*And she's God's creature!* Any more to tell?  
There's this young fellow that I took to bed...

What happened then? *A bit of that and this.*  
But always in the designated place?  
*And in the other.* O beastly sinfulness!

And so because of your young reprobate,  
Come, with repentant heart and downcast face,  
Tomorrow, daughter, my house, about eight."



*The Pope*

***Confronti Poetici /  
Poetic Comparisons  
Section Edited by Luigi Fontanella***

The purpose of this “rubrica” is to feature two poets, an American and an Italian, who in the opinion of the editor share affinities or embody different approaches to poetry. The editor will select one poem for each poet and provide both the Italian and the English translations, thus acting as a bridge between them. In this manner two poets, whose approach to poetry may be quite different, will be conversing through the translator.

For this issue I present a poem by Rowan Ricardo Phillips and a poem by Claudio Damiani. I would like to thank Alessandro Carrera and Joseph Tusiani for their helpful suggestions.

**Rowan Ricardo Phillips** lives in Barcelona and in New York City. His poems have appeared in, among other places, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Harvard Review*. He teaches at The State University of New York, Stony Brook, where is the director of the Poetry Center.

**Claudio Damiani** lives in Rome. He has published five collections of poetry: *Fraturno* (1987), *La mia casa* (1994), *La miniera* (1997), *Eroi* (2000), and *Attorno al fuoco* (2006, finalist at Viareggio Prize 2006).

**Luigi Fontanella’s** most recent books are *Pasolini rilegge Pasolini* (Archinto, 2005), and *Land of Time. Selected Poems 1972-2003*, edited by Irene Marchegiani (Chelsea Editions, 2006). He is the editor of *Gradiiva*, and the president of IPA (Italian Poetry in America).

**ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS**(da *The New Republic*, 9 Ottobre, 2006)**Tonight**

In the beginning there was this surface. A wall, beginning.  
 Tonight it coaxed music from a Harlem cloudbank. It freestyled  
 a smoke from a stranger's coat; stole thinned gin.  
 It was on the surfaces of its beginnings, but outside  
 looking in. The lapse-blue facade of Harlem Hospital is weatherstill  
 like a starlit lake in the middle of Lenox Avenue.  
 I touched the tattooed surfaces of my birthplace tonight -  
 and because tonight is curing, the beginning let me through;  
 and everywhere was blurring halogen. Love the place that welcomed you.

**CLAUDIO DAMIANI**(da *Attorno al fuoco*, Avagliano Editore, 2006)**Se il tempo scivolasse senza ferire**

Ogni istante ha un peso d'oro,  
 mi sembra incredibile che siano - pur vicini -  
 così tanti.  
 So che morirò. eppure so anche  
 che posso fermarmi, e vivere  
 un po' di questi istanti felici.  
 Posso sedermi un momento qui  
 e respirare,  
 posso captare le note  
 e ascoltarle una dopo l'altra  
 e stupirmi dell'ordine incredibile,  
 posso soffrire, posso far entrare  
 la sofferenza in questa quiete, posso sanguinare  
 e tuttavia restare, restare fermo seduto  
 lasciandomi trasportare.

**ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS**

(from *The New Republic*, October 9, 2006)

**Stanotte**

All'inizio c'era questa superficie. Solo un muro che iniziava.  
Stanotte blandiva musica da un banco di nubi sopra Harlem. Liberava  
un soffio di fumo dal soprabito di uno sconosciuto; rubava del gin  
annacquato.

Era sulle superfici del suo inizio, ma da fuori guardava all'interno.  
La facciata azzurro stinto dell'Harlem Hospital resiste al tempo  
come un lago illuminato dalle stelle nel mezzo di Lenox Avenue.  
Stanotte ho toccato le pareti tatuate della mia casa natale –  
e siccome questa notte è guarigione, quell'inizio mi ha lasciato passare;  
mentre l'alogeno offuscava ovunque. Ama il luogo che ti ha accolto.

**CLAUDIO DAMIANI**

(from *Attorno al fuoco*, Avagliano Editore, 2006)

**If Time Could Glide with no Wounds**

All moments have their weight in gold,  
I find it hard to believe there are so many,  
although so close to one another.  
I know one day I'll die, and also know  
that I could stop and live  
a little of these happy instants.  
I can sit a moment here  
and breathe,  
I can capture the notes  
and listen to them one by one, and  
marvel at their magnificent order.  
I can suffer, and allow my suffering  
to enter this calm, I can bleed  
and yet remain, remain still,  
seated, letting them carry me away.



*The Lover, China Ink, 70x50 cm.*

## ***Giovanni Pascoli's Italy***

Translated by Joseph Tusiani

Giovanni Pascoli's *Italy*, a poem in which some English words and phrases play an important role, is the first literary documentation of the Italian awareness of the immigrants' plight in the United States of America. The story is quite simple: an eight-year-old, American-born girl, Maria (*Molly*) is taken by her uncle and aunt to Italy where, thanks to the fresh, invigorating air of the Lucchese region, she quickly recovers from her incipient tuberculosis. But the greatness of Pascoli's poem, to which Dante's terza rima gives an epic resonance, is not so much in its story as in the tenderness of its lyrical development. The characters are as real as life itself – from the little girl who, at first, likes nothing of the strange country where she speaks a language no one understands, and then falls in love with her grandmother and the work she does (to her only a "play"), to Grandmother herself who, through the whole loving ordeal, remains the woman she has always been – a taciturn, hard-working person for the first time afraid: of being unable of communicating with her own granddaughter. But as the simple story unfolds as a fairy-tale, the tragedy of emigration stands out in its most revealing light – the conflict of Ghita, who, having been a few years in America, most naively boasts of what she has seen in the other country, not realizing, that is, that ancient poverty cannot be eradicated by simple talk, and, also, Joe's (her husband's) sorrowful silence, interrupted only whenever he has to assure his townsfolk of the welfare of this or that relative in far America.

Yes, the story is quite simple. The little American-born girl recovers, but, in the meantime, Grandmother dies – of what? Molly is too young to understand what it means to a mother to see her children leave "with no shoes, with no clothes, with no bread." She is also much too young to understand the difference between swallows that come back and human beings that do not. Oh, when she arrived in Italy, the home that she called "ugly" was open, whereas, when her own dad arrived in the foreign land, all doors were locked...

Giovanni Pascoli's *Italy*, one of his best poems, contains all the elements of his familiar art – a lucid awareness of man's helplessness on earth, a detailed, heart-rending description of nature's whims playing with, or differing from, man's needs or moods, and, also, together with a lofty paean of hope, a warming feeling of faith in the future of Italy on both the Mediterranean and Atlantic shores.

One more note: Pascoli did not invent this story. He actually knew Molly, the little heroine of his poem, and, most likely, even met and knew Doll, the inanimate toy that his poetic genius succeeds in elevating to a high pathos of love and loss (who will ever forget those "periwinkle eyes" that bid Grandmother open hers?). The poet of "Valentino" and "Cavallina Storna" is here at his very best.



**GIOVANNI PASCOLI****ITALY**

Sacro all'Italia raminga

**CANTO PRIMO****I**

A Caprona, una sera di febbraio,  
gente veniva, ed era già per l'erta,  
veniva su da Cincinnati, Ohio.

La strada, con quel tempo, era deserta.  
Pioveva, prima adagio, ora a diretto,  
tamburellando su l'ombrella aperta.

La Ghita e Beppe di Taddeo lì sotto  
erano, sotto la cerata ombrella  
del padre: una ragazza, un giovinotto.

E c'era anche una bimba malatella,  
in collo a Beppe, e di su la sua spalla  
mesceva giù le bionde lunghe anella.

Figlia d'un altro figlio, era una talla  
del ceppo vecchio nata là: Maria:  
d'ott'anni: aveva il peso d'una galla.

Ai ritornanti per la lunga via,  
già vicini all'antico focolare,  
la lor chiesa sonò l'Avemaria.

Erano stanchi! Avean passato il mare!  
Appena appena tra la pioggia e il vento  
l'udiron essi or sì or no sonare.

Maria cullata dall'andar su lento  
sembrava quasi abbandonarsi al sonno,  
sotto l'ombrella. Fradicio e contento

veniva piano dietro tutti il nonno.

**Giovanni Pascoli**

**ITALY 1897**

Sacred to Wandering Italia

*Canto I*

I

One February evening, at Caprona,  
up the steep hill people were seen to come –  
people from Cincinnati, Ohio. On a

night such as that the road was empty. Grim  
and heavy – soft no longer – now the rain  
on their umbrella beat as on a drum.

Under their father's waxed umbrella came  
Ghita and Beppe di Taddeo, close  
together – a young woman, a young man.

Also, there was a sickly little girl,  
carried by Beppe in his arms – a small  
young thing with many a golden-blending curl:

the daughter of another son we'll call  
a sprout of the old stump born over there –  
Maria, eight-years old, light as an oak-gall.

For them, returning from so vry far,  
now that to their old home they were so close,  
the church bell rang its "Hail" up in the air.

They were so tired though! The sea they'd crossed;  
now in the storm of rain and wind that howled  
that sound, so very faint, was nearly lost...

Maria, by that easy climbing lulled,  
beneath th' umbrella seemed about to fall  
into an easy sleep. Grandfather, soaked

and happy, trailed behind – the last of all.

## II

Salivano, ora tutti dietro il nonno,  
la scala rotta. Il vecchio Lupo in basso  
non abbaio; scodinzolò tra il sonno.

E tentennò sotto il lor piede il sasso  
d'avanti l'uscio. C'era sempre stato  
presso la soglia, per aiuto al passo.

E l'uscio, come sempre, era accallato.  
Lì dentro, buio come a chiuder gli occhi.  
Ed era buia la cucina allato.

La mamma? Forse scesa per due ciocchi...  
forse in capanna a mòlgere... No, era  
al focolare sopra i due ginocchi.

Avea pulito greppia e rastrelliera;  
ora, accendeva... Udì sonare fioco:  
era in ginocchio, disse la preghiera.

Appariva nel buio a poco a poco.  
"Mamma, perché non v'accendete il lume?  
Mamma, perché non v'accendete il fuoco?"

"Gesù! Ché ho fatto tardi col rosime..."  
E negli stecchi ella soffiò, mezzo arsi;  
e le sue rughe apparvero al barlume.

E raccattava, senza ancor voltarsi,  
tutta sgomenta, avanti a sé, la mamma,  
brocche, fuscilli, canapugli, sparsi

sul focolare. E si levò la fiamma.

## III

E i figli la rividero alla fiamma  
del focolare, curva, sfatta, smunta.  
"Ma siete trista! siete trista, o mamma!"

Ed accostando a gli occhi, essa, la punta

II

After grandfather, then, they climbed the frail  
and broken staircase. Down below, old Wolf  
dared not bark: sleepily, he wagged his tail.

Under their steps the threshold stone soon creaked –  
to make their entrance easier, it was  
there still in front of the old door, not locked –

rather, ajar .as ever. Dark inside,  
as when you close your eyes. And also dark,  
quite dark, the kitchen looked beside.

But where was Mother? Gone for wood or grass...  
Milking the cow perhaps... No, she was there –  
right at the fireplace on her knees she was.

Of rake and manger she had taken care,  
and now, about to light the fire, she heard  
the faintly ringing bell, and said her prayer.

Then someone softly in that darkness stirred:  
“Why in this dark, O Mother, do you wait?  
Why do you stay, O Mother, in this cold?”

“Jesus! How picking hay has made me late!...”  
And on the half-burnt sticks she blew, thus showing  
in that first glimmer all her wrinkled face.

Then, without turning, frantic and afraid,  
Mother before her gathered, split, and chose  
twigs, shoots, and branches round the chimney spread,

until a welcoming, bright flame arose.

III

Once more her children saw her in that glow,  
bent over, very wan and very thin.  
“Mother, you look so ill, so ill and slow!”

But, trying to conceal her tears within

del pennelletto, con un fil di voce:  
 "E il Cecco è fiero? E come va l'Assunta?"  
 "Ma voi! Ma voi!" "Là là, con la mia croce"  
 I muri grezzi apparvero col banco  
 vecchio e la vecchia tavola di noce.

Di nuovo, un moro, con non altro bianco  
 che gli occhi e i denti, era incollato al muro,  
 la lenza a spalla ed una mano al fianco:

roba di là. Tutto era vecchio, scuro.  
 S'udiva il soffio delle vacche, e il sito  
 della capanna empiva l'abituro.

Beppe sedè col capo indolenzito  
 tra le due mani. La bambina bionda  
 ora ammiccava qua e là col dito.

Parlava; e la sua nonna, tremebonda,  
 stava a sentire, e poi dicea: "Non pare  
 un lui quando canta tra la fronda?"

Parlava la sua lingua d'oltremare:  
 "...a chicken-house" "un piccolo lui..."  
 "...for mice and rats" "che goda a cinguettare,

zi zi" "*Bad country, Ioe, your Italy!*"

#### IV

Italy, penso, se la prese a male.  
 Maria, la notte (era la Candelora),  
 senti dei tonfi come per le scale...

tre quattro carri rotolarono... Ora  
 vedea, la bimba, ciò che n'era scorso!  
*the snow!* La neve, a cui splendea l'aurora.

Un gran lenzuolo ricopriva il torso  
 dell'Omo-morto. Nel silenzio intorno  
 pareva che singhiozzasse il Rio dell'Orso.

her handkerchief, she only murmured: "How is Cecco? How's Assunta?" "Have you been

ill, but since when?" "Oh, nothing... same old trouble." Together with the worn-out bench appeared the old raw walls and the old beechnut table.

The one new item was a picture hung – a moorish face whose eyes and teeth shone white, with fishline near and hand along his side –

things from abroad. The rest was dark as night. The breathing of the cow was heard. The stall filled with its heavy reek the room outright.

Beppe sat down, his numbing brow between his hands. The little blond-haired girl meanwhile with her small finger pointed here and there,

and spoke. Atremble, her Grandmother listened, who then replied, "Wouldn't you say she sounded like a small finch 'tween leaf and leaf a-singing?"

Of course she spoke her tongue of overseas: "A *chicken-house*," "a little finch, you see..." "for mice and rats" – "still chirping on its trees..."

"zee zee..." "Bad country, Joe, your Italy!"

#### IV

Italy did not like that, I believe. That night, Maria – it was Candlemas – several thuds along the stairs perceived...

three, four carts tumbled... What had come to pass the little girl could clearly see at last: *the snow!* the snow, full of the morning gloss!

A lengthy sheet was wrapped around the back of the Dead-Man. The River of the Bear in all that silence seemed to moan or crack.

Parea che un carro, allo sbianchir del giorno  
ridiscendesse l'erta con un lazzo  
cigolio. Non un carro, era uno storno,

uno stornello in cima del Palazzo  
abbandonato, che credea che fosse  
marzo, e strideva: marzo, un sole e un guazzo!

Maria guardava. Due rosette rosse  
aveva, aveva lagrime lontane  
negli occhi, un colpo ad or ad or di tosse.

La nonna intanto ripeteva: "Stamane  
fa freddo!" Un bianco borracciol consunto  
mettea sul desco ed affettava il pane.

Pane di casa e latte appena munto.  
Dicea: "Bimbina, state al fuoco: nieva!  
Nieva!" E qui Beppe soggiungea compunto:

*"Poor Molly! Qui non trovi il pai con fleva!"*

## V

Oh! No: non c'era lì né *pie* né *flavour*  
né tutto il resto. Ruppe in un gran pianto:  
*"Ioe, what means nieva? Never? Never? Never?"*

Oh! No: starebbe in *Italy* sin tanto  
ch'ella guarisse: *one month* or *two, poor Molly!*  
E *Ioe* godrebbe questo po' di scianto.

Mugliava il vento che scendea dai colli  
bianchi di neve. Ella mangiò, poi muta  
fissò la fiamma con gli occhioni molli.

Venne, sapendo della lor venuta,  
gente, e qualcosa rispondeva a tutti  
*Ioe*, grave: *"Oh yes, è fiero... vi saluta..."*

molti bisini, oh *yes*... No, tiene un frutt-  
stendo... *Oh yes*, vende checche, candi, scrima...  
Conta moneta! Può campar coi frutti...

A cart – it looked – was coming down the hill  
with a sour shrill in the first white of morn.  
A cart? It was a starling, if you will –

a starling that, believing March had come,  
atop the empty old Palazzo cuddled,  
shrieking: “March! March! With sunshine and a puddle!”

Her cheeks two fresh red roses – once again  
Maria stared outside, with distant tears  
deep in her eyes, and coughing now and then.

“ ‘Tis a cold morning,” her Grandmother said,  
placing an old white pitcher on the table  
and slicing then with tenderness some bread –

bread she herself had baked, and milk so fresh.  
She said, “Stay near the fire, my child. See? *Nieva!*”  
And Beppe added then, almost ablush:

“Here you won’t find, poor Molly, pie with flavor!”

V

No! She would not find either pie or flavor  
or other things there. Into tears she burst:  
“*What does nieva’ mean, Joe? Never? Never?*”

Of course not. She, poor Molly, would stay just  
as long as she got well – one month or two –  
and Joe would in the meantime take a rest.

Moaning from mountains still awash with snow,  
the wind came down. After she ate, the child  
fixed on the flame her eyes with tears aglow.

As the news traveled neighbors came to call,  
and Joe most seriously to each replied:  
“Oh yes, he’s well., sends greetings to you all...

“good business, and... he’s bought a fruit stand, yes...  
and he, oh yes, sells ice cream, candy, cakes...  
He’s counting money for his wintry days...



Il baschetto non rende come prima...  
*Yes, un salone, che ci ha tanti bordi...*  
*Yes, l'ho rivisto nel pigliar la stima..."*

Il tramontano discendea con sordi  
 brontoli. Ognuno si godeva i cari  
 ricordi, cari ma perché ricordi:

quando sbarcati dagli ignoti mari  
 scorrean le terre ignote con un grido  
 straniero in bocca, a guadagnar danari

per farsi un campo, per rifarsi un nido...

## VI

Un campettino da vangare, un nido  
 da riposare: riposare, e ancora  
 gettare in sogno quel lontano grido:

*Will you buy...* per Chicago Baltimora.  
*Buy images...* per Troy, Memphis, Atlanta,  
 con una voce che te stesso accora:

*cheap!* Nella notte, solo in mezzo a tanta  
 gente; *cheap! cheap!* tra un urlerò che opprime;  
*cheap!*... Finalmente un altro odi, che canta...

Tu non sai come, intorno a te le cime  
 sono dell'Alpi, in cui si arrossa il cielo:  
 chi canta, è il gallo sopra il tuo concime.

"La mi' Mèrica! Quando entra quel gelo,  
 ch'uno ritrova quella stufa roggia  
 per il gran *coke*, e si rià, *poor fellow!*"

e va pur via, battuto dalla pioggia.  
 Trova un *farm*. *You want buy?* Mostra il baschetto.  
 Un uomo compra tutto. Anche, l'alloggia!"

Diceva alcuno; ed assentiano al detto  
 gli altri seduti entro la casa nera,

"A little less today his basket makes...  
Yes, a big house with many boarding men...  
*Oh yes, I saw him at the pier...*" Again

the north wind mumbled, deafening and glum.  
Each of them treasured dear remembrances –  
remembrances, and therefore dear to them –

of a day when, from unknown billows landing,  
crying an alien cry that no one knew,  
they trod an unknown soil to earn some money –

to buy a piece of land, to make their nests anew...

VI

A tiny piece of land to dig, a nest  
wherein to lie at ease – to rest, and, even  
while dreaming, cry that cry of long ago:

*"Will you buy... through Chicago, Baltimore...  
buy images... through Troy, Memphis, Atlanta,  
with a low tone that makes you weep still more...*

*cheap!... in the night, alone within a crowd;  
cheap! cheap! amid so many aching shouts;  
cheap!... till you hear a voice that sings out loud:*

*"Remember that around you still endure  
the lofty Alps on which the sunset glows."  
It is your rooster sings on your manure.*

*"America, my land! When winter comes,  
one feeds more coal into that reddish stove,  
and one – poor fellow – feels so warm again!*

Or one has but to travel in the rain  
to the next farm. You want buy? And he shows  
his basket. Someone buys, and gives him shelter."

A neighbor spoke, and not the least disproof

più nera sotto il bianco orlo del tetto.

Uno guardò la piccola straniera,  
prima non vista, muta, che tossì.  
*"You like this country..."* Ella negò severa:

*"Oh no! Bad Italy! Bad Italy!"*

## VII

ITALY allora s'adirò davvero!  
Piovve; e la pioggia cancellò dal tetto  
quel po' di bianco, e fece tutto nero.

Il cielo, parve che si fosse stretto,  
e rovesciava acquate sopra acquate!  
O ferraietto, corto e maledetto!

Ghita diceva: "Mamma, a che filate?  
Nessuna fila in Mèrica. Son usi  
d'una volta, del tempo delle fate.

Oh *yes!* Filare! Assai mi ci confusi  
da bimba. Or c'è la macchina che scocca  
d'un frullo solo centomila fusi.

Oh *yes!* Ben altro che la vostra ròcca!  
E fila unito. E duole poi la vita  
e ci si sente prosciugar la bocca!"

La mamma allora con le magre dita  
le sue gugliate traeva giù più rare,  
perché ciascuna fosse bella unita.

Vedea le fate, le vedea scoccare  
fusi a migliaia, e s'indugiava a lungo  
nel suo cantuccio presso il focolare.

Diceva: "Andate a letto, io vi raggiungo"  
Vedea le mille fate nelle grotte  
illuminate. A lei faceva il fungo

came from the others, seated in the black  
old house, more black now for its white-dyed roof.

One looked then at the little foreign child,  
who, until now unnoticed, coughed a bit.  
“*You like this country?...*” Sternly she replied:

“*Oh no, oh no! Bad Italy! Bad Italy!*”

VII

Italy at this grew angry, to be sure.  
It rained; the rain deleted from the roof  
that dash of white, and all was black once more.

The sky seemed now to lose its whole expanse,  
and threw thick rainfall upon rainfall down.  
O fickle February, curt and cursed!

Ghita said: “Mother, you’re still spinning. Why?  
No woman in America now spins.  
With the old fairies all such things went by.

“*Oh yes, to spin!* It gave me trouble since  
I was a little girl. There’s a machine  
now, that one hundred thousand threads can spin.

“*Oh yes!* Your distaff is for nothing fit!  
But that works straight. Like this, you ache all over  
and soon your mouth gets dry.” Her mother’s thin

fingers made then each needleful more rare  
so as to render it more closely knit.  
She dreamed of fairies come to touch and share

a thousand spindles – even more – and so,  
there in her little corner, she would stay  
a little longer near that warming glow.

She said: “To bed now! Later, I will too.”  
She saw the thousand fairies in’ the light  
of all their caves, while trusting, for her sake,

la lucernina nell'oscura notte.

### VIII

Pioveva sempre. Forse uscian, la notte,  
le stelle, un poco, ad ascoltar per tutto  
gemer le doccie e ciangottar le grotte.

Un poco, appena. Dopo, era più brutto:  
piovea più forte dopo la quiete.  
O ferraiuzzo, piccolino e putto!

Ghita diceva: "Madre, a che tessete?  
Là, può comprare, a pochi cents, chi vuole,  
cambri, percalli, lustrì come sete.

E poi la vita dite che vi duole!  
C'è dei telari in Mèrica, in cui vanno  
ogni minuto centomila spole.

E ce n'ha mille ogni città, che fanno  
ciascuno tanta tela in uno scatto,  
quanta voi non ne fate in capo all'anno"

Dicea la mamma: "Il braccio ch'io ricatto  
bel bello, vuole diventar rotello.  
O figlia, più non è da fare, il fatto"

E tendeva col subbio e col subbiello  
altre fila. La bimba, lì, da un canto,  
mettea nello spoletto altro cannello.

Stava lì buona come ad un incanto,  
in quel celliere dalla vòlta bassa,  
*Molly*, e tossiva un poco, ma soltanto

tra il rumore dei licci e della cassa.

### IX

Tra il rumore dei licci e della cassa  
tossiva, che la nonna non sentisse.

her own small lantern in the shrouded night.

VIII

It rained and rained. During the night the stars  
maybe came out a little just to hear  
the gutters drip and every cavern moan

A little. Afterwards it grew far worse:  
it rained much harder after that brief peace.  
Short February, childishly perverse!

"Mother," said Ghita, "why still weaving? There,  
for a few cents a woman, yes, can buy  
cambric and new percale of silken glare.

"And then you say you ache all over... There,  
there in America, looms can be found  
with a hundred thousand bobbins every minute.

"And there are thousands of them in each town,  
that so much cloth in but one second weave  
as you can hardly make the whole year round."

And Mother answered: "Although weak and worn,  
this arm of mine still makes a lovely spool.  
Daughter, I do what I have always done."

Filaments with her beam she stretched anew  
while from the other side the little girl  
into the shuttle a new bobbin threw.

As if by magic all-entranced and won,  
in that low-ceilinged basement the small girl,  
our *Molly*, sat, coughing a bit, between

the sound of the old wheel and of the threads.

IX

'Tween the sound of the wheel and of the threads  
She coughed, so that Grandmother would not hear.

La nonna spesso le dicea: "Ti passa?"

*Yes*, rispondeva. Un giorno poi le disse:  
"Non venir qui!" Ma ella ci veniva,  
e stava lì con le pupille fisse.

Godeva di guardare la giuliva  
danza dei licci, e di tenere in mano  
la navicella lucida d'oliva.

Stava lì buona a' piedi d'un soppiano;  
girava l'aspo, riempia cannelli,  
e poi tossiva dentro sé pian piano.

Un giorno che veniva acqua a ruscelli,  
fissò la nonna, e chiese: "Die?" La nonna  
le carezzava i morbidi capelli.

La bimba allora piano per la gonna  
le salì, le si stese sui ginocchi:  
"Die?" "E che t'ho a dir io povera donna?"

La bimba allora chiuse un poco gli occhi:  
"Die! Die!" La nonna sussurrò: "dormire?"  
"No! No!" La bimba chiuse anche più gli occhi,

s'abbandonò per più che non dormire,  
piegò le mani, sopra il petto: "Die!  
Die! Die!" La nonna balbettò: "morire!"

"Oh *yes! Molly morire in Italy!*"

## CANTO SECONDO

### I

ITALY allora n'ebbe tanta pena.  
Povera *Molly!* E venne un vento buono  
che spazzò l'aria che tornò serena.

Vieni, *poor Molly!* Vieni! Dove sono  
le nubi? In cielo non c'è più che poca

But oft Grandmother asked: "Are you all right?"

"Yes," she'd reply. Grandmother, then, one day,  
"Don't come down here!" implored. And yet she came,  
and sat there, still, her eyes fixed on that play.

She was so happy, watching that turmoil –  
the dancing of the threads – while in her hand  
she held the shuttle bright with olive oil.

There, where the staircase ended, she sat still,  
turning the reel, and filling spool and spool,  
and coughing very softly, coughing still.

One day (the rain in rivulets came down),  
staring at her Grandmother, she asked: "Die?"  
Grandmother gently stroked her soft hair. Then

the girl jumped on her gown most silently,  
and very dearly cuddled on her knees:  
"Die?" "Child, what do you wish to say to me?"

The child then for a second closed her eyes:  
"Die! Die!" Grandmother asked: You wish to sleep?"  
"No! No!" She somewhat tighter closed her eyes,

lay limp there on her bosom, held her breath,  
crossed both her arms over her chest, and said:  
"Die! Die! Die!" Poor Grandmother whispered: "Death?"

"Oh yes! Molly will die in Italy!"

## *Canto Two*

### I

Italy at those words felt sad at heart.  
Poor Molly! Suddenly a lively breeze  
swept the air clean, which once again turned bright.

Come, my *poor Molly!* Come! Where are the clouds?  
Look! In the sky there's nothing but a bit



nebbia, una pace, un senso di perdono,

di quando il bimbo perdonato ha roca  
ancor la voce; all'angolo degli occhi  
c'era una stilla, e cade, mentre gioca.  
Vieni, *poor Molly!* Porta i tuoi balocchi.  
Dove sono le nubi nere nere?  
Qualche lagrima sgocciola dai fiocchi

delle avellane, e brilla nel cadere.

## II

Porta *the doll*, la bambola, che viene,  
povera *Doll*, anch'essa dal paese  
lontano, ed essa ti capisce bene.

E quando tu le parli per inglese,  
presso le guancie pallide ti pone  
le sue color di rosa d'ogni mese.

Dal suo lettino lucido, d'ottone,  
levala su, che l'uggia non la vinca.  
Non dorme, vedi. Vedi, dal cantone

sgrana que' suoi due fiori di pervinca.

## III

O *Moll* e *Doll*, venite! Ora comincia  
il tempo bello. Udite un campanello  
che in mezzo al cielo dondola? È la cincia.

O *Moll* e *Doll*, comincia il tempo bello.  
Udite lo squillar d'una fanfara  
che corre il cielo rapida? È il fringuello.

Fringuello e cincia ognuno già prepara  
per il suo nido il mustio e il ragnatelo;  
e d'ora in ora primavera a gara

cantano, uno sul pero, uno sul melo.

of mist, a peace, a feeling of forgiveness –

such as a quickly pardoned urchin earns,  
whose voice still trembles, whose last lingering tear  
now falls as to his playing he returns.

Come, my *poor Molly!* Bring your toys with you.  
Where are those clouds that were so very black?  
Only some tears are dripping from the new

tufts of the almond trees, and, dripping, shine.

II

Oh, bring that doll of yours, the doll that came –  
she too, poor Doll! – from the same distant lands,  
and what you whisper quickly understands.

For when you speak in English to her, soon  
she presses on your pallid cheeks her own –  
roses that every single month are born.

From her so bright and tiny bed of brass,  
oh, wake her up, or she of boredom dies.  
She is not sleeping – see? Look, from her corner.

she opens wide her periwinkle eyes.

III

O *Moll* and *Doll*, come both! The sky is clear  
at last. That little bell now in mid-air  
a-swinging? 'Tis a titmouse – don't you hear?

O *Moll* and *Doll*, the weather's fair anew.  
The clangor of that fanfare overhead,  
so swift? It is a chaffinch fleeing through.

Chaffinch and titmouse to their nests now bring  
cobweb and moss, and, in sweet rivalry,  
from hour to hour sing the new-risen Spring,

**line missing**

## IV

Altre due voci ora dal monte al piano  
s'incontrano: uno scampanare a festa,  
con un altro più piano e più lontano.  
L'una tripudia, e i mille echi ridesta

del monte, bianco ancora un po' di neve.  
Di tanto in tanto ecco la voce mesta;  
ecco un rintocco, appena appena un breve

colpo, che pare così lungo al cuore!  
No, non vorrebbe, o gente, no; ma deve.

C'è là chi sposa, ma c'è qua chi muore.

## V

Buoni villaggi che vivete intorno  
al verde fiume, e di comune intesa  
vi dite tutto ciò che fate il giorno!

Si levano. Ora vanno tutti in chiesa,  
ora son tutti a desinare, ed ora  
c'è in ogni casa la lucerna accesa.

Poi quando immersi ad aspettar l'aurora  
sembrano tutti, ecco più su più giù,  
più qua più là, le loro voci ancora.

Pensano a quelli che non sono più...

## VI

Lèvati, *Molly*. Gente odo parlare  
la tua parlata. Sono qui. Cammina,  
se vuoi vederle. Hanno passato il mare.

Fanno un brusio nell'ora mattutina!  
Ma il vecchio Lupo dorme e non abbaia.  
È buona gente e fu già sua vicina.

IV

But two more voices blend – one from the mount,  
one from the plain: a festive-ringing bell  
and a quite distant, much more somber sound.

From mountain tops, still white with lingering snow,  
one rouses countless echoes with its joy,  
but there is also at times that voice of woe:

'tis but a very solemn dirge, 'tis just  
a little sound yet on all hearts so trying!  
It doesn't like to, folks, but toll it must.

A wedding there, but someone here is dying.

V

Good villages that all together stay  
round the green river, and in harmony  
tell one another what you do all day!

People get up now, in their church they meet,  
now they all sit at table, and there's now  
in every house a little lamp alit.

Then, all in sleep immersed, they wait the new  
morning when, here and there, and dim and clear,  
their mingled voices can be heard anew:

they pray for those who are no longer here.

VI

*Molly*, get up. Some people you should see,  
who understand your speech. Yes, they are here.  
Come quick to talk to them. They've crossed the sea.

There's quite a buzzing at the peep of dawn  
but old Wolf's fast asleep and does not bark:  
they are good people, neighbors too well known.

Vengono e vanno, su e giù dall'aia  
alla lor casa che da un pezzo è vuota.  
Oh! La lor casa, sotto la grondaia,

non gli par brutta, ben che sia di mota!

## VII

*Sweet... sweet...* Ho inteso quel lor dolce grido  
dalle tue labbra... *sweet*, uscendo fuori  
e *sweet sweet sweet*, nel ritornare al nido.

Palpiti a volo limpidi e sonori,  
gorgheggi a fermo teneri e soavi,  
battere d'ali e battere di cuori!

In questa casa che tu bad chiamavi,  
black, nera, sì, dal tempo e dal lavoro,  
son le lor case, là, sotto le travi,

di mota sì, ma così *sweet* per loro!

## VIII

O rondinella nata in oltremare!  
Quando vanno le rondini, e qui resta  
il nido solo, oh! Che dolente andare!

Non c'è più cibo qui per loro, e mesta  
la terra e freddo è il cielo, tra l'affanno  
dei venti e lo scrosciar della tempesta.

Non c'è più cibo. Vanno. Torneranno?  
Lasciano la lor casa senza porta.  
Tornano tutte al rifiorir dell'anno!

Quella che no, di' che non può; ch'è morta.

## IX

Quando tu sei venuta, o rondinella,  
t'hanno pur salutata le campane;

They've come to this your barnyard and they go  
now to their house, that has long empty stood.  
Oh, their old home beneath the gutter seems  
  
so beautiful to them, though made of mud!

VII

Sweet... sweet... This joyous cry, so brief and fast,  
I've heard from your lips. *Sweet*, when going out,  
and *sweet sweet sweet* re-entering their nest.

O flying heartbeats, musical and bright,  
warblings so tender and once more so dear,  
flapping of wings and hearts bound in delight!

Yes, in this house that you have called so bad,  
and time and toil have made so black and grim,  
their homes are still beneath the ancient beams –

oh, made of mud, yes, but so sweet to them!

VIII

O little swallow, born beyond the sea!  
When all the swallows go, and here remain  
only their nests, how sad their trip must be!

There's no more food for them here, and the plain  
is desert, and the sky so cold between  
the roaring wind and the downpouring rain.

There's no more food. They go. Will they come back?  
Goodbye to doorless homes they have just said.  
When the new spring's in bloom they all come back!

If one does not, say she could not – she's dead.

IX

When to this home you came, O little swallow,  
"Welcome!" the bells on your arrival said;

ti venne incontro il nonno con l'ombrella,

ti s'è strusciato alle gambine il cane.  
Pioveva; ma tu, bimba eri coperta;  
trovasti in casa il latte caldo e il pane.

Il tuo nonno ansimava su per l'erta,  
la tua nonna pregava al focolare.  
Brutta la casa, sì ma era aperta,

o mia figliuola nata in oltremare!

### X

Ha la pena da parte, oggi, e la vita  
gli sente, e il capo, alla tua nonna, e il cuore;  
e siede al focolare infreddolita.

Ieri si colse malva ed erbe more.  
Oggi sta peggio. Ha due rosette rosse,  
che non le ha fatte il fuoco che rimuore.

*Molly*, tu vieni e guardi. Ecco, ha la tosse  
che avevi tu. Tosse ogni tanto un po'.  
Sta lì nel canto come non ci fosse.

E non tesse e non fila. Oggi non può.

### XI

Ha tessuto e filato, anche ha zappato,  
anche ha vangato, anche ha portato, oh! tanto  
che adesso stenta a riavere il fiato!

O dolce *Molly*, tu le porti accanto  
Doll nel lettino lucido, e tu resti  
con loro... Tanto faticato e pianto!

Pianto in vedere i figli o senza vesti  
o senza scarpe o senza pane! Pianto  
poi di nascosto, per non far più mesti

i figli che... diceano addio, col canto!

Grandfather met you under his umbrella;  
rubbing himself against your tiny legs,  
the old dog greeted you. 'Twas raining, but,  
well covered, here you found fresh milk, warm bread.

Oh, how Grandfather panted up the hill!  
Oh, how Grandmother at the fireplace prayed!  
Ugly this house, *oh yes*, but it was open,  
my little daughter born beyond the sea!

X

Forgetting all her grief, that is so old,  
Grandmother feels her head and heart so aching,  
and, seated at the fireplace, is so cold.

Mallow and some brown herbs she brewed last night,  
yet she feels worse today. Her two red roses  
are not like those the dying fire makes bright.

*Molly*, you come and look. She's coughing, see? —  
just as you did. She coughs a little bit,  
there in her corner as though she were not.

She neither spins nor weaves now: she cannot.

XI

Oh, but throughout her life she's done so much  
spinning and weaving, shoveling and carrying,  
that oh, her breath she now can hardly catch.

How good of you, sweet *Molly*, now to bring  
*Doll* in her shiny, tiny bed, and. stay  
with both of them... She's worked and wept so long —

wept as she saw her children with no clothes  
or with no shoes or with no bread... and then,  
in secret, wept still longer, not to grieve

her children who... were leaving with a song.



## XII

Addio, dunque! Ed anch'essa, *Italy*, vede,  
*Italy* piange. Hanno un po' più fardello  
che le rondini, e meno hanno di fede.

Si muove con un muglio alto il vascello.  
Essi, in disparte, con lo sguardo vano,  
mangiano qua e là pane e coltello.

E alcun li tende, il pane da una mano,  
l'altro dall'altra, torbido ed anelo,  
al patrio lido, sempre più lontano

e più celeste, fin che si fa cielo.

## XIII

Cielo, e non altro, cielo alto e profondo,  
cielo deserto. O patria delle stelle!  
O sola patria agli orfani del mondo!

Vanno serrando i denti e le mascelle,  
serrando dentro il cuore una minaccia  
ribelle, e un pianto forse più ribelle.  
Offrono *cheap* la roba, *cheap* le braccia,  
indifferenti al tacito diniego;  
e *cheap* la vita, e tutto *cheap*; e in faccia

no, dietro mormorare odono: Dego!

## XIV

Ma senti, *Molly*? Dopo piogge e brume  
e nevi e ghiacci, con la sua gran voce  
canta passando a piè dei monti il fiume.

Passa sotto la gran Pania alla Croce  
cantando, ed una lunga nube appare,  
bianca di sole, al suo passar veloce.

Passa cantando: Al mare! Al mare! Al mare!  
e l'Alpe azzurra ne rimbomba in cerchio,

XII

Children, goodbye then! Even *Italy*  
is watching, even *Italy's* in tears.

They carry more than little swallows do,

but have less faith than they. With a loud roar  
the steamer leaves. They with an empty stare,  
scattered, dejected, eat their piece of bread.

Grim and yet full of love, some of them more  
and more stretch out their hands holding that slice  
of stale bread toward their fading native shore —

farther away, more blue, now only sky.

XIII

Sky, nothing but a deep and boundless sky,  
a barren sky. O fatherland of stars!  
The country of the orphans of the world!

Gnashing their teeth, they say their last goodbye  
with a rebellious threat within their hearts!  
and maybe with a more rebellious cry.

Mute and rejected, yet indifferent,  
they offer their wares cheap, their labor cheap,  
their own lives *cheap*, everything *cheap*; behind,

Oh, not in front, they hear a word said – Dago!

XIV

But, *Molly*, do you hear? Past rain and mists  
and snow and ice, down at the mountain's foot  
the river with its mighty song insists.

From the great Pània to the Cross it flows,  
singing, while, white with sunshine, a long cloud  
appears behind its ever-rapid pace.

Singing, it flows: the sea! the sea! the sea!

e il cielo azzurro vede là fumare  
l'alito che si lascia addietro il Serchio.

## XV

O fiumi, o delle rupi e dei ghiacciai  
figli rubesti, che precipitate  
a pazza corsa senza posar mai,  
  
con l'eterno fragor delle cascate,  
ruzzando come giovani giganti,  
senza perché, per atterrir le fate  
  
delle montagne; e trascinate infranti  
boschi e tuguri, urtate le città,  
struggete i campi, sempre avanti, avanti,  
  
avanti, pieni di serenità...

## XVI

Acqua perenne, ottima e pessima, ora  
morte ora vita, acqua, diventa luce!  
Acqua, diventa fiamma! Acqua, lavora!  
  
Lavora dove l'uomo ti conduce;  
e veemente come l'uragano,  
vigile come femmina che cuce,  
  
trasforma il ferro, il lino, il legno, il grano;  
manda i pesanti traini come spole  
labili; rendi l'operato umano  
  
facile e grande come quel del Sole!

## XVII

La madre li vuol tutti alla sua mensa  
i figli suoi. Qual madre è mai, che gli uni  
sazia, ed a gli altri, a tanti, ai più, non pensa?

And in the middle the blue Alps resound,  
and from its summit the blue sky can see  
the breath the Sèrchio leaves like smoke behind.

XV

Rivers, O lustrous, fierce, precipitous sons  
of rocks and glaciers, you who plunge headlong  
with maddening fury, never resting once,  
with your cascades' eternal roaring song,  
playing like youthful giants full of zest,  
not knowing why, only to scare the throng  
of mountain fairies; you who fling abreast  
woodlands and villages, and mightily  
shake towns and cancel fields, forward and fast,  
forward and fast yet with serenity...

XVI

Perennial water, best and worst, now life  
now death, O water, into light now grow!  
Turn into flame, O water, into strife!  
Work, go as far as man now bids you go,  
with the power of the hurricane,  
and with the vigilance of girls that sew  
transform wood, flax, then iron, and then grain,  
pull every heavy cargo as soft-spun  
and weightless spool, make all men's toil as great  
and easy as the labor of the sun!

XVII

A mother wants her children all about  
in her own house. But can she feed but one  
and leave another, all the others, out?

Siedono a lungo qua e là digiuni;  
tacciono, tralasciati nel banchetto  
patrio, come bastardi, ombre, nessuno;

guardano intorno, e quindi sé nel petto;  
sentono su la lingua arida il sale  
delle lagrime; infine, a capo eretto,

escono, poi fuggono, poi: - Sii male...

### XVIII

Non maledite! Vostra madre piange  
su voi, che ai salci suspendete i gravi  
picconi, in riva all'Obi, al Congo, al Gange.

Ma d'ogni terra ove è sudor di schiavi,  
di sottoterra ove è stridor di denti,  
dal ponte ingombro delle nere navi,

vi chiamerà l'antica madre, o genti,  
in una sfolgorante alba che viene,  
con un suo grande ululo ai quattro venti

fatto balzare dalle sue sirene.

### XIX

Non piangere, *poor Molly!* Esci, fa' piano,  
lascia la nonna lì sotto il lenzuolo  
di tela grossa ch'ella fece a mano.

T'amava, oh! sì! Tu ne imparavi a volo  
qualche parola bella che balbetti:  
essa da te solo quel *die, die* solo!

Lascia lì *Doll*, lasciali accosto i letti,  
piccolo e grande. *Doll* è savia, e tace,  
né dorme: ha gli occhi aperti e par che aspetti

che li apra l'altra, ch'ora dorme in pace.

### XX

Prima d'andare, vieni al camposanto,  
s'hai da ridire come qua si tiene.

Yet, starving, some of them are here, some there,  
silent, excluded from the native table,  
like bastards, just like shadows from nowhere:

they look around, then at themselves, and feel  
upon their tongues the salt of their own tears,  
till, their heads straight, they go or run away,

muttering, "O my land, be ever curs...!"

XVIII

No, do not curse! For you your mother weeps,  
who hang your weighty picks on willow-trees  
along the Ganges or the Congo deep.

But from all lands where sweating slaves are still,  
from sunless mines where gnashing teeth are heard,  
from piers where black ships wait, eager to sail,

your ancient mother, folks, will call you back  
on a bright morning that's approaching fast,  
back with her loudest cry to the four winds,

back with her sirens' most resounding blast.

XIX

*Poor Molly*, do not cry! Hush hush, come on!  
Leave your Grandmother there beneath the sheet  
of heavy cloth her very hand has spun.

Oh yes, she loved you. You have learned from her  
some good words that you speak so poorly still:  
she only learned but one word from you – die.

Leave your *Doll* there, right there near the two beds –  
one small, one big. Doll is so wise: she dares  
not speak nor sleep – with staring eyes she bids  
the other open hers – the one who rests in peace.

XX

Before you go, oh, to the graveyard come,  
in case you're asked how here we keep our dead.

Stridono i bombi intorno ai fior d'acanto,  
ronzano l'api intorno le verbene.

E qui tra tanto sussurro riposa  
la cara nonna che ti volle bene.

O *Molly!* O *Molly!* Prendi su qualcosa,  
prima d'andare, e portalo con te.

Non un geranio né un boccio di rosa,  
prendi sol un non-ti-scordar-di-me!

### XXI

"*Ioe, bona cianza!...*" "*Ghita, state bene!...*"  
"Good bye" "L'avete presa la ticchetta?"  
"Oh *yes*" "Che barco?" "Il prinzessin Irene"

L'un dopo l'altro dava a *Ioe* la stretta  
lunga di mano. "Salutate il tale"  
"*yes, servirò*" "Come partite in fretta!"

Scendean le donne in zoccoli le scale  
per veder Ghita. Sopra il suo cappello  
c'era una fifa con aperte l'ale.

"Se vedete il mi' babbo... il mi' fratello...  
il mi' cognato..." "Oh *yes*" "Un bel passaggio  
vi tocca, o Ghita. Il tempo è fermo al bello"

"Oh *yes*" Facea pur bello! Ogni villaggio  
ridea nel sole sopra le colline.  
Sfiorian le rose da' rosai di maggio.

*sweet sweet...* era un sussurro senza fine  
nel cielo azzurro. Rosea, bionda, e mesta,  
*Molly* era in mezzo ai bimbi e alle bambine.

Il nonno, solo, in là volgea la testa  
bianca. Sonava intorno mezzodì.  
Chiedeano i bimbi con vocìo di festa:

"Tornerai, *Molly?*" Rispondeva: – Sì! –

Around acanthuses the bumbles hum,  
around verbenas buzzing bees are spread.

And in this murmur your Grandmother rests,  
who loved you so, so very much indeed.

*Molly!* Dear *Molly!* Take, before you go,  
something you like, something that you should have.

Not a geranium, and not a rose  
but a forget-me-not born on her grave!

XXI

"Good luck to you, Joe!..." "Ghita dear, goodbye!..."  
"Goodbye." "But don't forget your tickets now."  
"Oh yes." "What ship?" "Princess Irene." "Goodbye!"

For a long time Joe had to shake this hand,  
that hand. "Oh, give my best to So-and-so!"  
"Yes, I will do." "Stay longer in your land!"

In wooden sandals down the staircase came  
women to bid their Ghita their farewell.  
A bird with spread-out wings was on her hat.

"In case you see my dad... my brother... my  
brother-in-law..." "Oh yes." "A happy trip,  
Ghita, I'm sure... with such a limpid sky."

"Oh yes." The weather was so fine. Each village  
up on the hills was smiling in the sun.  
Out of May rosebushes some roses withered.

*Sweet sweet...* it was an endless murmur spun  
into the blue sky. Rosy, blonde, and sad,  
Molly mid other boys and girls was seen.  
Alone, Grandfather turned his white, white head.  
Above them all was heard the noonday bell.  
All the boys asked with voices clear and glad:

"*Molly*, will you come back?" She said: "I will."



Nota a *Italy*

Il lettore non ha certo bisogno dei miei lumi per leggere e interpretare il povero inglese de' miei personaggi. Gioverà tuttavia ricordare la pronuncia netta in a o aa che hanno, nella bocca dei nostri reduci di Mèrica, le parole come *flavour* (pr. fléva), *never* (pr. néva), *steamer* (pr. stima) e simili. Il grido dei figurinai, *Buy images* (= comprate figure) suona, in bocca loro, bai imigis. E *cheap* (pr. cip) vale: a buon mercato. Molte parole inglesi sono da loro accomodate a italiane: bisini (per *business*) = affari; fruttistendo (per *fruitstand*) = bottega di fruttaiolo; checche (per *cakes*) = paste, pasticci; candi (da *candy*) = canditi; scrima (per *ice-cream*) = gelato di crema; baschetto (per *basquet*) = paniere da metterci le figure; salone (per *saloon*) = trattoria, bettola; bordi (da *board*) = pensioni, abbonati; stima (per *steamer*) = piroscrafo; ticchetta (per *ticket*) = biglietto; cianza (per *chance*) = sorte, occasione. Barco dicono per bastimento.

*Molly* è vezzeggiativo casereccio per Mary o Maria; *doll* significa bambola, ed è anche vezzeggiativo di Dorothy.

*sweet* (pr. suit) vale dolce, ed è, per dir così, consacrato a home. Casa mia! Casa mia!

Brutta parola, dopo queste così dolci, è dego, così pronunciata. Deriva, mi pare, da *dagger* = pugnale.

Quanto alle rime con *Italy*, mi difenda, se accade, Shelley che rima, per esempio, *she* con *poesy* e *die* con *purity* (*The Witch of Atlas*; 26, 36).

***Poems by Adrienne Rich***  
***Translated by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai***

**Adeodato Piazza Nicolai**, nato a Vigo di Cadore (BL) nel 1944 ed emigrato negli Stati Uniti nel 1959, è poeta, saggista e traduttore. Laureatosi nel 1969 dal Wabash College, ha ottenuto il Master of Arts dall'Università di Chicago nel 1986. Ha lavorato per 30 anni presso la Inland Steel Company di Chicago. Autore di quattro volumi di poesia, il prossimo sarà *L'apocalisse e altre stagioni*. Sta traducendo vari poeti dall'italiano all'inglese e viceversa. Di prossima pubblicazione l'antologia *Nove poetesse afroamericane*. Ha insegnato letteratura italiana e "Creative Writing" all'Università di Purdue Calumet, Indiana. Tuttora vive in Italia, dove si occupa di poesia, traduzioni e di "workshops" sul ladino del Centro Cadore.

**Adrienne Rich** was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1929. She is the author of nearly twenty volumes of poetry, including *The School Among the Ruins: Poems 2000-2004* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), which won the Book Critics Circle Award; *Fox: Poems 1998-2000* (2001), *Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995-1998* (1999); *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995* (1995); *Collected Early Poems: 1950-1970* (1993); *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991* (1991); *Time's Power: Poems 1985-1988* (1989); *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978); and *Diving into the Wreck* (1973). She is also the author of several books of nonfiction prose, including *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (W. W. Norton, 2001), *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993) and *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986). Rich has received the Bollingen Prize, the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award, the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, the National Book Award, and a MacArthur Fellowship. In 1997 Adrienne Rich was awarded the Academy's Wallace Stevens Award. She lives in California.

### Per i morti

Ho sognato di chiamarti al telefono  
*per dirti*: Sii più dolce con te stesso  
ma eri ammalato e non hai risposto

Lo spreco del mio amore prosegue in questo modo  
cercando di salvarti da te stesso

ho sempre pensato ai residui  
di energia, di come l'acqua scorre da un colle  
dopo che le piogge si sono fermate

o del fuoco che vuoi lasciare quando vai a letto  
ma senza riuscirci, che si consuma senza spegnersi,  
i carboni sempre più rossi, sempre più strani  
nel scintillare e nello spegnersi  
di quanto tu non lo desiderassi  
seduto lì a mezzanotte passata

### Le tigri di zia Jennifer

Le tigri di zia Jennifer scorrono sullo schermo,  
Luminose creature di topazio in un mondo di verde.  
Non temono gli uomini sotto l'albero;  
Si muovono con felina nobile certezza.

Le dita di zia Jennifer svolazzano sopra la lana  
Spingono con difficoltà il lungo ago d'avorio.  
L'anello matrimoniale massiccio dello Zio  
Grava tanto sulla mano di zia Jennifer.

Quando zia morirà, le sue mani terrorizzate resteranno  
Ancora inanellate con le sfide che l'hanno conquistata.  
Le tigri sul ricamo da lei completato  
Continueranno a muoversi, fiere e senza paura.

### **For the Dead**

I dreamed I called you on the telephone  
to say: Be kinder to yourself  
but you were sick and would not answer

The waste of my love goes on this way  
trying to save you from yourself

I have always wondered about the left-over  
energy, the way water goes rushing down a hill  
long after the rains have stopped

or the fire you want to go to bed from  
but cannot leave, burning-down but not burnt-down  
the red coals more extreme, more curious  
in their flashing and dying  
than you wish they were  
sitting long after midnight

### **Aunt Jennifer's Tigers**

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,  
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.  
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool  
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.  
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band  
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

**In un'aula**

Parlando di poesia, spostando le braccia  
piene di libri sul tavolino dove le facce  
guardano in giù oppure in alto, ascoltando, leggendo  
ad alta voce, parlando di consonanti, di elisioni,  
intrappolate nel come, ignorando il perché;  
guardo il tuo viso, Jude,  
né immusonito né remissivo,  
opaco nell'obliqua pioggia di polvere sulla tavola:  
una presenza come la pietra, se la pietra potesse pensare  
Ciò che non posso dire, è me. Per questo sono venuta.

**Eventuali immigranti notate per favore**

O passerete  
attraverso questa porta  
o non ci passerete.

Se passerete  
ci sarà sempre il rischio  
di ricordare il vostro nome.

Le cose vi guarderanno due volte  
e dovrete ricambiare lo sguardo  
lasciandole accadere.

Se non ci passate  
è possibile  
vivere con dignità.

mantenere le vostre attitudini  
la vostra posizione  
morire con coraggio

ma molto vi accecherà,,  
molto vi sfuggirà,  
a quale costo chi lo sa?

La porta stessa  
non fa promesse.  
È solo una porta.

### **In A Classroom**

Talking of poetry, hauling the books  
arm-full to the table where the heads  
bend or gaze upward, listening, reading aloud,  
talking of consonants, elision,  
caught in the how, oblivious of why:  
I look in your face, Jude,  
neither frowning nor nodding,  
opaque in the slant of dust-motes over the table:  
a presence like a stone, if a stone were thinking  
What I cannot say, is me. For that I came.

### **Prospective Immigrants Please Note**

Either you will  
go through this door  
or you will not go through.

If you go through  
there is always the risk  
of remembering your name.  
Things look at you doubly  
and you must look back  
and let them happen.

If you do not go through  
it is possible  
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes  
to hold your position  
to die bravely

but much will blind you,  
much will evade you,  
at what cost who knows?

The door itself  
makes no promises.  
It is only a door.

### La mia bocca quasi sfiora i tuoi seni

La mia bocca quasi sfiora i tuoi seni  
 nel breve grigio pomeriggio d'inverno  
 in questo letto siamo delicate  
 e ci tocchiamo con gioia così calda da stupirci  
 dure e delicate disegniamo anelli una  
 intorno all'altra la nostra candela diurna  
 brucia con la sua luce particolare e se la neve  
 comincia a cadere e coprire i rami  
 e se cade la notte senza essere annunciata  
 ci sono le delizie dell'inverno  
 improvvisi, selvaggi e delicati le tue dita  
 esatta la mia lingua, esatta al medesimo istante  
 fermandosi per ridere a una tua barzelletta  
 è il mio amore sulla tua scia al cuspide dell'inverno.

### Cartografie del silenzio

1.

Una conversazione inizia  
 con una bugia, e ogni

parlante della cosiddetta lingua comune sente  
 la spaccatura nel ghiaccio, la separazione

come assenza di potere, come se fosse contro  
 una forza della natura

Una poesia può iniziare  
 con una bugia. Per essere stracciata.

Una conversazione ha altre leggi  
 si ricarica della sua propria

falsa energia. Non può essere stracciata.  
 Infiltra il nostro sangue. Si ripete.

Con lo stilo incide irripetibilmente  
 l'isolamento che nega.

### **My mouth hovers across your breasts**

My mouth hovers across your breasts  
in the short grey winter afternoon  
in this bed we are delicate  
and touch so hot with joy we amaze ourselves  
tough and delicate we play rings  
around each other our daytime candle burns  
with its peculiar light and if the snow  
begins to fall outside filling the branches  
and if the night falls without announcement  
there are the pleasures of winter  
sudden, wild and delicate your fingers  
exact my tongue exact at the same moment  
stopping to laugh at a joke  
my love hot on your scent on the cusp of winter

### **Cartographies of Silence**

1.  
A conversation begins  
with a lie. and each  
  
speaker of the so-called common language feels  
the ice-floe split, the drift apart  
  
as if powerless, as if up against  
a force of nature  
  
A poem can being  
with a lie. And be torn up.  
  
A conversation has other laws  
recharges itself with its own  
  
false energy, Cannot be torn  
up. Infiltrates our blood. Repeats itself.  
  
Inscribes with its unreturning stylus  
the isolation it denies.



2.

La stazione di musica classica  
che suona ora dopo ora nell'appartamento

l'alzare il rialzare  
e l'alzare di nuovo la cornetta telefonica

Le sillabe che pronunciano  
L'antico parlare ancora e ancora

La solitudine del bugiardo  
che vive nell'intreccio formale della bugia

girando i controlli per affogare il terrore  
sepolto sotto la parola mai pronunciata

3.

La tecnologia del silenzio  
i rituali, il protocollo

l'annebbiarsi dei termini  
silenzio non assenza

di parole o musica oppure  
suoni malvagi

Il silenzio può essere un piano  
rigorosamente completato

la cartografia della vita

É una presenza  
ha una storia una forma

Non confonderla  
con qualsiasi tipo di assenza

4.

Quanto tranquille, quanto inoffensive queste parole  
incominciano ad essere per me

anche se spinte dal dolore e dall'ira  
Posso oltrepassare questo film dell'astratto

2.

The classical music station  
playing hour upon hour in the apartment

the picking up and picking up  
and again picking up the telephone

The syllables uttering  
the old script over and over

The loneliness of the liar  
living in the formal network of the lie

twisting the dials to drown the terror  
beneath the unsaid word

3.

The technology of silence  
The rituals, etiquette

the blurring of terms  
silence not absence

of words or music or even  
raw sounds

Silence can be a plan  
rigorously executed

the blueprint of a life

It is a presence  
it has a history a form

Do not confuse it  
with any kind of absence

4.

How calm, how inoffensive these words  
begin to seem to me

though begun in grief and anger  
Can I break through this film of the abstract

senza ferire me stessa oppure te  
qua c'è abbastanza dolore

È per questo che suona il classico del jazz su questa stazione?  
per dare un sottofondo di significato al nostro dolore?

5.

Il silenzio si fa nudo:

*Nella Passione di Giovanna di Dryer*

il viso di Falconetti, capelli corti, una grande geografia  
sorvegliata mutamente dalla telecamera

Se ci fosse poesia dove questo può accadere  
non come spazio vuoto oppure parole

stirate come pelle sopra i significati di una notte nella quale  
due persone  
si sono parlate fino all'alba.

### **Tuffarsi nel relitto**

Appena letto il libro dei miti,  
e caricato la macchina fotografica,  
e controllato la lama del coltello,  
ho indossato  
la tuta protettiva di gomma nera  
le pinne assurde  
la grave e scomoda maschera.  
Devo fare questa cosa  
non come Cousteau con la sua  
squadra laboriosa  
a bordo di una solare goletta  
ma qui da sola.

C'è una scala,  
la scala è sempre presente  
con innocenza agganciata  
al fianco della goletta.  
Conosciamo la sua funzione  
noi che l'abbiamo usata.  
Altrimenti  
è un pezzo di relitto marino

without wounding myself or you  
there is enough pain here

This is why the classical of the jazz music station plays?  
to give a ground of meaning to our pain?

5.  
The silence strips bare:  
In Dreyer's Passion of Joan

Falconetti's face, hair shorn, a great geography  
mutely surveyed by the camera

If there were a poetry where this could happen  
not as blank space or as words

stretched like skin over meanings of a night through which  
two people  
have talked till dawn.

### **Diving into the Wreck**

First having read the book of myths,  
and loaded the camera,  
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
I put on  
the body-armor of black rubber  
the absurd flippers  
the grave and awkward mask.  
I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.

There is a ladder.  
The ladder is always there  
hanging innocently  
close to the side of the schooner.  
We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.  
Otherwise  
it is a piece of maritime floss

uno strumento particolare.

Mi immergo.  
Gradino dopo gradino e ancora  
l'ossigeno m'invade  
la luce blu  
gli atomi trasparenti  
della nostra aria umana.  
Vado giù.  
Le pinne rendono tutto difficile,  
striscio come un insetto lungo la scala  
e non c'è nessuno  
a dirmi dove l'oceano  
incomincerà.

All'inizio l'aria è blu e poi  
ancora più blu e poi verde e poi  
nera. Sto per svenire eppure  
la mia maschera è potente  
pompa il mio sangue con forza  
il mare è un'altra storia  
il mare non è una questione di forza  
devo imparare da sola  
a girare il corpo senza sforzo  
nell'elemento profondo.

E adesso: è facile dimenticare  
perché sono qui  
in mezzo ai tanti che hanno sempre  
vissuto qui  
sventolando i loro ventagli dentellati  
in mezzo ai coralli  
e oltre tutto  
si respira diversamente qui sotto.

Sono venuta ad esplorare il rottame  
Le parole sono scopi.  
Le parole sono carte geografiche  
Sono venuto a verificare il danno fatto  
e il tesoro sopravvissuto.  
Sposto la scia della mia lampada  
lentamente lungo la fiancata  
di un qualche cosa più permanente  
dei pesci e delle alghe

some sundry equipment.

I go down.  
Rung after rung and still  
the oxygen immerses me  
the blue light  
the clear atoms  
of our human air.  
I go down.  
My flippers cripple me,  
I crawl like an insect down the ladder  
and there is no one  
to tell me when the ocean  
will begin.

First the air is blue and then  
it is bluer and then green and then  
black I am blacking out and yet  
my mask is powerful  
it pumps my blood with power  
the sea is another story  
the sea is not a question of power  
I have to learn alone  
to turn my body without force  
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget  
what I came for  
among so many who have always  
lived here  
swaying their crenellated fans  
between the reefs  
and besides  
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.  
I stroke the beam of my lamp  
slowly along the flank  
of something more permanent  
than fish or weed

la cosa per cui sono qui:  
il relitto e non la storia del disastro  
la cosa in sé e non il mito  
il viso annegato che sempre fissa  
il sole  
l'evidenza del danno  
levigata dal sale e per sempre in questa scabra beltà  
le costole del disastro  
a riflettere il loro inserimento  
fra gli incerti predatori.

Questo è il luogo.  
E sono qui, la sirena dai capelli scuri  
che nuotano all'indietro, sirena intrappolata  
nell'armatura da palombaro. Giriamo in silenzio  
intorno al relitto  
ci tuffiamo nella stiva.  
Sono lei: sono lui  
il cui viso annegato dorme a occhi spalancati  
il cui seno porta ancora lo stress  
il cui cargo d'argento e di rame vermiglio riposa  
oscuramente dentro barili  
fissati a metà e lasciati a marcire  
noi siamo i quasi disfatti strumenti  
che una volta segnavano il percorso  
il diario di bordo inzuppato d'acqua  
la bussola rotta

Siamo, sono, sei  
per codardia o per coraggio  
colui che scopre la via  
del ritorno alla scena  
con un coltello, una macchina fotografica  
un libro dei miti  
dove i nostri nomi non ci sono.

the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
the drowned face always staring  
toward the sun  
the evidence of damage  
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty  
the ribs of the disaster  
curving their assertion  
among the tentative hunters.

This is the place.  
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
streams black, the merman in his armoured body.  
We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.  
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes  
whose breasts still bear the stress  
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies  
obscurely inside barrels  
half-wedged and left to rot  
we are the half-destroyed instruments  
that once held to a course  
the water-eaten log  
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.



**Da un atlante del mondo difficile**

So che stai leggendo tardi questa  
poesia, prima di lasciare l' ufficio  
con l'abbagliante lampada gialla e la finestra nel buio  
nell'apatia di un fabbricato sbiadito nella quiete  
dopo l'ora di traffico. So che stai leggendo questa poesia  
in piedi nella libreria lontano dall'oceano  
in un giorno grigio di primavera, fiocchi sparsi di neve  
spinti attraverso enormi spazi di pianure intorno a te.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia  
in una stanza dove tanto è accaduto che non puoi sopportare  
dove i vestiti giacciono sul letto in cumuli stagnanti  
e la valigia aperta parla di fughe  
ma non puoi ancora partire. So che stai leggendo questa poesia  
mentre il treno della metropolitana perde velocità e prima di salire  
le scale  
verso un nuovo tipo d'amore  
che la vita non ti ha mai concesso.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia alla luce  
del televisore dove immagini mute saltano e scivolano  
mentre tu attendi le telenotizie sull'intifada.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia in una sala d'attesa  
Di occhi che s'incontrano sì e no, d'identità con estranei.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia sotto la luce al neon  
nel tedio e nella stanchezza dei giovani fuori gioco,  
che si mettono fuori gioco quando sono ancora troppo giovani. So  
che stai leggendo questa poesia con una vista non più buona, le spese  
lenti  
ingigantiscono queste lettere oltre ogni significato però  
continui a leggere perché anche l'alfabeto è prezioso.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia mentre vai e vieni accanto alla stufa  
scaldando il latte, sulla spalla un bambino che piange, un libro  
nella mano  
poiché la vita è breve e anche tu hai sete.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia non scritta nella tua lingua  
indovinando alcune parole mentre altre continui a leggerle  
e voglio sapere quali siano queste parole.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia mentre ascolti qualcosa,  
diviso fra rabbia e speranza  
ricominciano a fare di nuovo il lavoro che non puoi rifiutare.  
So che stai leggendo questa poesia perché non rimane  
nient'altro da leggere  
là dove sei atterrato, completamente nudo.

**From an Atlas of the Difficult World**

I know you are reading this poem  
late, before leaving your office  
of the one intense yellow lamp-spot and the darkening window  
in the lassitude of a building faded to quiet  
long after rush-hour. I know you are reading this poem  
standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean  
on a grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven  
across the plains' enormous spaces around you.  
I know you are reading this poem  
in a room where too much has happened for you to bear  
where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed  
and the open valise speaks of flight  
but you cannot leave yet. I know you are reading this poem  
as the underground train loses momentum and before running  
up the stairs  
toward a new kind of love  
your life has never allowed.  
I know you are reading this poem by the light  
of the television screen where soundless images jerk and slide  
while you wait for the newscast from the intifada.  
I know you are reading this poem in a waiting-room  
of eyes met and unmeeting, of identity with strangers.  
I know you are reading this poem by fluorescent light  
in the boredom and fatigue of the young who are counted out,  
count themselves out, at too early an age. I know  
you are reading this poem through your failing sight, the thick  
lens enlarging these letters beyond all meaning yet you read on  
because even the alphabet is precious.  
I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove  
warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your hand  
because life is short and you too are thirsty.  
I know you are reading this poem which is not in your language  
guessing at some words while others keep you reading  
and I want to know which words they are.  
I know you are reading this poem listening for something, torn  
between bitterness and hope  
turning back once again to the task you cannot refuse.  
I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else  
left to read  
there where you have landed, stripped as you are.

**Vivere nel peccato**

Credeva che lo studio si sarebbe mantenuto da solo;  
niente polvere sui mobili dell'amore.  
Una mezza eresia volere le serrature meno rumorose,  
i vetri meno sporchi. Un piatto di pere,  
un pianoforte coperto da uno scialle persiano, un gatto  
che segue il divertente topo arabesco  
appena scosso dall'inseguimento.  
Non è che alle cinque ogni gradino serpeggiasse  
sotto i passi del lattaio; quella luce mattutina  
con freddezza delineava i rimasugli  
del formaggio di ieri sera e tre bottiglie sepolcrali;  
che da una mensola di cucina in mezzo ai piatti  
un paio di occhi da insetto si agganciassero ai suoi—  
messaggio da qualche villaggio fra le cornici...  
Nel frattempo lui, sbadigliando,  
suonava una dozzina di note sulla tastiera,  
dichiarandola stonata, scuoteva le spalle allo specchio,  
si grattava la barba poi usciva in cerca di sigarette;  
mentre lei, schernita da demoni minori,  
tirava su le lenzuola e rifaceva il letto e prendeva  
uno straccio per pulire la superficie della tavola,  
e lasciare che la caffettiera debordasse sulla stufa.  
Ora di sera si era innamorata di nuovo,  
ma non così completamente anche se durante la notte  
a volte si svegliava per sentire il giorno entrare  
come un lattaio inarrestabile su per le scale.

### **Living In Sin**

She had thought the studio would keep itself;  
no dust upon the furniture of love.  
Half heresy, to wish the taps less vocal,  
the panes relieved of grime. A plate of pears,  
a piano with a Persian shawl, a cat  
stalking the picturesque amusing mouse  
had risen at his urging.  
Not that at five each separate stair would writhe  
under the milkman's tramp; that morning light  
so coldly would delineate the scraps  
of last night's cheese and three sepulchral bottles;  
that on the kitchen shelf among the saucers  
a pair of beetle-eyes would fix her own—  
envoy from some village in the mouldings...  
Meanwhile, he, with a yawn,  
sounded a dozen notes upon the keyboard,  
declared it out of tune, shrugged at the mirror,  
rubbed at his beard, went out for cigarettes;  
while she, jeered by the minor demons,  
pulled back the sheets and made the bed and found  
a towel to dust the table-top,  
and let the coffee-pot boil over on the stove.  
By evening she was back in love again,  
though not so wholly but throughout the night  
she woke sometimes to feel the daylight coming  
like a relentless milkman up the stairs.

***Poems by Rita Dove***  
***Translated by Adeodato Piazza Nicolai***

**Rita Dove**, Poet Laureate (Poeta Ufficiale) degli Stati Uniti (1993-95), è Commonwealth Professor di Inglese all'Università della Virginia. I suoi libri più recente sono: *Selected Poems (Poesie scelte)* e *Grace Notes (Note di grazia)*, il romanzo *Through the Ivory Gate (Attraverso il cancello d'avorio)* e il dramma lirico *The Darker Face of the Earth (La faccia scura della terra)*. Nel 1987, *Thomas and Beulah (Tommaso e Beulah)* un ciclo di poesie basato sulla vita dei nonni della Dove, ha ottenuto il Premio Pulitzer. Fra gli altri onori ricevuti: fellowships dalla Fondazione Guggenheim e dalla National Endowment for the Arts. In 1993 fu la prima poetessa, in più di dieci anni, a dare una lettura ufficiale di poesia alla Casa Bianca. Nata e cresciuta a Akron, nell'Ohio, la Dove ora vive vicino alla città di Charlottesville insieme al marito Fred Viebahn e la figlia, Aviva.

Poesie tratte da *Mother Love (Amore di madre)*, di Rita "Dove. W. W. Morton & Company, New York, 1995.

**Persefone che cade**

Un narciso fra i comuni splendidi  
fiori, uno diverso da tutti gli altri! Tirò  
forte, si piegò per tirare ancora di più –  
quando, scaturito dalla terra con  
il suo terribile magnifico  
carro, reclamò il suo dovuto.  
È finita. Nessuno l'ha sentita.  
Nessuno! Si era allontanata dalla mandria.

(Ricorda: devi andare dritta a scuola.  
Questo importa, smetti di trastullarti!  
Non rispondere agli stranieri. Sta vicina  
alle amiche di gioco. Tieni gli occhi abbassati.)  
Il fosso si apre così facilmente.  
Così il piede si affonda nel suolo.

**Persephone, Falling**

One narcissus among the ordinary beautiful  
Flowers, one unlike all the others! She pulled,  
Stooped to pull harder –  
When, sprung out of the earth  
On his glittering terrible  
Carriage, he claimed his due.  
It is finished. No one heard her.

(Remember: go straight to school.  
This is important, stop fooling around!  
Don't answer to strangers. Stick  
With your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)  
This is how easily the pit  
Opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground.

**Statistica: il testimone**

Non importa da che parte mi giro, è là  
che urla. Non importa come corro,  
fermandomi a prendere il fiato—  
poiché sono io la persona che urla  
mentre il rombo di un motore sorpassa  
il pomeriggio.

So che dovrei smettere di guardare, fare  
ciò che la mamma mi dice—girare  
la faccia al muro e dirlo a Gesù—ma  
continuo a ricordarmi di cose,  
chiare e piccole: il suo orologio,  
il suo polso, i due ovali color grigio  
scalfiti nei suoi sandali ribaltati per aria.

Ora devo percorrere questa terra senza fede  
che non sa aggiustare l'abisso per  
renderlo un campo di fiori.  
Camminerò finché incontro  
un verde oblio... poi  
mi sdraierò nella sua dolcezza,  
nella culla infinita delle sue braccia.

**Wiederkehr**

Mi voleva soltanto per la felicità:  
per camminare in aria  
e non pensarci sopra,  
per vedere il sorriso  
iniziato nei suoi occhi  
fermarsi sulle labbra  
che accarezzava.

Soltanto sperava, nel buio, di annusare  
la pioggia; e mentre lui vedeva come stavo  
seduta immobile per raccogliere la pioggia  
che non toccavo dentro di me, non mi ha  
mai domandato se io volevo rimanere.  
Per questo, quando la scelta arrivò,  
mi sono allungata verso di lei.

**Statistic: The Witness**

No matter where I turn, she is there  
screaming. No matter how  
I run, pause to catch my breath—  
until I am the one screaming  
as the drone of an engine overtakes  
the afternoon.

I know I should stop looking, do  
as my mother says—turn my head  
to the wall and tell Jesus—but  
I keep remembering things,  
clearer and smaller: his watch,  
his wrist, the two ashen ovals  
etched on her upturned sandals.

Now I must walk this faithless earth  
which cannot readjust an abyss  
into flowering meadow.  
I will walk until I reach  
green oblivion... then  
I will lie down in its kindness,  
in the bottomless lull of her arms.

**Wiederkehr**

He only wanted me for happiness:  
to walk in air  
and not think so much,  
to watch the smile  
begun in his eyes  
end on the lips  
his eyes caressed.

He merely hoped, in darkness, to smell  
rain; and though he saw how still  
I sat to hold the rain untouched  
inside me, he never asked  
if I would stay. Which is why,  
when the choice appeared,  
I reached for it.



**Proposta dell'Averno**

*Potessi sfiorarti la caviglia, lui bisbiglia, proprio  
nella parte interna, sopra l'osso—si avvicina,  
il fiato sa di limo e pepperoncini—sono certo  
che saprei fare l'amore. Lei considera  
l'offerta, segretamente eccitata, anche se non  
capiva chiaramente la sua intenzione. Era bravo  
con le parole, parole che vanno dirette al fegato.  
Stava innamorandosi di lui a causa della noia—  
racchiusa in questo luogo non così povero, con  
oscene gargolle di pietra e drappi broccati con  
lingue di fuoco? La sua caviglia brucia dove l'ha  
descritta. Sospira, quando sua madre s'inciampa sulla  
superficie, è presa per la nocca—d'improvviso disperata—  
mentre il Grande Uomo soddisfa il proprio desiderio.*

**Telegrafando a casa**

Perché lupi non perdano i loro latrati  
e bottegai le loro domande,

spostati sempre; anche se le ginocchia stillano  
rosso come due mele macchiate,

spostati sempre, con testa fiera,  
oltre la ciottola fredda del mendicante,

oltre i fuochi fatui sotto le castagne  
e sottoportici rumoreggianti

con storie di odissea e di cuore spezzato  
finché, girato un angolo, stai

ferma a guardare: imboscata  
da una finestra con canarini

splendenti come mille  
narcissi d'oro.

### Hades' Pitch

*If I could just touch your ankle, he whispers, there on the inside, above the bone — I leans closer, breath of lime and peppers — I know I could make love to you. She considers this, secretly thrilled, though she wasn't quite sure what he meant. He was good with words, words that went straight to the liver. Was she falling for him out of sheer boredom— cooped up in this anything-but-humble dive, stone gargoyles leering and brocade drapes licked with fire? Her ankle burns where he described it. She sighs just as her mother aboveground stumbles, is caught by the fetlock—bereft in an instant— while the Great Man drives home his desire.*

### Wiring Home

Lest the wolves loose their whistles  
and shopkeepers inquire,

keep moving; though your knees flush  
red as two chapped apples,

keep moving, head up,  
past the beggar's cold cup,

past fires banked under chestnuts  
and the trumpeting kiosk's

tales of odyssey and heartbreak  
until, turning the corner, you stand

staring: ambushed  
by a window of canaries

bright as a thousand  
golden narcissi.



Strength

***Two Sonnets from Dante's Tenzone with Forese Donati***

Translated by Jordan Mills Pleasant

**Jordan Mills Pleasant** studies theoretical linguistics and philosophy, with a focus in semiotics at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. His current research treats Thomas Kuhn's problematic theory of paradigmatic incommensurability with the necessity of panlingual translatability. In his free time, Jordan writes and translates formal poetry from Latin, Italian, Provençal, and Bengali. He would like to dedicate these two translations to Professor Molly Morrison, without whose help they would have been impossible.

***Introduction to the Text***

The *Tenzone* translated here is a far too ignored sequence of six sonnets that constitute an exchange between Dante Alighieri and Forese Donati. Dante Alighieri, the author of the first poem, was born in Florence, Italy in June of 1265 and died in September of 1321, not long after completing his *Divine Comedy*. Forese Donati, the author of the second poem, was born in Florence, Italy around 1260 and died sometime around 1296. The two sonnets here are the first two sonnets in a series of six sonnets which together make up a *tenzone*, or a correspondence of invectives. The Italian *tenzone*, fairly common in the Middle Ages, is polemical and insulting in nature, and comes from earlier humorous Provençal rhymes. Although an animosity between the two poets seems clear from the poems themselves, scholars have debated about whether this animosity was real, because Forese Donati appears in Dante's *Purgatorio* 23 and 24, where he has a quite friendly exchange with Dante the Pilgrim. Their true relationship, therefore, is unclear. Their tense relationship in the invectives, however, is what matters here, and the poems themselves will best to demonstrate that.

## I

Chi udisse tossir la malfatata  
 moglie di Bicci vocato Forese,  
 otrebbe dir ch'ell'ha forse vernata  
 ove si fa 'l cristallo, in quel paese.

Di mezzo agosto la truove infreddata:  
 or sappi che de' far d'ogni altro mese...;  
 e non le val perché dorma calzata,  
 merzé del copertoio c'ha cortonese.

La tosse, 'l freddo e l'altra mala voglia  
 non l'addovien per omor ch'abbia vecchi,  
 ma per difetto ch'ella sente al nido.

Piange la madre, c'ha più d'una doglia,  
 dicendo: "Lassa, che per fichi secchi  
 messa l'avre' 'n casa del conte Guido!"

## II

L'altra notte mi venne una gran tosse,  
 perch'ì non avea che tener a dosso;  
 ma incontanente che fu di', fui mosso  
 per gir a guadagnar ove che fosse.

Udite la fortuna ove m'addosse:  
 ch'ì credetti trovar perle in un bosso  
 e be' fiorin coniatì d'oro rosso;  
 ed i' trovai Alaghier tra le fosse,

legato a nodo ch'ì non saccio il nome,  
 se fu di Salamone o d'altro saggio.  
 Allora mi segna' verso 'l levante:

e que' mi disse: "Per amor di Dante,  
 scio' mi". Ed i' non potti veder come:  
 tornai a dietro, e compie' mi' viaggio.

I

Whoever hears the poor ill-fated wife  
of that push-over, called Forese, cough,  
might want to say that she has passed her winters  
in some cold land that harvests only ice.

Even in August one will find her cold  
(so one can guess her state in other months):  
and she can't sleep well even in her socks,  
because her blanket's simply much too short.

The cough, the cold, and all the other ills  
don't plague her just because she's growing old,  
but for some lack she feels at night in bed.

Her mother cries (she has more than one grief),  
saying: "Ah! But for a few dried figs  
I could have married her to Count Guido!"

II

The other night a bad cough came upon me  
because I didn't have a single blanket;  
but suddenly day came, and I then rose  
to walk around and scrounge what I might find,

and let me tell you what great luck I had:  
I hoped to find a dainty box of pearls,  
or florins minted in a reddish gold,  
but in a ditch, I found old Alighierio

tied in a knot—I don't know how to say...  
Solomon's maybe, or else some other sage's—  
and then I signed the cross while facing East,

whereat the old man cried: "For love of Dante  
untie me!" But I couldn't quite see how,  
so turned, and carried on my former way.

***Poems by James Schevill***  
***translated by Gianluca Rizzo***

**Gianluca Rizzo** was born in Lecce in 1979. He graduated with a Laurea in Communication Studies from the University of Bologna and wrote his dissertation on the semiotics of cinema. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he is working on his final dissertation. His research deals with issues in language and genre in Teofilo Folengo's *Baldus*. His translations of contemporary poetry appeared in *Caper* by Paul Vangelisti (Piacenza: ML & NLF, 2006) and *Nuova Poesia Americana: San Francisco* (Milano: Mondadori, due this fall).

Born in 1920, **James Schevill** is a poet, novelist, and dramatist. He has been on the faculties of both San Francisco State and Brown Universities. Schevill has received numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Ford Fellowship, and a McKnight fellowship in writing. His poetry works include *The Stalingard Elegies* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1964) *The American Fantasies: Collected Poems 1945-1981* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), *Ambiguous Dancers of Fame: Collected Poems 1945-1986* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), *The Complete American Fantasies* (Ohio University Press, 1996), *New and Selected Poems* (Ohio University Press, 2000). Schevill lives in Berkeley with his wife.

**Nota sulla traduzione di “The Wound of Flatness”**

Per apprezzare pienamente “*The wound of flatness*” il lettore dovrà tenere presente il breve romanzo di Edwin A. Abbot “*Flatland, A romance of many dimensions*”. Il rapporto fra questi due testi va al di là della semplice citazione, caratterizzandosi piuttosto come un’operazione di risemantizzazione compiuta da Schevill sul testo di Abbot. Ed è proprio in questa operazione che, a mio avviso, risiede l’elemento più affascinante di “*The wound of flatness*”.

Ad ogni modo, perché il lettore sia in grado di giudicare indipendentemente occorrerà fornirgli tutti gli elementi necessari all’interpretazione, e fra questi l’aspetto intertestuale dovrà avere un posto di primo piano. Il problema si complica a causa della marginalità del testo di Abbot che, se è poco familiare al pubblico di lingua inglese, è quasi del tutto sconosciuto in Italia, nonostante sia stato tradotto già da alcuni anni.

Il traduttore si trova di fronte, dunque, a due problemi: da un lato dovrà riconoscere l’oscuro, ma cruciale, riferimento intertestuale, e dall’altro dovrà comunicarne l’esistenza al lettore italiano. Se il caso mi ha aiutato a risolvere il primo problema, facendomi incappare in “*Flatland*” proprio mentre lavoravo alla traduzione di Schevill, il secondo apparirebbe quasi insormontabile. Fornire al lettore italiano le informazioni necessarie all’interpretazione della poesia all’interno del testo è impensabile, così come sarebbe fuorviante introdurre dettagliati apparati paratestuali. La scelta da me compiuta è piuttosto un compromesso fra questi due approcci. Se da un lato ho tentato di enfatizzare la metafora bidimensionale alla base dei due testi attraverso alcune scelte lessicali, dall’altro lato mi sono visto costretto a ricorrere alla risorsa estrema del traduttore, la nota a piè di pagina, che pur se brevemente rimanda il lettore al testo utilizzato come fonte da Schevill e che, lungi dal colmare la lacuna di fronte alla quale si troverà il lettore italiano, serve piuttosto a me per esorcizzare la distanza che vedo aprirsi fra testo e testo, fra lingua e lingua.



**James Schevill****Strada con pianoforte**

Non devi avere scrupoli, Margaret.  
 Fatti guidare dal corpo per una volta,  
 Come facciamo noi . Dimentica i sentimenti  
 Della tradizione e della posizione che hai raggiunto. L'arte non è  
 Aristocratica. Sarà minore il tuo disappunto  
 In me hai sempre visto non soltanto un marito  
 E un amante, ma un pianista. Un piano  
 In Germania ha un suono particolare,  
 Un tono orgoglioso, percussivo,  
 Il nostro ritmo martellante la nostra melodia desiderante;  
 Quindi posso capire perchè scrivi  
 Di me come fossi ancora un pianista,  
 Anche se non suonerò mai più.  
 Il fatto è che le mie mani sono rovinatae.  
 Congelate. Il mignolo della mano sinistra fuori uso,  
 Insieme a tre dita della mano destra.  
 Sollevo la tazza usando pollice e mignolo.  
 Quello che mi riesce meglio col mignolo è sparare;  
 Mi porto sempre dietro il fucile,  
 Anche se non posso continuare a sparare per sempre.  
 Forse posso suonare la parte del cacciatore nel *Der Freischütz* <sup>1</sup>.

*Esempio di umorismo forcaiolo*

L'altro giorno un piano è apparso in strada,  
 Sì, in strada, proprio all'angolo della Piazza Rossa  
 Una strada di palazzi residenziali fatti saltare per aria  
 Per snidare i cecchini. A qualche soldato gli dispiaceva  
 Per il piano e l'ha portato fuori in strada  
 Prima che il palazzo esplodesse.  
 Ogni soldato di passaggio ci pestava canzoni  
 Con un dito, canzoni popolari, canzoni d'amore,  
 Ninne-nanne, esplorazioni del proprio passato.  
 Poi Kurt Hahnke, te lo ricordi  
 Al conservatorio nel 1937?–  
 (Tutti quanti dicevano che "prometteva bene",  
 quel cliché crudele, "una buona tecnica,  
 però è un po' freddo; gli manca l'esperienza").  
 Be', ha suonato benissimo qui questo gennaio.  
 Un centinaio di soldati si sono accucciati ad ascoltare

**James Schevill**

**THE PIANO ON THE STREET**

You must be ruthless, Margaret.  
Make your flesh judge for a change,  
As our does here. Forget the sentiments  
Of tradition and status. Art is no aristocrat.  
Then your disappointment will be less.  
Always you saw in me not just a husband  
And lover, but a pianist. A piano  
In Germany is a peculiar sound,  
A prideful, percussive tone,  
Our battering rhythm and yearning melody;  
So I can understand why you still  
Write of me as a pianist,  
When I will never play again.  
The fact is my hands are ruined.  
Frostbite. The small finger on my left hand is gone,  
And three middle fingers of my right hand.  
I hold my drinking cup with thumb and little finger.  
The thing I do best with the little finger is shoot;  
I carry my rifle with me all the time,  
Though I can't go on shooting forever.  
Perhaps, I can play the huntsman in *Der Freishütz*.  
Gallows Humor

The other day a piano appeared in the street,  
Yes, in the street, just off *Red Square*,  
A street of apartment houses blown up  
To flush out snipers. Some soldier felt sorry  
For the piano and carried it out into the street  
Before the house flew into the air.  
Every passing soldier hammered away at it  
With one finger, folksongs, love songs,  
Nursery songs, explorations of the past.  
Then Kurt Hahnke, you remember him  
From the conservatory in 1937?—  
(Everyone called him “promising,”  
That cruel cliché, “a fine technique,  
But a little cold’ he lacks experience.”)  
Well, he played very well here this January.  
A hundred soldiers squatted listening

Nei loro cappotti pesanti, coperte sporche  
 Sopra gli elmetti e le teste per stare caldi.  
 Ha suonato l'*Appassionata* di Beethoven.  
 Se solo potessi scriverti un'analisi  
 Di questa sonata da un punto di vista militare!  
 Ti ricordi quando l'abbiamo sentita suonata da Giesecking?  
 Veloce più veloce fino alla conclusione inevitabile.  
 Kurt l'ha suonata anche più velocemente; tu avresti  
 Detto *senza pietà*, mentre noi con la musica  
 Siamo sempre stati troppo teneri – "Beethoven  
 È magnifico" Certo, ma cosa dire del fatto  
 di non avere scampo, della brutalità, della frustrazione, della rabbia?  
 Beethoven era Beethoven, condannato a essere tedesco anche lui.  
 Aveva capito Napoleone ("Dopo tutto era un  
 uomo anche lui, come tutti").  
 Così come Stalingrado aveva capito Beethoven.  
 Il primo pianissimo, quel cadere e risollevarsi  
 Del La minore con il vibrato improbabile alla fine

Della frase, uscì come un sussurro dalla neve.  
 Tu sai quanto abbia sempre odiato i commenti letterari  
 Sulla musica; quasi quasi ero d'accordo con Goebbels  
 Quando mise fuori legge la critica d'arte;  
 Ma adesso penso che le parole siano molto simili alle note,  
 Ciascuna fa confluire allusioni e dettagli in un ritmo preciso.  
 Ricordi, l'*Appassionata* la si potè suonare  
 Solo una dozzina d'anni dopo la morte di Beethoven.  
 I pianoforti della sua epoca non erano *forti* abbastanza.  
 Erano costruiti per l'addomesticata eleganza dei salotti.  
 Non potevano neanche sostenere la melodia lenta  
 dell'*Andante*.  
 Erano stati costruiti come ornamenti barocchi per  
 ninfe che guardano di sottocchi.

Adesso so cosa significano davvero i vibrati di  
 Beethoven in questa sonata, sono ragnatele di enigmi  
 Fuori dalle quali si tessono, non soluzioni,  
 Ma transizioni infinite, altre svolte, altri tasti.  
 L'unico momento di quiete è nel secondo movimento,  
 Una necessità assoluta di tranquillità e pace  
 In mezzo alla violenza, alla pietà compulsiva,  
 E la compulsione pietosa (capisci la  
 differenza?).  
 Per la prima volta ho sentito gente che ascoltava per davvero

In their heavy coats, dirty blankets  
 Over their helmets and heads for warmth.  
 He played the *Appassionata* of Beethoven.  
 If I could only write you an analysis  
 Of this sonata from a *military* point of view!  
 Remember when we heard Gieseeking play it?  
 Fast and faster to the inevitable end.  
 Kurt played it even faster: you would  
 Have called it *merciless*, we were  
 Always too sentimental about music—  
 “Beethoven is beautiful.” Yes, but what about  
 Compulsion, brutality, frustration, rage?  
 Beethoven was Beethoven, sentenced to be a German too  
 He understood Napoleon (“He is only  
     a man after all, like any others.”)  
 Just as Stalingrad understood Beethoven.  
 The first pianissimo, that falling and rising  
 F minor chord with the uncanny trill at the end  
 Of the phrase, came whispering out of the snow.  
 You know how I always hated literary comments  
 On music; I almost agreed with Goebbels  
 When he banned criticism of the arts;  
 But I think now words are much the same as notes,  
 Each merges suggestion and detail in precise rhythm.  
 Remember, the *Appassionata* was only played  
 Some twelve years *after* Beethoven’s death.  
 The pianos of his time couldn’t stand the force;  
 They were built for the tame elegance of salons.  
 They couldn’t even sustain the slow melody  
     of the *Andante*.  
 They were built for baroque ornaments and  
     peering nymphs.  
 I know what Beethoven’s trills  
 In this sonata really mean, they are webs of enigma  
 Out of which is spun, not resolution,  
 But endless transition, other turns, other keys.  
 The second movement is the only rest,  
 An *absolute necessity* for tranquility and peace  
 Between violence, compulsive pity,  
 And pitiful compulsion (do you understand  
 the difference?).  
 For the first time I heard people really listening  
 To this movement. *There is no modulation in it*,  
 As if to say the lost harmony exists only

Questo movimento. *Non c'è dentro nessuna modulazione,*  
Che è come dire che l'armonia persa esiste solo  
In un tasto, in uno scopo, in una pace interiore.  
Poi è di nuovo la furia, che guida le corde e i ritmi sincopati,  
E alla fine non c'è nessuna liberazione, nessuna fratellanza,  
Semplicemente forza e un'andatura fortissima fino al disastro.  
Questo è il modo di finire, tre corde veloci,  
Tre spari rapidi, tre dita congelate;  
Al di là della musica, il suono dell'artiglieria in lontananza,  
Ma stanno tutti quanti a sentire le note che esplodono.  
Strade, detriti in ascolto, macchine appese  
A muri scheletrici, a ritorti lampioni, colpiti dalle raffiche  
è così che la sordità trova il suo silenzio interiore ...

### Ferite di un mondo piatto

Viviamo sul bordo livellato delle cose.  
Gli occhi vedono piani, diritti,  
Questo dannato paese che non curva mai;  
Sogni diavoli in completi bianchi  
Che riscaldano rosse ferite,  
Marciare, marciare, fino a che non cadi  
Dal bordo del mondo di Colombo.  
Conosco le fantasie dei cartografi:  
Uomini che sognano curve,  
Donne, mondi, bicchieri di vino,  
Rotondità ritornanti.

Tutto ciò che passa da qui  
Ha un senso di piattezza  
E mi tocca dirti  
Che anch'io sono giù di corda.  
Sono in un ospedale da campo  
In attesa che mi portino a casa.  
La data la cambiano sempre  
Sul nostro calendario congelato.  
Potremmo dover aspettare per sempre.

Dovresti sapere che un po' di tempo fa ...

In one key, one purpose, one inner peace.  
Then fury again, driving chords and syncopations,  
At the end no liberation, no brotherhood,  
Merely strength and fortissimo pace to disaster.  
This is the way to end, three quick chords,  
Three quick shots, three frozen fingers;  
Behind the music, the sound of distant artillery,  
But everyone listens only to the exploding notes.  
Streets, rubble listen, cars hang  
On the skeleton walls, on the bent, shot out street lamps  
As deafness finds its inner sound ...

#### THE WOUND OF FLATNESS

We live on the ruled edge of things.  
The eye sees level, straight,  
This damn country that never curves;  
You dream of devils in white suits  
Heating up red wounds,  
Of marching, marching, till you fall off  
The edge of Columbus' world.  
I know the fantasies of mapmakers:  
Men who dream of curves,  
Women, worlds, wine glasses,  
Roundness that returns.

Everything that passes here  
Has a sense of flatness  
And I must tell you  
That I, too, am down.  
I am in a field hospital  
The date is always changed  
On our frozen calendar.  
We may wait forever.

You must know sometime ...

Mi hanno fatto saltare le gambe  
 Al di sotto del ginocchio e della coscia.  
 Vicino a me giace una maschera  
 Senza il naso, senza un braccio.  
 "Non avrò più bisogno  
 Di fazzoletti", dice.  
 "E se piangi?" scherzo.  
 "Non ce ne sarà occasione", ride,  
 "Di sicuro siamo nel mondo dei quadrati<sup>2</sup>.  
 Sig. Gambe Piatte e Sig. Naso Piatto".

Ti mando il mio amore dalla superficie della terra.  
 È meglio che non ci incontriamo mai più.  
 Tu nel tuo mondo rotondo, ed io quaggiù;  
 Le mie gambe si ricorderebbero sempre  
 Di quando ti amavano, ti circondavano,  
 Camminavano con te, correvano verso la tua rotondità.

Qualche volte penso di ammazzarmi,  
 Ma ho dato una mano a costruire questo mondo  
 E ci vivrò quanto più a lungo possibile,  
 Come uno scacco dal fondo liscio  
 Che attraversa fino al limite una scacchiera.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>. Opera lirica di Carl Maria von Weber del 1821. Il cacciatore cui Shevill fa riferimento è il protagonista dell'opera. Dopo essere stato sconfitto in una gara di tiro al bersaglio, il cacciatore cerca un modo per rifarsi agli occhi degli abitanti del villaggio e soprattutto a quelli dell'amata. Un individuo sinistro, che si scoprirà essere in combutta col demonio, si offre di aiutarlo e gli procura sette proiettili magici. Di questi, sei colpiscono qualunque cosa il cacciatore voglia, il settimo sarà guidato dalla volontà del demonio. Nel giorno della rivincita il cacciatore spreca i suoi sei colpi infallibili in futili dimostrazioni di bravura. Non gli rimane che esplodere il settimo, che finisce per colpire a morte la sua amata.

<sup>2</sup>. Riferimento all'opera di Edwin A. Abbot intitolata "Flatland, A romance of many dimensions", 1884. Libro satirico, molto popolare all'inizio del secolo scorso, descrive un mondo bidimensionale nel quale non esiste la profondità

My legs were shot off  
Below the knee and thigh.  
Next to me lies a mask  
Without a nose or arm.  
"I'll never use any more  
Handkerchiefs," he says.  
"What if you cry?" I joke.  
"We won't have a chance to cry," he laughs,  
"We're in the square world now for sure.  
Mr. Flat Legs and Mr. Flat Nose."

I send you love from the earth's surface.  
It is best if we never meet again.  
You in your round world, I down here;  
For my legs would always remember  
Loving you, encircling you,  
Walking with you, running to your roundness.

Sometimes I think of killing myself,  
But I helped to make this world  
And I'll live in it as long as I can,  
Like a chessman with a flat bottom  
Moved across a board to the edge.





The world

## ***Traduttori a duello/ Dueling Translators***

**Section Edited by Gaetano Cipolla**

*It has been said that a text of poetry or prose, translated by ten equally knowledgeable translators, will result in ten different texts. In theory, the different versions should convey what is known as the kernel meaning, that is, the basic message contained in the original text. This section of Italian Journal of Translation will test this theory by asking our readers to translate a text chosen by the editors, using whatever style or approach they consider best. The submissions will then be printed with the original text. We will try to publish as many entries as possible, space allowing. For this issue, I selected the following poem by Guido Gozzano. Send your version of this poem and write a paragraph describing your approach. You may submit additional poems or short prose texts that in your estimation pose challenging problems. Send your submissions to me or Luigi Bonaffini.*

### Elogio degli amori ancillari

I

Allor che che viene con novelle sue,  
ghermir mi piace l'agile fantesca  
che secretaria antica è fra noi due.

M'accende il riso della bocca fresca,  
l'attesa vana, il motto arguto, l'ora,  
e il profumo d'istoria boccacesca...

Ella m'irride, si dibatte, implora,  
invoca il nome della sua padrona:  
"Ah! Che vergogna! Povera Signora!

Ah! Povera Signora!..." E s'abbandona.

II

Gaie figure di decamerone,  
le cameriste dan senza tormento,  
più sana voluttà che le padrone.

Non la scaltrezza del martirio lento,  
non da morbosità polsi riarsi,  
e non il tedioso sentimento

che fa le notti lunghe e i sonni scarsi,  
non dopo voluttà l'anima triste:  
ma un più sereno e maschio sollazzarsi.

Lodo l'amore delle cameriste!

Not many translators have accepted the challenge, probably because our journal has not been widely circulated yet. Nevertheless two versions have been received for the “Elogio degli amori ancillari” and we are pleased to publish them. The first was done by Michael Palma and the second by Gaetano Cipolla. Both translations can be compared to see how two practicing translators solved the difficulties posed by the poem. Michael chose to be faithful to the rhyme

**Elogio degli amori ancillari  
by Guido Gozzano**

**Translated by Michael Palma**

**Ancillary Amours**

I

I like to seize the nimble servant who  
comes with her salty tales, since long ago  
the trusted emissary between us two.

The laughter of her fresh mouth makes me glow,  
the playful pause, the tart remark, the pout,  
and the scent of a story out of Boccaccio ...

She laughs at me, she struggles, starts to shout,  
and in the name of her mistress she entreats:  
“Oh, the poor lady! The shame if it gets out!

Poor lady! ...” And she climbs between the sheets.

II

Gay figures from decamerons are these  
maids, without a load of misery,  
give healthier pleasures than their mistresses.

Not the slow torture dealt so cunningly,  
not the dry fevered wrists of the wretched wight,  
and not the tedious sentimentality

that murders sleep and frets away the night,  
not the animal that afterwards is sad:  
but a more calm and masculine delight.

I celebrate the serving maids I've had!  
scheme of the original. Gaetano made no attempt at rhyming his version. This one difference, however, makes an important contribution to the understanding and reception of the two versions in English. We invite our readers to comment on the two versions. No doubt there will be some disagreement, but that is the goal of this section: to discuss translation problems in view of reaching something of a consensus on what makes a good translation.

**Elogio degli amori ancillari  
by Guido Gozzano**

**Translated by Gaetano Cipolla**

**In Praise of Ancillary loves**

I

When she comes in with some fresh news,  
I like to grab the slippery chambermaid  
Who's been an ancient go-between for us.

The laugh from her young mouth arouses me,  
As does the futile wait, her sharp retorts,  
The hour and perfume of a Boccaccian tale.

She teases me, she struggles, she implores  
She starts invoking her poor mistress' name  
"How shameful! Ah, poor mistress, what a shame!"

"Ah, my poor mistress!" But she then gives in.

II

Gay characters of our imagination,  
Our chambermaids provide without torment  
More healthy sensuality than mistresses.

Not the slow suffering by cunning wrought,  
Not pulses burning up with morbidity,  
And not the empty sentiment that makes

Our nights unending and sleep hard to come.  
Not sadness in our soul after the loving,  
But a more masculine and calm enjoyment.

I praise the love of chambermaids.

The challenge for the next issue of *Journal of Italian Translation* is a sonnet by Cecco Angiolieri. It is a dialogue between Cecco and his Becchina that is a clear parody of the poets of the Dolce Stil Novo with their “*donne angelicate*.” Becchina is nothing like her aristocratic counterparts that appear in Guinizelli, Cavalcanti, and Dante.

**Dialogo fra Cecco e Becchina**  
(XLVII, *Rime*)

-- Becchin'amor! -- Che vuo', falso tradito?  
 -- Che mi perdoni. -- Tu non ne se' degno.  
 -- Merzè, per Deo! -- Tu vien molto gecchito.  
 -- E verrò sempre. -- Che sarammi pegno?

-- La buona fè.-- Tu ne se' mal fornito.  
 -- Non inver' di te.-- Non calmar, ch'i' ne vegno.  
 -- In che fallai? -- Tu sa' ch'i' l'abbo udito.  
 -- Dimmel, amor. -- Va', che ti vegna un segno!

-- Vuo' pur ch'i' moia? -- Anzi mi par mill'anni.  
 -- Tu non di' ben. -- Tu m'insegnerai.  
 -- Ed i' morrò -- Omè che tu m'inganni!

-- Die tel perdoni. -- E che, non te ne vai?  
 -- Or potess'io! -- Tegnoti per li panni?  
 -- Tu tieni 'l cuore. -- E terrò co' tuoi guai.

***The Taming of the Secretary:  
Reflections on Some English Translations of Machiavelli's *Il  
Principe****

**Stefano U. Baldassarri**

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Sometimes, when I teach, I feel like Oscar Wilde's *Canterville ghost*. The more I try to impress my students, the more they seem to sink into their adolescent aloofness. Yet, over the years, much to my initial surprise, I have discovered there is one feature in literature that usually captures their interest, if the shell of their juvenile self-confidence is not too hard. I'm speaking of philology, one of those "old schools", to borrow Dickens' words, "that seem never to have been young".<sup>1</sup> Maybe it is specifically because of its being so old that philology often strikes students as brand new, as an unexpected discovery. Philology, like literature itself, like the very act of reading and writing, is something at once 'obvious' in the very etymological sense (that is, under everyone's nose) and yet difficult to define. Dictionaries give various meanings for it. To be sure, any author, from classical antiquity to the present, has his own idea of philology, just as of literature itself. Possibly the reason for this apparent paradox is that philology is a craft, not unlike literature, and, just like literature, the term 'craft' must be applied to it in all the nuances of the word. This means that skill, ability, curiosity, a natural tendency to doubt, investigate, ask questions and, ultimately, manipulate (even a touch of serendipity, if you will) are proper to both. Be that as it may, what strikes students the most (I am speaking, of course, of today's average students in their early twenties), is the practical side of philology, that dimension of 'making', 'creating' (Greek 'poien', hence 'poetry' in the original and highest sense) that involves both the author and the critic when they step through that 'looking glass' called literature. I am speaking of their discovering (in the time of virtual reality, internet, videogames and emails) that the text has a body; actually, that the text *is* a body, something as tangible as an animal or a cloth can be, with a 'texture' made of threads patiently woven by that indistinct, everchanging entity called the author (or by several authors, either at once or over a span of time). A texture, a pattern — I would say — whose traces can be found in the body of the

texts, in their margins, scars and wounds, in all the kinds of changes a book goes through in its life and afterlife, much like any creature with its many metamorphoses. In other words, most students are fascinated when they realize — as Paul Valéry says in his best-known aphorism — that there is no such thing as a ‘finished’ text; books simply happen to be ‘abandoned’ by their authors at some point.<sup>2</sup>

Nor are these images and ideas original with recent literary criticism; in fact, they are as old as philology, if not as literature itself. Suffice it to recall that in medieval exegesis ‘corpus’ (body) means the ‘sacra pagina’ (the sacred page) and ‘spiritus’ (spirit) its meaning.<sup>3</sup> The text has always been perceived as a living compound of body and soul. As for its scars and wounds, Baroque poetics (just to name one) offers plenty of evidence.<sup>4</sup>

All this is, again, well known and yet no less surprising. Fortunately for us, philology is not an only child. She has at least two sisters: rhetoric and hermeneutics. Here is where things really start getting interesting, that is, when students realize that it is to all three ladies at once (Philology, Rhetoric and Hermeneutics) that they must turn if they want to make the most of literature and truly enjoy it. Here is also where another field that nowadays seems to raise interest among scholars as well as students (at least judging from personal teaching experience) comes into play: translation studies. Not only the amount of contributions devoted to translation theory and practice in the last years has grown to remarkable proportions, but students too seem to be fascinated, in most cases, by the various ways of rendering a text, as well as by the hermeneutical benefits of this process. This, in turn, has helped me to better understand the ‘Canterville ghost syndrome’ mentioned above. I believe one of the reasons why students are sometimes (if not frequently) unimpressed by the classics they read in school is that most recent English translations are (literally) monotonous; they all follow the same implied stereotype, to the point of making such different authors as Petronius, Tacitus, Xenophon, and Lucian (to limit the examples to ancient literature) sound the same. They efface the originals’ peculiarities by hiding their style under a uniform, misleading veneer. The rationale behind this unfortunate, arbitrary choice is clear. All these renditions are — as Lawrence Venuti lamented in a famous monograph —<sup>5</sup> ‘fluent’ and easy to follow, so much so that they read like samples of modern journalism (especially crisp editorials) or minimalist short-stories far ahead of their time, if the original stands out for concision.

In other words, George Orwell's worst linguistic fear has come true.<sup>6</sup> It is a sad case of 'reverse Ciceronianism', as it were, thinking of the many humanist complaints over Renaissance translators who styled all their Latin versions after Cicero's rich prose, uncritically holding it up as the best (and universal) literary model.<sup>7</sup>

English versions of Machiavelli's *Prince* are a case in point. In particular, George Bull's — which happens to be both the best known and the most widely adopted in American university courses — can be considered exemplary in this regard. As advertised by the Penguin blurb on the back of this fortunate edition, "The tough realities of Machiavelli's Italian are well preserved in the clear, unambiguous English of George Bull's revised translation".<sup>8</sup> Although it is meant as a compliment, such a statement should make any scholar of Machiavelli immediately suspicious. Far from being straightforward and clear, the Florentine secretary is known for his intentional ambiguity, a feature revealed by the complex and strategically involved prose of its most famous political treatise, as all his opponents have always pointed out.<sup>9</sup> Fluency and readability are certainly not among *The Prince's* qualities, at least not by the standards of present-day prose. When dealing with a text of this nature and time period, one should always remember (especially a translator) that medieval and early Renaissance books were more often listened to than read. The oral dimension of literature must constantly be kept in mind when studying a text authored before the invention of the printing press or shortly after it. This helps to account, among other things, for a certain sense of 'repetitiousness' in most works of the time, as is typical of spoken language. In plying their trade, both verse and prose translators alike, not just the former, must resort — to borrow from Dickens again — to "that very useful appendage, a voice".<sup>10</sup>

In the case of Lorenzo de' Medici, the second and final dedicatee of *The Prince*, he would have listened to his secretary Goro Gheri read him the treatise aloud, as was customary at the time.

All this is (or should be) common knowledge among scholars. And yet in his introduction Bull candidly admits: "I have tried to put Machiavelli into clear, unambiguous English, and therefore sometimes shortened his periods and made use of a variety of near synonyms available in English to avoid monotony".<sup>11</sup> In other words, he has made the original more 'palatable' to the average modern English speaking reader (whatever that may mean) by doing away with



any feature that may strike him or her as odd or difficult to understand. We do not have to go far into Bull's translation to see the consequences of his strategy. First of all, in his English version virtually the same style characterizes both the preface to Lorenzo and the chapters forming the treatise proper despite their being so different in the original, as most editors of *The Prince* note. As for a more specific example, let us take the beginning of Chapter II (*Hereditary principalities*), where Machiavelli writes:

Io lascerò indrieto el ragionare delle repubbliche, perché altra volta ne ragionai a lungo.<sup>12</sup> Volterommi solo al principato, e andrò tessendo gli orditi soprascritti, e disputerò come questi principati si possino governare e mantenere.

Dico adunque, che negli stati ereditarii e assuefatti al sangue del loro principe, sono assai minori difficoltà a mantenerli che ne' nuovi, perché basta solo non preterire l'ordine de' sua antenati, e di poi temporeggiare con gli accidenti; in modo che, se tale principe è di ordinaria industria, sempre si manterrà nel suo stato, se non è una straordinaria ed eccessiva forza che ne lo privi; e, privato che ne fia, quantunque di sinistro abbi lo occupatore, lo riacquista.<sup>13</sup>

Here is how Bull renders this passage:

I shall leave out any discussion of republics, since I discussed them at length on another occasion. I shall deal only with the principality, and I shall follow the order set out above, and debate how these principalities can be governed and maintained.

I say, then, that in hereditary states, accustomed to their prince's family, there are far fewer difficulties in maintaining one's rule than in new principalities; because it is enough merely not to neglect the institutions founded by one's ancestors and then to adapt policy to events. In this way, if the prince is reasonably assiduous he will always maintain his rule, unless some extraordinary and inordinate force deprive him of it; and if so deprived, whenever the usurper suffers a setback he will reconquer.<sup>14</sup>

As one can easily notice, hardly any of the rhetorical features of

the Italian original has been preserved, even in the case of such a simple metonymy as “il sangue del loro principe”, which could have been easily rendered with terms like “bloodline” or, to opt for a less ‘dramatic’ formula, “lineage”. More important still, Bull’s search for clarity has wiped away the technical terminology peculiar to many pages of Machiavelli’s *Prince*, such as the verbs “ragionare” and “tessere”, which the author drew from Florentine vernacular. These terms too could have been maintained, I believe, without puzzling the ‘average reader’ by adopting their English equivalents “reasoning” and “weaving”. The words, similes, and teachings that Machiavelli derives from the various ‘arti’ (guilds) thriving in late medieval and early Renaissance Florence are crucial not only to his style but to his political theory as well, as one can immediately notice from the *Prince*’s preface to the “Magnifico Lorenzo de’ Medici”.<sup>15</sup> Bull’s English reader, however, would certainly have a hard time noticing it. “Per forza di levare”, as Michelangelo would have said, Bull trivializes both Machiavelli’s theories and language.

Fortunately in recent times there have been several attempts at redressing this loose attitude towards *The Prince*. In particular, I would like to focus on the English translations by Angelo M. Codevilla and William J. Connell.<sup>16</sup> The former is a daring and most welcome example of what could be called, using German romantic terminology, a ‘foreignizing’ version.<sup>17</sup> Codevilla has tried to preserve Machiavelli’s syntax by offering a translation as complex as the original instead of explaining the text away for the students’ supposed benefit. Here is how he defines his own approach and goals in the opening paragraph of his introductory essay *Words and Power*:

*Traduttore traditore*: Translator, traitor. So goes an old Italian saying. Machiavelli offers the translator more than the normal incentives to translingual treason. He writes with apparent disregard for grammar and uses the same unspecialized words to convey different meanings in different contexts. His text is full of puns. He writes the way baseball’s Casey Stengel used to speak. The translator is tempted at every turn to “clean up” the text and to specify ambiguous meaning. But he cannot do so without impressing his own interpretation upon the text.<sup>18</sup>

This said, he offers some examples by explaining the various nuances Machiavelli may attach to such words as “convenire”, “stato”, “intendere” and “ordine”. He then underscores Machiavelli’s extensive use of the conditional and subjunctive moods,<sup>19</sup> as well as

of disjunctive and correlative particles, all of which enhance the probabilistic nature of his political discourse, before spelling out the strategy behind this new English version:

The present translation of *The Prince* allows scholars and students who do not know Italian to work with a text in which the translator has not resolved the problems of interpretation posed by Machiavelli. To this end I have tried, sometimes at the cost of readability, to translate every word in the same way throughout, while indicating the variant meanings in the endnotes. I have also tried to duplicate Machiavelli's syntax in English with as few changes as possible. Thus, I have tried to render verbs by verbs, nouns by nouns, and so on, and have retained the person, gender, tense, and punctuation of the original, as well as his wide use of the subjunctive mood. As a result, this translation may often appear awkward, but then those who read *The Prince* first in the original are likely to find other translations treacherously smooth. In sum, I content that the sacrifices of elegance made for the sake of faithfulness to the original are justified inasmuch as Machiavelli accomplished his larger ends by artful manipulation of linguistic details.<sup>20</sup>

We are, as we can see, at the opposite end from Bull's approach, and a far cry, too, from the practice of most twentieth-century English translators.<sup>21</sup> Let us see, for instance, how Codevilla renders the same passage from *The Prince* which I have quoted above as typical of Bull's style (beginning of Chapter II: *Hereditary principalities*):

I will leave aside *reasoning* of republics, because I *reasoned* of them at length on another occasion.<sup>22</sup> I will turn only to the *principlity*, and I will go *weaving the aforesaid warp*, and I will debate how these *principlities* may be governed and maintained.

I say, then, that there are far smaller difficulties involved in maintaining states hereditary and inured to the bloodline of their prince than in the new ones, because it suffices not to break the order of one's ancestors, and then to temporize with accidents; so that, if such a prince is of ordinary industriousness, he will always maintain himself in his state, if there is not an extraordinary and excessive force that deprives him of it; and, though he might become a private man, whatever disaster the occupier might have, he reacquires it.<sup>23</sup>

Codevilla does not hesitate to use obsolete or unusual terms

(for instance 'to temporize') to keep as close as possible to the 'departure text', nor does he have problems maintaining the connotative verbs ('ragionare', 'tessere') that Machiavelli borrows from the Florentine crafts. Also, unlike Bull he prefers to translate one word the same way throughout, true to his belief that "[...] to undersatnd what Machiavelli is doing, one must not assign to his words meanings more specific than he intends".<sup>24</sup>

The last English translation I want to speak of is also the most recent: William Connell's. A scholar well known and appreciated for his many studies on Renaissance Florence,<sup>25</sup> Connell tries to steer a middle course between Bull's free (and common) approach on the one hand and Codevilla's faithfulness to the letter on the other. In his opening essay he makes it clear from the outset that his rendition aims at both readability and precision, before providing the reader with a concise and yet very informative note on the history of English translations of *The Prince*, at least from the 1950s onwards.<sup>26</sup> In particular, Connell compares the pros and cons of what he calls 'consistent' vs. 'inconsistent' translations, to wit the various ways of coping with Machiavelli's strategically polysemous vocabulary. A fitting and well-known case is the rendering of Italian 'virtù' in *The Prince*: should the translator use its English cognate 'virtue' throughout the text or turn to terms like 'craft', 'skill', 'cleverness', 'ability', 'courage', 'power' and the like, depending on the passage where it occurs? Connell's favor (like Codevilla's) goes to the first option, having a higher opinion of the average reader's intelligence than most translators do. Consequently, he renders 'virtù' with 'virtue' and 'stato' with 'state' wherever they occur, fearing that an inconsistent version would — as he writes — make the English reader "lose contact with Machiavelli's careful manipulation of meaning-laden words in the original Italian".<sup>27</sup> Connell thus shows to be close to Codevilla's position, at least in principle. In practice, however, he will adopt a more flexible stance, trying to pay greater attention than Codevilla, as already anticipated in the introduction, to the current standards of fluency. In his striving to reach a mean between the two methods mentioned above, Connell offers an English text which satisfies the demands of both scholars and students by being at once readable and accurate, as well as provided with a rich apparatus of explanatory notes and an interesting appendix of 'related documents', to which I shall return. All these features indicate that Connell's edition was made with an eye to its use in class, as also shown by the

intelligent 'linguistic compromise', so to speak, he has opted for in his translation. In this regard, I will give an example of Connell's translating technique by quoting the same passage already excerpted from Bull and Codevilla (beginning of Chapter II: *Hereditary principalities*):

I shall leave out *reasoning* on republics because on another occasion I have discussed them at length.<sup>28</sup> I shall apply myself only to the principality; *I shall weave full cloth around the guiding threads* stated above; and I shall debate how these principalities may be governed and maintained.

I say therefore that in states that are hereditary and accustomed to the lineage of their prince there are many fewer difficulties in maintaining them than in new ones, for it suffices only not to break with the orders of one's ancestors and then to govern according to circumstances. So that if such a prince is of ordinary industry he will always maintain himself in his state, unless an extraordinary and excessive force deprives him of it. And even should he be so deprived, whenever the occupier experiences some mishap he reacquires it.<sup>29</sup>

Here (and throughout his translation) Connell makes an effort to preserve all the original figures of speech. To this purpose, he has rendered Machiavelli's use of technical terms through the English formulas italicized above ('to reason', as the Italian 'ragionare', and the metaphor of 'tessere gli orditi soprascritti', drawn from the art of weaving and cloth making, maintained through the image of 'weaving the guiding threads'). The metonymy referring to the prince's family ('il sangue del principe') has been slightly diluted, so to speak, by translating it as "the lineage of their prince";<sup>30</sup> on the other hand, Connell follows closely the strategy put forth in the introduction by translating consistently (again, here and throughout) such words as 'ordine' and 'stato' with their English cognates 'order' and 'state'. The result is a version as open to the reader's interpretation as Codevilla's (that is, without depending too much on the translator's view of the text and his or her hidden choices) and yet more readable (and therefore suitable for teaching purposes).

I will conclude this short review by quoting one more passage from these three English versions of *The Prince* as indicative of their author's hermeneutical and linguistic choices. This time I intend to focus on an excerpt that has recently attracted scholarly attention, namely the last section of chapter 18 (*How princes should honour their*

word). There Machiavelli alludes to a Tuscan proverb — a very common one at the time and cited by the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini among others, in his *Facezie* — <sup>31</sup> in the following paragraph:

Debbe, adunque, avere uno principe gran cura che non gli esca mai di bocca una cosa che non sia piena delle soprascritte cinque qualità, e paia, a vederlo e udirlo, tutto pietà, tutto fede, tutto integrità, tutto umanità, tutto religione. E non è cosa più necessaria a parere di avere che questa ultima qualità. *E gli uomini in universali iudicano più agli occhi che alle mani*; perché tocca a vedere a ognuno, a sentire a pochi.<sup>32</sup>

Let us focus on the expression italicized above. Here is how Bull renders the passage:

A prince, then, must be very careful not to say a word which does not seem inspired by the five qualities I have mentioned earlier. To those seeing and hearing him, he should appear a man of compassion, a man of good faith, a man of integrity, a kind and religious man. And there is nothing so important as to seem to have this last quality. *Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands*; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you.<sup>33</sup>

Once again Bull has gone to great lengths to make the text clear and easy to follow. To this end, he has sacrificed — as he does throughout — the original figures of speech and stylistic peculiarities. Machiavelli's anaphora, for instance, has been both changed and shortened by replacing the five "tutto" with "a man of ..." repeated four times. Also, the colloquial and crisp expression "che non gli esca mai di bocca una cosa che ..." has been substituted with the much more banal formula "A prince, then, must be very careful not to say a word which ...". If Bull's simplistic rendition of this passage gives us a further example of his technique, the same is true of both Codevilla and Connell. The former follows the original as closely as possible:

Therefore a prince must have great care that nothing ever leave his mouth that is not full of the above-written five qualities, and

that to see him and hear him, he appear all piety, all faith, all integrity, all humaneness, all religion. And there is nothing more necessary to seem to have than this last quality. *And men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands*; because to see is for everyone, to feel for a few.<sup>34</sup>

Far from standardizing Machiavelli's Italian after present-day English usage, Codevilla preserves the original syntax and idioms. He repeats, for instance, the original "tutto" five times ("all"), instead of replacing it with the ordinary, more readable formula of Bull's translation mentioned above ("a man of compassion, a man of good faith, a man of integrity, a kind and religious man"). Likewise he prefers a connotative word like 'humaness' to Bull's commonplace rendition ("a kind [...] man"). As for Connell's version, his English version of this passage is similar to Codevilla's, though it departs from it in the interpretation of two important verbs ("iudicano" and "sentire"), as we shall discuss shortly:

Thus a prince must take great care that nothing ever leave his mouth that is not full of the five qualities stated above, and that he appear, to hear him and to look at him, all compassion, all faith, all integrity, all humaneness, all religion — and there is nothing more necessary to appear to have than this last quality. And men as a whole judge more with their eyes than their hands, because everyone is permitted to see, but few are permitted to touch.<sup>35</sup>

True to the rules expounded in his introductory essay, Connell has preserved both Machiavelli's syntax, word choice and idioms. The sentence in this passage that has captured the attention of several scholars in recent years is "E gli uomini in universali iudicano più agli occhi che alle mani". As shown by Giovanni Bardazzi first and, more recently, by Hugo Jaekel, the underlying source is the following anecdote from Bracciolini's *Liber facetiarum* and the related moral/proverb:

Quidam aviculas capiens in cavea reclusas, stricto manibus capite interficiebat. Interim casu lacrimas coepit emittere. Tum una ex reclusis ait reliquis: 'Bono sitis animo, nam, ut video lacrimantem, nostri miseretur'. Hic senior ex eis: 'O fili, inquit,

*non ad oculos respice, sed ad manus'*; non ad verba, sed opera monstrans esse a nobis respiciendum.<sup>36</sup>

In his edition of the *Facezie* with facing Italian translation, Stefano Pittaluga renders the anecdote as follows:

Un tizio prendeva degli uccelletti chiusi in gabbia per ucciderli schiacciando loro la testa con le mani. Nel far questo capitò che cominciarono a lacrimargli gli occhi. Al che uno degli uccelletti in gabbia si rivolse agli altri: 'Fatevi coraggio! Vedo che piange: certo ha pietà di noi'. Ma il più anziano gli obiettò: 'Figliolo, non guardare agli occhi, ma alle mani!'. Dimostrazione di come si debbano considerare i fatti, non le parole.<sup>37</sup>

If, as seems most likely, Machiavelli's source in *The Prince* ch. 18 and in the first dedication of the treatise is this 'facetia' as told in Bracciolini's book,<sup>38</sup> I find it plausible to express, at once, an opinion on the three English versions mentioned above and propose an interpretation of this passage slightly different from that of most scholars. First, the Latin expression "non ad oculos respice, sed ad manus", which Machiavelli seems to have in mind when writing "E gli uomini in universali iudicano più agli occhi che alle mani", leads me to prefer Codevilla's translation to the other two. True to the method expounded in the introductory essay, Codevilla does not venture to solve the ambiguities in the original text. I believe Machiavelli wanted to be ambiguous in his not specifying whose hands and eyes he was speaking about by using the aforesaid formula. In other words, whereas most editors and translators attach an instrumental nuance to those two prepositions ("agli" and "alle"), thus interpreting the phrase as if the author condemned most people for judging with their eyes, not with their hands (as Bull and Codevilla translate), I consider it as a 'complemento di limitazione' (to use the jargon of Italian 'analisi logica').<sup>39</sup> People, in other words, the gullible 'vulgo' despised by Machiavelli, look at politics from afar and superficially; consequently, when they see those in power shed tears over the violent ways of the world they are usually taken in by what seems a sign of compassion, forgetting to see what those same hands are doing. The prince should then act as the unspecified "quidam" in the little story, while most people are as naive as the "avicula" urging the others to take heart. In this light, I find Codevilla's translation



best (“And men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands”) as it preserves the original (and most likely intentional) ambiguity, while a rendering like “And men in general judge more *from* the eyes than *from* the hands” would have disclosed too much to be truly ‘machievellian’.<sup>40</sup> If Bull had shared my reading of this phrase, he would have probably translated it as “Men in general pay more attention to the eyes than to the hands of princes” or something along these lines,<sup>41</sup> because that is — in my opinion — what the statement really means, as if Machiavelli had said (in modern Italian) “La gente in genere bada più agli occhi che alle mani dei principi”. I prefer Connell’s version, instead, when it comes to the rendering of the verb ‘sentire’ in the phrase immediately following. In this case I find Connell’s version preferable to Codevilla’s (namely, ‘to touch’ vs. ‘to feel’) as it better preserves the contrast between the two senses (sight and touch) implied in the original formula.<sup>42</sup> Also, Machiavelli’s use of ‘sentire’ in this passage is akin, I believe, to the Italian expression ‘toccare con mano’ as ‘to realize’, ‘to ascertain the truth’.<sup>43</sup>

Needless to say, these minor matters — whatever the aptest interpretation of the two cases discussed above — cannot have any consequence on my opinion of two such excellent translations as Codevilla’s and Connell’s. The latter, in particular, will most likely meet with the favor of scholars and students alike for its precision, fluency, and rich apparatus of notes and documents. Not only, as shown by the excerpts quoted above, Connell’s English version is at once close to the original and readable, but the texts he publishes in the appendix to the book are of extreme interest. In this section (called ‘Related Documents’) he offers an anthology of documents about *The Prince* and its reception, many of which had never been translated into English before, spanning from the famous letter to Francesco Vettori (23 November 1513) to Gramsci’s and Mussolini’s interpretation of Machiavelli’s political treatise.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, he renders a real service to scholars and students as well by shedding light not only on the background to *The Prince* — which he already discusses in detail in his general introduction — but also on the many reasons for its long and controversial success, from the sixteenth century to the present.

### Notes

1. C. Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. S. Gill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, ch.2, p. 20. "A poem is never finished, only abandoned". Valéry's statement refers to all kinds of literary texts, as shown by his account of how *Le cimetière marin* reached its 'final' format; see P. Valéry, *Variété*, in Id., *Oeuvres*, ed. J. Hytier, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, vol. I, p.1500. Having told how the poem had been 'snatched' away from him for publication, Valéry writes: "Du reste, je ne puis en général revenir sur quoi que ce soit que j'aie écrit que je ne pense que j'en ferais tout autre chose si quelque intervention étrangère ou quelque circonstance quelconque n'avait rompu l'enchantement de ne pas en finir" (*ibidem*).
3. For an introduction to medieval exegesis terminology, see B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1978 (3), pp.1-36.
4. See, for instance, Torquato Accetto's introduction to his *Della dissimulazione onesta*, ed. S.S. Nigro, Turin, Einaudi, 1997, pp.3-8 and the editor's notes to it.
5. See L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, London, Routledge, 1995. Venuti's important study has been translated into Italian by M. Guglielmi: *L'invisibilità del traduttore*, Rome, Armando, 1999.
6. See G. Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* [1946], in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Volume IV. In Front of Your Nose 1945-1950*, eds. S. Orwell and I. Angus, London, Secker & Warburg, 1968, pp.127-140.
7. On this well-known dispute, suffice it here to refer to A. Gambaro's introduction to Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Il Ciceroniano o dello stile migliore*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1965, pp. xxi-cxii and the bibliography reported therein. See also R.G. Witt, *Sulle tracce degli antichi. Padova, Firenze e le origini dell'umanesimo*, It. trans. by D. De Rosa, Donzelli, Rome, 2005, pp.455-506.
8. I quote from the blurb on the back of George Bull's 1999 Penguin edition of his revised translation, with an introduction by A. Grafton.
9. On the vast school of thought known as 'antimachiavellianism' see especially and R. De Mattei, *Dal premachiavellismo all'antimachiavellismo*, Florence, Sansoni, 1969 and R. Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: Antimachiavellianism on Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1990. See also the subtle remarks in G. Mazzotta, *Ariosto and Machiavelli: Real Worlds/Imaginary Worlds*, in Id., *Cosmopoiesis. The Renaissance Experiment*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2001, pp.27-51 and G. Giglioli, *Ateismo e machiavellismo in età moderna. Il ritrovato 'Ateismo Trionfato' di Tommaso Campanella, "Rinascimento"*, s. II, 44, 2004, pp. 459-468 with further bibliography. C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. K. Hayens, London-Glasgow, Collins, 1968 (2), ch. I, p.20. Among the many studies on orality as a crucial factor to all translations (both prose and verse)

see the conference proceedings collected in *Ritmologia. Il ritmo del linguaggio. Poesia e traduzione (Atti del Convegno 'Il ritmo del linguaggio'. Poesia e traduzione, Università di Cassino, Dipartimento di Linguistica e Letterature Comparate, 22-24 marzo 2001)*, Milan, Marcos y Marcos, 2002.

11. Bull, cit., p.xxix.

12. Namely, in the first book of the *Discourses*. Another 'marketable' characteristic of Bull's edition is that, despite its having been revised no less than four times in almost four decades (and notwithstanding the remarkable amount of new studies on *The Prince* appearing virtually every year) it makes very little use of explanatory footnotes.

13. I quote from Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, eds. F. Melotti and E. Janni, Milan, Rizzoli, 1982 (6), p. 86. I have checked the text against the new critical edition of *Il Principe* by Mario Martelli and Nicoletta Marcelli in the series "Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli" (Rome, Salerno, 2006), noting only few minor differences in spelling and (of course) punctuation. The spelling variants are "dificultà" vs. "difficultà", "antinati" vs. "antenati", "dipoi" vs. "di poi", "e eccessiva" vs. "ed eccessiva" (*ibidem*, pp.66-67).

14. Bull, cit., pp. 5-6.

15. Among the many studies on this important aspect of Machiavelli's language and political thought see the recent article by G. Mazzotta, *Politics and Art: The Question of Perspective in 'Della Pittura' and 'Il Principe'*, "Rinascimento", s.II, 43, 2004, pp.15-29.

16. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated and edited by Angelo M. Codevilla. Commentary by William B. Allen, Hadley Arkes and Carnes Lord, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1997 and *The Prince by Niccolò Machiavelli with Related Documents*, translated, edited and with a commentary by William J. Connell, Boston-New York, Bedford-St. Martin's, 2005.

17. For an introduction to this terminology (the 'pre-history', as it were, of the much used 'source oriented' and 'target oriented' formulas) see the writings by Herder, Goethe and Schlegel in *Translation/History/Culture. A Sourcebook*

, ed. A. Lefevere, New York-London, Routledge, 1992, pp.74-80 and the ones by Goethe, von Humboldt and Schleiermacher in *La teoria della traduzione nella storia*, ed. S. Nergaard, Milan, Bompiani, 1993, pp.121-179.

18. Codevilla, cit., p.xix. Codevilla's introductory essay (*Words and Power*, pp. xix-xxxviii) is worth mentioning not only for his remarks on translation theory but also for his own reading of *The Prince*

. As regards the latter, for instance, he does not refrain from pointing out some of the many inconsistencies that punctuate Machiavelli's text. In so doing he departs from most scholars (and translators, too) who regard the Florentine secretary as an unquestionable authority in political theory. This, of course, prevents them from fully understanding (and rendering) *The Prince*.

19. Which features Bull tends to eliminate for clarity's sake, replacing the

subjunctive and the conditional moods with the indicative.

20. Codevilla, cit., p.xx.

21. As Codevilla repeatedly points out in his essay (*Words and Power*), using James B. Atkinson's translation (New York, MacMillan, 1976) as typical of the tendency he criticizes, much as I use Bull's here.

22. Here Codevilla, unlike Bull, duly refers the reader to *Discourses*, Book I. Whereas Bull's edition, as said above, makes very little use of explanatory notes (endnotes, actually), Codevilla provides his text with no less than 424 footnotes.

23. Codevilla, cit., p.6 (italics mine). *Ibidem*, p.xxix. By contrast, in his introduction —after mentioning the importance of such words as “ambizione”, “onore”, “gloria”, “fortuna”, “necessità” and “virtù” in Machiavelli's treatise

— Bull writes: “But I think it dangerous to build too much on these few words or, when translating, to follow too slavishly the rule that one word should always be translated by the same word. In the case of *virtù*, to labour the point, I have decided to translate mostly by the rather literary word ‘prowess’, but have not hesitated to use quite another word where the context would not admit prowess” (cit., pp.xxix-xxx).

25. See, among his latest publications, the monograph on late medieval and early Renaissance Pistoia *La città dei crucci: fazioni e clientele in uno stato repubblicano del '400*, Florence, Nuova Toscana Editrice, 2000 and the ‘case study’ (in collaboration with Giles Constable)

*Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence. The Case of Antonio Rinaldeschi*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005. Connell has also edited two volumes of collected essays: *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 2002 and (in collaboration with Andrea Zorzi) *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

26. See Connell, cit., pp.ix-xiv (*A Note about the Text and Translation*

). The prefatory matter in Connell's English version consists of a preface (pp.v-viii), the aforesaid *Note* (pp.ix-xix), a fairly long essay (*Introduction: The Puzzle of 'The Prince'*, pp.1-34, in which Connell contextualizes Machiavelli's work and hints at its reception), and three maps.

27. Connell, cit., p.x.

28. Connell too, like Codevilla, makes wide use of explanatory footnotes. In this case, for instance, he adds a fairly long note on the chronology of both *The Discourses* and *The Prince* (stressing to some extent their complementary nature) to help students contextualize these works.

29. Connell, cit., pp.41-42 (italics mine).

30. Unlike Codevilla, who, as we have seen, has rendered it literally as “the bloodline of their prince”.

31. This source has been identified by G. Bardazzi, *Tecniche narrative nel Machiavelli scrittore di lettere*, “Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa

" (Classe di lettere e filosofia), s. III, 5.4, 1975, pp.1443-1489. See esp. P.1486. In the last years the present passage in ch. 18 of *The Prince* has been discussed by H. Jaeckel, *I 'Tordi' e il 'Principe Nuovo'*. *Note sulle dediche del 'Principe' di Machiavelli a Giuliano e a Lorenzo de' Medici*, "Archivio Storico Italiano", 156, 1998, pp. 73-92; R. Fubini, *Postilla ai 'Tordi'*, *ibidem*, pp. 93-96 and F. Bausi, *Politica e poesia. Ancora sulla cultura di Machiavelli*, "Intersezioni", 23, 2002, pp.377-393, in particular pp.382-382. See also M.Martelli's long note in his recent critical edition of *The Prince*, cit., pp.492-494.

32. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, cit., p. 157. In this case too I have checked the text against the critical edition by Martelli and Marcelli. The only different spellings are "li òmini" vs. "gli uomini" and "alli occhi" vs "agli occhi". Also, Martelli and Marcelli italicize *in universali*, regarding it as a Latin formula (Martelli, cit., p.241) .

33. Bull, cit, pp. 57-58 (italics mine).

34. Codevilla, cit., p. 67 (italics mine).

35. Connell, cit., p.95 (italics mine).

36. I quote from P. Bracciolini, *Facezie*

, ed and trans. S. Pittaluga, Milan, Garzanti, 1995, p.272 (italics mine). The Latin text can also be read in P. Bracciolini, *Liber facetiarum*, in Id., *Opera omnia*

, ed. R. Fubini, Turin, Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964, vol. I, p.486 and Bardazzi, cit., p.1486. For the diffusion of this anecdote in fifteenth-century Florence, see the contributions by Haeckel, Fubini, Martelli and Bausi cited above; see also Pittaluga's note 299 on p.320.

37. Pittaluga, cit., p.273.

38. See Jaeckel, cit., and Fubini, cit.

39. The use of 'a' as a preposition with an instrumental meaning (thus synonymous with 'per', 'mediante', 'con') is extremely widespread in late medieval and early Renaissance Florentine vernacular. Only slightly less common, however, is its use as 'in base a', 'da' (the 'complemento di limitazione' mentioned above). See S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, Turin, UTET, 1967 (2), vol. I, p.3 n.10 and p.5 n.18 respectively.

40. Ironically, in a footnote to his own translation Codevilla (cit., p. 67 n. 301) explains that "by the eyes" must be read as "by means of the eyes", thus agreeing with the other translators in attaching an instrumental value to this formula. In other words, consistently with his method Codevilla has translated as I would, keeping Machiavelli's amphibology, yet his interpretation of the passage is different from mine.

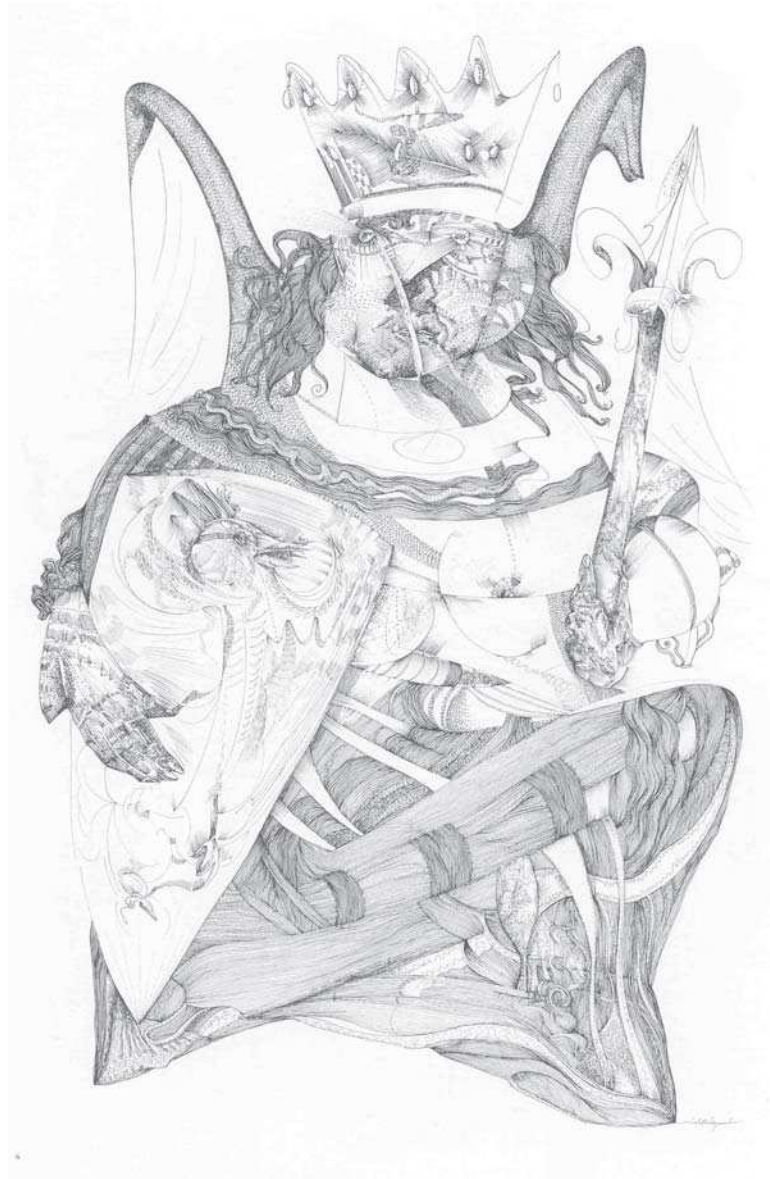
41. Paradoxically enough, Bull's translation almost succeeds at preserving the original ambiguity. His "Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands" would be excellent, in my opinion, if Machiavelli spoke of "principi" (plural) instead of "uno principe".

42. This emphasis on the tactile is reinforced, I think, by the idiomatic phrase "tocca a" ("it falls to") in the sentence (" [...] perché *tocca a* vedere a ognuno,

sentire a pochi”).

43. That is, in my opinion, the real “iudicare alle mani” as in the old and current Italian idiom comes here in the chapter, not before. On this expression in Machiavelli see also Jaeckel, cit., p.91. In his excellent article Jaeckel also criticizes what he calls “L’epurazione operata da tanti traduttori anglo-merricani” (cit., p.91), whose versions he quotes and compares with the original to give a quick example of their simplistic translation method (pp.91-92).

44. Codevilla, cit., pp.125-189 (‘Part Three: Related Documents’). This appendix is followed by a chronology of the life and works of Niccolò Machiavelli (pp.190-193), a series of ‘Questions for Consideration’ (pp.193-194) which tackle some of the treatise’s main issues and can help students find suitable paper topics on *The Prince*, and by a select bibliography (pp.195-198).



The Empress

Antonio Veneziano, *Ninety Love Octaves*, Edited, introduced and Translated by Gaetano Cipolla. Mineola: Legas, 2006. 128 pp. \$12.95.

Congratulations to Gaetano Cipolla on this new great achievement in his literary career. Antonio Veneziano's collection of *Ninety Love Octaves*, published by Legas, will, I'm sure, enable all its readers to discover something new about Sicily—not only the status of the Sicilian dialect two centuries before Meli gave it substance and resonance, but also the social and artistic environment of the Island in the years of the Counter-Reformation. To my amazement I noticed how chronologically close Veneziano's life is to Tasso's (1543-1593 and 1544-1595).

The stylistic feature of Veneziano's octave that most impressed me is the absence of the couplet that distinguishes the Italian "ottava" from its popular beginnings through Boccaccio's *Ninfale Fiesolano* to its epic grandeur with Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso and Marino, and—why not—Tassoni. Veneziano's device is obviously more difficult insofar as it requires the extension of the two primary rhymes, so to speak, one step further. His readers then (and Cipolla's) will have to determine whether these ninety octaves should be considered as belonging to the family of the Italian "ottava" proper or, instead, be classified as truncated Petrarchan sonnets.

But this has nothing to do, of course, with the value of the book, which, aside from the poetic corpus presented, recommends itself for the learned, masterly Introduction that opens it, in which all that was already known of Veneziano and all that we should now add to our knowledge is brilliantly collected. It is this probing, thorough Introduction that makes us think, not without sadness, how a man who in his time was held as the paragon of poetic excellence, a poet who counted among his admirers none other than Cervantes, could have fallen into such obscurity as to be utterly unknown today.

In reading Gaetano Cipolla's selection of Veneziano's *Ottave*, we can immediately see how superior the Sicilian poet is to most of the Tuscan madrigalists of the Renaissance, such as Luigi Tansillo, Chiara Matraini, Laura Battiferri, Gaspara Stampa, Luigi Croto, Girolamo Casoni, Cesare Rinaldi, Annibale Pocaterra and Bernardino Baldi. In each of their madrigals we find metaphors and conceits that Antonio Veneziano had already expressed with greater elo-



quence and, more importantly, with more evident poetic grace. Cipolla's English translation will undoubtedly save from oblivion Veneziano's verse, thanks to its unfaltering adherence to the word and spirit of the original texts. I will cite here only two of the ninety Ottave to show how Professor Cipolla's performance as translator (let us not forget that the Sicilian dialect is also his native tongue) scrupulously preserves the beauty of Veneziano's poetry.

Here is the first of the two ottave:

Nasci in Sardigna un'erva, anzi un venenu,  
 chi, cui ndi gusta, di li risa mori:  
 né antidoti ci ponnudu di Galenu,  
 né d'Esculapiu incantati palori.  
 Cuss'iu, senza rimedi u terrenu,  
 unu su dintra e n'autru paru fori;  
 su tuttu mestu e mustrumi serenu:  
 la vucca ridi e chiangimi lu cori.

The reader can see at once that it is the second part of the simile that gives the ottava lasting memorability: those three concluding oxymora, surely of Petrarchan derivation, impress themselves on the mind and become easily, almost instinctively, quotable. Observe now how they live with equal urgency in Cipolla's rendering:

A grass grown in Sardinia, nay a poison,  
 will make those tasting it die laughing.  
 There are no Galen antidotes for it,  
 nor magic words by Esculapius.  
 Likewise, without an earthly cure for it,  
 I'm one inside, outside another man:  
 I feel depressed, but look serene outside,  
 my mouth is laughing but I weep inside.

The other ottava is a gem of a madrigal in which gallantry is raised to heights of pure lyricism:

Ad ogni sguardu tu formi una stilla  
 e ad ogni risu crii milli aurori,  
 ad un passu Eolu lu mari tranquilla,  
 a un motu scopri infiniti tesori,  
 ietta ligustri e rosi ogni mascilla,  
 la vucca d'ambra odorati calori,

o forgia undi si fundi amuri e stilla,  
o isca, amu e cimedda di li cori.

And see now how the translator accomplished his task:

With every little glance you form a star;  
with every smile you form a thousand dawns;  
with every step you soothe the raging sea;  
with every move you show us endless treasures.  
From your cheeks blossom roses and sweet tendrils,  
and from your mouth breath scented with sweet  
amber.  
O furnace where love you distill and fuse,  
o fishing pole of hearts, o bait and noose.

This volume is not for Sicilians only, but for all lovers of poetry.

Joseph Tusiani

Luigi Fontanella. *Land of Time. Selected Poems 1972-2003*. Bilingual edition edited by Irene Marchegiani. Introduction by Dante Della Terza. New York: Chelsea Editions, 2006. Pp. 234.

This anthology of Luigi Fontanella's poetry, accurately and sensitively edited by Irene Marchegiani, the well-known translator of Tasso's *Aminta*, has also the distinction of bearing Dante Della Terza's *beneplacitum*, an Introduction that brilliantly captures the essentials of Fontanella's poetic edifice. It is Giovanni Raboni, however, who puts his fingers, so to speak, on what creates the first perilous impression in Fontanella's reader:

"There's a great freedom of forms and intonations in Luigi Fontanella's poetry. He doesn't take a strong formal stand; his poetry entertains moments of nearly proselike colloquial narrative along with moments of powerful lyrical tension." I said "perilous" because, as we shall see, a reader steeped in classical lore, with an ear therefore attuned to no other music than the recognizable one, may immediately be tempted to dismiss unorthodox musical canons such as often appear in Fontanella's poetry.

When reading a book of verse, one expects, of course, to detect the poet's penchant for the re-iteration of the chords most familiar

and dear to him. By the same token, when reading an anthology of verse assembled by a compiler whose taste is not necessarily infallible, but hopefully akin to the poet's, one expects to find and thrill to the latter's musical predilections. Now, when I read Fontanella's *Round Trip* (1991), I cannot but ask if his "proselike colloquial narrative", too loose and slovenly to recommend itself for a second reading, should solicit a dismissal. But here the unexpected comes. Not only in *Round Trip* but in the other sections of this anthology as well, Fontanella's "proselike" way of proceeding hides, and then suddenly reveals, great links to the unmistakable tenets of our classical tradition. As if by magic you discover here and there, as in strategic points, perfect hendecasyllables that not only remind you of what I would call *l'orecchio collettivo* of the Italian people as far as poetry is concerned, but also prepare you, as we shall also see, for a stunning, entrancing surprise – the *cantabile* in Fontanella's poetry. Her are some of them, at random: "Ci sono dentro quest'aria citrata", "qui nella blanda rete che incatena", "come quel giorno mutamente gaio", "in un frammento una scoria una storia", "il desiderio si tinge di bianco", "quando ad un tratto si fa strada in luce", "stanotte il tempo è un ballerino stanco", and "affossato nel gioco dell'abisso."

It is through such unexpected, memorable lines that we arrive at passages in which the subtlety of internal rhymes and assonances created a lilt easy to memorize, and a jingle-like music that gives levity, and at the same time, solemnity to the expression. I will cite only two of them: "volano le insegne i finti stili e steli / cadono lentamente ad una ad una / le belle stelle in schiera / da una lontana azzurra bandiera", and "vibra la pagina bianca / in quest'aria autunnale / foglia su foglia / che sopra vi scende / come l'albero si spoglia / la pagina si riempie."

And now the big question: how have Fontanella's translators handled these gems, deeply concealed in the deceptively barren, ore-less matter of his poetry?

The translators who have contributed to this anthology – Carol Lettieri, Irene Marchegiani, W.S. Di Piero, Michael Palma, and Emanuel di Pasquale – have all sworn and shown the strictest allegiance to the poetic text by rendering, almost *syllabatim*, every phrase and every paragraph. Some, more than others, however, have displayed greater deftness in hearing and re-echoing tones or, rather, semitones, in absorbing and transmitting nuances, in other words in retaining and respecting what belongs to poetry and must never be

removed from its sacred awe. And yet, as it happens in all translations and with all translators, even in this anthology there are at times jolts that stun the reader. Take, for example, this unassuming yet charming hendecasyllabic line, “di noi perdutoamente innamorato.” Its translation is undoubtedly faithful, but is inert, flat, echo-less: “so hopelessly in love with our being together.” How much better, and much more poetic, this possible variant would have been: “of us hopelessly lost in our own love”! The music of the quotable hendecasyllable would at least have been saved.

And there are jolts of a different nature, caused by inaccuracy of linguistic knowledge or, more often, by hastiness of reading. Fontanella’s “Si ammassavano volatili” becomes “The crowds amassed.” But what happened to the birds, the “winged beings” the poet refers to? “Crowds” is not *le mot juste*. And take now “pedinando una prole immaginaria.” The translator’s rendering, “shadowing an imaginary offsprings,” is by no means a felicitous one insofar as *pedinare* (from *pes-pedis*) has to do with the stalking of feet, and not with the evanescence of a shadow. Then “questa finestra d’infanzia” is not “this infant’s window”: it is instead, and more amply, the window of our infancy. “Una passeggiata controtempo” is not “a walk in the face of time,” since the term *controtempo*, like *contropiede*, connotes a dynamic counter-offensive movement, not a static appearance in front or “in the face” of someone or something – in our case, Time. Little things? But isn’t poetry also made of little, impalpable, ineffable things? Therefore, Fontanella’s “mare lattiginoso” is much more than “cloudy sea”, and “sera dolcelunga” much more than “long, sweet night.”

Needless to say, no one should blame a translator for failing to give a new garb to puns or palindromes, which are like bric-a-brac that belongs in a corner of a particular room, and is never to be removed or exported. So, nothing is gained by either poet or translator for venturing into meanders or linguistic tongue-twisters such as Fontanella’s “gratta la gatta alla porta ogni notte / la gatta gratta”, a line most likely suggested to him by the recollection of Pulci’s “La casa parca cosa bretta e brutta,” the incipit of the craziest ottava (XXIII: 47) in the entire *Morgante*.

Luigi Fontanella’s poetry, thanks to the commendably great achievements of all his translators (my few acerbic remarks were only meant to emphasize the vastness of their good work), stands out, even in English, with all its shadows and shimmerings, with all

its lapses and leaps. Poems such "Padre-Sequenza," "Parole per Emma," "Grand Central," "Avevo una cagna ilare e gentile," and "Sono migrati altrove gli uccelli" retain all their tenderness and luster. Gennaro and Nedelia, the poet's parents, have inspired elegies of great beauty in which the emotion is both impetuous and controlled, and Emma, the poet's daughter, has likewise inspired pages of the utmost serenity and intimacy. "Padre bambino smarrito," the poet transforms the observation of ordinary, daily details into a transfiguration, reaching the ecstatic level of the world's first morning in which "every utopia" becomes synonymous with a "great concrete innocent Reality."

Joseph Tusiani

Justin Vitiello, *Labirinti e vulcani nel cuore della Sicilia*. Tr. Lillyrose Veneziano Broccia and Justin Vitiello. Palermo-Roma: Ila Palma 2005. Pp. 129. (Original edition: *Labyrinths and Volcanoes: Windings through Sicily*. New York-Ottawa-Toronto: Legas 1999. Pp. 118.)

Authors who translate their own work are only partial translators. They will not forget that they are the makers of the text, and will therefore feel entitled to rework it to a far greater extent than a regular translator would. The result is often a type of writing that swings between translation proper and a *rifacimento* or rewriting, and even restructuring of the amalgam that was the original.

This is what happened to Justin Vitiello's travel book on Sicily. As a matter of fact, in rendering it into Italian, he was aided by a person who was external or extraneous to the text, so that sometimes the translator's hand, and the author's, can be separately detected, as though the latter had provided variations on the basis of the former's actual translation. No translator of a prose book would in fact have gone so far as to render the following paragraph in the way it appears below:

Actually half-Neapolitan and half-German in origin, I wasn't "going back to Sicily." On my Christmas vacation from a teaching job in Rome, I was visiting Castellammare Bay to study poets whose work I was translating. And to write an article or two on nonviolent change in the area. Especially as it was proposed by the "Gandhi of Sicily," Danilo Dolci. (24)

*Non è che un napoletano, nato per sbaglio a New York, stesse ritornando in Sicilia. Mi recai lì anche per scrivere articoli sulla possibilità di cambiare un mondo come quello siculo attraverso la nonviolenza In quel caso – o casino? – si trattava di capire se avevano inciso nel contesto storico dell'isola i metodi di Danilo Dolci, o no. (12.)*

In other words, a translator would have seen no reason to introduce the ambiguity of a general reference (*Non è che un napoletano* etc.) as the equivalent of a clear first-person construction in English; nor would she have distorted “half-Neapolitan and half-German” into *un napoletano, nato per sbaglio a New York*. Moreover, the obliteration of the reference to German descent can only be an authorial decision; and only the author may have had some reason to completely cut out the mention of his own literary work on some local poets. On the other hand, a mere translator would have found it much more convenient to render literally such a self-evident sentence as “And to write *etc.*,” rather than expanding it into a lengthy statement; and she would have rendered literally also the quick mention of Danilo Dolci, as it was in the original, instead of changing it into an even lengthier, abstract reflection. To say nothing of the appearance of an Italian colloquialism, *casino*, or the disappearance of the epithet “the Gandhi of Sicily,” that may have been dictated by the assumption that the Italian readership may be familiar with the Sicilian intellectual and writer.

Indeed, the idea of an Italian readership may have led to a number of alterations exceeding the ones pointed out above, and showing an autonomy of decision that normal translators would never afford.

In fact alterations include the cutting off of whole parts as well as single passages – the opening poems attached to some chapters, for instance; and even entire chapters: the first two of the original have been totally removed from the translation, as well as the one entitled “Excursus: Honorable Trades”: Most of the latter – a visit to the town of Alcamo – consists of Vitiello’s English translation of Cielo d’Alcamo’s famous *contrasto*, and the reporting or reprinting of it would obviously have been inappropriate in an Italian version. But it would also seem that Vitiello somewhat wanted to efface the literary aspects of the original, as if they were irrelevant to the serious political and social questions that Sicily poses – mainly the colluding

of the Mafia with local authorities (in the Portella delle Ginestre massacre, for example), and of local and national authorities with the American government (as in the case of the NATO missile base at Comiso), which in the author's views seems to be the origin of all of Sicily's evils – rather extreme views, sometimes, as the one that sees Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* as "the first maneuver of linguistic imperialism that would make Florentine the official *bel parlare* and literary language of the boot and its butt," on page 95 of the original – happily cancelled in the translation, one must say. But the sociopolitical condition of Sicily is Vitiello's constant concern, so much so that many pages sound like the report of fatal historical events as told by the characters he meets during the journey.

The authorial reworking often amounts to additions of short sentences or totally new passages. Examples of the former are:

The proceedings were high drama. (108),  
*Ma che processo? Si trattava del gran teatro del mondo.*  
 (114);

The trial is a farce. (109),  
*il processo è una farsa, una commedia pirandelliana.* (116)

Looking for the house of Salvatore Carnevale's  
 mother, [...] (111)  
*Superati tornanti infiniti, arrivai e chiesi della casa di  
 Salvatore Carnevale.* (118)

The general tendency is in fact to expand (less frequently to condense) and to paraphrase rather than merely translate:

But to others he conveyed serenity through his limpid  
 grey-blue eyes, deep as Arab wells. (83)  
*Nonostante la sua capacità di comunicare ai suoi compagni  
 attraverso i suoi begli occhi grigio-blu, profondi come pozzi arabi,  
 una serenità carismatica.* (93)

Countless cemetery gates and tombs remind you: 'You  
 are what I once was and will become what I am now.' (87)  
*Poi, quasi ogni cancello cimiteriale ti fa da memento mori:  
 HODIE MIHI/CRAS TIBI.* (97);

Another trait to be attributed to the author's hand is the rendering of English words and phrases into Sicilian dialect ("I don't know" [39], *Un sacciu* [32]; "we've come full circle in this hell" [54], *semmu cca dintra 'stu 'nfernu* [50]) or certain peculiar uses (we come across a typical "avvicinare," that for a Sicilian means "to pay a visit": "I can come back tomorrow" [113], *Posso avvicinare domani, se vuole* [120]; and a very popular exclamation: "Damn!" [35], *Minchia!* [27]).

In some cases, whether it be the actual hand of the translator or of the author himself, the reader may be puzzled at their translational choices:

Blocking out the bleeps of search and destroy  
jukeboxes, [...] (55)

[...] *non c'è più il fuoco che ti annienta la capacità di pensare  
e riesci a bloccarti le orecchie contro i chiassi di jukebox genocidiali*  
[...] (52),

The translation here is an expansion that encompasses additions (*il fuoco che ti annienta* ecc. as a paraphrase of "search and destroy," itself an ironical reversal of the set phrase "search and rescue," or perhaps "search and seizure," that would be more in keeping with the author's anti-institutional taste), and peculiar language items that may sound unexpected to an Italian ear (the unusual plural *chiassi*; the adjective *genocidiali*, a calque of "genocidal," that is best described as a loan translation practically non-existent in Italian use. There is some other vocabulary that may sound unusual: *superegoismo*, not so much an intensified form of *egoismo* (as a prefix *super-* might suggest) as a derivative of *superego*: "for an instant of super-ego" (55), *Per un attino di superegoismo* (52); a *mafiaizzazione* (73), derived from *mafia* with a typical suffix; and, even more inventively, *rigormortizzano* (83; word stress on *-ti-*), from *rigormortizzare*, transferred to Italian as an equivalent of "rigor-mortize" – neologisms in both languages from *rigor mortis*, the muscular rigidity after death – here used metaphorically: "bureaucrats rigor-mortize works" (77). Another calque is *cerbereo* (53; supposedly carrying a stress on the second *e*), from *Cerberian*, unfrequent in English and hardly ever heard in Italian.

Although such wordplay indubitably satisfies the author's taste for experimenting with language (Vitiello is also a poet in his own right), there are cases where the reader might prefer different choices, and even disagree with the ones provided. A case in point is



*prelapsariano* as an equivalent of “prehistoric” (“prehistoric plants” [41], *piante prelapsariane* [36]), which is one more calque of the rare English word “prelapsarian,” *i.e.* a time before the Fall of Man; or “the prickling of the brambles” (41), *le pungenze del sottobosco* (36), as compared to an ordinary *i rovi pungenti*, or – would the author like a more abstract expression, as the infrequent *pungenze* makes one assume – *il pungere dei roveti*. Ambiguous seems to me the translation of “men who no longer saw the sacred as one with the secular” (42), *uomini che dissecavano il sacro e il profano* (36), with the Latinate *dissecare*, “to dissect, to anatomize,” here used to mean separation; and I could not explain why “Demeter’s avatar” (42) is *L’ava di Demetra* (36) and not *L’avatar di Demetra* or just *Demetra*.

In fact, such examples show an interesting side of language use in multilingual individuals: the change of perspective on words and of frames of mind behind words. Studies in multilingualism show that bi- or trilingual users have a different feeling and varied levels of competence of each language they possess. This is clearly seen in this translation. A number of discrepancies like the ones pointed out above, when not clearly authorial choices, are explained in the light of different levels of language uses in the bilingual writer. Here is one further example out of many possible: “found a companion resilient enough to give him the family he had never known – with five kids” (47), *compagno di una donna abbastanza resiliente da fare famiglia (con cinque figli [...])*, (42): I guess a native Italian translator would have preferred *resistente*, or an equivalent, rather than *resiliente*, a technical word, as De Mauro’s *Grande dizionario italiano dell’uso* labels it, uncommon in its specialized use, and possibly unknown in its extended use as *vigoroso*, *forte*, in fact *resistente*. That is to say, the translator in this case has been content with the basic English meaning, predominant in the back of her mind, of “able to quickly return to a previous good condition,” and has conveyed it through the same word in Italian, without worrying about matters of frequency (a common item though not common-core language in English, a technical or rare word in Italian); where the Italian-minded translator would have to resort to an extended meaning and to a word that indicates the consequence of being a resilient person.

There is a lesson in all this for readers of the target language. You only realize certain language features, or reflect on them, when you have to come to grips with the idiom of a multilingual speaker, and even with foreign speech. An example is implicit in what has

been said above on the *prickling/pungenza* couple: when confronted with the necessity of expressing the abstract English *gerund*, and with the bold solution found by the bilingual speaker, you realize that you do not have a single noun in Italian to convey the idea of being prickling or feeling prickles, if you do not want to resort to the obsolete *pungimento* or *pungenza*. The study of multilingual or foreign-speech performances, with their background of diverse frames of thought, would in actual fact deserve delving into it.

But let all this be said for the sake of comparativeness, which is ultimately not really needed, for hardly anyone will undertake a comparative reading of such a prose book as this (as of any prose translation ever). Readers will no doubt enjoy Vitiello's perspectives on Sicily while noticing certain peculiarities of language. They will enjoy, for example, the author's social passion if they share his political concerns; or if they intend to consider the aesthetic effect of the writing as well (and one cannot help that, unless the book is downgraded to a collection of reports of political misdeeds), they will like the way the author juxtaposes his social, sometimes outraged mood with a pensive, intense manner, or mingles his anarchic fervour with visionary power, as in the description of architectural features in the third and four paragraphs of the following excerpt:

Millenni erano trascorsi prima che la gente si ribellasse contro gli stupratori della sua terra. Finalmente una serata del 1282, i Siculi macellarono tutti gli angioini che si trovavano in giro. Ma, finita la festa, gli insorti subirono solo redenzione inquisitoriale: feudalesimo senza infedeli.

Nel 1492, gli *dei* arabi, ebraici, contadini e pescatori vennero spogliati, e la materia grigia degli intellettuali scorticata. Le mutilazioni sarebbero progredite e, così, il verbo degli autodafè avrebbe purgato anime e corpi siciliani da quelle malattie chiamate Rinascimento ed Illuminismo. Fin quando il Risorgimento avrebbe fatto interventi chirurgici miracolosi, innestando organi nativi in anticorpi piemontesi, il cui linguaggio era gallico e la cui mentalità rigettava integralmente tale trapianto.

Ma dall'ecatombe spagnola, le rocce scoppiarono, incarnandosi in gargolle, bestiari, archi interrotti, nicchie vuote, statue di mostri e santi guerrafondai che dondolavano da facciate concave e convesse, guglie che lanciavano tutto il loro

volume insù [*sic*] per sfidare la gravità. E le città divennero monumenti macabri al dio arcigno che aveva scacciato tutte le madri-natura, tutti gli Yahweh, tutti gli Allah insieme agli umanisti e ai sensualisti.

Tuttora, ciò che fu ricostruito dopo il terremoto del 1693 assale i sensi. Anche se l'incenso e la mirra non ci sono più, le pietre che fondono terre d'ombra, gialli e ambre sono mostruosamente vive nel gioco perverso di diavoli e angeli.  
(40)

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Barbara Carle. *New Life: (a fictitious autobiographical story)*. Trans. Marella Feltrin-Morris. Stony Brook, NY: Gradiva Publications, 2006. Pp. 61.

Carle's *New Life: (a fictitious autobiographical story)* presents us with one of those occasional, if not rare, opportunities in which we can read an original text along with its facing translation – usually, translations are performed on extant, published works. In a work of simultaneous translation, the general assumption might be that Carle and her translator, Feltrin-Morris, have collaborated and conferred with each other, guaranteeing the reader as close to a faithful rendering as possible. In that respect, regardless of the degree of collaboration, the proto-text and the meta-text flow smoothly in reflection of each other. Often, when a translator renders a text in his or her target language, and the merits of the original are a foregone conclusion, the focus of the reviewer remains on the fidelity of the transcription from the source language and culture. But, because Carle's book will be as new to her readers as Feltrin-Morris' translation, the task is two-fold.

*New Life* is written from the point of view of a Ph.D. in Italian who struggles with her new life in the Southwest, specifically in the state of Texas. Part of that struggle is balancing a life as a professor building a developing Italian program, raising her new baby, and trying to decide if her marriage – already fraying – is worth saving. Amidst this chaotic and depressive environment, the main protagonist begins a relationship with her male student. How much of this relationship is real and how of it is imagined by the protagonist can only be known by reading the story until the very end.

The nine chapters have a candor that mimics that of a poetic diary, yet the prose is not betrayed by a lack of structure and plot development. Part of that structure is the tribute to Dante's *Vita nuova*, whereby Carle – in a way similar to Dante's own *New Life* – ends each chapter with original poems that offer a lyrical summation to the protagonist's narration. These poetic works could stand on their own in a collection, and Feltrin-Morris' translation of them is commendable. Throughout the story – whether in prose or in verse – in detailing the relationship with the student, Carle's narrator provides witty side comments about her students and colleagues, offering up material that normally goes unsaid, if not for the respect of the teacher-student relationship and propriety of the workplace.

What immediately strikes the reader is Feltrin-Morris' ability to maneuver in the culturo-specific context of the North American university system. In some ways, the terminology rendered in Italian could otherwise confuse the Italian reader familiar only with the Italian system. Yet, in *New Life*, each version stands as a mirror to the other; little is sacrificed as we see in typical approximations of cultural phenomena. One of the finest moments – especially for those who have experienced 'horror stories' while pursuing a Ph.D. – is Carle's mention of her "thesis direc / tor / mentor," which is matched by Feltrin-Morris' "il mio relatore (detto anche "torturelatore")" (pp. 6-7). Normally, I might have found parenthetical explanations to be clumsy or unnecessary, but this one was, I believe, the only option; and, its impact outweighs any possible flaw one could find in such a translation strategy.

Though Carle's protagonist recounts her life in a rural area of Texas – an area about which even many North Americans might know little from personal experience – the content appears quite accessible to the Italian-language reader. Feltrin-Morris adds a bit of geographical intelligibility to such nomenclature as the "Southwest." Where Carle speaks of her "leap into the unknown Southwest," the latter opts for "il salto improvviso dal Midwest al Southwest" (pp. 8-9) in order to allow those unfamiliar with the geography to see the Midwest and the Southwest as separate, officially recognized regions, and not just personal toponyms chosen by the author. At other times, a lack of fidelity to the original renders the Italian more agreeable to reader with minimal geographic knowledge. For example, Feltrin-Morris's words recall a trip taken by the protagonist "un Natale alle isole Mauritius"; meanwhile, Carle's original – intentionally, or not

– assumes the reader to be ignorant: “Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar” (pp. 42-3). What have author and translator revealed – subconsciously or otherwise – about collective knowledge in one society and the other?

Clearly, both writer and translator are familiar with Italy and the United States of America. They live – if only in their work – between the two, and this makes the translation appeal to inhabitants of both. As a result, therefore, there might be statements that can only be appreciated by people with similar bi-cultural backgrounds. For example, to say that there were “dozens” of Italian courses to teach, Feltrin-Morris chooses “dozzine di corsi” (pp. 8-9). Though this is a reasonable equivalent, an Italian might have thought in terms of “decine.” Feltrin-Morris’ “dozzine” more accurately places the reader in the mindset of the narrator – almost as if to vocally intone the word where a reader can only see the written word otherwise. (This recalls the native Italian professor who refers to a “class” as a “classe,” when she really means to say “lezione.” It is a way of acknowledging a simultaneous knowledge of both languages. Even as one consciously uses the so-called ‘incorrect’ term, the local culture’s context is ‘correct’.)

This bi-cultural awareness, however, turns a rather mundane passage in English into a charming piece of reflection on culinary civilization in the ‘New World’. The protagonist writes of how she prepared a “caprese” for her students at a class party “with fresh basil and the mediocre mozzarella Annick, who arrived late, had bought downtown” (p. 54). The Italian version offers this: “con del basilico fresco e con la mozzarella non troppo tremenda comprata in centro da Annick, che era arrivata dopo gli altri” (p. 55). In the English, the comment casually refers to the middling quality, as if to say that it could have been better; but it could, also, have been worse. Instead, the Italian version holds a whole narrative history of frustration for anyone who has experienced real, Italian mozzarella, only to be stymied again and again by unreasonable facsimiles in the States, not to mention in the Texas of BBQ, Cadillacs and country music. “Non troppo tremenda” is a phrase packed with that sort of trial-and-error history of the attempts to track down the culinary comforts of home; it implies that, in fact, the protagonist has met some mozzarella that was absolutely “tremenda.” “Mediocre” is not bad; “non troppo tremenda” speaks volumes on continuous disappointment.

I have brought up only a few examples, for, in the final analysis, the Italian translation of the English is so strong and faithful, that one could say that they were written simultaneously by the same hand. One represents the closest approximation of the other's lexicon, and together they straddle two worlds in equilibrium.

The content will provoke an entirely different reaction from any reader, whether an Italian-speaker or an English-speaker. The plot will provide many scenarios familiar to anyone who has been a university instructor, or to anyone who has been a student in a university-level language course. The rapport between Carle's protagonist and her male student might be troubling for those interested in maintaining firm boundaries between the student and the teacher. Yet, this is "a fictitious autobiographical story," and one might wonder just how "fictitious" it is. Perhaps one could recriminate Carle for airing her own dalliances from the safe position of her narrator, thereby absolving herself from direct culpability. Perhaps she merely exorcizes any demons of transgression by indulging a fantasy from the safe standpoint of an observer – imagining what might happen if one were to act out with conduct that violates understood codes; sublimating the fantasy in the laboratory of writing. Some might find her character apologetic in a situation where the main transgressor is a woman, rather than a man. All of this is conjecture and much could be stipulated, but if one sees *New Life* as one woman's working through her taboos, psychopathologies and personal baggage, one would be missing the development of a human character who reveals hidden perspectives, especially for the educator.

As the narrator deals with impending divorce and the development of her young child amid that fractured environment, the relationship between her and Michael – her male student – never reaches the point of physical consummation. Rather it dances in the interstices of flirtation, expectation, suspicion and fantasy. But in that interstitial space, Carle captures the whole rapport of teaching in a contemporary institution of higher learning. When Michael progresses wonderfully, the narrator expresses sincere joy in knowing that the student-teacher relationship has worked. But there is more than that. She teaches us about how to read people. Often she will recall how Michael appeared distant to her, when, in fact, we discover that this distance was caused by something completely unrelated. What was taken for apathy or disgust on Michael and his classmates' faces, was later realized to be pure interest and admiration.

As an educator, I often fear the worst in my students' reactions: if a facial expression assumes the form of a scowl, I presume it to be a negative, visceral reaction to my teaching. Later, I might discover that the 'scowl' was a misread sign of concentration – that is how that particular student facially manifests interest. After all, when we are fixed in concentration, do we think of looking in the mirror to see what look we assume? Maybe we all project external appearances quite different from those that we experience internally. Carle leads us to think about the tacit, unwritten communication that transpires in any given session of learning and information transferal. Negative and/or positive energy is not unidirectional.

Other times, the narrator refers to how she mentioned her personal life in the classroom when, normally, such a subject would have been inappropriate. Yet, for whatever reason, this inappropriateness brought her students closer to her; allowed them to see her as a person, instead of a cog in some sort of cold, institutional machine. Generally speaking, Carle's narrator reads too deeply and personally into the reactions to her teaching, but by the end she discovers that her perspective was rather egotistical. Who was she, after all, to imagine that she was the only focus in her students' lives? How could she deem herself able enough to judge her students from the outside, when she, herself, had a tremendous amount of personal baggage looming behind her eyes as she looked out at them from her podium? This story is about imagining yourself – humbly, if possible – not to be the center of others' worlds, even as you might be the center of your own world.

We are all – pupils and teachers alike – individuals with stories; we all have our narratives to share. The problem is that our narratives do not line up with a template, namely with the content of a fifteen-week syllabus of class meetings. Most of our personal circumstances will never – for better AND for worse – be factored into the overall results that we yield. Carle reminds us of the contradiction that we face daily in education: on so many levels the topics in our fields are impersonal, but our approaches are, per force, very personal – going into, and connecting with, parts of students' minds that others may never know.

Gregory Pell